DR. SEVIER

BY

GEORGE W. CABLE

PART 2

CHAPTER XXII.

BORROWER TURNED LENDER.

It was only a day or two later that the Richlings, one afternoon, having been out for a sunset walk, were just reaching Mrs. Riley's door-step again, when they were aware of a young man approaching from the opposite direction with the intention of accosting them. They brought their conversation to a murmurous close.

For it was not what a mere acquaintance could have joined them in, albeit its subject was the old one of meat and raiment. Their talk had been light enough on their starting out, notwithstanding John had earned nothing that day. But it had toned down, or, we might say up, to a sober, though not a sombre, quality. John had in some way evolved the assertion that even the life of the body alone is much more than food and clothing and shelter; so much more, that only a divine provision can sustain it; so much more, that the fact is, when it fails, it generally fails with meat and raiment within easy reach.

Mary devoured his words. His spiritual vision had been a little clouded of late, and now, to see it clear— She closed her eyes for bliss.

"Why, John," she said, "you make it plainer than any preacher I ever heard."

This, very naturally, silenced John. And Mary, hoping to start him again, said:—

"Heaven provides. And yet I'm sure you're right in seeking our food and raiment?" She looked up inquiringly.

“Yes; like the fowls, the provision is made *for* us through us. The mistake is in making those things the *end* of our search.”

“Why, certainly!” exclaimed Mary, softly. She took fresh hold in her husband’s arm; the young man was drawing near.

“It’s Narcisse!” murmured John. The Creole pressed suddenly forward with a joyous smile, seized Richling’s hand, and, lifting his hat to Mary as John presented him, brought his heels together and bowed from the hips.

“I wuz juz coming at yo’ ’ouse, Mistoo Itchlin. Yesseh. I wuz juz sitting in my ’oom afteh dinneh, envelop’ in my *’obe de chambre*, when all at once I says to myseff, ’Faw distwaction I will go and see Mistoo Itchlin!’”

“Will you walk in?” said the pair.

Mrs. Riley, standing in the door of her parlor, made way by descending to the sidewalk. Her calico was white, with a small purple figure, and was highly starched and beautifully ironed. Purple ribbons were at her waist and throat. As she reached the ground Mary introduced Narcisse. She smiled winningly, and when she said, with a courtesy: “Proud to know ye, sur,” Narcisse was struck with the sweetness of her tone. But she swept away with a dramatic tread.

“Will you walk in?” Mary repeated; and Narcisse responded:—

“If you will pummit me yo’ attention a few moment’.” He bowed again and made way for Mary to precede him.

“Mistoo Itchlin,” he continued, going in, “in fact you don’t give Misses Witchlin my last name with absolute co’ectness.”

“Did I not? Why, I hope you’ll pardon”—

“Oh, I’m glad of it. I don’ feel lak a pusson is my fwen’ whilst they don’t call me Nahcisse.” He directed his remark particularly to Mary.

“Indeed?” responded she. “But, at the same time, Mr. Richling would have”— She had turned to John, who sat waiting to catch her eye with such intense amusement betrayed in his own that she saved herself from laughter and disgrace only by instant silence.

“Yesseh,” said Narcisse to Richling, “’tis the tooth.”

He cast his eye around upon the prevailing hair-cloth and varnish.

“Misses Witchlin, I muz tell you I like yo’ tas’e in that pawlah.”

“It’s Mrs. Riley’s taste,” said Mary.

"'Tis a beaucheouz tas'e," insisted the Creole, contemplatively, gazing at the Pope's vestments tricked out with blue, scarlet, and gilt spangles. "Well, Mistoo Itchlin, since some time I've been stipulating me to do myseff that honoh, seh, to come at yo' 'ouse; well, ad the end I am yeh. I think you fine yoseff not ve'y well those days. Is that nod the case, Mistoo Itchlin?"

"Oh, I'm well enough!" Richling ended with a laugh, somewhat explosively. Mary looked at him with forced gravity as he suppressed it. He had to draw his nose slowly through his thumb and two fingers before he could quite command himself. Mary relieved him by responding:—

"No, Mr. Richling hasn't been well for some time."

Narcisse responded triumphantly:—

"It stwuck me—so soon I pe'ceive you—that you 'ave the ai' of a valedictudina'y. Thass a ve'y fawtunate that you ah 'esiding in a 'ealthsome pawt of the city, in fact."

Both John and Mary laughed and demurred.

"You don't think?" asked the smiling visitor. "Me, I dunno,—I fine one thing. If a man don't die fum one thing, yet, still, he'll die fum something. I 'ave study that out, Mistoo Itchlin. 'To be, aw to not be, thaz the queztion,' in fact. I don't ca'e if you live one place aw if you live anotheh place, 'tis all the same,—you've got to pay to live!"

The Richlings laughed again, and would have been glad to laugh more; but each, without knowing it of the other, was reflecting with some mortification upon the fact that, had they been talking French, Narcisse would have bitten his tongue off before any of his laughter should have been at their expense.

"Indeed you have got to pay to live," said John, stepping to the window and drawing up its painted paper shade. "Yes, and"—

"Ah!" exclaimed Mary, with gentle disapprobation. She met her husband's eye with a smile of protest. "John," she said, "Mr. ——" she couldn't think of the name.

"Nahcisse," said the Creole.

"Will think," she continued, her amusement climbing into her eyes in spite of her, "you're in earnest."

"Well, I am, partly. Narcisse knows, as well as we do that there are two sides to the question." He resumed his seat. "I reckon"—

“Yes,” said Narcisse, “and what you muz look out faw, ’tis to git on the soff side.”

They all laughed.

“I was going to say,” said Richling, “the world takes us as we come, ‘sight-unseen.’ Some of us pay expenses, some don’t.”

“Ah!” rejoined Narcisse, looking up at the whitewashed ceiling, “those egspenze’!” He raised his hand and dropped it. “I *fine* it so *diffycul’* to defeat those egspenze’! In fact, Mistoo Itchlin, such ah the state of my financial emba’assment that I do not go out at all. I stay in, in fact. I stay at my ’ouse—to light’ those egspenze’!”

They were all agreed that expenses could be lightened thus.

“And by making believe you don’t want things,” said Mary.

“Ah!” exclaimed Narcisse, “I nevvah kin do that!” and Richling gave a laugh that was not without sympathy. “But I muz tell you, Mistoo Itchlin, I am aztonizh at *you*.”

An instant apprehension seized John and Mary. They *knew* their ill-concealed amusement would betray them, and now they were to be called to account. But no.

“Yesseh,” continued Narcisse, “you ’ave the gweatez o’casion to be the subjec’ of congwatulation, Mistoo Itchlin, to ’ave the poweh to *ac*cum’late money in those hawd time’ like the pwesen’!”

The Richlings cried out with relief and amused surprise.

“Why, you couldn’t make a greater mistake!”

“Mistaken! Hah! W’en I ged that memo’andum f’om Dr. Seveeah to paz that fifty dollah at yo’ cwedit, it burz f’om me, that egs*clam*ation! ’Acchilly! ’ow that Mistoo Itchlin deserve the ’espect to save a lill quantity of money like that!”

The laughter of John and Mary did not impede his rhapsody, nor their protestations shake his convictions.

“Why,” said Richling, lolling back, “the Doctor has simply omitted to have you make the entry of’”—

But he had no right to interfere with the Doctor’s accounts. However, Narcisse was not listening.

“You’ compel’ to be witch some day, Mistoo Itchlin, ad that wate of p’ogwess; I am convince of that. I can deteg that indis*put*ably in yo’ physio’nomie. Me—I *can’t* save a cent! Mistoo Itchlin, you would be aztonizh to know ’ow bad I want some money, in fact; exceb that I am *too* pwoud to dizclose you that state of my condition!”

He paused and looked from John to Mary, and from Mary to John again.

“Why, I’ll declare,” said Richling, sincerely, dropping forward with his chin on his hand, “I’m sorry to hear”—

But Narcisse interrupted.

“Diffyculty with me—I am not willing to baw’.”

Mary drew a long breath and glanced at her husband. He changed his attitude and, looking upon the floor, said, “Yes, yes.” He slowly marked the bare floor with the edge of his shoe-sole. “And yet there are times when duty actually”—

“I believe you, Mistoo Itchlin,” said Narcisse, quickly forestalling Mary’s attempt to speak. “Ah, Mistoo Itchlin! *if* I had baw’d money ligue the huncle of my hant!” He waved his hand to the ceiling and looked up through that obstruction, as it were, to the witnessing sky. “But I *hade* that—to baw’! I tell you ’ow ’tis with me, Mistoo Itchlin; I nevvah would consen’ to baw’ money on’y if I pay a big inte’es’ on it. An’ I’m compel’ to tell you one thing, Mistoo Itchlin, in fact: I nevvah would leave money with Doctah Seveeah to invez faw me—no!”

Richling gave a little start, and cast his eyes an instant toward his wife. She spoke.

“We’d rather you wouldn’t say that to us, Mister ——” There was a commanding smile at one corner of her lips. “You don’t know what a friend”—

Narcisse had already apologized by two or three gestures to each of his hearers.

“Misses Itchlin—Mistoo Itchlin,”—he shook his head and smiled skeptically,—“you think you kin admiah Doctah Seveeah mo’ than me? ’Tis uzeless to attempt. ‘With all ’is fault I love ’im still.’”

Richling and his wife both spoke at once.

“But John and I,” exclaimed Mary, electrically, “love him, faults and all!”

She looked from husband to visitor, and from visitor to husband, and laughed and laughed, pushing her small feet back and forth alternately and softly clapping her hands. Narcisse felt her in the centre of his heart. He laughed. John laughed.

“What I mean, Mistoo Itchlin,” resumed Narcisse, preferring to avoid Mary’s aroused eye,—“what I mean—Doctah Seveeah don’t un’stan’ that kine of business co’ectly. Still, ad the same time, if I was you I know I would ’ate faw my money not to be makin’ me some inte’es’. I tell you what I would do with you, Mistoo Itchlin, in fact: I kin baw’ that fifty dollah f’om you myseff.”

Richling repressed a smile. “Thank you! But I don’t care to invest it.”

“Pay you ten pe’ cent. a month.”

“But we can’t spare it,” said Richling, smiling toward Mary. “We may need part of it ourselves.”

“I tell you, ’eally, Mistoo Itchlin, I nevveh baw’ money; but it juz ’appen I kin use that juz at the pwesent.”

“Why, John,” said Mary, “I think you might as well say plainly that the money is borrowed money.”

“That’s what it is,” responded Richling, and rose to spread the street-door wider open, for the daylight was fading.

“Well, I ’ope you’ll egscuse that libbetty,” said Narcisse, rising a little more tardily, and slower. “I muz baw’ fawty dollah—some place. Give you good secu’ty—give you my note, Mistoo Itchlin, in fact; muz baw fawty—aw thutty-five.”

“Why, I’m very sorry,” responded Richling, really ashamed that he could not hold his face straight. “I hope you understand”—

“Mistoo Itchlin, ’tis baw’d money. If you had a necessity faw it you would use it. If a fwend ’ave a necessity—’tis anotheh thing—you don’t feel that libbetty—you ah ’ight—I honoh you”—

“I *don’t* feel the same liberty.”

“Mistoo Itchlin,” said Narcisse, with noble generosity, throwing himself a half step forward, “if it was yoze you’d baw’ it to me in a minnit!” He smiled with benign delight. “Well, madame,—I bid you good evening, Misses Itchlin. The bes’ of fwen’s muz pawt, you know.” He turned again to Richling with a face all beauty and a form all grace. “I was juz sitting—mistfully—all at once I says to myseff, ‘Faw distwaction I’ll go an’ see Mistoo Itchlin.’ I don’t *know* ’ow I juz ’appen’!— Well, *au ’evoi*’, Mistoo Itchlin.”

Richling followed him out upon the door-step. There Narcisse intimated that even twenty dollars for a few days would supply a stern want. And when

Richling was compelled again to refuse, Narcisse solicited his company as far as the next corner. There the Creole covered him with shame by forcing him to refuse the loan of ten dollars, and then of five.

It was a full hour before Richling rejoined his wife. Mrs. Riley had stepped off to some neighbor's door with Mike on her arm. Mary was on the sidewalk.

"John," she said, in a low voice, and with a long anxious look.

"What?"

"He *didn't* take the only dollar of your own in the world?"

"Mary, what could I do? It seemed a crime to give, and a crime not to give. He cried like a child; said it was all a sham about his dinner and his *robe de chambre*. An aunt, two little cousins, an aged uncle at home—and not a cent in the house! What could I do? He says he'll return it in three days."

"And"—Mary laughed distressfully—"you believed him?" She looked at him with an air of tender, painful admiration, half way between a laugh and a cry.

"Come, sit down," he said, sinking upon the little wooden buttress at one side of the door-step.

Tears sprang into her eyes. She shook her head.

"Let's go inside." And in there she told him sincerely, "No, no, no; she didn't think he had done wrong"—when he knew he had.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WEAR AND TEAR.

The arrangement for Dr. Sevier to place the loan of fifty dollars on his own books at Richling's credit naturally brought Narcisse into relation with it.

It was a case of love at first sight. From the moment the record of Richling's "little quantity" slid from the pen to the page, Narcisse had felt himself betrothed to it by destiny, and hourly supplicated the awful fates to frown not upon the amorous hopes of him unaugmented. Richling descended upon him once or twice and tore away from his embrace small fractions of the coveted treasure, choosing, through a diffidence which he mistook for a sort of virtue, the time of day when he would not see Dr. Sevier; and at the third visitation took the entire golden

fleece away with him rather than encounter again the always more or less successful courtship of the scorner of loans.

A faithful suitor, however, was not thus easily shaken off. Narcisse became a frequent visitor at the Richlings', where he never mentioned money; that part was left to moments of accidental meeting with Richling in the street, which suddenly began to occur at singularly short intervals.

Mary labored honestly and arduously to dislike him—to hold a repellent attitude toward him. But he was too much for her. It was easy enough when he was absent; but one look at his handsome face, so rife with animal innocence, and despite herself she was ready to reward his displays of sentiment and erudition with laughter that, mean what it might, always pleased and flattered him.

"Can you help liking him?" she would ask John. "I can't, to save my life!"

Had the treasure been earnings, Richling said—and believed—he could firmly have repelled Narcisse's importunities. But coldly to withhold an occasional modest heave-offering of that which was the free bounty of another to him was more than he could do.

"But," said Mary, straightening his cravat, "you intend to pay up, and he—you don't think I'm uncharitable, do you?"

"I'd rather give my last cent than think you so," replied John. "Still,"—laying the matter before her with both open hands,—"if you say plainly not to give him another cent I'll do as you say. The money's no more mine than yours."

"Well, you can have all my share," said Mary, pleasantly.

So the weeks passed and the hoard dwindled.

"What has it got down to, now?" asked John, frowningly, on more than one morning as he was preparing to go out. And Mary, who had been made treasurer, could count it at a glance without taking it out of her purse.

One evening, when Narcisse called, he found no one at home but Mrs. Riley. The infant Mike had been stuffed with rice and milk and laid away to slumber. The Richlings would hardly be back in less than an hour.

"I'm so'y," said Narcisse, with a baffled frown, as he sat down and Mrs. Riley took her seat opposite. "I came to 'epay 'em some moneys which he made me the loan—juz in a fwenly way. And I came to 'epay 'im. The sum-total, in fact—I suppose he nevva mentioned you about that, eh?"

"No, sir; but, still, if"—

“No, and so I can’t pay it to you. I’m so’y. Because I know he woon like it, I know, if he fine that you know he’s been bawing money to me. Well, Misses Wiley, in fact, thass a *ve’y* fine gen’leman and lady—that Mistoo and Misses Itchlin, in fact?”

“Well, now, Mr. Narcisse, ye’r about right? She’s just too good to live—and he’s not much better—ha! ha!” She checked her jesting mood. “Yes, sur, they’re very peaceable, quiet people. They’re just simply ferst tlass.”

“’Tis t’ue,” rejoined the Creole, fanning himself with his straw hat and looking at the Pope. “And they handsome and genial, as the lite’ati say on the noozpapeh. Seem like they almoze wedded to each otheh.”

“Well, now, sir, that’s the trooth!” She threw her open hand down with emphasis.

“And isn’t that as man and wife should be?”

“Yo’ mighty co’ect, Misses Wiley!” Narcisse gave his pretty head a little shake from side to side as he spoke.

“Ah! Mr. Narcisse,”—she pointed at herself,—“haven’t I been a wife? The husband and wife—they’d aht to jist be each other’s guairdjian angels! Hairt to hairt sur; sperit to sperit. All the rist is nawthing, Mister Narcisse.” She waved her hands. “Min is different from women, sur.” She looked about on the ceiling. Her foot noiselessly patted the floor.

“Yes,” said Narcisse, “and thass the cause that they dwess them dif’ent. To show the dif’ence, you know.”

“Ah! no. It’s not the mortial frame, sur; it’s the sperit. The sperit of man is not the sperit of woman. The sperit of woman is not the sperit of man. Each one needs the other, sur. They needs each other, sur, to purify and strinthen and enlairge each other’s speritu’l life. Ah, sur! Doo not I feel those things, sur?” She touched her heart with one backward-pointed finger, “*I* doo. It isn’t good for min to be alone—much liss for women. Do not misunderstand me, sur; I speak as a widder, sur—and who always will be—ah! yes, I will—ha! ha! ha!” She hushed her laugh as if this were going too far, tossed her head, and continued smiling.

So they talked on. Narcisse did not stay an hour, but there was little of the hour left when he rose to go. They had passed a pleasant time. The Creole, it is true, tried and failed to take the helm of conversation. Mrs. Riley held it. But she steered well. She was still expatiating on the “strinthenin’” spiritual value of the marriage relation when she, too, stood up.

“And that’s what Mr. and Madam Richlin’s a-doin’ all the time. And they do ut to perfiction, sur—jist to perfiction!”

“I doubt it not, Misses Wiley. Well, Misses Wiley, I bid you *au ’evoi’*. I dunno if you’ll pummit me, but I am compel to tell you, Misses Wiley, I nevva yeh anybody in my life with such a educated and talented conve’sation like yo’seff. Misses Wiley, at what univussity did you gwaduate?”

“Well, reely, Mister—eh”—she fanned herself with broad sweeps of her purple bordered palm-leaf—“reely, sur, if I don’t furgit the name I—I—I’ll be switched! Ha! ha! ha!”

Narcisse joined in the laugh.

“Thaz the way, sometime,” he said, and then with sudden gravity: “And, by-the-by, Misses Wiley, speakin’ of Mistoo Itchlin,—if you could baw’ me two dollahs an’ a ’alf juz till tomaw mawnin—till I kin sen’ it you fum the office— Because that money I’ve got faw Mistoo Itchlin is in the shape of a check, and anyhow I’m c’owding me a little to pay that whole sum-total to Mistoo Itchlin. I kin sen’ it you firs’ thing my bank open tomaw mawnin.”

Do you think he didn’t get it?

“What has it got down to now?” John asked again, a few mornings after Narcisse’s last visit. Mary told him. He stepped a little way aside, averting his face, dropped his forehead into his hand, and returned.

“I don’t see—I don’t see, Mary—I”—

“Darling,” she replied, reaching and capturing both his hands, “who does see? The rich *think* they see; but do they, John? Now, *do* they?”

The frown did not go quite off his face, but he took her head between his hands and kissed her temple.

“You’re always trying to lift me,” he said.

“Don’t you lift me?” she replied, looking up between his hands and smiling.

“Do I?”

“You know you do. Don’t you remember the day we took that walk, and you said that after all it never is we who provide?” She looked at the button of his coat, which she twirled in her fingers. “That word lifted me.”

“But suppose I can’t practice the trust I preach?” he said.

“You do trust, though. You have trusted.”

“Past tense,” said John. He lifted her hands slowly away from him, and moved toward the door of their chamber. He could not help looking back at the eyes that followed him, and then he could not bear their look. “I—I suppose a man mustn’t trust too much,” he said.

“Can he?” asked Mary, leaning against a table.

“Oh, yes, he can,” replied John; but his tone lacked conviction.

“If it’s the right kind?”

Her eyes were full of tears.

“I’m afraid mine’s not the right kind, then,” said John, and passed out into and down the street.

But what a mind he took with him—what torture of questions! Was he being lifted or pulled down? His tastes,—were they rising or sinking? Were little negligences of dress and bearing and in-door attitude creeping into his habits? Was he losing his discriminative sense of quantity, time, distance? Did he talk of small achievements, small gains, and small truths, as though they were great? Had he learned to carp at the rich, and to make honesty the excuse for all penury? Had he these various poverty-marks? He looked at himself outside and inside, and feared to answer. One thing he knew,—that he was having great wrestlings.

He turned his thoughts to Ristofalo. This was a common habit with him. Not only in thought, but in person, he hovered with a positive infatuation about this man of perpetual success.

Lately the Italian had gone out of town, into the country of La Fourche, to buy standing crops of oranges. Richling fed his hope on the possibilities that might follow Ristofalo’s return. His friend would want him to superintend the gathering and shipment of those crops—when they should be ripe—away yonder in November. Frantic thought! A man and his wife could starve to death twenty times before then.

Mrs. Riley’s high esteem for John and Mary had risen from the date of the Doctor’s visit, and the good woman thought it but right somewhat to increase the figures of their room-rent to others more in keeping with such high gentility. How fast the little hoard melted away!

And the summer continued on,—the long, beautiful, glaring, implacable summer; its heat quaking on the low roofs; its fig-trees dropping their shrivelled and blackened leaves and writhing their weird, bare branches under the scorching

sun; the long-drawn, frying note of its cicada throbbing through the mid-day heat from the depths of the becalmed oak; its universal pall of dust on the myriad red, sleep-heavy blossoms of the oleander and the white tulips of the lofty magnolia; its twinkling pomegranates hanging their apples of scarlet and gold over the garden wall; its little chameleons darting along the hot fence-tops; its far-stretching, empty streets; its wide hush of idleness; its solitary vultures sailing in the upper blue; its grateful clouds; its hot north winds, its cool south winds; its gasping twilight calms; its gorgeous nights,—the long, long summer lingered on into September.

One evening, as the sun was sinking below the broad, flat land, its burning disk reddened by a low golden haze of suspended dust, Richling passed slowly toward his home, coming from a lower part of the town by way of the quadroon quarter. He was paying little notice, or none, to his whereabouts, wending his way mechanically, in the dejected reverie of weary disappointment, and with voiceless inward screamings and groanings under the weight of those thoughts which had lately taken up their stay in his dismayed mind. But all at once his attention was challenged by a strange, offensive odor. He looked up and around, saw nothing, turned a corner, and found himself at the intersection of Trémé and St. Anne streets, just behind the great central prison of New Orleans.

The “Parish Prison” was then only about twenty-five years old; but it had made haste to become offensive to every sense and sentiment of reasonable man. It had been built in the Spanish style,—a massive, dark, grim, huge, four-sided block, the fissure-like windows of its cells looking down into the four public streets which ran immediately under its walls. Dilapidation had followed hard behind ill-building contractors. Down its frowning masonry ran grimy streaks of leakage over peeling stucco and mould-covered brick. Weeds bloomed high aloft in the broken gutters under the scant and ragged eaves. Here and there the pale, debauched face of a prisoner peered shamelessly down through shattered glass or rusted grating; and everywhere in the still atmosphere floated the stifling smell of the unseen loathsomeness within.

Richling paused. As he looked up he noticed a bat dart out from a long crevice under the eaves. Two others followed. Then three—a dozen—a hundred—a thousand—millions. All along the two sides of the prison in view they poured forth in a horrid black torrent,—myriads upon myriads. They filled the air. They came and came. Richling stood and gazed; and still they streamed out in gibbering waves, until the wonder was that anything but a witch’s dream could contain them.

The approach of another passer roused him, and he started on. The step gained upon him—closed up with him; and at the moment when he expected to see the person go by, a hand was laid gently on his shoulder.

"Mistoo Itchlin, I 'ope you well, seh!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

BROUGHT TO BAY.

One may take his choice between the two, but there is no escaping both in this life: the creditor—the borrower. Either, but never neither. Narcisse caught step with Richling, and they walked side by side.

"How I learned to mawch, I billong with a fiah comp'ny," said the Creole. "We mawch eve'y yeah on the fou'th of Mawch." He laughed heartily. "Thass a 'ime!—Mawch on the fou'th of Mawch! Thass poetwy, in fact, as you may *say* in a jesting *way*—ha! ha! ha!"

"Yes, and it's truth, besides," responded the drearier man.

"Yes!" exclaimed Narcisse, delighted at the unusual coincidence, "at the same time 'tis the tooth! In fact, why should I tell a lie about such a thing like *that*? 'Twould be useless. Pe'haps you may 'ave notiz, Mistoo Itchlin, thad the noozpapehs opine us fiahmen to be the gau'dians of the city."

"Yes," responded Richling. "I think Dr. Sevier calls you the Mamelukes, doesn't he? But that's much the same, I suppose."

"Same thing," replied the Creole. "We combad the fiah fiend. You fine that building ve'y pitto'esque, Mistoo Itchlin?" He jerked his thumb toward the prison, that was still pouring forth its clouds of impish wings. "Yes? 'Tis the same with me. But I tell you one thing, Mistoo Itchlin, I assu' you, and you will believe me, I would 'atheh be lock' *out*side of that building than to be lock' *in*side of the same. 'Cause—you know why? 'Tis ve'y 'umid in that building. An thass a thing w'at I believe, Mistoo Itchlin; I believe w'en a building is v'ey 'umid it is not ve'y 'ealthsome. What is yo' opinion consunning that, Mistoo Itchlin?"

"My opinion?" said Richling, with a smile. "My opinion is that the Parish Prison would not be a good place to raise a family."

Narcisse laughed.

“I thing yo’ *o*pinion is co’ect,” he said, flatteringly; then growing instantly serious, he added, “Yesseh, I think you’ about a-’ight, Mistoo Itchlin; faw even if ’twas not too ’umid, ’twould be too confining, in fact,—speshly faw child’en. I dunno; but thass my opinion. If you ah p’oceeding at yo’ residence, Mistoo Itchlin, I’ll juz *con*tinue my p’omenade in yo’ society—if not intooding”—

Richling smiled candidly. “Your company’s worth all it costs, Narcisse. Excuse me; I always forget your last name—and your first is so appropriate.” It *was* worth all it cost, though Richling could ill afford the purchase. The young Latin’s sweet, abysmal ignorance, his infantile amiability, his artless ambition, and heathenish innocence started the natural gladness of Richling’s blood to effervescing anew every time they met, and, through the sheer impossibility of confiding any of his troubles to the Creole, made him think them smaller and lighter than they had just before appeared. The very light of Narcisse’s countenance and beauty of his form—his smooth, low forehead, his thick, abundant locks, his faintly up-tipped nose and expanded nostrils, his sweet, weak mouth with its impending smile, his beautiful chin and bird’s throat, his almond eyes, his full, round arm, and strong thigh—had their emphatic value.

So now, Richling, a moment earlier borne down by the dreadful shadow of the Parish Prison, left it behind him as he walked and laughed and chatted with his borrower. He felt very free with Narcisse, for the reason that would have made a wiser person constrained,—lack of respect for him.

“Mistoo Itchlin, you know,” said the Creole, “I like you to call me Nahcisse. But at the same time my las’ name is Savillot.” He pronounced it Sav-*veel*-yo. “Thass a somewot Spanish name. That double l got a twist in it.”

“Oh, call it Papilio!” laughed Richling.

“Papillon!” exclaimed Narcisse, with delight. “The buttehfly! All a-’ight; you kin juz style me that! ’Cause thass my natu’e, Mistoo Itchlin; I gatheh honey eve’y day fum eve’y opening floweh, as the bahd of A-von wemawk.”

