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TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 1891.

HIGH SPIRITS
(Second Series)

BY
JAMES PAYN.

IN ONE VOLUME.

LEIPZIG: BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ.

PARIS: C. REINWALD, 15, RUE DES SAINTS PÈRES.

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BRITISH
AUTHORS
TAUCHNITZ
EDITION
VOL. 1891.
JAMES PAYN
31.
HIGH
SPIRITS
Second Series
PRICE
M. 1.60

1750
1760

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HIGH SPIRITS

BEING

CERTAIN STORIES WRITTEN IN THEM

(Second Series.)

BY

JAMES PAYN,

AUTHOR OF "BY PROXY," "LESS BLACK THAN WE'RE PAINTED,"
ETC. ETC.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1880.

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HIGH SPIRITS

CERTAIN STORIES WRITTEN BY THEM

(Second Series)

'And yet I do not dare to write
So funny as I can'—OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

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NEW YORK
DUNN AND COMPANY

1881

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A CHANGE OF VIEWS.

A CHANGE OF VIEWS.

A CHANGE OF VIEWS.

As a sporting event and a wicked gambling proceeding the Derby is naturally out of my line. A serious writer, I am well aware, should be careful how he contaminates his pen with such a subject—and especially if he doesn't understand it—but he may go some lengths if actuated by a moral purpose. This may be seen any day in the way in which the most respectable journals handle the most disreputable topics. "They only touch upon the matter in the interests of morality," or "for the purpose of holding it up for public reprehension"—just as though a barn-door should apologise for the polecat nailed upon it. I, however, have an excuse for alluding to so sad a thing as a race-course which is more than valid; the two Derbys I have in my mind are indissolubly connected with a reverent, if not a sacred, subject, in the person of the Rev. Theodore Pyx. On the first occasion when I stood beside him on Epsom Downs he was not indeed a clergyman, but he was very near it. He was not the rose, but, so to speak, stood in the next pot to it; for he had passed his "voluntary," and was to

be "japanned" in a fortnight. That was the expression which, I am grieved to say, he used, in those unregenerate days, for the ceremony of ordination.

We went together from London on a drag, with a good many University men, and Pyx was not the gravest of the party. He had never been remarkable for gravity, and this was almost the last occasion when he would be at liberty to indulge his natural instincts for liveliness and larks. He called it, with a touching pathos, his "last fling"—and it was a tolerably high one. There was nothing that he did not do that Derby day that was to be done—from throwing at his Aunt Sally up to losing "the tenner" which another aunt had sent him (on hearing he had "passed his Vol") in backing the first favourite. I can see him now, with his hat stuck round with dolls, having his fortune told by a gipsy, who, with all her talents for prevision, and desire to prophecy smooth things, never dreamt of promising him that he should be one day Archbishop of Canterbury: he looked so exceedingly unlike even the very earliest formation—the merest chrysalis—of any development of that nature. He did not come back *on* the drag, but inside of it, along with the empty hampers, by reason of our solicitude for his personal safety. Though his equilibrium was out of gear, the native geniality of his disposition remained unimpaired; and we could hear him singing all the way underneath us, no doubt at the top of his

voice; but mellowed by distance and his position so as to resemble the lay of a bumble-bee between two panes of glass. The last I saw of Théodore Pyx that day was his legs; he was taken out head foremost at his lodgings in Bury Street, St. James's, and put to bed by two charitable undergraduates, whom he entreated to make an apology for him to Dr. Paley, with whom, he said, he had made an engagement to sup that evening at Cremorne. In this impression he was of course mistaken; but I mention it in fairness to Pyx, since it shows that his recent course of theological study had not been obliterated, though he just then confused it with matters of a somewhat different character.

I had had some slight acquaintance with this gentleman during his college career, where he had distinguished himself as a good billiard-player and a mellifluous and flowery speaker at the Union; but we had not much in common together. He belonged to a fast set, and rather looked down upon me, as being only fast by fits and starts—as in that expedition to the Derby (which was my first one, by-the-bye); he had a knowledge, too, of practical mathematics, which enabled him to make a book upon every great racing event of the year—although it did not suffice to make him win. A tall, handsome young fellow he was, and, though not of an aristocratic type in other respects, had fine white hands which at that time we thought

little of. They were not noticed much in dealing at Loo or Vingt-et-un, where it is one's own hands only in which one takes any particular interest; but they afterwards served him in some stead. He did not make much money by those games, I believe, and had none of his own to start with; but those who knew him best were wont to aver that Theodore Pyx was a shrewd fellow—an opinion which, though I did not share it, I am bound to say has since been amply justified.

About four years after I left the University I happened to be spending a few weeks' holiday at a certain seaside town on the south coast, with an aunt of mine who was given to ritualism. She attended matins and vespers every day at the district church, and was rather scandalised at my not accompanying her on those expeditions.

"I hope at all events, my dear," she said, "that on Sunday you will not go to any church save St. Ethelburga's."

This I readily promised, since it left me more alternatives than she was aware of, when she presently added, which decided me at once on accompanying her, "that I should then have the privilege of listening to that most eloquent of theologians, Mr. Theodore Pyx."

"Why, good gracious, I know *him!*" cried I.

"I am truly glad to hear it," returned she gravely; "for it shows that your acquaintances, have been well chosen." There was a reproof in her voice which I at

once understood to have been evoked by my having alluded to her favourite Divine in a too jocular and even somewhat disparaging tone, and I hastened to remove this unfortunate impression.

I said that he had been a most admirable speaker at the Union, and she replied, to my surprise, "that he was so now whenever opportunity offered." I subsequently discovered that she meant that respectable assembly of High Churchmen called the Church Union, and she was much pleased to find, or rather to infer, that even in my undergraduate career I had been a constant attendant at it.

I confess I looked forward to the ensuing Sunday with even more than the wonted enthusiasm that the prospect of hearing a fashionable preacher always awakens within me, for in the mean time I had gathered many interesting particulars of my old college friend. From the rich widow, Lady Gergoyle, who had erected and endowed the church, down to my aunt's ancient handmaiden, Betty, his congregation it seemed adored the Rev. Theodore Pyx. He might have had a pair of slippers worked by fair hands for every day of the year if he could have brought himself to wear them; but his habits were ascetic. He wore tight boots, not to show off his feet (though they certainly, as I afterwards observed, looked smaller in them), but for the sake of the discomfort. Under his buttonless silk waistcoat it was understood that he had a horse-

hair shirt, and there were whispers abroad that in the cupboard of his private oratory hung a scourge that had drunk deep of poor Theodore Pyx's blood. What was so charming about him, however, said my aunt, was that you would never guess these things to look at him; to the outward eye, he appeared comfortable enough: there was nothing to speak of fastings and watchings in his appearance, nor did he ever allude to them himself, except in such confidential communications with certain members of his congregation as were almost—though not quite—under the seal of the Confessional.

When, indeed, I had the opportunity—or “privilege,” as it was the custom, I found, to term it—of seeing the Rev. Theodore Pyx in his pulpit, he appeared to me to be in particularly good case, and to have suffered little or nothing from those mortifications of the flesh to which it was his habit to submit himself.

He had, indeed, certainly *made* flesh, whether it was mortified or not; his hands were considerably plumper, and one of them wore a ring—perhaps a pastoral ring—with a fine diamond in it, which I am quite sure he had never possessed as a layman. He was said to be a very “earnest worker,” and it is certain that he worked with his hands, and that in a very attractive and graceful manner; when he raised them in supplication, my aunt said that they reminded her

of a dove with folded wings, which in the act of benediction became a pair of ditto. His voice was really a good one; only when it dropped to a sweet murmur, or solemn coo, I could not for the life of me help recollecting how it had sounded among the hampers under the drag upon that Derby day. It was very illogical, as well as uncharitable in me, to revert to such a matter, for the wildest undergraduate may become the best of men and clergymen in time, and Theodore Pyx had not been so very wild. Only, somehow, as I watched him, those lines about the "snowy-banded, delicate-handed, dilettante priest," would come into my mind, and I could not quite believe in that hair shirt, nor yet in the scourge in his cupboard.

I called upon him the next day, and sent in my card, but he was compelled to decline to see me; it was the eve of St. Bungay the Elder, who, it seemed, was his patron saint, on the anniversary of whose martyrdom he was bound to be "in retreat" for twenty-four hours. He accepted, however, the invitation I carried to him from my aunt, to dine with us on Wednesday and renew his acquaintance with his old college friend; and at the hour appointed he arrived.

His hostess received him as though he had been a Prince of the Blood Royal who had taken Holy Orders from conscientious convictions, and set before him, I must needs confess, a much better dinner than she

had hitherto thought it worth while to provide for her nephew.

Perhaps I was piqued at this, but his mode of receiving my welcome when we first met had not pleased me; it had not been frank, and had suggested apprehension; as though it was just possible I might have told some stories of his career before the blessed St. Bungay the Elder had taken him under his immediate protection.

His conversation at dinner was confined to the two graces (by which I mean, of course, his benedictions) and the new painted window at St. Ethelburga's which Lady Gergoyle was putting up in memory of her late husband; which, combined with the way in which he put aside, with a gentle sigh, any allusion to our college days, I confess, exasperated me. I felt like Hotspur when the courtier met him.

He made me mad to see him shine so brisk and smell so sweet,
And talk so like a waiting gentlewoman.

When my aunt left the room, I said, rather curtly, "Now, Pyx, have a cigar. This is one of the old brands you used to like so."

"Thank you, no," he answered gently. "I have quite given up smoking."

"You don't object to other people doing it, I hope?" It was clear by the look he cast at his long silk waistcoat that he did; but I had already lit my

regalia, which I was glad to think distributed a fine full flavour of tobacco smoke such as no incense would readily take away from that garment. "And billiards?" I continued: "I suppose you never touch a cue now."

He shook his head with a sad smile. "I should hardly know which end to strike with."

"And yet, what a dab you used to be at pool, Pyx! Do you remember how you used to laugh at Jones 'for putting his trust in Providence,' as he called it, when he used to go in for a fluke?"

"I am thankful to say that I have forgotten those matters," said he, taking a sip of port. "What a noble character is your dear aunt!"

"Yes; she's a jolly good old woman," said I cheerfully. "I hope you are not thinking of marrying her."

"I? My good friend!" he answered smiling, "I have a wife already."

"The deuce you have!" exclaimed I, with astonishment. "That's not generally known, is it?"

"You mistake me," said he. "I mean that I am already wedded to the Church."

"Oh, I see; you go in for celibacy of the clergy?"

"Most certainly I do. A priest should be vowed to Heaven. Perhaps you have not read my little work upon that subject?"

"No; but I should like to read it immensely. I hope it has a portrait of the author for its frontispiece."



"Well, yes, it has," said he, with an imperturbable gravity; "it was by desire of my congregation that it was inserted."

If he had not been sitting at my own table, I think I must have burst out laughing; as it was, I only said, "Well, that was rather hard upon the ladies, Pyx. It appears to me that they adore you—as indeed they always did."

A roseate flush spread over my companion's features. "Let us recall, my friend, no humiliating antecedents."

He was thinking, I knew, of the milliner in the High Street whom he certainly would have married at college, only, as he had frankly owned, he had not the money to pay for a special licence, and to have put up the banns would have been ruin.

I felt that, though Pyx was a humbug, it would still be inhospitable to roast him further, so I hastened to assure him that nothing I had known to his disadvantage in his salad days would ever pass my lips, and then turned the conversation to his parish.

And so we parted good friends.

Six months after my return to town I had a letter from my aunt, which contained the following post-script: "We have all been greatly distressed here by the conduct of your friend, Mr. Theodore Pyx; it will be a sad blow, I fear, to the cause with which he has

been so unhappily identified. You doubtless saw yesterday's *Post*."

I had seen nothing about Pyx in the paper in question, and rushed down to the club at once to look at it. There was nothing about him in the Police Reports, nor yet in the proceedings of the Divorce Court, which my eye naturally sought in the first instance. What *could* he have done? At last I found it under a special heading, "*Marriage in High Life*." The Reverend Theodore Pyx had been united in the bonds of wedlock (with full choral service) to Emily, relict of the late Sir Anthony Gergoyle, K.C.B., formerly Governor of Patagonia.

It was not without some difficulty, for I was interrupted by several paroxysms of laughter, that I could write the required letter of sympathy and condolence to my aunt upon the backsliding of her favourite Divine. I said I blushed for him as though I were the painted window put up by Lady Gergoyle to the memory of her late husband; a metaphor which pleased my respected relative very much, by the way, and gave her a higher opinion of my intelligence than she had been hitherto pleased to entertain.

I neither saw nor heard anything of Pyx again till last Derby day, which found me, for the second time in my life, upon Epsom Downs. It is no matter why I thus revisited a scene of pleasure so unsuited to my own respectable habits. I disdain to protest that I

patronised it because the institution tends to improve the breed of horses; suffice it to say that I was there, and that there I met Theodore Pyx—once more upon a drag—his own drag—and in very pleasant company. He had a red silk tie, which contrasted with a well-cut white waistcoat, that set off his appearance to great advantage, but certainly detracted from it in an ecclesiastical point of view.

In answer, however, to my astonished stare, he at once informed me that he had “cut the Church,” to the health of which, nevertheless, and to show that there was no ill-feeling, he would be very happy to drink a glass of champagne with me.

“But where,” said I, “is Mrs. Pyx?”

“Hush! she retains her maiden—I mean, her courtesy title: Lady Gergoyle is inside.” And he introduced me to her through the open window accordingly.

She was a fine woman, but older than her present husband: I should say five-and-twenty years older. She had some cold chicken and salad on her lap, and a tankard of claret-cup in her hand, and seemed to be enjoying herself exceedingly.

“You must come down to our house in the country,” she said, “and stay a week with your old college friend.”

“There’s a capital billiard table,” added Pyx, “and you will find me in pretty good practice again.”

And he winked unutterable things. I felt myself in quite a false position, for it was evident not only that Pyx had been playing his late ecclesiastical game for something like the very thing he had gained by it, but also that he thought it one which all sensible persons, including myself, must sympathise with and admire.

"You offered me a weed the last time I saw you, my good fellow," he said; "now take one of mine:" and he gave me one of the very longest cigars I ever saw, except the one he had in his own mouth, which was its twin brother.

When he gave up Celibacy, it seems, he resumed Tobacco. What he had done with his hair shirt and his scourge—if they ever existed—I know not: perhaps he had left them as relics to the shrine of St. Ethelburga.

It is very improbable that I shall revisit Epsom again; but the association of it with the Rev. Theodore Pyx will abide with me for ever; it seems, so to speak, to hallow those two Derbys.

And he wished unchangeable things. I felt myself in quite a false position, for it was evident not only that Fry had been playing his late confessional game for something like the very thing he had gained by it, but also that he thought it one which all sensible persons, including myself, must sympathize with and admire.

"You offered me a word the last time I saw you," my good fellow," he said; "now take one of mine;" and he gave me one of the very largest cigars I ever saw, except the one he had in his own mouth, which was his wife's brother.

When he gave an O'Leary, it seems he assumed Johnson. What he had done with his hair since and his sponge—if they ever existed—I know not; but he had had that as before to the time of St. Elizabeth.

It is very probable that I shall revisit Boston again; but the association of it with the Rev. Dr. Fry will abide with me for ever; it seems, so to speak, to follow those two Dicks.

SIMPSON OF BUSSORA.

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SIMPSON OF BUSSORA.

I HAVE a profound distrust of all travellers. Not because they are prone to tell me untruths about their experiences, for that has in a great measure become a dangerous experiment: wherever they may have been, other people have now also been, and it is easy, if I may use a professional expression, to "correct their proofs;" my distrust arises from the ideas in my own mind of the experiences that they do *not* tell me. When they get away from the regions of civilisation, and out of the influence of public opinion, think I to myself, what is it these people do not do? For the very fact of a man's being a traveller is, between ourselves, by no means a good sign. Why does he not stop at home in the bosom of his family, or, if he has no family, acquire one? It is his duty as a citizen. When a boy runs away from school, it is, of course, the correct thing to call him "intrepid," "gallant," "high-spirited," and "independent;" but that sort of boy is in reality not—generally speaking—a good boy. It may be very true that a nation owes its nautical supremacy to this description of youth; but he doesn't

run away to sea from that distant and patriotic motive; he goes to sea because he doesn't like what is good for him on land; and almost immediately, though that is beside the question, finds he has made a great mistake. Similarly, a man does not go to Tartary or Kamtschatka to improve his mind: if he ventured to tell me *that* (supposing he was not a very tall man, and I had no reason to suppose he had a yataghan or any other outlandish weapon concealed about his person), I should laugh in his face. No: he flies to such obscure regions because the restraints of civilisation are abhorrent to his undisciplined mind, and he has some morbid taste, say, for human flesh—uncooked. The mildest-spoken man I ever met in my life, and the greatest traveller, once confided to me, after a most excellent dinner at our club, that, "after all," there was nothing like uncooked food. He did not *say* human flesh, but I knew well enough what he meant. He has repented since of having let out so much, and endeavours to re-assure me by his conventional behaviour and conversation.

"The world is small," he says (he has been round it two or three times), "and give him England; for, when all is said, that is the best place to live in;" but this does not deceive me for a moment. That man is a cannibal at heart. I have seen him look at plump and tender people in a very peculiar way, and I would not trust him alone with my baby for a small fortune.

That sweet child would take rank among the "mysterious disappearances." He would say, "How should I know?" like the frog who swallowed the duck's egg; but I should know better than the duck. If you think these apprehensions extreme, you are, of course, welcome to your own opinions: some people are more sanguine than others, and also more simple.

My mind is, I think, a tolerably fair one, and I have never entertained suspicions against those who are compelled to visit distant latitudes against their wills. Queen's messengers, convicts, sailors, etc., etc., may be very respectable persons in their way, notwithstanding where they may have been to. Such was my charitable belief until within the last few days; since which I have seen some reason to change it. One of the quietest and best fellows I ever knew—and I have known him all my life—was Simpson of Bussora. I was at school with him five-and-forty years ago, and though his house of business is at the distant spot just mentioned, I had met him from time to time during his periodical visits to this country, and always found him unchanged—gentle, unassuming, modest, and orthodox in his opinions. Our house does a little business with him in shawls and carpets, but our acquaintance is mainly social. My wife and daughters are very partial to him, and delight in his Persian tales, which are picturesque and full of local colour. He brings them little bottles of scent which perfume

the whole neighbourhood, and now and then a scarf that is the envy of their friends. I never, however, entertained any idea of Simpson as a son-in-law until my wife put it into my head. He lived too far away for me to picture him in such a relation, and though I knew he had made money, I did not think he had made enough to return home and settle. His income was a very handsome one; but living at Bussora, he had given me to understand, was dear, and did not admit of much saving. Above all, Simpson struck me as by no means a marrying man. Whenever the subject of matrimony was mooted, he always smiled in that dry, cynical way which proclaims the confirmed bachelor. Household matters did not interest him; he did not take much to children; he would smoke until the small hours of the morning, and raise his eyebrows when one said it was late, and perhaps one's wife might be sitting up. He would say, "Really!" as though such an idea as one's wife sitting up for one was preposterous, but could never concern *him*.

I need not go into the causes which led to my conversing with Simpson on the subject of matrimony. Suffice it to say that I did not do so of my own free-will. I had received instructions from my wife to "sound" Simpson on the matter, with relation to some "ideas" that she had got into her head with respect to our second daughter Jane, and "to hear was to obey," as they say at Bussora.

"My dear Simpson," said I, as we were cracking our walnuts together after a little dinner under my own roof, "I often wonder why a man like you, with a large income and a fine house, as you describe your home to be at Bussora, has never married. It must be rather wretched living out there all alone."

"Well, it would be, no doubt," said Simpson in his quiet way. "But, Lord bless you! I've been married these twenty years."

You might have knocked me down with a feather. "Married these twenty years! You astound me. Why, how was it you never spoke about it?"

"Oh, I don't know; I thought it wouldn't interest you. She was a Persian, you know. If she had been a European, then I should have told you."

"A Persian wife! Dear me," said I, "how funny it seems!" I said "funny," but at the same time all the suspicions that I entertained (and now entertain more than ever) respecting travellers and persons who abjure civilisation, crowded into my mind. "Now, what colour, my dear Simpson, if I may put the question without impertinence, are your children?"

"Well, we've got no children," said Simpson, in his usual imperturbable tone. "We never had any."

I don't quite know why, but somehow or other I thought this creditable to Simpson. It was very wrong in him to have married a Persian, perhaps a fire worshipper, or at best a Mahommedan, but it was a

comfort to think that the evil had, so to speak, stopped there. To think of Simpson with a heap of parti-coloured children, professing, perhaps, their mother's outlandish faith as they grew up, would have been painful to me, in connection with the fact that Simpson was at that moment under my roof, the same roof with my wife and daughters, and that I was the churchwarden of our district church. I forsook at once the particular subject of Simpson's wife to discuss the general subject of polygamy.

"The Persians have more wives than one, have they not?" inquired I.

"Those who can afford it have," said he; "but it is not so usual as you may imagine."

"I need not ask how so profligate a system must needs work," said I. "It is a domestic failure, of course?"

"You need not ask the question, as you say," replied Simpson, cracking a walnut. "But if you do ask, I am bound to say it is so far like marriage in this country—it is sometimes a domestic failure and sometimes not. Perhaps it requires more judgment in selection; you have not only to please yourself, you know, but to please your other wives."

"Goodness gracious!" said I, "how coolly you talk about it! I hope no European who happens to be resident in this strange community ever gives in to the custom?"

"Some do and some don't," was the reply of Simpson. "I lived in Persia with one wife for fifteen years before I gave in."

"What! you married a second wife, your first wife being alive?"

"Just so," was the unabashed rejoinder.

Simpson swept the walnut shells into a corner of his plate, and helped himself to sherry. "I have now four wives."

"Bless my soul and body!" said I. "Four wives!"

"Yes. The story of my little *ménage* may seem in your ears rather curious. If it will not bore you, I'll tell you about it."

I had no words to decline the offer, even if I wished it. My breath was fairly taken away by Simpson's four wives. The traveller that had liked his food uncooked had given me rather a turn, but that was nothing to this revelation of my present companion: a man we had always considered of the highest respectability, and who my wife had even thought would have suited our Jane.

"Well, it was at a picnic party on the plains near Bussora that the thing first came about. My wife and I were both present at it; and my European notions preventing my believing there could be the least misunderstanding about it, since I was already married, I made myself very agreeable to a certain Persian lady. She was neither young nor pretty—just like what my

wife herself, indeed, had grown to be by that time—and I no more thought of making her my No. 2 than—dear me!—of embracing Mahommedanism. My attentions, however, were misconstrued; and her brother, being a violent man in the Shah's cavalry, and knowing I had a fairish income, insisted upon my becoming his brother-in-law. I believe Irish marriages are often brought about in the same way, so there was nothing in *that*; the peculiarity of the case lay in my having a wife already, and one who was very resolute indeed to prevent my having another. I spare you the troubles that ensued. Between my No. 1 wife on the one hand, and her sharp tongue, and the officer of Spahis on the other, with his sharp sword, I was placed in a very unpleasant position, I promise you; but in the end I married Khaleda. I am sorry to say the two ladies got on extremely ill together. It was said by a great English wit that when one's wife gets to be forty, one ought to be allowed to change her for two twenties, like a forty-pound note, and I dare say that would be very nice; but, unhappily, I had now two wives, each forty, if they were a day, and there was no prospect of getting them changed, or parting from them in any way.

“Pirouzé and Khaleda led me a most unhappy life. They quarrelled from morning to night, and so far from being able to play off one against the other, as I had secretly hoped, I was treated with great un-

kindness by both of them. They were a matter of very considerable expense, of course, and very little satisfaction. My position, in fact, became intolerable; and as I could please neither of them, I resolved to please myself by marrying No. 3."

"A twenty, I suppose?" said I, interested in spite of myself in this remarkable narration.

"Well, yes; that is, she would have been a twenty in England, but in Persia young ladies marry a good deal earlier. She was a charming creature, and cost me——"

"What! did you *buy* her?" cried I, in astonishment and horror.

"Well, no, not exactly; her father, however, insisted upon something handsome, and there were heavyish fees to be paid to her mother and sisters, and to the Governor of Bussora. The custom of the country is curious in that respect. After one's second wife a considerable tax is levied by the government upon marrying men. However, Badoura was worth all the money: she sang, she played divinely; that is, she would have done so if she had not been always crying. Pirouzé and Khaleda made her life utterly miserable. Hitherto they had been at daggers drawn with one another, but now they united together to persecute the unhappy Badoura. Her very life was scarcely safe with them. Wretched as my former lot had been, it was now become unendurable, for one

can bear one's own misery better than that of those we love."

Here Simpson took out his handkerchief, of a beautiful Persian pattern, and pressed it to his eyes. "Yes, my dear friend, they led my Badoura a dog's life—did those two women. I felt myself powerless to protect her, for I was never physically strong; and though I did not understand one-half of the epithets they showered upon her, I could see by the effect they had upon her that they were most injurious—what I have no doubt would in this country be considered actionable. For her, however, there was no remedy, and I think she would have sunk under their persecution had I not married Zobeide."

"No. 4!" cried I, aghast. "What on earth did you do that for?"

"I married Zobeide solely and wholly for Badoura's sake. I chose her, not for her beauty, nor her virtues, nor her accomplishments, but entirely for her thews and sinews. I said to her, 'Zobeide, you are a strong and powerful young woman: if I make you my wife, will you protect my lamb?' and she said, 'I will.' It was the most satisfactory investment—I mean, the happiest choice—I ever made. My home is now the abode of peace. In one wing of the house abide Pirouzé and Khaleda, in the other Zobeide and Badoura: two on the east side and two on the west. Each respects the other; for although Pirouzé and

Khaleda are strong females, and could each wring the neck of my dear Badoura, Zobeide is stronger than both of them put together, and protects her. Thus the opposing elements are, as it were, neutralised: the combatants respect one another, and I am the head of a united house. I got letters from all of my four wives this morning, each of them most characteristic and interesting: Badoura forgot to pay the postage—she has a soul above pecuniary details—and her letter was the dearest of all.”

“Don’t cry, Simpson,” said I—“don’t cry, old fellow. The steamer goes on Tuesday, and then you will see all your wives again. They will welcome you with outstretched arms—eight outstretched arms, like the octopus.”

I confess I was affected by my friend’s artless narration at that time, though, since I have reflected upon the matter, my moral sense has reasserted itself, and is outraged. I state the matter as fairly as I can. I have been to picnics myself, as a married man, and made myself agreeable to the ladies. Well, in Persia this might have cost me my life, or the expense of a second establishment. So far, there is every excuse for Simpson. But, on the other hand, the astounding fact remains that there are four Mrs. Simpsons at Bussora. Whenever I look at his quiet, business-like face, or hear him talking to my wife and the girls about Persian scenery, this revelation of his

strikes me anew with wonder. Of course I have not told them about his domestic relations; it would be too great a shock to their respective systems; yet the possession of such a secret all to myself is too hard to bear, and I have, therefore, laid it before the public. The whole thing resolves itself into a rule-of-three sum. If even a quiet respectable fellow like Simpson, residing at Bussora, has *four* wives, how many wives—well, I don't mean exactly *that*; but how much queerer things must people do who are not so quiet and respectable as Simpson, and who live still further off.

SOME TALES OF WHITE
ELEPHANTS.

SOME TALES OF WHITE
ELEPHANTS.

SOME TALES OF WHITE ELEPHANTS.

I KNOW a good and honest lawyer—*rara avis in*—
(no, I shall want that fine old quotation presently)—
an honest lawyer, who has stated it as his opinion—
and his opinion is what people give pounds and pounds
for—that it is a great mistake to be “much respected.”
His experience is, he says, that most persons who have
been thus designated are dead; and that the rest suffer
from their good reputations. He has himself often suc-
coured the widow and the orphan, free, gratis, for no-
thing; and when the orphans have grown up they are
apt to be grateful. They send presents to their “valued
and much respected friend” from the uttermost ends
of the earth, which is what he objects to even when
they pay the carriage.

And true it is, it often happens (even confining the
matter to this country) that a present is a misfortune
to one. For example, I am myself a poor man, and
a rich friend sends me a haunch of venison. My larder
is not big enough for it to hang in, my kitchen-range
is not large enough to cook it; and it has to lodge
and even to board out (for it requires flour and all

sorts of applications daily); thus it costs as much as a leg of mutton to begin with. Then I am obliged to ask ten people to eat it, the expense of which entertainment reduces me to my last shilling. My rich friend has no wish to impoverish me, but the effect of his munificence is similar to that of the present of the White Elephant which the King of Siam gives to those whom he intends to ruin; its meat, drink, and clothing (for they have to supply its trunk, of course) eat them out of house and home.

Or, suppose I am a rich man, and a poor one sends me, as friendship's offering, some ornament for my drawing-room, which is very tastefully and elegantly furnished; what the deuce am I to do with it? If it is really handsome, I feel that I have robbed him; if it is otherwise, though one does not prize a gift according to its cost, it spoils my drawing-room by its contrast with what is already there.

Again, there are a lot of people in the world who are always giving one presents which are worthless. They remember one's birthday, and one's marriage-day, and the anniversary of the day one was appointed a revising barrister, or the chaplain to the lunatic asylum. They think it very touching to call to mind these interesting dates by the gifts of a paper-knife, or a box of toothpicks, or a volume of Tupper's Poems. For my part, I would much rather "compound" for all these subscriptions as is done in the Inns of Court, and that

they gave me a five-pound note, and had done with them.

There is a still more troublesome sort of people—generally very wealthy—who insist upon paying your fare for you when you travel with them by the Underground, or on defraying the turnpike toll when you drive over a bridge; but to get a five-pound note out of *them*—in the way of composition or any other—is a dream to be indulged in not even by the most sanguine.

Then there are some excellent persons who insist upon providing us with some specimens of their own particular productions; what they have themselves invented, concocted, or made captive to their own bow and spear; and which in nine cases out of ten, and independently of the obligation incurred, one would infinitely rather be without.

Your friend the amateur author, for example, sends you a presentation copy of his first novel in three volumes. Now, what are you to do with that? Of course, if you are prepared to read it, I have nothing further to say; but suppose you shrink from proceeding to that dread extremity; you have in that case to sit down and write quickly that you have received his most thoughtful present, which will indeed be highly prized, and that you are “looking forward with the greatest eagerness” to its perusal. But if you think that will satisfy him, except for the moment, you are

very much mistaken. He will be sure to inquire your opinion, sooner or later, about that immortal work—and then be on your guard; for fatal to your friendship with him will be the moment when he elicits the truth. Above all things, cut the book—I mean, with the paper-knife—on the instant of its arrival; no eulogy, however vague or skilful, will avail you if he discovers that this precaution has not been taken.

Again, there are some excellent housewives who, not content with delighting their own families with preserves and pickles, and even medicines of their own manufacture, export them to other people's houses: they present one at Christmas with a bottle of home-made Curaçoa, better, as they inform us, than any we can get at the wine merchant's; and some specific of their own concoction, which, however "sovereign" it may be against all other ailments, is quite powerless to ward off the effects of the Curaçoa.

Or again, one's friend is a sportsman, who, having secured some prize of exceptional rarity, and modestly thinking it is too good for his own table (or perhaps not unwilling that we should bear personal testimony to his prowess), sends it to us (generally unpaid) by rail.

The last gift I received in this way was from a famous fowler, and consisted of a black cygnet—*rara avis in terris, nigroque* (here you have it, as I promised) *simillima cygno*. Neither I, nor my cook, nor the

poulterer round the corner, had seen (except on a sign-board) such a bird before. Its size was gigantic—much larger than that of a full-grown white swan—and it had no end of a neck. How this neck was to be cooked was a problem, while to cut it off was out of the question. For who would have been able to guess its nature, or have been by any means induced to eat it, had it come to table *without* its neck? As it was, I felt that I should have to make a little speech about it to my guests, in the way of introduction, not to say of apology for its appearance. As the result of the plucking of it we promised ourselves an eider-down quilt, if not an entire feather-bed; but at the very outset an unpleasant circumstance happened. It had arrived in apparently admirable condition: we had said to ourselves, “For once, we have really got a useful present out of old Webfoot;” but directly the cook began to pluck it—it was not “the last feather,” mind, that did it, but the first—it began to smell beyond all power of words to express. We talk of “knocking one down with a feather,” in a metaphorical and poetical way, but one of our cygnet’s feathers was literally enough to do it. Why it was so, I do not pretend to explain. It is possible that, just as a gentleman of colour—though a man and a brother, and even a clerk in holy orders—has unquestionably a certain—well—an aroma about him, such as (I am thankful to say) does not belong to you or me, so this black cygnet

had an odour that surely never belonged to any other race but his own. One has heard of sea-birds being "strong" and "fishy," but those are feeble adjectives to express the exhalations from that bird. As to making anything with his feathers except a bonfire—it was not to be thought of. Of course our kitchen could not accommodate the cygnet, which consequently went to the baker's—whereby we became in a manner public benefactors. One has heard how a knife that has cut an ortolan is thought highly of as giving a rare flavour to quite a common dish. Well, our bird gave a flavour (so the baker told me) to everything that he cooked that day, from a joint of beef to an apple-pie. They had, as one may say, the impression of our signet upon them—and it was a very strong one. When it came to table everyone rose and fled, and all the windows had to be thrown open, though it was far from summer weather. I buried it in the back garden with a coal scoop, with my own hands, and there it lies to this day, let us hope, deodorised; but if so it will be a great corroboration of the Moule, or Mould, theory, and of earth as a disinfectant generally. As to our house, if you had broken a gallon jar of attar of roses in it, it could not have been more thoroughly impregnated—only Cygnet, I do assure you, is not attar of roses.

