Golden Grain

By

Benjamin Leopold Farjeon

GOLDEN GRAIN

I.

THROUGH COUNTRY ROADS TO SOME GREEN PLEASANT SPOT.

This Christmas I fulfill a purpose which has been in my mind for more than a year. Until now my days and nights have been so much occupied that I have not been able to commence my task. But you will see, by the time you reach the end of these s--if you have patience to go through them--that I am enjoying a little leisure. The task that I have set myself to perform is both sad and pleasant, and no more fitting time than Christmas could be found for its accomplishment.

Not that it is Christmas at this present moment of writing. But the good season will be here in a month; and when the mistletoe and holly are hanging in cot and mansion, and the hearts of men are beating in harmony, as if one pulse of love and goodwill animated them, I hope, with God's blessing, that my little book will be completed, ready for those who care to read what I have written. It may be that certain persons who appear in these s will be familiar to some of my readers. I hope they will not be the less welcome on that account. To me the story of their lives is fraught with deep and abiding interest.

How sweet the days are!--ay, although it is winter. Happiness comes from within. Grateful hearts can give light and colour to the gloomiest hours. But the hours for me are not gloomy, and no effort on my part is required to make them bright. This is the sweetest part of my life, both in itself and in the promise that it holds out. Three days ago I was married. My wife is working in the room in which I am writing. I call her to me.

'Rachel!'

She comes to my side. I hold her hand in mine. I look into her face, which is inclined towards me. She cannot see me; she is blind. But she smiles as I gaze at her. She knows the tender thought which impelled me to call her to my side.

I am a clergyman, and my name is Andrew Meadow. My duties lie in one of the most crowded and populous parts of the City, and the stipend I received (for I no longer receive it) in return for my labours was small. Far be it from my intention to make a merit of the fact, but it is necessary that I should mention it. Although I have at times felt myself cruelly hampered for want of means, my stipend was sufficient for my

personal wants, and I have even been able now and then to spare a little: but very little. In the clerical, as in many other professions, the payment to the workers is most unequally apportioned; it is almost the rule that those who work the hardest receive the least. So far as I myself am concerned, I have no complaint to make; but I feel that it is an anomaly that some of those who work in the Church should receive so much that they leave great fortunes behind them, while others receive so little as to be scarcely able to maintain their families. The priests of Him who advised the wealthy to sell all they had, and give to the poor, should have neither more nor less than enough. If they do not recognise in their practical life, and by practical example, that the cause they labour in is the cause of humanity, they are in a measure unfaithful to their trust.

I have no recollection of my father; but I have learned to honour his memory. My mother lived until I was eight years of age. She was a simple good woman--sweetly girlish in her manner to the last--and although she is dust, I have not lost her. She dwells in my heart. There is always to my consciousness a strong affinity between good women; in point of feature, voice, or manner, one reminds you of another; and' I often see in the face of my wife a likeness to that of my mother. I read these last words to my wife; her face lights up with a new happiness, and she says:

'I am glad; very, very glad!'

My wife knows and approves of the task I am engaged upon.

'It will do good, Andrew,' she says; 'I am sure it will.'

In my heart of hearts I hope so. If ever so little good results from these words of mine, if but a seed is sown, if but a little sympathy is roused to action which otherwise would have lain dormant, I shall be amply repaid.

My wife, like myself, is an orphan; unlike myself, she never knew father or mother. But she had, and has, those who stand to her in that relation. In the house of these dear souls I first met her.

Their name is Silver. The maternal instinct is implanted in the breast of every good woman, and it was a great grief to the Silvers that their union was a barren one; but they turned their sorrow to good use. Childless themselves, they, to the full extent of their means, adopted a family of children, and trained them in such a manner as to make their lives a blessing to them and to those around them. I cannot hope to give you an idea of the perfect goodness of the lives of these two dear friends, to whom my present and future happiness is due. I thank God that I know them, and that they account me their friend. Could the example which they have set in their small way and with their

small means be followed out on a larger scale, in other places and localities than those in which I labour, a blessing would fall upon the land, and humanity itself would be ennobled. These children, when Mr. and Mrs. Silver adopted them, were babes, unconscious of the perils which lay before them, and only those were selected who had no parents. The time chosen for their adoption was within a week or two of Christmas. They were found in the most miserable courts and alleys in the metropolis; they were surrounded by ignorance, poverty, dirt, and crime. God knows into what form of shame they might have developed, had they been left to grow up in accordance with their surroundings. But a happier fate is theirs. Under the influence of a sweet and wise benevolence they have grown into good and useful men and women, of whom their country may be justly proud.