So they went on.

Ad infinitum? Ah, no! The end was just as plainly in view to both from the beginning as it was when, at length, the two stepping across the street gutter at the last corner between Richling and home, Narcisse laid his open hand in his companion’s elbow, and stopped, saying, as Richling turned and halted with a sudden frown of unwillingness:—

“I tell you ’ow ’tis with me, Mistoo Itchlin, I’ve p’oject that manneh myseff; in weading a book—w’en I see a beaucheouz idee, I juz take a pencil”—he drew one from his pocket—“check! I check it. So w’en I wead the same book again, then I take notiz I’ve check that idee and I look to see what I check it faw. ’Ow you like that invention, eh?”

“Very simple,” said Richling, with an unpleasant look of expectancy.

“Mistoo Itchlin,” resumed the other, “do you not fine me impooving in my p’onouncement of yo’ lang-widge? I fine I don’t use such bad land-widge like biffo. I am shue you muz’ ’ave notiz since some time I always soun’ that awer in yo’ name. Mistoo Itchlin, will you ’ave that kin’ness to baw me two-an-a-’alf till the lass of that month?”

Richling looked at him a moment in silence, and then broke into a short, grim laugh.

“It’s all gone. There’s no more honey in this flower.” He set his jaw as he ceased speaking. There was a warm red place on either cheek.

“Mistoo Itchlin,” said Narcisse, with sudden, quavering fervor, “you kin len’ me two dollahs! I gi’e you my honah the moze sacwed of a gen’leman, Mistoo Itchlin, I nevvah hass you ag’in so long I live!” He extended a pacifying hand. “One moment, Mistoo Itchlin,—one moment,—I implo’ you, seh! I assu’ you, Mistoo Itchlin, I pay you eve’y cent in the worl’ on the laz of that month? Mistoo Itchlin, I am in indignan’ circumstan’s. Mistoo Itchlin, if you know the distwess—Mistoo Itchlin, if you know—’ow bad I ’ate to baw!” The tears stood in his eyes. “It nea’ly *kill* me to b—” Utterance failed him.

“My friend,” began Richling.

“Mistoo Itchlin,” exclaimed Narcisse, dashing away the tears and striking his hand on his heart, “I *am* yo’ fwend, seh!”

Richling smiled scornfully. “Well, my good friend, if you had ever kept a single promise made to me I need not have gone since yesterday without a morsel of food.”

Narcisse tried to respond.

“Hush!” said Richling, and Narcisse bowed while Richling spoke on. “I haven’t a cent to buy bread with to carry home. And whose fault is it? Is it my fault—or is it yours?”

“Mistoo Itchlin, seh”—

“Hush!” cried Richling, again; “if you try to speak before I finish I’ll thrash you right here in the street!”

Narcisse folded his arms. Richling flushed and flashed with the mortifying knowledge that his companion’s behavior was better than his own.

“If you want to borrow more money of me find me a chance to earn it!” He glanced so suddenly at two or three street lads, who were the only on-lookers, that they shrank back a step.

“Mistoo Itchlin,” began Narcisse, once more, in a tone of polite dismay, “you aztonizh me. I assu’ you, Mistoo Itchlin”—

Richling lifted his finger and shook it. “Don’t you tell me that, sir! I will not be an object of astonishment to you! Not to you, sir! Not to you!” He paused, trembling, his anger and his shame rising together.

Narcisse stood for a moment, silent, undaunted, the picture of amazed friendship and injured dignity, then raised his hat with the solemnity of affronted patience and said:—

“Mistoo Itchlin, seein’ as ’tis you, a puffic gen’leman, ’oo is not goin’ to ’efuse that satisfagtion w’at a gen’leman, always a-’eady to give a gen’leman,—I bid you—faw the pwesen’—good-evenin’, seh!” He walked away.

Richling stood in his tracks dumfounded, crushed. His eyes followed the receding form of the borrower until it disappeared around a distant corner, while the eye of his mind looked in upon himself and beheld, with a shame that overwhelmed anger, the folly and the puerility of his outburst. The nervous strain of twenty-four hours’ fast, without which he might not have slipped at all, only sharpened his self-condemnation. He turned and walked to his house, and all the misery that had oppressed him before he had seen the prison, and all that had come with that sight, and all this new shame, sank down upon his heart at once. “I am not a man! I am not a whole man!” he suddenly moaned to himself. “Something is wanting—oh! what is it?”—he lifted his eyes to the sky,—“what is it?”—when in truth, there was little wanting just then besides food.

He passed in at the narrow gate and up the slippery alley. Nearly at its end was the one window of the room he called home. Just under it—it was somewhat above his head—he stopped and listened. A step within was moving busily here and there, now fainter and now plainer; and a voice, the sweetest on earth to him, was singing to itself in its soft, habitual way.

He started round to the door with a firmer tread. It stood open. He halted on the threshold. There was a small table in the middle of the room, and there was food on it. A petty reward of his wife's labor had brought it there.

"Mary," he said, holding her off a little, "don't kiss me yet."

She looked at him with consternation. He sat down, drew her upon his lap, and told her, in plain, quiet voice, the whole matter.

"Don't look so, Mary."

"How?" she asked, in a husky voice and with flashing eye.

"Don't breathe so short and set your lips. I never saw you look so, Mary, darling!"

She tried to smile, but her eyes filled.

"If you had been with me," said John, musingly, "it wouldn't have happened."

"If—if"— Mary sat up as straight as a dart, the corners of her mouth twitching so that she could scarcely shape a word,—"if—if I'd been there, I'd have made you *whip* him!" She flouted her handkerchief out of her pocket, buried her face in his neck, and sobbed like a child.

"Oh!" exclaimed the tearful John, holding her away by both shoulders, tossing back his hair and laughing as she laughed,—"Oh! you women! You're all of a sort! You want us men to carry your hymn-books and your iniquities, too!"

She laughed again.

"Well, of course!"

And they rose and drew up to the board.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE DOCTOR DINES OUT.

On the third day after these incidents, again at the sunset hour, but in a very different part of the town, Dr. Sevier sat down, a guest, at dinner. There were flowers; there was painted and monogrammed china; there was Bohemian glass; there was silver of cunning work with linings of gold, and damasked linen, and oak of fantastic carving. There were ladies in summer silks and elaborate

coiffures; the hostess, small, slender, gentle, alert; another, dark, flashing, Roman, tall; another, ripe but not drooping, who had been beautiful, now, for thirty years; and one or two others. There were jewels; there were sweet odors. And there were, also, some good masculine heads: Dr. Sevier's, for instance; and the chief guest's,—an iron-gray, with hard lines in the face, and a scar on the near cheek,—a colonel of the regular army passing through from Florida; and one crown, bald, pink, and shining, encircled by a silken fringe of very white hair: it was the banker who lived in St. Mary street. His wife was opposite. And there was much high-bred grace. There were tall windows thrown wide to make the blaze of gas bearable, and two tall mulattoes in the middle distance bringing in and bearing out viands too sumptuous for any but a French nomenclature.

It was what you would call a quiet affair; quite out of season, and difficult to furnish with even this little handful of guests; but it was a proper and necessary attention to the colonel; conversation not too dull, nor yet too bright for ease, but passing gracefully from one agreeable topic to another without earnestness, a restless virtue, or frivolity, which also goes against serenity. Now it touched upon the prospects of young A. B. in the demise of his uncle; now upon the probable seriousness of C. D. in his attentions to E. F.; now upon G.'s amusing mishaps during a late tour in Switzerland, which had—"how unfortunately!"—got into the papers. Now it was concerning the admirable pulpit manners and easily pardoned vocal defects of a certain new rector. Now it turned upon Stephen A. Douglas's last speech; passed to the questionable merits of a new-fangled punch; and now, assuming a slightly explanatory form from the gentlemen to the ladies, showed why there was no need whatever to fear a financial crisis—which came soon afterward.

The colonel inquired after an old gentleman whom he had known in earlier days in Kentucky.

"It's many a year since I met him," he said. "The proudest man I ever saw. I understand he was down here last season."

"He was," replied the host, in a voice of native kindness, and with a smile on his high-fed face. "He was; but only for a short time. He went back to his estate. That is his world. He's there now."

"It used to be considered one of the finest places in the State," said the colonel.

"It is still," rejoined the host. "Doctor, you know him?"

"I think not," said Dr. Sevier; but somehow he recalled the old gentleman in button gaiters, who had called on him one evening to consult him about his sick wife.

“A good man,” said the colonel, looking amused; “and a superb gentleman. Is he as great a partisan of the church as he used to be?”

“Greater! Favors an established church of America.”

The ladies were much amused. The host’s son, a young fellow with sprouting side-whiskers, said he thought he could be quite happy with one of the finest plantations in Kentucky, and let the church go its own gait.

“Humph!” said the father; “I doubt if there’s ever a happy breath drawn on the place.”

“Why, how is that?” asked the colonel, in a cautious tone.

“Hadn’t he heard?” The host was surprised, but spoke low. “Hadn’t he heard about the trouble with their only son? Why, he went abroad and never came back!”

Every one listened.

“It’s a terrible thing,” said the hostess to the ladies nearest her; “no one ever dares ask the family what the trouble is,—they have such odd, exclusive ideas about their matters being nobody’s business. All that can be known is that they look upon him as worse than dead and gone forever.”

“And who will get the estate?” asked the banker.

“The two girls. They’re both married.”

“They’re very much like their father,” said the hostess, smiling with gentle significance.

“Very much,” echoed the host, with less delicacy. “Their mother is one of those women who stand in terror of their husband’s will. Now, if he were to die and leave her with a will of her own she would hardly know what to do with it—I mean with her will—or the property either.”

The hostess protested softly against so harsh a speech, and the son, after one or two failures, got in his remark:—

“Maybe the prodigal would come back and be taken in.”

But nobody gave this conjecture much attention. The host was still talking of the lady without a will.

“Isn’t she an invalid?” Dr. Sevier had asked.

“Yes; the trip down here last season was on her account,—for change of scene. Her health is wretched.”

“I’m distressed that I didn’t call on her,” said the hostess; “but they went away suddenly. My dear, I wonder if they really did encounter the young man here?”

“Pshaw!” said the husband, softly, smiling and shaking his head, and turned the conversation.

In time it settled down with something like earnestness for a few minutes upon a subject which the rich find it easy to discuss without the least risk of undue warmth. It was about the time when one of the graciously murmuring mulattoes was replenishing the glasses, that remark in some way found utterance to this effect,—that the company present could congratulate themselves on living in a community where there was no poor class.

“Poverty, of course, we see; but there is no misery, or nearly none,” said the ambitious son of the host.

Dr. Sevier differed with him. That was one of the Doctor’s blemishes as a table guest: he would differ with people.

“There is misery,” he said; “maybe not the gaunt squalor and starvation of London or Paris or New York; the climate does not tolerate that,—stamps it out before it can assume dimensions; but there is at least misery of that sort that needs recognition and aid from the well-fed.”

The lady who had been beautiful so many years had somewhat to say; the physician gave attention, and she spoke:—

“If sister Jane were here, she would be perfectly triumphant to hear you speak so, Doctor.” She turned to the hostess, and continued: “Jane is quite an enthusiast, you know; a sort of Dorcas, as husband says, modified and readapted. Yes, she is for helping everybody.”

“Whether help is good for them or not,” said the lady’s husband, a very straight and wiry man with a garrote collar.

“It’s all one,” laughed the lady. “Our new rector told her plainly, the other day, that she was making a great mistake; that she ought to consider whether assistance assists. It was really amusing. Out of the pulpit and off his guard, you know, he lisps a little; and he said she ought to consider whether ‘aththithtanth aththihttth.’”

There was a gay laugh at this, and the lady was called a perfect and cruel mimic.

“‘Aththithtanth aththiththth!’” said two or three to their neighbors, and laughed again.

“What did your sister say to that?” asked the banker, bending forward his white, tonsured head, and smiling down the board.

“She said she didn’t care; that it kept her own heart tender, anyhow. ‘My dear madam,’ said he, ‘your heart wants strengthening more than softening.’ He told her a pound of inner resource was more true help to any poor person than a ton of assistance.”

The banker commended the rector. The hostess, very sweetly, offered her guarantee that Jane took the rebuke in good part.

“She did,” replied the time-honored beauty; “she tried to profit by it. But husband, here, has offered her a wager of a bonnet against a hat that the rector will upset her new schemes. Her idea now is to make work for those whom nobody will employ.”

“Jane,” said the kind-faced host, “really wants to do good for its own sake.”

“I think she’s even a little Romish in her notions,” said Jane’s wiry brother-in-law. “I talked to her as plainly as the rector. I told her, ‘Jane, my dear, all this making of work for the helpless poor is not worth one-fiftieth part of the same amount of effort spent in teaching and training those same poor to make their labor intrinsically marketable.’”

“Yes,” said the hostess; “but while we are philosophizing and offering advice so wisely, Jane is at work—doing the best she knows how. We can’t claim the honor even of making her mistakes.”

“’Tisn’t a question of honors to us, madam,” said Dr. Sevier; “it’s a question of results to the poor.”

The brother-in-law had not finished. He turned to the Doctor.

“Poverty, Doctor, is an inner condition”—

“Sometimes,” interposed the Doctor.

“Yes, generally,” continued the brother-in-law, with some emphasis. “And to give help you must, first of all, ‘inquire within’—within your beneficiary.”

“Not always, sir,” replied the Doctor; “not if they’re sick, for instance.” The ladies bowed briskly and applauded with their eyes. “And not always if they’re well,” he added. His last words softened off almost into soliloquy.

The banker spoke forcibly:—

“Yes, there are two quite distinct kinds of poverty. One is an accident of the moment; the other is an inner condition of the individual”—

“Of course it is,” said sister Jane’s brother-in-law, who felt it a little to have been contradicted on the side of kindness by the hard-spoken Doctor. “Certainly! it’s a deficiency of inner resources or character, and what to do with it is no simple question.”

“That’s what I was about to say,” resumed the banker; “at least, when the poverty is of that sort. And what discourages kind people is that that’s the sort we commonly see. It’s a relief to meet the other, Doctor, just as it’s a relief to a physician to encounter a case of simple surgery.”

“And—and,” said the brother-in-law, “what is your rule about plain almsgiving to the difficult sort?”

“My rule,” replied the banker, “is, don’t do it. Debt is slavery, and there is an ugly kink in human nature that disposes it to be content with slavery. No, sir; gift-making and gift-taking are twins of a bad blood.” The speaker turned to Dr. Sevier for approval; but, though the Doctor could not gainsay the fraction of a point, he was silent. A lady near the hostess stirred softly both under and above the board. In her private chamber she would have yawned. Yet the banker spoke again:—

“Help the old, I say. You are pretty safe there. Help the sick. But as for the young and strong,—now, no man could be any poorer than I was at twenty-one,—I say be cautious how you smooth that hard road which is the finest discipline the young can possibly get.”

“If it isn’t *too* hard,” chirped the son of the host.

“Too hard? Well, yes, if it isn’t too hard. Still I say, hands off; you needn’t turn your back, however.” Here the speaker again singled out Dr. Sevier. “Watch the young man out of one corner of your eye; but make him swim!”

“Ah-h!” said the ladies.

“No, no,” continued the banker; “I don’t say let him drown; but I take it, Doctor, that your alms, for instance, are no alms if they put the poor fellow into your debt and at your back.”

“To whom do you refer?” asked Dr. Sevier. Whereat there was a burst of laughter, which was renewed when the banker charged the physician with

helping so many persons, “on the sly,” that he couldn’t tell which one was alluded to unless the name were given.

“Doctor,” said the hostess, seeing it was high time the conversation should take a new direction, “they tell me you have closed your house and taken rooms at the St. Charles.”

“For the summer,” said the physician.

As, later, he walked toward that hotel, he went resolving to look up the Richlings again without delay. The banker’s words rang in his ears like an overdose of quinine: “Watch the young man out of one corner of your eye. Make him swim. I don’t say let him drown.”

“Well, I do watch him,” thought the Doctor. “I’ve only lost sight of him once in a while.” But the thought seemed to find an echo against his conscience, and when it floated back it was: “I’ve only *caught* sight of him once in a while.” The banker’s words came up again: “Don’t put the poor fellow into your debt and at your back.” “Just what you’ve done,” said conscience. “How do you know he isn’t drowned?” He would see to it.

While he was still on his way to the hotel he fell in with an acquaintance, a Judge Somebody or other, lately from Washington City. He, also, lodged at the St. Charles. They went together. As they approached the majestic porch of the edifice they noticed some confusion at the bottom of the stairs that led up to the rotunda; cabmen and boys were running to a common point, where, in the midst of a small, compact crowd, two or three pairs of arms were being alternately thrown aloft and brought down. Presently the mass took a rapid movement up St. Charles street.

The judge gave his conjecture: “Some poor devil resisting arrest.”

Before he and the Doctor parted for the night they went to the clerk’s counter.

“No letters for you, Judge; mail failed. Here is a card for you, Doctor.”

The Doctor received it. It had been furnished, blank, by the clerk to its writer.

JOHN RICHLING.

At the door of his own room, with one hand on the unturned knob and one holding the card, the Doctor stopped and reflected. The card gave no indication of urgency. Did it? It was hard to tell. He didn’t want to look foolish; morning would be time enough; he would go early next morning.

But at daybreak he was summoned post-haste to the bedside of a lady who had stayed all summer in New Orleans so as not to be out of this good doctor's reach at this juncture. She counted him a dear friend, and in similar trials had always required close and continual attention. It was the same now.

Dr. Sevier scrawled and sent to the Richlings a line, saying that, if either of them was sick, he would come at their call. When the messenger returned with word from Mrs. Riley that both of them were out, the Doctor's mind was much relieved. So a day and a night passed in which he did not close his eyes.

The next morning, as he stood in his office, hat in hand, and a finger pointing to a prescription on his desk, which he was directing Narcisse to give to some one who would call for it, there came a sudden hurried pounding of feminine feet on the stairs, a whiff of robes in the corridor, and Mary Richling rushed into his presence all tears and cries.

"O Doctor!—O Doctor! O God, my husband! my husband! O Doctor, my husband is in the Parish Prison!" She sank to the floor.

The Doctor raised her up. Narcisse hurried forward with his hands full of restoratives.

"Take away those things," said the Doctor, resentfully. "Here!—Mrs. Richling, take Narcisse's arm and go down and get into my carriage. I must write a short note, excusing myself from an appointment, and then I will join you."

Mary stood alone, turned, and passed out of the office beside the young Creole, but without taking his proffered arm. Did she suspect him of having something to do with this dreadful affair?

"Missez Witchlin," said he, as soon as they were out in the corridor, "I dunno if you goin' to billiv me, but I boun' to tell you that nodwithstanning that yo' 'uzban' is displease' with me, an' nodwithstanning 'e's in that calaboose, I h'always fine 'im a puffic gen'leman—that Mistoo Itchlin,—an' I'll sweah 'e *is* a gen'leman!"

She lifted her anguished eyes and looked into his beautiful face. Could she trust him? His little forehead was as hard as a goat's, but his eyes were brimming with tears, and his chin quivered. As they reached the head of the stairs he again offered his arm, and she took it, moaning softly, as they descended:—

"O John! O John! O my husband, my husband!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE TROUGH OF THE SEA.

Narcisse, on receiving his scolding from Richling, had gone to his home in Casa Calvo street, a much greater sufferer than he had appeared to be. While he was confronting his abaser there had been a momentary comfort in the contrast between Richling's ill-behavior and his own self-control. It had stayed his spirit and turned the edge of Richling's sharp denunciations. But, as he moved off the field, he found himself, at every step, more deeply wounded than even he had supposed. He began to suffocate with chagrin, and hurried his steps in sheer distress. He did not experience that dull, vacant acceptance of universal scorn which an unresentful coward feels. His pangs were all the more poignant because he knew his own courage.

In his home he went so straight up to the withered little old lady, in the dingiest of flimsy black, who was his aunt, and kissed her so passionately, that she asked at once what was the matter. He recounted the facts, shedding tears of mortification. Her feeling, by the time he had finished the account, was a more unmixed wrath than his, and, harmless as she was, and wrapped up in her dear, pretty nephew as she was, she yet demanded to know why such a man shouldn't be called out upon the field of honor.

"Ah!" cried Narcisse, shrinkingly. She had touched the core of the tumor. One gets a public tongue-lashing from a man concerning money borrowed; well, how is one going to challenge him without first handing back the borrowed money? It was a scalding thought! The rotten joists beneath the bare scrubbed-to-death floor quaked under Narcisse's to-and-fro stride.

"—And then, anyhow!"—he stopped and extended both hands, speaking, of course, in French,—"anyhow, he is the favored friend of Dr. Sevier. If I hurt him—I lose my situation! If he hurts me—I lose my situation!"

He dried his eyes. His aunt saw the insurmountability of the difficulty, and they drowned feeling in an affectionate glass of green-orangeade.

"But never mind!" Narcisse set his glass down and drew out his tobacco. He laughed spasmodically as he rolled his cigarette. "You shall see. The game is not finished yet."

Yet Richling passed the next day and night without assassination, and on the second morning afterward, as on the first, went out in quest of employment. He and Mary had eaten bread, and it had gone into their life without a remainder either in larder or purse. Richling was all aimless.

“I do wish I had the *art* of finding work,” said he. He smiled. “I’ll get it,” he added, breaking their last crust in two. “I have the science already. Why, look you, Mary, the quiet, amiable, imperturbable, dignified, diurnal, inexorable haunting of men of influence will get you whatever you want.”

“Well, why don’t you do it, dear? Is there any harm in it? I don’t see any harm in it. Why don’t you do that very thing?”

“I’m telling you the truth,” answered he, ignoring her question. “Nothing else short of overtowering merit will get you what you want half so surely.”

“Well, why not do it? Why not?” A fresh, glad courage sparkled in the wife’s eyes.

“Why, Mary,” said John, “I never in my life tried so hard to do anything else as I’ve tried to do that! It sounds easy; but try it! You can’t conceive how hard it is till you try it. I can’t *do* it! I *can’t* do it!”

“*I’d* do it!” cried Mary. Her face shone. “*I’d* do it! You’d see if I didn’t! Why, John”—

“All right!” exclaimed he; “you sha’n’t talk that way to me for nothing. I’ll try it again! I’ll begin to-day!”

“Good-by,” he said. He reached an arm over one of her shoulders and around under the other and drew her up on tiptoe. She threw both hers about his neck. A long kiss—then a short one.

“John, something tells me we’re near the end of our troubles.”

John laughed grimly. “Ristofalo was to get back to the city to-day: maybe he’s going to put us out of our misery. There are two ways for troubles to end.” He walked away as he spoke. As he passed under the window in the alley, its sash was thrown up and Mary leaned out on her elbows.

“John!”

“Well?”

They looked into each other’s eyes with the quiet pleasure of tried lovers, and were silent a moment. She leaned a little farther down, and said, softly:—

“You mustn’t mind what I said just now.”

“Why, what did you say?”

“That if it were I, I’d do it. I know you can do anything I can do, and a hundred better things besides.”

He lifted his hand to her cheek. “We’ll see,” he whispered. She drew in, and he moved on.

Morning passed. Noon came. From horizon to horizon the sky was one unbroken blue. The sun spread its bright, hot rays down upon the town and far beyond, ripening the distant, countless fields of the great delta, which by and by were to empty their abundance into the city’s lap for the employment, the nourishing, the clothing of thousands. But in the dusty streets, along the ill-kept fences and shadowless walls of the quiet districts, and on the glaring façades and heated pavements of the commercial quarters, it seemed only as though the slowly retreating summer struck with the fury of a wounded Amazon. Richling was soon dust-covered and weary. He had gone his round. There were not many men whom he could even propose to haunt. He had been to all of them. Dr. Sevier was not one. “Not to-day,” said Richling.

“It all depends on the way it’s done,” he said to himself; “it needn’t degrade a man if it’s done the right way.” It was only by such philosophy he had done it at all. Ristofalo he could have haunted without effort; but Ristofalo was not to be found. Richling tramped in vain. It may be that all plans were of equal merit just then. The summers of New Orleans in those times were, as to commerce, an utter torpor, and the autumn reawakening was very tardy. It was still too early for the stirrings of general mercantile life. The movement of the cotton crop was just beginning to be perceptible; but otherwise almost the only sounds were from the hammers of craftsmen making the town larger and preparing it for the activities of days to come.

The afternoon wore along. Not a cent yet to carry home! Men began to shut their idle shops and go to meet their wives and children about their comfortable dinner-tables. The sun dipped low. Hammers and saws were dropped into tool-boxes, and painters pulled themselves out of their overalls. The mechanic’s rank, hot supper began to smoke on its bare board; but there was one board that was still altogether bare and to which no one hastened. Another day and another chance of life were gone.

Some men at a warehouse door, the only opening in the building left unclosed, were hurrying in a few bags of shelled corn. Night was falling. At an earlier hour Richling had offered the labor of his hands at this very door and had been rejected. Now, as they rolled in the last truck-load, they began to ask for rest with all the gladness he would have felt to be offered toil, singing,—

“To blow, to blow, some time for to blow.”

They swung the great leaves of the door together as they finished their chorus, stood grouped outside a moment while the warehouseman turned the resounding

lock, and then went away. Richling, who had moved on, watched them over his shoulder, and as they left turned back. He was about to do what he had never done before. He went back to the door where the bags of grain had stood. A drunken sailor came swinging along. He stood still and let him pass; there must be no witnesses. The sailor turned the next corner. Neither up nor down nor across the street, nor at dust-begrimed, cobwebbed window, was there any sound or motion. Richling dropped quickly on one knee and gathered hastily into his pocket a little pile of shelled corn that had leaked from one of the bags.

That was all. No harm to a living soul; no theft; no wrong; but ah! as he rose he felt a sudden inward lesion. Something broke. It was like a ship, in a dream, noiselessly striking a rock where no rock is. It seemed as though the very next thing was to begin going to pieces. He walked off in the dark shadow of the warehouse, half lifted from his feet by a vague, wide dismay. And yet he felt no greatness of emotion, but rather a painful want of it, as if he were here and emotion were yonder, down-street, or up-street, or around the corner. The ground seemed slipping from under him. He appeared to have all at once melted away to nothing. He stopped. He even turned to go back. He felt that if he should go and put that corn down where he had found it he should feel himself once more a living thing of substance and emotions. Then it occurred to him—no, he would keep it, he would take it to Mary; but himself—he would not touch it; and so he went home.

Mary parched the corn, ground it fine in the coffee-mill and salted and served it close beside the candle. “It’s good white corn,” she said, laughing. “Many a time when I was a child I used to eat this in my playhouse and thought it delicious. Didn’t you? What! not going to eat?”

Richling had told her how he got the corn. Now he told his sensations. “You eat it, Mary,” he said at the end; “you needn’t feel so about it; but if I should eat it I should feel myself a vagabond. It may be foolish, but I wouldn’t touch it for a hundred dollars.” A hundred dollars had come to be his synonyme for infinity.

Mary gazed at him a moment tearfully, and rose, with the dish in her hand, saying, with a smile, “I’d look pretty, wouldn’t I!”

She set it aside, and came and kissed his forehead. By and by she asked:—

“And so you saw no work, anywhere?”

“Oh, yes!” he replied, in a tone almost free from dejection. “I saw any amount of work—preparations for a big season. I think I certainly shall pick up something to-morrow—enough, anyhow, to buy something to eat with. If we can only hold out a little longer—just a little—I am sure there’ll be plenty to do—for

everybody." Then he began to show distress again. "I could have got work to-day if I had been a carpenter, or if I'd been a joiner, or a slater, or a bricklayer, or a plasterer, or a painter, or a hod-carrier. Didn't I try that, and was refused?"

"I'm glad of it," said Mary.

"'Show me your hands,' said the man to me. I showed them. 'You won't do,' said he."