Now, the honest lawyer whom I have in my mind pooh-poohs that terrible gift as nothing surprising. He

says you must have presents from abroad, and from distant and out-of-the-way places, to appreciate their merits. One of his grown-up and grateful orphans—whom he had laid under eternal obligations by procuring him a divorce on the plea of “infancy”—once sent him a live dromedary (unpaid) from the upper Nile. “The hump,” he says, “was by all accounts a great delicacy,” but I could not kill so huge a creature for its hump, nor, if I had done it, should I have known how to dispose of the rest of the carcass. As to using it as a means of locomotion, that was not to be thought of; as a professional man I could never have ridden the creature to my office, and even in the park he would probably have been objected to, so in the end I gave him to the Zoological Gardens, the committee of which would have made me a fellow of the society, only I happened to be so already. That was a sad business.

“Then again there were the alligator pears (that is not their real name, but it is what the London fruiterers call them, who sometimes exhibit them in their shops). They come from Madeira, and, I hear, are thought very highly of by the islanders. One of my orphans, who is resident there on account of a delicacy of the chest, sent me one winter half a hundred of them. He said they were ‘peculiar’; which I could have believed without that statement from the context of his letter, for he added, ‘they should be

eaten with bread-and-butter and pepper.' They looked like immensely huge green figs—very ripe. When you cut into them there was an enormous kernel, hard as a stone, lying in a mash or squash of what looked like black and yellow cream. It was this cream we were expected to spread upon our bread-and-butter like marrow. Hunger, they say, will tame a lion; but give me the alternative of human flesh or an alligator pear, and I should prefer the former. There was one virtue about these pears which, although a negative one, I have learnt to appreciate in gifts of food from foreign parts; although it had every appearance of being in an advanced state of decomposition, it did not smell.

"The most terrible present, however, I have ever received was from the West Indies. It came from an orphan, who had greatly prospered in the world, and who, thinking himself to be under great obligations to me, must have wished to pay them off at one swoop. He sent me a packing-case of goods so large that it might have come from the West Indies alone (like the Cleopatra Needle), without being shipped at all. For some reason unknown to me (it was too large, perhaps, to be got out of the gates), it was stopped and opened at the docks, the authorities of which sent me the following official memorandum:

"Several articles have been consigned to you from St. Kitt's W.I., which await here your esteemed orders; they comprise a cask (large) of pine-apples, and three

live turtle, one of them dead. Another seems to be in an ailing state. We would recommend your sending for the above. The dock dues are as per enclosed.

“The last item was very considerable; but one must not (thought I) look a gift-cask in the bung-hole; and then the turtle at a guinea a pint would pay their own expenses and those of the pine-apples too. I was partial to turtle and also to pine-apple, and the notion of ‘the whole animal’ being consigned to me in one case, and of a cask (large) in the other, flattered my sense of self-importance. It was only in accordance with the fitness of things that a man like me should be supplied with such dainties wholesale.

“I let my clients run loose that morning, and took a hansom to the docks myself, in order to inspect my property. I had some difficulty in finding it, by-the-bye, when I reached the docks; it is not only the law, let me tell you, which is hedged about with forms and technicalities, and requires lubrication—golden ointment—for its wheels. However, I found it at last; a portion of it—the dead turtle—I could have identified at some distance. No. 2 had also died by that time, but was comparatively fresh, though of course uneatable. The third turtle was the most diminutive of its kind I ever saw in my life. Even at a guinea a pint I didn’t think its soup could have been worth more than seven-and-sixpence. It was more like one of those tortoises

that are sold in the streets for ninepence apiece. However, though a small thing, it was my own, and I brought it to my office in the hansom, on my lap, to the astonishment of the neighbourhood, which is legal.

"The pine-apples I directed to be sent home by parcels delivery, but the clerk of the docks said, 'Not it, it'll have to go by van;' and it was certainly a very large cask. At five shillings a pine-apple, I reckoned roughly, its contents would about defray the dock dues.

"It is customary with persons of my profession to talk darkly about their office secrets. 'You have no idea,' they say, 'what strange things come under our professional eye.' But I never had anything in my office which excited a greater amazement than that turtle, especially among the junior clerks. Some supposed it to be a household pet that I could not bear out of my sight, and which I should bring with me to business every day: others that I had taken it in liquidation of a bad debt from a house in the West India trade. A lady client in a delicate situation, who came to consult me upon a succession case, was seriously alarmed by the quadruped, whom I had placed for security in the waste paper basket—so much so, indeed, that the succession took subsequently quite a new direction. Altogether I was injured in my professional character by that animal, which, moreover, died in the basket.

"'However, thank Heaven,' thought I (though, as

it turned out, I was acknowledging an obligation quite unnecessarily), 'there are still those pine-apples.'

"The door was opened to me at home that evening by a policeman.

"'Why are *you* here?' enquired I. 'Where is John?'

"'John is gone to the hospital, sir,' he replied, 'being as fixed as ——I don't know what they call it.'

"'What a frightful smell!' cried I; 'you must mean asphyxiated. What *is* the matter?'

"'Well, sir, your house is poisoned; that's the long and short of it: your missus is very bad upstairs, and the maids—just listen to 'em!'

"While he was speaking I heard a succession of screams from the downstairs premises. 'What are they screaming at?' I exclaimed impatiently.

"'I don't know the name of 'em,' he replied, with that cautious stolidity peculiar to the Force, 'but they have any number of legs.'

"'The maids!' cried I. 'Impossible!'

"'No, sir; it is what has come with them pine-apples. They're a mass of putrefaction, and have bred a pestilence and these things besides.'

"'Are they cockroaches?'

"'Cockroaches!' he echoed contemptuously; 'worse than that.'

“Great heavens! they are not scorpions, surely?”

“Ay, summut o’ that. Forty-two and forty-three have been at ’em with a hatchet these three hours. The cook and housemaid are attached to those two, or would have fled with the other servants. As for me, I am seeing they don’t get upstairs. Here’s one on ’em.”

“As he spoke, an enormous centipede wriggled into the hall from the kitchen stairs. The policeman drew his truncheon, and, after a hand-to-hand conflict which reminded one of St. George and the dragon, subdued it by cutting off its head.

“The scene below-stairs beggars description. The two maids were standing on the dresser screaming, and the two policemen, one with the kitchen poker and the other with the chopper, were engaged with a legion of abominable reptiles. They worked like Samson with his jaw-bone, but at least one of these centipedes survived the massacre. I say *one*, because I am of a sanguine disposition; I can’t say less than one, because I have seen a centipede in the house since very often, and in all sorts of places. My impression is that two escaped the general slaughter, and that they have an increasing family.

“Can you wonder now,” said my honest lawyer, in conclusion, “that I regret being ‘found out’ (I mean as to honesty) and being ‘so much respected’? If I

had not saved that man in St. Kitt's from the gallows —however, that's not the point; I mean generally, if I had not succoured the widow and the orphan, I should not have exposed myself to their generosity. It is their gifts that make life unendurable. I protest, when I come upon that familiar phrase, 'Know all men by these presents,' it gives me quite a turn."

had not arrived from the Earl of Lincoln the day before
 — however, about the year, I mean generally, I
 had not succeeded the widow and the orphan, I
 should not have expressed myself so differently.
 It is their gift that makes the remarkable. I know
 when I come upon that familiar phrase, "know ye
 not by their fruits," or give me quite a turn.

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AN ADVENTURE IN A FOREST.

AN ADVENTURE IN A FOREST.

AN ADVENTURE IN A FOREST.

I WAS sitting two years ago, with an American lady and her husband, in one of the cool parlours of "Botham's," at Salt Hill—that fine old inn, which, though it had had its day, still up to that date maintained its dignity. I was telling them how in the "King's Room," above-stairs, the allied monarchs with old Blücher had dined together, and how, every year, old King George III. or jolly King William had been wont at Montem time to visit the hospitable place, when the air rang with boyish shouts, and the full-foliaged garden was gay with Greek and Albanian, with Turk and Spaniard, with admiral and post-captain, all in duodecimo editions. The old-world legends of the place, and, above all, the literary air, blown across from Stoke Pogis (Gray's burial-place), not two miles away, delighted my transatlantic friends, and, indeed, we all three were having "a good time" at Botham's, and naturally enough, perhaps, we began talking about old English inns.

"Now, the inn of all others I should like to see," said the lady, "is the old Maypole Inn at Chigwell,

drawn by Cattermole so beautifully in Dickens's 'Bar-naby Rudge.'"

I did not know where Chigwell was, but I gallantly said, "And you shall see it."

There is nothing astonishes English people (and I hope shames some of them) in their companionship with their American cousins so much as the interest which the latter take in all things literary, and especially in the English classics. I will venture to say that the average educated American—and there are few who are not, at all events, well read in our common tongue—knows better than his English cousin where our great men are buried or have been born, where they wrote their more celebrated works, and what localities they have immortalised. This wish to visit Dickens's May-pole, for example, though every way pleasant and natural, was what had never occurred to myself, though I know my Dickens as well as most men, and love him more than most. But as to Chigwell, I had forgotten that the scene of the rioters' visit to the inn was laid there, and I only vaguely knew that it was somewhere in Epping Forest. Nay, I only knew Epping Forest as a spot rarely visited save by the wild East Enders on their Sunday "outing," and, in connection with some bill in Parliament respecting its preservation. To my American friends, just fresh from the Windsor glades, it suggested vast ancestral trees and herds of deer; and though I had my doubts of anything quite so noble

as *that*, I partly shared their expectation. At all events, there would be the inn, more antique now than when the great novelist described it, with its huge porch and carved oak parlours, and gracious associations such as cling around the picturesque abodes of old. And there would be, methought, if not a venison pasty and black-jack of ale, still some good homely fare, and honest liquor in which to drink the memory of him who drew the raven and his master, and sent down Cattermole, R.A., to draw the Maypole Inn.

It is astonishing how quickly have fallen to Dickens's lot that tender reverence and sympathy among his countrymen—and, I may add, at least as much among his transatlantic cousins—which ordinarily takes many years, and even generations, to grow about a dead writer. A small and "highly cultured" clique, indeed, there still is who contend that posterity will pronounce a different verdict; but considering that their contempt for every thing about them—people, places, and things—is so overwhelming, and that the Present has almost no value with them when compared with the Past, it seems to me that the Future and the opinions of our descendants should in their eyes, by analogy, have no value at all. In the mean time, it is certain that no writer has been so successful in making his works part and parcel of the language of his country, I do not say in so short a time, but even without that restriction. Dickens is

more quoted by other writers, even by those who affect to depreciate him, than *any* author. The very sayings of his characters, as well as his characters themselves, have already, indeed, become "household words;" and with respect to his humour, there is an especial and very melancholy reason why we prize it and yet use it so familiarly: with Dickens all real fun has died. We have still, and partly thanks to him, writers who have command of pathos, and who exhibit genuine sympathy with the lot of the Many; but with him all our high spirits seem to have died out. His loss has really done what that of Garrick was by an hyperbole described to have done: it has "eclipsed the gaiety of nations." We have no one else who can tickle our heart-strings with a Micawber or a Sam Weller, and therefore we cling to those immortal conceptions, and are interested by even the scenes in which the Great Master placed them to play their own parts. In this respect the localities of "Barnaby Rudge," including the famous Maypole, have a double attraction, since an historical as well as a literary interest attaches to them. It was Dickens's first attempt, and a most successful one, at the historical novel. It is of necessity, therefore, in some respects less like himself, and in consequence has failed to secure the suffrages of "the clique" I have spoken of, less than any of his others. They are so good as to state that it is the first book in which Dickens exhibited any

power of drawing a gentleman—in the person, I suppose, of Mr. Harewood, though it may possibly be that Sir John Chester has been identified by them with that type of character.

It was for far better reasons, you may be sure, however, that my American friends admired "Barnaby Rudge," and were anxious to visit the famous inn—itsself so picturesque a fragment of old times—where old John Willett was tied and bound by the mad London mob, and where his noble son abode, whom she who has given her name of late to so many a fashionable garb clave to so faithfully, and about which still hang the echoes of that dread alarm-bell which, though it gave but a single knell, still speaks of murder done.

Naturally, all the arrangements for visiting the Maypole—an excursion which was, of course, to include the deer forest of Epping—devolved on me, the Britisher; and, to begin with, I am ashamed to say I had to consult "Bradshaw's Railway Guide" as to how we were to get there.

The East End of London is literally a *terra incognita* to us West Enders, and even our starting-point was much too distant to be reached by cab or carriage. An extension of the Metropolitan Railway, however, seemed to promise to take us to the required station, and by it, on the day appointed, we started accordingly. It landed us somewhere in the City, and

from it we were directed by an official to Liverpool Street Station—only just across the way—where tickets could be procured to Epping. And here it was that our difficulties in search of the desired shrine began.

The booking clerk at Liverpool Street Station, when I said, "Three for Epping," replied, "For Epping?" doubtfully, and then consulted a little ledger. "Well, you see, you *can* go to Epping by this line of rail, but it isn't usual."

I did not wish, of course, to induce my American friends to do any thing more unusual than what they had in hand (for nobody that I could discover among all my circle of acquaintances, which is large, had ever tried the expedition on which *we* were bound), and accordingly I went back to the Metropolitan line to be directed on our way afresh. But, like the little damsel in the poem of "We are Seven," the officials stuck to their text—the Liverpool Street Station was the station for Epping, and, to their knowledge, a thousand people had gone that way "a-foresting" only that very morning. This latter piece of intelligence was not pleasing to me (though I did not breathe it to my friends), for a thousand foresters were likely to exercise a disturbing influence on a comparatively limited locality, and if any of them, by unhappy chance, should have a literary taste, they might have already seized and occupied the best—that is, the most picturesque—apartments that the Maypole had to

offer. Upon our second application, the clerk gave us tickets to Epping, though, as it were, under protest, and giving us notice that we should have to change at Bethnal Green—the dismalest, ugliest, and most abject portion of London, and wholly unconnected with literature, except by a specimen of early ballad poetry, singular to say, comparatively unknown in the United States.

If a thousand “foresters” had preceded us on our road, a good many, it seemed, were still left to accompany us, whose lips even at that comparatively early hour had made acquaintance with the flagon; but they were not, I concluded from their style of conversation, persons who affected literature, nor, on that account at least, likely to visit the Maypole.

At Bethnal Green, and for many stations afterwards, our view was bounded by walls and roofs; but as we emerged from the great wilderness of brick and mortar, the pleasant fields of Essex began to appear as heralds of the fairer scenes beyond.

We were the only people, as it seemed to me, who patronised the first-class at all, which perhaps accounted for the guard in his turn (doubtless with the idea of a “tip” in his head) patronising us.

“For the Forest, I suppose, gentlemen?” said he, putting his head into our open window as we drew near our destination.

“Yes,” said I; “for Epping.”

"Oh, but Epping ain't the Forest, sir; very true it's *called* Epping, and you *can* get to it *from* Epping."

"How very extraordinary!" observed my American lady; "that is the very same thing the booking clerk said!"

I had no explanation to offer of this eccentric behaviour of my countrymen, so I confined myself to asking which station would be more convenient for us to alight at, since Epping was not the place for Epping.

"Well, you had better try Loughton, sir."

I didn't like the idea of "trying Loughton," as though the notion of finding the Forest at all (let alone our way in it) was doubtful; but of course I assented. However, before this experiment could be made, the guard's elbow appeared at the window again, with, "What *part* of the Forest, now, may you be in search of, ma'am?" He had observed by this time that the lady was our guiding star, as indeed she was (and deserved to be), and henceforth addressed himself exclusively to her.

"Well, we wish to go to the Maypole," said she sweetly.

"The Maypole? Ah, the Maypole Inn, that would be," answered he, as though we might possibly have come to dance about the pole itself. "Ah, then Loughton wouldn't be the place; you had best get out at Woodford."

It was all the same to us; so we got out at Woodford, where the obliging guard informed us that a conveyance could be procured. Such a vehicle it was, too! I am sure the honest blacksmith's cart, in which he drove to Chigwell and met the murderer on the way at night, would have been a far more comfortable conveyance. The driver, however, professed to know the forest well—"Ay, as well as any man alive," he said—so we felt at least that we should not be lost in its deep and dusky labyrinths; and also, of course, he knew the Maypole. "It's a longish step from here, however, and it's not the *nighest* inn, by no means, you know."

We hastened to say that we were not going to the Maypole on account of its convenience of access, but for the sake of the inn itself.

"Well, but it ain't the *best* inn, neither," insisted he. "The folks is roughish as has got it just now, and they're about to leave, too, which makes 'em worsen. I reckon you'd be happier like, especially with the lady, at the Druid's Head."

I confess this information a little staggered me; but "the lady," being of opinion that a spice of personal danger would make the expedition more agreeable than otherwise, as giving us, perhaps, some experience of outlaw life in the merry greenwood, was by no means disturbed by it. Her husband, who was not so devoted to literature as to be oblivious of

practical matters, inquired whether we could dine at the Maypole.

"Oh, yes, you can *dine*," was the reply, delivered with what I thought unnecessary emphasis.

"Well, you see, my good man, we don't want to sleep there," said I, cheerfully.

He nodded, and I could not help confessing to myself that there was that in his nod which seemed to say, "And very lucky for you."

"Now, *there's* the Druid's Head," said he, as, passing through a quaint old-fashioned village, he pointed out a very modest house of entertainment. But we took small notice of his remark, since, as it happened, my lady friend had just produced a copy of the first edition of "Barnaby Rudge" (which she had brought with her to refresh her memory), and was calling our attention to the frontispiece, by Cattermole, illustrative of the Maypole itself. Within a mile or so, as we had been informed, we should come in sight of that fine old hostelrie, the picturesqueness of which would doubtless, by the hand of intervening time, be increased rather than otherwise since the great painter drew it. The idea filled us all three with great excitement, and, thanks to the eager Epping air, we were also looking forward to dinner. We already pictured ourselves in a vast apartment of carved oak, or one perhaps hung with moth-eaten tapestry, on one side the huge fire-place with its old-fashioned "dogs," on

the other the mullioned window (not that all of us quite knew what "mullioned" was) with its diamond panes, against which the playful creepers tapped. We saw the portly host respectfully bearing in the lordly sirloin and placing it on the groaning board; we saw—But here the driver pulled up short in the dusty road, and, pointing with his whip across the hedge, exclaimed, "That there's the Maypole."

Our eyes searched the leafy distance for the gabled ends, the twisted chimneys, the lichen-covered antique roof of old John Willett's dwelling. Our literary lady placed her hand upon her heart, as though to restrain its pulsations. The moment was supreme.

"I guess I don't see it *now*," observed her husband.

"It's plain enough, anyways," said the driver.

And it certainly was—very plain. Close to us, just on the other side of the hedge, was the ugliest, commonest, newest, whitewashedest railway beer-house—for it was so small that it could not be called an inn at all—I ever beheld. A door in the middle; a window on each side, and two above them; in the front, a strip of ragged turf; behind, a yard. Not a tree sheltered it. The summer sun beat down upon its unporched front, and displayed all its deformity in hideous detail. Out of the lower windows leaned various heads, surmounted by fur caps and crumpled "wideawakes," the proprietors of which surveyed us in bucolic wonder.

"I do really believe that this *is* the Maypole," said I, despairingly.

"It cannot, *cannot* be," said my lady friend. Her tone suggested a solemn remonstrance addressed to the government of the universe: things could never have come to such a pass, it seemed to convey, under a beneficent scheme of creation. "You don't mean that this is Dickens's, my man," continued she, addressing the driver in a conciliatory tone—"the inn of 'Barnaby Rudge'?"

He took off his hat and scratched his head, which seemed to afford him little relief; he was evidently at a nonplus. "Well, ma'am, the fact is, this here inn, though it ain't a-been built more than these four years, is always changing hands. A Rudge, I believe, did have it; but he was Bill Rudge, and not Barnaby. As to the other landlord's name as you mentioned, *I never heerd on it.*"

"This is *shocking*," said the lady, looking at me. "The ignorance of your fellow-countrymen—"

"It's not in natur', ma'am," interrupted the man, stung by this observation, "that I should remember all them landlords' names, many on 'em having been here but a month or two, and the rent not paid by the half of them even for *that* time. And as to the accommodation, didn't I tell you that you would ha' been better served at the Druid's Head?"

"Is there no *other* Maypole, my good man?" inquired I, with the calmness of despair.

"Well, I've lived hereabout, man and boy, these fifty year, and I never *heerd* o' one."

I looked at my transatlantic guests, and they looked at me, and then we all three burst out laughing. To have come so far, and with such changings and inconvenience, and so very uncomfortably, in order to arrive at this ridiculous pot-house, struck us all three in so humorous a light, that we fairly roared with laughter. The dreadful people in the Maypole parlours waved their beer mugs at us and laughed also in an idiotic fashion. The driver thought we were laughing at him, and in sulky tones inquired where we would please to be driven to *now*.

"Oh," I said, "since there is no Maypole, at least let us see the Forest. Drive into the Forest."

"This *is* the Forest," answered he, waving his whip about in a vague manner. All about us were fields and lanes, a cow or two, and a dog asleep, a hen and chickens in the white road, and a horse-trough.

"Good heavens!" cried I, "are you making game of us? Where are the deer, the trees, the 'boundless contiguity of shade'?"

"I never heerd of no deer, except the one as they brings down in a cart to 'unt o' Eastèr-Monday. There's trees enuff, aren't there? I dunno what you wants, not I."

The man was evidently getting very angry, and the more so since my American friends, who were fortunately very good-natured, and had a keen sense of humour, had by this time become speechless with mirth. That there should be not only no Maypole at Chigwell, but also no forest at Epping, was something too exquisitely ludicrous.

"I insist," said I, "upon being shown a forest. You are deceiving us, driver. I have known a gentleman who speaks in the highest terms of Epping Forest and the view from its hill."

"Ah, you must mean 'Igh Beech," said he.

"Very likely. Then drive us to High Beech."

"Well, it's nigh upon seven miles away."

"I don't care if it's seventy!" cried I, indignantly. "Drive on."

I felt that my country would be disgraced in the eyes of my transatlantic friends if that forest was not discovered. And after an interminable drive we arrived at High Beech. This was a cluster of trees upon a highish hill, and really commanded a splendid view; but the fact is, I, for my part, was by that time too hungry to appreciate views. There is a metaphorical phrase commonly applied to children who help themselves to more than they can eat—"Your eye is bigger than your stomach;" and the reverse of that expression was now applicable to our little party. Our eye, even if it could have rested upon Cattermole's Maypole

(which I don't believe ever existed), would have been no longer satisfied; another organ required sustenance, and cried, "Dinner."

"Is there any decent inn near here, my man, where we can dine?" demanded I.

"Well, there's the Druid's Head and the Maypole—"

"I said *near here*," I interrupted, fiercely; "and never let me hear the names of those two hateful inns again."

"Well, wot do 'ee say to the Stars and Stripes?"

"Come," said I, cheerfully, "here is a compliment to the American flag. Has it a garden, my man? and is it clean and comfortable?"

"It 'ave a garden," rejoined the driver, cautiously; and on he drove.

I will not harrow the gentle reader's heart by describing that inn. It was larger than the Maypole, but, if possible, uglier, and it was full of those gentry who, we had been warned, had preceded us "out a-foresting." Nearly the whole thousand must have been at that inn. Over what we ate and how we ate it I draw a discreet veil, and also over the return journey. The getting back to the East End of London was even worse than the departure from it had been. Once, after actually arriving there, we found ourselves in a strange railway station, which, it seems, was the direct one for Epping, and we got very nearly taken back there, the bare idea

of which was more ridiculous to us than can be described.

If we didn't absolutely enjoy that day of failures, I am quite sure that no three people ever laughed more within the space of twelve hours. Some people are said "never to move a muscle" when they indulge in laughing, and I wish that had been my case, for I strained a muscle in my back during an aggravated fit of it. Once at home, I was fortunately enabled to offer my friends a decent meal, and we were very glad to get it. But supper never agrees with me. I had a dreadful dream that night, in which Betsey Prig appeared to me. She was driving me in a one-horse chaise, and held Mrs. Gamp's famous umbrella in her hand in place of a whip.

"Where, madam," inquired I, respectfully, "is the Maypole Inn?"

She pulled up, and looked me steadily and severely in the face, just as on a certain memorable occasion she once confronted her old friend.

"Young man," said she, "I don't believe as there is any such place."

And upon my honour, I agree with her.

The reflection made by my lady friend upon this wonderful adventure was, I thought, very characteristic of her sex: "I wonder what that guard could have thought of us, who imagined us to be bound for the Maypole as it really is!"

CAPTAIN COLE'S PASSENGER.

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EVERYONE who uses the great steam ferry between Liverpool and New York knows Captain Cole of the Cunard line. I don't say anything about his seamanship, because I know nothing about it; but he is said to be the very best of the commanders of that company, which boasts of never having lost a ship—nor a passenger—during the many years it has ploughed the Atlantic. My own acquaintance with him has been solely on shore; because when at sea I am never in a condition to make acquaintance with anybody. There are some folks that tell you that sea-sickness "goes off" after a certain number of days. I can only say that I should like to know the number. It has never "gone off" with me during even the longest voyage between this country and the United States or *vice versâ*. Perhaps it would "go off" if I extended my travels to South America, but my impression is that I should go off first. Nature herself seems to have set bounds, in my case, to the wish to range. If I had been born on the Continent, I might have been a great traveller; but being insular, no desire for

foreign travel ever stirs within me. My Barque is on the shore, and never goes beyond it (such a thing as into a Bight) if I can help it. I can sit on a pier (if it is not one of those chain piers which swing), and watch the ripple of the wave with much satisfaction; but not all the blandishments of all the boatmen in Great Britain would induce me to embark upon it for pleasure.

Of all poems, Byron's "Address to the Ocean" is my favourite, because (under pretence of friendship) he shows what a monster it is. "The wrecks are all thy deed"—a strongish expression to use, at a time when French ships of battle were sunk by scores by the English guns, but I like him all the better for it. "A thousand ships sweep over thee in vain," which, though not quite a correct statement, is eminently true as regards sea-sickness. You may try any number of vessels, and all kinds of them, but to that complexion (of sea-green, with black about the eyes) you come at last, with which you started.

I hate the sea. For certain reasons, however, I am compelled periodically to cross the Atlantic, and on the first occasion I had a letter of introduction to good Captain Cole. We shook hands; the screw began to move, and I rushed to my cabin, where I remained throughout the voyage. I believe he came to see me very often in my misery. "Visiting the sick" at sea is a much more unpleasant thing than

on shore, remember, but I didn't know and I didn't care. I saw him—to know him again—at New York; and in short, though on board his ship he might have been its rudder, for all I saw of him, we met on shore both in the New and Old World pretty frequently. He knew Charles Dickens, and, being himself a genial fellow, was personally much attached to him, but he could never forgive him what he has written of the dangers (from fire) of a steamer's chimney at sea. It was the only part of the great novelist's writings that seemed to have come under his notice (indeed, the gallant captain never read anything but his own log and the points of the compass), and this caused him to form an unfavourable view of him as an author. "No, sir," he would say, when I would endeavour to combat this idea; "he was a great man, a noble, generous, fine-hearted creature, but as a writer he was nowhere—just like what you are," he would say, with a wink of the eye and a roll of his head, "when you're aboard ship." In spite of which disagreement of literary opinion, the Captain and I grew to be fast friends.

He entertained a colossal contempt for the land and all belonging to it (except his fellow-creatures) which amused me vastly; but especially for its modes of locomotion. Cabs, coaches, and omnibuses were all in his eyes senseless and dangerous; and as to getting astride a horse, I don't believe any sum

would have induced him to attempt it. He had a certain respect, however, for an express train, or rather for the engine of it, which, flying through storm and sleet from starting-point to terminus, reminded him perhaps of his own gallant ship.

As we had hardly a thought or a topic in common, it was natural that our social intercourse took a narrative shape. I told him stories (which, as he had never read anything, had the merit of novelty), and he reciprocated with yarns. I was foolish enough at first to suggest a channel for his recollections—shipwrecks, of the records of which, as a thorough-going landsman, I was naturally fond. "Sir," he said, drawing himself up, and getting very red in the face, "you forget that you are talking to a captain of a Cunarder. What the—[here he inserted a sea-term] do *we* know about shipwrecks? However," he added, more benignly, "there was one occasion when I confess I thought the spell of our Company's good fortune was about to be broken, and that I should be the critter to do it.

"It was six years ago or so, and in the summer time, that the ship was making her voyage out, and a very good voyage. The whole way the sea had been like a duck-pond."

Here I shook my head incredulously. I had seen the Atlantic in the condition referred to—and felt it.

"Well, I should not perhaps have said 'the whole

way," he admitted, with a smile, "for when we were about 100 miles from land we met with a breeze of wind."

The Captain always talked of "a breeze of wind" just as some shore folks talk (though with less tautology, for sherry is not always wine) of "a glass of sherry wine."

"I remember the breeze, because we picked up a little sailing boat with only one man in her, very short of provisions, who had been blown out to sea, and whom we took on board. About half an hour after that incident I was informed that one of the passengers wished to speak with me in private upon a very important matter. Accordingly he came to me in my cabin, a little thin wizened man looking like a tailor, whom I had hardly noticed as being on board; indeed, he was insignificant enough in every way save for the expression of his face, which certainly exhibited the most intense anxiety and distress of mind. Of course I thought he had been drinking, and in fact was on the verge of 'the jumps,' which is what the Yankees term *delirium tremens*.

"Well, my man, what is it?" said I severely; 'we shall soon sight land; I have no time to throw away.'

"That is very true, Captain," he answered, in a thin quavering voice, and with a strong American accent, 'but your time will be even shorter than you

imagine unless you listen to what I have got to say to you. You will never see land, and much more make it, if you are not prepared to act at once on the information I am about to give you. Neglect it, and your ship will be at the bottom of the sea in'—he looked at his watch—'yes, in exactly an hour and a half.'

"'All right, my man,' said I, 'you may go. I'll send the ship's doctor to look at you;' for of course I thought he was wandering in his wits.

"Then what had seemed like anxiety in his face became mortal fear—genuine abject terror such as no actor could have imitated. He threw himself upon his knees, and, clasping his hands together, besought me not to treat his words with incredulity.

"'Then why, sir,' I replied, 'do you talk such damned nonsense about my ship?'

"'Because it's true, Captain,' he groaned. 'There's dynamite on board, and clockwork machinery connected with it. As I am a living man, if the thing is not at once looked to, the ship and all on board of her will be blown to atoms within the time I have mentioned.'

"At this I confess I felt a cold shudder down the nape of my neck, for not three months before the very catastrophe at which he hinted had taken place at (I think) Bremerhaven, and had struck terror into all ships' captains like myself. Some infamous villain

had insured a steamer very heavily, and had taken means for its destruction on its voyage in this very manner, only the infernal machine had burst on the quay, killing scores of people, and its inventor with it.

“‘Good heavens, man! tell me all,’ I cried, ‘and quickly.’

“‘Nay, but I daren’t, and I can’t,’ he pleaded, ‘unless I have your solemn promise that you will never betray me. I know that you are a man of your word, and that will suffice for me. You must promise, whatever may happen, never to allude to the conversation that we are now having, or to make use of it in any way to the disadvantage of myself or others.’

“‘Well,’ said I, ‘I promise. Now, where is this cursed dynamite?’

“‘One moment, Captain. There is still time and to spare, now, since you have listened to reason, and I must prove to you that, though I once hearkened to the whisper of the devil, I repented, and would have undone the mischief if I could. This ship is insured in London—never mind where and how—for a huge sum, and I have been employed to sink her. I brought the machinery, set to this very day (for you have made the voyage quicker than was thought possible), down to Liverpool, in a small portmanteau which was sent on board the night before she

sailed. It was a stipulation that I should sail with you to see that nothing interfered with the execution of the plan. But I swear to you, no sooner did I touch the deck than I repented. I wanted the package placed in my own cabin—ask your men if it was not so—in order that I might have some opportunity of getting it thrown overboard in the course of the voyage. They had already, however, put it below—where, indeed, it had been intended to go—with the other baggage. It's a small portmanteau of bullock's-hide, and they might as well have let me have had it in my cabin.'

"The dread had passed away from the man's voice directly I had given my promise that no harm should happen to him. He had doubtless every confidence in the clockwork machinery, but that of course was not my case.

"'Come up on deck, you scoundrel,' cried I, 'and identify this infernal thing.'