I made the acquaintance of the Silvers almost as soon as I had entered upon my duties; but circumstances did not bring us together, and I was not very intimate with them until some time afterwards. I had heard much of their goodness, for they are loved in the neighbourhood; every man and woman has a good word for them.

One memorable day in August, more than four years ago now, I received a note from Mrs. Silver, who lived in Buttercup-square, asking me as a great favour to visit her in the evening, if I had the time to spare. I was glad of the opportunity of seeing something of a household of which I had heard so much good, and from that evening our actual friendship commenced. There were present Mr. and Mrs. Silver, and two of their adopted children, Mary and Rachel. They received me cordially, and I felt that I was among friends. I saw that Rachel was blind, and it touched me deeply, at that time and always afterwards, to witness their tender thoughtfulness for the dear girl's calamity. Not, I truly believe, that it is a calamity to her. She has been so wisely trained, and has such strong inherent gratitude for the love which is shed upon her, for the blessings by which she is surrounded, that a repining thought never enters her mind. The effect of her grateful nature is shown in the purity of her face, in the modesty of her every movement. Were I a sculptor, it would be my earnest wish to take her face as a model for Purity, and were I talented enough to be faithful in the reproduction, I am sure that my fame would be made.

'These are only two of our children,' said Mrs. Silver, after I had shaken hands all round; 'we have three more--Ruth and Charley, who took into their heads to fall in love with each other, and are married; and Richard, who is in Canada, and from whom we have received a letter to-day. Ruth has a baby, and she and her husband will be here in half-an-hour.'

'Not the baby, mother!' said Mary.

'No, dear, not the baby. She is only three months old, Mr. Meadow.'

'But such a wise little dear!' added Mary. 'I do believe she begins to understand already.'

Then Mrs. Silver went on to tell me that Mary, the eldest girl--woman now, indeed, twenty-four years of age--held a responsible position in a government telegraph-office; that Charley was a compositor; that Richard was a watchmaker; and that Rachel was as useful as any of them, for she did all the needlework of the house. Rachel was working a black-silk watch-guard for Richard, and it surprised me to see how nimble her fingers were. She was listening intently to every word that passed, and when I first spoke, she paused in her work to pay attention to my voice.

'I want you to know exactly all about us,' said Mrs. Silver, 'and to interest you in us, for I have made up my mind--pray excuse me for it--that you are necessary to our plans. In a word, I wish to enlist you.'

Rachel did a singular thing here--something which made a great impression upon me. She left the room, and returned with a small piece of bread dipped in salt. She held the plate towards me.

'Pray eat this piece of bread, Mr. Meadow,' she said.

I took the bread, and ate it.

'Now, mother,' said Rachel, with a satisfied expression, 'Mr. Meadow is enlisted.'

'Yes,' I said, addressing Mrs. Silver; 'I am one of your soldiers.'

'Ah,' rejoined Mrs. Silver; 'but I want you to be my captain.'

At that moment there was a knock at the street-door.

'That's Mr. Merrywhistle,' cried Rachel, running into the passage, and they all turned their faces to the door to welcome a friend.

'Rachel knows every knock and every step,' observed Mrs. Silver; 'she will know you by your step the next time you visit us.'

I had heard of Mr. Merrywhistle as a large-hearted charitable man, and I was pleased to come into closer acquaintanceship with him. He entered, with his arm around Rachel's waist. An old man with white hair and a kind eye.

Mrs. Silver was the first to speak. 'We have enlisted our curate, Mr. Merrywhistle.'

'I knew,' he said, as he shook hands with me, 'that he had only to be spoken to. I am truly pleased to see you here. Well, children'--turning to the girls--'what is the news?'