"I'm glad of it!" said Mary, again.

"No," continued Richling; "or if I'd been a glazier, or a whitewasher, or a wood-sawyer, or"—he began to smile in a hard, unpleasant way,—"or if I'd been anything but an American gentleman. But I wasn't, and I didn't get the work!"

Mary sank into his lap, with her very best smile.

"John, if you hadn't been an American gentleman"—

"We should never have met," said John. "That's true; that's true." They looked at each other, rejoicing in mutual ownership.

"But," said John, "I needn't have been the typical American gentleman,—completely unfitted for prosperity and totally unequipped for adversity."

"That's not your fault," said Mary.

"No, not entirely; but it's your calamity, Mary. O Mary! I little thought"—

She put her hand quickly upon his mouth. His eye flashed and he frowned.

"Don't do so!" he exclaimed, putting the hand away; then blushed for shame, and kissed her.

They went to bed. Bread would have put them to sleep. But after a long time—

"John," said one voice in the darkness, "do you remember what Dr. Sevier told us?"

"Yes, he said we had no right to commit suicide by starvation."

"If you don't get work to-morrow, are you going to see him?"

"I am."

In the morning they rose early.

During these hard days Mary was now and then conscious of one feeling which she never expressed, and was always a little more ashamed of than probably she

need have been, but which, stifle it as she would, kept recurring in moments of stress. Mrs. Riley—such was the thought—need not be quite so blind. It came to her as John once more took his good-by, the long kiss and the short one, and went breakfastless away. But was Mrs. Riley as blind as she seemed? She had vision enough to observe that the Richlings had bought no bread the day before, though she did overlook the fact that emptiness would set them astir before their usual hour of rising. She knocked at Mary's inner door. As it opened a quick glance showed the little table that occupied the centre of the room standing clean and idle.

"Why, Mrs. Riley!" cried Mary; for on one of Mrs. Riley's large hands there rested a blue-edged soup-plate, heaping full of the food that goes nearest to the Creole heart—*jambolaya*. There it was, steaming and smelling,—a delicious confusion of rice and red pepper, chicken legs, ham, and tomatoes. Mike, on her opposite arm, was struggling to lave his socks in it.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Riley, with a disappointed lift of the head, "ye're after eating breakfast already! And the plates all tleared off. Well, ye air smairt! I knowed Mr. Richlin's taste for jumbalie"—

Mary smote her hands together. "And he's just this instant gone! John! John! Why, he's hardly"— She vanished through the door, glided down the alley, leaned out the gate, looking this way and that, tripped down to this corner and looked—"Oh! oh!"—no John there—back and up to the other corner—"Oh! which way did John go?" There was none to answer.

Hours passed; the shadows shortened and shrunk under their objects, crawled around stealthily behind them as the sun swung through the south, and presently began to steal away eastward, long and slender. This was the day that Dr. Sevier dined out, as hereinbefore set forth.

The sun set. Carondelet street was deserted. You could hear your own footstep on its flags. In St. Charles street the drinking-saloons and gamblers' drawing-rooms, and the barber-shops, and the show-cases full of shirt-bosoms and walking-canes, were lighted up. The smell of lemons and mint grew finer than ever. Wide Canal street, out under the darkling crimson sky, was resplendent with countless many-colored lamps. From the river the air came softly, cool and sweet. The telescope man set up his skyward-pointing cylinder hard by the dark statue of Henry Clay; the confectioneries were ablaze and full of beautiful life, and every little while a great, empty cotton-dray or two went thundering homeward over the stony pavements until the earth shook, and speech for the moment was drowned. The St. Charles, such a glittering mass in winter nights, stood out high and dark under the summer stars, with no glow except just in its midst, in the rotunda; and even

the rotunda was well-nigh deserted The clerk at his counter saw a young man enter the great door opposite, and quietly marked him as he drew near.

Let us not draw the stranger's portrait. If that were a pleasant task the clerk would not have watched him. What caught and kept that functionary's eye was that, whatever else might be revealed by the stranger's aspect,—weariness, sickness, hardship, pain,—the confession was written all over him, on his face, on his garb, from his hat's crown to his shoe's sole, Penniless! Penniless! Only when he had come quite up to the counter the clerk did not see him at all.

"Is Dr. Sevier in?"

"Gone out to dine," said the clerk, looking over the inquirer's head as if occupied with all the world's affairs except the subject in hand.

"Do you know when he will be back?"

"Ten o'clock."

The visitor repeated the hour murmurously and looked something dismayed. He tarried.

"Hem!—I will leave my card, if you please."

The clerk shoved a little box of cards toward him, from which a pencil dangled by a string. The penniless wrote his name and handed it in. Then he moved away, went down the tortuous granite stair, and waited in the obscurity of the dimly lighted porch below. The card was to meet the contingency of the Doctor's coming in by some other entrance. He would watch for him here.

By and by—he was very weary—he sat down on the stairs. But a porter, with a huge trunk on his back, told him very distinctly that he was in the way there, and he rose and stood aside. Soon he looked for another resting-place. He must get off of his feet somewhere, if only for a few moments. He moved back into the deep gloom of the stair-way shadow, and sank down upon the pavement. In a moment he was fast asleep.

He dreamed that he, too, was dining out. Laughter and merry-making were on every side. The dishes of steaming viands were grotesque in bulk. There were mountains of fruit and torrents of wine. Strange people of no identity spoke in senseless vaporings that passed for side-splitting wit, and friends whom he had not seen since childhood appeared in ludicrously altered forms and announced impossible events. Every one ate like a Cossack. One of the party, champing like a boar, pushed him angrily, and when he, eating like the rest, would have turned fiercely on the aggressor, he awoke.

A man standing over him struck him smartly with his foot.

“Get up out o’ this! Get up! get up!”

The sleeper bounded to his feet. The man who had waked him grasped him by the lapel of his coat.

“What do you mean?” exclaimed the awakened man, throwing the other off violently.

“I’ll show you!” replied the other, returning with a rush; but he was thrown off again, this time with a blow of the fist.

“You scoundrel!” cried the penniless man, in a rage; “if you touch me again I’ll kill you!”

They leaped together. The one who had proposed to show what he meant was knocked flat upon the stones. The crowd that had run into the porch made room for him to fall. A leather helmet rolled from his head, and the silver crescent of the police flashed on his breast. The police were not uniformed in those days.

But he is up in an instant and his adversary is down—backward, on his elbows. Then the penniless man is up again; they close and struggle, the night-watchman’s club falls across his enemy’s head blow upon blow, while the sufferer grasps him desperately, with both hands, by the throat. They tug, they snuffle, they reel to and fro in the yielding crowd; the blows grow fainter, fainter; the grip is terrible; when suddenly there is a violent rupture of the crowd, it closes again, and then there are two against one, and up sparkling St. Charles street, the street of all streets for flagrant, unmolested, well-dressed crime, moves a sight so exhilarating that a score of street lads follow behind and a dozen trip along in front with frequent backward glances: two officers of justice walking in grim silence abreast, and between them a limp, torn, hatless, bloody figure, partly walking, partly lifted, partly dragged, past the theatres, past the lawyers’ rookeries of Commercial place, the tenpin alleys, the chop-houses, the bunko shows, and shooting-galleries, on, across Poydras street into the dim openness beyond, where glimmer the lamps of Lafayette square and the white marble of the municipal hall, and just on the farther side of this, with a sudden wheel to the right into Hevia street, a few strides there, a turn to the left, stumbling across a stone step and wooden sill into a narrow, lighted hall, and turning and entering an apartment here again at the right. The door is shut; the name is written down; the charge is made: Vagrancy, assaulting an officer, resisting arrest. An inner door is opened.

“What have you got in number nine?” asks the captain in charge.

“Chuck full,” replies the turnkey.

“Well, number seven?” These were the numbers of cells.

“The rats’ll eat him up in number seven.”

“How about number ten?”

“Two drunk-and-disorderlies, one petty larceny, and one embezzlement and breach of trust.”

“Put him in there.”

And this explains what the watchman in Marais street could not understand,—why Mary Richling’s window shone all night long.

CHAPTER XXVII.

OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN.

Round goes the wheel forever. Another sun rose up, not a moment hurried or belated by the myriads of life-and-death issues that cover the earth and wait in ecstasies of hope or dread the passage of time. Punctually at ten Justice-in-the-rough takes its seat in the Recorder’s Court, and a moment of silent preparation at the desks follows the loud announcement that its session has begun. The perky clerks and smirking pettifoggers move apart on tiptoe, those to their respective stations, these to their privileged seats facing the high dais. The lounging police slip down from their reclining attitudes on the heel-scraped and whittled window-sills. The hum of voices among the forlorn humanity that half fills the gradually rising, greasy benches behind, allotted to witnesses and prisoners’ friends, is hushed. In a little square, railed space, here at the left, the reporters tip their chairs against the hair-greased wall, and sharpen their pencils. A few tardy visitors, familiar with the place, tiptoe in through the grimy doors, ducking and winking, and softly lifting and placing their chairs, with a mock-timorous upward glance toward the long, ungainly personage who, under a faded and tattered crimson canopy, fills the august bench of magistracy with its high oaken back. On the right, behind a rude wooden paling that rises from the floor to the smoke-stained ceiling, are the peering, bloated faces of the night’s prisoners.

The recorder utters a name. The clerk down in front of him calls it aloud. A door in the palings opens, and one of the captives comes forth and stands before the rail. The arresting officer mounts to the witness-stand and confronts him. The oath is rattled and turned out like dice from a box, and the accusing testimony is heard. It may be that counsel rises and cross-examines, if there are witnesses for the defence. Strange and far-fetched questions, from beginners at the law or from old blunderers, provoke now laughter, and now the peremptory protestations of the court against the waste of time. Yet, in general, a few minutes suffices for the whole trial of a case.

"You are sure she picked the handsaw up by the handle, are you?" says the questioner, frowning with the importance of the point.

"Yes."

"And that she coughed as she did so?"

"Well, you see, she kind o'"—

"Yes, or no!"

"No."

"That's all." He waves the prisoner down with an air of mighty triumph, turns to the recorder, "trusts it is not necessary to," etc., and the accused passes this way or that, according to the fate decreed,—discharged, sentenced to fine and imprisonment, or committed for trial before the courts of the State.

"Order in court!" There is too much talking. Another comes and stands before the rail, and goes his way. Another, and another; now a ragged boy, now a half-sobered crone, now a battered ruffian, and now a painted girl of the street, and at length one who starts when his name is called, as though something had exploded.

"John Richling!"

He came.

"Stand there!"

Some one is in the witness-stand, speaking. The prisoner partly hears, but does not see. He stands and holds the rail, with his eyes fixed vacantly on the clerk, who bends over his desk under the seat of justice, writing. The lawyers notice him. His dress has been laboriously genteel, but is torn and soiled. A detective, with small eyes set close together, and a nose like a yacht's rudder, whisperingly calls the notice of one of these spectators who can see the prisoner's face to the

fact that, for all its thinness and bruises, it is not a bad one. All can see that the man's hair is fine and waving where it is not matted with blood.

The testifying officer had moved as if to leave the witness-stand, when the recorder restrained him by a gesture, and, leaning forward and looking down upon the prisoner, asked:—

"Have you anything to say to this?"

The prisoner lifted his eyes, bowed affirmatively, and spoke in a low, timid tone. "May I say a few words to you privately?"

"No."

He dropped his eyes, fumbled with the rail, and, looking up suddenly, said in a stronger voice, "I want somebody to go to my wife—in Prieur street. She is starving. This is the third day"—

"We're not talking about that," said the recorder. "Have you anything to say against this witness's statement?"

The prisoner looked upon the floor and slowly shook his head. "I never meant to break the law. I never expected to stand here. It's like an awful dream. Yesterday, at this time, I had no more idea of this—I didn't think I was so near it. It's like getting caught in machinery." He looked up at the recorder again. "I'm so confused"—he frowned and drew his hand slowly across his brow—"I can hardly—put my words together. I was hunting for work. There is no man in this city who wants to earn an honest living more than I do."

"What's your trade?"

"I have none."

"I supposed not. But you profess to have some occupation, I dare say. What's your occupation?"

"Accountant."

"Hum! you're all accountants. How long have you been out of employment?"

"Six months."

"Why did you go to sleep under those steps?"

"I didn't intend to go to sleep. I was waiting for a friend to come in who boards at the St. Charles."

A sudden laugh ran through the room. "Silence in court!" cried a deputy.

“Who is your friend?” asked the recorder.

The prisoner was silent.

“What is your friend’s name?”

Still the prisoner did not reply. One of the group of pettifoggers sitting behind him leaned forward, touched him on the shoulder, and murmured: “You’d better tell his name. It won’t hurt him, and it may help you.” The prisoner looked back at the man and shook his head.

“Did you strike this officer?” asked the recorder, touching the witness, who was resting on both elbows in the light arm-chair on the right.

The prisoner made a low response.

“I don’t hear you,” said the recorder.

“I struck him,” replied the prisoner; “I knocked him down.” The court officers below the dais smiled. “I woke and found him spurning me with his foot, and I resented it. I never expected to be a law-breaker. I”— He pressed his temples between his hands and was silent. The men of the law at his back exchanged glances of approval. The case was, to some extent, interesting.

“May it please the court,” said the man who had before addressed the prisoner over his shoulder, stepping out on the right and speaking very softly and graciously, “I ask that this man be discharged. His fault seems so much more to be accident than intention, and his suffering so much more than his fault”—

The recorder interrupted by a wave of the hand and a preconceived smile: “Why, according to the evidence, the prisoner was noisy and troublesome in his cell all night.”

“O sir,” exclaimed the prisoner, “I was thrown in with thieves and drunkards! It was unbearable in that hole. We were right on the damp and slimy bricks. The smell was dreadful. A woman in the cell opposite screamed the whole night. One of the men in the cell tried to take my coat from me, and I beat him!”

“It seems to me, your honor,” said the volunteer advocate, “the prisoner is still more sinned against than sinning. This is evidently his first offence, and”—

“Do you know even that?” asked the recorder.

“I do not believe his name can be found on any criminal record. I”—

The recorder interrupted once more. He leaned toward the prisoner.

“Did you ever go by any other name?”

The prisoner was dumb.

“Isn’t John Richling the only name you have ever gone by?” said his new friend: but the prisoner silently blushed to the roots of his hair and remained motionless.

“I think I shall have to send you to prison,” said the recorder, preparing to write. A low groan was the prisoner’s only response.

“May it please your honor,” began the lawyer, taking a step forward; but the recorder waved his pen impatiently.

“Why, the more is said the worse his case gets; he’s guilty of the offence charged, by his own confession.”

“I am guilty and not guilty,” said the prisoner slowly. “I never intended to be a criminal. I intended to be a good and useful member of society; but I’ve somehow got under its wheels. I’ve missed the whole secret of living.” He dropped his face into his hands. “O Mary, Mary! why are you my wife?” He beckoned to his counsel. “Come here; come here.” His manner was wild and nervous. “I want you—I want you to go to Prieur street, to my wife. You know—you know the place, don’t you? Prieur street. Ask for Mrs. Riley”—

“Richling,” said the lawyer.

“No, no! you ask for Mrs. Riley? Ask her—ask her—oh! where are my senses gone? Ask”—

“May it please the court,” said the lawyer, turning once more to the magistrate and drawing a limp handkerchief from the skirt of his dingy alpaca, with a reviving confidence, “I ask that the accused be discharged; he’s evidently insane.”

The prisoner looked rapidly from counsel to magistrate, and back again, saying, in a low voice, “Oh, no! not that! Oh, no! not that! not that!”

The recorder dropped his eyes upon a paper on the desk before him, and, beginning to write, said without looking up:—

“Parish Prison—to be examined for insanity.”

A cry of remonstrance broke so sharply from the prisoner that even the reporters in their corner checked their energetic streams of lead-pencil rhetoric and looked up.

“You cannot do that!” he exclaimed. “I am not insane! I’m not even confused now! It was only for a minute! I’m not even confused!”

An officer of the court laid his hand quickly and sternly upon his arm; but the recorder leaned forward and motioned him off. The prisoner darted a single flash of anger at the officer, and then met the eye of the justice.

“If I am a vagrant commit me for vagrancy! I expect no mercy here! I expect no justice! You punish me first, and try me afterward, and now you can punish me again; but you can’t do that!”

“Order in court! Sit down in those benches!” cried the deputies. The lawyers nodded darkly or blandly, each to each. The one who had volunteered his counsel wiped his bald Gothic brow. On the recorder’s lips an austere satire played as he said to the panting prisoner:—

“You are showing not only your sanity, but your contempt of court also.”

The prisoner’s eyes shot back a fierce light as he retorted:—

“I have no object in concealing either.”

The recorder answered with a quick, angry look; but, instantly restraining himself, dropped his glance upon his desk as before, began again to write, and said, with his eyes following his pen:—

“Parish Prison, for thirty days.”

The officer grasped the prisoner again and pointed him to the door in the palings whence he had come, and whither he now returned, without a word or note of distress.

Half an hour later the dark omnibus without windows, that went by the facetious name of the “Black Maria” received the convicted ones from the same street door by which they had been brought in out of the world the night before. The waifs and vagabonds of the town gleefully formed a line across the sidewalk from the station-house to the van, and counted with zest the abundant number of passengers that were ushered into it one by one. Heigh ho! In they went: all ages and sorts; both sexes; tried and untried, drunk and sober, new faces and old acquaintances; a man who had been counterfeiting, his wife who had been helping him, and their little girl of twelve, who had done nothing. Ho, ho! Bridget Fury! Ha, ha! Howling Lou! In they go: the passive, the violent, all kinds; filling the two benches against the sides, and then the standing room; crowding and packing, until the officer can shut the door only by throwing his weight against it.

“Officer,” said one, whose volunteer counsel had persuaded the reporters not to mention him by name in their thrilling account,—“officer,” said this one, trying

to pause an instant before the door of the vehicle, “is there no other possible way to”—

“Get in! get in!”

Two hands spread against his back did the rest; the door clapped to like the lid of a bursting trunk, the padlock rattled: away they went!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

“OH, WHERE IS MY LOVE?”

At the prison the scene is repeated in reverse, and the Black Maria presently rumbles away empty. In that building, whose exterior Narcisse found so picturesque, the vagrant at length finds food. In that question of food, by the way, another question arose, not as to any degree of criminality past or present, nor as to age, or sex, or race, or station; but as to the having or lacking fifty cents. “Four bits” a day was the open sesame to a department where one could have bedstead and ragged bedding and dirty mosquito-bar, a cell whose window looked down into the front street, food in variety, and a seat at table with the officers of the prison. But those who could not pay were conducted past all these delights, along one of several dark galleries, the turnkeys of which were themselves convicts, who, by a process of reasoning best understood among the harvesters of perquisites, were assumed to be undergoing sentence.

The vagrant stood at length before a grated iron gate while its bolts were thrown back and it growled on its hinges. What he saw within needs no minute description; it may be seen there still, any day: a large, flagged court, surrounded on three sides by two stories of cells with heavy, black, square doors all a-row and mostly open; about a hundred men sitting, lying, or lounging about in scanty rags,—some gaunt and feeble, some burly and alert, some scarred and maimed, some sallow, some red, some grizzled, some mere lads, some old and bowed,—the sentenced, the untried, men there for the first time, men who were oftener in than out,—burglars, smugglers, house-burners, highwaymen, wife-beaters, wharf-rats, common “drunks,” pickpockets, shop-lifters, stealers of bread, garroters, murderers,—in common equality and fraternity. In this resting and refreshing place for vice, this caucus for the projection of future crime, this ghastly burlesque of justice and the protection of society, there was a man who had been convicted of a dreadful murder a year or two before, and sentenced to twenty-one years’ labor in the State penitentiary. He had got his sentence

commuted to confinement in this prison for twenty-one years of idleness. The captain of the prison had made him "captain of the yard." Strength, ferocity, and a terrific record were the qualifications for this honorary office.

The gate opened. A howl of welcome came from those within, and the new batch, the vagrant among them, entered the yard. He passed, in his turn, to a tank of muddy water in this yard, washed away the soil and blood of the night, and so to the cell assigned him. He was lying face downward on its pavement, when a man with a cudgel ordered him to rise. The vagrant sprang to his feet and confronted the captain of the yard, a giant in breadth and stature, with no clothing but a ragged undershirt and pantaloons.

"Get a bucket and rag and scrub out this cell!"

He flourished his cudgel. The vagrant cast a quick glance at him, and answered quietly, but with burning face:—

"I'll die first."

A blow with the cudgel, a cry of rage, a clash together, a push, a sledge-hammer fist in the side, another on the head, a fall out into the yard, and the vagrant lay senseless on the flags.

When he opened his eyes again, and struggled to his feet, a gentle grasp was on his arm. Somebody was steadying him. He turned his eyes. Ah! who is this? A short, heavy, close-shaven man, with a woollen jacket thrown over one shoulder and its sleeves tied together in a knot under the other. He speaks in a low, kind tone:—

"Steady, Mr. Richling!"

Richling supported himself by a hand on the man's arm, gazed in bewilderment at the gentle eyes that met his, and with a slow gesture of astonishment murmured, "Ristofalo!" and dropped his head.

The Italian had just entered the prison from another station-house. With his hand still on Richling's shoulder, and Richling's on his, he caught the eye of the captain of the yard, who was striding quietly up and down near by, and gave him a nod to indicate that he would soon adjust everything to that autocrat's satisfaction. Richling, dazed and trembling, kept his eyes still on the ground, while Ristofalo moved with him slowly away from the squalid group that gazed after them. They went toward the Italian's cell.

"Why are you in prison?" asked the vagrant, feebly.

"Oh, nothin' much—witness in shootin' scrape—talk 'bout aft' while."

“O Ristofalo,” groaned Richling, as they entered, “my wife! my wife! Send some bread to my wife!”

“Lie down,” said the Italian, pressing softly on his shoulders; but Richling as quietly resisted.

“She is near here, Ristofalo. You can send with the greatest ease! You can do anything, Ristofalo,—if you only choose!”

“Lay down,” said the Italian again, and pressed more heavily. The vagrant sank limply to the pavement, his companion quickly untying the jacket sleeves from under his own arms and wadding the garment under Richling’s head.

“Do you know what I’m in here for, Ristofalo?” moaned Richling.

“Don’t know, don’t care. Yo’ wife know you here?” Richling shook his head on the jacket. The Italian asked her address, and Richling gave it.

“Goin’ tell her come and see you,” said the Italian. “Now, you lay still little while; I be back t’rectly.” He went out into the yard again, pushing the heavy door after him till it stood only slightly ajar, sauntered easily around till he caught sight of the captain of the yard, and was presently standing before him in the same immovable way in which he had stood before Richling in Tchoupitoulas street, on the day he had borrowed the dollar. Those who idly drew around could not hear his words, but the “captain’s” answers were intentionally audible. He shook his head in rejection of a proposal. “No, nobody but the prisoner himself should scrub out the cell. No, the Italian should not do it for him. The prisoner’s refusal and resistance had settled that question. No, the knocking down had not balanced accounts at all. There was more scrubbing to be done. It was scrubbing day. Others might scrub the yard and the galleries, but he should scrub out the tank. And there were other things, and worse,—menial services of the lowest kind. He should do them when the time came, and the Italian would have to help him too. Never mind about the law or the terms of his sentence. Those counted for nothing there.” Such was the sense of the decrees; the words were such as may be guessed or left unguessed. The scrubbing of the cell must commence at once. The vagrant must make up his mind to suffer. “He had served on jury!” said the man in the undershirt, with a final flourish of his stick. “He’s got to pay dear for it.”

When Ristofalo returned to his cell, its inmate, after many upstartings from terrible dreams, that seemed to guard the threshold of slumber, had fallen asleep. The Italian touched him gently, but he roused with a wild start and stare.

“Ristofalo,” he said, and fell a-staring again.

“You had some sleep,” said the Italian.

“It’s worse than being awake,” said Richling. He passed his hands across his face. “Has my wife been here?”

“No. Haven’t sent yet. Must watch good chance. Git captain yard in good-humor first, or else do on sly.” The cunning Italian saw that anything looking like early extrication would bring new fury upon Richling. He knew *all* the values of time. “Come,” he added, “must scrub out cell now.” He ignored the heat that kindled in Richling’s eyes, and added, smiling, “You don’t do it, I got to do it.”

With a little more of the like kindly guile, and some wise and simple reasoning, the Italian prevailed. Together, without objection from the captain of the yard, with many unavailing protests from Richling, who would now do it alone, and with Ristofalo smiling like a Chinaman at the obscene ribaldry of the spectators in the yard, they scrubbed the cell. Then came the tank. They had to stand in it with the water up to their knees, and rub its sides with brickbats. Richling fell down twice in the water, to the uproarious delight of the yard; but his companion helped him up, and they both agreed it was the sliminess of the tank’s bottom that was to blame.

“Soon we get through we goin’ to buy drink o’ whisky from jailer,” said Ristofalo; “he keep it for sale. Then, after that, kin hire somebody to go to your house; captain yard think we gittin’ mo’ whisky.”

“Hire?” said Richling. “I haven’t a cent in the world.”

“I got a little—few dimes,” rejoined the other.

“Then why are you here? Why are you in this part of the prison?”

“Oh, ’fraid to spend it. On’y got few dimes. Broke ag’in.”

Richling stopped still with astonishment, brickbat in hand. The Italian met his gaze with an illuminated smile. “Yes,” he said, “took all I had with me to bayou La Fourche. Coming back, slept with some men in boat. One git up in night-time and steal everything. Then was a big fight. Think that what fight was about—about dividing the money. Don’t know sure. One man git killed. Rest run into the swamp and prairie. Officer arrest me for witness. Couldn’t trust me to stay in the city.”

“Do you think the one who was killed was the thief?”

“Don’t know sure,” said the Italian, with the same sweet face, and falling to again with his brickbat,—“hope so!”

“Strange place to confine a witness!” said Richling, holding his hand to his bruised side and slowly straightening his back.

“Oh, yes, good place,” replied the other, scrubbing away; “git him, in short time, so he swear to anything.”

It was far on in the afternoon before the wary Ristofalo ventured to offer all he had in his pocket to a hanger-on of the prison office, to go first to Richling’s house, and then to an acquaintance of his own, with messages looking to the procuring of their release. The messenger chose to go first to Ristofalo’s friend, and afterward to Mrs. Riley’s. It was growing dark when he reached the latter place. Mary was out in the city somewhere, wandering about, aimless and distracted, in search of Richling. The messenger left word with Mrs. Riley. Richling had all along hoped that that good friend, doubtless acquainted with the most approved methods of finding a missing man, would direct Mary to the police station at the earliest practicable hour. But time had shown that she had not done so. No, indeed! Mrs. Riley counted herself too benevolently shrewd for that. While she had made Mary’s suspense of the night less frightful than it might have been, by surmises that Mr. Richling had found some form of night-work,—watching some pile of freight or some unfinished building,—she had come, secretly, to a different conviction, predicated on her own married experiences; and if Mr. Richling had, in a moment of gloom, tipped the bowl a little too high, as her dear lost husband, the best man that ever walked, had often done, and had been locked up at night to be let out in the morning, why, give him a chance! Let him invent his own little fault-hiding romance and come home with it. Mary was frantic. She could not be kept in; but Mrs. Riley, by prolonged effort, convinced her it was best not to call upon Dr. Sevier until she could be sure some disaster had actually occurred, and sent her among the fruiterers and oystermen in vain search for Raphael Ristofalo. Thus it was that the Doctor’s morning messenger to the Richlings, bearing word that if any one were sick he would call without delay, was met by Mrs. Riley only, and by the reassuring statement that both of them were out. The later messenger, from the two men in prison, brought back word of Mary’s absence from the house, of her physical welfare, and Mrs. Riley’s promise that Mary should visit the prison at the earliest hour possible. This would not be till the next morning.