"I set twenty men to work at once to bring up the luggage on the deck, which, since we had not yet even sighted land, astonished them not a little.

"'Quick, quick, my good fellows; there will be extra grog for you,' I said, 'if you turn the things out within the hour.'

"The passengers who had not been across the water before, thought it a natural thing enough perhaps, but my officers imagined I had gone de-

mented. There I stood with this Yankee tailor (as he looked like) by my side, who, though he affected to be quite unconcerned, kept a sharp eye on everything that came up, and was to let me know by a nod when we got to the dratted thing. The luggage of a Cunarder is no joke in point of quantity, but in quality it varies more perhaps than any similar collection to be found anywhere else. There were arks belonging to fine ladies, large enough to go to sea in; chests that contained clothes and tools of emigrants, dapper portmanteaus of gentlemen touring for pleasure; bags of carpet-baggers that had no other luggage nor property on earth; hampers full of English fare to astound the natives of New York; and photograph cases smelling of nasty stuff for twenty feet round 'em.

"I won golden opinions from the ladies, through my being so very particular, and calling out, 'Gently gently; handle 'em smart, my men, but be careful not to shake 'em,' which of course was put down to my carefulness of their precious possessions, whereas I was thinking of the dangers of dynamite, which explodes, you know, by concussion. That blessed portmanteau, as it happened, was at the very bottom of all—a mangy, ill-looking thing enough, and, though small, as heavy as lead. 'Now, just throw that over board, my fine fellows,' said I, 'will you, and be careful not to knock it against the bulwarks.'

“Nobody, of course, questions the orders of a ship’s captain when at sea—and over it went with a splash; but I saw the first mate look at the second with an expression that conveyed ‘he’s mad,’ as clearly as if he had given words to it. It was this circumstance, combined with the sense of complete security from the awful peril that had threatened us, that for the first time put it into my mind that I had been made the victim of a hoax. If it had been so, I verily believe I should have thrown the little tailor after his portmanteau; but when I called to mind the face of the fellow when he first came into my cabin, I could not quite believe that. However, I took an opportunity of speaking to him once more alone. ‘Look here,’ said I, ‘you unmitigated thief and villain; there’s one point in your story that wants clearing up. Your life is not very valuable, it is true, but I dare say you yourself put a fancy price upon it, and, that being so, how could you take personal charge of a machine that, according to your own account, was to blow us all to splinters?—how comes it, I mean, that you were on board with it, yourself?’”

“‘Well, Captain,’ he replied, ‘you see, I’m a poor man, and the money was a good round sum; and, as I told you, my employer insisted on my seeing the thing was going right with my own eyes; there was a risk, of course, but the fact is, arrangements had been made for meeting me in this very latitude. The man

in the boat, whom we took on board, was on the look-out for me, and it was agreed should take me off the ship.'

"'What! did *he* know about the dynamite, too?'" I broke out; 'is it possible that there was a third villain, beside you and your employer?'

"'Well, yes, Captain, I'm afraid there was; but you can't touch him, you know, without touching me, and you have passed your word that I shall not be harmed. Besides, you must remember that I might have got off and clean away, leaving you all to bust up, if it had not been for the extreme delicacy of my conscience.'

"There was a sly smile about the fellow's mouth for which I could have wrung his neck, but for the safe-conduct I had given him; his whole manner, as well as the expression of his face, had changed, now he had got his way; and instead of a villain who had repented of a great crime, he looked more like a successful schemer.

"However, the dynamite was overboard, thank heaven; we were nearing land, and I had other things to think about.

"When we were still some way from the harbour we were met by a police boat, the chief officer of which demanded to be taken on board, to speak with me.

"'Hullo!' I said, when we were in the cabin to-

gether; 'no extradition business, I hope? There is no murdering Englishman among my passengers, is there?'

"Well, no,' he answered; 'but I've reason to believe there's a citizen of the United States who would neither stick at murder nor anything else.'

"Then I thought of the dynamite, of course, and rejoiced that the villain had been discovered without any betrayal of his secret on my part."

"You have a warrant for his apprehension, I conclude?'

"Well, no, Captain, that's just my difficulty, for I don't know which man it is; but I've an order to search the luggage. Information has come by wire that a whole plant for forging American banknotes is being imported by your ship; it will not be down below, of course, but in the man's personal luggage in his cabin.'

"I smelt a rat at once, and I dare say looked pretty blank and bamboozled.

"No one has left the ship since you started, has he?' inquired the officer anxiously; 'there has been a small boat hanging off and on the harbour, and we have reason to believe that this man's confederate may have had a hint by telegram——'

"No, no,' interrupted I, 'everybody is on board that sailed with us;' and I might have added 'and one more,' but I thought he might just as well find that out for himself. I didn't want more people than

was necessary to know that I had been made such a fool of.

“‘According to my instructions,’ continued the officer, ‘the plant is contained in a portmanteau of bullock’s-hide, with brass nails round the rim, and therefore easily recognisable.’

“I nodded, for indeed I myself recognised the thing from his description very readily. Had I not told them to be very careful with it, and not to knock it against the bulwarks, and seen it dropped overboard with my own eyes?—thus making myself an accomplice in his escape from justice of a Yankee forger!

“Of course the officer didn’t find that portmanteau among the ‘personal luggage,’ though I am bound to say he looked for it very carefully, and scandalised some of my saloon passengers not a little by his unwelcome attentions; nor was it among the larger articles, though they all lay exposed on the deck, as if for his especial behoof and convenience. His impression was, he said, that his ‘information,’ as he called it, had been incorrect, and that that bullock-hide portmanteau must be coming over in the next ship; which I said was possible—because everything is possible, you know—though, I own, I did not think it very probable.

“As to the owner of the article in question, he kept out of my way, and slipped out of the ship on the first opportunity. His story was so far true that he

had intended to keep the thing in his cabin to be got quietly on shore, only the steward had objected and caused it to be taken below. That information had been telegraphed from England to the New York police was known to his confederate, who had come out to warn him, and they would no doubt have saved me all trouble by dropping the portmanteau overboard themselves, only it was among the other luggage. How to get it out and dispose of it without discovery was the problem they had to solve; which they accomplished by means of the dynamite story. I don't know which of them made it up, or whether they composed it together, like those two Frenchmen you were speaking to me about the other day" [I think the Captain's reference was to MM. Erckmann-Chatrian], "but I must say it was a devilish good story, and that's why I've told it to you."

AN INDEPENDENT OPINION.

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THE modesty of "bashful fifteen" in members of the fair sex has been a good deal insisted on, but the shyness of the most retiring maiden at that epoch is not to be compared with the shrinking sensitiveness of an unprinted young author. While his first work remains in MS. there is no miss in muslin who has not a greater assurance; albeit when they have both "come out" it must be allowed that the author is the first to lose his modesty.

Even before he has gained the honours of type he has of course an excellent opinion of his merits—is certain that there is "that within him" which, if it will not set the Thames on fire, will make a considerable conflagration in any suitable material; makes comparisons, not altogether unfavourable, between his own productions and those of Byron, for instance, at his own age; and draws deductions from data to be depended upon (for they are his own) that are as satisfactory as they are conclusive. But these opinions he keeps religiously to himself, or confides them to only a trusty friend or sister who believes in him.

When he has furtively slipped his MS. into the contributors' box of the "Weekly Parthenon"—for he cannot endure the suspense involved in entrusting it to any monthly organ—he falls into a state of anxiety which I should call "the jumps," but that the Americans have, as usual, pirated the term and applied it to another malady; let us term it "the twitters." And he remains in them for an indefinite time, dependent partly on whether the editor of the "Parthenon" has mislaid or lost the precious document, and partly on his own powers of mental endurance. Then he writes in the most humble and honeyed strain to inquire after the fate of his "unpretending little story," and receives a printed reply, couched in antagonistic terms, to the effect that the periodical in question does not guarantee the return of any rejected contribution whatsoever. No young lady of the tender age I have indicated, and who has conceived a passion for her music-master, suffers half the pangs on discovering that, instead of being the exiled scion of a princely house, he is a "man of family," in quite another sense, and has been married these five years.*

* It is curious that the great lord of literature who has so admirably described the slings and arrows of "outrageous fortune," and all the disappointments to which flesh is heir, has not a word to say about the hopes and fears of authorship, with especial reference to the fastidiousness of theatrical managers. If he had tried his luck nowadays, it is certain he would know what it is to be rejected.

I remember a most terrible accident that happened to the first production of my own pen that ought to have got into print—not “ought,” of course (as I thought), in respect to merit, for there had been several others of equal intrinsic value which had been unhesitatingly and remorselessly declined, but which really could have done so but for my own impatience. I had received a letter—as sweet as the first kiss of love—from some admirable editor, expressing his approval and acceptance, and I waited, week after week, for the blessed thing to appear, as the sick man longs for the morning. I knew nothing, of course, of the mechanical necessities of a periodical, and, if I had, should only have felt that all the contrivances of science and art should have been enlisted to procure for a yearning public the immediate publication of my contribution; so, on the second week of its non-appearance, I wrote to express my surprise; on the third week, and since I had still received no answer, I wrote another letter to demand an explanation; and on the fourth week to express “disgust” at what I conceived an unparalleled outrage. On this I got my MS. sent back again with “Declined” (without a word of thanks), written on its first page, which bore evident marks of the printer’s hands.

It was as though some Peri had knocked at the gates of Paradise, been admitted through the golden gates for half a second, and then been shown out

again with ignominy at the back door. I only hope, for the sake of my future, that those divines are in error who say that it is as wicked to have the wish to commit murder as to put that wish into effect; for I could have drunk that editor's blood with relish.

After that little experience I became, if possible, more modest than ever.

But when the author in embryo has not only appeared in print, but published a volume of his own, matters are very different with him. His diffidence has disappeared, while his sensitiveness remains as delicate as ever, and unfortunately much more liable to meet with shocks. I got one once, or rather a succession of them, that lasted for a long railway journey, and which I am almost surprised I ever survived; for there were two factors, as it were, that went to make up the discharge (it was so far electrical that it set my hair on end), and both of the most powerful kind—self-love and (what is only second to it) first love for somebody else.

Arabella was my beloved object, and with Arabella and her aunt I was to travel from London to Exeter. She was young and charming, but, as I even then perceived, somewhat frivolous in character. She liked dancing, and—what was worse—dancing with military men rather than with civilians; and she had no opinion of her own as to books—that is to say, she was not quite so certain as she ought to have been (for *I* was)

of the supreme excellence of a particular story of mine which had not only been given to the public in a three-volume form, but had recently obtained the honours of a cheap edition. She liked to hear "what other people thought about it," which was clearly an act of disloyalty to me, as well as a proof of her want of judgment and independence of character. She said, "she didn't care for the opinions of friends and relatives about it," a remark which showed her to be deficient in natural affection and the reverence that is implanted even in the breast of the savage; and she wanted to know if I was personally acquainted with my reviewers, which argued suspicion of the basest sort.

"Nevertheless, I loved Arabella, and would have married her if an allowance of one hundred pounds a year, and tastes that would have done honour to one of a thousand, would have permitted it. As it was, we had agreed to wait and live in hope, which is certainly preferable to living *on* it.

At Paddington station, after seeing the ladies comfortably settled in the carriage, of course I went to the book-stall to see if my "Bandit of the Apennines" (it was not a domestic story like this by any means) was properly displayed, and to put a few careless questions as to how it was going off. In point of fact I meant to buy it, for I always encouraged its sale in that way whenever I took a journey. To my surprise and horror there was not one copy on the stall. "This is

the way," thought I, "that great reputations are burked." However, I commanded my temper (which is beautiful, but hasty) so far as to ask of the person in charge how this infamy had occurred.

"Well, sir," said he "the explanation is very simple: we have just sold the last copy of the book."

If I had had one to spare—but the fact was, that fare to Exeter had made a great hole in my quarter's allowance—I could have given that man a sovereign.

"Is there any other book, sir?" he continued willingly.

"Other book? No, indeed," thought I; "I hate your railway literature." And had I not got my Arabella, the prettiest picture book in the world, to look at throughout the journey?

"The sale of the 'Bandit' is pretty good, I suppose?" remarked I, indifferently.

"It's very quiet," he answered drily.

Now, what could he mean by *that*? The term "quiet" as applied to the "Bandit of the Apennines" was a monstrous misnomer; he lived, in fact, in a lurid atmosphere made up of combats, escapes, and wholesale massacres; the man must therefore have restricted his observation to the sale of the book only. In that case he probably meant "quietly prosperous"—not influenced by fits and starts of public favour, but growing more and more into popularity as its merits became known.

"You say, my man, that you have just sold the last copy," said I affably; "would you kindly tell me—for I happen to take an interest in the author—how many copies did you take to begin with?"

"Jem," cried he to a small boy at his side, whose head was only half above the counter, "how many had we at first of that 'ere 'Bandit of the Apennines'?"

"Oh, *that*? We never had but one," replied the small boy.

Again I say that I trust the desire for blood is not so culpable in the eyes of the recording angel as the actual imbruement of the hand in human gore.

I fled to my railway carriage with the smothered execration of "Dear me!"

I found there not only Arabella and her aunt, but another passenger—a middle-aged gentleman (but old in my eyes), who would have made a very nice companion for the latter if I could only have persuaded them to remove into another compartment and to leave us two alone. But the selfishness of old age is proverbial, and there they stuck. However, I was opposite to Arabella, and under the protection of a common railway rug we could, and did, interchange an occasional affectionate pressure of the feet—an operation that is a little difficult, by-the-bye; dangerous through its openness to the mistake of pressing somebody else's foot, and exposed to the ridiculous error of making

advances to the foot-warmer and other things under the seat. To do her justice, Arabella had never been backward in reciprocities of this kind, but on this occasion she was especially demonstrative; indeed, as I happened to possess a corn only less tender than my sentiments towards her, her attentions, which I could not of course but welcome, were a little embarrassing.

At last I perceived by the direction of her glance that they had a particular object. Her eyes were fixed on the volume that our railway companion had purchased at the station, and she was telegraphing to me with intense excitement, "It is the 'Bandit of the Apennines.'"

I declare that for the first moment or two I quite forgot my Arabella in the consideration of this tremendous circumstance. That a stranger should have actually bought my book, paid coin of the realm for it, of his own head, without fear or favour or personal relationship, and then got into the same compartment as the author of that admirable production, was something much more than an undesigned coincidence; it was an incident (remember, it was my first book) calculated to confound the infidel and establish the providential government of the world. "But suppose—for everything is possible, however improbable"—thought I with a sudden revulsion, "that he shouldn't like it, that he should yawn and even go to sleep over it, and that Arabella, who wants to know the opinion of outsiders

about the 'Bandit of the Apennines,' should see him?" My heart felt cold as a stone.

It was obvious that my beloved object was enjoying the situation; her eyes sparkled even more brightly than usual—with joy, no doubt, at seeing how I was appreciated by the public; but there was a twinkle of fun about them, which I didn't like. "Now we shall see what we *shall* see," they seemed to say.

The man was not a romantic-looking man, such as would be likely to enjoy a high-class dramatic fiction; I should have said he was a lawyer, or perhaps connected with commerce—and not in the fancy goods line either. Upon the whole I was relieved to see that, after fumbling in all his pockets for a paper-knife, he was about to put the "Bandit" (which was uncut) into his travelling bag for a more convenient season, when, to my horror, Arabella's aunt—a good-natured but officious personage—produced from her reticule the article of which he stood in need. He thanked her, and proceeded to cut the book with irreverent rapidity, as though it were a penny paper; nevertheless, I was pleased that he cut it all at once, for if he had cut as he read and stopped half-way, or even earlier, it might have produced the impression that he was tired of it.

"It is a pity," he said as he handed the knife back with a bow to Arabella's aunt, "that these railway books should not have their leaves cut; but they

tell me the reason is that a good many of 'em don't 'go off,' and then the sheets are used for packing purposes."

I saw Arabella's beautiful form tremble with suppressed mirth at this frightful speech. It seemed to me that there was something unnatural, and a little coarse, in a girl of her age possessing such a sense of humour; her pretty lips distinctly formed the words "for packing purposes" before they subsided into a roguish smile.

Then the man began to read, but not in a satisfactory manner; instead of his attention being at once riveted (as it ought to have been, for there was a most thrilling episode in the first chapter), it was distracted by contemptible objects—the management of his railway rug, the pushing of his portmanteau farther under the seat, and by the localities on the way-side. He must have been mad himself, I thought, to have stared at the Hanwell Asylum so attentively, at the very moment—for I knew where he was by the pages he had turned over—when all his intelligence should have been concentrated on the description of the brigand's prison cell. I am not a pessimist—I endeavour to think as well of our common human nature as circumstances will permit—and yet I could almost swear that I saw him turn over two pages at a time without discovering his mistake, and that in the middle of an unequal contest between the brigand and five officers

of justice, that should have stirred the blood of a sea anemone. Then, presuming upon the paper-knife as an introduction, he would address a word or two to Aunt Arabella, as to whether she liked the window shut to the very top, or preferred sitting with her face to the engine (as if *that* signified), while the heroine, in whose adventures he ought to have been wrapped up, was escaping out of a window much too small for her, and by a rope that swayed with every gust from the mountain-side.

It was I alone, of course, who was aware of the extent of his enormity, for Arabella only knew he had my book in his hand, and Arabella's aunt did not even know that; but it was easy even for them to see that his attention was not devoted to it. Indeed, every now and then he stole a glance of admiration at Arabella herself, which I should have objected to at any time, but which under the circumstances was doubly impertinent and offensive; as an old man—old enough to be her father, forty at the very least—he ought to have been ashamed of himself, and as a man of business he ought to have been attending *to* his business and getting his money's worth out of his investment. Then—horror of horrors!—as he drew near Swindon (perhaps it was the motion of the train affecting his aged frame, or the need of lunch asserting itself in his enfeebled carcass) he actually began to drop off in little snatches of—I hesitate, in charity, to say sleep—

but of somnolency. The idea to which I clung was that he closed his eyes the better to picture the scenes which the author of the "Bandit of the Appennines" had so vividly painted; but this explanation it was difficult for me to communicate to Arabella (who sat next to him) by the mere pressure, however significant, of my foot; in her eyes I felt that this cold-blooded and stupid ruffian was falling asleep over my story. She had made, in fact, more than one little grimace to express her apprehensions upon this point, and though I had smiled back in the most cheerful way, "He is only thinking, my dear; he is in reality charmed with the story," she seemed to only half understand me, and shook her head in a very incredulous way. If he really should go to sleep beyond all doubt, so as to snore, for example—and he looked just the sort of man to snore—I felt that my reputation as a novelist with Arabella was gone.

However, we reached Swindon without his committing himself to that full extent; but, under the influence of lunch, I felt certain it would happen, unless something was done in the mean time, and I resolved to do it.

We all got out to have some soup, and I found my opportunity of speaking to the old gentleman.

"My dear sir," I said, "I am sure you had no notion whose book you were reading coming along, or you would never have nodded your head over it."

"What do you mean, my lad? I was reading my own book—the 'Bandit of' something or another. I bought it at Paddington. It is rather a——"

"Hush! But you didn't write it: that's the point. That young woman in the carriage with us wrote it."

"What, the pretty girl who sat opposite to you?"

"Yes, next to you." (This I said with significant reproach.) "She couldn't help seeing you nod, and it pained her."

"She wrote that book—she?"

"Yes; she is exceedingly clever."

"Very likely; but it seems so strange that a woman should have written such a book at all," he murmured. "It's so sensational, so full of scenes. Dear me!"

"She's a girl of genius, my dear sir."

"No doubt, no doubt," he said. "How very unfortunate! Did I nod? If I did so, it was in adhesion to her sentiments. I remember now that some of them struck me as very beautiful."

"They are all beautiful," said I; "it is a noble book. But she would not have you know she wrote it for any money. It was published anonymously because she was too modest to put her name to it. You must not hint at what I have told you; only, you had better alter your manner."

"Thank you; I will, of course. I have a sincere admiration for the book, and I shall show it."

"Only, don't excite her suspicions; be careful about that."

He nodded till I thought he would have nodded his old head off; and we returned to the carriage very amicably and resumed our journey.

"I always feel sleepy after luncheon," said Arabella's aunt, by way of excuse for the forty winks in which she felt herself about to indulge.

"So do I in a general way," said the old gentleman; "but I have a book here that interests me immensely."

I saw Arabella's eyes light up with pleasure, then hid myself behind a newspaper which I had just purchased for that very purpose; I was a very young man, and my tender conscience reproached me for my little duplicity. I had not the hardihood to look; I only listened, which fortunately, my darling took not for remorse but modesty.

"I thought you didn't seem to like it," said Arabella's aunt, who was a plain-spoken person.

"On the contrary, I am delighted with it; it is not often one buys a book at a venture—for I confess I never heard of the work before—and finds one has drawn such a prize. I am not myself much of a novel-reader, but henceforth I shall look for a book by the author of the 'Bandit of the——'"

Would it be credited that he had to look at the title-page before he said, "Apennines"? But such is the "outside public."

"The 'Bandit of the Apennines!'" exclaimed the old lady in great excitement. "Why, that's—" Here, thank goodness, she was stopped by a cross volley of reproachful glances from her niece and me.

Arabella was very anxious that her aunt should not reveal the authorship, on account of her craze for an "independent opinion," and of course I was still more solicitous not to have my innocent little artifice exposed. Our united efforts had the happiest effect; they sealed the old lady's lips, and convinced the stranger that Arabella was the real Simon Pure.

"There is a strength and vigour about this book," continued the old gentleman, "that keeps one's attention at the fullest stretch; one has only to lay it down and close one's eyes to feel oneself one of the *dramatis personæ*. Have you ever read it, sir?" And the hypocritical wretch actually addressed himself to me.

"Yes," I said; "it is a good story, and, as you suggest" (for I determined to pay him out for his audacity), "singularly masculine in style."

"Nay, I didn't say that," he answered hurriedly; "it has the vigour of a male writer, but there is a delicacy, a purity,—a dear me! what shall I call it?—a perception of the niceties of female nature in it, in which I seem to recognise a lady's hand."

Here Arabella, shaking with laughter, put up her muff before her eyes, and I took advantage of the circumstance to give the man a warning glance that

he was going too far. My fear was that before we got to Exeter there would be an *éclaircissement* of some kind; but, to my immense satisfaction and relief, he left the train at Bath.

"I have no friends here, and am going to stay at an hotel," said our fellow-passenger at parting; "but while I have this book unfinished I shall not find the time hang heavy on my hands."

"Upon my life," said Arabella's aunt as we steamed away, "one would think, James, that you had told the man you had written the book."

"Upon my word and honour," said I fervently, "I told him nothing of the kind."

"I am quite sure he didn't," cried Arabella indignantly; "James is incapable of such underhand conduct. And I must say the independent praise of that gentleman is very satisfactory and convincing. I really began to fear at first that he didn't like the book. If so, it evidently grew upon him."

"It grew beautifully," said I, "the soil being rich and favourable."

"Yes, evidently a most intelligent man," said Arabella's aunt, "and exceedingly polite. I am so glad I lent him that paper-cutter."

And so was I, although there had been moments (when he was "feeling himself one of the *dramatis personæ*") when I had regretted it very much.

AN UNREQUITED ATTACHMENT.

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THE affinities between us are not always reciprocal. Just as love is sometimes "all on one side," so the attraction that draws one man to another is occasionally altogether wanting in the individual so drawn. A gravitates to B, and sticks there; but B for the life of him can't tell why. He has not the brutality to say, "Go away; I have nothing for you, my good man. You may think I have, but I haven't." It is scarcely in human nature to reject the hand of friendship, but it is certainly true that one often does not know what to do with it. We take it in our own, and there it lies. One feels no inclination to return its pressure, and yet one does not like to drop it. It is very natural, of course, that nice people should be fond of us; also good people, and in fact everybody worth knowing. Beyond that, however, we don't wish admiration to go. And yet now and then it does so.

Muggins Q.C., for example, has long entertained for me a regard that is most embarrassing. It is not on account of any similarity of opinion, for we differ on all points. It is not my faith, for I am orthodox;

while he, so far as I have been able to discover, believes in Muggins only. It is not my works, for he never reads anything but law books. In a modest way, and when only one or two persons at most are present, I am fond of a quiet joke; but Muggins hates jokes, although with a somewhat ignorant malevolence, for I am sure he has never seen one. The Laureate, it is true, has given some sort of explanation for the friendship of dissimilar natures—"as his unlikeness fitted mine," is, I think, his phrase—but the unlikeness of myself and Muggins does not fit at all. On the knife-board of my "twopenny" 'bus, I pass the great lawyer trotting on his cob to Lincoln's Inn every morning, and tremble lest recognition should take place on his part; not that I am ashamed of riding on an omnibus, or that Muggins would be ashamed of me. For, to do him justice, he is not that kind of idiot at all; but I know that he would patronise the 'bus and the people on it (out of regard for me) to that extent that they would rise up (if they were men) and throw me off the knifeboard.

He is such an all-pervading, all-important personage as the human mind cannot grapple with, but must either at once submit to or resent with vehemence. I wish to goodness I had resented him, but I succumbed. I met him first at a dull dinner-party—one of those great deserts without an oasis in the shape of an intelligent man or a pretty woman, in which one

sometimes finds oneself, through want of caution, or from good nature, or in punishment for some offence committed by one's ancestors. As a refuge from "Art" and the "Rhodope Massacres," both of which subjects demanded replies, I nestled under Muggins's wing, who was restating a right of way case, in which he had been engaged in court that morning, and only required a listener. I could think my own thoughts while he pounded on in his fine forensic style, and was comparatively content. The others knew him and I did not, and, dull as they were, they refused to listen to him. It was not till he observed, "I perceive you are a man of sense," that I began to understand my danger, and remembered how the great boa of the serpent tribe lubricates his victim before he swallows him.

It was Muggins Q.C.'s habit (as I have now good reason to know) to repeat to any private ear he could capture in the evening the arguments he had addressed to "My Lord" in the course of the day. Five thousand a-year is what "My Lord" gets for listening to them, and nobody can say he is overpaid; but I of course got nothing from that right of way case. He called it "right o' way" (from familiarity with the subject), and I caught myself murmuring "right o' way. Oh, if I could only get right away," which flattered him, I believe. He thought I was attempting to commit his argument to memory. When he had quite done, he asked me, with much warmth of manner,

where I lived, to which I replied, "Holloway." I didn't live there, but I felt sure that *he* didn't and that it would be a safe thing to say. He replied very graciously that he was sorry we did not dwell on the same side of the Park, but that distance was of no consequence in London. I don't believe it is of any consequence anywhere when Muggins Q.C. has once taken a fancy to one. If I had fled to Greenwich, or Richmond, he would amble up to my door on his cob, or emerge at it from his little brougham (into which he exactly fits), to repeat his legal arguments of the morning. Nothing but death, I feel, will ever release me from the toils of Muggins's friendship; and from the tables of annuities I calculate he will live ten years longer at the very least, when I may regain my liberty indeed, but shall have lost the youth which would have enabled me to enjoy it.

A rude person would of course find the means of breaking with such a tormentor, but I am unfortunately incapable of a rudeness. Muggins Q.C., who is good temper itself, believes his attachment to be reciprocated, and how am I to undeceive him? I venture to think that no story of the affections, ancient or modern, has ever described them to be more hopelessly misplaced; but the elements of poetry and romance are wanting in my case to render it pathetic, and I cannot conceal from myself that among ill-natured people my position has excited some ridicule. Muggins Q.C. has endea-

voured to attach himself to many persons, all of them of eminence and notoriety, which I try to think ought to be some sort of comfort or compliment to me; but they have eluded him with a dexterity I envy beyond measure, but to which I cannot attain.

A triple example of this has just been brought under my notice. For a month and more Muggins Q.C. has had a topic of conversation other than his own flights of legal eloquence, Mrs. Muggins having rather unexpectedly, or at all events after an unusually long delay, presented him with a son and heir. As the learned counsel tells me that "he is opposed to making eldest sons on principle," I conclude there will be no more of these infants, since if there were, and they were boys, this would be an eldest son. (Muggins Q.C. says that if I have a fault it is the want of a logical mind, but I think I have worked that out satisfactorily.) However, some weeks after the arrival of this prodigy, I received the following letter:

"My dear Friend,—Augustus George is to be christened on Tuesday next, and we count upon your presence at the midday banquet. If a boy could have three godfathers you should be one; but, as it is, his spiritual responsibilities have been undertaken by older but not more valued friends. The Lord High Chancellor of England, and Jones, the leader-writer of the 'Intelligencer,' volunteered for that post on the

very afternoon of the arrival of Augustus George. They will both, of course, be with us on the auspicious morning. The Bishop of Mugginton (no relation of mine, though our names are somewhat similar, and our armorial bearings identical) has insisted on performing the ceremony. With the addition of yourself, we shall therefore be rather a distinguished little party. I dare say you noticed my arguments in the 'Intelligencer' this morning in the great case of Gimlet *v.* Bradawl, which you will have regretted to see were reported with shameful brevity in the 'Times.'

"Yours very faithfully,

"JONATHAN MUGGINS Q.C."

This invitation disturbed me exceedingly, for, next to a funeral, and perhaps a wedding, there is nothing I dislike more cordially than a christening party. In this case, too, there would be a certain flavour of hypocrisy about it, since Muggins Q.C. who, as I have said, only believes in himself, was necessarily incredulous of any advantage to be derived from godfathers, except spoons and mugs; and yet he would make a speech, I knew (since a Bishop was to be present), calculated to move the heart of the infidel, and at all events to cast him before any jury in very serious damages. It was clear to me, however, that I had to go. It was only with much misgiving, and, as it were, with a dead lift of all my energies, that I dared to make excuse in the

case of an ordinary invitation to Muggin's table; and the present occasion was of course a supreme one. I therefore bought a second-hand spoon and fork, as my contribution to Augustus George's effects, and, placing it in a brand-new case, forwarded it to his address with a written promise to appear in person on the day appointed; and that promise I performed.

On Sunday, of course, it is always a pleasure as well as a duty to go to church; but on a week-day, and in winter, it is not so cheerful. Even the most fashionable places of worship strike you then as rather cold, and a font (however much it may look like it) is not the kind of place to warm your hands at. Muggins Q.C., naturally, was there in person, looking as if he was the proprietor, not only of the infant, but of the whole establishment, and Mrs. Muggins, and the monthly nurse. But of the Lord High Chancellor and of the famous leader-writer of the "Intelligencer" I saw nothing. Moreover, if the officiating minister was a Bishop, he was a very young one, and was dressed—well, I don't know much about ecclesiastical garments, but I really saw no difference between him and the curate of the parish. Nor, indeed, was there any. Muggins whispered to me that his Lordship had been prevented at the last moment from coming to perform the interesting ceremony by an attack of the measles. The notion of a Bishop with the measles so completely captivated my attention that it was only with the

greatest difficulty I could be made to understand that I was undertaking, by deputy, the office of sponsor. Twice did the curate inquire, "Who names this child?" before I gathered that he was addressing my humble self; and I am afraid it was only Muggins's whisper, "Why the deuce don't you name the child?" which brought me at last to a sense of my situation. Not only did the Lord High Chancellor and the scarcely less distinguished journalist absent themselves from the church, but they were not at the breakfast either. No one was there at all, besides the host and hostess and myself, except the monthly nurse, who stood with the infant at the sideboard, and was addressed by Muggins (on the occasion of handing her a glass of port wine) with a pomposity and prolixity that would have done honour to the judges in banco.

When she was at last permitted to depart, we sat down to a most excellent repast, the hilarity of which was somewhat marred by the three vacant seats. I made some feeling allusion to them, but Muggins put the remark aside with a wave of his hand which I thought expressed a regret too deep for words; but I was mistaken. When refreshed by food and wine, he rose from his chair, and, with one hand in his bosom (how well I knew that oratorical attitude!), he proceeded to explain the absence of his guests.

His venerable friend (if he would allow him to call him so) the Lord Bishop of Mugginton was suffer-

ing, he said, from domestic affliction. One of his children had that morning broken out in a rash, and under the circumstances, and in the possible contingency of measles, his Lordship, with that forethought for others which always distinguished him, had deprived himself of the satisfaction of admitting Augustus George into the fold of the church, "lest his presence should be a source of contagion." "My Lord Bishop," concluded Muggins in a voice broken by emotion, which he can affect at any time before any jury (I think by putting his tongue in his cheek), "my Lord Bishop has sent my child Augustus George—his blessing."

Muggins had finished, and I was stamping delicately on the floor to express my appreciation of the Bishop's generosity, when, to my horror, off he started again.

"My friend the Lord High Chancellor of England had promised, as you know, to shed by his presence this morning a lustre upon the head of Augustus George; 'but unfortunately,' he writes, 'I received last night a summons to attend Her Majesty at Windsor Castle, which must needs deprive me of that great pleasure.'

"The Lord Chancellor sends—it is a most characteristic and noteworthy gift, though one which years alone will enable Augustus George duly to appreciate

—a copy of his own admirable work on Property Law—the cheap edition.”