The important news was Richard's letter from Canada. Mr. Merrywhistle's face brightened when he heard of it. It was not to be read, however, until Ruth and Charley came in. They arrived earlier than was expected, both of them in a glow of excitement. It was evident that they also had important news to communicate. Ruth, after the first affectionate greetings, went to Rachel's side, and for the rest of the evening the maid and the wife were never apart. A special affection seemed to exist between them. Now that the whole family was assembled, I thought I had never seen a more beautiful group--especially beautiful because the ties that bound them together were made fast by love and esteem. I knew to whom this was due, and I looked towards Mr. and Mrs. Silver with increased respect and admiration.

The first inquiries were about Ruth's baby. The young mother's enthusiasm in answering the inquiries, and in detailing the wonderful doings of her treasure during the last twenty-four hours, warmed my heart; and when, after a long and almost breathless narration, Ruth exclaimed, 'And I really think the darling has a tooth coming!' I thought I had never heard anything more delicious. As for Mr. Merrywhistle, he rubbed his hands with delight, and took Ruth's hands in his, and rubbed those also, and exclaimed, 'Wonderful, wonderful! Really I never did!' a score of times at least. Flushed with pride and pleasure, Ruth as she spoke nodded at the others, now wisely, now merrily, now tenderly, with looks which said, 'Of all happy mothers, I am the happiest!' Never in my life had I seen so exquisite a home picture.

'And now, Charley,' said Ruth, when she had exhausted her budget, although she could have gone through the whole of it again with perfect satisfaction, as if it were something entirely new, 'and now, Charley, tell them.'

What Charley had to tell was simply that he was to be made overseer of the printing establishment in which he was employed. There was an honest ring in his voice as he spoke of his good fortune, and I was convinced that it had been earned by merit.

'That is good news, indeed,' said Mr. Merrywhistle, with his hand on Charley's shoulder. 'Charley, by the time you are thirty, you will be a master printer. Bravo! Bravo!

Mrs. Silver kissed him, without saying a word, and as he drew her face down to his and returned the kiss, and her gray hair mingled with his brown curly locks, he whispered something in her ear which brought a happy sigh from her.

Then came the reading of Richard's letter. Mr. Silver took it from his pocket and opened it, and there was a general rustle of expectation in the room and a closer drawing together of chairs. He looked around him with a wistful air; the movement reminded him of a time when those who were now men and women grown were children. To this purpose he spoke, in a soft tone, before he commenced to read Richard's letter:

'You remind me, children, you remind me! It brings many happy evenings to my mind. Do you remember Paul and Virginia and the Vicar of Wakefield?'

This challenge loosened their tongues, and for five minutes they were busy recalling refreshing reminiscences. When memories of times that were sweet and pleasant come to us, they come wrapt in a cloud of solemn tenderness, and the voices of these children were pensive as they spoke.

Behind the year whose seasons we are now enjoying is an arch of overhanging leaves and boughs, receding, as it were, and growing fainter in colour as old age steals upon us. Within this arch of green leaves and boughs live the memories of our past. As, with a wistful yearning to the days that were so sweet, we turn towards the arch, which spans from heaven to earth, it opens, as by the touch of a magic wand, and we see the tender trees that made our young lives green. They are fair and good, and their leaves and branches are dew-laden, though we of whom they are a part are walking to the grave. Some sadness is there always in the mind as we recall these memories, but only to those who believe not in the future, who see no hope in it, do they bring pain and distress.

'When our children were in jackets and pinafores,' said Mrs. Silver to me, 'my husband used to read to them every evening, and the hour was always looked forward to with delight.'

'One night,' said Charley, with a sly look at his wife, 'when we were in the middle of Paul and Virginia, and left off where Paul was carrying Virginia in his arms, Ruth said, "Charley, you are like Paul!" "But Where's my Virginia?" I asked. "I'll be Virginia!" Ruth cried; "and you can carry me about where you like." That's the way it came about, sir.'

Of course there was much laughter at this reminiscence, to the truth of which they all vouched, and Ruth, with a saucy toss of her head, said,

'Ah, but there's no doubt that I was too little then to know my own mind.'

'I don't know that, Ruth,' exclaimed Mr. Merrywhistle, chuckling; 'I don't know that. It's my opinion you determined to marry Charley long before you were out of short clothes.'

After this innocent fashion they made merry.

'Dear me, dear me, children!' cried Mr. Silver, with assumed petulance. 'How much longer am I to wait with Richard's letter in my hand?'

'Read it now, father,' said Mrs. Silver; and there was a general hush of expectancy.