While Mrs. Riley was sending this message, Mary, a great distance away, was emerging from the darkening and silent streets of the river front and moving with timid haste across the broad levee toward the edge of the water at the steam-boat landing. In this season of depleted streams and idle waiting, only an occasional boat lifted its lofty, black, double funnels against the sky here and there, leaving wide stretches of unoccupied wharf-front between. Mary hurried on, clear out to the great wharf’s edge, and looked forth upon the broad, softly moving harbor.

The low waters spread out and away, to and around the opposite point, in wide surfaces of glassy purples and wrinkled bronze. Beauty, that joy forever, is sometimes a terror. Was the end of her search somewhere underneath that fearful glory? She clasped her hands, bent down with dry, staring eyes, then turned again and fled homeward. She swerved once toward Dr. Sevier's quarters, but soon decided to see first if there were any tidings with Mrs. Riley, and so resumed her course. Night overtook her in streets where every footstep before or behind her made her tremble; but at length she crossed the threshold of Mrs. Riley's little parlor. Mrs. Riley was standing in the door, and retreated a step or two backward as Mary entered with a look of wild inquiry.

"Not come?" cried the wife.

"Mrs. Richlin'," said the widow, hurriedly, "yer husband's alive and found."

Mary seized her frantically by the shoulders, crying with high-pitched voice:—

"Where is he?—where is he?"

"Ya can't see um till marning, Mrs. Richlin'."

"Where is he?" cried Mary, louder than before.

"Me dear," said Mrs. Riley, "ye kin easy git him out in the marning."

"Mrs. Riley," said Mary, holding her with her eye, "is my husband in prison?—O Lord God! O God! my God!"

Mrs. Riley wept. She clasped the moaning, sobbing wife to her bosom, and with streaming eyes said:—

"Mrs. Richlin', me dear, Mrs. Richlin', me dear, what wad I give to have my husband this night where your husband is!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

RELEASE.—NARCISSE.

As some children were playing in the street before the Parish Prison next morning, they suddenly started and scampered toward the prison's black entrance. A physician's carriage had driven briskly up to it, ground its wheels against the curb-stone, and halted. If any fresh crumbs of horror were about to be dropped, the children must be there to feast on them. Dr. Sevier stepped out, gave

Mary his hand and then his arm, and went in with her. A question or two in the prison office, a reference to the rolls, and a turnkey led the way through a dark gallery lighted with dimly burning gas. The stench was suffocating. They stopped at the inner gate.

“Why didn’t you bring him to us?” asked the Doctor, scowling resentfully at the facetious drawings and legends on the walls, where the dampness glistened in the sickly light.

The keeper made a low reply as he shot the bolts.

“What?” quickly asked Mary.

“He’s not well,” said Dr. Sevier.

The gate swung open. They stepped into the yard and across it. The prisoners paused in a game of ball. Others, who were playing cards, merely glanced up and went on. The jailer pointed with his bunch of keys to a cell before him. Mary glided away from the Doctor and darted in. There was a cry and a wail.

The Doctor followed quickly. Ristofalo passed out as he entered. Richling lay on a rough gray blanket spread on the pavement with the Italian’s jacket under his head. Mary had thrown herself down beside him upon her knees, and their arms were around each other’s neck.

“Let me see, Mrs. Richling,” said the physician, touching her on the shoulder. She drew back. Richling lifted a hand in welcome. The Doctor pressed it.

“Mrs. Richling,” he said, as they faced each other, he on one knee, she on both. He gave her a few laconic directions for the sick man’s better comfort. “You must stay here, madam,” he said at length; “this man Ristofalo will be ample protection for you; and I will go at once and get your husband’s discharge.” He went out.

In the office he asked for a seat at a desk. As he finished using it he turned to the keeper and asked, with severe face:—

“What do you do with sick prisoners here, anyway?”

The keeper smiled.

“Why, if they gits right sick, the hospital wagon comes and takes ’em to the Charity Hospital.”

“Umhum!” replied the Doctor, unpleasantly,—“in the same wagon they use for a case of scarlet fever or small-pox, eh?”

The keeper, with a little resentment in his laugh, stated that he would be eternally lost if he knew.

"*I* know," remarked the Doctor. "But when a man is only a little sick,—according to your judgment,—like that one in there now, he is treated here, eh?"

The keeper swelled with a little official pride. His tone was boastful.

"We has a complete dispenisary in the prison," he said.

"Yes? Who's your druggist?" Dr. Sevier was in his worst inquisitorial mood.

"One of the prisoners," said the keeper.

The Doctor looked at him steadily. The man, in the blackness of his ignorance, was visibly proud of this bit of economy and convenience.

"How long has he held this position?" asked the physician.

"Oh, a right smart while. He was sentenced for murder, but he's waiting for a new trial."

"And he has full charge of all the drugs?" asked the Doctor, with a cheerful smile.

"Yes, sir." The keeper was flattered.

"Poisons and all, I suppose, eh?" pursued the Doctor.

"Everything."

The Doctor looked steadily and silently upon the officer, and tore and folded and tore again into small bits the prescription he had written. A moment later the door of his carriage shut with a smart clap and its wheels rattled away. There was a general laugh in the office, heavily spiced with maledictions.

"I say, Cap', what d'you reckon he'd 'a' said if he'd 'a' seen the women's department?"

In those days recorders had the power to release prisoners sentenced by them when in their judgment new information justified such action. Yet Dr. Sevier had a hard day's work to procure Richling's liberty. The sun was declining once more when a hack drove up to Mrs. Riley's door with John and Mary in it, and Mrs. Riley was restrained from laughing and crying only by the presence of the great

Dr. Sevier and a romantic Italian stranger by the captivating name of Ristofalo. Richling, with repeated avowals of his ability to walk alone, was helped into the house between these two illustrious visitors, Mary hurrying in ahead, and Mrs. Riley shutting the street door with some resentment of manner toward the staring children who gathered without. Was there anything surprising in the fact that eminent persons should call at her house?

When there was time for greetings she gave her hand to Dr. Sevier and asked him how he found himself. To Ristofalo she bowed majestically. She noticed that he was handsome and muscular.

At different hours the next day the same two visitors called. Also the second day after. And the third. And frequently afterward.

Ristofalo regained his financial feet almost, as one might say, at a single hand-spring. He amused Mary and John and Mrs. Riley almost beyond limit with his simple story of how he did it.

“Ye’d better hurry and be getting up out o’ that sick bed, Mr. Richlin’,” said the widow, in Ristofalo’s absence, “or that I-talian rascal’ll be making himself entirely too agree’ble to yer lady here. Ha! ha! It’s *she* that he’s a-comin’ here to see.”

Mrs. Riley laughed again, and pointed at Mary and tossed her head, not knowing that Mary went through it all over again as soon as Mrs. Riley was out of the room, to the immense delight of John.

“And now, madam,” said Dr. Sevier to Mary, by and by, “let it be understood once more that even independence may be carried to a vicious extreme, and that”—he turned to Richling, by whose bed he stood—“you and your wife will not do it again. You’ve had a narrow escape. Is it understood?”

“We’ll try to be moderate,” replied the invalid, playfully.

“I don’t believe you,” said the Doctor.

And his scepticism was wise. He continued to watch them, and at length enjoyed the sight of John up and out again with color in his cheeks and the old courage—nay, a new and a better courage—in his eyes.

Said the Doctor on his last visit, “Take good care of your husband, my child.” He held the little wife’s hand a moment, and gazed out of Mrs. Riley’s front door

upon the western sky. Then he transferred his gaze to John, who stood, with his knee in a chair, just behind her. He looked at the convalescent with solemn steadfastness. The husband smiled broadly.

“I know what you mean. I’ll try to deserve her.”

The Doctor looked again into the west.

“Good-by.”

Mary tried playfully to retort, but John restrained her, and when she contrived to utter something absurdly complimentary of her husband he was her only hearer.

They went back into the house, talking of other matters. Something turned the conversation upon Mrs. Riley, and from that subject it seemed to pass naturally to Ristofalo. Mary, laughing and talking softly as they entered their room, called to John’s recollection the Italian’s account of how he had once bought a tarpaulin hat and a cottonade shirt of the pattern called a “jumper,” and had worked as a deck-hand in loading and unloading steam-boats. It was so amusingly sensible to put on the proper badge for the kind of work sought. Richling mused. Many a dollar he might have earned the past summer, had he been as ingeniously wise, he thought.

“Ristofalo is coming here this evening,” said he, taking a seat in the alley window.

Mary looked at him with sidelong merriment. The Italian was coming to see Mrs. Riley.

“Why, John,” whispered Mary, standing beside him, “she’s nearly ten years older than he is!”

But John quoted the old saying about a man’s age being what he feels, and a woman’s what she looks.

“Why,—but—dear, it is scarcely a fortnight since she declared nothing could ever induce”—

“Let her alone,” said John, indulgently. “Hasn’t she said half-a-dozen times that it isn’t good for woman to be alone? A widow’s a woman—and you never disputed it.”

“O John,” laughed Mary, “for shame! You know I didn’t mean that. You know I never could mean that.”

And when John would have maintained his ground she besought him not to jest in that direction, with eyes so ready for tears that he desisted.

“I only meant to be generous to Mrs. Riley,” he said.

“I know it,” said Mary, caressingly; “you’re always on the generous side of everything.”

She rested her hand fondly on his arm, and he took it into his own.

One evening the pair were out for that sunset walk which their young blood so relished, and which often led them, as it did this time, across the wide, open commons behind the town, where the unsettled streets were turf-grown, and toppling wooden lamp-posts threatened to fall into the wide, cattle-trodden ditches.

“Fall is coming,” said Mary.

“Let it come!” exclaimed John; “it’s hung back long enough.”

He looked about with pleasure. On every hand the advancing season was giving promise of heightened activity. The dark, plumy foliage of the china trees was getting a golden edge. The burnished green of the great magnolias was spotted brilliantly with hundreds of bursting cones, red with their pendent seeds. Here and there, as the sauntering pair came again into the region of brick sidewalks, a falling cone would now and then scatter its polished coral over the pavement, to be gathered by little girls for necklaces, or bruised under foot, staining the walk with its fragrant oil. The ligustrums bent low under the dragging weight of their small clustered berries. The oranges were turning. In the wet, choked ditches along the interruptions of pavement, where John followed Mary on narrow plank footways, bloomed thousands of little unrenowned asteroid flowers, blue and yellow, and the small, pink spikes of the water pepper. It wasn’t the fashionable habit in those days, but Mary had John gather big bunches of this pretty floral mob, and filled her room with them—not Mrs. Riley’s parlor—whoop, no! Weeds? Not if Mrs. Riley knew herself.

So ran time apace. The morning skies were gray monotones, and the evening gorgeous reds. The birds had finished their summer singing. Sometimes the alert chirp of the cardinal suddenly smote the ear from some neighboring tree; but he would pass, a flash of crimson, from one garden to the next, and with another chirp or two be gone for days. The nervy, unmusical waking cry of the mocking-bird was often the first daybreak sound. At times a myriad downy seed floated everywhere, now softly upward, now gently downward, and the mellow rays of sunset turned it into a warm, golden snow-fall. By night a soft glow from distant burning prairies showed the hunters were afield; the call of unseen wild fowl was heard overhead, and—finer to the waiting poor man’s ear than all other sounds—came at regular intervals, now from this quarter and now from that, the heavy,

rushing blast of the cotton compress, telling that the flood tide of commerce was setting in.

Narcisse surprised the Richlings one evening with a call. They tried very hard to be reserved, but they were too young for that task to be easy. The Creole had evidently come with his mind made up to take unresentfully and override all the unfriendliness they might choose to show. His conversation never ceased, but flitted from subject to subject with the swift waywardness of a humming-bird. It was remarked by Mary, leaning back in one end of Mrs. Riley's little sofa, that "summer dresses were disappearing, but that the girls looked just as sweet in their darker colors as they had appeared in midsummer white. Had Narcisse noticed? Probably he didn't care for"—

"Ho! I notiz them an' they notiz me! An' thass one thing I 'ave notiz about young ladies: they ah juz like those bird'; in summeh lookin' cool, in winteh waum. I 'ave notiz that. An' I've notiz anotheh thing which make them juz like those bird'. They halways know if a man is lookin', an' they halways make like they don't see 'im! I would like to 'ite an i'ony about that—a lill i'ony—in the he'oic measuh. You like that he'oic measuh, Mizzez Witchlin'?"

As he rose to go he rolled a cigarette, and folded the end in with the long nail of his little finger.

"Mizzez Witchlin', if you will allow me to light my ciga'ette fum yo' lamp—I can't use my sun-glass at night, because the sun is nod theh. But, the sun shining, I use it. I 'ave adop' that method since lately."

"You borrow the sun's rays," said Mary, with wicked sweetness.

"Yes; 'tis cheapeh than matches in the longue 'un."

"You have discovered that, I suppose," remarked John.

"Me? The sun-glass? No. I believe Ahchimides invend that, in fact. An' yet, out of ten thousan' who use the sun-glass only a few can account 'ow tis done. 'Ow did you think that that's my invention, Mistoo Itchlin? Did you know that I am something of a chimist? I can tu'n litmus papeh 'ed by juz dipping it in SO_3HO. Yesseh."

"Yes," said Richling, "that's one thing that I have noticed, that you're very fertile in devices."

"Yes," echoed Mary, "I noticed that, the first time you ever came to see us. I only wish Mr. Richling was half as much so."

She beamed upon her husband. Narcisse laughed with pure pleasure.

“Well, I am compel’ to say you ah co’ect. I am continually makin’ some discove’ies. ‘Necessity’s the motheh of inventions.’ Now thass anotheh thing I ’ave notiz—about that month of Octobeh: it always come befo’ you think it’s comin’. I ’ave notiz that about eve’y month. Now, to-day we ah the twennieth Octobeh! Is it not so?” He lighted his cigarette. “You ah compel’ to co’obo’ate me.”

CHAPTER XXX.

LIGHTING SHIP.

Yes, the tide was coming in. The Richlings’ bark was still on the sands, but every now and then a wave of promise glided under her. She might float, now, any day. Meantime, as has no doubt been guessed, she was held on an even keel by loans from the Doctor.

“Why you don’t advertise in papers?” asked Ristofalo.

“Advertise? Oh, I didn’t think it would be of any use. I advertised a whole week, last summer.”

“You put advertisement in wrong time and keep it out wrong time,” said the Italian.

“I have a place in prospect, now, without advertising,” said Richling, with an elated look.

It was just here that a new mistake of Richling’s emerged. He had come into contact with two or three men of that wretched sort that indulge the strange vanity of keeping others waiting upon them by promises of employment. He believed them, liked them heartily because they said nothing about references, and gratefully distended himself with their husks, until Ristofalo opened his eyes by saying, when one of these men had disappointed Richling the third time:—

“Business man don’t promise but once.”

“You lookin’ for book-keeper’s place?” asked the Italian at another time. “Why don’t dress like a book-keeper?”

“On borrowed money?” asked Richling, evidently looking upon that question as a poser.

"Yes."

"Oh, no," said Richling, with a smile of superiority; but the other one smiled too, and shook his head.

"Borrow mo', if you don't."

Richling's heart flinched at the word. He had thought he was giving his true reason; but he was not. A foolish notion had floated, like a grain of dust, into the over-delicate wheels of his thought,—that men would employ him the more readily if he looked needy. His hat was unbrushed, his shoes unpolished; he had let his beard come out, thin and untrimmed; his necktie was faded. He looked battered. When the Italian's gentle warning showed him this additional mistake on top of all his others he was dismayed at himself; and when he sat down in his room and counted the cost of an accountant's uniform, so to speak, the remains of Dr. Sevier's last loan to him was too small for it. Thereupon he committed one error more,—but it was the last. He sunk his standard, and began again to look for service among industries that could offer employment only to manual labor. He crossed the river and stirred about among the dry-docks and ship-carpenters' yards of the suburb Algiers. But he could neither hew spars, nor paint, nor splice ropes. He watched a man half a day calking a boat; then he offered himself for the same work, did it fairly, and earned half a day's wages. But then the boat was done, and there was no other calking at the moment along the whole harbor front, except some that was being done on a ship by her own sailors.

"John," said Mary, dropping into her lap the sewing that hardly paid for her candle, "isn't it hard to realize that it isn't twelve months since your hardships commenced? They *can't* last much longer, darling."

"I know that," said John. "And I know I'll find a place presently, and then we'll wake up to the fact that this was actually less than a year of trouble in a lifetime of love."

"Yes," rejoined Mary, "I know your patience will be rewarded."

"But what I want is work now, Mary. The bread of idleness is getting *too* bitter. But never mind; I'm going to work to-morrow;—never mind where. It's all right. You'll see."

She smiled, and looked into his eyes again with a confession of unreserved trust. The next day he reached the—what shall we say?—big end of his last mistake. What it was came out a few mornings after, when he called at Number 5 Carondelet street.

“The Doctah is not in pwesently,” said Narcisse. “He ve’y hawdly comes in so soon as that. He’s living home again, once mo’, now. He’s ve’y un’estless. I tole ’im yistiddy, ‘Doctah, I know juz ’ow you feel, seh; ’tis the same way with myseff. You ought to git ma’ied!’”

“Did he say he would?” asked Richling.

“Well, you know, Mistoo Itchlin, so the povvub says, ‘Silent give consense.’ He juz look at me—nevvah said a word—ha! he couldn’! You not lookin’ ve’y well, Mistoo Itchlin. I suppose ’tis that waum weatheh.”

“I suppose it is; at least, partly,” said Richling, and added nothing more, but looked along and across the ceiling, and down at a skeleton in a corner, that was offering to shake hands with him. He was at a loss how to talk to Narcisse. Both Mary and he had grown a little ashamed of their covert sarcasms, and yet to leave them out was bread without yeast, meat without salt, as far as their own powers of speech were concerned.

“I thought, the other day,” he began again, with an effort, “when it blew up cool, that the warm weather was over.”

“It seem to be finishin’ ad the end, I think,” responded the Creole. “I think, like you, that we ’ave ’ad too waum weatheh. Me, I like that weatheh to be cole, me. I halways weigh the mose in cole weatheh. I gain flesh, in fact. But so soon ’tis summeh somethin’ become of it. I dunno if ’tis the fault of my close, but I reduct in summeh. Speakin’ of close, Mistoo Itchlin,—egscuse me if ’tis a fair question,—w’at was yo’ objec’ in buyin’ that tawpaulin hat an’ jacket lass week ad that sto’ on the levee? You din know I saw you, but I juz ’appen to see you, in fact.” (The color rose in Richling’s face, and Narcisse pressed on without allowing an answer.) “Well, thass none o’ my biziness, of co’se, but I think you lookin’ ve’y bad, Mistoo Itchlin”— He stopped very short and stepped with dignified alacrity to his desk, for Dr. Sevier’s step was on the stair.

The Doctor shook hands with Richling and sank into the chair at his desk. “Anything turned up yet, Richling?”

“Doctor,” began Richling, drawing his chair near and speaking low.

“Good-mawnin’, Doctah,” said Narcisse, showing himself with a graceful flourish.

The Doctor nodded, then turned again to Richling. “You were saying”—

“I ’ope you well, seh,” insisted the Creole, and as the Doctor glanced toward him impatiently, repeated the sentiment, “’Ope you well, seh.”

The Doctor said he was, and turned once more to Richling. Narcisse bowed away backward and went to his desk, filled to the eyes with fierce satisfaction. He had made himself felt. Richling drew his chair nearer and spoke low:—

"If I don't get work within a day or two I shall have to come to you for money."

"That's all right, Richling." The Doctor spoke aloud; Richling answered low.

"Oh, no, Doctor, it's all wrong! Indeed, I can't do it any more unless you will let me earn the money."

"My dear sir, I would most gladly do it; but I have nothing that you can do."

"Yes, you have, Doctor."

"What is it?"

"Why, it's this: you have a slave boy driving your carriage."

"Well?"

"Give him some other work, and let me do that."

Dr. Sevier started in his seat. "Richling, I can't do that. I should ruin you. If you drive my carriage"—

"Just for a time, Doctor, till I find something else."

"No! no! If you drive my carriage in New Orleans you'll never do anything else."

"Why, Doctor, there are men standing in the front ranks to-day, who"—

"Yes, yes," replied the Doctor, impatiently, "I know,—who began with menial labor; but—I can't explain it to you, Richling, but you're not of the same sort; that's all. I say it without praise or blame; you must have work adapted to your abilities."

"My abilities!" softly echoed Richling. Tears sprang to his eyes. He held out his open palms,—"Doctor, look there." They were lacerated. He started to rise, but the Doctor prevented him.

"Let me go," said Richling, pleadingly, and with averted face. "Let me go. I'm sorry I showed them. It was mean and foolish and weak. Let me go."

But Dr. Sevier kept a hand on him, and he did not resist. The Doctor took one of the hands and examined it. "Why, Richling, you've been handling freight!"

"There was nothing else."

“Oh, bah!”

“Let me go,” whispered Richling. But the Doctor held him.

“You didn’t do this on the steam-boat landing, did you, Richling?”

The young man nodded. The Doctor dropped the hand and looked upon its owner with set lips and steady severity. When he spoke he said:—

“Among the negro and green Irish deck-hands, and under the oaths and blows of steam-boat mates! Why, Richling!” He turned half away in his rotary chair with an air of patience worn out.

“You thought I had more sense,” said Richling.

The Doctor put his elbows upon his desk and slowly drew his face upward through his hands. “Mr. Richling, what is the matter with you?” They gazed at each other a long moment, and then Dr. Sevier continued: “Your trouble isn’t want of sense. I know that very well, Richling.” His voice was low and became kind. “But you don’t get the use of the sense you have. It isn’t available.” He bent forward: “Some men, Richling, carry their folly on the surface and their good sense at the bottom,”—he jerked his thumb backward toward the distant Narcisse, and added, with a stealthy frown,—“like that little fool in yonder. He’s got plenty of sense, but he doesn’t load any of it on deck. Some men carry their sense on top and their folly down below”—

Richling smiled broadly through his dejection, and touched his own chest. “Like this big fool here,” he said.

“Exactly,” said Dr. Sevier. “Now you’ve developed a defect of the memory. Your few merchantable qualities have been so long out of the market, and you’ve suffered such humiliation under the pressure of adversity, that you’ve—you’ve done a very bad thing.”

“Say a dozen,” responded Richling, with bitter humor. But the Doctor swung his head in resentment of the levity.

“One’s enough. You’ve allowed yourself to forget your true value.”

“I’m worth whatever I’ll bring.”

The Doctor tossed his head in impatient disdain.

“Pshaw! You’ll never bring what you’re worth any more than some men are worth what they bring. You don’t know how. You never will know.”

“Well, Doctor, I do know that I’m worth more than I ever was before. I’ve learned a thousand things in the last twelvemonth. If I can only get a chance to prove it!” Richling turned red and struck his knee with his fist.

“Oh, yes,” said Dr. Sevier; “that’s your sense, on top. And then you go—in a fit of the merest impatience, as I do suspect—and offer yourself as a deck-hand and as a carriage-driver. That’s your folly, at the bottom. What ought to be done to such a man?” He gave a low, harsh laugh. Richling dropped his eyes. A silence followed.

“You say all you want is a chance,” resumed the Doctor.

“Yes,” quickly answered Richling, looking up.

“I’m going to give it to you.” They looked into each other’s eyes. The Doctor nodded. “Yes, sir.” He nodded again.

“Where did you come from, Richling,—when you came to New Orleans,—you and your wife? Milwaukee?”

“Yes.”

“Do your relatives know of your present condition?”

“No.”

“Is your wife’s mother comfortably situated?”

“Yes.”

“Then I’ll tell you what you must do.”

“The only thing I can’t do,” said Richling.

“Yes, you can. You must. You must send Mrs. Richling back to her mother.”

Richling shook his head.

“Well,” said the Doctor, warmly, “I say you must. I will lend you the passage-money.”

Richling’s eye kindled an instant at the Doctor’s compulsory tone, but he said, gently:—

“Why, Doctor, Mary will never consent to leave me.”

“Of course she will not. But you must make her do it! That’s what you must do. And when that’s done then you must start out and go systematically from door to door,—of business houses, I mean,—offering yourself for work befitting your

station—ahem!—station, I say—and qualifications. I will lend you money to live on until you find permanent employment. Now, now, don't get alarmed! I'm not going to help you any more than I absolutely must!"

"But, Doctor, how can you expect"— But the Doctor interrupted.

"Come, now, none of that! You and your wife are brave; I must say that for you. She has the courage of a gladiator. You can do this if you will."

"Doctor," said Richling, "you are the best of friends; but, you know, the fact is, Mary and I—well, we're still lovers."

"Oh!" The Doctor turned away his head with fresh impatience. Richling bit his lip, but went on:—

"We can bear anything on earth together; but we have sworn to stay together through better and worse"—

"Oh, pf-f-f-f!" said the doctor, closing his eyes and swinging his head away again.

"—And we're going to do it," concluded Richling.

"But you can't do it!" cried the Doctor, so loudly that Narcisse stood up on the rungs of his stool and peered.

"We can't separate."

Dr. Sevier smote the desk and sprang to his feet:—

"Sir, you've got to do it! If you continue in this way, you'll die. You'll die, Mr. Richling—both of you! You'll die! Are you going to let Mary die just because she's brave enough to do it?" He sat down again and busied himself, nervously placing pens on the pen-rack, the stopper in the inkstand, and the like.

Many thoughts ran through Richling's mind in the ensuing silence. His eyes were on the floor. Visions of parting; of the great emptiness that would be left behind; the pangs and yearnings that must follow,—crowded one upon another. One torturing realization kept ever in the front,—that the Doctor had a well-earned right to advise, and that, if his advice was to be rejected, one must show good and sufficient cause for rejecting it, both in present resources and in expectations. The truth leaped upon him and bore him down as it never had done before,—the truth which he had heard this very Dr. Sevier proclaim,—that debt is bondage. For a moment he rebelled against it; but shame soon displaced mutiny, and he accepted this part, also, of his lot. At length he rose.

"Well?" said Dr. Sevier.

“May I ask Mary?”

“You will do what you please, Mr. Richling.” And then, in a kinder voice, the Doctor added, “Yes; ask her.”

They moved together to the office door. The Doctor opened it, and they said good-by, Richling trying to drop a word of gratitude, and the Doctor hurriedly ignoring it.

The next half hour or more was spent by the physician in receiving, hearing, and dismissing patients and their messengers. By and by no others came. The only audible sound was that of the Doctor’s paper-knife as it parted the leaves of a pamphlet. He was thinking over the late interview with Richling, and knew that, if this silence were not soon interrupted from without, he would have to encounter his book-keeper, who had not spoken since Richling had left. Presently the issue came.

“Dr. Seveeah,”—Narcisse came forward, hat in hand,—“I dunno ’ow ’tis, but Mistoo Itchlin always wemine me of that povvub, ‘Ully to bed, ully to ’ise, make a pusson to be ’ealthy an’ wealthy an’ wise.’”

“I don’t know how it is, either,” grumbled the Doctor.

“I believe thass not the povvub I was thinking. I am acquainting myseff with those povvubs; but I’m somewhat gween in that light, in fact. Well, Doctah, I’m goin’ ad the—shoemakeh. I burs’ my shoe yistiddy. I was juz”—

“Very well, go.”

“Yesseh; and from the shoemakeh I’ll go”—

The Doctor glanced darkly over the top of the pamphlet.

“—Ad the bank; yesseh,” said Narcisse, and went.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AT LAST.

Mary, cooking supper, uttered a soft exclamation of pleasure and relief as she heard John’s step under the alley window and then at the door. She turned, with an iron spoon in one hand and a candlestick in the other, from the little old stove with two pot-holes, where she had been stirring some mess in a tin pan.