Here Muggins paused again, and once more thinking he was going to sit down, I softly shuffled my feet together; any stronger mark of appreciation, I felt, was uncalled for. A Bishop's blessing might be beyond price—there were no means of estimating it; but the exact cost of the legal work just spoken of I happened to know. It was one shilling and eightpence.

“We have been deprived of another guest this morning,” recommenced Muggins Q.C. in a voice so hushed and solemn that I thought Jones must be dead. “A great journalist was to have honoured by his personal presence that ceremony which it will be his duty, and, as I venture to think, a pleasing one, to record; it will be mentioned in the columns of that widely circulated and extensively advertised newspaper, the ‘Intelligencer,’ no doubt; and if it is possible, will be alluded to in a leading article. ‘If it *can* be done,’ writes Jones, in a letter that does honour to the human heart, and is also, perhaps, one of the finest specimens of epistolary style in the language, ‘if it *can* be done it *shall* be done.’ The cause of his absence is a sudden change in the policy of his journal, which has compelled him to give his immediate and undivided attention to all the arguments that have been advanced on the other side, and which he has heretofore disregarded. He goes on to say that he looks upon the

relation of godchild and godfather as a link of virgin gold—a tie far too solemn and too sacred to be associated (in a reverent mind) with mugs and spoons, for which reason he has abstained upon principle from sending any christening present to Augustus George. That, to my mind, is very touching," concluded Muggins, wiping his gold spectacles, "and shows a fine public spirit."

And I have no doubt that he believed it. For as regards himself, and all that belongs to him, Muggins Q.C. has the simplicity of a child. He believes that he is not only the most learned of all learned counsel (which, for aught I know, he may be), but the most attractive (to both sexes) of all human beings. He cannot conceive that anyone (being in his right mind) can wish to avoid him, or find anything but edification and delight in the reproduction of his forensic eloquence. He is the most perfectly content and self-satisfied of mortals, and therefore one of the happiest of them. "I may have my faults," he said, with a bland smile, as he took my hand with effusion upon Christmas Day; "it is possible: 'we do not know ourselves,' says the Greek poet; but no one, my dear fellow, can ever accuse me of not sticking to my friends."

That, alas, is very true. I felt it in my bones when he said it. In this world I shall never get quit of Muggins Q.C., I know. In the other—I wish Mug-

gins no harm, and of course I wish myself no harm—but in the other, I do hope some arrangement may be effected (without, of course, hurting his feelings) by which Muggins Q.C. and I may be separated for evermore.

A TOWN VENGEANCE.

A TOWN VENGEANCE

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THE whirligig of time brings about our revenges to most of us, but not quickly enough; and it is only natural (though very improper) that we should try to accelerate them. The Corsican will wait for years, and will even bequeath the accomplishment of his cherished objects to his descendants; but we English are not so persevering. When a man, or a monster bearing some vague likeness to the human form—such as a reviewer, for example—annoys *me*, I wish to pay him out for it at once; otherwise, as time goes by, I am but too apt to forget my wrong and the wrong-doer; like the forlorn young gentleman who would weep over his faded love-token, but was unable, because he could not remember “who the deuce it was who gave him that forget-me-not,” I lose remembrance of the reptile, and he crawls on, uncrushed; which is a failure of justice.

In the early ages of Society, the first impulse of a man who had received an injury at the hands of another was to beat him; but the inconvenience—or, at all events, the possible inconvenience—of such a course

of conduct is obvious, and was obvious even then. As civilisation began to exercise its influence, men's ideas became less crude; and they hired others to do the beating for them. This was an excellent plan if you were rich; Charles the Second, for example—it is true he was not rich, but he was a king, and could get things done for him—paid out Sir John Coventry in this way very completely; but if you were poor there was a difficulty. The great question of Capital and Labour confronted you at the outset; where were you to get the money from to hire your men? There were also all sorts of complications respecting "Breach of the Peace," "Assault and Battery," and other pettifogging obstacles, which have increased year by year to that extent that it has become very difficult to pay out old scores without incurring new ones. In the good old times the offended party would gather his friends together, and falling on the mansion of his unsuspecting enemy by night, would put him and all his family to the sword. But the days of chivalry are fled.

The shifts to which a noble spirit is driven when he would avenge himself for an injury, without risking the action of the law, are most insufficient and pitiable. Perhaps the best of them is the anonymous letter. It is a medium through which you can at least speak out and relieve your mind, independently of the miserable trammels of convention. Even this, how-

ever, is not of universal utility, for some people write so badly that their anonymous letter remains undecipherable; it might be an invitation to dinner, or even a testimonial of their personal admiration and esteem, for anything their enemy knows to the contrary. As an example, however, how well it may be made to work (up to a certain point), I narrate the following story.

Mr. John Blades, of Clifford Cottage, Shepherd's Bush, and also of Lincoln's Inn, had amassed a little property as clerk to a wellknown barrister who afterwards became one of Her Majesty's judges; and when the latter left the Bench for another place where there are no criminals to be tried, Mr. John Blades invested his savings in a mansion in Pimlico and took in gentlemen lodgers. He was an honest simple fellow, in spite of the legal society he had mingled with, and had once on his own responsibility lent a strange gentleman, who had called in his employer's absence and represented himself as a friend from the country who had lost his railway ticket, thirty shillings.

Nor was Mrs. Blades, his wife, a woman by any means fitted to take in lodgers, but rather the reverse. She was of a nervous temperament, easily cajoled, and still more easily frightened; and as to abstracting other people's tea and sugar, not to speak of coals, her conscience was so tender that she would have described such practices as thieving. She was an excel-

lent cook, and, though now in fairly good circumstances, did not think it derogatory to her self-respect to assist in the more delicate operations of the cuisine. Her clear soups were beyond the dreams of any hotel proprietor, and, to say truth, would have put to shame most of the Clubs; the little delicacies she could serve up for breakfast were things to think upon before you got up in the morning; while her suppers, though equally dainty, were forgotten when you went to bed. Her house was as clean as soap could make it, and furnished even to the linen in a manner that astounded persons, who, accustomed to lodgings elsewhere, could not understand why their feet did not protrude beyond the upper sheet, or their pillows were so much thicker than a pancake.

She had her weaknesses, like the rest of the world (save you and me, reader), but they were all venial ones; the chief perhaps was a somewhat unreasonable respect for the aristocracy of her native land. This peculiarity, however (which, moreover, was shared by her husband), had never led her to set her cap at any aristocrat, and as she was now five-and-fifty it was not likely that it ever would, or, at all events, that any mischief should result from it.

The first gentleman who was so fortunate as to take apartments in the house of this worthy couple was the Hon. Rollo Plantagenet Tallboise, the son of an Irish viscount, Lord Cameleopard, but who had

inherited, to judge by his want of ready money, very little beyond a magnificent brogue and a noble spirit of independence. Accustomed, as without doubt he had been, in the halls of his ancestors, to every luxury and refinement, this young man (for he still looked young, thanks to a constitution that defied the effects of a somewhat dissipated career) had yet not a fault to find with Mrs. Blades's domestic arrangements. That was one of the traits by which she recognised his birth and breeding; your ordinary lodger, she had been told, was always picking holes in this and that, and hanging on to the bell-rope. The Honourable Rollo gave very little trouble, and what he did give was accompanied with a smile so condescending, and a manner so urbane, that it was quite a pleasure to wait upon him. He was not easily put out, except by any application for money on the part of tradesmen, or even cabmen: these were what he termed "disgusting details;" and when they were forced upon his notice, he had a way of lifting his eyebrows which was very effective; Mrs. Blades, who had a strain of poetry in her nature, said it reminded her of a man pained by the weight of a coronet. The pain, however, did not last long, for almost everything was settled for him by herself and put down in his monthly account.

Of course he inhabited the first floor and lived on the best of everything that money—or rather Mrs.

Blades's credit—could procure. His smoking in the drawing-room was a blow to her because of the new curtains, but Mr. Tallboise, she felt, was not a sort of gentleman one could remonstrate with; it was some comfort to know that he smoked the very best cigars, or at all events the most expensive, which she had an excellent reason for being convinced of; and that if his champagne occasionally disagreed with him, it was from no fault of the vintage. He paid Mrs. Blades the compliment of dining at home, instead of at his club because of her clear soups, which he pronounced to be as good as any he had tasted at the paternal table at Castle Macgillicuddy.

At the end of the first month Mrs. Blades brought up with his breakfast things, neatly folded on a silver salver, his little account; he took it from her with a gracious expression of countenance, and carelessly looked at the total—which was in three figures, and not small ones.

“My dear Mrs. Blades,” he said, “you and your good husband must have been cheating yourselves; the amount is perfectly ridiculous.”

“It is quite correct, sir,” she answered modestly; “as we pay ready money for everything, the items perhaps are less than you may have expected.”

“Less, my dear madam? I positively feel as if I was robbing you. Moreover, there is no commission. I must insist upon remunerating you for the loss of

the interest of your money. Let us say five per cent. for the three months."

"But there is but one month, sir."

"True; but my custom is to settle all these little matters at the end of the quarter.—Your coffee this morning is positively perfection;" and he took up the newspaper in his jewelled fingers to intimate that the interview was closed.

Poor Mrs. Blades would much rather have had Mr. Tallboise's cheque, but her powers of resistance were unable to cope with such aristocratic manners. To repeat an application for money to an Honourable in a flowered dressing-gown, who had just praised her coffee, was beyond her strength; something told her that it would evoke that lifting of the eyebrows which had so often filled her soul with pity for the wretches who had produced it. The excellent woman was a snob to the backbone, and she retired.

"What!" inquired Mr. Blades, who was waiting in the back sitting-room to take Mr. Tallboise's cheque to the bank, and who could read countenances if he couldn't read characters, "has he not paid?"

"No; he hasn't. He says he always settles at the end of the quarter; and begs you will put on five per cent. for the interest of the money."

"But that won't *do*, you know," exclaimed Mr. Blades; "it really won't. And he has given an undertaking to settle monthly."

"You had better speak to him yourself, then; but mind you are very civil, John; say it's nothing to him of course, but that it's a good lump of money for such as you to be out of pocket in."

It was quite unnecessary to tell Mr. Blades to be civil. He was a small and gentle-mannered man, whose very aspect seemed to apologise for obtruding his presence anywhere, much less on the privacy of an Honourable. He went upstairs and knocked timidly at the drawing-room door. Mr. Tallboise, who was in the tobacco stage of his repast, removed his cigar in astonishment, and suffered the smoke to wreath itself above his well-brushed head like a halo.

"Mr.—Blades, is it not?"

"Yes, my lord—I mean sir; it is about this little account. If you could find it convenient—not that I mean to be pressing—it is nothing to you, I know, but it's a good lump——"

"One moment, Mr. Blades," interrupted his lodger with frigid dignity. "It's nothing to me, as you say; the sum to which you allude is a mere bagatelle; but I am not accustomed"—here his eyebrows went to work as usual—"to be pressed for money. My principle—and it is invariable—is to pay my bills quarterly. If you insist upon it, I will settle this matter at once;" here he produced a gigantic cheque-book—"but mark me, in that case I leave your apartments this evening.

—You would prefer my remaining? Very good. Be so good as to touch the bell. I have quite finished.”

The last remark referred to the breakfast things, but its tone gave it a wider significance. Mr. Blades found himself in the back parlour without quite knowing how he got there.

“I could do nothing with him,” he said; “he would have left the house if I’d pressed it. He’s such a masterful sort of man.”

“He’s accustomed to command; that’s where it is,” said his wife admiringly; “well, we’ve got the money to go on with, and five per cent. for three months will pay us handsomely; he’s openhanded, like all the quality—that I will say; I do believe I might have got ten per cent. for the asking.”

Here at least Mrs. Blades showed her sagacity; she might have got ten or even twenty per cent., just as easily as five.

On the day before the three months expired the Honourable Rollo Plantagenet Tallboise left his apartments rather suddenly, thereby saving himself the annoyance—which his sensitive nature had always so much resented—of being asked for a sum of money—which on that occasion would have amounted to six hundred pounds. I think, under the circumstances, that after a decent interval during which they waited for a communication—with enclosure—from their aristocratic lodger, Mr. and Mrs. Blades were justified

in writing to Lord Cameleopard of Macgillicuddy Castle (the only reference he had given them), to inquire as to the whereabouts and solvency of his missing relative. The chagrin of the worthy couple may be conceived on their receipt of a letter by return of post, to say that his lordship had no relative of the name of Rollo Plantagenet Tallboise, and knew of no such person.

If the story had ended there the case had been a common one of mere credulity and imposture. Mr. and Mrs. Blades would have paid six hundred pounds for their experience and for the acquaintanceship of a person who, as they both agreed, had behaved (up to a certain point) as like a nobleman's son as could be: but they had not done with Mr. Tallboise yet.

Exactly a month from the date of their lodger's departure, some old friends came to dine with them, in consequence of an invitation which they had never sent. The next day some more friends, not so intimate, arrived, with the same object; and on the next about twenty of their acquaintances came quite as unexpectedly to enjoy the hospitality of luncheon. Later on, that day, there was an evening party at their house of about half the people that they had ever known, and of a good many whom they didn't know. "Supper at twelve" was in the corner of the cards of invitation, and written in the same hand (evidently a feigned one) as the forged letters. Mr. and Mrs. Blades were hospitable folks, but as they only had a cold joint of

beef in the house and a few eggs for their own consumption, these 120 persons or so had necessarily to be sent empty away.

This went on for weeks, till they found that life, with so much involuntary party-giving, was growing intolerable. Who could be playing them this cruel trick? and why? were the two questions the consideration of which wore this worthy pair almost to thread-paper. The second, however, soon found an answer. The following note arrived in the now well-known handwriting: "If you do not insert the following advertisement, '*I will pay the fifty guineas all right, J.B.*' in the 'Daily Trumpeter' of Tuesday next, you shall see what you *shall* see. The manner of paying the money can be afterwards arranged. All I wish to be assured of for the present is that you have a willing mind. Vengeance."

That there should be a person who wanted fifty guineas out of "J.B." or anybody else, if he could get it, was not beyond all human experience; but that he should also want "vengeance" was inexplicable.

Poor Mr. Blades reviewed the incidents of his blameless life for a single case in which he had incurred the resentment of a fellow-creature, in vain; he could only conclude that he was the victim of some malevolent maniac. He consulted a legal friend (one Mr. Joshua Figgins) in this extremity, who recommended that the required advertisement should be in-

serted, and a trap laid for the apprehension of the offender; but here Mr. Blades exhibited a somewhat unlooked-for determination of character. "I will never promise what I don't mean to perform," said he; "let the wicked creature do his worst." Nevertheless he looked forward to Tuesday, and afterwards, with very melancholy forebodings.

On Wednesday morning at eleven o'clock his quiet residence in Pimlico was besieged by a crowd of females—no less than eighty in all—who had all come for a cook's place which had been advertised that morning on very advantageous terms in the "Trumpeter."

Great cooks, small cooks, lean cooks, tawny cooks,
Brown cooks, black cooks, grey cooks, brawny cooks,

and an immense variety of plain cooks, thronged the thoroughfare, demanding compensation for their disappointment, and their return fares by train and omnibus. Mrs. Blades, though a better cook than any of them, felt herself wholly unequal to the situation, and had to appeal to the police.

The new lodger on the first floor had heart-disease, and protested that if such a thing occurred again it would be the death of him.

In the afternoon another letter arrived: "Your next reception will take place on Tuesday between 10

and 2. All the 'wanted's' in the 'Trumpeter' are invited. Vengeance."

And they came—about 450 of them—filling up the entire street. The new lodger left (palpitating) at 2.30, for a less desired, however inferior, place of residence. By the evening's post came another letter: "I hope you liked it. Your next grand reception is fixed for Sunday, from 8 to 12. There is only one way of avoiding it. Advertise to V. '*I will pay the 75l. all right.*' My terms are raised, you see. Vengeance."

Before the Sunday came round, however, another despatch arrived: "I have invited a thousand persons to wait upon you on Wednesday. Vengeance." It seemed as if the wretch's fury was so ungovernable that he was obliged to relieve it by constant correspondence; and Mr. Blades's theory of his being a malevolent maniac derived, so far, some corroboration.

The grand reception held, in spite of themselves, by this unhappy couple was on a scale of unprecedented magnitude, and transformed their ordinary quiet Sabbath into a Saturnalia. "We shall certainly be indicted for a nuisance under the Disorderly House Act, 17 and 18 Vict. c. 45, s. 12;" muttered poor Mr. Blades, quoting a scrap of his old legal learning.

The worthy pair had each betaken themselves behind one of their drawing-room curtains, from which,

unseen, they could watch the madding crowd of place-seekers in the street below.

"There he is!" cried Mrs. Blades, with sudden vehemence; "I see his face. THAT'S THE MAN THAT HAS DONE IT."

"Where, where?" cried her husband, leaving the shelter of the curtain in his excitement, and thereby evoking a yell of execration from the mob below.

But whatever poor Mrs. Blades had seen, it was too much for her. "Blind, blind!" she cried; "The Hon. Tallboise!" and went off in a dead faint.

The remark at first was set down to some sudden burst of regret at having been deceived by the aristocratic blandishments of her late lodger; but upon her resuscitation, it appeared that, while scanning the street, the poor woman's frightened glance had happened to fall on a window at no great distance, where, insufficiently hidden by the blind, peered forth a face she knew, lit up with a certain fiendish exultation. That this gentleman had set a-going the proceedings which afforded him so much amusement was a conviction that flashed upon her at once, and from which she never swerved.

"She will take her affidavit," said Mr. Blades to Mr. Figgins, who was once more summoned for a consultation, "as that is Tallboise, and that he wrote the letters."

"Very good: we shall have to prove it, however:

we have no hold on the fellow, except as to the money he owes you, and which you may take your oath you will never see. He ain't worth powder and shot in that way."

"Then, is he to worry us to death, like this?" cried Mr. Blades, pointing to a neat little note which had just arrived from "Vengeance," giving notice of another "grand reception."

"Well, he can be prosecuted for an annoyance, of course; but where you'll have him best is 'for attempting to extort money by threatening letters.'"

"But that's transportation for life, isn't it?" exclaimed Mrs. Blades pitifully. "I am sure neither John nor I could sleep comfortably in our bed, if we had sent a fellow-creature, and such a nice gentlemanly person as we used to think him, beyond seas."

Mr. Blades, who, if not "an angel in top-boots," was a sort of Early Christian in list slippers, nodded adhesion.

"It's not Transportation," said Mr. Figgins drily. "Just leave the matter in my hands, and I'll see to it."

On Monday morning a detective had taken the ground-floor apartments of the house in which the enemy was located—and before noon the same day had found an opportunity to sift the contents of his waste-basket. He found a letter in fragments, which he pasted together, and in which the words "reception" and "Vengeance" occupied prominent positions; and

before the business of the day was concluded in the nearest police office, the (late) Honourable Rollo Plantagenet Tallboise made his appearance in the dock.

I had this story from the lips of a clergyman who was soon afterwards thrown a good deal into his society—(being chaplain of a gaol)—and who was much impressed by this gentleman's conduct and character. That he had been a swindler from his cradle was nothing—for some swindlers have their good points; but he thought him on the whole the most heartless villain that had ever come under his professional notice. A selfishness that soared to sublimity was combined in his case with a cruelty and arrogance that would have done honour to Cetewayo—that is, as painted by his enemies. (I would do no man wrong, and some assert that he is the Edward the Sixth of Caffreland.) Like all wretches of his stamp, he detested those on whom he had inflicted any injury; while simple and kindly natures, like those of his landlord and landlady, he not only looked upon as his natural prey, but any resistance on their part to his selfish greed, seemed a species of high treason. That he had been compelled, however delicately, by the worthy pair to leave comfortable lodgings after so ridiculously short a time as three months, he resented much as "Mr. Alexander Nicalaievich" resents Nihilism; and it was the Chaplain's firm conviction that his attempt to extort money

from his late host and hostess was a motive quite secondary to his desire for "Vengeance."

If the Rev. Gentleman was right, are not some philosophers a little hasty in attributing a certain modicum of good to everybody? and is it so certain that "the worst possible use we can put a man to"—in all cases—is to hang him?

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Will the New Gentleman was right, and not some philosopher a little busy in attributing a certain amount of good to everybody, and in so certain that "the worst possible case we can put a man to" — in all cases — is to hang him!

The rest of the page contains extremely faint, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the paper. The text is too light to transcribe accurately.

A MODERN DELILAH.

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I.

JOHN RIDDEL was a young man in whom confidence was justly placed by Messrs. Moonstone & Co., jewellers, his employers, in whose establishment, at the time we became acquainted with him, he occupied the post of foreman. He was not a "self-made man" as yet, but he was on the road to it. For, as we all know, Providence has still the advantage of priority in this particular; it makes its man (such as he is) at a comparatively early date, whereas, when a man makes himself, he seldom accomplishes it before he is five-and-forty at the very least—when, indeed, the other cannot be compared with him. John never drank, except a glass of beer with his early dinner; he never smoked, nor of course took snuff; he never handled anything in the shape of a billiard cue, unless it was his neatly and tightly rolled-up umbrella; he never—I was going to add, he had no weakness as regards the ladies; but this I hardly dare to write, because of the extreme attention he paid to his very fine head of hair. Why should any man, not being a Narcissus, take such great

pains with his hair, unless to make an impression on the ladies?

Yet even here I must hasten to do John Riddel justice; it would have shocked him to have supposed that he had any general views in this direction. He was not a Don Juan, nor ever a gay Lothario; if he had had serious designs, they would have been upon one lady only, and by no means induced by any meretricious attractions such as youth or beauty; he would, in accordance with precedent, have attached himself to his master's daughter, though she had been twenty years older than himself, or a black woman, or an albino. Unfortunately, M. Moonstone had only nephews, whom our hero could not marry, and who would in all probability become partners in the concern before him. Still, he cultivated that fine head of hair, harrowed it with a tortoiseshell comb, drove a furrow straight across it from his brow to the nape of his neck, and top-dressed it with macassar oil and other unguents. It shone in the sun as brightly as any of Messrs. Moonstone & Co.'s costly wares, over which he presided.

There were other assistants in the shop, and with them I am sorry to say Mr. John Riddel was not popular—young men rarely appreciate in their associate so much virtue as resided in our hero, and especially if that virtue has not been its own reward, but has enabled its possessor to walk over their heads and stop there. There was hardly one among them

but at some time during his servitude with Messrs. Moonstone had mislaid a ring or a trinket for a few hours, or had even caused some loss to the firm, not so much through carelessness as from not being quite as wide awake as a weasel.

For the way of a jeweller's assistant is set with springs. It is calculated that about one per cent. of the customers at such establishments are rogues and vagabonds, people who come to spy out not the nakedness of the land but its riches, and if possible to possess themselves of them by force or fraud. And these look as little like rogues as nature (and art) can enable them to do. Notwithstanding all that has been written upon the deceitfulness of riches, it is difficult to believe that a gentleman who drives his own mail phaeton, or a lady in occupation of a chariot upon c springs, are brigands in disguise. Yet the young men at Messrs. Moonstone's had been most of them taken in by appearances, and at least once in the lives of each, their employers had paid for the experience. One of them had taken jewellery to a newly married couple at a fashionable hotel "on approval," and had been so successful in his recommendations that they had "collared" the whole lot, and given him such a dose of chloroform in exchange for them, that he was unable to give any clear account of his adventures for hours afterwards. Another had been set upon by a whole gang of thieves, in such a promiscuous and overwhelming

fashion that he could recall nothing of what had happened except that he had been "struck with an instrument like the ace of spades," which the newspapers expressed a hope would afford some clue to the police; they thought it showed, I suppose, that the perpetrators of the outrage must be either gardeners or gamblers; but nothing came of the suggestion. Others, again, had been exposed to the seductions of the fair sex, and in losing their hearts had sacrificed the diamonds of their employers.

In this last regard Mr. John Riddel, being adamantine, was invaluable. His youthful as well as handsome looks attracted these ladies of industry, who, on entering the shop, gravitated towards him quite naturally. A man of that age, as they flattered themselves, and one so particular about his hair, must surely fall an easy victim to their fascinations. Thieves as they were, they were still women, and perhaps they allowed their feelings to carry them too far; if they had stopped halfway, where Mr. Boltby the cashier sat, or at the desk over which Mr. Malton (the hero of the ace of spades story) presided, they would have had a better chance; but Boltby was bald and Malton was grey, and women will never understand that it is from forty to fifty that men are most impressionable with respect to female charms. Your conceited young fellows think it nothing surprising that any lady should fall in love with them, but when a man comes to that more mature

period which we call (or at least *I* call) the prime of life, he appreciates the compliment.

I do not say that Mr. John Riddel had not some admirers among the fair sex who loved him for his own sake. Indeed, it was whispered among his detractors that, like the first Duke of Marlborough and other great men who ought to have known better, he derived pecuniary advantage from their devotion to him; that the sums expended in macassar oil, &c., for the adornment of his appearance, came back to him twenty-fold in substantial tokens from Duchesses and Countesses and the like. Goodness knows whether there was any truth in such stories. Perhaps it pleased his rivals to invest the drudgery that was their daily lot with this halo of romance. For my part my tastes are sensational, and I do what I can to make my beliefs correspond with them; but, on the other hand, my strong common sense declares for moderation as regards Mr. Riddel and the ladies of rank; therefore I draw the line at Duchesses. But he was certainly as fascinating as he was hard-hearted. When any lady customer who was unknown to him got out of her brougham—for no one ever came in a cab to Messrs. Moonstone's establishment—and moved up the shop in his direction, he would look at her through his half-shut eyes—for they were of the "dreamy" order of beauty—and murmur to himself, "Now, is this a swindler or a *bonâ-fide* party?" and many a *bonâ-fide*

party did he serve with much external politeness who little dreamt of the suspicion which she excited within him.

He thought it a bad sign when they took off their gloves, and under such circumstances would always decline to show them those specimens of rough diamonds which a wet finger can carry away with it. And when they offered to pay for their little purchases by cheque, it was quite pretty to hear him explain, in his soft voice, how the "system" of the firm was a ready-money one, and that no exception could be made in favour of anyone, however highly connected, who was not personally known to it.

You might have thought perhaps that the entertainment of such suspicions, not to mention the "evil communications" (when they turned out to be well founded), to which he was necessarily exposed, would have corrupted his own integrity; but this was not the case: his employers entrusted him quite literally with untold gold, and he was the last man to have abused their confidence. And yet, as I have said, he was not popular. Indeed, the story which I am about to relate concerning him, and which is certainly of a character to arouse sympathy and compassion, was told me by his fellow-clerk, Mr. Malton (who had given me his own ace-of-spades adventure in a very different style), with a great deal of waggishness and enjoyment.

One afternoon, a brougham stopped at Messrs.

Moonstone's establishment with a widow in it; about the brougham there could be no sort of doubt; it was not a private vehicle, but one of those which are hired by the day or hour; the appearance of the driver, not to mention that of the horse, precluded the possibility of its being the property of the person who employed it. If she thought to be set down among "carriage people," because she used such a conveyance, she must have been sanguine indeed. And so far that was a good sign. People that came to rob on a scale worth mentioning (I am not thinking of those who slipped an unconsidered trifle, such as a ring or a spray, into their muff; they were always detected and bowed out of the shop into the arms of a policeman in plain clothes who stood at the door)—people, I say, who wanted to *swindle*, were always very particular about the vehicle that brought them.

What roused suspicion in the watchful eye of Mr. John Riddel was the widow herself. Like Mr. Weller senior (though without his matrimonial experience to excuse it) he had a prejudice against widows—at least, in jewellers' shops; nor, I am bound to confess, was it altogether without grounds: the garb and the mien of sorrow being the stalking-horses under which a good deal of knavery is accomplished. And then this widow was so bewitching to look at, that he was naturally alarmed; from every neat plait of her beautiful hair, and every fold of her modest suit of mourn-

ing, there seemed to him to flutter a danger signal. He was wont to declare, indeed, that he knew she was after no good from the first moment he set eyes on her; but that statement must, I think, be received with caution. If his face grew severe and his manner painfully polite, as she came up to where he stood, it was because he knew that Boltby and Malton had got their eyes upon him and were looking out for some sign of weakness.

"I wish to see some rings," she said in a soft and gentle voice; "mourning rings;" and then she took off her glove, displaying the whitest little hand imaginable.

Of course he could not help seeing her hand, nor yet her face from which she had put back her veil. It wore an impression of sadness, but also one of enfranchisement and content; it seemed to say, "My late husband was very unworthy of me; but he has left me free, and I forgive him." Who has not seen such widows, who wear their weeds almost as if they were flowers, and who have apparently selected black as their only wear because it is becoming to them? I have often thought, if I could have the choice of my own calling, that, next to being "companion to a lady," I should like to be a young jeweller trying on rings. It must be almost as good as bigamy, trigamy, polygamy, and with none of the risks.

Mr. Riddel said, "Allow me, Madam," in his most

honeyed voice, and slipped ("eased" he called it, and certainly it was very easy work) ring after ring upon the widow's dainty finger. "I hope I am not hurting you," he murmured.

"Oh, no," she sighed; "there was a time—but that is passed now—when it would have given me pleasure. I mean," she added hastily, and with a modest blush, "when the rings would have done so; but jewels and gewgaws have no longer any attractions for me." Mr. John Riddel by no means felt certain of this, but he had an eye for number, and would have missed a ring from the tray in an instant, though he had been exhibiting a thousand. At last she made her choice (it was the most expensive of the whole lot), and produced from the prettiest little bag in the world—a cheque-book.

"Pardon me, Madam, we do not take cheques except from—ahem—old customers."

"Well, I am not a very old customer," she said, smiling. ("No; but you're a queer one," he thought, "or I'm much mistaken.") "Still, I should have thought in the case of a lady like myself——"

"Madam," said this crafty young man, "if it lay in my power to oblige you, there would of course be no difficulty in the matter; but the rule of the firm is, unhappily, what I have stated."

"Then the firm will take my last sixpence," she rejoined with tender playfulness; and from the most

elegant of "porte-monnaies" she counted him out the sum required, when its contents in truth were quite exhausted. "I am lodging at De la Bois', the court hairdresser," she said: "my name is Mrs. Montfort. However, I will not trouble you to send the ring, as I shall have to go home to get some more money," and she looked at him with eyes that seemed to say, "cruel man, thus to reduce me to destitution."

Then she rose and sailed down the shop, carelessly glancing at this or that (chiefly in the hair and mourning department) as she passed out. "If she is not on the square, she does it uncommonly well," thought Mr. Riddel; "perhaps I have done her an injustice, poor dear."

On the third morning after her visit the widow called again, sailed quite naturally up to our hero, and cast anchor under his eyes. "You will think," she remarked, "after what I said the other day about gewgaws, that I am very changeable in my tastes: but I am not come this time upon my own account; I want to see some diamond lockets for a friend."

This is quite the usual course with ladies and others who victimise the jewellers: they buy a ring for ten pounds, and after having thus established themselves—cast out their sprat to catch a herring—they patronise the establishment in earnest.

Singular to say, however, this did not rouse Mr. Riddel's suspicions. Notwithstanding his pretence of

indifference to Mrs. Montfort's charms, he had privately sent to De la Bois, in the interim, and found that the lady did reside at that fashionable hairdresser's, and on the first floor; he had done it, of course, in the interests of the firm, and in case she should call again; but perhaps he would not have been pleased had Messrs. Malton and Boltby been made aware of his precaution.

The locket that pleased her most was an expensive one, perhaps too much so for her friend's purse, she said. It was very foolish of that lady, but she had such a complete reliance upon her (Mrs. Montfort's) taste and judgment that she had placed the matter entirely in her hands. It was a great responsibility. What did Mr. Riddel think?

Mr. Riddel's thoughts were always cut and dried on such occasions. He expressed his opinion that the locket selected by Mrs. Montfort was certainly the most elegant of all, and testified to the sagacity of the lady who had such confidence in her good taste. But as to the price, Mrs. Montfort herself was the only judge as to the state of her friend's exchequer.

"Oh, she's rich enough," smiled Mrs. Montfort, "and as open-handed as any woman can be. Our sex are naturally inclined to be a little close," she added with a smile, "don't you think so?"

Mr. Riddel did not think so; he had always found ladies very generous in their dealings; in this lady's

particular case he felt more certain than ever that the locket—and he let the light play on it so as to show the brilliants to the best advantage—was the very thing to suit her.

“I think so too,” murmured the widow; “but then you see there’s the responsibility. I tell you what you shall do. You shall send all the lockets to my lodgings for an hour or so, and then my niece, who is staying with me, shall give her opinion on the matter; and by her advice I will abide.”

Mr. Riddel smiled, but shook his beautiful head of hair. Every curl of it—and there were thousands of them—expressed a polished but decided negative. “We couldn’t do it, Madam, we really couldn’t.”

“What! not leave the lockets for an hour?”

“No, Madam, not for a moment. Of course it is but a mere formula, one of those hard-and-fast regulations, the existence of which one so often has to deplore; but I have no authority to oblige you as you request. I can send the lockets, of course—or bring them myself—but whoever is in charge of them will have orders not to lose sight of them. This is an invariable rule with every customer whose name is not entered on our books.”