The letter was a long one, and in it were recounted all the writer's experiences in the land of his adoption. It was written hopefully and confidently, and yet with modesty, and was filled with expressions of love for the dear ones at home. 'Everything before me is bright, and I have no doubt of the future. Not a day passes that I am not assured that I was right in coming, and the conviction that I have those in the old country who love me, and whom I love with all my heart and soul, strengthens me in a wonderful manner. I can see you all as I write, and my heart overflows towards you. Yes, I was right in coming. The old country is over-crowded; there are too many people in it, and every man that goes away gives elbow-room to some one else. When I see the comfortable way in which poor people live here, and compare it with the way they live at home--and above all, when I think of the comfortable future there is before them if they like to be steady--I find myself wishing that hundreds and hundreds of those I used to see in rags, selling matches, begging, and going in and out of the gin-shops, could be sent to this country, where there is room for so many millions. I daresay some of them would tum out bad; but the majority of them, when they saw that by a little steadiness they could make sure of good clothes and good food, would be certain to turn out good. I am making myself well acquainted with the history of this wonderful country, and I mean to try hard to get along in it. You can have no idea what a wonderful place it is; what opportunities there are in it; what room there is in it. Why, you could put our right-little tight-little island in an out-of-the-way corner of it, and the space wouldn't be missed! If I make my fortune here--and I believe I shall--I shall know how to use it, with the example I have had before me all my life. I hope to have the opportunity of doing more good here than I should have been able to do at home, and depend upon it I will, if I have it in my power, for I want to repay my dear mother and father for all their goodness to me. Want to repay you! No, my dearest parents, I do not want to do that; I never could do it, if I tried ever so hard. O, if I could put my arms now round my dear mother's neck, and kiss her as I used to do! But I can kiss her picture and all your pictures. Here's Mary and Ruth and Rachel--I feel inclined to cry as they pass through my hands--and Charley--How are you, Charley?--here you are, all of you, with mother and father, lying before me as I write. Upon my word, I fancy you almost know that I'm speaking to you.

God bless you, my dears!... I've got ideas, and there's room to work them out in this new country. And one day, when Mary writes to me that she is going to get married, I shall be able to say, perhaps, to my dear sister, "Here is a purse from runaway Richard to help you and your husband along in the battle of life." For it is a battle, isn't it, dears? And I mean to fight it, and win. Yes, and win! You'll see if I don't!'

In this way the letter ran on--eagerly, impetuously, lovingly--and there was not a dry eye in the room when Mr. Silver read the last words, 'Ever your own faithful and loving Son and Brother, RICHARD. God bless you all, again and again! Now I shall go to bed, and dream of you.'

I am particular in narrating this incident of the reading of Richard's letter, for Richard, although he will not appear in person in these s, plays an important part in them on one momentous occasion, as you will see.

The reading being concluded, eager tongues related anecdotes of Richard; and, 'Do you remember, mother, when Richard----?' and, 'Do you remember, Rachel, when we were at Hampstead-heath, and Richard----?' so-and-so and so-and-so. And then, when there was silence, Ruth said pensively, 'I wish Richard could see baby!'

And thus, in various shapes of love, the thoughts of all travelled over the waters to the absent one. I can fancy that the very breezes that waft thitherward, and thence to the mother-land, are sweetened by the loving thoughts which float upon them from one shore to another.

'Mr. Meadow will forgive us,' said Mrs. Silver, 'for detaining him with these family details. We are apt to be selfish in our joys.'

I assured her that I regarded it as a privilege to be admitted to these family confidences, and that I hoped it would not be the last occasion I should share them.

'I hope not, dear sir,' she replied. 'Mary, give me my desk.'

Mary brought the desk, and took her purse from her pocket.

'I have two contributions, mother. A gentleman came to our office to-day, and when he read the paper they allowed me to put up, he gave me five shillings. Jane Plunkett, too, who has only been in the office three weeks, gave me ninepence.'

'I collected four shillings and twopence,' said Charley, 'among the men and boys in the office. Some of the boys gave a halfpenny each; and my master has promised half-a-sovereign.'