“Why, you’re”—she reached for a kiss—“real late!”

“I could not come any sooner.” He dropped into a chair at the table.

“Busy?”

“No; no work to-day.”

Mary lifted the pan from the stove, whisked it to the table, and blew her fingers.

“Same subject continued,” she said laughingly, pointing with her spoon to the warmed-over food.

Richling smiled and nodded, and then flattened his elbows out on the table and hid his face in them.

This was the first time he had ever lingered away from his wife when he need not have done so. It was the Doctor’s proposition that had kept him back. All day long it had filled his thoughts. He felt its wisdom. Its sheer practical value had pierced remorselessly into the deepest convictions of his mind. But his heart could not receive it.

“Well,” said Mary, brightly, as she sat down at the table, “maybe you’ll have better luck to-morrow. Don’t you think you may?”

“I don’t know,” said John, straightening up and tossing back his hair. He pushed a plate up to the pan, supplied and passed it. Then he helped himself and fell to eating.

“Have you seen Dr. Sevier to-day?” asked Mary, cautiously, seeing her husband pause and fall into distraction.

He pushed his plate away and rose. She met him in the middle of the room. He extended both hands, took hers, and gazed upon her. How could he tell? Would she cry and lament, and spurn the proposition, and fall upon him with a hundred kisses? Ah, if she would! But he saw that Doctor Sevier, at least, was confident she would not; that she would have, instead, what the wife so often has in such cases, the strongest love, it may be, but also the strongest wisdom for that particular sort of issue. Which would she do? Would she go, or would she not?

He tried to withdraw his hands, but she looked beseechingly into his eyes and knit her fingers into his. The question stuck upon his lips and would not be uttered. And why should it be? Was it not cowardice to leave the decision to her? Should not he decide? Oh! if she would only rebel! But would she? Would not her utmost be to give good reasons in her gentle, inquiring way why he should

not require her to leave him? And were there any such? No! no! He had racked his brain to find so much as one, all day long.

“John,” said Mary, “Dr. Sevier’s been talking to you?”

“Yes.”

“And he wants you to send me back home for a while?”

“How do you know?” asked John, with a start.

“I can read it in your face.” She loosed one hand and laid it upon his brow.

“What—what do you think about it, Mary?”

Mary, looking into his eyes with the face of one who pleads for mercy, whispered, “He’s right,” then buried her face in his bosom and wept like a babe.

“I felt it six months ago,” she said later, sitting on her husband’s knee and holding his folded hands tightly in hers.

“Why didn’t you say so?” asked John.

“I was too selfish,” was her reply.

When, on the second day afterward, they entered the Doctor’s office Richling was bright with that new hope which always rises up beside a new experiment, and Mary looked well and happy. The Doctor wrote them a letter of introduction to the steam-boat agent.

“You’re taking a very sensible course,” he said, smoothing the blotting-paper heavily over the letter. “Of course, you think it’s hard. It is hard. But distance needn’t separate you.”

“It can’t,” said Richling.

“Time,” continued the Doctor,—“maybe a few months,—will bring you together again, prepared for a long life of secure union; and then, when you look back upon this, you’ll be proud of your courage and good sense. And you’ll be”— He enclosed the note, directed the envelope, and, pausing with it still in his hand, turned toward the pair. They rose up. His rare, sick-room smile hovered about his mouth, and he said:—

“You’ll be all the happier—all three of you.”

The husband smiled. Mary colored down to the throat and looked up on the wall, where Harvey was explaining to his king the circulation of the blood. There was quite a pause, neither side caring to utter the first adieu.

“If a physician could call any hour his own,” presently said the Doctor, “I should say I would come down to the boat and see you off. But I might fail in that. Good-by!”

“Good-by, Doctor!”—a little tremor in the voice,—“take care of John.”

The tall man looked down into the upturned blue eyes.

“Good-by!” He stooped toward her forehead, but she lifted her lips and he kissed them. So they parted.

The farewell with Mrs. Riley was mainly characterized by a generous and sincere exchange of compliments and promises of remembrance. Some tears rose up; a few ran over.

At the steam-boat wharf there were only the pair themselves to cling one moment to each other and then wave that mute farewell that looks through watery eyes and sticks in the choking throat. Who ever knows what good-by means?

“Doctor,” said Richling, when he came to accept those terms in the Doctor’s proposition which applied more exclusively to himself,—“no, Doctor, not that way, please.” He put aside the money proffered him. “This is what I want to do: I will come to your house every morning and get enough to eat to sustain me through the day, and will continue to do so till I find work.”

“Very well,” said the Doctor.

The arrangement went into effect. They never met at dinner; but almost every morning the Doctor, going into the breakfast-room, met Richling just risen from his earlier and hastier meal.

“Well? Anything yet?”

“Nothing yet.”

And, unless there was some word from Mary, nothing more would be said. So went the month of November.

But at length, one day toward the close of the Doctor’s office hours, he noticed the sound of an agile foot springing up his stairs three steps at a stride, and Richling entered, panting and radiant.

“Doctor, at last! At last!”

“At last, what?”

“I’ve found employment! I have, indeed! One line from you, and the place is mine! A good place, Doctor, and one that I can fill. The very thing for me! Adapted to my abilities!” He laughed so that he coughed, was still, and laughed again. “Just a line, if you please, Doctor.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

A RISING STAR.

It had been many a day since Dr. Sevier had felt such pleasure as thrilled him when Richling, half beside himself with delight, ran in upon him with the news that he had found employment. Narcisse, too, was glad. He slipped down from his stool and came near enough to contribute his congratulatory smiles, though he did not venture to speak. Richling nodded him a happy how-d’ye-do, and the Creole replied by a wave of the hand.

In the Doctor’s manner, on the other hand, there was a decided lack of response that made Richling check his spirits and resume more slowly,—

“Do you know a man named Reisen?”

“No,” said the Doctor.

“Why, he says he knows you.”

“That may be.”

“He says you treated his wife one night when she was very ill”—

“What name?”

“Reisen.”

The Doctor reflected a moment.

“I believe I recollect him. Is he away up on Benjamin street, close to the river, among the cotton-presses?”

“Yes. Thalia street they call it now. He says”—

“Does he keep a large bakery?” interrupted the Doctor.

“The ‘Star Bakery,’” said Richling, brightening again. “He says he knows you, and that, if you will give me just one line of recommendation, he will put me in charge of his accounts and give me a trial. And a trial’s all I want, Doctor. I’m not the least fearful of the result.”

“Richling,” said Dr. Sevier, slowly picking up his paper-folder and shaking it argumentatively, “where are the letters I advised you to send for?”

Richling sat perfectly still, taking a long, slow breath through his nostrils, his eyes fixed emptily on his questioner. He was thinking, away down at the bottom of his heart,—and the Doctor knew it,—that this was the unkindest question, and the most cold-blooded, that he had ever heard. The Doctor shook his paper-folder again.

“You see, now, as to the bare fact, I don’t know you.”

Richling’s jaw dropped with astonishment. His eye lighted up resentfully. But the speaker went on:—

“I esteem you highly. I believe in you. I would trust you, Richling,”—his listener remembered how the speaker *had* trusted him, and was melted,—“but as to recommending you, why, that is like going upon the witness-stand, as it were, and I cannot say that I know anything.”

Richling’s face suddenly flashed full of light. He touched the Doctor’s hand.

“That’s it! That’s the very thing, sir! Write that!”

The Doctor hesitated. Richling sat gazing at him, afraid to move an eye lest he should lose an advantage. The Doctor turned to his desk and wrote.

On the next morning Richling did not come for his breakfast; and, not many days after, Dr. Sevier received through the mail the following letter:—

ANS, December 2, 1857.

DEAR DOCTOR,—I've got the place. I'm Reisen's book-keeper. I'm earning my living. And I like the work. Bread, the word bread, that has so long been terrible to me, is now the sweetest word in the language. For eighteen months it was a prayer; now it's a proclamation.

I've not only got the place, but I'm going to keep it. I find I have new powers; and the first and best of them is the power to throw myself into my work and make it *me*. It's not a task; it's a mission. Its being bread, I suppose, makes it easier to seem so; but it should be so if it was pork and garlic, or rags and raw-hides.

My maxim a year ago, though I didn't know it then, was to do what I liked. Now it's to like what I do. I understand it now. And I understand now, too, that a man who expects to retain employment must yield a profit. He must be worth more than he costs. I thank God for the discipline of the last year and a half. I thank him that I did not fall where, in my cowardice, I so often prayed to fall, into the hands of foolish benefactors. You wouldn't believe this of me, I know; but it's true. I have been taught what life is; I never would have learned it any other way.

And still another thing: I have been taught to know what the poor suffer. I know their feelings, their temptations, their hardships, their sad mistakes, and the frightful mistakes and oversights the rich make concerning them, and the ways to give them true and helpful help. And now, if God ever gives me competency, whether he gives me abundance or not, I know what he intends me to do. I was once, in fact and in sentiment, a brother to the rich; but I know that now he has trained me to be a brother to the poor. Don't think I am going to be foolish. I remember that I'm brother to the rich too; but I'll be the other as well. How wisely has God—what am I saying? Poor fools that we humans are! We can hardly venture to praise God's wisdom to-day when we think we see it, lest it turn out to be only our own folly to-morrow.

But I find I'm only writing to myself, Doctor, not to you; so I stop. Mary is well, and sends you much love.
Yours faithfully,
JOHN RICHLING.

"Very little about Mary," murmured Dr. Sevier. Yet he was rather pleased than otherwise with the letter. He thrust it into his breast-pocket. In the evening, at his fireside, he drew it out again and re-read it.

"Talks as if he had got into an impregnable castle," thought the Doctor, as he gazed into the fire. "Book-keeper to a baker," he muttered, slowly folding the sheet again. It somehow vexed him to see Richling so happy in so low a station. But—"It's the joy of what he has escaped *from*, not *to*," he presently remembered.

A fortnight or more elapsed. A distant relative of Dr. Sevier, a man of his own years and profession, was his guest for two nights and a day as he passed through the city, eastward, from an all-summer's study of fevers in Mexico. They were sitting at evening on opposite sides of the library fire, conversing in the leisurely ease of those to whom life is not a novelty.

"And so you think of having Laura and Bess come out from Charleston, and keep house for you this winter? Their mother wrote me to that effect."

"Yes," said Dr. Sevier. "Society here will be a great delight to them. They will shine. And time will be less monotonous for me. It may suit me, or it may not."

"I dare say it may," responded the kinsman, whereas in truth he was very doubtful about it.

He added something, a moment later, about retiring for the night, and his host had just said, "Eh?" when a slave, in a five-year-old dress-coat, brought in the card of a person whose name was as well known in New Orleans in those days as

St. Patrick's steeple or the statue of Jackson in the old Place d'Armes. Dr. Sevier turned it over and looked for a moment ponderingly upon the domestic.

The relative rose.

"You needn't go," said Dr. Sevier; but he said "he had intended," etc., and went to his chamber.

The visitor entered. He was a dark, slender, iron gray man, of finely cut, regular features, and seeming to be much more deeply wrinkled than on scrutiny he proved to be. One quickly saw that he was full of reposing energy. He gave the feeling of your being very near some weapon, of dreadful efficiency, ready for instant use whenever needed. His clothing fitted him neatly; his long, gray mustache was the only thing that hung loosely about him; his boots were fine. If he had told a child that all his muscles and sinews were wrapped with fine steel wire the child would have believed him, and continued to sit on his knee all the same. It is said, by those who still survive him, that in dreadful places and moments the flash of his fist was as quick, as irresistible, and as all-sufficient, as lightning, yet that years would sometimes pass without its ever being lifted.

Dr. Sevier lifted his slender length out of his easy-chair, and bowed with severe gravity.

"Good-evening, sir," he said, and silently thought, "Now, what can Smith Izard possibly want with me?"

It may have been perfectly natural that this man's presence shed off all idea of medical consultation; but why should it instantly bring to the Doctor's mind, as an answer to his question, another man as different from this one as water from fire?

The detective returned the Doctor's salutation, and they became seated. Then the visitor craved permission to ask a confidential question or two for information which he was seeking in his official capacity. His manners were a little old-fashioned, but perfect of their kind. The Doctor consented. The man put his hand into his breast-pocket, and drew out a daguerreotype case, touched its spring, and as it opened in his palm extended it to the Doctor. The Doctor took it with evident reluctance. It contained the picture of a youth who was just reaching manhood. The detective spoke:—

"They say he ought to look older than that now."

"He does," said Dr. Sevier.

"Do you know his name?" inquired the detective.

“No.”

“What name do you know him by?”

“John Richling.”

“Wasn’t he sent down by Recorder Munroe, last summer, for assault, etc.?”

“Yes. I got him out the next day. He never should have been put in.”

To the Doctor’s surprise the detective rose to go.

“I’m much obliged to you, Doctor.”

“Is that all you wanted to ask me?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Mr. Izard, who is this young man? What has he done?”

“I don’t know, sir. I have a letter from a lawyer in Kentucky who says he represents this young man’s two sisters living there,—half-sisters, rather,—stating that his father and mother are both dead,—died within three days of each other.”

“What name?”

“He didn’t give the name. He sent this daguerreotype, with instructions to trace up the young man, if possible. He said there was reason to believe he was in New Orleans. He said, if I found him, just to see him privately, tell him the news, and invite him to come back home. But he said if the young fellow had got into any kind of trouble that might somehow reflect on the family, you know, like getting arrested for something or other, you know, or some such thing, then I was just to drop the thing quietly, and say nothing about it to him or anybody else.”

“And doesn’t that seem a strange way to manage a matter like that,—to put it into the hands of a detective?”

“Well, I don’t know,” said Mr. Izard. “We’re used to strange things, and this isn’t so very strange. No, it’s very common. I suppose he knew that if he gave it to me it would be attended to in a quiet and innocent sort o’ way. Some people hate mighty bad to get talked about. Nobody’s seen that picture but you and one ’aid,’ and just as soon as he saw it he said, ‘Why, that’s the chap that Dr. Sevier took out of the Parish Prison last September.’ And there won’t anybody else see it.”

“Don’t you intend to see Richling?” asked the Doctor, following the detective toward the door.

“I don’t see as it would be any use,” said the detective, “seeing he’s been sent down, and so on. I’ll write to the lawyer and state the facts, and wait for orders.”

“But do you know how slight the blame was that got him into trouble here?”

“Yes. The ’aid’ who saw the picture told me all about that. It was a shame. I’ll say so. I’ll give all the particulars. But I tell you, I just guess—they’ll drop him.”

“I dare say,” said Dr. Sevier.

“Well, Doctor,” said Mr. Izard, “hope I haven’t annoyed you.”

“No,” replied the Doctor.

But he had; and the annoyance had not ceased to be felt when, a few mornings afterward, Narcisse suddenly doubled—trebled it by saying:—

“Doctah Seveeah,”—it was a cold day and the young Creole stood a moment with his back to the office fire, to which he had just given an energetic and prolonged poking,—“a man was yeh, to see you, name’ Bison. ’F want’ to see you about Mistoo Itchlin.”

The Doctor looked up with a start, and Narcisse continued:—

“Mistoo Itchlin is wuckin’ in ’is employment. I think ’e’s please’ with ’im.”

“Then why does he come to see me about him?” asked the Doctor, so sharply that Narcisse shrugged as he replied:—

“Reely, I cann’ tell you; but thass one thing, Doctah, I dunno if you ’ave notiz: the worl’ halways take a gweat deal of welfa’e in a man w’en ’e’s ’ising. I do that myseff. Some’ow I cann’ ’e’p it.” This bold speech was too much for him. He looked down at his symmetrical legs and went back to his desk.

The Doctor was far from reassured. After a silence he called out:—

“Did he say he would come back?” A knock at the door arrested the answer, and a huge, wide, broad-faced German entered diffidently. The Doctor recognized Reisen. The visitor took off his flour-dusted hat and bowed with great deference.

“Toc-tor,” he softly drawled, “I yoost taught I trop in on you to say a verte to you apowt teh chung yentleman vot you hef rickomendet to me.”

“I didn’t recommend him to you, sir. I wrote you distinctly that I did not feel at liberty to recommend him.”

“Tat iss teh troot, Toctor Tseweer; tat iss teh ectsectly troot. Shtill I taught I’ll yoost trop in on you to say a verte to you,—Toctor,—apowt Mister”— He hung his large head at one side to remember.

“Richling,” said the Doctor, impatiently.

“Yes, sir. Apowt Mister Richlun. I heff a tifficuldy to rigolict naymps. I yoost taught I voot trop in und trop a verte to you apowt Mr. Richlun, vot maypy you titn’t herr udt before, yet.”

“Yes,” said the Doctor, with ill-concealed contempt. “Well, speak it out, Mr. Reisen; time is precious.”

The German smiled and made a silly gesture of assent.

“Yes, udt is brecious. Shtill I taught I voot take enough time to yoost trop in undt say to you tat I heffent het Mr. Richlun in my etsteplitchmendt a veek undtil I finte owdt someting apowt him, tot, uf you het a-knowdt ud, voot hef mate your letter maypy a little tifferendt written, yet.”

Now, at length, Dr. Sevier’s annoyance was turned to dismay. He waited in silence for Reisen to unfold his enigma, but already his resentment against Richling was gathering itself for a spring. To the baker, however, he betrayed only a cold hostility.

“I kept a copy of my letter to you, Mr. Reisen, and there isn’t a word in it which need have misled you, sir.”

The baker waved his hand amicably.

“Sure, Tocter Tseweer, I toandt hef nutting to gomblain akinst teh vertes of tat letter. You voss mighty puttickly. Ovver, shtill, I hef sumpting to tell you vot ef you het a-knowdt udt pefore you writed tose vertes, alreatty, t’ey voot a little tifferendt pin.”

“Well, sir, why don’t you tell it?”

Reisen smiled. “Tat iss teh ectsectly vot I am coing to too. I yoost taught I’ll trop in undt tell you, Toctor, tat I heffent het Mr. Richlun in my etsteplitchmendt a veek undtil I findte owdt tat he’s a—berfect—tressure.”

Doctor Sevier started half up from his chair, dropped into it again, wheeled half away, and back again with the blood surging into his face and exclaimed:—

“Why, what do you mean by such drivelling nonsense, sir? You’ve given me a positive fright!” He frowned the blacker as the baker smiled from ear to ear.

“Vy, Toctor, I hope you ugscooce me! I yoost taught you voot like to herr udt. Undt Missis Reisen sayce, ‘Reisen, you yoost co undt tell um.’ I taught udt voot pe blessant to you to know tatt you hett sendt me teh fynust pissness mayn I effer het apowdt me. Undt uff he iss onnust he iss a berfect tressure, undt uff he aint a berfect tressure,”—he smiled anew and tendered his capacious hat to his listener,—“you yoost kin take tiss, Toctor, undt kip udt undt vare udt! Toctor, I vish you a merrah Chris’mus!”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BEES, WASPS, AND BUTTERFLIES.

The merry day went by. The new year, 1858, set in. Everything gathered momentum. There was a panic and a crash. The brother-in-law of sister Jane—he whom Dr. Sevier met at that quiet dinner-party—struck an impediment, stumbled, staggered, fell under the feet of the racers, and crawled away minus not money and credit only, but all his philosophy about helping the poor, maimed in spirit, his pride swollen with bruises, his heart and his speech soured beyond all sweetening.

Many were the wrecks. But over their débris, Mercury and Venus—the busy season and the gay season—ran lightly, hand in hand. Men getting money and women squandering it. Whole nights in the ball-room. Gold pouring in at the hopper and out at the spout,—Carondelet street emptying like a yellow river into Canal street. Thousands for vanity; thousands for pride; thousands for influence and for station; thousands for hidden sins; a slender fraction for the wants of the body; a slenderer for the cravings of the soul. Lazarus paid to stay away from the gate. John the Baptist, in raiment of broadcloth, a circlet of white linen about his neck, and his meat strawberries and ice-cream. The lower classes mentioned mincingly; awkward silences or visible wincings at allusions to death, and converse on eternal things banished as if it were the smell of cabbage. So looked the gay world, at least, to Dr. Sevier.

He saw more of it than had been his wont for many seasons. The two young-lady cousins whom he had brought and installed in his home thirsted for that gorgeous, nocturnal moth life in which no thirst is truly slaked, and dragged him with them into the iridescent, gas-lighted spider-web of society.

“Now, you know you like it!” they said.

“A little of it, yes. But I don’t see how you can like it, who virtually live in it and upon it. Why, I would as soon try to live upon cake and candy!”

“Well, we can live very nicely upon cake and candy,” retorted they.

“Why, girls, it’s no more life than spice is food. What lofty motive—what earnest, worthy object”—

But they drowned his homily in a carol, and ran away arm in arm to dress for another ball. One of them stopped in the door with an air of mock bravado:—

“What do we care for lofty motives or worthy objects?”

A smile escaped from him as she vanished. His condemnation was flavored with charity. “It’s their mating season,” he silently thought, and, not knowing he did it, sighed.

“There come Dr. Sevier and his two pretty cousins,” was the ball-room whisper. “Beautiful girls—rich widower without children—great catch! *Passé*, how? Well, maybe so; not as much as he makes himself out, though.” “*Passé*, yes,” said a merciless belle to a blade of her own years; “a man of strong sense is *passé* at any age.” Sister Jane’s name was mentioned in the same connection, but that illusion quickly passed. The cousins denied indignantly that he had any matrimonial intention. Somebody dissipated the rumor by a syllogism: “A man hunting a second wife always looks like a fool; the Doctor doesn’t look a bit like a fool, ergo”—

He grew very weary of the giddy rout, standing in it like a rock in a whirlpool. He did rejoice in the Carnival, but only because it was the end.

“Pretty? yes, as pretty as a bonfire,” he said. “I can’t enjoy much fiddling while Rome is burning.”

“But Rome isn’t always burning,” said the cousins.

“Yes, it is! Yes, it is!”

The wickeder of the two cousins breathed a penitential sigh, dropped her bare, jewelled arms out of her cloak, and said:—

“Now tell us once more about Mary Richling.” He had bored them to death with Mary.

Lent was a relief to all three. One day, as the Doctor was walking along the street, a large hand grasped his elbow and gently arrested his steps. He turned.

“Well, Reisen, is that you?”

The baker answered with his wide smile. “Yes, Toctor, tat iss me, sure. You titn’t tink udt iss Mr. Richlun, tit you?”

“No. How is Richling?”

“Vell, Mr. Richlun kitten along so-o-o-so-o-o. He iss not ferra shtrong; ovver he vurks like a shteam-inchyine.”

“I haven’t seen him for many a day,” said Dr. Sevier.

The baker distended his eyes, bent his enormous digestive apparatus forward, raised his eyebrows, and hung his arms free from his sides. “He toandt kit a minudt to shpare in teh tswendy-four hourss. Sumptimes he sayss, ‘Mr. Reisen, I can’t shtop to talk mit you.’ Sindts Mr. Richlun pin py my etsteplitchmendt, I tell you teh troot, Toctor Tseweer, I am yoost meckin’ monneh haynd ofer fist!” He swung his chest forward again, drew in his lower regions, revolved his fists around each other for a moment, and then let them fall open at his sides, with the added assurance, “Now you kott teh ectsectly troot.”

The Doctor started away, but the baker detained him by a touch:—

“You toandt kott enna verte to sendt to Mr. Richlun, Toctor!”

“Yes. Tell him to come and pass an hour with me some evening in my library.”

The German lifted his hand in delight.

“Vy, tot’s yoost teh dting! Mr. Richlun alvayss pin sayin’, ‘I vish he aysk me come undt see um;’ undt I sayss, ‘You holdt shtill, yet, Mr. Richlun; teh next time I see um I make um aysk you.’ Vell, now, titn’t I tunned udt?” He was happy.

“Well, ask him,” said the Doctor, and got away.

“No fool is an utter fool,” pondered the Doctor, as he went. Two friends had been kept long apart by the fear of each, lest he should seem to be setting up claims based on the past. It required a simpleton to bring them together.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TOWARD THE ZENITH.

“Richling, I am glad to see you!”

Dr. Sevier had risen from his luxurious chair beside a table, the soft downward beams of whose lamp partly showed, and partly hid, the rich appointments of his library. He grasped Richling's hand, and with an extensive stride drew forward another chair on its smooth-running casters.

Then inquiries were exchanged as to the health of one and the other. The Doctor, with his professional eye, noticed, as the light fell full upon his visitor's buoyant face, how thin and pale he had grown. He rose again, and stepping beyond Richling with a remark, in part complimentary and in part critical, upon the balmy April evening, let down the sash of a window where the smell of honeysuckles was floating in.

"Have you heard from your wife lately?" he asked, as he resumed his seat.

"Yesterday," said Richling. "Yes, she's very well, been well ever since she left us. She always sends love to you."

"Hum," responded the physician. He fixed his eyes on the mantel and asked abstractedly, "How do you bear the separation?"

"Oh!" Richling laughed, "not very heroically. It's a great strain on a man's philosophy."

"Work is the only antidote," said the Doctor, not moving his eyes.

"Yes, so I find it," answered the other. "It's bearable enough while one is working like mad; but sooner or later one must sit down to meals, or lie down to rest, you know"—

"Then it hurts," said the Doctor.

"It's a lively discipline," mused Richling.

"Do you think you learn anything by it?" asked the other, turning his eyes slowly upon him. "That's what it means, you notice."

"Yes, I do," replied Richling, smiling; "I learn the very thing I suppose you're thinking of,—that separation isn't disruption, and that no pair of true lovers are quite fitted out for marriage until they can bear separation if they must."

"Yes," responded the physician; "if they can muster the good sense to see that they'll not be so apt to marry prematurely. I needn't tell you I believe in marrying for love; but these needs-must marriages are so ineffably silly. You 'must' and you 'will' marry, and 'nobody shall hinder you!' And you do it! And in three or four or six months"—he drew in his long legs energetically from the hearth-pan—"*death* separates you!—death, sometimes, resulting directly from the turn

your haste has given to events! Now, where is your ‘must’ and ‘will’?” He stretched his legs out again, and laid his head on his cushioned chair-back.

“I have made a narrow escape,” said Richling.

“I wasn’t so fortunate,” responded the Doctor, turning solemnly toward his young friend. “Richling, just seven months after I married Alice I buried her. I’m not going into particulars—of course; but the sickness that carried her off was distinctly connected with the haste of our marriage. Your Bible, Richling, that you lay such store by, is right; we should want things as if we didn’t want them. That isn’t the quotation, exactly, but it’s the idea. I swore I couldn’t and wouldn’t live without her; but, you see, this is the fifteenth year that I have had to do it.”

“I should think it would have unmanned you for life,” said Richling.

“It made a man of me! I’ve never felt young a day since, and yet I’ve never seemed to grow a day older. It brought me all at once to my full manhood. I have never consciously disputed God’s arrangements since. The man who does is only a wayward child.”

“It’s true,” said Richling, with an air of confession, “it’s true;” and they fell into silence.

Presently Richling looked around the room. His eyes brightened rapidly as he beheld the ranks and tiers of good books. He breathed an audible delight. The multitude of volumes rose in the old-fashioned way, in ornate cases of dark wood from floor to ceiling, on this hand, on that, before him, behind; some in gay covers,—green, blue, crimson,—with gilding and embossing; some in the sumptuous leathers of France, Russia, Morocco, Turkey; others in worn attire, battered and venerable, dingy but precious,—the gray heads of the council.

The two men rose and moved about among those silent wits and philosophers, and, from the very embarrassment of the inner riches, fell to talking of letter-press and bindings, with maybe some effort on the part of each to seem the better acquainted with Caxton, the Elzevirs, and other like immortals. They easily passed to a competitive enumeration of the rare books they had seen or not seen here and there in other towns and countries. Richling admitted he had travelled, and the conversation turned upon noted buildings and famous old nooks in distant cities where both had been. So they moved slowly back to their chairs, and stood by them, still contemplating the books. But as they sank again into their seats the one thought which had fastened itself in the minds of both found fresh expression.