Instead of getting into a rage—genuine, if *she* was genuine, or pretended, if she was a swindler—the widow uttered a low rippling laugh,

Like the voice of a summer brook
In the leafy month of June,
Which, to the sleeping woods, all night
Singeth a quiet tune—

only her teeth were much whiter than the pebbles of any brook. "You tickle me," she said (of course she was only speaking metaphorically), "so that I really cannot help laughing; it is so droll that you should think I came here to steal lockets."

"My *dear* Madam," said Mr. Riddel, "pray do not talk like that; if it rested with me" (sly dog that he was), "you should carry off the whole contents of the shop to choose from."

"You are very good, and very kind," she said. "If any other person had expressed such doubts of me I should have been terribly offended. But I quite understand how you are situated. Well, you shall bring the lockets yourself, and for fear you should think I have any wicked designs," she added with a little blush, "will you come this morning? It will be equally convenient to my niece, and you needn't be afraid of being garrotted by daylight."

"My *dear* Madam," exclaimed Mr. Riddel for the second time, with even deeper deprecation than before, "how *can* you? Of course I will come whenever you please."

"Very good; as my brougham is here, I will drive you home in it." In five minutes he had packed up all

the lockets and was following her elegant though stately figure down the shop.

"There he goes with another Duchess," whispered Malton to Boltby; "see how he runs his hand through his hair."

"Let us hope she will comb it for him," answered Boltby the bald, thinking of that happy pair who had seemed all in all to one another, but had not been so preoccupied as to prevent them giving him the chloroform. "I believe she's no more a Duchess than you are."

II.

MONTHS rolled on, but though you had gone ever so many times into Messrs. Moonstone's establishment you would not have seen Mr. John Riddel. His flowing cataract of hair no more adorned the foreman's desk, over which gleamed in its place—like moonlight after sunlight—the bald and shining head of Mr. Boltby. And yet our hero was in the shop; he stood at the counter in the farther corner, where the youngest assistant was always placed (in charge of the mourning jewellery), with a Welsh wig on. His own mother—not to mention the Duchess—would never have known him. He had fallen from his high estate, and was beginning life again on the lowest rung of the ladder.

This was how it happened. Mrs. Montfort and her niece, a young lady only less charming than herself, dwelt, as I have said, on the first floor of Mr. De la Bois', the court hairdresser. They had lodged there for some weeks, and by punctual payments, and carelessness concerning the domestic accounts, had won the heart of their susceptible landlord. He saw that she had an inward grief—passing that of the ordinary widow—and he ventured to enquire what it was.

"Alas!" she said, "I have a dear and only nephew whose condition gives me the greatest uneasiness. He has overworked himself, and is threatened with brain fever; the doctors say that if we could only get him to have his head shaved, all might be well, but he has a splendid head of hair—indeed, a great deal too much of it. No argument of mine will induce him to part with it."

This touched Mr. De la Bois' professional feelings. "Dear me, Madam, how I pity the young gentleman! It is a terrible thing to part with one's hair, but still—we could shave him better than at any other establishment in the kingdom, and quicker."

"Oh, I don't care about the quickness," answered Mrs. Montfort hastily, "the thing is to get it done thoroughly. I would give fifty pounds if Alphonse would only submit to it. Don't you think, if he came with me one morning, you could get it done whether he would or not?"

"Well, really, Madam, that would be a strong measure; still, if it is for the young man's good——"

"They tell me, Mr. De la Bois, nothing else will save his wits: he is half mad already; entertains the strangest delusions—that every thing I have—my jewels, for example—belongs to him. They *will* belong to him some day, poor fellow—that is," she added with a sigh, "if he lives to enjoy them."

"Poor dear young gentleman! And you said fifty

pounds, I think. Well, I think it can be managed for you. If you will name a morning, I will have four of my strongest young men in readiness, and if you will bring him here, I will promise you he shall have his head shaved."

"Very good; I will take him out shopping with me; he is fond of shopping; thinks he is a shopkeeper sometimes, when his head is bad. He shall come here in my brougham. You will know him in a moment by his magnificent head of hair."

"Just so; and in five minutes nobody shall know him, Madam."

"Don't be in a hurry about it. Let it be done thoroughly," she answered. And so it was arranged.

Accordingly, when Mr. John Riddel arrived in the widow's carriage at Mr. De la Bois', and had just placed the parcel of diamond locket upon her sitting-room table, there was an incursion of four strong young men, with combs in their heads and aprons round their waists. Since those

Four-and-twenty brisk young fellows,
All of them with umber-rellas,
Fell upon poor Billy Taylor,
And persuaded him to be a sailor,

there has been no such outrage. They carried him into a back room, fastened him into a chair, and in spite of his babbling about how he was a jeweller's

foreman, and was being robbed (and with violence), they shaved his head.

They not only effected this with great completeness, but took their time about it, as his aunt had requested them to do, so that in the mean time she got clear out of the house, and nothing was ever heard of her afterwards, nor of her niece, nor of the diamond lockets. It was supposed to be the completest "shave," in the slang sense, that had ever been effected. Never since Samson's time had anyone suffered so severely from being cropped; for Mr. John Riddel not only lost his hair but his situation. The Messrs. Moonstone declined any longer to entrust their business to a foreman who had fallen into such a shallow trap, and lost them thereby a thousand pounds' worth of jewellery. They declared that it was all through his insufferable conceit, and that if he had not taken such pains with his hair, or worn so much of it, such a plan would never have entered the head of that modern Delilah, Mrs. Montfort.

THE
TRANSFUSED TRANSFORMED.

A TALE OF BLOOD.

THE
TRANSFORMED
STATION

THE TRANSFUSED TRANSFORMED.

A TALE OF BLOOD.

IF you live in Downshire and do not know the ffiendells of ffiendell Court, you are unknown indeed; the circumstance of their name being spelt with two little fs, and pronounced Fendall, stamps it with a peculiar aristocracy. Radicals, indeed—persons who interest themselves in roots—assert that there was at one time no such thing as a capital in our alphabet, and that it was indicated by the duplication of the small letters. As intelligence increased, capitals were invented, and the last persons to use them were, of course, the most illiterate; so that the retention of the two small fs is not—intellectually speaking—a feather in the ffiendell cap. On the other hand, as a token of antiquity, it is invaluable. The possession of a name that nobody can pronounce without instruction is also obviously a great inheritance, and in this case it was the more valuable, since there is no record of a ffiendell of Downshire being distinguished in any other way. The family had “flourished” for centuries, in

the sense that an old tree is said to flourish, and, like it, most of it was underground.

Sir Geoffrey Fendall (for we will take the liberty of spelling his name as it was pronounced, as though he were an ordinary Christian), the present tenant of the Court, was a widower, childless, and stricken in years. The long line, which had moved as directly as a pawn in chess for so many generations, had at last failed, and the succession was going aslant; nay, even zigzag—like the knight's move—to a second cousin, young Percival Fendall, of Lincoln's Inn, barrister-at-law. His father had subsisted on a very moderate property, the income from which had been in no way supplemented by the head of the family, and had bequeathed it in a reduced condition to his son. The former had discovered by bitter experience that the fact of his name being spelt with two fs did not enhance its financial value at the back of a bill; while the latter was seriously thinking of discarding the peculiarity altogether, as an affectation out of which nothing had ever come but ridicule, when suddenly old Geoffrey, acting under advice (not legal, but medical), awoke to the fact of his heir-presumptive's existence. He wrote from Downshire with his own hand to invite Percival to Fendall Court.

Most young men would have jumped at such an offer, nor was Percival himself by any means blind to its possible advantages; but he was a man of that dis-

position which, in poor people, is called obstinacy, in persons of moderate means, firmness, and in rich people, determination of character. Thanks to nobody but himself, he was surely but slowly making his way in the world, and he was not disposed to barter his independence even for the reversion of the family estate. This was not entailed upon him, but it would have been contrary to all traditions of the house with two fs that Cousin Geoffrey should leave it to any other person than the natural heir. The young man knew, in fact, that unless he gave his kinsman some grave cause of offence he would one day reign in his stead. Would it not be better, therefore, as he had not an idea in common with the old Squire, that they should keep apart, so that no offence could be given by him? Percival certainly did not wish to go to Downshire. It was November, and, since he was no sportsman, he greatly preferred London at that season to the country; just now, indeed, he preferred it at all seasons, from the circumstance that it contained, in Gloucester Place, a young lady called Mary Blake, whose name it was his intention to change to Fendall (with one F) as soon as his income had become sufficient for him to marry upon it.

Her father was a hop merchant, and no doubt given to speculation in his own line, but strongly opposed to contingencies in connection with his daughter's settlement in life. He had at first refused to take

Percival's great expectations into consideration at all; but when this invitation came from the old Baronet he had visibly thawed, and even held out a hope that he might not now insist upon seeing Percival's ledger, setting forth that he had received in fees, &c., at least 500*l.* a year, before he would give consent to his daughter's marriage.

To the young man himself this relaxation of Mr. Blake's proviso gave much less satisfaction than that gentleman had anticipated. In his own mind he was persuaded that the match would be disagreeable to Sir Geoffrey, and render his expectations less promising than before; and this was one of the reasons that made him incline to be very dutiful to his venerable cousin at a distance, and through the medium of the post-office. He did not like the old gentleman; he had resented the coldness he had shown to his father; and he did not appreciate the overtures now made to himself, which he thoroughly understood were not owing to any personal regard, but only because circumstances had made him the sole surviving member of the house with two *fs.* At the same time, he was much too sensible to throw away the brilliant prospects which had thus unfolded themselves to his view, if he could retain them with self-respect and without much inconvenience. Although a very unworthy descendant of his race as regarded the belief in their blue blood—which he looked upon either as imaginary, or as a very

serious physical ailment—he had inherited a strong indisposition to be bored or troubled. Old Sir Geoffrey himself, with his 20,000*l.* a year and an obedient county, did not dislike being “put out” more than he did, and when he was annoyed he took as little pains as his great kinsman to conceal it. Such men are, socially speaking, the very salt of the earth, who amongst a world of snobs and toadies speak the plain truth to its little tyrants, even if they do not succeed in teaching them how to behave themselves. But Percival had no sense of apostleship whatever. He simply liked his own way as much as his betters did, and—since his ambition was limited—almost as often got it: a man who did not walk, and look, and speak as if the street belonged to him, but rather as if he did not care one halfpenny (which was the case) to whom it did belong. Moreover, his father had been no “tenth transmitter of a foolish face,” and this young fellow was as intelligent as he looked. He knew himself—it is only fools, notwithstanding what philosophers have said to the contrary, who do not—and was well aware that he would not make a favourable impression upon the owner of Fendall Court, and that was another reason why he was unwilling to go there.

That we should be able to keep at a distance the good people from whom we have expectations (and yet retain them) is, however, a mere dream of the optimist; and so Percival found it. To the polite and carefully-

worded letter, by which he had endeavoured to evade the invitation to the home of his ancestors, he received a reply by return of post, the tone of which necessitated his immediate appearance at Fendall Court, or his giving up all hopes of ever seeing it his own; in short, Sir Geoffrey was furious.

"Dear Percival, you had better go," pleaded Mary, to whom he had showed the note, with some strong expressions of indignation. She was a beautiful creature, with eyes like a gazelle, and a voice more persuasive to his ear than any in the Law Courts.

"But he writes so disagreeably," said Percival, pulling at his moustache; "he must be a most offensive person."

"Recollect, my darling, that he is an old man," argued Mary, meaning that allowance, as well as reverence, was due to grey hairs.

"He is not so old as all *that*," mused Percival. "This sort of thing may go on—I mean one's having to put up with his impertinent arrogance—for years and years. The question is, is it worth such a tremendous sacrifice?"

The wretch was thinking of his own peace of mind, and whether he could keep his temper if such things were said to him—about "respect" and "obedience"—as his kinsman had thought proper to put on paper.

"If you get on with your cousin," she murmured,

with a beautiful blush, "dear papa would, I think, be more inclined to consent—that is—perhaps he would let us marry a little earlier."

"You darling! that's true," said Percival, "and is worth going through almost anything for. I'll write and say I will run down to Downshire in the course of next week."

"Don't write, dear—telegraph; and run down by to-night's train."

"But I am to meet you at dinner, Mary, at the Joneses, on Saturday."

"Never mind; don't let me be the cause of your running any risk of increasing Mr. Fendall's displeasure. I am sure I am giving you good advice. Go to-night."

"Very good; I'll go."

And Percival went accordingly.

Sir Geoffrey received him with a stately welcome, the coldness of which, however, was owing to the general frigidity of the establishment, rather than to any annoyance at his tardy obedience to his summons. Upon the whole, Percival's hesitation had perhaps done him good. If he had showed himself eagerly desirous to accede to his kinsman's wishes, it would probably have been set down by Sir Geoffrey to anything but disinterestedness, and might have even suggested Death—a subject very distasteful to the head of the ffiendells. An independence of spirit which had

eventually given way to his wishes was not unpardonable, for it exemplified the power of the will which had subdued it.

The Baronet himself volunteered to be the young man's guide over the picture gallery and the stables (the Horse, we may be sure, was a favoured animal with him), and gave him to understand less by words than by his confidential tone that at some time or another, though at a date so distant that it would be absurd to allude to it, all these things might be his own—if he behaved himself.

It was well understood in Downshire that good behaviour in Sir Geoffrey's eyes was doing what Sir Geoffrey wished, and for three days Percival's behaviour was unexceptionable. On the fourth morning, however, it became infamous.

On the previous evening there had been a large dinner party, composed chiefly of the magnates of the county, who had treated the young barrister with a civility that had sufficiently indicated their opinion of his prospects; and the young ladies had been at least as gracious as their fathers and mothers.

"Percival, did you notice that girl in blue, last night?" enquired Sir Geoffrey, snipping off the end of his after-breakfast cigar and proceeding to light it: "Amelia Elton, Lord Wraxall's daughter; it is my intention that you shall marry her."

Percival lifted his eyebrows. "It can't be done

Sir Geoffrey"—here he also lit his cigar with great deliberation—"that is, if I continue to live in England. We should have to go to Salt Lake City, where bigamy is permissible."

"What the devil do you mean, sir?" exclaimed the Baronet. "Have you a wife already?"

"No, Sir Geoffrey." Percival could not help wondering to himself what would have happened had he answered "Yes." Would his cousin have had an apoplectic fit (he looked very near it as it was) and gone off the hooks at once, leaving everybody happy ever afterwards? or would he have sent for his lawyer and devised everything he had to the County Lunatic Asylum on the spot? Percival had felt that this crucial matter must crop up sooner or later, and had nerved himself for the encounter. "I have no wife," he went on; "but, what is the same thing, Sir Geoffrey, so far as my future is concerned, I am engaged to be married."

"What, to that hop-picker's daughter?" thundered the old man, who, it seemed, had been making keener enquiries into Percival's affairs than he had had any idea of.

"Well, sir, her father is a hop-merchant," returned the young man coolly, "and I dare say has made some pretty pickings; but I don't think he would like to be called a hop-picker. I may, perhaps, be allowed to add that your use of the term is not very polite to *me*."

His face was very white, and looked all the whiter by contrast with his companion's, which was scarlet. They were both in a frightful rage, the one at a white heat, the other boiling.

"And who the deuce are *you*?" exclaimed Sir Geoffrey, in precisely the same tone (though he *was* such an aristocrat) as the butcher's boy used who, having run the leg of his wooden tray into the duke's eye, enquired of him: Who the deuce *he* was that he should be so particular about his eyesight?

"My name is Percival Fendall, sir. A man that boasts better blood than you, in as much as he can count a generation beyond you." This reply, intended to be satirical, was an inspiration, and had quite the contrary effect to what he had expected. He had accidentally protected himself as it were by this interposition of the other's fetish, as though it had been a shield.

"By Jove, that's true," said Sir Geoffrey, regarding him with undisguised admiration. "You're the eleventh of us, though not quite in the direct line. I am glad you appreciate the circumstance at its full value. I had been told by a mischievous fellow that you had been thinking of spelling our name with a capital F."

"That would be blasphemy indeed," said Percival, without moving a muscle.

"Of course it would," put in the Baronet eagerly. "I perceive that my informant was a liar. You are

worthy of your name, and you were only joking—though let me observe that I don't like such jokes—when you talked of being engaged to this Miss Lake.”

“Blake, sir, is her name,” continued Percival, with unruffled calm; “it is a very decent one, though she doesn't spell it with two little bs. She is a delicate-minded, honourable gentlewoman, and I mean to marry her.”

“What, without my consent?”

“No, Sir Geoffrey. I hope, with your consent. You have only to see her, and I venture to think you will confess that Miss—the young lady in blue, whom you were so good as to recommend to me—cannot hold a candle to her.”

“But her blood, sir? You, of all men, should understand the importance, the necessity, the indispensability——” The Baronet supplied in expression and gesture what was wanting to him in words.

“I do, Sir Geoffrey. Science has lately corroborated your opinion upon that point. To persons about to marry it recommends the microscope. Mary's blood shall be subjected to investigation.”

“What nonsense you talk! As if it could possibly be blood like ours! Beware how you trifle—or rather how you venture beyond trifling—with persons of this class. A blot on the 'scutcheon, remember, is ineradicable.”

"If a Fendall were to break his word, Sir Geoffrey, would not that be a blot on the 'scutcheon?"

It was cruel of Percival to place his kinsman on the horns of such a dilemma. But there is no fetish so utterly illogical—and, to say truth, so selfish and egotistical—as that of blood.

"The promise was extracted from you by passion," answered the old man, "and is therefore invalid." Then, as if aware of the monstrosity of this position, he went hurriedly on—as after one has skimmed over thin ice—to paint the horrors of an unequal marriage. "Look at young Lascelles: if he had married as his uncle wished him, he might have stood for the county; a man whose ancestry is only second to our own, but who chose to throw himself away upon a female nobody; respectable, I dare say, she may be—her father lives in Baker Street, and is of the name of Jones. What was the result of it all? Why, young Lascelles was compelled to walk the hospitals."

If he had been made to walk the plank, it is impossible that Geoffrey could have spoken of the fact with more sincere compassion for the young man's unhappy fate.

"I know Lascelles," said Percival cheerfully; "he lives close to the Blakes."

"*Very* likely," put in Sir Geoffrey drily.

"And has already acquired a good practice," continued the young man. "He told me he is much

happier than when he was subjected to his uncle's whims and caprices."

This was a home thrust. Sir Geoffrey seized the bellrope to summon the footman to show his kinsman the door, but, by the time the menial entered, his master's passion had cooled down. He only said, "Make up the fire." The fact was that the notion of that extra generation which Percival had boasted of had seized on what the old Baronet called "his mind," and placed the young man in a position of positive superiority.

"Look here, Percival," he said. "Just to oblige you I'll see this young woman, and if I'm dissatisfied with her you must promise me to break off your engagement."

"It is impossible that you should be dissatisfied with her," said Percival, gallantly, but evasively.

The old gentleman had got an idea—rather an unusual event with the Fendalls—and hence it was the more to be regretted that it was unworthy of them. If he found this Mary Blake so "honourable and delicate-minded" as Percival had described, he might work upon her feelings by representing that she was ruining the young man's prospects; if, on the other hand, she was mercenary, he might buy her off.

Accordingly, in due course Sir Geoffrey came up to London, and an interview was arranged between

himself and Mary; after which Percival received the following letter:—

“My dear Cousin,—Love has not blinded you, for I grant that the young person is very good-looking, but it has dulled your sense of hearing. Miss B. drops her hs—one h I can swear to; it was in ‘hospital.’ This is not her fault, of course, but her misfortune. It is in the blood. If you marry her—being what she is, and can’t help being—you shall never have one acre of the ffiendell land, nor one shilling of the ffiendell money.—Yours faithfully,
“G. ff.”

The old Baronet would not have dared to write this but that he had, as he flattered himself, won over poor Mary to his side. He had painted to her the splendid prospects that awaited Percival, but which her marriage with him would dissipate for ever; and had appealed to her love itself to discard her lover.

He did not effect what he had hoped, but yet succeeded only too well. The thought that she would be the cause of her Percival’s future being destroyed, preyed on her mind and produced a dangerous illness. Percival was heartbroken, and had only just spirit enough left to direct an envelope to Sir Geoffrey, enclosing a piece of his mind. It was an ugly fragment, and thus concluded:—

"If through your infernal egotism my Mary dies, I will take out letters patent and change the idiotic name of ffiendell to Bullock-Smithy."

Sir Geoffrey was reduced to despair by this frightful menace.

In the meantime poor Mary got weaker and weaker, and had hæmorrhage from the lungs, or more probably the heart. The blood of the Blakes, though an inferior fluid, was necessary to her existence, and she was rapidly sinking. Dr. Lascelles, who was called in in consultation, said, "There is only one thing that can save this young lady's life. We must try transfusion."

The other doctor—who was of the old school—shook his head as only doctors can.

Dr. Lascelles understood at once from the solemn significance of the gesture, that he had never so much as heard of the operation.

"I felt sure you would agree with me," he said, with the sweet smile that had won his way to professional success—for his practice lay chiefly among the ladies. "You remember Playfair's directions, without doubt?" And he told him what they were. "One of us two must sustain this ebbing life."

"I think it had better be you," returned the other hastily. "There's nothing like new blood—I mean young blood."

"True; I am young and strong: I can't see a

beautiful creature like this slipping through our hands." And he bared his arm to the other's lancet.

Two months afterwards Sir Geoffrey received the following letter from Percival, written under compulsion at his wife's dictation:—

"Dear Cousin,—Actuated by feelings of passion, which, as you yourself once justly remarked, renders one's actions invalid, I addressed you a communication, some time ago, the terms of which I sincerely regret. When the blood of the fiend is up they are apt to express themselves strongly; and you are the last man (except me) not to make allowances for the fact. I am thankful to say my dearest Mary has been raised from her bed of sickness, and is now—I had almost written "herself again;" but though she is as well as ever, this is not the case. She has in a very singular, though perfectly scientific manner, become somebody else. She has undergone the operation of transfusion at the hands—or rather the arm—of Cavendish Lascelles, whose noble blood, to use the words of the poet, now 'courses through her veins.' One has so often heard of persons who are ready to shed the last drop of their blood for this or that, and so seldom seen them shed even the first drop, that you may have put them down in the same category

with ghosts; but I saw this with my own eyes [for Percival had been present at the operation], and can swear to it. I owe a debt to Lascelles which I can never repay, for he brought back to life the dear girl I married yesterday. Both she and I are well convinced that our union will have your approbation, since the sole objection you had to it has been removed—by transfusion.

“By birth, it is true, she is still a Blake, but by blood, she is a Lascelles.

“With our united kind regards,

“I am yours truly,

“PERCIVAL FFIENDELL.”

Poor Sir Geoffrey, thus confronted not only with a dilemma, but an anomaly, was at his wit's end, which was at no great distance.

In this extremity he consulted his oracle, an ancient nurse, who had dwelt in the household almost for that term of years scouted by Mr. Thoms, and who believed in the ffiendells first and Providence afterwards.

“It's my opinion, Sir Geoffrey,” said this female sage, “as it's no use crying over spilt milk.”

The Baronet himself was already partly of that opinion; so the reconciliation was effected, and the young couple were invited to the Court.

The bride, less from interested motives than from

the sense that the old man had so much to "get over" in his welcome to her, devoted herself to her host and soon surpassed her husband in Sir Geoffrey's favour.

"You are not only a ffiendell by name, my dear," he once said to her, "but, thanks to science, have become worthy of the race by nature. You were always very nice—in your way—but there were points before that fortunate operation—— But there," he added, patting her little hand, "we will not speak of them now."

"You mean I used to say 'ospital' for 'hospital,'" she answered, "hanging her beautiful head," like the rose immortalised by Cowper. "But I was always taught to do that, and also to say 'umble' for 'humble.'"

"My dear," he said quite gravely, "you used to drop all your h's dreadfully. (She spoke as purely as Lindley Murray.) "But transfusion has picked them up for you. Depend upon it there is nothing like blood."

Mrs. Percival Fendall was a woman, but she knew when not to have the last word.

"What is the use of arguing with people," said she to her husband (when he called her a humbug), "who spell their name with two little fs?"

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NUMBER FORTY-SEVEN.

WHAT becomes of waiters, when they don't wait, is a question that has long perplexed those who occupy themselves with the gigantic problems of human nature. In the winter, as we all know, many hotels at the seaside and other places of summer resort are closed; then the swallow, as has been ascertained, flies south; but whither does the man with the swallow-tail—the "John" or "George" whose vocation is over for the season at the *Crown* or the *Vulture*—fly? Their destination when aged (and they have saved money) has been of course discovered. They adopt the only business they are fit for (though it is true they might be platelayers): they keep an inn. It is in the meantime—which with them is the extreme winter—that their abode and calling are hidden from their fellow-creatures. One of them—one cannot say "ex uno disce omnes," because the occupation was such a very exceptional one—used, years ago, to accompany Christmas visitors in their adventurous descents in the diving bell at the Polytechnic, while

the ordinary attendant went for his holiday. I met him in the bell itself.

Even in my youth I was never too venturesome, and it had cost me sixpennyworth of cherry brandy in the refreshment room of that home of science to screw my courage to the sticking place. I was just then writing a story called "Under the Sea," about divers—(a few copies of which can still be obtained of the publisher's assignees)—and being exceedingly well principled (in fiction), I felt that I ought to experience what I was about to describe. And the Polytechnic was in every way a more convenient, not to say a safer, place than the boundless ocean.

Even as it was, I was a prey to terror, on finding myself swinging over that gigantic basin, which, though it might not be Scylla, nor yet Charybdis, as to roughness, was quite deep enough to drown me, and (so far) "quench the gaiety of nations."

The seats, you must understand, have no rails in front of them, such as every child is accustomed to, and such as I venture to think they ought to have, and I thought it much more strongly on that occasion. Some scoffing holiday maker, who had not "the pluck of a lamb," as I told him (amid plaudits), or he would have come down himself, had bidden me "hold on by my eyelids," but the advice, even if well meant—the vacant chaff well meant for grain—was of course valueless. I was in a blue funk, and felt very un-

steady. There had been only one person besides myself who had been fool enough to try it; a serious man in a threadbare black coat, and with a white cravat, whom I perceived at once to be an official—probably the chaplain of the diving bell. I remember wondering, even in that moment of agony—so closely does the ridiculous tread on the heels of the sublime—whether he was instructed by the Polytechnic Company, if anything went wrong, to read the “Prayers to be used at Sea.” It was a nice point, considering the amphibious nature of the duties of the man (a sort of clerical marine), and engaged my attention for nearly half a second. By that time the rim of the bell had touched the water.

Of course I had the assurance of Science, though we did keep sinking and sinking, that the water would never so much as touch the soles of my boots; but then one has very little confidence in the assurance of anyone—even though she be a lady—of whom one knows nothing at all. The only parallel that my memory furnished to my own situation was unhappily that of King Canute, and, as everybody knows, the water got the better of him in spite of the most flattering predictions. However, the bell did stop, as it seemed to me in the very nick of time—and continued to stop.

“Why on earth,” cried I (though we were unhappily not on earth), “do we not go up again?”

"There is a little something wrong, perhaps," he answered; "it does sometimes happen in the lifting gear."

"Good heavens!"

"There is nothing to be alarmed about. They will keep on pumping air in."

"Air?" exclaimed I, indignantly.

"Ah, you are thinking of your dinner; we shall be out long before seven o'clock."

"How do you know I dine at seven?"

"Because I have waited on you many times, at the *Hand and Glove* at Brighton."

"To be sure, you are Bob the waiter. How ever came you to be waiting here?"

"Well, sir, it is only a temporary arrangement: to see that no impropriety takes place in the diving-bell. The fact is, I am going to carry on the hotel myself."

"Indeed?" I wondered how this "shilling-seeking, napkin-carrying, up-and-down-stairs" *attaché* of so magnificent an inn, could have scraped together the money for the rent. He was a shrewd fellow, and read this in my face.

"Well, sir, it's a curious story," he said; "and as you've got nothing to do, and we shall have some time on our hands, I'll tell it to you."

It's more than twenty years ago since I first went to the *Hand and Glove* as second waiter in the summer

time, and I have taken the same situation ever since. I am not head waiter there even now, though I shall be the master of the place in a few months; so you may conclude (though you was a liberal gent yourself, so far as I remember) I might have waited long enough before I saved the money out of my wages and perquisites. But in the autumn of the year before last a curious thing happened at that hotel.

It was the race week at Brighton, when we are always full, and every room was engaged; most of them by old customers, but one or two, of course, by strangers. One of these last was a Mr. John Adamson; he was a chance comer—that is, he had not written beforehand to secure a room, as is usual at that time, and therefore he got a very bad one. It was No. 47, which in slack seasons was never occupied; it looked into the little courtyard in the middle of the house, and had nothing to recommend it but its great height—it was, in fact, two floors thrown into one; some nervous persons had a fancy for it, however, because a few steps down the passage was the trapdoor in the roof under which stood the ladder that formed the fire escape; but as a rule people who were shown to No. 47 objected to it. Mr. Adamson, however, made no objections; and, indeed, to look at him, you would have said that he had been used to worse rooms. It was not so much his clothes—though they didn't fit him, and yet looked as if he was wearing them for the first

time—but a certain hang-dog cringing way he had with him, which showed he was a low fellow. He was a turfite, of course—a man who made his living, or tried to make it, by horse racing, and had come down to fill his pockets at the expense of other people; but, so far as that went, so had all our other guests. There was the great Mr. Dodds, the bookmaker, for instance—only second in the extent of his operations to the Leviathan himself—who travelled with his secretary, and had our first floor front; there was Captain Leger, who went halves in winnings—whatever he did in losings—with the Marquis of Spavin; and there was Sir Toby Gray, who had three horses on the hill himself, and one of them first favourite for the Cup. But all these men, for the present at least, were men of substance, and looked like it. You might have said they were made of money, for every one of them had a pocket-book bursting with bank-notes, which was certain to be either fuller or emptier before the week was out.

Now, Mr. Adamson did not look as though he owned a bank-note in the world, and if I had had to name his trade, I could have done it the first moment I clapped eyes on him; it was Welsher. However, it is not the business of an hotel-keeper to turn any man from his door who wants a bed and can afford to pay for it; and as for picking and stealing, our own plate was all Britannia metal, while Mr. Dodds and Captain

Leger and Sir Toby knew very well how to take care of themselves and their money, having been on the turf for the last twenty years, and accustomed to all descriptions of villains. As for me, I had enough to do at that busy time, without looking after the seedy tenant of No. 47, who went up the hill every day to the course on foot, and took six penn'orth of whisky with his dinner in the coffee-room, and nothing after it. Only of course it was suspicious; for the *Hand and Glove* was not an hotel meant for the likes of him, and he knew it. He was always apologising, as it were, for being there, and hoping he was not giving trouble when he asked for this and that—always something cheap—at the bar and in the public room. He also pretended to be ignorant as to who was who, and inquired of me on one occasion whether that was *the* Mr. Dodds whom he had just seen come out of No. 4, whereas it is my opinion that he knew them all, and who was the principal winner after each day's work.

There was a good deal of betting on the race for the Cup that year, in which were entered two public favourites, who were very heavily backed by the "gentlemen;" and as a rank outsider won, so also, of course, did the "bookmakers." It was rumoured in the coffee-room that evening that Mr. Dodds had cleared twenty thousand pounds out of the transaction, and by the way he and his friends and his secretary kept it up that night in the first floor front, you would

have thought it might have been forty thousand. What I will say for the racing folks, whether gentry or otherwise, is, that they are free-handed; it is "light come, light go," with them, I suppose; but when fortune sends them a stroke of luck, they let other people share it. It was open house in No. 5 that night (next to his bedroom, the room was, and then the secretary's, as I well remember) for all as knew him, and I dare say a good many as didn't know him (more than to say, "Bravo, Dodds!" when he was reported to have pulled off a stake), took their glass at his expense. But Dodds had his eyes about him for all that, and his secretary too, and woe would have been to the man who tried to take more than what was offered him—that is, aught beyond food and liquor. They would not have given him into custody, not they, but they have laws of their own, these gentlemen, which they put in force at once against such transgressors. I believe soldiers, when they catch a thief among them, do the like. Well, the evening went off without anything worse than shouting, but in the morning there was a terrible "to-do." Mr. Dodds had been robbed in the night of all his winnings. In reality, these were not quite so great as had been reported; but they amounted to eleven thousand pounds in bank-notes—and they were gone.

I verily believe the man was not so annoyed by the loss of the money as by the fact of his having

been robbed—that is, of another man having outwitted him. He stormed and raved like a mad bull, so that my master hardly dared to listen to what he had to say about the matter—though, indeed, it was very little. These notes, which were all for large amounts, were in a pocket-book by themselves, and lay in a drawer in his room. He had seen all was right, he thought, before he retired to rest, his door being not only locked, but fastened with a bolt with a spring bell to it. Only, there was at that time nothing *in* the pocket-book but two copies of the “Sporting Times,” very neatly folded. The notes must have been taken out beforehand—while he was entertaining his friends—and the little substitution effected. When my master asked Mr. Dodds, “Have you got the numbers of the notes?” he burst out into a fury. “Because I have been robbed, sir, do you take me for a born idiot? Of course I have.”