'This partly explains our business,' said Mrs. Silver to me; 'and the reason for my asking you to come this evening. We have been collecting subscriptions for the purpose of taking a number of the poorest children in the parish into the country for a day. Richard sent us two pounds a little while ago to give away, and the idea struck us that it could not be better devoted than to such a purpose. So we commenced a fund with his subscription, and we shall write him a full description of the holiday, telling him that it was he who initiated it. Indeed we call it Richard's Day. Nothing could please him better. You, who go so much among the poor, know what numbers of poor children there are who have never seen the country, and to whom the sight of flowers and green fields will be like gentle rain to drooping blades of grass.'

I noticed here that Mr. Merrywhistle started; but he offered no explanation of his sudden movement.

'Whosoever,' I said, 'shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, shall in no wise lose his reward.'

'Thank you, dear sir,' was Mrs. Silver's earnest rejoinder. 'Our reward will be the brightening faces and the innocent delight of these poor little waifs. We have been very successful in our collection, and I think we shall have sufficient money to take a hundred and twenty children. My idea is, that we shall engage vans, and drive as much as possible through country roads to some green pleasant spot, where the children can play, and have dinner and tea. I must tell you that it is only the poorest of the poor who will be chosen, and that in the matter of shoes and stockings there may be here and there a deficiency. But we will endeavour that they shall all have clean faces. Will you join us, and take the command of our ragged army?'

I consented to join them with pleasure, but said that I must be regarded more in the light of a soldier than of a captain. 'We can divide the command,' I said. 'Have you any place where the children can assemble before starting?'

'That is one of my difficulties,' said Mrs. Silver. 'Some of these children will be sure to come not over clean, and I want to make them so before they get into the vans. I have plenty of help in the shape of hands, but I want the room.'

'I can wash some,' said Mr. Merrywhistle, in perfect sincerity. The good old man was like a child in his simplicity.

'I think we women will do it better,' replied Mrs. Silver gaily; 'but we will find you plenty to do.'

'To be sure,' mused Mr. Merrywhistle, 'there are the buns and the fruit----' And lost himself in the contemplation of these duties.

I then told Mrs. Silver that I could obtain the use of a large warehouse, which had been for some time unoccupied, and that she might depend upon my fullest assistance in the arrangement of the details. Their pleasure was unbounded, and I myself felt happier and more truly thankful than I had felt for a long time past. I left the house with Mr. Merrywhistle, and he beguiled the way with stories of the doings of these his dearest friends. He was in the heart of an enthusiastic speech when a poor woman, carrying a child, brushed past us; her head was bent down to the child, and she was murmuring some restful words.

'Dear me!' exclaimed Mr. Merrywhistle, suddenly stopping. 'You will excuse me, my dear sir. Goodnight! Good-night!'

Without waiting for a reply, he shook hands warmly with me, and hurried after the woman. They turned the corner of the street almost at the same moment.

[Golden Grain

I walked home by myself, and thought of the pleasant evening I had spent. The last words I had heard in the house of the Silvers were from Rachel's lips.

'Good-night,' she had said, with her hand in mine. 'I am so glad you came!'

But she was not more glad than I.

II.

THANK GOD FOR A GOOD BREAKFAST!

It is not necessary, nor is it within the limit of these s, to narrate how the details necessary to make the day in the country a success were got through. Sufficient for my purpose to say that everything was satisfactorily arranged and completed on the evening before the appointed day. The number of applications was very great; ten times as many as we were able to take begged to be allowed to go. Mothers entreated; children looked imploringly into our faces. There were many heartaches, I am sure; but none suffered greater pain than we, the committee, upon whom devolved the duty of making the selection. But we gave pleasure to many; and for the others---- Would there were more workers! Each can do a little, with time or purse, and that little may prove to be so much! Remember what the strongest and most beautiful trees were, once upon a time. So may a good life be developed even from such a seedling as this.

There was one anxiety which nature alone could allay, if it were kind: the weather. Many a heart beat with mingled hope and fear that night before the day, and many a child's prayer was thought and whispered that the sun would shine its best in the morning. Nature was kind, and the sun broke beautifully bright. How we congratulated ourselves, with smiling faces, as we all assembled at seven o'clock in the large warehouse I had borrowed for the occasion! The door was to be opened for the children at half-past seven.