Richling began, smilingly, as if the subject had not been dropped at all,—“I oughtn’t to speak as if I didn’t realize my good fortune, for I do.”

“I believe you do,” said the Doctor, reaching toward the fire-irons.

“Yes. Still, I lose patience with myself to find myself taking Mary’s absence so hard.”

“All hardships are comparative,” said the Doctor.

“Certainly they are,” replied Richling. “I lie sometimes and think of men who have been political prisoners, shut away from wife and children, with war raging outside and no news coming in.”

“Think of the common poor,” exclaimed Dr. Sevier,—“the thousands of sailors’ wives and soldiers’ wives. Where does that thought carry you?”

“It carries me,” responded the other, with a low laugh, “to where I’m always a little ashamed of myself.”

“I didn’t mean it to do that,” said the Doctor; “I can imagine how you miss your wife. I miss her myself.”

“Oh! but she’s here on this earth. She’s alive and well. Any burden is light when I think of that—pardon me, Doctor!”

“Go on, go on. Anything you please about her, Richling.” The Doctor half sat, half lay in his chair, his eyes partly closed. “Go on,” he repeated.

“I was only going to say that long before Mary went away, many a time when she and I were fighting starvation at close quarters, I have looked at her and said to myself, ‘What if I were in Dr. Sevier’s place?’ and it gave me strength to rise up and go on.”

“You were right.”

“I know I was. I often wake now at night and turn and find the place by my side empty, and I can hardly keep from calling her aloud. It wrenches me, but before long I think she’s no such great distance away, since we’re both on the same earth together, and by and by she’ll be here at my side; and so it becomes easy to me once more.” Richling, in the self-occupation of a lover, forgot what pains he might be inflicting. But the Doctor did not wince.

“Yes,” said the physician, “of course you wouldn’t want the separation to be painless; and it promises a reward, you know.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Richling, with an exultant smile and motion of the head, and then dropped his eyes in meditation. The Doctor looked at him steadily.

“Richling, you’ve gathered some terribly hard experiences. But hard experiences are often the foundation-stones of a successful life. You can make them all profitable. You can make them draw you along, so to speak. But you must hold them well in hand, as you would a dangerous team, you know,—coolly and alertly, firmly and patiently,—and never let the reins slack till you’ve driven through the last gate.”

Richling replied, with a pleasant nod, “I believe I shall do it. Did you notice what I wrote you in my letter? I have got the notion strongly that the troubles we have gone through—Mary and I—were only our necessary preparation—not so necessary for her as for me”—

“No,” said Dr. Sevier, and Richling continued, with a smile:—

“To fit us for a long and useful life, and especially a life that will be full of kind and valuable services to the poor. If that isn’t what they were sent for”—he dropped into a tone of reflection—“then I don’t understand them.”

“And suppose you don’t understand,” said the Doctor, with his cold, grim look.

“Oh!” rejoined Richling, in amiable protest; “but a man would like to understand.”

“Like to—yes,” replied the Doctor; “but be careful. The spirit that *must* understand is the spirit that can’t trust.” He paused. Presently he said, “Richling!”

Richling answered by an inquiring glance.

“Take better care of your health,” said the physician.

Richling smiled—a young man’s answer—and rose to say good-night.

CHAPTER XXXV.

TO SIGH, YET FEEL NO PAIN.

Mrs. Riley missed the Richlings, she said, more than tongue could tell. She had easily rented the rooms they left vacant; that was not the trouble. The new tenant was a sallow, gaunt, wind-dried seamstress of sixty, who paid her rent punctually, but who was—

“Mighty poor comp’ny to thim as’s been used to the upper tin, Mr. Ristofalo.”

Still she was a protection. Mrs. Riley had not regarded this as a necessity in former days, but now, somehow, matters seemed different. This seamstress had, moreover, a son of eighteen years, principally skin and bone, who was hoping to be appointed assistant hostler at the fire-engine house of "Volunteer One," and who meantime hung about Mrs. Riley's dwelling and loved to relieve her of the care of little Mike. This also was something to be appreciated. Still there was a void.

"Well, Mr. Richlin'!" cried Mrs. Riley, as she opened her parlor door in response to a knock. "Well, I'll be switched! ha! ha! I didn't think it was you at all. Take a seat and sit down!"

It was good to see how she enjoyed the visit. Whenever she listened to Richling's words she rocked in her rocking-chair vigorously, and when she spoke stopped its motion and rested her elbows on its arms.

"And how *is* Mrs. Richlin'? And so she sent her love to me, did she, now? The blessed angel! Now, ye're not just a-makin' that up? No, I know ye wouldn't do sich a thing as that, Mr. Richlin'. Well, you must give her mine back again. I've nobody else on e'rth to give ud to, and never will have." She lifted her nose with amiable stateliness, as if to imply that Richling might not believe this, but that it was true, nevertheless.

"You may change your mind, Mrs. Riley, some day," returned Richling, a little archly.

"Ha! ha!" She tossed her head and laughed with good-natured scorn. "Nivver a fear o' that, Mr. Richlin'!" Her brogue was apt to broaden when pleasure pulled down her dignity. "And, if I did, it wuddent be for the likes of no I-talian Dago, if id's him ye're a-dthrivin' at,—not intinding anny disrespect to your friend, Mr. Richlin', and indeed I don't deny he's a perfect gintleman,—but, indeed, Mr. Richlin', I'm just after thinkin' that you and yer lady wouldn't have no self-respect for Kate Riley if she should be changing her name."

"Still you were thinking about it," said Richling, with a twinkle.

"Ah! ha! ha! Indeed I wasn', an' ye needn' be t'rowin' anny o' yer slyness on me. Ye know ye'd have no self-respect fur me. No; now ye know ye wuddent,—wud ye?"

"Why, Mrs. Riley, of course we would. Why—why not?" He stood in the doorway, about to take his leave. "You may be sure we'll always be glad of anything that will make you the happier." Mrs. Riley looked so grave that he checked his humor.

“But in the nixt life, Mr. Richlin’, how about that?”

“There? I suppose we shall simply each love all in absolute perfection. We’ll”—

“We’ll never know the differ,” interposed Mrs. Riley.

“That’s it,” said Richling, smiling again. “And so I say,—and I’ve always said,—if a person *feels* like marrying again, let him do it.”

“Have ye, now? Well, ye’re just that good, Mr. Richlin’.”

“Yes,” he responded, trying to be grave, “that’s about my measure.”

“Would *you* do ut?”

“No, I wouldn’t. I couldn’t. But I should like—in good earnest, Mrs. Riley, I should like, now, the comfort of knowing that you were not to pass all the rest of your days in widowhood.”

“Ah! ged out, Mr. Richlin’!” She failed in her effort to laugh. “Ah! ye’re sly!” She changed her attitude and drew a breath.

“No,” said Richling, “no, honestly. I should feel that you deserved better at this world’s hands than that, and that the world deserved better of you. I find two people don’t make a world, Mrs. Riley, though often they think they do. They certainly don’t when one is gone.”

“Mr. Richlin’,” exclaimed Mrs. Riley, drawing back and waving her hand sweetly, “stop yer flattery! Stop ud! Ah! ye’re a-feeling yer oats, Mr. Richlin’. An’ ye’re a-showin’ em too, ye air. Why, I hered ye was lookin’ terrible, and here ye’re lookin’ just splendud!”

“Who told you that?” asked Richling.

“Never mind! Never mind who he was—ha, ha, ha!” She checked herself suddenly. “Ah, me! It’s a shame for the likes o’ me to be behavin’ that foolish!” She put on additional dignity. “I will always be the Widow Riley.” Then relaxing again into sweetness: “Marridge is a lottery, Mr. Richlin’; indeed an’ it is; and ye know mighty well that he ye’re after joking me about is no more nor a fri’nd.” She looked sweet enough for somebody to kiss.

“I don’t know so certainly about that,” said her visitor, stepping down upon the sidewalk and putting on his hat. “If I may judge by”— He paused and glanced at the window.

“Ah, now, Mr. Richlin’, na-na-now, Mr. Richlin’, ye daurn’t say ud! Ye daurn’t!” She smiled and blushed and arched her neck and rose and sank upon herself with sweet delight.

“I say if I may judge by what he has said to me,” insisted Richling.

Mrs. Riley glided down across the door-step, and, with all the insinuation of her sex and nation, demanded:—

“What’d he tell ye? Ah! he didn’t tell ye nawthing! Ha, ha! there wasn’ nawthing to tell!” But Richling slipped away.

Mrs. Riley shook her finger: “Ah, ye’re a wicket joker, Mr. Richlin’. I didn’t think that o’ the likes of a gintleman like you, anyhow!” She shook her finger again as she withdrew into the house, smiling broadly all the way in to the cradle, where she kissed and kissed again her ruddy, chubby, sleeping boy.

Ristofalo came often. He was a man of simple words, and of few thoughts of the kind that were available in conversation; but his personal adventures had begun almost with infancy, and followed one another in close and strange succession over lands and seas ever since. He could therefore talk best about himself, though he talked modestly. “These things to hear would Desdemona seriously incline,” and there came times when even a tear was not wanting to gem the poetry of the situation.

“And ye might have saved yerself from all that,” was sometimes her note of sympathy. But when he asked how she silently dried her eyes.

Sometimes his experiences had been intensely ludicrous, and Mrs. Riley would laugh until in pure self-oblivion she smote her thigh with her palm, or laid her hand so smartly against his shoulder as to tip him half off his seat.

“Ye didn’t!”

“Yes.”

“Ah! Get out wid ye, Raphael Ristofalo,—to be telling me that for the trooth!”

At one such time she was about to give him a second push, but he took the hand in his, and quietly kept it to the end of his story.

He lingered late that evening, but at length took his hat from under his chair, rose, and extended his hand.

“Man alive!” she cried, “that’s my *hand*, sur, I’d have ye to know. Begahn wid ye! Lookut heere! What’s the reason ye make it so long atween yer visits, eh? Tell me that. Ah—ah—ye’ve no need fur to tell me, Mr. Ristofalo! Ah—now don’t tell a lie!”

“Too busy. Come all time—wasn’t too busy.”

“Ha, ha! Yes, yes; ye’re too busy. Of coorse ye’re too busy. Oh, yes! ye *air* too busy—a-courtin’ thim I-talian froot gerls around the Frinch Mairket. Ah! I’ll bet two bits ye’re a bouncer! Ah, don’t tell me. I know ye, ye villain! Some o’ thim’s a-waitin’ fur ye now, ha, ha! Go! And don’t ye nivver come back heere anny more. D’ye mind?”

“Aw righ’.” The Italian took her hand for the third time and held it, standing in his simple square way before her and wearing his gentle smile as he looked her in the eye. “Good-by, Kate.”

Her eye quailed. Her hand pulled a little helplessly and in a meek voice she said:—

“That’s not right for you to do me that a-way, Mr. Ristofalo. I’ve got a handle to my name, sur.”

She threw some gentle rebuke into her glance, and turned it upon him. He met it with that same amiable absence of emotion that was always in his look.

“Kate too short by itself?” he asked. “Aw righ’; make it Kate Ristofalo.”

“No,” said Mrs. Riley, averting and drooping her face.

“Take good care of you,” said the Italian; “you and Mike. Always be kind. Good care.”

Mrs. Riley turned with sudden fervor.

“Good cayre!—Mr. Ristofalo,” she exclaimed, lifting her free hand and touching her bosom with the points of her fingers, “ye don’t know the hairt of a woman, surr! No-o-o, surr! It’s *love* we wants! ‘The hairt as has trooly loved nivver furgits, but as trooly loves ahn to the tlose!’”

“Yes,” said the Italian; “yes,” nodding and ever smiling, “dass aw righ’.”

But she:—

“Ah! it’s no use fur you to be a-talkin’ an’ a-pallaverin’ to Kate Riley when ye don’t be lovin’ her, Mr. Ristofalo, an’ ye know ye don’t.”

A tear glistened in her eye.

“Yes, love you,” said the Italian; “course, love you.”

He did not move a foot or change the expression of a feature.

“H-yes!” said the widow. “H-yes!” she panted. “H-yes, a little! A little, Mr. Ristofalo! But I want”—she pressed her hand hard upon her bosom, and raised her eyes aloft—“I want to be—h—h—h-adaured above all the e’rth!”

“Aw righ’,” said Ristofalo; “das aw righ’; yes—door above all you worth.”

“Raphael Ristofalo,” she said, “ye’re a-deceivin’ me! Ye came heere whin nobody axed ye,—an’ that ye know is a fact, surr,—an’ made yerself agree’ble to a poor, unsuspectin’ widdah, an’ [*tears*] rabbed me o’ mie hairt, ye did; whin I nivver intinded to git married ag’in.”

“Don’t cry, Kate—Kate Ristofalo,” quietly observed the Italian, getting an arm around her waist, and laying a hand on the farther cheek. “Kate Ristofalo.”

“Shut!” she exclaimed, turning with playful fierceness, and proudly drawing back her head; “shut! Hah! It’s Kate Ristofalo, is it? Ah, ye think so? Hah-h! It’ll be ad least two weeks yet before the priest will be after giving you the right to call me that!”

And, in fact, an entire fortnight did pass before they were married.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WHAT NAME?

Richling in Dr. Sevier’s library, one evening in early May, gave him great amusement by an account of the Ristofalo-Riley wedding. He had attended it only the night before. The Doctor had received an invitation, but had pleaded previous engagements.

“But I am glad you went,” he said to Richling; “however, go on with your account.”

“Oh! I was glad to go. And I’m certainly glad I went.”

Richling proceeded with the recital. The Doctor smiled. It was very droll,—the description of persons and costumes. Richling was quite another than his usual restrained self this evening. Oddly enough, too, for this was but his second visit; the confinement of his work was almost like an imprisonment, it was so constant.

The Doctor had never seen him in just such a glow. He even mimicked the brogue of two or three Irish gentlemen, and the soft, outlandish swing in the English of one or two Sicilians. He did it all so well that, when he gave an instance of some of the broad Hibernian repartee he had heard, the Doctor actually laughed audibly. One of his young-lady cousins on some pretext opened a door, and stole a glance within to see what could have produced a thing so extraordinary.

“Come in, Laura; come in! Tell Bess to come in.”

The Doctor introduced Richling with due ceremony Richling could not, of course, after this accession of numbers, go on being funny. The mistake was trivial, but all saw it. Still the meeting was pleasant. The girls were very intelligent and vivacious. Richling found a certain refreshment in their graceful manners, like what we sometimes feel in catching the scent of some long-forgotten perfume. They had not been told all his history, but had heard enough to make them curious to see and speak to him. They were evidently pleased with him, and Dr. Sevier, observing this, betrayed an air that was much like triumph. But after a while they went as they had come.

“Doctor,” said Richling, smiling until Dr. Sevier wondered silently what possessed the fellow, “excuse me for bringing this here. But I find it so impossible to get to your office”— He moved nearer the Doctor’s table and put his hand into his bosom.

“What’s that?” asked the Doctor, frowning heavily. Richling smiled still broader than before.

“This is a statement,” he said.

“Of what?”

“Of the various loans you have made me, with interest to date.”

“Yes?” said the Doctor, frigidly.

“And here,” persisted the happy man, straightening out a leg as he had done the first time they ever met, and drawing a roll of notes from his pocket, “is the total amount.”

“Yes?” The Doctor regarded them with cold contempt. “That’s all very pleasant for you, I suppose, Richling,—shows you’re the right kind of man, I suppose, and so on. I know that already, however. Now just put all that back into your pocket; the sight of it isn’t pleasant. You certainly don’t imagine I’m going to take it, do you?”

“You promised to take it when you lent it.”

“Humph! Well, I didn’t say when.”

“As soon as I could pay it,” said Richling.

“I don’t remember,” replied the Doctor, picking up a newspaper. “I release myself from that promise.”

“I don’t release you,” persisted Richling; “neither does Mary.”

The Doctor was quiet awhile before he answered. He crossed his knees, a moment after folded his arms, and presently said:—

“Foolish pride, Richling.”

“We know that,” replied Richling; “we don’t deny that that feeling creeps in. But we’d never do anything that’s right if we waited for an unmixed motive, would we?”

“Then you think my motive—in refusing it—is mixed, probably.”

“Ho-o-oh!” laughed Richling. The gladness within him would break through. “Why, Doctor, nothing could be more different. It doesn’t seem to me as though you ever had a mixed motive.”

The Doctor did not answer. He seemed to think the same thing.

“We know very well, Doctor, that if we should accept this kindness we might do it in a spirit of proper and commendable—a—humble-mindedness. But it isn’t mere pride that makes us insist.”

“No?” asked the Doctor, cruelly. “What is it else?”

“Why, I hardly know what to call it, except that it’s a conviction that—well, that to pay is best; that it’s the nearest to justice we can get, and that”—he spoke faster—“that it’s simply duty to choose justice when we can and mercy when we must. There, I’ve hit it out!” He laughed again. “Don’t you see, Doctor? Justice when we may—mercy when we must! It’s your own principles!”

The Doctor looked straight at the mantel-piece as he asked:—

“Where did you get that idea?”

“I don’t know; partly from nowhere, and”—

“Partly from Mary,” interrupted the Doctor. He put out his long white palm. “It’s all right. Give me the money.” Richling counted it into his hand. He rolled it up and stuffed it into his portemonnaie.

“You like to part with your hard earnings, do you, Richling?”

“Earnings can’t be hard,” was the reply; “it’s borrowings that are hard.”

The Doctor assented.

“And, of course,” said Richling, “I enjoy paying old debts.” He stood and leaned his head in his hand with his elbow on the mantel. “But, even aside from that, I’m happy.”

“I see you are!” remarked the physician, emphatically, catching the arms of his chair and drawing his feet closer in. “You’ve been smiling worse than a boy with a love-letter.”

“I’ve been hoping you’d ask me what’s the matter.”

“Well, then, Richling, what is the matter?”

“Mary has a daughter.”

“What!” cried the Doctor, springing up with a radiant face, and grasping Richling’s hand in both his own.

Richling laughed aloud, nodded, laughed again, and gave either eye a quick, energetic wipe with all his fingers.

“Doctor,” he said, as the physician sank back into his chair, “we want to name”—he hesitated, stood on one foot and leaned again against the shelf—“we want to call her by the name of—if we may”—

The Doctor looked up as if with alarm, and John said, timidly,—“Alice!”

Dr. Sevier’s eyes—what was the matter? His mouth quivered. He nodded and whispered huskily:—

“All right.”

After a long pause Richling expressed the opinion that he had better be going, and the Doctor did not indicate any difference of conviction. At the door the Doctor asked:—

“If the fever should break out this summer, Richling, will you go away?”

“No.”

CHAPTER XXXVII.

PESTILENCE.

On the twentieth of June, 1858, an incident occurred in New Orleans which challenged special attention from the medical profession. Before the month closed there was a second, similar to the first. The press did not give such matters to the public in those days; it would only make the public—the advertising public—angry. Times have changed since—faced clear about: but at that period Dr. Sevier, who hated a secret only less than a falsehood, was right in speaking as he did.

"Now you'll see," he said, pointing downward aslant, "the whole community stick its head in the sand!" He sent for Richling.

"I give you fair warning," he said. "It's coming."

"Don't cases occur sometimes in an isolated way without—anything further?" asked Richling, with a promptness which showed he had already been considering the matter.

"Yes."

"And might not this"—

"Richling, I give you fair warning."

"Have you sent your cousins away, Doctor?"

"They go to-morrow." After a silence the Doctor added: "I tell you now, because this is the time to decide what you will do. If you are not prepared to take all the risks and stay them through, you had better go at once."

"What proportion of those who are taken sick of it die?" asked Richling.

"The proportion varies in different seasons; say about one in seven or eight. But your chances would be hardly so good, for you're not strong, Richling, nor well either."

Richling stood and swung his hat against his knee.

"I really don't see, Doctor, that I have any choice at all. I couldn't go to Mary—when she has but just come through a mother's pains and dangers—and say, 'I've thrown away seven good chances of life to run away from one bad one.' Why, to say nothing else, Reisen can't spare me." He smiled with boyish vanity.

"O Richling, that's silly!"

“I—I know it,” exclaimed the other, quickly; “I see it is. If he could spare me, of course he wouldn’t be paying me a salary.” But the Doctor silenced him by a gesture.

“The question is not whether he can spare you, at all. It’s simply, can you spare him?”

“Without violating any pledge, you mean,” added Richling.

“Of course,” assented the physician.

“Well, I can’t spare him, Doctor. He has given me a hold on life, and no one chance in seven, or six, or five is going to shake me loose. Why, I tell you I couldn’t look Mary in the face!”

“Have your own way,” responded the Doctor. “There are some things in your favor. You frail fellows often pull through easier than the big, full-blooded ones.”

“Oh, it’s Mary’s way too, I feel certain!” retorted Richling, gayly, “and I venture to say”—he coughed and smiled again—“it’s yours.”

“I didn’t say it wasn’t,” replied the unsmiling Doctor, reaching for a pen and writing a prescription. “Here; get that and take it according to direction. It’s for that cold.”

“If I should take the fever,” said Richling, coming out of a revery, “Mary will want to come to me.”

“Well, she mustn’t come a step!” exclaimed the Doctor.

“You’ll forbid it, will you not, Doctor? Pledge me!”

“I do better, sir; I pledge myself.”

So the July suns rose up and moved across the beautiful blue sky; the moon went through all her majestic changes; on thirty-one successive midnights the Star Bakery sent abroad its grateful odors of bread, and as the last night passed into the first twinkling hour of morning the month chronicled one hundred and thirty-one deaths from yellow fever. The city shuddered because it knew, and because it did not know, what was in store. People began to fly by hundreds, and then by thousands. Many were overtaken and stricken down as they fled. Still men plied their vocations, children played in the streets, and the days came and went, fair, blue tremulous with sunshine, or cool and gray and sweet with summer rain. How strange it was for nature to be so beautiful and so unmoved! By and by one could not look down a street, on this hand or on that, but he saw a funeral. Doctors’ gigs began to be hailed on the streets and to refuse to stop, and houses

were pointed out that had just become the scenes of strange and harrowing episodes.

“Do you see that bakery,—the ‘Star Bakery’? Five funerals from that place—and another goes this afternoon.”

Before this was said August had completed its record of eleven hundred deaths, and September had begun the long list that was to add twenty-two hundred more. Reisen had been the first one ill in the establishment. He had been losing friends,—one every few days; and he thought it only plain duty, let fear or prudence say what they might, to visit them at their bedsides and follow them to their tombs. It was not only the outer man of Reisen, but the heart as well, that was elephantine. He had at length come home from one of these funerals with pains in his back and limbs, and the various familiar accompaniments.

“I feel right clumsy,” he said, as he lifted his great feet and lowered them into the mustard foot-bath.

“Doctor Sevier,” said Richling, as he and the physician paused half way between the sick-chambers of Reisen and his wife, “I hope you’ll not think it foolhardy for me to expose myself by nursing these people”—

“No,” replied the veteran, in a tone of indifference, and passed on; the tincture of self-approval that had “mixed” with Richling’s motives went away to nothing.

Both Reisen and his wife recovered. But an apple-cheeked brother of the baker, still in a green cap and coat that he had come in from Germany, was struck from the first with that mortal terror which is so often an evil symptom of the disease, and died, on the fifth day after his attack, in raging delirium. Ten of the workmen, bakers and others, followed him. Richling alone, of all in the establishment, while the sick lay scattered through the town on uncounted thousands of beds, and the month of October passed by, bringing death to eleven hundred more, escaped untouched of the scourge.

“I can’t understand it,” he said.

“Demand an immediate explanation,” said Dr. Sevier, with sombre irony.

How did others fare? Ristofalo had, time and again, sailed with the fever, nursed it, slept with it. It passed him by again. Little Mike took it, lay two or three days very still in his mother’s strong arms, and recovered. Madame Ristofalo had had it in “fifty-three.” She became a heroic nurse to many, and saved life after life among the poor.

The trials of those days enriched John Richling in the acquaintanceship and esteem of Sister Jane’s little lisping rector. And, by the way, none of those with

whom Dr. Sevier dined on that darkest night of Richling's life became victims. The rector had never encountered the disease before, but when Sister Jane and the banker, and the banker's family and friends, and thousands of others, fled, he ran toward it, David-like, swordless and armorless. He and Richling were nearly of equal age. Three times, four times, and again, they met at dying-beds. They became fond of each other.

Another brave nurse was Narcisse. Dr. Sevier, it is true, could not get rid of the conviction for years afterward that one victim would have lived had not Narcisse talked him to death. But in general, where there was some one near to prevent his telling all his discoveries and inventions, he did good service, and accompanied it with very chivalric emotions.

"Yesseh," he said, with a strutting attitude that somehow retained a sort of modesty, "I 'ad the gweatess success. Hah! a nuss is a nuss those time'. Only some time' 'e's not. 'Tis accawding to the povvub,—what is that povvub, now, ag'in?" The proverb did not answer his call, and he waved it away. "Yesseh, eve'ybody wanting me at once—couldn' supply the deman'."

Richling listened to him with new pleasure and rising esteem.

"You make me envy you," he exclaimed, honestly.

"Well, I s'pose you may say so, Mistoo Itchlin, faw I nevva nuss a sing-le one w'at din paid me ten dollahs a night. Of co'se! 'Consistency, thou awt a jew'l.' It's juz as the povvub says, 'All work an' no pay keep Jack a small boy.' An' yet," he hurriedly added, remembering his indebtedness to his auditor, "'tis aztonizhin' 'ow 'tis expensive to live. I haven' got a picayune of that money pwesently! I'm aztonizh' myseff!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"I MUST BE CRUEL ONLY TO BE KIND."

The plague grew sated and feeble. One morning frost sent a flight of icy arrows into the town, and it vanished. The swarthy girls and lads that sauntered homeward behind their mothers' cows across the wide suburban stretches of marshy commons heard again the deep, unbroken, cataract roar of the reawakened city.

We call the sea cruel, seeing its waters dimple and smile where yesterday they dashed in pieces the ship that was black with men, women, and children. But what shall we say of those billows of human life, of which we are ourselves a part, that surge over the graves of its own dead with dances and laughter and many a coquetry, with panting chase for gain and preference, and pious regrets and tender condolences for the thousands that died yesterday—and need not have died?

Such were the questions Dr. Sevier asked himself as he laid down the newspaper full of congratulations upon the return of trade's and fashion's boisterous flow, and praises of the deeds of benevolence and mercy that had abounded throughout the days of anguish.

Certain currents in these human rapids had driven Richling and the Doctor wide apart. But at last, one day, Richling entered the office with a cheerfulness of countenance something overdone, and indicative to the Doctor's eye of inward trepidation.

"Doctor," he said hurriedly, "preparing to leave the office? It was the only moment I could command"—

"Good-morning, Richling."

"I've been trying every day for a week to get down here," said Richling, drawing out a paper. "Doctor"—with his eyes on the paper, which he had begun to unfold.

"Richling"— It was the Doctor's hardest voice. Richling looked up at him as a child looks at a thundercloud. The Doctor pointed to the document:—

"Is that a subscription paper?"

"Yes."

"You needn't unfold it, Richling." The Doctor made a little pushing motion at it with his open hand. "From whom does it come?"

Richling gave a name. He had not changed color when the Doctor looked black, but now he did; for Dr. Sevier smiled. It was terrible.

"Not the little preacher that lisps?" asked the physician.

"He lisps sometimes," said Richling, with resentful subsidence of tone and with dropped eyes, preparing to return the paper to his pocket.

"Wait," said the Doctor, more gravely, arresting the movement with his index finger. "What is it for?"