His secretary, indeed, had made a memorandum of them; but, unfortunately, had wrapped it up with the notes themselves, which was very handy and convenient for the thief.

Mr. Dodds was a stout man, and I thought would have had a fit of apoplexy when he discovered this. I don't remember ever hearing so much strong language from the same mouth in so short a time. We kept the secretary locked up in the bar till the storm had blown over a little, and in the meantime we did what

we could. As Mr. Adamson was the only stranger at the *Hand and Glove*, suspicion naturally fell upon him—and so did Mr. Dodds. In less time than it takes me to tell you, the unfortunate man was stripped to his skin, and his room searched with that completeness that not a pin's head could have escaped notice: but nothing was found; and except that he had gone up with the rest to drink a glass of champagne in the first floor front in honour of Mr. Dodds' success, not a tittle of proof existed against him. He had not left the house that day since he had returned from the races, and even now he showed no signs of departure. He said he had been infamously treated, but had too much respect for Mr. Dodds to take the law of him for the insult that had been inflicted on him. And he stayed for the next day's races, where he told me that he had been "welshed" out of fifteen shillings, or he should have been happy to have given me half-a-crown, though "attendance" was included in our bills. In justice to himself, my master sent for the police; but, of course, *they* were no good, and Mr. Dodds had to give them five pounds, in consideration of having expressed an opinion, in his usual terms, upon their incompetency. He offered one thousand pounds reward for the recovery of the notes, and started off with the secretary (with his tail between his legs) for the next race meeting.

Some people thought it was the secretary who had

done the trick; but Mr. Dodds knew better; and so did I. I have heard of things being "borne in" upon folks—a first cousin of mine by the mother's side being a bit of a Calvin—but never was any man more convinced of what he hadn't seen than I was that Mr. John Adamson had taken that money. The hold it got on me was surprising, especially after the thousand pounds reward was offered, which did not make my brain less busy about the matter, you may be certain. At first I could talk of nothing else, so that I got to be quite a laughing-stock with my fellow-servants at the inn, when I grew sulky and dropped it, which was afterwards lucky for me. They, of course, talked about it too, for a robbery of that magnitude under one's own roof was enough to set any tongue wagging; but after a month or two the thing wore away from their minds, whereas with me it was as fresh as ever. Where could he have put that money when we searched him and his room so thoroughly? and Did he get clear away with it? were the two questions that worried me most. That he stole the notes from Mr. Dodds' drawer I took for granted.

Perhaps I should not so soon have got free of my fellow-servants' chaff—especially as it had begun to rile me—if something else had not presently occurred to turn their attention from the subject altogether. This was a murder committed at Lewes, within a few miles of us. A murder is always more exciting than

a robbery, and in this instance the victim was a Brighton cabdriver, known to many of us, which, of course, made the incident more attractive. Otherwise it was a common case enough; the man had made a few pounds in a Derby lottery, and for those and the watch in his pocket, the other, who was a bookmaker on the turf, called Kyneton, had murdered him. The trial had nothing noteworthy in it from first to last; but when the murderer had met his deserts, a certain paragraph appeared in a Lewes paper, which being copied into other journals attracted much attention, and set my ears tingling more than anybody's. After the murderer was found guilty, it said, he had made a voluntary statement to one of the prison warders that it was he who had stolen the notes from Mr. Dodds at the *Hand and Glove* Hotel at Brighton, during the race week in the previous autumn.

"Come, Bob," said my master, "that disposes of your friend Adamson's having had anything to do with it, which you thought such a 'moral.'"

"Well, sir, yes, I suppose it does," said I.

"Of course it does; and I am very glad this has happened, since it removes all suspicion from anyone connected with the hotel. You don't know anything of this fellow Kyneton being about the place on the Cup day, do you?"

"No, sir," I said, "but there were a many folks

coming and going, and especially, as you remember, to congratulate Mr. Dodds on his good fortune."

"Just so; and this Kyneton was one of them, no doubt."

But, for my part, I still stuck to my own opinion. If Kyneton had stolen eleven thousand pounds in the autumn, what need had he to kill a man for twenty pounds and a silver watch a few months afterwards? The man was not a gentleman, and would not have flung so much money away in as many years. And why did he tell a warder about it, instead of confessing his crime to the chaplain in the usual way?

The next Sunday happened to be my Sunday out, and I took advantage of it to go to Lewes. I had an acquaintance there who was a sporting reporter upon the staff of the newspaper in which the paragraph first appeared, and I had a great fancy to put a few questions to him. He was a civil fellow enough, and had had information from me on certain occasions—one picks it up when horsey gents are talking together, in spite of their whispering ways—which had been useful to him.

"Now, Jack," I said, "I want to see the prison warder as this here Kyneton told that story to about that robbery at our hotel."

"Well, to tell you the truth, Bob," he says, laughing, "you'll find that a little difficult. Between ourselves, it was all bogus. It has been very successful,

and been quoted in all the London papers, but no such statement was ever made."

"Then, how did it get into the papers?"

"Oh, in the usual way; it was put in by a penny-a-liner; a mere effort of the imagination."

"Then, Jack, I must see that penny-a-liner."

"To tell you the whole truth, Ned," he answered, with another laugh (but I thought not quite so natural a one), "he stands before you; it was me as wrote it."

"Oh, you wrote it, did you? Now, look here; this will go no further," said I, "than you and me, but I must know more. You said you would tell me the whole truth: then tell me, who was it as paid you to write it?"

"Well, my proprietors, of course," he answered sulkily.

"I know that, but who paid you besides?"

"Well, if you must know, a man of the name of Loftus. I met him at the *Harp* here during the trial, and he said he would give something to see himself in print. It struck him, he said (and he was right), that to make Kyneton confess to the Dodds robbery would be an attractive sort of 'par' (that means paragraph), and between us we worked it up. It was more my composition than his, but I did not tell him so, and he promised me a guinea when he saw it in type: and he paid the guinea like a man; and what was the harm in it?"

"No sort of harm, Jack," says I, "and indeed rather the reverse. I do assure you, you shall never get into trouble about it; but just tell me what this man was like."

"Well, he was rather a down-looking cove."

"Hang-dog?" said I.

"Well, yes, to be frank, hang-dog—a washed-out whitey-brown sort of fellow."

"With a beard?" inquired I.

"No, with no beard."

"Did you notice any impediment in his speech?"

"No. By-the-by, now you mention it," said Jack, correcting himself, "I did. It was very slight, but he said pup—pup—paragraph."

"All right," said I; "I'm much obliged to you. It's not the man I thought it was."

"And who did you think it was?"

"It's no matter. I have come on a fool's errand, but I thank you all the same. If I can do anything for you next meeting"—I meant, of course, the Brighton race-meeting, for Jack was not a chapel-goer, far from it—"command me."

Then I went home more confident in my old opinion than ever. It was Adamson himself (though he now wore no beard) who had put that statement into the *Lewes Express*. The question, of course, was, why had he done it? since nobody now accused him of being a thief. And why should he have adopted so

clumsy and dangerous a method of getting his exculpation printed if he had had money at command to get it done in safer ways? As I read it, the man, though he had stolen the money, had by no means got it in his pocket. It was hidden somewhere under the roof of the *Hand and Glove*, and, now that his character was in the eyes of the world re-established, he would some day return to take possession.

I was not fool enough to communicate these ideas to anyone else; I had already experienced the inconveniences of talking, and I felt that, if I was right in my conjecture, the value of it depended on my keeping it to myself. Consequently I bore with much good humour the sly remarks of the other waiters, and even of the pretty chambermaid (whom I dare say you remember, sir), about the mare's nest I had discovered as respected the guilt of Mr. Adamson, whom they proceeded to pity as an ill-used and innocent man. I confessed that I had made a mistake such as human nature is liable to, and after a few weeks there was an end of it. The robbery, having been explained, was forgotten, just as, I make no doubt, the man who had done it had calculated upon: only Bob Taylor (at your service) happened to be the exception as proved the rule.

It was in the autumn time, and about three weeks before the race-meeting, that a Mr. Morton arrived at our hotel by the evening train, and asked for a bed-

room. What he couldn't abide, as he told Eliza (which was the pretty housemaid's name, as you may remember), was the noise of the sea at night. He didn't care where he slept, but the room must be at the back of the house, and at the same time airy. Now, the only room which combined these advantages, as it happened, was No. 47. I did not take much notice of Mr. Morton at first, except as respected his portmanteau, which I thought a very shabby one for a gent as was so particular about his sleeping; but as it happened, it fell to me to wait upon him in the coffee-room, and the way in which he ordered dry champagne and the best of everything the house afforded did strike me (in connection with that portmanteau) as peculiar.

He spoke very little, occupying himself chiefly in smoothing his black moustache, which was very fine and silky, and in reading a sporting newspaper. I noticed that one leg of his trousers was patched at the knee, and said I to myself, "There's bricks in that portmanteau." But that, of course, was no business of mine at that time, being only the waiter.

Before the house closed he went out for a walk, with one of our best cigars in his mouth, and on his return asked for hot whisky and water; only he called it wur-wur-whisky. You might have knocked me down with a feather, for when he said that it flashed upon me in an instant that here was my man. His beard

was gone, it was true, but that I was prepared for, "from information received," as the police say; his moustache had changed its colour—indeed, it was a false one; but that unfortunate hesitation in his speech recalled Mr. Adamson to my recollection at once. When I handed him the spirits and water, my hand shook so that you would have thought I had taken any amount of the same prescription myself. To think that he had taken the very same room again—No. 47—though, of course, that was only what you may call the association of ideas—seemed to carry conviction with it. The room was, I think I have said, in the servants' quarter, and my own little dog-hole was close to it. I slept—no, I didn't sleep—I laid awake all that night with my door ajar, and listened, listened, listened, till there was a buzzing in my brain equal to a million of bees in swarming time. At two o'clock in the morning I heard his door open, and was out of bed in a twinkling with my eyes at the chink of my own door.

It was a moonlight night, and I saw him go down the passage in his nightgown as noiseless as a ghost. Then I heard something scrape against the floor; it was the foot of the ladder of the fire-escape that led up through the trapdoor on to the roof. "He has hidden them there," said I to myself, and in my hurry to follow him I stumbled in the passage and fell. When I picked myself up, all was as quiet as death;

and on turning the corner of the passage I see my gentleman coming towards me, walking quite slow and rigid. "Hullo," I said, "how come *you* here?" He didn't answer a word, but, with his eyes wide open and staring over my shoulder, tried to pass me. I took him by the arm, however, and again asked him what he was doing in the passage at that time of night. Then he drew a long sigh, passed his hand over his eyes, and says, "Where am I?"

"Well," says I, "you're where you've no business to be. Your room is No. 47, I believe."

"Thank you," he says, "so it is. I've been walking in my sleep. It's a habit I have. Good nun—nun—night."

And then he turned into his room and locked the door.

He was certainly one of the coolest hands I ever saw, but his little device did not impose upon me for an instant; what he wanted, I now felt positively certain, were those nun—nun—notes, which were lying, no doubt, stuffed under the tiles, or in some spout or other in the roof. The trapdoor was a long way up, and could not be reached except by the ladder; so this is what I did. I went down into the pantry, where I knew of a chain and padlock that had belonged to the kennel of a Newfoundland dog of ours as was dead, and I just fastened that ladder to a

staple in the wall as had been put there for that very purpose, but never used. After that, though I heard my gentleman go out again about 3.30, I felt more comfortable in my mind. I rather fancied that he would soon come back again—which he did; a-cussing and a-swearing under his breath, without any sort of hesitation whatsoever.

The adventures of the night, however, were not over, for at four o'clock there was such a thundering noise in his room, that I thought the floor must have given way.

"Good heavens!" says I, knocking at his door, "what is the matter?"

"It's nothing," he says; "I've been walking in my sleep again, that's all."

"Well," says I, "I do hope you'll not do it again, or you'll rouse the house."

After which, he was as quiet as a mouse; quieter than me, I do assure you, for I lay in my bed shaking like an aspen leaf, and without a dry rag upon me, as the saying is. For, as I'm a living man, I knew from that moment where those 11,000*l.* worth of notes were hid as well as he did.

In the morning he came down to breakfast, and then went out, saying he would not return before luncheon time, as he had some business to transact in the town. Eliza made his bed, and thought nothing

had happened, for I was not going to be made a fool of a second time; and when the coast was clear, I just walked into No. 47 and locked myself in—with the ladder.

I have said that the room had been thoroughly searched, and so it had been, for even the very wainscot had been ripped up. Only, nobody had thought of the ceiling, which was twenty feet out of everybody's reach, and had not even a chandelier; but where the chandelier ought to have been, as I have mentioned, there were a few roses and things made of plaster, by way of ornament. Mr. Adamson, as I was now convinced, had been trying to reach those pretty flowers by the help of his bedstead and dressing-table, only they had not come up to the mark, and had also given way under him. By putting the ladder against the bedstead I could, however, reach the ceiling easily enough (as my gentleman himself had done on a certain occasion), and under the rose (one may make a little joke when everything turns out so comfortable) I found the notes. The whole thing didn't take five minutes; and after telling my master of my discovery we sent at once for a policeman.

Before Mr. Adamson came back there arrived for him a largish package, which we took the liberty to open. It was an iron ladder that folded up very neatly, and was labelled "Mr. Morton, No. 47." If he had had the prudence to bring it with him in the first

instance, things might have turned out more fortunately for him; but as it was, it came a little late. Of course he was given into custody, and a telegram sent to Mr. Dodds. That gentleman, sir, behaved *like* a gentleman, for on the day that Mr. Adamson was "copped"—he got twenty years—I not only received my thousand pounds, but "a hundred added," as Mr. Dodds called it, "for my perseverance, sagacity, and integrity," and it is with that money that I have become master of the *Hand and Glove*.

Just as Bob concluded his narrative, the interest of which had greatly conduced to still the feelings of alarm which our position had engendered within me, the bell began slowly to rise, its lifting gear having been put in order. "Bob," said I, "I don't know whether, since you have become a landlord on your own account, it may not be an insult to offer it to you, but here is a sovereign for you."

I thought he would have been overwhelmed with gratitude at this generous behaviour; on the contrary, he flipped the coin up in the air (for we *were* in the air by that time), and caught it again as though it had been a copper. "I make no bones about taking this sov, because you see, sir, you're a literary gent, and I dare say will make more out of that 'ere story than ever I made out of you."

I must say I thought it rather an ungracious speech of Bob's; but we parted on the edge of the Polytechnic pond the best of friends.

"You'll come down and patronise us—that is, Eliza and me," he said, "at the *Hand and Glove*, won't you? then I'll show you No. 47."

I must say I thought I rather an ungracious spirit
of Bob's but we parted on the edge of the highway
from the best of friends
You'll come down and get some more that is, Eliza
and me, he said, in the black and white wool
then I'll show you No. 4.
I was very much surprised to find that
the same person who had been so kind
to show me the way to the house
was now so kind to show me the way
to the house.

I was very much surprised to find that
the same person who had been so kind
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A VERY QUIET RUBBER.

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IF the meditations of Mr. Gray had occurred to him in the churchyard of Tatbury, Berks, his "Elegy" would have taken a different turn, or at least there would have been a supplementary verse or two not quite in accordance with its general tone. If he had had (as in my boyhood *I* had) the advantage of the acquaintance of Mr. John Newton of Tatbury, he would have obtained some new material, which, though not precisely poetic perhaps, might have been "worked up" into some startling stanzas. Mr. Newton was the great "auctioneer and upholder" of those parts, but incidentally an undertaker also, and knew a great deal more about churchyards than Mr. Gray did. He knew, at all events, all those within thirty miles of him, and most of those who had been in the occupation of them for fifty years. It could hardly have been said of a Berkshire gentleman of any position, during that period, that he was "happy" unless Mr. John Newton had conducted his obsequies; it was like "having no burial" at all.

When even the Marquis of Berks was gathered to

his forefathers, no London firm was employed to place him in the family vault at Tatbury; Mr. Newton was felt (by the executors) to be equal to the emergency. In the Marquis's will it was known beforehand that he had expressed a wish that his hearse should be drawn by his own carriage horses, and Mr. Newton had the foresight (when his lordship was given over by Dr. Frump of Tatbury, whose word was Law and Physic in one) to have them exercised every day in plumes, lest they should be restive under them on the stately occasion for which their services were required.

Of course there were people, even in Tatbury, so lost to all sense of authority and solemnity as to make light of Mr. John Newton. At the Town Club, for example, which was held at the *Berkshire Arms*, and where he was accustomed to play whist, on one occasion—it was under the Regency—when he had won three bumpers running, a loser had sarcastically observed to him, "Why, this is better, old man, than burying the Prince Regent;" but the observation had fallen flat, as being profane when addressed to a man of his grave position, as well as slightly flippant with respect to a leading member of the Royal Family. Yet, if Mr. Newton could ever be said to unbend himself at all, it was at Long Whist; when his manner of saying "Hush!" and "We are playing at whist, if you please," was justly pronounced to be perfect in its

gentlemanly bearing. The way in which he would set down his cards (with their faces downwards, you may be certain, for there were sharp players in the Town Club), and fold his hands till conversation should cease, was something that the Lord Chancellor of England, or the Speaker of the House of Commons, might have copied with advantage, as a lesson in the dignity of reproach.

If a man so well established and respected as Mr. Newton of Tatbury could be said to have an ambition unsatisfied, it was that his scientific genius as a whist-player was confined to the Town Club, and forbidden to exercise itself in private circles. But trade, even in its quietest and gravest form, which surely can be said of undertaking, was tabooed among the gentry of Tatbury; their incomes were microscopic, but they made up for that by being exclusive and select. Even the local banker was only admitted into their society on sufferance, and it was thought a piece of impertinence in him (as it was certainly one of superfluity) to win at whist.

There was one especial clique, consisting of two ladies and two gentlemen, who played the game with rigour every lawful night of their lives, to which Mr. Newton particularly aspired, but in vain. Mr. Ashton and Mr. Groves, Miss Lake and Miss Sutton, were the names of this little *coterie*, who had been partners and opponents for nearly one quarter of their natural lives.

Their points were but three pennies, but their science was great; if they made mistakes in play, they acknowledged them, and away from the card-table they made none. Their lives were blameless; they were looked up to by all their neighbours; and it was said they gave all they won to the poor, which I can well believe. If they did so, that largess would not have been so great as to have demoralised Tatbury.

Mr. John Newton had made various efforts to enter this little paradise, but he remained outside. Like the Peri in the poem, he could have brought many a tear gathered in the course of his professional experience (from mourners, if not from penitents), but it would have availed him nothing. They knew he was quiet in his manners, an excellent whist-player, and would have given them first-rate suppers when his turn to invite them came round—for they played alternately at each other's houses—but their doors were closed against him. They refused to be connected, however unofficially, with a man who sold by retail, even though it was but coffins to the great. On the other hand, they very eagerly welcomed the information he had to give them concerning the demise of eminent persons in the neighbourhood, and admitted him to a certain degree of familiarity. He knew, from each one's account of the others, all their different styles of play, and which was the favourite partner of each. The temptation that beset Mr. Ashton,

when his hand was full of trumps (otherwise he would have scorned it) was to lead a single card; Mr. Groves played too much for his own hand; Miss Lake would lead trumps on too slight a provocation; and Miss Sutton, an admirable performer in other respects, was given to finesses that made one's blood curdle.

Mr. Newton felt that he had none of these weaknesses, and was worthy to be the partner of any one of the four. But though envious of them, he was not malicious. It was from his lips that I first heard of their virtues; he had come professionally to "measure" my grandfather, and over a glass of dry sherry discoursed to the housekeeper in my presence concerning them in a manner which, to my childish ears, considering the solemnity of the occasion, sounded somewhat secular. In later days I was better able to grasp Mr. Newton's character (which was anything but profane), and to appreciate his observations upon human nature. His lecture-room was most commonly the graveyard itself, which, being contiguous to our own house, afforded me many opportunities of conversing with him, when on the eve of any great engagement he came, like a prudent general, to survey the ground and make his dispositions beforehand—in advance of the sexton.

After many years' absence from the home of my fathers, I returned to Tatbury the other day, and found my friend of the scarf and hatband still above ground

and busy as usual. His was a trade, as I ventured to observe to him, that never fails, and which such bad times as these even promote by occasional suicides.

He shook his head. "Folks die, Master James, of course," he said; "there is no falling off *there*." He was about to add, "thank Heaven;" but perceiving with fine tact that the ejaculation was too professional, and might have been misunderstood, he effected the following substitution: "but when they die, they are not buried as they used to be."

"Dear me!" said I; "has cremation made such strides, then?"

He smiled contemptuously. "In a Christian land, sir, that will never succeed. What sort of a future can be looked for as begins, so to speak, with burning? The parson says, 'Ashes to ashes,' it is true; but that is quite another thing from cremation. Folks know they will be reduced to dust, but they don't see the operation, and therefore do not realise it; if they did, it would be harder for them to imagine their friends saints and angels: and therefore they don't want to see it."

"There's something in that," I assented, "no doubt."

Mr. Newton smiled benignly, as though he would have said, "There is generally 'something' in what I say, if you will only favour me with your attention;" then added reflectively, "Why, there was old Lady

Braddon the other day, she wouldn't be put into the family vault, nor yet into a brick grave, because, said she, 'How am I to get out again?' She was the best of Christians, but in that respect she had material views. And here she lies"—we were standing in the churchyard—"among the mere common people accordingly."

"It must be rather sad for you to have to come here so often," said I, "and on such melancholy errands."

I felt the observation was a foolish one directly it had passed my lips; but it is one thing to know what is commonplace, and another to know how to avoid it.

"Melancholy!" he exclaimed, "not a bit of it. The great majority of my friends lie here, and I have no disinclination to join them. You see that square green grave, with the four stones about it; there lie the best people I ever knew in Tatbury, and the best whist-players; two of them bachelors, two of them spinsters; Mr. Ashton and Miss Lake, Mr. Groves and Miss Sutton. There they lie, opposite to one another, just as they sat in life; you remember them, Master James, of course?"

"I remember who they were," I said. "I was but a boy in their time. You used to tell me about them."

"Ay, I dare say. When Mr. Ashton went, I had some hopes of filling his place; but they preferred dummy. The three met together every night for years,

with that vacant seat at the old table; it was a very touching spectacle. None of them would ever lead a single card after they had lost him, no matter how desperate their condition; it was felt to be irreverent, and, so to speak, an infringement of copyright. It was what the American publishers (with whom, however, I wouldn't compare them for a moment) are wont to call 'the courtesy of the trade.' *There* was a delicacy of feeling, and no mistake. Mr. Groves was the next to go, when the two old ladies were reduced to double dummy. Miss Lake used to say, 'We can't help playing for our own hands *now*, dear, can we, as poor Mr. Groves used to do?' They were obliged to infringe *his* copyright from necessity. A man as couldn't drop a tear to see those two ladies without partners, evening after evening, wasn't worthy to be called a man. And in my opinion it hastened their end: double dummy is a great strain upon the mind, Master James."

The undertaker was so moved, that if he had seen the same demonstrativeness in one of his own mutes, he would have given him a shilling; it was always a principle with him to encourage emotion.

"Then Miss Lake, she was the third to go. A good woman, if ever there was one. The poor lost a friend in her, and the church a constant attendant. She never touched a card after twelve o'clock on Saturday nights, though only a few people knew what it cost her to resist the temptation. There's been a

note of it kept in the proper place, I've not a doubt."

Here the undertaker gave a sigh so significant that I could not for the life of me help observing, "There are few whist-players can say as much, Mr. Newton."

"No, you are wrong there, Master James; least-ways, if you think as conscience is a-pricking *me*, I have never played into Sunday morning, though it is true I have sat up till after twelve on Sunday nights and begun *then*. Well, when Miss Lake went, Miss Sutton was left alone; the last leaf, as one might say, of that green table. There was nothing for her, poor soul, but patience; and she played Patience accordingly every night. When her turn came, as she expressed it, 'to cut out,' she sent for me. It was only a few hours before her demise, and she had already seen the clergyman. 'Mr. Newton,' said she, 'I know you wanted to join our little party years ago, but it was not to be. Still, I feel you had a kindness for us. There are some good people in the world who made objections to our innocent game. I hope they may have nothing worse upon their own consciences to answer for than having played a quiet rubber. But I don't want to be a stumbling-block. You need not therefore make public what I am about to ask you—at least, not until I am forgotten, which won't be long. Mr. Ashton and Mr. Groves lie at right angles to one another, as you well know, and dear Miss Lake op-

posite to Mr. Ashton; bury me opposite to Mr. Groves, so that I shall make up the old party!’

“I assure you, Master James, she said it so pitiful that I couldn’t answer her for tears. I only nodded my head and looked mournful, like one of my own hearse horses.

“Then she added, ‘And if you don’t think it would be wrong, Mr. Newton, I should like the two packs of cards we last played with—we always used to make them last three months, you know—put into my coffin. Would you mind seeing to that yourself?’

“Of course I said it should be done, and it *was* done with my own hands. There are some folks as would think it irreverent, though I have known the same people drop a toy into a child’s coffin, with tears ready to break their hearts: yet, what are cards but toys, and we but children? Well, I buried the poor old lady just as she wished, and there they lie, all four of ’em.”

We were standing by the place he indicated, and I noticed that one green grave which contained the whole party had been somewhat flattened at the top.

“That was your doing also, I suppose?” I inquired.

“Yes. No one has observed it but yourself; but I thought if I made it tabular it would look more like the real thing. It is a very quiet rubber!”

THE FATAL CURIOSITY,

OR

A HUNDRED YEARS HENCE.

THE FATAL CURIOSITY.

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CHAPTER I.

AT THE BREAKFAST-TABLE. *

It was Christmas morning 1979, and nearly ten o'clock, yet none of the guests who at that season are always to be found at Mellington Hall had yet made their appearance at the breakfast-table. People got up when they liked in that excellent mansion, and were never punished with cold tea. The hostess, Mrs. Raymond, was hospitality itself, and her husband would have been equally so if he had had time. He was, however, entirely occupied in scientific pursuits, from which he could barely tear himself away, even to eat his meals; it was quite a treat, said his wife, to see him take a holiday on this occasion, which, as the old saying observes, "Comes but once a year." She had a passion for old sayings, old observances, old fashions, and on Christmas Day she would have everything arranged as much as possible in accordance with ancient custom. There was nothing newfangled to be seen in the appointments of the table that morning, while, on the other hand, some things were

* This story was in print six years ago, though first published in 1877.

so old that they had quite the flavour of rareties. For example, dried leaves of tea were put in the teapot and boiling water thrown over them, after which the tea-maker (fancy a *tea-maker!*) dispensed it with her own hands; toast (also hand-made) appeared in quaint little silver racks; loaves of bread, such as one now only sees in pictures, baked from the flour in an oven; butter quite independent of it, and in pats, as it used to be before cowcorn was invented and the great principle of combination of cultivation discovered; marmalade produced by slicing oranges, and subjecting them to some tedious mechanical process; eggs laid by live hens, *one at a time*; and salmon cutlets dissociated from the fish, and brought by land (such was the lady's caprice) from the nearest seaport, a hundred miles away. On the side-table, in addition to cold kangaroo and the usual meats, there was a small plate of the almost extinct crustacean called oysters. These last, however, were only partaken of as a relish, since they cost their weight in ideas. Many persons, indeed, objected to them on principle; it was "taking too much thought," they said; and certainly they were an extravagant luxury even at the table of such a man as Mr. Raymond, who was said to have thirty thousand a year; for no man's ideas can last for ever.

Mrs. Raymond has been much exercised in her mind with the teapot, which is evidently a strange vessel to her; but at last she has made the tea in the old-

fashioned way, and stands regarding it with a pleased smile on her kind, comely face.

"I do believe I have done it right," says she; "at least, as old Anthony Trollope describes the process in one of his domestic novels. If it were not for such books as his, we should never know how people really lived and talked a hundred years ago. Whatever Harry may say, we are certainly under great obligations to our far-away ancestors, at all events to those who were authors; the best punch we make is still from that receipt given by Dickens in his Pick—pick—what is it? I never can remember those queer names his stories go by—and beats, in my opinion, the produce of our best punch vineyards. Good morning, Sir Rupert. Nay, you are not late, I assure you; and if you were, I should set it down to the temperature of your room. Harry, you know, is mad about ventilation."

"Well, I must say, my dear madam, if we were living in the old fireside days, one would feel a little cold under his *régime*. Why, good heavens, you've got a fire!"

"Yes; we always have on Christmas Day, or rather *I* always have, for my husband calls it 'relapsing into barbarism.' To my mind that crackle of sticks is very cheerful; it reminds one of the good old times when people burnt heretics and martyrs, and persons in effigy, when they couldn't get the real ones (that *was*

funny, wasn't it?), and all because of their *opinions*. What drollery our ancestors must have possessed."

"That's true; but I doubt whether the people of whom the bonfires were composed appreciated the joke."

"But they had only got to asbest—oh, I forgot, that wasn't invented, was it? Why, how on earth did they put out fires—I mean conflagrations?"

"My dear madam, they poured water upon them. I don't mean to say that they had not some ingenious methods of doing that, engines, hydrants, and other mechanical contrivances; but that is what it came to, when all was done—they poured upon them."

What a cheery ringing laugh that dear Mrs. Raymond had; she had not a delicate sense of humour, but broad and palpable absurdities, like that of burning people for their opinions, and of creating scalding steam when the object was to extinguish and *cool* a thing, tickled her immensely. She fell back in her chair and fairly wobbled with laughter; her plump figure seemed to become one dimple, and to typify wholesome Mirth itself.

Sir Rupert placed his double eyeglasses upon his nose, and then withdrew them with nervous haste and substituted another pair. "Goodness gracious," muttered he, "what a mistake! I was almost looking at her through my Pandi-optic spectacles." These were not those in ordinary use, which command but a mile

or so when high on the nose, and a twenty-thousandth part of an inch when depressed, but a kind only used by scientific persons for looking into mile-stones and other geological experiments; and with them you could see through everything. He was a fine tall old gentleman, but with rather a finical manner and a face beautifully carved by the small-pox (in the Middle Ages he would have been hideously pitted by it, and even under the old system of vaccination, not improved, but as it was he was splendid). He had earned his title by the possession of one peculiar idea, which was that everything was really contrary to what it appeared to be. Centuries ago there had been one Berkeley who published an opinion that nothing had any real existence (he had been made a bishop for it even in those days), and Sir Rupert's notion had been objected to as being a plagiarism from that ecclesiastic; but the Court of Patents of Nobility had decided in his favour. "It *was* a new idea," they said, "to suppose that everything was really the contrary of what it appeared to be."

"Now, my dear madam," said he, gazing earnestly at his laughing hostess, "are you really enjoying yourself when you laugh like that, or are you in torments? I see you put your hand to your side."

"That is because it aches," explained the lady, still undulating with merriment.

"Just so; it aches," said Sir Rupert triumphantly;

"that is only another proof (if one were wanting) of my universal theory. My idea is this—"

Another moment, and Sir Rupert would have mounted his hobby and rendered his poor hostess very melancholy indeed, but at that crisis her liege lord, who would endure, as Sir Rupert was well aware, no theories but his own, opportunely entered the breakfast-room and preserved her.

"Why, Raymond, this is quite late for you," exclaimed the visitor, as he saluted his host.

"Late! Gad, *you'd* have been late if you had had St. Gothard air turned on into your room in place of that of the Simplon; upon my life, as I tell Charlotte there, there's not a servant in the whole house that can be trusted with the taps."

Mr. Raymond was a stout-looking man enough, stouter even than his wife, but this was caused in his case less by habit of body than by want of exercise; he was always dabbling in science, and could never be got out even in a sky-chaise for half an hour's exercise. From his build one would have expected him to have been of a florid complexion, and to be indolent and sleepy; whereas he was fidgety, impatient, and energetic to an excessive degree. Sir Rupert liked him, if he liked him at all, because he illustrated his theory.

"But, my dear Harry," remonstrated Mrs. Raymond, "there is really no occasion to put yourself in such a

tantrum; of course it was a foolish mistake of Duncombe's, but it might have been much more serious."

"Serious, madam? Do you call a difference of 900 feet perpendicular nothing serious? My doctor has particularly enjoined upon me never to sleep in a mountain atmosphere of less than 10,000 feet. What's the good of having mountain atmospheres laid on in your house at all, if things are arranged like this? Why, even in those meagre old times that you are always praising so, when people had gas in their bedrooms, the servants knew when it was turned on or off."

"But *something* was turned on, my dear, in your case, though it was not the right thing," remonstrated the lady of the house. "Moreover, gas or not, our ancestors did contrive to live: you talk about not being able to breathe unless this or that air is laid on fresh from Switzerland or the seaside, but what would you have done had you been compelled to put up with bottled air from those places, such as your fathers used, or even with any air there might be about—Pimlico air, Holloway air, or such as you would get here in the country, and with which the agricultural poor have still to be content?"