I have mentioned the committee. Let me tell you who they were. All Mrs. Silver's family, of course. Mary and Charley had obtained a holiday, and Ruth was there with her baby, whom the fond mother every now and then consulted with bewitching gravity, and to whom she whispered, in the delicious tones that only a mother's voice can convey, all sorts of confidences about the party. I include in Mrs. Silver's family Mr. Merrywhistle, for he was truly one of them. But Mr. Merrywhistle was a member of the selecting committee for only one day; he had been summarily dismissed and deprived of power, because he found it impossible to say No to a single application. 'My rock ahead, sir,' he whispered to me confidentially, when we reproached him. 'I never can get that word out! I mean it often, but there's an imp in my throat that invariably changes it into Yes. I ought to know better at my age.' And he shook his head in grave reproof of himself. As Mrs. Silver had warned him, however, we gave him plenty to do. He was unanimously elected chief of the commissariat, and he made himself delightfully busy in the purchase of buns and fruit and lemonade. We were not aware that he was unfit even for this task, until we discovered that he had provided twice as many buns as were necessary. When his blunder was pointed out to him by Mrs. Silver on the ground, he gazed

disconsolately at the heap of uneaten buns. 'Dear me!' he said mournfully, 'what is to be done with them? I suppose they must be divided among the children. You see, my dear madam, I am not to be trusted--not to be trusted!' But I am sure I detected a sly twinkle in his eye as he condemned his own shortcomings. In addition to the persons I have mentioned, there were two other members of the committee--to wit, Mr. Robert Truefit and Mr. James (or Jimmy) Virtue; as singular a contrast in individuals as can well be imagined. Robert Truefit I hold in high esteem. He is a fine, and I take pleasure in thinking a fair, representative of the sterling English working-man, with a higher intelligence than is possessed by the majority of his class. He is a married man, with a large and increasing family, and his earnings will probably average a trifle under two pounds a week. With these earnings he supports and 'brings up' his family in a manner which commands admiration. His children are likely to be a credit to the State; it is such as he who form the sound bone and muscle of a great nation. Jimmy Virtue is of a lower grade. Outwardly a cynic, one who sneers at goodness, but who has, to my knowledge, occasionally been guilty of an act of charity. He kept a leaving-shop in one of the worst thoroughfares in the locality where my duties lie. Everything about him outwardly was unprepossessing; the wrinkles in his face seemed to snarl at you; he had a glass eye, and he was ill-dressed and ostensibly ill-mannered to those in a better position than himself.

Such was Jimmy Virtue, of whom you will find, as you proceed, some exciting record. You may reasonably ask. How came such a man on your committee? Both Robert Truefit and Mr. Merrywhistle were his friends, and took pleasure in his society. This surprised me at first, but not afterwards. I found that, to read his character properly, it was necessary to read between the lines. Having lived amongst misery-mongers all his life, he was well acquainted with the class from which our children were to be chosen; and, as it proved, his services were most useful to us.

A word about Rachel in connection with the selection. Instances occurred where opinion was divided as to the suitability of candidates; it was our natural desire to choose those who were most deserving, and it was impossible to take them haphazard, as they presented themselves. Here was a mother with two children, pleading, entreating, imploring that they might be taken. Jimmy Virtue shook his head. Robert Truefit, with a quiet motion, also gave an adverse vote. We--the Silvers and I--were in favour of the applicants, but we felt that, the two dissentients were more fitted to judge than we. It seemed that there was something worse than usual against the mother, whose face grew almost wickedly sullen as she observed signs of a refusal in Truefit and Virtue.

'Let Rachel decide,' said Mrs. Silver.

We all experienced a feeling of relief at this suggestion. The woman and the children went aside with Rachel, and kept together for fully twenty minutes, while we continued

the business of the hour. I, furtively watching the group in the corner of the large room, saw Rachel sit down and take the two miserable children by the hand. Then the woman went towards Rachel, and gradually the sullen expression in her face softened; and shortly afterwards she was on her knees by the side of the blind maid, listening and speaking with tears in her eyes. Not a word reached me; but when the interview was ended, Rachel rose and walked towards us with a child on each side of her. Behind her was the mother, hiding her face, as if ashamed of her tears. As Rachel stood before us, looking upwards, with her face of purity and goodness, clasping the ragged children to her, a light seemed to fall upon her in my eyes--a light which touched with merciful glance the figure of the wretched mother in the rear.

'I am to decide?' said Rachel, gently and earnestly.