“It’s for the aid of an asylum overcrowded with orphans in consequence of the late epidemic.” There was still a tightness in Richling’s throat, a faint bitterness in his tone, a spark of indignation in his eye. But these the Doctor ignored. He reached out his hand, took the folded paper gently from Richling, crossed his knees, and, resting his elbows on them and shaking the paper in a prefatory way, spoke:—

“Richling, in old times we used to go into monasteries; now we subscribe to orphan asylums. Nine months ago I warned this community that if it didn’t take the necessary precautions against the foul contagion that has since swept over us it would pay for its wicked folly in the lives of thousands and the increase of fatherless and helpless children. I didn’t know it would come this year, but I knew it might come any year. Richling, we deserved it!”

Richling had never seen his friend in so forbidding an aspect. He had come to him boyishly elated with the fancied excellence and goodness and beauty of the task he had assumed, and a perfect confidence that his noble benefactor would look upon him with pride and upon the scheme with generous favor. When he had offered to present the paper to Dr. Sevier he had not understood the little rector’s marked alacrity in accepting his service. Now it was plain enough. He was well-nigh dumfounded. The responses that came from him came mechanically, and in the manner of one who wards off unmerited buffetings from one whose unkindness may not be resented.

“You can’t think that only those died who were to blame?” he asked, helplessly; and the Doctor’s answer came back instantly:—

“Ho, no! look at the hundreds of little graves! No, sir. If only those who were to blame had been stricken, I should think the Judgment wasn’t far off. Talk of God’s mercy in times of health! There’s no greater evidence of it than to see him, in these awful visitations, refusing still to discriminate between the innocent and the guilty! Richling, only Infinite Mercy joined to Infinite Power, with infinite command of the future, could so forbear!”

Richling could not answer. The Doctor unfolded the paper and began to read: “‘God, in his mysterious providence’—O sir!”

“What!” demanded Richling.

“O sir, what a foul, false charge! There’s nothing mysterious about it. We’ve trampled the book of Nature’s laws in the mire of our streets, and dragged her penalties down upon our heads! Why, Richling,”—he shifted his attitude, and laid the edge of one hand upon the paper that lay in the other, with the air of commencing a demonstration,—“you’re a Bible man, eh? Well, yes, I think you

are; but I want you never to forget that the book of Nature has its commandments, too; and the man who sins against *them* is a sinner. There's no dispensation of mercy in that Scripture to Jew or Gentile, though the God of Mercy wrote it with his own finger. A community has got to know those laws and keep them, or take the consequences—and take them here and now—on this globe—*presently*!"

"You mean, then," said Richling, extending his hand for the return of the paper, "that those whose negligence filled the asylums should be the ones to subscribe."

"Yes," replied the Doctor, "yes!" drew back his hand with the paper still in it, turned to his desk, opened the list, and wrote. Richling's eyes followed the pen; his heart came slowly up into his throat.

"Why, Doc—Doctor, that's more than any one else has"—

"They have probably made some mistake," said Dr. Sevier, rubbing the blotting-paper with his finger. "Richling, do you think it's your mission to be a philanthropist?"

"Isn't it everybody's mission?" replied Richling.

"That's not what I asked you."

"But you ask a question," said Richling, smiling down upon the subscription-paper as he folded it, "that nobody would like to answer."

"Very well, then, you needn't answer. But, Richling,"—he pointed his long finger to the pocket of Richling's coat, where the subscription-list had disappeared,—"this sort of work—whether you distinctly propose to be a philanthropist or not—is right, of course. It's good. But it's the mere alphabet of beneficence. Richling, whenever philanthropy takes the *guise* of philanthropy, look out. Confine your philanthropy—you can't do it entirely, but as much as you can—confine your philanthropy to the *motive*. It's the temptation of philanthropists to set aside the natural constitution of society wherever it seems out of order, and substitute some philanthropic machinery in its place. It's all wrong, Richling. Do as a good doctor would. Help nature."

Richling looked down askance, pushed his fingers through his hair perplexedly, drew a deep breath, lifted his eyes to the Doctor's again, smiled incredulously, and rubbed his brow.

"You don't see it?" asked the physician, in a tone of surprise.

"O Doctor,"—throwing up a despairing hand,—"we're miles apart. I don't see how any work could be nobler. It looks to me"— But Dr. Sevier interrupted.

"—From an emotional stand-point, Richling. Richling,"—he changed his attitude again,—"if you *want* to be a philanthropist, be cold-blooded."

Richling laughed outright, but not heartily.

"Well!" said his friend, with a shrug, as if he dismissed the whole matter. But when Richling moved, as if to rise, he restrained him. "Stop! I know you're in a hurry, but you may tell Reisen to blame me."

"It's not Reisen so much as it's the work," replied Richling, but settled down again in his seat.

"Richling, human benevolence—public benevolence—in its beginning was a mere nun on the battle-field, binding up wounds and wiping the damp from dying brows. But since then it has had time and opportunity to become strong, bold, masculine, potential. Once it had only the knowledge and power to alleviate evil consequences; now it has both the knowledge and the power to deal with evil causes. Now, I say to you, leave this emotional A B C of human charity to nuns and mite societies. It's a good work; let them do it. Give them money, if you can."

"I see what you mean—I think," said Richling, slowly, and with a pondering eye.

"I'm glad if you do," rejoined the Doctor, visibly relieved.

"But that only throws a heavier responsibility upon strong men, if I understand it," said Richling, half interrogatively.

"Certainly! Upon strong spirits, male or female. Upon spirits that can drive the axe low down into the causes of things, again and again and again, steadily, patiently, until at last some great evil towering above them totters and falls crashing to the earth, to be cut to pieces and burned in the fire. Richling, gather fagots for pastime if you like, though it's poor fun; but don't think that's your mission! *Don't* be a fagot-gatherer! What are you smiling at?"

"Your good opinion of me," answered Richling. "Doctor, I don't believe I'm fit for anything but a fagot-gatherer. But I'm willing to try."

"Oh, bah!" The Doctor admired such humility as little as it deserved. "Richling, reduce the number of helpless orphans! Dig out the old roots of calamity! A spoon is not what you want; you want a *mattock*. Reduce crime and vice! Reduce squalor! Reduce the poor man's death-rate! Improve his tenements! Improve his hospitals! Carry sanitation into his workshops! Teach the trades! Prepare the poor for possible riches, and the rich for possible poverty! Ah—ah—Richling, I preach well enough, I think, but in practice I have missed it myself! Don't repeat my error!"

“Oh, but you haven’t missed it!” cried Richling.

“Yes, but I have,” said the Doctor. “Here I am, telling you to let your philanthropy be cold-blooded; why, I’ve always been hot-blooded.”

“I like the hot best,” said Richling, quickly.

“You ought to hate it,” replied his friend. “It’s been the root of all your troubles. Richling, God Almighty is unimpassioned. If he wasn’t he’d be weak. You remember Young’s line: ‘A God all mercy is a God unjust.’ The time has come when beneficence, to be real, must operate scientifically, not emotionally. Emotion is good; but it must follow, not guide. Here! I’ll give you a single instance. Emotion never sells where it can give: that is an old-fashioned, effete benevolence. The new, the cold-blooded, is incomparably better: it never—to individual or to community—gives where it can sell. Your instincts have applied the rule to yourself; apply it to your fellow-man.”

“Ah!” said Richling, promptly, “that’s another thing. It’s not my business to apply it to them.”

“It *is* your business to apply it to them. You have no right to do less.”

“And what will men say of me? At least—not that, but”—

The Doctor pointed upward. “They will say, ‘I know thee, that thou art an hard man.’” His voice trembled. “But, Richling,” he resumed with fresh firmness, “if you want to lead a long and useful life,—you say you do,—you must take my advice; you must deny yourself for a while; you must shelve these fine notions for a time. I tell you once more, you must endeavor to reëstablish your health as it was before—before they locked you up, you know. When that is done you can commence right there if you choose; I wish you would. Give the public—sell would be better, but it will hardly buy—a prison system less atrocious, less destructive of justice, and less promotive of crime and vice, than the one it has. By-the-by, I suppose you know that Raphael Ristofalo went to prison last night again?”

Richling sprang to his feet. “For what? He hasn’t”—

“Yes, sir; he has discovered the man who robbed him, and has killed him.”

Richling started away, but halted as the Doctor spoke again, rising from his seat and shaking out his legs.

“He’s not suffering any hardship. He’s shrewd, you know,—has made arrangements with the keeper by which he secures very comfortable quarters.

The star-chamber, I think they call the room he is in. He'll suffer very little restraint. Good-day!"

He turned, as Richling left, to get his own hat and gloves. "Yes," he thought, as he passed slowly downstairs to his carriage, "I have erred." He was not only teaching, he was learning. To fight evil was not enough. People who wanted help for orphans did not come to him—they sent. They drew back from him as a child shrinks from a soldier. Even Alice, his buried Alice, had wept with delight when he gave her a smile, and trembled with fear at his frown. To fight evil is not enough. Everybody seemed to feel as though that were a war against himself. Oh for some one always to understand—never to fear—the frowning good intention of the lonely man!

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"PETTENT PRATE."

It was about the time, in January, when clerks and correspondents were beginning to write '59 without first getting it '58, that Dr. Sevier, as one morning he approached his office, noticed with some grim amusement, standing among the brokers and speculators of Carondelet street, the baker, Reisen. He was earnestly conversing with and bending over a small, alert fellow, in a rakish beaver and very smart coat, with the blue flowers of modesty bunched saucily in one button-hole.

Almost at the same moment Reisen saw the Doctor. He called his name aloud, and for all his ungainly bulk would have run directly to the carriage in the middle of the street, only that the Doctor made believe not to see, and in a moment was out of reach. But when, two or three hours later, the same vehicle came, tipping somewhat sidewise against the sidewalk at the Charity Hospital gate, and the Doctor stepped from it, there stood Reisen in waiting.

"Toctor," he said, approaching and touching his hat, "I like to see you a minudt, uff you bleace, shtrict prifut."

They moved slowly down the unfrequented sidewalk, along the garden wall.

"Before you begin, Reisen, I want to ask you a question. I've noticed for a month past that Mr. Richling rides in your bread-carts alongside the drivers on their rounds. Don't you know you ought not to require such a thing as that from a

person like Mr. Richling? Mr. Richling's a gentleman, Reisen, and you make him mount up in those bread-carts, and jump out every few minutes to deliver bread!"

The Doctor's blood was not cold.

"Vell, now!" drawled the baker, as the corners of his mouth retreated toward the back of his neck, "end't tat teh funn'est ting, ennahow! Vhy, tat iss yoost teh ferra ting fot I comin' to shpeak mit you apowdt udt!" He halted and looked at the Doctor to see how this coincidence struck him; but the Doctor merely moved on. "*I* toant make him too udt," he continued, starting again; "he cumps to me sindts apowdt two-o-o mundts aco—ven I shtill feelin' a liddle veak, yet, fun teh yalla-feewa—undt yoost paygs me to let um too udt. 'Mr. Richlun,' sayss I to him, 'I toandt kin untershtayndt for vot you vawndts to too sich a ritickliss, Mr. Richlun!' Ovver he sayss, 'Mr. Reisen,'—he alvays callss me 'Mister,' undt tat iss one dting in puttickly vot I alvays tit li-i-iked apowdt Mr. Richlun,—'Mr. Reisen,' he sayss, 'toandt you aysk me te reason, ovver yoost let me co abate undt too udt!' Undt I voss a coin' to kiff udt up, alretty; ovver ten cumps in *Missess* Reisen,—who iss a heap shmarter mayn as fot Reisen iss, I yoost tell you te ectsectly troot,—and she sayss, 'Reisen, you yoost tell Mr. Richlun, Mr. Richlun, you toadnt coin' to too sich a ritickliss!'"

The speaker paused for effect.

"Undt ten Mr. Richlun, he talks!—Schweedt?—Oh yendlemuns, toandt say nutting!" The baker lifted up his palm and swung it down against his thigh with a blow that sent the flour out in a little cloud. "I tell you, Toctor Tseweer, ven tat mayn vawndts to too udt, he kin yoost talk te mo-ust like a Christun fun enna mayn I neffa he-ut in mine li-i-fe! 'Missess Reisen,' he sayss, 'I vawndts to too udt pecause I vawndts to too udt.' Vell, how you coin' to arg-y ennating eagval mit Mr. Richlun? So teh upshodt iss he coes owdt in teh prate-cawts tistripputin' te prate!" Reisen threw his arms far behind him, and bowed low to his listener.

Dr. Sevier had learned him well enough to beware of interrupting him, lest when he resumed it would be at the beginning again. He made no answer, and Reisen went on:—

"Bressently"— He stopped his slow walk, brought forward both palms, shrugged, dropped them, bowed, clasped them behind him, brought the left one forward, dropped it, then the right one, dropped it also, frowned, smiled, and said:—

"Bressently"—then a long silence—"effrapotty in my etsteplitchmendt"—another long pause—"hef yoost teh same ettechmendt to Mr. Richlun,"—another interval,—"tey hef yoost tso much effection fur *him*"—another silence—"ass tey

hef'—another, with a smile this time—"fur—te teffle himpselluf!" An oven opened in the baker's face, and emitted a softly rattling expiration like that of a bursted bellows. The Doctor neither smiled nor spoke. Reisen resumed:—

"I seen udt. I seen udt. Ovver I toandt coult untershtayndt udt. Ovver one tay cumps in mine little poy in to me fen te pakers voss all ashleep, 'Pap-a, Mr. Richlun sayss you shouldt come into teh offuss.' I kumpt in. Mr. Richlun voss tare, shtayndting yoost so—yoost so—py teh shtofe; undt, Toctor Tseweer, I yoost tell you te ectsectly troot, he toaldt in fife minudts—six minudts—seven minudts, udt may pe—undt shoadt me how effrapotty, high undt low, little undt pick, Tom, Tick, undt Harra, pin ropping me sindts more ass fife years!"

The longest pause of all followed this disclosure. The baker had gradually backed the Doctor up against the wall, spreading out the whole matter with his great palms turned now upward and now downward, the bulky contents of his high-waisted, barn-door trowsers now bulged out and now withdrawn, to be protruded yet more a moment later. He recommenced by holding out his down-turned hand some distance above the ground.

"I yoompt tot hoigh!" He blew his cheeks out, and rose a half-inch off his heels in recollection of the mighty leap. "Ovver Mr. Richlun sayss,—he sayss, 'Kip shtill, Mr. Reisen;' undt I kibt shtill."

The baker's auditor was gradually drawing him back toward the hospital gate; but he continued speaking:—

"Py undt py, vun tay, I kot someting to say to Mr. *Richlun*, yet. Undt I sendts vert to Mr. *Richlun* tat *he* shouldt come into teh offuss. He cumps in. 'Mr. Richlun,' I sayss, sayss I to him, 'Mr. Richlun, I kot udt!'" The baker shook his finger in Dr. Sevier's face. "'I kot udt, udt layst, Mr. Richlun! I yoost het a *suspish'n* sindts teh first tay fot I employedt you, ovver now I *know* I kot udt!' Vell, sir, he yoost turnun so rate ass a flennen shirt!—'Mr. Reisen,' sayss he to me, 'fot iss udt fot you kot?' Undt sayss I to him, 'Mr. Richlun, udt iss you! Udt is *you* fot I kot!'"

Dr. Sevier stood sphinx-like, and once more Reisen went on.

"'Yes, Mr. Richlun,'" still addressing the Doctor as though he were his book-keeper, "'I yoost layin, on my pett effra nighdt—effra nighdt, vi-i-ite ava-a-ake! undt in apowdt a veek I make udt owdt ut layst tot you, Mr. Richlun,'—I lookt um shtraight in te eye, undt he lookt me shtraight te same,—'tot, Mr. Richlun, *you*,' sayss I, 'not dtose fellehs fot pin py mo sindts more ass fife yearss, put *you*, Mr. Richlun, iss teh mayn!—teh mayn fot I—kin *trust*!'" The baker's middle parts bent out and his arms were drawn akimbo. Thus for ten seconds.

"'Undt now, Mr. Richlun, do you kot teh shtrengdt for to shtart a noo pissness?'—Pecause, Toctor, udt pin seem to me Mr. Richlun kitten more undt more shecklun, undt toandt take tot meticine fot you kif um (ovver he sayss he toos). So ten he sayss to me, 'Mister Reisen, I am yoost so sollut undt shtrong like a pilly-coat! Fot is teh noo pissness?'—'Mr. Richlun,' sayss I, 've goin' to make pettent prate!'"

"What?" asked the Doctor, frowning with impatience and venturing to interrupt at last.

"*Pet-tent prate!*"

The listener frowned heavier and shook his head.

"*Pettent prate!*"

"Oh! patent bread; yes. Well?"

"Yes," said Reisen, "prate mate mit a mutcheen; mit copponic-essut kass into udt ploat pefore udt is paked. I pought teh pettent tiss mawning fun a yendleman in Garontelet shtreedt, alretty, naympt Kknox."

"And what have I to do with all this?" asked the Doctor, consulting his watch, as he had already done twice before.

"Vell," said Reisen, spreading his arms abroad, "I yoost taught you like to herr udt."

"But what do you want to see me for? What have you kept me all this time to tell me—or ask me?"

"Toctor,—you ugscooce me—ovver"—the baker held the Doctor by the elbow as he began to turn away—"Toctor Tseweer,"—the great face lighted up with a smile, the large body doubled partly together, and the broad left hand was held ready to smite the thigh,—"you shouldt see Mr. Richlun ven he fowndt owdt udt is goin' to lower teh price of prate! I taught he iss goin' to kiss Mississ Reisen!"

CHAPTER XL.

SWEET BELLS JANGLED.

Those who knew New Orleans just before the civil war, even though they saw it only along its riverfront from the deck of some steam-boat, may easily recall a

large sign painted high up on the side of the old "Triangle Building," which came to view through the dark web of masts and cordage as one drew near St. Mary's Market. "Steam Bakery" it read. And such as were New Orleans householders, or by any other chance enjoyed the experience of making their way in the early morning among the hundreds of baskets that on hundreds of elbows moved up and down along and across the quaint gas-lit arcades of any of the market-houses, must remember how, about this time or a little earlier, there began to appear on one of the tidiest of bread-stalls in each of these market-houses a new kind of bread. It was a small, densely compacted loaf of the size and shape of a badly distorted brick. When broken, it divided into layers, each of which showed—"teh bprindt of teh kkneading-mutcheen," said Reisen to Narcisse; "yoost like a tsoda crecker!"

These two persons had met by chance at a coffee-stand one beautiful summer dawn in one of the markets,—the Tréiné, most likely,—where, perched on high stools at a zinc-covered counter, with the smell of fresh blood on the right and of stale fish on the left, they had finished half their cup of *café au lait* before they awoke to the exhilarating knowledge of each other's presence.

"Yesseh," said Narcisse, "now since you 'ave wemawk the mention of it, I think I have saw that va'iety of bwead."

"Oh, surely you poundt to a-seedt udt. A uckly little prown dting"—

"But cook well," said Narcisse.

"Yayss," drawled the baker. It was a fact that he had to admit.

"An' good flou'," persisted the Creole.

"Yayss," said the smiling manufacturer. He could not deny that either.

"An' honness weight!" said Narcisse, planting his empty cup in his saucer, with the energy of his asservation; "an', Mr. Bison, thass a ve'y seldom thing."

"Yayss," assented Reisen, "ovver tat prate is mighdy dtry, undt shtickin' in ten dtroat."

"No, seh!" said the flatterer, with a generous smile. "Egscuse me—I diffeh fum you. 'Tis a beaucheouz bwead. Yesseh. And eve'y loaf got the name beaucheouzly pwint on the top, with 'Patent'—sich an' sich a time. 'Tis the tooth, Mr. Bison, I'm boun' to congwatu*late* you on that bwead."

"O-o-oh! tat iss not *mine* prate," exclaimed the baker. "Tat iss not fun mine etsteplitchmendt. Oh, no! Tatt iss te prate—I'm yoost dtellin' you—tat iss te prate fun tat fellah py teh Sunk-Mary's Morrikit-house! Tat's teh 'shteam prate'.

I to-undt know for vot effrapotty puys tat prate annahow! Ovver you yoost vait dtill you see *mine* prate!"

"Mr. Bison," said Narcisse, "Mr. Bison,"—he had been trying to stop him and get in a word of his own, but could not,—"I don't know if you—Mr.—Mr. Bison, in fact, you din unde'stood me. Can that be poss'ble that you din notiz that I was speaking in my i'ony about that bwead? Why, of co'se! Thass juz my i'onious cuztom, Mr. Bison. Thass one thing I dunno if you 'ave notiz about that 'steam bwead,' Mr. Bison, but with me that bwead always stick in my th'oat; an' yet I kin swallow mose anything, in fact. No, Mr. Bison, yo' bwead is deztyned to be the bwead; and I tell you how 'tis with me, I juz gladly eat yo' bwead eve'y time I kin git it! Mr. Bison, in fact you don't know me ve'y in*tim*itly, but you will oblige me ve'y much indeed to baw me five dollahs till tomaw—save me fum d'awing a check!"

The German thrust his hand slowly and deeply into his pocket. "I alvayss like to oplyche a yendleman,"—he smiled benignly, drew out a toothpick, and added,—"ovver I nivveh bporrah or lend to ennabodda."

"An' then," said Narcisse, promptly, "'tis imposs'ble faw anybody to be offended. Thass the bess way, Mr. Bison."

"Yayss," said the baker, "I tink udt iss." As they were parting, he added: "Ovver you vait dtill you see *mine* prate!"

"I'll do it, seh!— And, Mr. Bison, you muzn't think anything about that, my not bawing that five dollars fum you, Mr. Bison, because that don't make a bit o' dif'ence; an' thass one thing I like about you, Mr. Bison, you don't baw yo' money to eve'y Dick, Tom, an' Hawwy, do you?"

"No, I dtoandt. Ovver, you yoost vait"—

And certainly, after many vexations, difficulties, and delays, that took many a pound of flesh from Reisen's form, the pretty, pale-brown, fragrant white loaves of "aërated bread" that issued from the Star Bakery in Benjamin street were something pleasant to see, though they did not lower the price.

Richling's old liking for mechanical apparatus came into play. He only, in the establishment, thoroughly understood the new process, and could be certain of daily, or rather nightly, uniform results. He even made one or two slight improvements in it, which he contemplated with ecstatic pride, and long accounts of which he wrote to Mary.

In a generous and innocent way Reisen grew a little jealous of his accountant, and threw himself into his business as he had not done before since he was

young, and in the ardor of his emulation ignored utterly a state of health that was no better because of his great length and breadth.

"Toctor Tseweer!" he said, as the physician appeared one day in his office. "Vell, now, I yoost pet finfty tawllars tat iss Mississ Reisen sendts for you tat I'm sick! Ven udt iss not such a dting!" He laughed immoderately. "Ovver I'm gladt you come, Toctor, ennahow, for you pin yoost in time to see ever'ting runnin'. I vish you yoost come undt see udt!" He grinned in his old, broad way; but his face was anxious, and his bared arms were lean. He laid his hand on the Doctor's arm, and then jerked it away, and tried to blow off the floury print of his fingers. "Come!" He beckoned. "Come; I show you somedting putiful. Toctor, I *vizh* you come!"

The Doctor yielded. Richling had to be called upon at last to explain the hidden parts and processes.

"It's yoost like putt'n' te shpirudt into teh potty," said the laughing German. "Now, tat prate kot life in udt yoost teh same like your own selluf, Toctor. Tot prate kot yoost so much sense ass Reisen kot. Ovver, Toctor—Toctor"—the Doctor was giving his attention to Richling, who was explaining something—"Toctor, toandt you come here uxpectin' to see nopoty sick, less-n udt iss Mr. Richlun." He caught Richling's face roughly between his hands, and then gave his back a caressing thwack. "Toctor, vot you dtink? Ve goin' teh run prate-cawts mit copponic-essut kass. Tispense mit hawses!" He laughed long but softly, and smote Richling again as the three walked across the bakery yard abreast.

"Well?" said Dr. Sevier to Richling, in a low tone, "always working toward the one happy end."

Richling had only time to answer with his eyes, when the baker, always clinging close to them, said, "Yes; if I toandt look oudt yet, he pe rich pefore Reisen."

The Doctor looked steadily at Richling, stood still, and said, "Don't hurry."

But Richling swung playfully half around on his heel, dropped his glance, and jerked his head sidewise, as one who neither resented the advice nor took it. A minute later he drew from his breast-pocket a small, thick letter stripped of its envelope, and handed it to the Doctor, who put it into his pocket, neither of them speaking. The action showed practice. Reisen winked one eye laboriously at the Doctor and chuckled.

"See here, Reisen," said the Doctor, "I want you to pack your trunk, take the late boat, and go to Biloxi or Pascagoula, and spend a month fishing and sailing."

The baker pushed his fingers up under his hat, scratched his head, smiled widely, and pointed at Richling.

“Sendt him.”

The Doctor went and sat down with Reisen, and used every form of inducement that could be brought to bear; but the German had but one answer: Richling, Richling, not he. The Doctor left a prescription, which the baker took until he found it was making him sleep while Richling was at work, whereupon he amiably threw it out of his window.

It was no surprise to Dr. Sevier that Richling came to him a few days later with a face all trouble.

“How are you, Richling? How’s Reisen?”

“Doctor,” said Richling, “I’m afraid Mr. Reisen is”—Their eyes met.

“Insane,” said the Doctor.

“Yes.”

“Does his wife know whether he has ever had such symptoms before—in his life?”

“She says he hasn’t.”

“I suppose you know his pecuniary condition perfectly; has he money?”

“Plenty.”

“He’ll not consent to go away anywhere, I suppose, will he?”

“Not an inch.”

“There’s but one sensible and proper course, Richling; he must be taken at once, by force if necessary, to a first-class insane hospital.”

“Why, Doctor, why? Can’t we treat him better at home?”

The Doctor gave his head its well-known swing of impatience. “If you want to be *criminally* in error try that!”

“I don’t want to be in error at all,” retorted Richling.

“Then don’t lose twelve hours that you can save, but send him off as soon as process of court will let you.”

“Will you come at once and see him?” asked Richling, rising up.

“Yes, I’ll be there nearly as soon as you will. Stop; you had better ride with me; I have something special to say.” As the carriage started off, the Doctor leaned

back in its cushions, folded his arms, and took a long, meditative breath. Richling glanced at him and said:—

"We're both thinking of the same person."

"Yes," replied the Doctor; "and the same day, too, I suppose: the first day I ever saw her; the only other time that we ever got into this carriage together. Hmm! hmm! With what a fearful speed time flies!"

"Sometimes," said the yearning husband, and apologized by a laugh. The Doctor grunted, looked out of the carriage window, and, suddenly turning, asked:—

"Do you know that Reisen instructed his wife about six months ago, in the event of his death or disability, to place all her interests in your hands, and to be guided by your advice in everything?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Richling, "he can't do that! He should have asked my consent."

"I suppose he knew he wouldn't get it. He's a cunning simpleton."

"But, Doctor, if you knew this"—Richling ceased.

"Six months ago. Why didn't I tell you?" said the physician. "I thought I would, Richling, though Reisen bade me not, when he told me; I made no promise. But time, that you think goes slow, was too fast for me."

"I shall refuse to serve," said Richling, soliloquizing aloud. "Don't you see, Doctor, the delicacy of the position?"

"Yes, I do; but you don't. Don't you see it would be just as delicate a matter for you to refuse?"

Richling pondered, and presently said, quite slowly:—

"It will look like coming down out of the tree to catch the apples as they fall," he said. "Why," he added with impatience, "it lays me wide open to suspicion and slander."

"Does it?" asked the Doctor, heartlessly. "There's nothing remarkable in that. Did any one ever occupy a responsible position without those conditions?"