"That's no argument, madam. You might as well ask me how I should have got about before sky-chaises were invented, or warmed myself—why, bless my soul, if you are not burning *coal!*"

"Now do sit down, Harry, and take your breakfast comfortably, like Sir Rupert and myself; not walk about the room picking holes in everything in that aggravating manner. You know it is my whim to have everything on Christmas Day as old-fashioned as possible."

"But why *coals*, madam?" reiterated Mr. Raymond petulantly; he had fallen on his knees upon the hearth-rug, the better to examine this curious spectacle of a material fire. "Why *coals*? Are you aware what is the price of coals per ounce avoirdupois?"

"I have no idea," confessed Mrs. Raymond.

"Of course not; you need not tell me that I didn't marry an heiress; and let me remark, that even I have not ideas enough to pay for such freaks as these. Coals, indeed! Why, every one of those little black diamonds will cost me as much as a white diamond of the same size. Puff—how the smoke comes in one's eyes. This is a return to the first ages of savagery. There is nothing to excuse it, or recommend it, except that it's expensive. You have no better reason for it than had Cleopatra for swallowing the pearl—and what was a pearl in those days compared with a scuttle of coals in these? No wealth can stand it, and if I had five million ideas a year, I would not permit such extravagance."

"My dear Harry, I am *so* sorry," said good Mrs. Raymond, rising from her chair to kiss the bald spot on her husband's head as he knelt before the object

of his ire; "we will never have coals again, even on Christmas Day, though that never comes but once a year, you know."

"I don't know anything of the kind, madam," returned her still irritated lord; "I am not without some expectation of being able to bring about anniversaries more than once a year, and even at pleasure. However, the subject is too intricate to discuss now—there, there, we'll say no more about it, Dodo" (he always called his wife "Dodo" when he was in a good humour, and especially when he wished a quarrel to become extinct). "Let me cut you some kangaroo—Why, by Jove, What are these? Oysters! What do you think of oysters, Sir Rupert? This is domestic economy with a vengeance, upon my word!"

"Well, I was thinking whether I had ever *seen* an oyster," replied Sir Rupert, who took everything very literally except what could be referred to his pet theory, which oysters couldn't, since nobody has ever yet imagined the contrary of an oyster. "Having been always a man of one idea, you see, I have not been able to indulge in luxuries—thank you, since they *are* here I will have one; it is the inside that you eat, is it not? Swallow it whole? Surely not. Very good, I put myself in your hands. One, two—there, I have done it."

"For such a luxury you don't look as if you enjoyed it much," said Mr. Raymond dryly.

"Ah, but I did though," answered the other; "that's just my theory—you should never judge by appearances. I must say it strikes me now, however, as not being quite so nice; I have a taste in my mouth as if it were full of halfpence, but *it isn't* full of halfpence, so there's my theory again, you see. Where do these oysters come from now?"

"The sea; they are natives of it," exclaimed the host. "My wife had them sent from Whitstable *by land.*"

"Curious," observed Sir Rupert, "and I should think expensive."

"You'd have to think a good deal, I promise you, before you paid for them, my good fellow," continued Mr. Raymond; "a man need be made of thoughts with a wife like mine—Well, Charley, how have *you* slept? Nothing wrong with *your* air-taps, I should say, to look at you."

Charles Lester was the nephew of Mrs. Raymond, but as much the favourite of her husband as herself; a fine handsome young fellow, with a roguish smile, and that confident and easy air which, when not the result of self-complacency, is so winning and agreeable.

"The air was delicious," answered the young fellow, as he kissed his aunt; "and my dreams were so divine that I think it must have been laid on from the Jung-

frau. Why, surely" (sniffing) "this is Brighton, is it not? How invigorating, how appetising!"

"No, darling, it's Isle of Wight air. We have got Brighton in the dining-room, but your uncle complains that there is not enough smell of the sea with it. He will never be satisfied, I know, till we have a different air in every room."

"And so I would have, if I were rich enough," said Mr. Raymond stoutly. "I envy old Lord Raby, who has put his castle in connection with the Himalayas. I enjoy those sniffs at Dhawalagiri in the library; 28,000 feet, my lad, not an inch less!"

"What a long library," observed Charles, who was by this time busy with the cold kangaroo.

"Nonsense, I mean the mountains; what a fool you are, boy!"

"I know it; it's almost the only thing I do know," replied the young man, laughing. "Fortunately I have a clever uncle, who keeps me now, and intends to provide for me hereafter."

"Ah! you think so; then he *won't*," cried Sir Rupert, looking sharply up.

"He must," answered Mrs. Raymond softly. "If poor Charley was left to live by his wits, he would starve."

"Quite right, aunt; it would not, however, be a lingering death," said Charley coolly; "all would soon be over."

"Don't, my darling, don't; the idea is too much for me."

"Of course it is," said Mr. Raymond, with irritation; "did you ever know an idea that wasn't? Why on earth should you go trying your constitution in that way; have you not got a husband to think for you? Why, Lotty, how late you are!"

Lotty was Miss Charlotte Greville, an orphan daughter of an old friend of Mr. Raymond, and one who would have found a home under his roof if she had not had an idea in the world. She had, however, a large income of them in her own right, and was not only a "catch" on that account, but one of the most charmingly beautiful young women you ever beheld. Such an heiress as this you might have expected would have looked out for a mate in possession of at least an equal fortune, yet she showed considerable favour to Charley (who had not a notion to bless himself with), and had for certain refused much more eligible offers. Among the suitors had been Sir Rupert himself; but he did not entertain the least bad feeling on that account, because her rejection had confirmed his theory. "I thought you would have had me, you see, and you didn't, which is another proof (if one were wanting)," &c., &c.

She kissed Mr. and Mrs. Raymond, but, with true maidenly reserve, contented herself with looking at Charley as if she wanted to kiss him.

"Has the post come in?" inquired she of that young man.

Charley rose and went to the window. "The London post is signalled, but there are no letters of consequence for any of us," replied he. "The Australian bag has just dropped in the garden, for I heard it flop."

"Then let it lie where it is," said Mr. Raymond. "I never had a letter from an Australian mail (or female for that matter either) that did not contain a request for assistance from their old-world relatives."

"What a trouble we have had to get that Australian delivery twice a day," observed Mrs. Raymond, taking no notice of this remark; "one would really think the theory of attraction had never been discovered. Is there any news in the morning papers?"

"Nothing of much importance," answered Charley, still at the window; "the Tichborne case is still agitating the public mind."

"I wonder how that case began," observed Mrs. Raymond, leaning back in her chair; "I can never make head nor tail of it."

"Well, it's a long story, aunt," said Charley. "There was a Sir Roger Tichborne who fell out of the Ark, and whether he was drowned, or floated on account of his fat, is the point at issue. For my part, I don't believe the fellow was ever in the Ark at all."

"Your opinion is worth nothing," said Sir Rupert rudely; "according to *my* theory, he certainly was."

"Quiet, quiet!" exclaimed Mrs. Raymond, "I will have no quarrels here over the Tichborne case. It is one of the many legacies of evil that we have received from our ancestors, a miasma from the mists of antiquity. Remember, it is Christmas Day, when even the Claimant should cease to be a bone of contention."

"He did not look much like a bone of anything," said Charley contemptuously.

"No, but he *is*," put in Sir Rupert, "and that's only another proof (if proof were wanting)—"

"Silence!" roared Mr. Raymond. "I won't have it. Who's going to church? Tell us how's the weather, Charley; my eyes are not so good as they used to be."

Charley, who had resumed his place at the table, here looked up at the ceiling and read off the gauge, "Very high and dangerous, Channel tunnel endangered."

"Why, you stupid boy, that's the 'sea disturbance.'"

"I don't wonder at his being puzzled!" exclaimed Mrs. Raymond, striking in to Charley's rescue; "what with the wind, and the sea, and the daily state of the public health, I can never tell, myself, whether the morning is wet or fine. Upon my word, I believe

the good old plan of looking out of the window is as good as any."

"According to that evidence, it seems beautifully fine," remarked Sir Rupert.

"Are you sure that the antiphinium isn't stretched over the lawn?" observed Miss Greville.

"By Jove, you are right," returned the baronet, "which proves my theory, by-the-by."

"Did you think I was wrong then?" inquired the young lady tartly (she was angry because he had snubbed her young man).

"No, no," answered the knight hastily, "I only referred to its looking beautifully fine whenever it is raining cats and dogs. The gold-beaters' skin stretched over the lawn is so delicate that I did not at first perceive that it had been put up. I thought it was not, you know, which proves (if proof were wanting)—"

"The skin ought to be all over the country on a day like this," interrupted Mr. Raymond petulantly. "The roads at least might be protected, so that people might go to church. And yet the Government calls itself paternal."

"Religion, however, is an open question," remarked Sir Rupert.

"But it needn't be open to the *rain*," retorted the host. He was not so logical as usual, but then he was a little put out. "However, it is fortunate that we

have every convenience for attending public worship, without getting wet through. Let's see, you're a Sandemanian, Sir Rupert, ain't you? I believe I've got a Sandemanian tube in the attic somewhere, though I don't believe it has ever been used. Duncombe shall bring it down presently. My wife and I generally take our doctrine on wet days from St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey; she is so fond of the organ. Lotty, my darling, you are ritualistic, I think; you'll find the service is nicely done at St. Ethelburga's; we've got a tube, the mouthpiece hangs at the east end of the chapel, shaped like a gargoye. Charley, my boy, what are your tenets?"

"Oh, don't mind me, uncle; Lotty's mouthpiece will suit me very well," answered the young man demurely.

Whereupon they went into prayers.

CHAPTER II.

IN CHAPEL.

THE spectacle of public worship in a cathedral or other imposing edifice is, without doubt, both impressive and elevating, but the sight of a quiet party at family prayers is also not without its peculiar charm.

Mr. Raymond was liberality itself in matters of conscience, and, though a good orthodox Churchman, spared no expense in providing for his guests every description of religious discourse. It was even rumoured that he had had a tube laid on at an enormous expense from the chapel of Johanna Southcote's great grand-daughter, who still carried on the business of her distinguished ancestress, and preached to a select circle in the groves of Paradise Park, once Seven Dials, and the identical spot affected by the original Johanna. This was perhaps an exaggeration, but the very assertion illustrated his catholicism of mind. The chapel at Mellington Hall was quite a gem in its way. An immense divan ran round the apartment, broken at intervals with *prie-dieux* for those who preferred them; while on the table in the centre, hung with purple,

and edged with gold, were arranged, in chaste silver vases, the ashes of the deceased Raymonds; in these the present representative of that ancient race took a pardonable pride.

"To think," said he, taking one of them up reverently, and removing the lid, "that at one time people calling themselves civilised used to put their deceased relatives underground—dibble them in like potatoes—and even that it was not so long ago when they employed petrification."

"Very true," said Sir Rupert, "I remember it well; and wonderfully well preserved some of them looked."

"Yes, indeed," replied Mr. Raymond, sighing at some reminiscence that this idea suggested, and thereby inadvertently blowing the remains of his great-grandfather all over the room, "those were very hard times for our dear departed. Our funeral pyres, again, were only rehabilitations of an old idea; the covered furnaces were cumbrous, seldom elegant, and, what was worse, the most delicious odours—rose-leaf, sandal-wood, and russia leather—were thereby always associated with human loss. *Ars longa, vita brevis*; what a time it was before we thought of the *reductio ad absurdum* plan, reducing them by the touch of a wire to a handful of dust. Lord Raby deserves his peerage for that, though he never should have another idea in his life."

"Ay, but that must come to an end, you know, some day, Raymond. The sun is getting exhausted;

these unexpected demands upon his system are beginning to tell upon him."

"You may say that, Sir Rupert," answered Mr. Raymond mournfully. "He is already 'paling his ineffectual fires'—curious what prophets some of those old writers were! 'Saw the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue,' says one of them—Archbishop Tenison, I believe it was; strange, by-the-by, that he and Berkeley should have been both bishops; 'gift of prophecy' it seems, don't it?"

"But the nations' airy navies *don't* grapple that I am aware of," observed Miss Greville.

"Just my theory—at least I think so," added Sir Rupert in a hesitating tone.

"No, my darling, but they *did*," said Mr. Raymond, laying his hand affectionately on the young girl's head. "You were not born or thought of—certainly not born—in those days; but *I* can recollect when the German fleet anchored in a fog immediately over London, and the Admiral's ship grappled St. Paul's, and when the weather cleared was captured in consequence. Why, a hundred years ago navies used to fight at sea, and what is more, at the top of the water."

"That *is* so," corroborated Sir Rupert, seeing the two young people look incredulous; "but speaking of prophets, I remember an old tract of that date, called the 'Cruise of the Anti-Torpedo,' in which the underwater inventions were anticipated."

"I know it well," said Mr. Raymond gravely; "it was a remarkable advance upon the knowledge of that time; but, like most other pioneers of science, the author is nameless. But we were talking of the failing powers of the sun. Is it not terrible to think that yonder beautiful invention must some day, and we know not how soon, be rendered useless through lack of material?"

He pointed to the fireplace, a disc of splendour, produced as usual by the combination of rays from the sun, and with a reversible side to receive moonshine after dark.

"However, between ourselves, my friend"—here his voice grew very grave and impressive—"I am not without hope that a substitute for even the sun itself may be discovered; that at all events, for all domestic purposes of light and warmth, we may be made quite independent of that waning luminary."

"Why you don't mean to say that you've got anything in your mind——"

"Well, it's not in *your* mind," answered Mr. Raymond, with sudden asperity; "you've got your title, and I've got to get mine, my good friend. All I say is, that it is possible that some extraordinarily intelligent person may work out some plan to emancipate us from our dependence upon the sun; just as, when the coal deposits gave out, the universal refractor saved us from being frozen; only we must be quick about it,

and not, as in that case, be reduced to our last ray before the substitute is discovered. I can well remember my poor grandmother burning her pianoforte when our woodstack came to an end in February, and the little joke I made about setting Burns to music, which made her cut me out of her will. My grandfather dared not walk out in the fields that spring—which was unusually inclement—because the peasantry had become desperate, and he had a wooden leg.”

“Those were evil days indeed,” said Sir Rupert. “The government, however, I am glad to see, are taking time by the forelock as respects our present emergency. The application of every ray of sun to useful purposes is strenuously insisted upon, and in last night’s ‘Gazette’ I noticed that to use a burning-glass had been declared felony; moreover, any person found with the sun in his eyes is to be prosecuted by the State.”

“All these things are only stopgaps,” observed Mr. Raymond; “and the man who shall find a substitute for Phoebus Apollo—as my great-grandfather yonder was taught to call him, before the bubble of classical education burst, and opened the first gate to the enfranchisement of our youth—will deserve well of his country. My dear Dodo, I think service must be beginning.”

He took up one of the many tubes that hung from the ceiling, and each of whose silver mouthpieces—or

rather ear-pieces ("Dionysians," as they were called after their original inventor)—was engraved with the name of the ecclesiastical edifice with which it communicated, and listened for a few seconds.

"Yes, I hear the opening notes of the organ. Sir Rupert, I see Duncombe has remembered your peculiar tap. Lotty, there is St. Ethelburga's for you and Charley."

Everybody put on their gloves at once, and took their seats on the divan, and each, with his favourite preacher turned on at his ear, assumed, and perhaps with truth, an attitude of attention. Sir Rupert alone used the nicotina; that agreeable invention which envelopes the smoker in a separate atmosphere, and permits the enjoyment of the thought-inspiring weed without annoyance to his neighbours.

"How dreadful it must have been," observed he, "to live in those straitlaced times, when it was thought wicked to smoke in church."

"Our service has *begun*, Sir Rupert," observed Mrs. Raymond reprovingly.

"Ten thousand pardons, madam. I thought it hadn't, which is another proof (if proof were wanting)," &c. &c.

"Hush-sh-sh," murmured the congregation.

Not a word was uttered for nearly an hour, except that Lotty whispered once "How beautiful!" at some exquisite passage in her favourite curate's sermon, and

Charley replied, with his eyes fixed softly on her face, "It is, indeed!" Nothing was heard in that still chamber save the occasional spurt of Sir Rupert's cigar-lights (which lit only on the back of his head), yet everyone was imbibing the best of doctrine, or being elevated by the sublimest music.

At last Mrs. Raymond drew off her gloves in sign that she had come out of church, and in a few minutes the others did the like.

"I hope your preacher was to your liking, Sir Rupert?" observed she graciously.

"Excellent, excellent," said he; "not a word that I could have wished unsaid from beginning to end."

"The compliment would have been higher, Sir Rupert, if you had heard him say anything," observed Charley, laughing; "but unfortunately you omitted to take the stopper out of your tube."

"Dear me, dear me; so I did. I am sure I thought I took it out, which is only another proof (if proof were wanting)—"

But the congregation would not listen to him; they were angry, as people always are, and always will be, because they had been to church and he had not.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said the hostess; "that comes of your horrid smoking" (against which practice, like most of her sex, though they can no longer pretend as of old that the smell annoys

them, she was always inveighing). "The use of that stopper, as you are well aware, is to cut off the communication with the pulpit when anything is said that has a bearing on one's own case likely to render one uncomfortable; it was never intended to render all preaching futile. One would almost think that you wished to silence the voice of conscience itself."

Here Mr. Raymond hastily took out his notebook. "Why, my excellent Dodo, you have given me an idea," cried he; "when I can spare a minute from my great scheme for producing light and heat, I'll just think that over. If the tube can be discovered—suppose it's the ordinary bronchial tube, for instance (though, since it is "still small," the channel is probably of less dimensions)—through which the voice of conscience speaks, one may make a revolution in morals. No more scruples, no more stings of remorse, no more sleepless nights; it will be better than the *Revalenta Arabica*—a revelation from Arabia Felix. What an advertisement to stick on the moon at harvest time! However, as matters are, you're all wrong, Sir Rupert, and my wife is quite right. If it was 1879, and you were obliged to go to chapel in person, anything would be excusable. It must have been most painful, for instance, in some cases to have to 'sit under a clergyman.'

"I believe that was a mere metaphorical expression," said Sir Rupert, preferring even an argument with his

host than to suffer the well-deserved rebukes of his hostess; "it was a part of the Eastern imagery of our ancestors."

"Eastern fiddlesticks," rejoined Mr. Raymond tartly; "I hate that system of affixing a non-natural sense to every old phrase which happens to be unintelligible to us. We find the expression "sat upon him" in many of the British classics, and also that of "a flat" as applied to a human being."

"It was nothing but a form of clerical censure," contended Sir Rupert stoutly. "Similarly things were 'quashed,' or 'squashed,' in the old ecclesiastical courts. They put heavy weights on silent people in order to get at their opinions; hence the term "expression.'"

"That was the *peine forte et dure*, my good fellow. You are talking about what you don't understand."

"Then I am more likely to be right," answered Sir Rupert quickly; "that is the very gist of my theory. You don't mean to assert, for instance, that the phrase, "I sent George *out for a fly* because it was wet" (which I found in an old domestic novel of Miss Yonge's yesterday), really meant that he was sent out in an air-chaise, for they were not invented at the time of the story? I firmly believe that it was only Eastern imagery!"

"Then you will believe anything. I don't say there were air-chaises, but there was evidently some sort of wind conveyance (we *know* there were wind *instruments*),

and George is recommended to go out *for a fly*, because it was wet *underfoot*. The omission of the last word is obviously a clerical error."

"Perhaps you think that, when our ancestors used the phrase, 'It will be all the same a hundred years hence,' that they really thought *that?*" observed Sir Rupert contemptuously.

"Most certainly I do. In 1879, for instance, exactly a century ago, our ancestors believed that science and politics had culminated, and that there was no further room for improvement. Read the literature of that day, and you will find the writers divided into two classes, one of which maintains, in effect, that the millennium has arrived, because they have managed to stretch a telegraph wire under the Atlantic, to go some fifty or sixty miles an hour by means of some childish contrivance in the way of a locomotive, and to poke a hole through mont Cenis. The other class was still more idiotic, for, decrying all these inventions (which, however insignificant, were still steps in the right direction—Forward), they praised the past, and regretted the Cimmerian darkness of the days (if you can call them days) when ideas themselves were proscribed, and persons who notoriously had none were authorised to think for other people. I say that neither of those two classes had the least expectation of improvements going any farther than they were then and that one of them even regretted they had gone

so far. 'It will be all the same a hundred years hence,' was therefore a literal expression of their self-satisfaction."

"Perhaps you will also assert that the phrase, 'May you live a thousand years,' found in the 'Arabian Nights' and other books of assuredly Eastern origin, was not metaphorical?"

"Certainly it was not. The 'Arabian Nights' (astounding as it may appear to us who look after our children's education ourselves, and do not depute it to hirelings) was then a child's book, and the expression you speak of was in reality written as a question, though printed by mistake without the sign of interrogation. 'May you live a thousand years?' asks the child of its parent or guardian, and the reply is not stated only because it is so obvious. 'You may if you can, my dear, but even Methuselah only got within a year of it.' No, no, Sir Rupert, you are one of those persons who delight in paradox, and endeavour from sheer contrariety of mind to persuade yourself that our ancestors were worth having; but that is the old 'noble savage' theory which has been exploded generations ago: if you care to be convinced, let me show you my museum this afternoon, which contains all the most remarkable specimens of our progenitors a hundred years back, with examples of their follies, crudities, shortcomings, and social obfuscation generally. In the meantime what say you to 'going out for a fly, because

it is wet?' And let's have no more of your Miss Yonge."

"She was a very excellent person," observed Lotty boldly, who thought that poor Sir Rupert had been punished quite enough, "and wrote good books."

"Oh! I know them; 'Night Thoughts,' and all that sort of thing; they were well named, for she was all in the dark, like the rest of them," replied Mr. Raymond with irritation. "Come, Charley, signal for the wind-waggon, and let us all get a breath of fresh air."

CHAPTER III.

IN THE WIND-WAGGON.

THE wind-waggon at Mellington Hall was a most comfortable conveyance, and carried off the palm from all the other carriages in the county; the wheels of its air-fans were tireless (whereby a great obstacle to progression was avoided), and were rotated by the conversation of the passengers; so that they went to-day at a fine rate, in spite of the presence of Sir Rupert, who was given to argue in a vicious circle, and thereby diminished the speed. A hand dropped into the water out of a pleasure-boat going up stream retards its progress, but if *all hands* were dropped out, it would be considerably more buoyant, though its movement would be in the other direction; and similarly if everybody had argued in a vicious circle, the wind-waggon would have gone at a tremendous pace—only backwards.

The rain had ceased, and the atmosphere was beautifully clear, exhibiting the sky lines to great advantage. That to Melbourne and Sydney was crossed immediately after they left the Hall, and but for Charley's skilful steering they would have collided with one

of the Australian lines which was carrying the afternoon post.

"The reticulation of the atmosphere caused by these innumerable lines is really getting very dangerous," observed Sir Rupert, "and reminds one of those ancient maps of Britain by Bradshaw, showing the intersection of the railways. The only place in England that did not become a junction was Portland prison, because nobody wanted to go there."

"A good many people, however, must have wanted to come away," observed Mr. Raymond.

"A very judicious observation," admitted Sir Rupert; "perhaps you will not object to my making use of the idea—which I think may be worked up into something striking—in my place in Parliament?"

Mr. Raymond made no reply; the fact was, he did not approve of his friend being in the House at all; he liked him as a man, but had an indifferent opinion of his abilities, and especially objected to his having been made a knight. No title, of course, however small, was ever conferred except for eminent public services; mere ideas, though the source of enormous revenues, did not command that distinction, unless they had been the means of conferring some benefit upon the community; and though jobs were no longer possible in those enlightened times, Sir Rupert's case did somewhat savour of a job. At a time when the two great political parties were equally balanced in

the House, the Government had proposed a tax on muffins so comprehensive that it took in the caps of the boys of the Bluecoat School and other charitable endowments, and Sir Rupert (then Mr. Trentham) had pointed out with much ingenious subtlety that muffin caps were not muffins, *although they looked like it*; another proof, if proof were wanting, of the truth of a theory to which, as that House was well aware, he stood committed. Fired with his eloquence, which, when his hobby was fairly mounted, was really of a very extraordinary character, the Opposition divided the House against the Bill, obtained a majority and threw out the Ministry, and then (amongst other things) decreed that Mr. Trentham (now Sir Rupert) had deserved well of his country. In most cases this would have earned a patent of nobility, but his elevation to the peerage was objected to on the ground I have mentioned, that his idea was a plagiarism from Bishop Berkeley, and on the whole he was thought fortunate by his friends to have even earned a knighthood. This, briefly, was his story, and it was not to be wondered at that the master of Mellington Hall, with his ten thousand ideas per annum—many of them, it is true, of a most ambitious and Utopian kind, but still all tending to the public utility—felt a little sore that he was but plain Mr. Raymond, while his friend had a handle to his name and a ferule after it, namely, the initials M.P. His constituency, notwithstanding the tri-

weekly Parliaments, stuck to him like wax, for they had only to object to any course of political conduct to insure his obedience to their wishes. "It is true, I thought it right to do so and so," he would tell them, "but as you point out to me, the facts are obviously the reverse of what I had imagined them, which only proves (if proof were wanting) the truth of that theory which (thanks to you, gentlemen) I had the opportunity on a certain great occasion to set before the Parliament of this country."

"Talking of railways," observed Mr. Raymond irritably, and with such sudden vehemence that the fan-wheel next to him made sixty revolutions on the instant (a rate of no less than 3,600 per minute). "Talking of railways, reminds me of the Vanishing Point."

"Why?" enquired Charley simply.

His uncle was not made angry by the interruption, but only sad.

"My poor boy," said he, laying his hand on Lotty's head (for hers and Charley's were so very close together that it was all one), "you are certainly the most ignorant of human beings. I don't blame you for it, for I always thought it a mistake that persons without ideas should trouble themselves to study—since the result can be at best but the acquisition of stolen goods; but if you had read *anything* of the history of your country, you would be aware that its railways became the destruction of all who travelled by them—

scattered them in such small pieces into space that the Points (where the accidents chiefly occurred) were called Vanishing Points. I was about to observe that the adaptation of the vanishing point (a term once employed by painters only) to practical purposes is perhaps the most wonderful of our discoveries in aerial progression. No other common object for all our air-lines would have possessed such material advantages; while ever visible, yet never attained, it stimulates every energy of the steersman and confers the greatest of moral benefits."

"In that respect," observed Sir Rupert, "it resembles the polestar, once a great object of attraction to the humble sailor—and also to magnets."

"True," said Mr. Raymond thoughtfully. "I imagine the poor fellow and his companions stretched on their backs upon the decks, the better to take an observation of that bright but not very particular star."

"What was the matter with it?" enquired Lotty innocently, moved by this picture of the mariner of old traversing the pathless deep in a horizontal position, and literally "thanking his stars" if he arrived anywhere near the port for which he was bound.

"I didn't mean anything to the disadvantage of the polestar in a moral sense, my dear," explained Mr. Raymond, "though I daresay it was *not* very particular as to what it beheld; out of civilised latitudes, indeed, it has been observed to wink at some very

queer proceedings. I alluded to its not being very easy to be seen. They used even to employ pointers to detect its whereabouts."

"No, upon my word, Raymond, I believe that is a mistake of yours," observed Sir Rupert quickly. "'You may always discover the position of the polestar by means of the pointers,' is, I know, to be found in old 'Mangnall, his Questions'; but it seems to me to have been certainly a metaphorical expression."

"Ah, more of the Eastern imagery of our ancestors, I suppose. Well, I am a plain man myself. Put 'a partridge' in that sentence in the place of 'the polestar,' and what becomes of your metaphor, I should like to know?"

"It is easy to make game of anything," returned Sir Rupert, "but I believe our far-away ancestors—even those that were sailors—were not so dull as you imagine. The conditions of their life were of course very different from our own, but they made the best of them. They did not attempt what we accomplish now, because such feats would have been impossibilities; Switzerland had no sea-board, and therefore no fleet, because its air-board could not then be used for such purposes. The merry Swiss boy was then a shepherd, and very rarely indeed a cabin-boy or a midddy, but it would be absurd for us to call him a landlubber on that account, as it was not his own fault. Let us be just before we are generous with such epithets."

"I do not despise our forefathers for their ignorance," resumed Mr. Raymond, "but for their hostility to those who would have led them to better things. Moreover, what they did not understand they pronounced in their self-conceit to be either useless or hurtful. Why, the obliquity of the ecliptic (of which we have taken such admirable advantage for our cross lines) was absolutely instanced by one of their infidel mathematicians as a proof of the malevolence of the scheme of creation."

"Why, that must have been a joke, my good friend."

"Not a bit of it; the gentleman came from Scotland. Then, again, though they were used to see things upon the Horizon, they laughed to scorn the notion of using it as a means of transit. The Equators were practically useless. The Poles were only used for experiments at the Polytechnic to amuse children at this festive season, or as a last resource by our politicians. How different was all that from our present enlightened system, wherein a use has been found for everything—even the Irish!"

"That last, however, was a very unexpected discovery," observed Sir Rupert, "and had been given up by the most sanguine for centuries."

"True; yet, after all, what could be a simpler means of resolving the Irish difficulty than that each Irishman should take his own bull by the horns? We see them

now what they always wanted to be (though in a less politic sense)—an independent nation. And why should they not have been so a hundred years ago? To pronounce a thing impossible is a sure means of making it so; and yet that was the generation of our ancestors who resented Darwin's theory that they were descended from the ape! I think we have much more cause to resent being descended from Darwin. Why, in those days they had not even discovered the art of preserving the surplus food in one country to supply the lack of another. Waste ruled in Australia and Want in England. The art of concentration was almost unknown."

"People are a little long-winded even now, when they get upon their favourite topics," observed Sir Rupert silyly.

"I was referring to the concentration of *food*, sir."

"Oh, I beg your pardon. Well, *that* has not proved an invariable success, as I understand from Mrs. Raymond," observed the Knight still more silyly than before.

"You are referring to that ridiculous story of the sheep's lozenge, I suppose," said Mr. Raymond, looking just a trifle sheepish himself.

"What was *that*?" enquired Lotty mischievously.

"Well, it was a little mistake of my dear husband," answered Mrs. Raymond. "As soon as the lozenges were advertised, he ordered a box for the use of the parish poor, and before issuing them he was so rash as

to venture upon one himself. Moreover, he actually took a whole one, as though it had been a cough lozenge."

A roar of laughter broke from the occupants of the air-waggon, causing a tremendous acceleration of speed.

"He forgot, you see, that each lozenge was the concentration of an entire sheep (with the trifling exception of the wool and teeth), and the consequence was he became so enormously strong that he was positively dangerous. Poor Lord Raby happened to call that morning, and got his arm broken through shaking hands with my husband; and the destruction that took place in our furniture was something awful; if he had laid his finger on what he thought to be a flaw in an argument, it went to pieces whether it was a flaw or not; and he cast such sheep's eyes at the maids that I should have been very much annoyed if I had not known them (I mean the eyes) to have been irresponsible agents."

"Well, well, it might have been worse," observed Mr. Raymond complacently; "suppose one had taken a pork lozenge, for example, and gone the whole hog. It is no discredit to a man to have been a martyr to science; and let me tell you, ours was the first village from which want was banished, never, I believe, to return among our poor. Look down yonder at that mighty ruin, made picturesque by time, and its synonym,

a little money, and reflect that that was once the universal home and last retreat of our peasants, the Union Workhouse! A hundred years ago every county had half a dozen such. And now the poor man no more dreams of visiting it than a rich man thinks of visiting the play-house."

"You are speaking of very rich men indeed, however," observed Sir Rupert. "For though it is within the reach of every householder of moderate means to hear a play under his own roof, just as it is to hear a sermon—"

("Or to keep the stoppers in and *not* to hear it," muttered Mrs. Raymond.)

"—Yet, I say, the spectacle is lost to those who cannot afford the wall-pictures. How much do you suppose, Master Charley, that your uncle paid for having the Drury Lane pantomime photographed on the walls of your nursery when you were a child?"

"I have not an idea," returned Charley with his usual truthfulness; "but my uncle never spared expense, I know, to gratify me, and least of all when ill, as I was then."

"Pooh, pooh, it was a mere bagatelle," said Mr. Raymond carelessly, "though indeed that was when the art was in its infancy. I can now get instantaneous reflections on my wall, and at a very reasonable figure, of what all my friends are doing all over the world."

"Don't you find that a little embarrassing sometimes?" enquired Sir Rupert.

"Not a bit. I don't say that my friends do not, but that is their look-out. They ought never to do anything that they would be ashamed of my seeing upon my walls."

Sir Rupert shook his head.

"I remember," said Mrs. Raymond, "the invention was very much objected to by our Australian cousins, upon the ground that they were represented upside down."

"In my opinion that was false delicacy," said Mr. Raymond; "if people choose to live at the antipodes, they must take the consequences. However, that trifling cause of annoyance is now removed by the *reversor*, which makes them look all right again."