'Yes, my dear.'

'Then we will take these little ones with us. They will be very good.'

'Very well, my dear.'

And their names were put down and instructions given to the weeping mother. The woman showed no gratitude to us; but as she turned to go, with a lingering look at Rachel, the blind girl held out her hand. The woman seized it, kissed it, and muttered, 'God love yer, miss!' We were all satisfied with Rachel's decision. Even Jimmy Virtue shut his useful eye and glared out of his glass one, that being, as I understood the action, the only mode he could find of taking a clear view of the difficulty.

Among those who were chosen were no fewer than seven children, maimed and deformed; one could not walk; another used crutches, and proved to be one of the most active of the whole party, much to our surprise, for when he applied, he appeared to be very lame indeed. One little fellow presented himself without a guardian; he was about six years of age, and had the largest and roundest eyes I ever saw in a child. To all our questions about his parents he gave no answer; he only stared at us.

'What is your name?'

He found his tongue. 'Jacky Brown.'

'And what do you want?'

'I wants to 'ave a ride and see a lot o' trees.'

'Who told you to come to us?'

'Old Rookey.'

'And what did Old Rookey tell you to say?'

'Old Rookey ses, he ses. You go, Jacky, and arks 'em to take yer to 'ave a ride and see the trees. And Old Rookey ses, he ses, Don't you come away, Jacky, till they puts your name down.'

Who Old Rookey was we were unable to discover. Jimmy Virtue recognised the child, and told us his mother was in prison, and that he didn't know how the little fellow lived. There was something so interesting about Jacky, that we promised to take him. We wrote instructions on a piece of paper, and gave it to him, telling him to give it to Old Rookey.

'You must come very clean, Jacky.'

'I'll tell Old Rookey,' he said. 'He knows wot's wot.'

Long before half-past seven o'clock on the holiday morning the children and their friends began to arrive. The committee of selection had given them to understand that they were to have breakfast before they came. At the back of the warehouse was a recess screened off by sacks hung over a line, in which were ample supplies of water, soap, and towels; and the girls were ready to do the washing, with their sleeves tucked up and aprons on to save their dresses. The process was this: we, the men, stood at the door and received the visitors, taking their names and otherwise identifying them, so that no deceit should be practised. Each child, as he established his right of entrance, was passed into the room, where, if he were not clean and tidy, he was made so, as far as possible, by the women. Some of them, I must admit, required washing badly; but when the work was done, and the children stood in lines along the benches, their bright eager faces and restless limbs formed a picture which dwelt vividly in my mind for a long time afterwards. Jacky Brown was very punctual, and, contrary to our expectation, very clean. We looked for some person answering to the description we had formed of Old Rookey, but we were not successful in finding him. Jacky had something to say to us.

'Old Rookey ses, he ses, you'll open yer eyes when yer sees me.'

And Jacky pointed to his well-polished face and held out his clean hands. We thought we would improve the occasion.

'We are very pleased with you, Jacky. It's much nicer to be clean than dirty, isn't it?'

But Jacky was dubious.

'It gets inter yer eyes, and 'urts,' he said.

Soap was evidently a disagreeable novelty to him.

Mrs. Silver and the girls were putting on their bonnets and getting ready for the start, when a serious innovation in our programme occurred. The guilty person was one of the most esteemed members of our own body.

'Children,' exclaimed Mr. Merrywhistle, suddenly stepping in front of them, 'have you had breakfast?'

A mighty shout arose of 'No!' but whether those who gave evidence were witnesses of truth I dare not venture to say.

'Then you shall have some,' cried Mr. Merrywhistle, with a triumphant look at us; but there was conscious guilt in his gaze.

The 'Hoorays!' that were sent forth in voices shrill and gruff formed a fine pæan certainly, but scarcely recompensed us at the moment for the loss of time. But it all turned out splendidly. Mr. Merrywhistle had planned his artifice skilfully, and, in less than seven minutes, buns and hot milk in mugs were in the hands of every member of our ragged crew. The moment we found we were compromised, we rushed to assist, and (although we were sure we were wrong in encouraging the traitor) we shook hands heartily with Mr. Merrywhistle, whose beaming face would have been sufficient excuse for fifty such innovations. I am not certain that, when the children were served, Ruth and Rachel did not take the good old fellow behind the screen of sacks where the washing had been done, and kiss him; for he came forth from that recess with an arm round the waist of each of the girls, and with his face beaming more brightly than ever.