"But, you know, I have made some unscrupulous enemies by defending Reisen's interests."

"Um-hmm; what did you defend them for?"

Richling was about to make a reply; but the Doctor wanted none. "Richling," he said, "the most of men have burrows. They never let anything decoy them so far

from those burrows but they can pop into them at a moment's notice. Do you take my meaning?"

"Oh, yes!" said Richling, pleasantly; "no trouble to understand you this time. I'll not run into any burrow just now. I'll face my duty and think of Mary."

He laughed.

"Excellent pastime," responded Dr. Sevier.

They rode on in silence.

"As to"—began Richling again,—"as to such matters as these, once a man confronts the question candidly, there is really no room, that I can see, for a man to choose: a man, at least, who is always guided by conscience."

"If there were such a man," responded the Doctor.

"True," said John.

"But for common stuff, such as you and I are made of, it must sometimes be terrible."

"I dare say," said Richling. "It sometimes requires cold blood to choose aright."

"As cold as granite," replied the other.

They arrived at the bakery.

"O Doctor," said Mrs. Reisen, proffering her hand as he entered the house, "my poor hussband iss crazy!" She dropped into a chair and burst into tears. She was a large woman, with a round, red face and triple chin, but with a more intelligent look and a better command of English than Reisen. "Doctor, I want you to cure him ass quick ass possible."

"Well, madam, of course; but will you do what I say?"

"I will, certain shure. I do it yust like you tellin' me."

The Doctor gave her such good advice as became a courageous physician.

A look of dismay came upon her. Her mouth dropped open. "Oh, no, Doctor!" She began to shake her head. "I'll never do tha-at; oh, no; I'll never send my poor hussband to the crazy-house! Oh, no, sir; I'll do not such a thing!" There was some resentment in her emotion. Her nether lip went up like a crying babe's, and she breathed through her nostrils audibly.

"Oh, yes, I know!" said the poor creature, turning her face away from the Doctor's kind attempts to explain, and lifting it incredulously as she talked to the

wall,—"I know all about it. I'm not a-goin' to put no sich a disgrace on my poor hussband; no, indeed!" She faced around suddenly and threw out her hand to Richling, who leaned against a door twisting a bit of string between his thumbs. "Why, he wouldn't go, nohow, even if I gave my consents. You caynt coax him out of his room yet. Oh, no, Doctor! It's my duty to keep him wid me an' try to cure him first a little while here at home. That aint no trouble to me; I don't never mind no trouble if I can be any help to my hussband." She addressed the wall again.

"Well, madam," replied the physician, with unusual tenderness of tone, and looking at Richling while he spoke, "of course you'll do as you think best."

"Oh! my poor Reisen!" exclaimed the wife, wringing her hands.

"Yes," said the physician, rising and looking out of the window, "I am afraid it will be ruin to Reisen."

"No, it won't be such a thing," said Mrs. Reisen, turning this way and that in her chair as the physician moved from place to place. "Mr. Richlin',"—turning to him,—"Mr. Richlin' and me kin run the business yust so good as Reisen." She shifted her distressed gaze back and forth from Richling to the Doctor. The latter turned to Richling:—

"I'll have to leave this matter to you."

Richling nodded.

"Where is Reisen?" asked the Doctor. "In his own room, upstairs?" The three passed through an inner door.

CHAPTER XLI.

MIRAGE.

"This spoils some of your arrangements, doesn't it?" asked Dr. Sevier of Richling, stepping again into his carriage. He had already said the kind things, concerning Reisen, that physicians commonly say when they have little hope. "Were you not counting on an early visit to Milwaukee?"

Richling laughed.

“That illusion has been just a little beyond reach for months.” He helped the Doctor shut his carriage-door.

“But now, of course—” said the physician.

“Of course it’s out of the question,” replied Richling; and the Doctor drove away, with the young man’s face in his mind bearing an expression of simple emphasis that pleased him much.

Late at night Richling, in his dingy little office, unlocked a drawer, drew out a plump package of letters, and began to read their pages,—transcripts of his wife’s heart, pages upon pages, hundreds of precious lines, dates crowding closely one upon another. Often he smiled as his eyes ran to and fro, or drew a soft sigh as he turned the page, and looked behind to see if any one had stolen in and was reading over his shoulder. Sometimes his smile broadened; he lifted his glance from the sheet and fixed it in pleasant revery on the blank wall before him. Often the lines were entirely taken up with mere utterances of affection. Now and then they were all about little Alice, who had fretted all the night before, her gums being swollen and tender on the upper left side near the front; or who had fallen violently in love with the house-dog, by whom, in turn, the sentiment was reciprocated; or whose eyes were really getting bluer and bluer, and her cheeks fatter and fatter, and who seemed to fear nothing that had existence. And the reader of the lines would rest one elbow on the desk, shut his eyes in one hand, and see the fair young head of the mother drooping tenderly over that smaller head in her bosom. Sometimes the tone of the lines was hopefully grave, discussing in the old tentative, interrogative key the future and its possibilities. Some pages were given to reminiscences,—recollections of all the droll things and all the good and glad things of the rugged past. Every here and there, but especially where the lines drew toward the signature, the words of longing multiplied, but always full of sunshine; and just at the end of each letter love spurned its restraints, and rose and overflowed with sweet confessions.

Sometimes these re-read letters did Richling good; not always. Maybe he read them too often. It was only the very next time that the Doctor’s carriage stood before the bakery that the departing physician turned before he reëntered the vehicle, and—whatever Richling had been saying to him—said abruptly:—

“Richling, are you falling out of love with your work?”

“Why do you ask me that?” asked the young man, coloring.

“Because I no longer see that joy of deliverance with which you entered upon this humble calling. It seems to have passed like a lost perfume, Richling. Have you let your toil become a task once more?”

Richling dropped his eyes and pushed the ground with the toe of his boot.

“I didn’t want you to find that out, Doctor.”

“I was afraid, from the first, it would be so,” said the physician.

“I don’t see why you were.”

“Well, I saw that the zeal with which you first laid hold of your work was not entirely natural. It was good, but it was partly artificial,—the more credit to you on that account. But I saw that by and by you would have to keep it up mainly by your sense of necessity and duty. ‘That’ll be the pinch,’ I said; and now I see it’s come. For a long time you idealized the work; but at last its real dulness has begun to overcome you, and you’re discontented—and with a discontentment that you can’t justify, can you?”

“But I feel myself growing smaller again.”

“No wonder. Why, Richling, it’s the discontent makes that.”

“Oh, no! The discontent makes me long to expand. I never had so much ambition before. But what can I do here? Why, Doctor, I ought to be—I might be”—

The physician laid a hand on the young man’s shoulder.

“Stop, Richling. Drop those phrases and give us a healthy ‘I am,’ and ‘I must,’ and ‘I will.’ Don’t—*don’t* be like so many! You’re not of the many. Richling, in the first illness in which I ever attended your wife, she watched her chance and asked me privately—implored me—not to let her die, for your sake. I don’t suppose that tortures could have wrung from her, even if she realized it,—which I doubt,—the true reason. But don’t you feel it? It was because your moral nature needs her so badly. Stop—let me finish. You need Mary back here now to hold you square to your course by the tremendous power of her timid little ‘Don’t you think?’ and ‘Doesn’t it seem?’”

“Doctor,” replied Richling, with a smile of expostulation, “you touch one’s pride.”

“Certainly I do. You’re willing enough to say that you love her and long for her, but not that your moral manhood needs her. And yet isn’t it true?”

“It sha’n’t be true,” said Richling, swinging a playful fist. “‘Forewarned is forearmed;’ I’ll not allow it. I’m man enough for that.” He laughed, with a touch of pique.

“Richling,”—the Doctor laid a finger against his companion’s shoulder, preparing at the same time to leave him,—“don’t be misled. A man who doesn’t need a wife isn’t fit to have one.”

“Why, Doctor,” replied Richling, with sincere amiability, “you’re the man of all men I should have picked out to prove the contrary.”

“No, Richling, no. I wasn’t fit, and God took her.”

In accordance with Dr. Sevier’s request Richling essayed to lift the mind of the baker’s wife, in the matter of her husband’s affliction, to that plane of conviction where facts, and not feelings, should become her motive; and when he had talked until his head reeled, as though he had been blowing a fire, and she would not blaze for all his blowing—would be governed only by a stupid sentimentality; and when at length she suddenly flashed up in silly anger and accused him of interested motives; and when he had demanded instant retraction or release from her employment; and when she humbly and affectionately apologized, and was still as deep as ever in hopeless, clinging sentimentalisms, repeating the dictums of her simple and ignorant German neighbors and intimates, and calling them in to argue with him, the feeling that the Doctor’s exhortation had for the moment driven away came back with more force than ever, and he could only turn again to his ovens and account-books with a feeling of annihilation.

“Where am I? What am I?” Silence was the only answer. The separation that had once been so sharp a pain had ceased to cut, and was bearing down upon him now with that dull, grinding weight that does the damage in us.

Presently came another development: the lack of money, that did no harm while it was merely kept in the mind, settled down upon the heart.

“It may be a bad thing to love, but it’s a good thing to have,” he said, one day, to the little rector, as this friend stood by him at a corner of the high desk where Richling was posting his ledger.

“But not to seek,” said the rector.

Richling posted an item and shook his head doubtingly.

“That depends, I should say, on how much one seeks it, and how much of it he seeks.”

“No,” insisted the clergyman. Richling bent a look of inquiry upon him, and he added:—

“The principle is bad, and you know it, Richling. ‘Seek ye first’—you know the text, and the assurance that follows with it—‘all these things shall be added’”—

“Oh, yes; but still”—

“‘But still!’” exclaimed the little preacher; “why must everybody say ‘but still’? Don’t you see that that ‘but still’ is the refusal of Christians to practise Christianity?”

Richling looked, but said nothing; and his friend hoped the word had taken effect. But Richling was too deeply bitten to be cured by one or two good sayings. After a moment he said:—

“I used to wonder to see nearly everybody struggling to be rich, but I don’t now. I don’t justify it, but I understand it. It’s flight from oblivion. It’s the natural longing to be seen and felt.”

“Why isn’t it enough to be felt?” asked the other. “Here, you make bread and sell it. A thousand people eat it from your hand every day. Isn’t that something?”

“Yes; but it’s all the bread. The bread’s everything; I’m nothing. I’m not asked to do or to be. I may exist or not; there will be bread all the same. I see my remark pains you, but I can’t help it. You’ve never tried the thing. You’ve never encountered the mild contempt that people in ease pay to those who pursue the ‘industries.’ You’ve never suffered the condescension of rank to the ranks. You don’t know the smart of being only an arithmetical quantity in a world of achievements and possessions.”

“No,” said the preacher, “maybe I haven’t. But I should say you are just the sort of man that ought to come through all that unsoured and unhurt. Richling,”—he put on a lighter mood,—“you’ve got a moral indigestion. You’ve accustomed yourself to the highest motives, and now these new notions are not the highest, and you know and feel it. They don’t nourish you. They don’t make you happy. Where are your old sentiments? What’s become of them?”

“Ah!” said Richling, “I got them from my wife. And the supply’s nearly run out.”

“Get it renewed!” said the little man, quickly, putting on his hat and extending a farewell hand. “Excuse me for saying so. I didn’t intend it; I dropped in to ask you again the name of that Italian whom you visit at the prison,—the man I promised you I’d go and talk to. Yes—Ristofalo; that’s it. Good-by.”

That night Richling wrote to his wife. What he wrote goes not down here; but he felt as he wrote that his mood was not the right one, and when Mary got the letter she answered by first mail:—

“Will you not let me come to you? Is it not surely best? Say but the word, and I’ll come. It will be the steamer to Chicago, railroad to Cairo, and a St. Louis boat to New Orleans. Alice will be both company and protection, and no burden at all. O

my beloved husband! I am just ungracious enough to think, some days, that these times of separation are the hardest of all. When we were suffering sickness and hunger together—well, we were *together*. Darling, if you'll just say come, I'll come in an *instant*. Oh, how gladly! Surely, with what you tell me you've saved, and with your place so secure to you, can't we venture to begin again? Alice and I can live with you in the bakery. O my husband! if you but say the word, a little time—a few days will bring us into your arms. And yet, do not yield to my impatience; I trust your wisdom, and know that what you decide will be best. Mother has been very feeble lately, as I have told you; but she seems to be improving, and now I see what I've half suspected for a long time, and ought to have seen sooner, that my husband—my dear, dear husband—needs me most; and I'm coming—I'm *coming*, John, if you'll only say come.
Your loving
MARY."

CHAPTER XLII.

RISTOFALO AND THE RECTOR.

Be Richling's feelings what they might, the Star Bakery shone in the retail firmament of the commercial heavens with new and growing brilliancy. There was scarcely time to talk even with the tough little rector who hovers on the borders of this history, and he might have become quite an alien had not Richling's earnest request made him one day a visitor, as we have seen him express his intention of being, in the foul corridors of the parish prison, and presently the occupant of a broken chair in the apartment apportioned to Raphael Ristofalo and two other prisoners. "Easy little tasks you cut out for your friends," said the rector to Richling when next they met. "I got preached *to*—not to say edified. I'll share my edification with you!" He told his experience.

It was a sinister place, the prison apartment. The hand of Kate Ristofalo had removed some of its unsightly conditions and disguised others; but the bounds of the room, walls, ceiling, windows, floor, still displayed, with official unconcern, the grime and decay that is commonly thought good enough for men charged, rightly or wrongly, with crime.

The clergyman's chair was in the centre of the floor. Ristofalo sat facing him a little way off on the right. A youth of nineteen sat tipped against the wall on the left, and a long-limbed, big-boned, red-shirted young Irishman occupied a poplar

table, hanging one of his legs across a corner of it and letting the other down to the floor. Ristofalo remarked, in the form of polite acknowledgment, that the rector had preached to the assembled inmates of the prison on the Sunday previous.

“Did I say anything that you thought was true?” asked the minister.

The Italian smiled in the gentle manner that never failed him.

“Didn’t listen much,” he said. He drew from a pocket of his black velveteen pantaloons a small crumpled tract. It may have been a favorite one with the clergyman, for the youth against the wall produced its counterpart, and the man on the edge of the table lay back on his elbow, and, with an indolent stretch of the opposite arm and both legs, drew a third one from a tin cup that rested on a greasy shelf behind him. The Irishman held his between his fingers and smirked a little toward the floor. Ristofalo extended his toward the visitor, and touched the caption with one finger: “Mercy offered.”

“Well,” asked the rector, pleasantly, “what’s the matter with that?”

“Is no use yeh. Wrong place—this prison.”

“Um-hm,” said the tract-distributor, glancing down at the leaf and smoothing it on his knee while he took time to think. “Well, why shouldn’t mercy be offered here?”

“No,” replied Ristofalo, still smiling; “ought offer justice first.”

“Mr. Preacher,” asked the young Irishman, bringing both legs to the front, and swinging them under the table, “d’ye vote?”

“Yes; I vote.”

“D’ye call yerself a cidizen—with a cidizen’s rights an’ djuties?”

“I do.”

“That’s right.” There was a deep sea of insolence in the smooth-faced, red-eyed smile that accompanied the commendation. “And how manny times have ye bean in this prison?”

“I don’t know; eight or ten times. That rather beats you, doesn’t it?”

Ristofalo smiled, the youth uttered a high rasping cackle, and the Irishman laughed the heartiest of all.

“A little,” he said; “a little. But nivver mind. Ye say ye’ve bin here eight or tin times; yes. Well, now, will I tell ye what I’d do afore and iver I’d kim back here ag’in,—if I was you now? Will I tell ye?”

“Well, yes,” replied the visitor, amiably; “I’d like to know.”

“Well, surr, I’d go to the mair of this city and to the judge of the criminal coort, and to the gov’ner of the Sta-ate, and to the ligislatur, if needs be, and I’d say, ‘Gintlemin, I can’t go back to that prison! There is more crimes a-being committed by the people outside ag’in the fellies in theyre than—than—than the—the fellies in theyre has committed ag’in the people! I’m ashamed to preach theyre! I’m afeered to do ud!’” The speaker slipped off the table, upon his feet. “‘There’s murrder a-goun’ on in theyre! There’s more murrder a-bein’ done in theyre nor there is outside! Justice is a-bein’ murdered theyre ivery hour of day and night!’”

He brandished his fist with the last words, but dropped it at a glance from Ristofalo, and began to pace the floor along his side of the room, looking with a heavy-browed smile back and forth from one fellow-captive to the other. He waited till the visitor was about to speak, and then interrupted, pointing at him suddenly:—

“Ye’re a Prodez’n preacher! I’ll bet ye fifty dollars ye have a rich cherch! Full of leadin’ cidizens!”

“You’re correct.”

“Well, I’d go an’—an’—an’ I’d say, ‘Dawn’t ye nivver ax me to go into that place ag’in a-pallaverin’ about mercy, until ye gid ud chaynged from the hell on earth it is to a house of justice, wheyre min gits the sintences that the coorts decrees!’ *I* don’t complain in here. *He* don’t complain,” pointing to Ristofalo; “ye’ll nivver hear a complaint from him. But go look in that yaird!” He threw up both hands with a grimace of disgust—“Aw!”—and ceased again, but continued his walk, looked at his fellows, and resumed:—

“*I* listened to yer sermon. I heerd ye talkin’ about the souls of uz. Do ye think ye kin make anny of thim min believe ye cayre for the souls of us whin ye do nahthing for the *bodies* that’s before yer eyes tlothed in rrags and stairved, and made to sleep on beds of brick and stone, and to receive a hundred abuses a day that was nivver intended to be a pairt of *anny*body’s sintince—and manny of’m not tried yit, an’ nivver a-goun’ to have annythin’ proved ag’in ’m? How *can* ye come offerin’ uz merrcy? For ye don’t come out o’ the tloister, like a poor Cat’lic priest or Sister. Ye come rright out o’ the hairt o’ the community that’s a-committin’ more crimes ag’in uz in here than all of us together has iver

committed outside. Aw!—Bring us a better airticle of yer own justice ferst—I doan't cayre how *crool* it is, so ut's *justice*—an' *thin* preach about God's mercy. I'll listen to ye."

Ristofalo had kept his eyes for the most of the time on the floor, smiling sometimes more and sometimes less. Now, however, he raised them and nodded to the clergyman. He approved all that had been said. The Irishman went and sat again on the table and swung his legs. The visitor was not allowed to answer before, and must answer now. He would have been more comfortable at the rectory.

"My friend," he began, "suppose, now, I should say that you are pretty nearly correct in everything you've said?"

The prisoner, who, with hands grasping the table's edge on either side of him, was looking down at his swinging brogans, simply lifted his lurid eyes without raising his head, and nodded. "It would be right," he seemed to intimate, "but nothing great."

"And suppose I should say that I'm glad I've heard it, and that I even intend to make good use of it?"

His hearer lifted his head, better pleased, but not without some betrayal of the distrust which a lower nature feels toward the condescensions of a higher. The preacher went on:—

"Would you try to believe what I have to add to that?"

"Yes, I'd try," replied the Irishman, looking facetiously from the youth to Ristofalo. But this time the Italian was grave, and turned his glance expectantly upon the minister, who presently replied:—

"Well, neither my church nor the community has sent me here at all."

The Irishman broke into a laugh.

"Did God send ye?" He looked again to his comrades, with an expanded grin. The youth giggled. The clergyman met the attack with serenity, waited a moment and then responded:—

"Well, in one sense, I don't mind saying—yes."

"Well," said the Irishman, still full of mirth, and swinging his legs with fresh vigor, "he'd aht to 'a' sint ye to the ligislatur."

“I’m in hopes he will,” said the little rector; “but”—checking the Irishman’s renewed laughter—“tell me why should other men’s injustice in here stop me from preaching God’s mercy?”

“Because it’s pairt *your* injustice! Ye *do* come from yer cherch, an’ ye *do* come from the community, an’ ye can’t deny ud, an’ ye’d ahtn’t to be comin’ in here with yer sweet tahk and yer eyes tight shut to the crimes that’s bein’ committed ag’in uz for want of an outcry against ’em by you preachers an’ prayers an’ thract-disthributors.” The speaker ceased and nodded fiercely. Then a new thought occurred to him, and he began again abruptly:—

“Look ut here! Ye said in yer serrmon that as to Him”—he pointed through the broken ceiling—“we’re all criminals alike, didn’t ye?”

“I did,” responded the preacher, in a low tone.

“Yes,” said Ristofalo; and the boy echoed the same word.

“Well, thin, what rights has some to be out an’ some to be in?”

“Only one right that I know of,” responded the little man; “still that is a good one.”

“And that is—?” prompted the Irishman.

“Society’s right to protect itself.”

“Yes,” said the prisoner, “to protect itself. Thin what right has it to keep a prison like this, where every man an’ woman as goes out of ud goes out a blacker devil, and cunninger devil, and a more dangerous devil, nor when he came in? Is that anny protection? Why shouldn’t such a prison tumble down upon the heads of thim as built it? Say.”

“I expect you’ll have to ask somebody else,” said the rector. He rose.

“Ye’re not a-goun’!” exclaimed the Irishman, in broad affectation of surprise.

“Yes.”

“Ah! come, now! Ye’re not goun’ to be beat that a-way by a wild Mick o’ the woods?” He held himself ready for a laugh.

“No, I’m coming back,” said the smiling clergyman, and the laugh came.

“That’s right! But”—as if the thought was a sudden one—“I’ll be dead by thin, willn’t I? Of coorse I will.”

“Yes?” rejoined the clergyman. “How’s that?”

The Irishman turned to the Italian.

“Mr. Ristofalo, we’re a-goin to the pinitintiary, aint we?”

Ristofalo nodded.

“Of coorse we air! Ah! Mr. Preechur, that’s the place!”

“Worse than this?”

“Worse? Oh, no! It’s better. This is slow death, but that’s quick and short—and sure. If it don’t git ye in five year’, ye’re an allygatur. This place? It’s heaven to ud!”

CHAPTER XLIII.

SHALL SHE COME OR STAY?

Richling read Mary’s letter through three times without a smile. The feeling that he had prompted the missive—that it was partly his—stood between him and a tumult of gladness. And yet when he closed his eyes he could see Mary, all buoyancy and laughter, spurning his claim to each and every stroke of the pen. It was all hers, all!

As he was slowly folding the sheet Mrs. Reisen came in upon him. It was one of those excessively warm spring evenings that sometimes make New Orleans fear it will have no May. The baker’s wife stood with her immense red hands thrust into the pockets of an expansive pinafore, and her three double chins glistening with perspiration. She bade her manager a pleasant good-evening.

Richling inquired how she had left her husband.

“Kviet, Mr. Richlin’, kviet. Mr. Richlin’, I pelief Reisen kittin petter. If he don’t gittin’ better, how come he’ss every day a little more kvieter, and sit’ still and don’t say nutting to nobody?”

“Mrs. Reisen, my wife is asking me to send for her”—Richling gave the folded letter a little shake as he held it by one corner—“to come down here and live again.”

“Now, Mr. Richlin’?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I will shwear!” She dropped into a seat. “Right in de bekinning o’ summer time! Vell, vell, vell! And you told me Mrs. Richling is a sentsible voman! Vell, I don’t belief dat I efer see a young voman w’at aint de pickest kind o’ fool apowt her hussbandt. Vell, vell!—And she comin’ down heah ’n’ choost kittin’ all your money shpent, ’n’ den her mudter kittin’ vorse ’n’ she got ’o go pack akin!”

“Why, Mrs. Reisen,” exclaimed Richling, warmly. “you speak as if you didn’t want her to come.” He contrived to smile as he finished.

“Vell,—of—course! *You* don’t vant her to come, do you?”

Richling forced a laugh.

“Seems to me ’twould be natural if I did, Mrs. Reisen. Didn’t the preacher say, when we were married, ‘Let no man put asunder’?”

“Oh, now, Mr. Richlin’, dere aindt nopotty a-koin’ to put you under!—’less-n it’s your vife. Vot she want to come down for? Don’t I takin’ koot care you?” There was a tear in her eye as she went out.

An hour or so later the little rector dropped in.

“Richling, I came to see if I did any damage the last time I was here. My own words worried me.”

“You were afraid,” responded Richling, “that I would understand you to recommend me to send for my wife.”

“Yes.”

“I didn’t understand you so.”

“Well, my mind’s relieved.”

“Mine isn’t,” said Richling. He laid down his pen and gathered his fingers around one knee. “Why shouldn’t I send for her?”

“You will, some day.”

“But I mean now.”

The clergyman shook his head pleasantly.

“I don’t think that’s what you mean.”

“Well, let that pass. I know what I do mean. I mean to get out of this business. I’ve lived long enough with these savages.” A wave of his hand indicated the whole *personnel* of the bread business.

“I would try not to mind their savageness, Richling,” said the little preacher, slowly. “The best of us are only savages hid under a harness. If we’re not, we’ve somehow made a loss.” Richling looked at him with amused astonishment, but he persisted. “I’m in earnest! We’ve had something refined out of us that we shouldn’t have parted with. Now, there’s Mrs. Reisen. I like her. She’s a good woman. If the savage can stand you, why can’t you stand the savage?”

“Yes, true enough. Yet—well, I must get out of this, anyway.”

The little man clapped him on the shoulder.

“*Climb* out. See here, you Milwaukee man,”—he pushed Richling playfully,—“what are *you* doing with these Southern notions of ours about the ‘yoke of menial service,’ anyhow?”

“I was not born in Milwaukee,” said Richling.

“And you’ll not die with these notions, either,” retorted the other. “Look here, I am going. Good-by. You’ve got to get rid of them, you know, before your wife comes. I’m glad you are not going to send for her now.”

“I didn’t say I wasn’t.”

“I wouldn’t.”

“Oh, you don’t know what you’d do,” said Richling.

The little preacher eyed him steadily for a moment, and then slowly returned to where he still sat holding his knee.

They had a long talk in very quiet tones. At the end the rector asked:—

“Didn’t you once meet Dr. Sevier’s two nieces—at his house?”

“Yes,” said Richling.

“Do you remember the one named Laura?—the dark, flashing one?”

“Yes.”

“Well,—oh, pshaw! I could tell you something funny, but I don’t care to do it.”

What he did not care to tell was, that she had promised him five years before to be his wife any day when he should say the word. In all that time, and this very night, one letter, one line almost, and he could have ended his waiting; but he was not seeking his own happiness.

They smiled together. “Well, good-by again. Don’t think I’m always going to persecute you with my solicitude.”

“I’m not worth it,” said Richling, slipping slowly down from his high stool and letting the little man out into the street.

A little way down the street some one coming out of a dark alley just in time to confront the clergyman extended a hand in salutation.

“Good-evenin’, Mr. Blank.”

He took the hand. It belonged to a girl of eighteen, bareheaded and barefooted, holding in the other hand a small oil-can. Her eyes looked steadily into his.

“You don’t know me,” she said, pleasantly.

“Why, yes, now I remember you. You’re Maggie.”

“Yes,” replied the girl. “Don’t you recollect—in the mission-school? Don’t you recollect you married me and Larry? That’s two years ago.” She almost laughed out with pleasure.

“And where’s Larry?”

“Why, don’t you recollect? He’s on the sloop-o’-war *Preble*.” Then she added more gravely: “I aint seen him in twenty months. But I know he’s all right. I aint a-scared about *that*—only if he’s alive and well; yes, sir. Well, good-evenin’, sir. Yes, sir; I think I’ll come to the mission nex’ Sunday—and I’ll bring the baby, will I? All right, sir. Well, so long, sir. Take care of yourself, sir.”

What a word that was! It echoed in his ear all the way home: “Take care of *yourself*.” What boast is there for the civilization that refines away the unconscious heroism of the unfriended poor?

He was glad he had not told Richling all his little secret. But Richling found it out later from Dr. Sevier.