"Even that would be unnecessary if my theory were universally adopted," observed Sir Rupert. "My mind always corrects my eye, and when a person looks upside down I know that he is quite the reverse and behold him accordingly."

"Why, good gracious! then to you, Sir Rupert, we always appear to be standing on our heads!" exclaimed Mrs. Raymond in horrified accents.

"That is very true, madam; but then I know that you are incapable of such an action, and after a very little reflection reason asserts itself, and you come round again."

I don't think Mrs. Raymond was quite satisfied with this explanation, although her husband assured her it was an argument well known to metaphysicians under the name of the Circuitous Process, and quite as good as any she was likely to get. In a few moments she observed that she was hungry and chilly, and wished to return home.

"What do you say to putting the screw on, and passing half-an-hour in the Tropics, my dear?" enquired her husband tenderly; "we can pick a pine-apple off the first tree."

"No, Harry; you know I dislike the sensation of being screwed exceedingly, though you and Sir Rupert think nothing of it. It makes the whole world seem to be going round and round with me like a top."

"But so it *does*, my dear," reasoned her husband mildly.

"Very likely, Harry, or at all events I'll take your word for it; but the pace that this wind-waggon goes with that screw on is something too frightful, and I regret that such a thing was ever invented. It seems to me that we are becoming too clever by half."

"Then you may depend upon it, my dear madam," said Sir Rupert, "that the actual fact is that we are not half clever enough."

"I am sure, Sir Rupert, you are very polite—that is, according to your own theory," answered his hostess sharply.

"Your wish is *my* law at all events, Dodo," observed her husband affectionately, "if it is not that of the universe. Charley, back her."

Charley, who had only caught the last sentence (having been engaged in whispering a wish into Lotty's ear on his own private account), at once produced his cigar-case.

"I wish you may get it," said his aunt promptly.

"And he *has* got it—sharp," observed his uncle, laughing.

But Mrs. Raymond was in no mood for laughter. There is no woman so sweet-tempered but that she is apt to be irritable when that mid-day meal, which from the earliest dawn of civilisation has been to the female what dinner is to the male, has been postponed for half-an-hour. If the whole of her sentient being could, so to speak, have been realised at that moment, it would have expressed itself in one long passionate cry for Lunch.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MUSEUM.

THE question of opening museums upon a Sunday was still as much debated in Parliament as ever—Sir Rupert, by-the-by, voting against it, because it so strongly recommended itself to his common sense—but Mr. Raymond always made a point of exhibiting his collection of old-world curiosities upon Christmas Day. He disposed of the old lots every year, to buyers if possible, but if not, in the cellars, and procured others of a later epoch; and his present miscellany happened to be formed out of materials of the date of 1879.

“I shall have the honour, ladies and gentlemen,” said he, as he led the way to the museum after luncheon, “of showing you this afternoon some very remarkable examples of our ancestors, with illustrations of what is vulgarly termed their “goings on,” though, as a matter of fact, they scarcely moved on at all, or, when they did, only like a mill-horse.”

The museum was a magnificent apartment, lit by painted windows, mostly of a green colour, so as to throw a dim and therefore appropriate tint upon the crude inventions of the past, and also perhaps to

charitably conceal the defects of our ancestors' effigies, scores of whom, as large as life, and habited in the costume of their time, loomed through the gloom.

"This will serve for my wand as showman," said Mr. Raymond, selecting a long peeled twig, much frayed at the end, from a neighbouring wall; "though it was once put to a more ignoble use."

"Why, that's a cream-whipper," exclaimed the hostess, "surely."

"You are very nearly right, Dodo," answered her husband approvingly; "which is as much as can be reasonably expected of any woman. This *is* a cream-whipper in one sense, since it was used to whip the cream of the youthful aristocracy of this country: it is a fragment of a birch used at Eton in the year of grace 1879, and applied—ahem—well, that is better left unexplained. It is sufficient to say that a most offensively indelicate custom was permitted to exist at that seminary from the reign of Henry VI. until that of Victoria. Its discontinuance, indeed, was only owing to an engraving of the punishment published in an illustrated paper (very properly prosecuted, by-the-by, for the offence under the Act which takes its name from the poet Campbell), and which for the first time opened the eyes of the public (very wide indeed) to the existence of the scandal."

"Surely," said Sir Rupert, "there must have been some reason for its having had so long a lease?"

“There was an excellent reason, sir; a guinea a year was paid for each boy for birch, whether employed in his correction or not; a fact which swelled the list of school offences in those boys who had been brought up on economical principles, and were resolved to get their money’s worth out of the article in question. Here is a public schoolboy of the period, with a brass instrument beside him, whose use is uncertain; some say it is a Jewish harp, played with the teeth, but others are of opinion that from it was extracted that mysterious attribute called ‘the tone,’ of which so much was heard and so little seen, and for which three or four great public schools had the patent. The possession of it, for each boy, was valued at two hundred pounds a year, and is supposed (perhaps because Etonians always wore tall hats) to be analogous to castoreum in the beaver. Let us remove the skull of this very gentlemanly youth, and see what was taught him for that money. The brain, you will remark, is in parallel lines, resulting from its almost exclusive application to Latin verse, which was performed mechanically by an instrument called a *gradus*. No allowance was made at any of those great seminaries for individual character; a boy of genius was made to grind at his Latin verses just as if he had been a fool; thus the great principle of that epoch, the repression of ideas, was maintained in its integrity.”

"But how long, Harry, did they persevere upon this system with downright stupid boys, like our dear Charley?" enquired Mrs. Raymond.

"For ever—that is to say, until they were boys no longer. It was not until half a century afterwards that it was discovered that reading, writing, and arithmetic are the only things that a stupid boy can comprehend, and the only things which a clever boy cannot quite easily learn for himself. That you may fill your average boy with classics, mathematics, the use of the globes, and all the ologies, only to make an intolerable prig of him and a nuisance to society after all, was not understood by this purblind race; nor were the sufferings of their juvenile incapables under the educational harrow taken into account."

"And yet they had the proverb, 'One can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear,' " mused Sir Rupert, "as well as we."

"True, but there were a good many persons interested in the manufactory who swore they could. Moreover, the prizes at the Universities, Fellowships and such like, were mostly conferred on proficients in the Latin verse business, which gave it, so far, a practical value. There were arguments by the score, you may depend upon it, in favour of everything—I daresay even of this fellow."

He pointed to a figure attired as a mechanic of the period, but whose garments seemed to have been

made for some other person. His mouth was open, which gave a weak expression to a countenance otherwise wily enough; and his hand, which he had a curious habit of moistening with his lips, though it was far from white, showed not a trace of toil.

“That’s an agitator, ladies and gentlemen. A self-appointed professional adviser of the British workman. Where there was discontent, he fostered it; where there was none, he begot it; where there was a hope of reconciliation between man and master, he stepped in and trampled it out. And yet there was nothing more surprising in his existence than that a fungus grows upon a rotten soil. The relations between labour and capital were deemed even by political economists to be antagonistic. The system of co-operation was but beginning, and that of bonus profits was unknown—absolutely unknown. In place of mutual understanding, there was suspicion—upon one side a stubborn gloom which called itself independence; on the other, a truculent selfishness, which bore falsely the same name. The weapon which he holds aloft was even more destructive to those whose battle he pretended to fight than to their opponents.”

“Why, it looks like a mere roll of paper,” observed Lotty.

“Yet it was used to Strike with. It is the member-list of a Trade Union. With that he dashed the food from the workman’s child, and with the same

blow palsied the hands of Trade. It must be admitted that this eloquent gentleman never himself did a stroke of work in his life, but, on the other hand, he never wanted a good dinner. And, curiously enough, both masters and men encouraged him, by admitting that self-interest was the only rule of life."

"Was that the period of what was called the Civil Wars?" suggested Charley modestly.

"No, my boy; it was long posterior to it."

"Then the introduction of Christianity must have taken place quite lately?"

"My dear Dodo, you must look after that boy's head," said Mr. Raymond gravely.

"Good gracious, why, Harry?" enquired his wife with apprehension.

"Because, if I am not mistaken, he's getting ideas into it."

"My dear Mr. Raymond, who is this exceedingly well-dressed person in polished leather boots?" enquired Lotty, pointing to a gentlemanlike figure, who with a languid air was surveying universal nature through a race-glass.

"Oh! that's a very funny fellow indeed. He is an hereditary legislator."

"What *do* you mean, Mr. Raymond? Born so?"

"Well, he was supposed to be born so."

"But you don't mean that the genius for legislation was supposed to be inherited?"

“Certainly not; there was no genius about it. Titles of nobility were not bestowed (except in the rarest instances) for public service at all; but on illegitimate branches of the Royal Family, political adherents of Government (especially if they were renegades), on rich men because they were rich, and on just a few soldiers to give a colour to the institution; they were red, you know.”

“Soldiers?” said Lotty.

“Yes, I’ll tell you about *them* presently. Let me finish with this gentleman first. Well, so enamoured were our ancestors of their Peers when they had made them, that they fell in love with their sons also; and, having flattered and fawned upon them from their cradles, so that it was next to impossible that the poor young men could turn out otherwise than vain and selfish, they took away from them every incitement to exertion by decreeing that they should enjoy their fathers’ titles. After a generation or two of a family had accomplished the feat of succeeding to their ancestors, the public adulation of them passed all bounds and assumed the form of fetish; and the famous verse:

Let law, religion, virtue, morals, die;
But leave us still our old nobility,

was added to the National Anthem.”

“But did not the absurdity of his position strike the hereditary legislator himself, uncle?”

"Not a bit of it; I lift his skull. There is, you observe, no sense of humour. Here are the parallel lines, which show he came from a public school, only fainter and softer; here is a gap which held the Latin quotations he used in the House of Lords—so he was up to that, you see. There are also traces of arithmetic, by help of which he made up his betting-book."

"There's something written in his brain," said Lotty, standing on tiptoe, and peering into the cavity of the skull.

"Ah! that's something that was inculcated so strongly that it got stereotyped—probably some sort of apology for his position in life suggested by his friends. I thought so—*The small end of the wedge*. That was the metaphor he always kept by him to use against the reformers. "Touch me and you open the flood-gates"—upon my life, I believe Sir Rupert agrees with him."

"I do, and I can't help it, Raymond. The gentleman you say was ill-educated, spoilt from his cradle, and debarred from all incitement to exertion: consequently, the very last sort of person to be intrusted with the duties of legislating. Now, according to my theory—the golden Rule of Contrary—this is just the sort of person to be made a peer."

"Oh my, what a guy!" exclaimed Charley suddenly. The exclamation was evoked by a figure of defiant

aspect, but with his limbs so awkwardly put together that it was a marvel how they supported him.

"Ah! that is a self-made man," explained Mr. Raymond, "the very opposite of the case we have just been considering. He is not an attractive member of society to look at, but then he is independent of public opinion. Lift his skull, Charley, and reveal his sentiments. You won't find *his* brain in parallel lines, I reckon. He never went to school at all, but educated himself; 'the only kind of education, sir,' as he used to say, 'worth having.' That accounted for his original method of spelling."

"But *it is* in parallel lines, uncle," exclaimed Charley, investigating what the gentleman used to term his "ED." "He's as full of poetry as an egg's full of meat."

"Poetry!" exclaimed Mr. Raymond. "He did nothing but prose—and all about his getting on in the world. Read it out."

"It's certainly verses, uncle:

A pin a day's a groat a year,
A penny saved is a penny got.

"Oh, what fun! Did he think it rhyme? Let *me* look," cried Lotty, laughing.

"No, no; it's not a nice brain to look at," said Mr. Raymond; "it's full of old saws."

"Lor, how, nasty," said Mrs. Raymond; "the poor man's brain was diseased, then?"

"It *was*, my dear—with ignorance and self-conceit. And yet the admiration of the vulgar was in the times we are considering divided between him and their idol in the patent leathers."

"And which did they like best?" asked Charley.

"Well, the Hereditary Legislator was the idler of the two. There were a few good men of both sets, but the failures became so frequent and notorious that Life Peerages were invented (the idea of *merit* did not occur even then till the next century), and men were forbidden to make themselves at all.* Here is another gentleman much looked up to in his day, and invested with many imaginary qualities—prudence, acuteness, modesty, and especially a sense of the value of time. That is a Man of Business."

"And what did *he* do, uncle?"

"Business. It was a very mysterious profession, but extensively followed. Its professors laid claims to magic powers. You have heard of Archimedes?"

"Yes; he was a screw," replied Charley promptly.

"Well, I daresay this gentleman was one also. I was about to observe, however, that Archimedes boasted if you gave him a standpoint he could move the world

* The practice, if not the theory, of "spontaneous generation" was thus knocked on the head at once.

(in fact he has one, and in a sense does move it). These gentry likewise boasted, no matter what their pecuniary difficulties, that if you gave them twenty-four hours to turn round in——”

“Like the sun,” remarked Mrs. Raymond.

“No, my darling, not quite the sun, nor even *very near* the sun, you mean the earth,—if you gave them twenty-four hours to turn round in, they could find any amount of money. It is true they never did it, but everybody (except their creditors) believed they could. They sat on high stools from ten till five and even longer daily, to perform their incantations, and I dare say if you lift the skull of this particular specimen, you will find some of their cabalistic phrases—*Your favour of the 14th instant has been duly received.* Yes, that is one of them, my lad. They never set about anything without some preface of that kind; it is supposed to be some relic of the Jewish custom (for many of them were Jews) of using phylacteries, only, instead of pasting them on their foreheads, they stuck them at the beginning of their letters. The system of Verbiage was very popular among our ancestors, and especially among members of the legal profession. Here is a law document of the period, written on vellum—for, after taking all the wool from their victims, they even used their skins—written, you observe, in characters well-nigh inscrutable, and which, if perused, would be utterly unintelligible to what was called ‘the General

Reader'—an individual named after Sir Rupert's plan, because he never read that nor anything else. This was called a 'conveyance.'"

"Lor!" exclaimed Mrs. Raymond.

"You may say that, my dear; and a very expensive branch of it it was. This deed puts the fortunate client in possession of a property worth fifty pounds, and charges forty-five pounds for the writing and the vellum."

"That was before the invention of printing," observed Charley, with the air of one who imparts information gratuitously, "and anterior to the birth of Winkyn de Worde."

"My dear Dodo, you must really look to that boy's head. No, my lad, there was a great deal of winking at extortion among the lawyers of those days, and a great many words."

"Yes, taking these good folks all round," mused Sir Rupert, "I should suppose the lawyers were the greatest shams and humbugs of the whole set."

"I don't know *that*," answered Mr. Raymond laughing. "*Place aux Dames*. Look at this young lady, if you want a thorough-paced impostor a hundred years old."

"But she is *not* a hundred years old, uncle; and she's very pretty," observed Charley, regarding with no little interest a girl of the period, to whom Mr. Raymond had drawn attention.

"I confess I see little in her to admire," said Lotty frigidly. "In the first place, she is not properly balanced."

"Ah! that is because of her high heels," explained Mr. Raymond. "It was thought attractive to lean forward and to limp. She would have fallen on her nose, but that the centre of gravity was put farther back by the weight of her chignon—a bunch of dead people's hair worn at the back of the head."

"Then she was false from head to heel," remarked Lotty contemptuously.

"Well, I am afraid she has very little to stand upon—except her rights. It was the era of Woman's Rights, you know, when the sex first began to insist upon their intelligence, and assert they were not the slaves of fashion they were supposed to be. Who has taken your fancy there, Lotty?"

"I don't know," said Lotty, "but I never saw anyone so striking before."

"Well, upon my life," observed Charley, "I see nothing in him, except that he is preposterously dressed."

"Oh, that's a soldier," explained Mr. Raymond, "a very useful fellow, let me tell you, at one time, and always ornamental. He was, in fact, a carver and gilder, and in his leisure hours the ingenious fellow turned the heads of his fellow-countrywomen."

"And why haven't we got him now?" enquired Lotty with interest.

"Because carving (on any considerable scale) is abolished; it became impossible, you remember, when the secret of propagating miasma was discovered. It is a humiliating reflection, that what all the arguments of humanity and civilisation failed to accomplish was brought to pass by a nasty smell. There was indeed an attempt made to counteract it by means of smelling-bottles, but the spectacle of a Field-Marshal (not to mention the inferior officers) holding a smelling-bottle to his nose, instead of a *bâton*, was found to be too ridiculous even for the French. War became (literally) in such bad odour that it had to be abolished."

"Where did the patent miasma come from, uncle?" enquired Charley.

"From the Ashantees. It was the only thing we took from them in our last campaign, and at that time it was about the last thing from which we anticipated any advantage."

"Which is another proof," observed Sir Rupert, "(if proof were wanting) of the truth of my theory."

"How *does* this fellow manage to keep his hat on at the back of his head?" enquired Charley suddenly.

"He must have a peg inside, surely."

"Not at all; that is the famous British sailor. How his hat was stuck on puzzled all the mathematicians for centuries, but in the end was the humble

cause of the true theory of attraction being brought to light. It was supposed at one time that the earth was a universal magnet; that was the theory of Sir Isaac Walton (discovered by fishing with a plummet); and though divines and other pious persons asserted that the world itself had no attraction for *them*, nobody believed them. We have by no means exhausted the museum, gentlemen and ladies, but I perceive that information is having its usual effect upon my excellent wife, and she has gone fast asleep."

"I was only nodding adhesion to your remarks, Harry," answered the good lady indignantly; "and have never even closed my eyes."

"Curious," observed Mr. Raymond to Sir Rupert, as they all left the room, "that no woman (save in a fairy story) has ever owned to falling asleep in the daytime, except under chloroform."

CHAPTER V.

ADIPOCERE.

EVERY system, however excellent, has its drawbacks, and must by no means be denounced on that account; in that of "length of service," for instance (which succeeded promotion by purchase and patronage), it was undoubtedly an inconvenience that, in order to become governor of a gaol, a candidate had to enter as a convict and *work his way up*; and, similarly, the admirable enactment, that no one shall talk about what he neither understands nor wishes to understand (and which has so wholesomely swept away all dissertations on art and metaphysics), is not without its dark side. Conversation is apt to languish in consequence—especially in the country and on Sundays and red-letter days, where there is no go-bang in well-regulated drawing-rooms—matters often come to a standstill. At such a time even that noble system of credit, which has made England what she is, fails to revive a limited company, for one cannot credit a man with ideas when we know him to possess none. Hence the melancholy which (I again repeat, in well-regulated households, and after the church

services have been attended) pervades the British race upon Sundays and Holy days. So deep was the social gloom at Mellington Hall that the Christmas oratorio was turned on to the drawing-room from the Crystal Palace in order to dispel it. It is needless to say that this had the contrary effect; for, if "a little music" is a dangerous thing, how much more to be dreaded is the bassoon and other huge, though harmonious, reptiles necessary to the due performance of the "Creation." To listen patiently to inarticulate sounds while staring at one's fellow-creatures, demands a peculiar education, or at all events the absence of a general one. Such performances may soothe the savage breast, but they irritate others to the verge of madness, unless Nature's mitigator, Sleep, slides in and saves them. Mrs. Raymond was as fast as a church. Lotty, I fear, only pretended to be so, so that she need not reprove Charley for stealing his arm round her waist as they sat together on the sofa. Sir Rupert sat opposite them, wondering in his philosophic mind whether the young gentleman was really comfortable. "A man could take his own life, but *could* he steal his own arm." (If the "Creation" would have stopped for a moment he might have worked this out lucidly enough, but as it was he got confused.) "She could doubtless steel her heart, but that again would require an iron will." There was something wrong in this logic; he denied its major, or

its minor, but he did not know which; he only knew that a major could not have been a minor at any period after promotion by purchase had been done away with. He was aware that he was trifling with his own intelligence, but how could he help it while that Bumble Bee was being made; there is nothing in the "Creation" (for noise) to be compared to the Bumble Bee.

And what had become of Mr. Raymond? It was really intolerable that a man calling himself one's host should get an oratorio turned on upon one—so that if a man so much as sneezed people said, "Hush"—and then sneak away to enjoy himself somewhere. For his own part, he should have thought better, much better, of Raymond—which was, however, only another proof (if proof were wanting) of the correctness of his theory. "When a man withdraws himself from his family circle, not to say from an honoured and important guest, upon a Christmas afternoon," reasoned Sir Rupert (as well as the singing in his ears permitted him to do), "there must be something in it, you know." There must be some very strong attraction—ay, **ATTRACTION**. That was Raymond's pet theory. No doubt his absence had to do with that great secret to the very verge of which he had confessed his investigations had carried him. "I will stake my existence he is experimentalising."

Now a scientific experiment going on, and especi-

ally another man's experiment, was to Sir Rupert what a neighbour's preserve is to a sportsman. It was a direct invitation to trespass. Mrs. Raymond was not only still asleep, but contributing a little quota to the oratorio upon her own account; the young people were much engaged—or, if they were not, they ought to have been—and would probably not observe his departure from the room; and (better than all) the Bumble Bee was still in process of creation. Under its wing (as it were) he could creep away. He did so, and softly closed the door behind him. The great hall was in semi-darkness, for Mr. Raymond not only inveighed against the extravagance of others with respect to the solar rays, but economised them himself on principle; his race were celebrated for their consistency; "Heaven help me," said his father the Dean, when praised for this quality, "if *my* practice is not better than *my* preaching." No reflection, however (perhaps on account of the gloom of the hall) intruded itself upon Sir Rupert, in connection with his host's wishes; to confess the truth, he was jealous of him. Why should one man have ten thousand a year, and another only one solitary idea—the Rule of Contrary? At present, it is true, Sir Rupert was a Knight, and therefore a few hours (so to speak) in advance of his friend; but what if Raymond should wrest from Nature some tremendous secret, and, for making it appear, be made a peer himself?

"This cove even now imagines himself a Bey (to use the Eastern imagery of our ancestors)," muttered Sir Rupert between his false teeth; "and there will be no bounds to his arrogance if he really hits upon anything substantial."

At this moment Sir Rupert's shin hit upon something so exceedingly substantial, and with such a sharp edge to it (it was the scuttle, in which those expensive coals had come), that he made use of an imprecation.

Instead of taking this accident as a rebuke to his evil thoughts, or a warning against prying curiosity, Sir Rupert's mind was more than ever fixed on effecting his purpose, for it flashed to court-plaster and then (by a natural association of ideas) to the title he imagined his friend to be upon the point of earning.

Mr. Raymond's study was situated (no one knew why at that time, though ill-natured people made foolish guesses about it) below the basement floor and next to the cellar, and thither Sir Rupert cautiously made his way. When he reached the door he stopped and listened at the keyhole. After about five minutes, during which he heard nothing, he lifted his head and murmured,—

"This is very discreditable, and I will never demean myself to such an action on any future occasion."

Then he softly opened the door; all was dark; he

advanced and came into violent contact with some soft substance.

"This is not the first time," he remarked complacently, "that my head" (and he rubbed it) "has been acquainted with bays."

He now remembered that the study had double doors, but at the same time (in accordance with the inexorable rule of compensation) forgot his recent good resolution, and immediately listened again. All was silent as before. He opened the green-baize door, and looked in.

The interior of Mr. Raymond's study presented much the same appearance as the sanctum of any other *savant* of our day, except that the contents showed a more Catholic mind (the Pope's treatment of Galileo having always set men of science rather against him). In addition to the usual scientific appliances, such as for dredging in the upper strata of the atmosphere, and for weighing the sun (the results of which have of late years told so sad a story), there were some very curious psychological instruments—heart-reflectors, mind-reflectors, and machines for turning light on people's motives generally—the sight of which ought to have brought a blush into Sir Rupert's cheek. But since Mr. Raymond was not in the study, Sir Rupert (so greatly did his intellectual faculties preponderate over the moral) saw no reason to blush, and he never did anything without a reason. Upon the

table were various MSS. in his host's handwriting, and even over these private memoranda he did not hesitate to cast his eye, in hopes to appropriate an idea. I am glad to say they were most of them beyond him.

There was one MS., however, the ink of which, he might have observed, had not his mind been so fixed on plagiarism, was still wet, on which his eye fastened like a leech.

"The theory of the Central Fire," it began, "held by Humboldt early in the nineteenth century, but abandoned by later generations on account of its supposed interference with the precession of the equinoxes, attracted once more, upon the better appreciation of that popular spectacle, the attention of science. It has been reserved, however, for the humble individual who pens these lines not only to prove its existence, but, as I venture to hope, to utilise it for our hearths and homes."

"By the living jingo," cried Sir Rupert softly, "this is the very thing. Ho, ho! he's after the Central Fire, is he? Why, that is the very last thing surely that any man would have dreamt of utilising (which proves, by-the-by—if proof were wanting—the correctness of my theory). You are a most ingenious fellow, Raymond, I allow. It is not always, however, the discoverer of an invention who gets the patent for it." Then he read on:

"If I succeed, not only will there be no more ne-

cessity to borrow a single ray from the sun's surface, but it is possible that we may be able to repay it for its past advances, and even set apart a handsome percentage in return for its countenance during the late pressure. I say 'if I succeed,' for the next five minutes may see me reduced to cinders, annihilated, like a second Prometheus, for my audacity; *he*, however, stole fire from heaven, while it is my humble ambition only to withdraw a little of the surplus incandescence from what is euphoniously termed 'another place.'

(This term, as everyone knows, is the parliamentary phrase used in the House of Commons for the House of Lords, and the mention of it excited Sir Rupert's unhappy jealousy of his friend beyond all bounds.)

"He shall never be a peer if I can help it," muttered he for the second time, and cast his eyes impatiently about the room, as if in search of some tangible evidence of the experimentalist's success. "There are no cinders here, and therefore he must have gained his end; and yet he could scarcely have taken his secret with him. What's this?" His eye had lit upon a long steel rod with a hook at one end of it, and close beside it, let into the hearthstone, a small round iron plate with M.P. engraved upon it.

"M.P. stands for Member of Parliament, and that's me," exclaimed Sir Rupert, too excited to be gram-

matical. "It almost seems as though it was fated. This is the Model of the Patent, no doubt; and if I carry it off and get it registered, then I shall be the patentee. I shall not deny that Raymond thought of it independently; he will not find me illiberal in that respect; only it must be understood that I thought of it *first*. I have only to fix the hook in this ring, and pull the plate up. Then we shall see what we *shall* see, as the children say. Here goes." And he raised the plate by about a quarter of an inch. As he did so a jet of flame (like that used by glass-blowers at the Polytechnic) shot out from the orifice, and in one instant Sir Rupert was nowhere. I am aware that that is a sporting term, but I use it advisedly, and if I have caused offence by doing so, I beg to repeat it. In this sober scientific narrative, to tell the plain truth has been my only object. Sir Rupert was nowhere.

The moment after he had evanesced, a little door opened in the wall, and out came Mr. Raymond, who had been only washing his hands in the cupboard. His attire since we beheld him in the drawing-room had undergone considerable change. At his back he wore a quiver, like Cupid, which, however, on closer inspection had more resemblance to a pillar letter-box—this was an extinguisher, or flame extinguisher. Moreover, he had exchanged his Christmas garments for a suit of old "dittos," which his wife had for years en-

deavoured to persuade him to give away. He was far from being parsimonious, and delighted in novelties; but he liked old clothes and old friends. "I have found a use for these at last, dear Dodo," mused he in a tender voice as he surveyed himself in the mirror. "If anything happens, these will be quite good enough to be fried in, for the moment has now come for a peerage or Westminster Abbey. Good gracious! What a smell of sulphur matches!" He hastily approached the hearthstone, and carefully examined the iron plate. "I do believe," said he, "that somebody has been meddling with the main plug." A round spot of grease upon the floor, about the same size as that which drops off a tallow candle (sixteen to the pound), here attracted his attention. "Adipocere!" exclaimed he, with horror, not, however, unmixed with scientific interest. "This was once a human being, and now through merely opening a fire plug—a Central Fire plug——" Emotion choked his utterance. "Thank Heaven, it cannot be Dodo or Lotty," murmured he presently; "they are women, but they would never pry into my secrets. It can't be Charley, because (though he is such a fool) he is a gentleman. It can't be Duncombe, or any of the servants, because they're afraid to enter the study on account of the electrical machine. It must therefore be poor Sir Rupert! Who would have thought to look at that tiny spot that a minute ago it was a live knight (a knight banneret he used

to call himself, and perhaps it was so, for nobody contradicted him) and a member of the British Legislature? If he were only alive, poor dear, to see himself thus, he would say it was only one more proof (if proof were wanting) of the correctness of his theory, that everything looks as different as possible from what it is, or at all events from what it was. Adipocere! He had always a fancy for being in the Encyclopædia, and there he is. This is very curious." (Here an idea appeared to strike Mr. Raymond, for he took out his pocket-book and made a rough note.) "*It has always puzzled anatomists and homicides how to dispose of a dead body. Well, nothing is easier. Reduce it to adipocere, and then, with a piece of brown paper and a hot iron above it, remove the spot.*" Mr. Raymond suited the action to the word, so that nothing in fact remained of the great advocate of the Rule of Contrary but a slight stain on the brown paper about the size of half a crown. He might have been applied with vinegar for a bruise, and nobody would have been any the wiser.

"It is better so," murmured Mr. Raymond, regarding this memento of his friend with pitying eyes—"it is better so than that there should be a row about it. It is true I am a magistrate, but not even a magistrate is bound to commit *himself* (though he often does it). Besides, there is absolutely nothing (or at all events not enough) for any coroner to sit upon. I shall not

even tell Dodo; for she will be sure to say, it all comes of working in one's laboratory upon a Christmas Day. As for this Central Fire experiment, the subject has become too painful to be pursued at present." Then, blowing (as his custom was when greatly moved), Mr. Raymond ascended to the drawing-room, where he found all (save one, and "ah, the difference to *him!*") much as he left them.

"Why, Dodo, you were asleep!" exclaimed he playfully.

"No, Harry, I was only keeping time to the oratorio; I do assure you I have never closed my eyes."

"Nor Charley and Lotty their mouths," said Mr. Raymond, turning to the young people with an air of gaiety that it cost him much to assume. "What *can* you two find to talk about?"

"One another," answered Charley simply.

"That's better than talking of oneself," observed Mrs. Raymond, anxious to shield her nephew from the consequences of this imprudent speech; "and, *by-the-by*, where is Sir Rupert?"

"He—he—he," said Mr. Raymond; he was not laughing; it was no laughing matter; he was hesitating; lying was not his *forte*, nor his weakness. "He—has gone away."

"Gone away! why, where's he gone to?"

"Ah! that I don't know," answered Mr. Raymond

eagerly; it was a relief to him to be able to tell the literal truth.

"But this is shocking, Harry; he must have been offended with us. People will say that you made your house too hot to hold him."

"I hope not," sighed Mr. Raymond, with a shudder. "Let us talk of somebody else."

* * * * *

What became of Sir Rupert never was discovered. The disappearance of the Hon. Member had been so complete (the Government organs said "so satisfactory") that there was no end to the unnatural suggestions made by the press to account for it. Even the "Times," the only high priced (farthing) paper we have left, could find no more satisfactory solution than that a Cannibal Society must have been established amongst us (inexcusable considering the sheep lozenges), and that Sir Rupert had fallen their first victim—the First of a Series. The effects of this were temporarily shocking, for nervous people went about catching rashes, measles, and other harmless but objectionable-looking complaints, in order to render themselves uninviting to the palate. The real secret was confided one day after dinner by Mr. Raymond to his brother the Dean, over a bottle of claret with the yellow seal; the seal of confession, as you would think, under the circumstances; yet the ecclesiastic, being a strong Protestant, did not hesitate to publish the main fea-

tures of the story in a little tract, called "Playing with Fire: a Caution to Young People." His wife, who was a fashionable authoress, used the same materials for a thirty-three volume novel, entitled "Adipocere," so there has been really no breach of confidence in my relating the incident as it actually occurred.

THE END.

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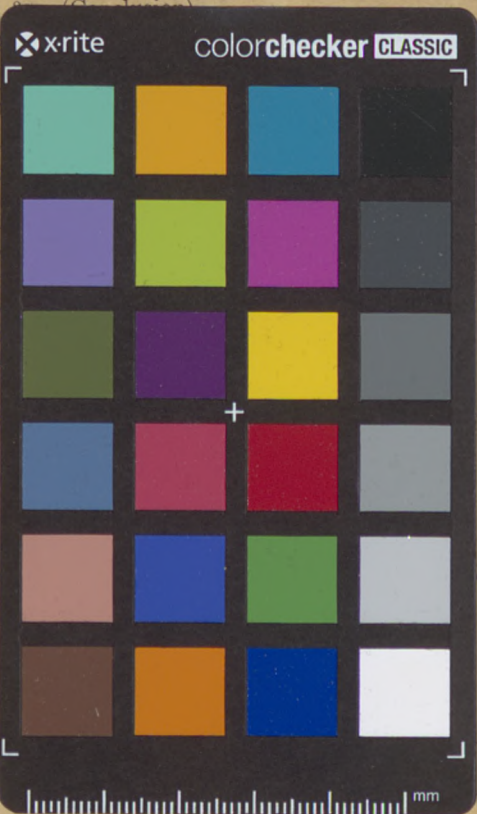
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