In the middle of breakfast the vans rattled up to the door; they were decorated with bright ribbons and flags, and the drivers had flowers in their coats; the very horses wore rosettes. There were five vans, and they presented so gay an appearance that the street was filled with sight-gazers. Immediately the vans drew up--which they did smartly, as if they knew what they were about, and that this was a day of days--the children paused from their eating to give vent to another cheer, and another, and another. Their faces flushed, their little hands trembled, their restless limbs shifted and danced, and took

part in the general animation. As for ourselves----Well, we paused also, and smiled at each other, and Ruth held baby's face to Charley to kiss.

'A fine sermon this, sir,' said Robert Truefit to me.

'Indeed, indeed,' I assented. 'Better than any that tongue can preach.'

There was no need to tell the children to hurry with their meal; they were too eager to be on the road.

'Now, children, have you finished?'

'Yes, sir! Yes, marm! Yes, miss!'

'Then thank God for a good breakfast!'

The simple thanksgiving was uttered by all with earnest meaning. Then out they trooped to the vans, the sight-gazers in the street waving their arms and hats at us. The deformed children were placed in advantageous positions, so that they could see the roads through which we were to drive, and were given into the charge of other children, who promised to take care of them; Jacky Brown had a seat on the box; we took our places on the vans; the drivers looked seriously at their reins; the horses shook their heads; and all was ready. If I had the space at my command, and were gifted with the power, what scenes I could describe here of mothers, sisters, friends, who showed their gratitude to us in various ways as we prepared to start! Not all of them as low as by their outward presence you would judge them to be. Written history--notwithstanding that we pin our faith to it, that we pride ourselves upon it, that we strive to shape our ends according to its teaching--is to unwritten history, in its value of example, as a molehill to a mountain; even the written history of great national conflicts, which strew the cornfields with dead and dying, upon whom we throw that sham halo called Glory, as compared with the unwritten history of courts and alleys, which we push out of sight with cruel carelessness.

III.

THEY LISTENED WITH ALMOST BREATHLESS ATTENTION TO EVERY WORD THAT FELL FROM HER LIPS.

And so, with our mud-larks and street arabs, we rode out of the busy city, away from the squalid walls in the shadow of which the bad lessons which lead naturally to bad lives are graven on the hearts of the helpless young. It was the end of August, and the corn was being cut. The children sniffed the sweet-smelling air, and asked one another if it wasn't prime. Every turn of the road through which we gaily trotted opened new wonders to our ragged crew; and we were kept busy answering the torrent of questions that were poured upon us. What's that? A field of clover. Three cheers for the clover. Fields of barley, wheat, oats, all were cheered for lustily. What's them fellers diggin' up? Potatoes. Hurrah for the taters! Hallo! here's a bank of lavender, filling the air with fragrance. Most of the children were noisy in their expressions of delight; but a few sat still, staring in solemn wonder. The golden corn which the scythe had not yet touched--how it bowed and waved and whispered in the breeze that lightly swept across it! How few of the uncultured children could be made to understand that bread--to them so scarce and precious--was made from these golden wavelets! A windmill! Another! The huge fans sailed slowly round. 'Here,' we said, 'the corn is ground to flour.' 'Wonder what makes the flour so white!' whispered a mudlark to his mate; ''t ought to be yaller.' Now we were driving along a narrow lane, between hedges; the sounds of music came from our rear. I stood up and looked. Some twenty or thirty yards behind the last van was a spring-cart, with a band of musicians in it. What cheers the children gave for 'the musicianers'! Their cup of happiness was full to the brim. I caught Mr. Merrywhistle's eye: it fell guiltily beneath my gaze; but as I smiled with grateful approval at him, he brightened up, and rubbed his hands joyously. Every popular air that the musicians played was taken up by a full chorus of voices. Here and there, along the country roads, housewives and children came out to look at us. There was a greeting for all of them from our noisy youngsters, and they greeted us in return. One woman threw a shower of apples into the vans, and received in return the acknowledgment, 'Bravo, missis! You're a good sort, you are!' At half-past ten we reached our destination--a very pretty spot, with a wood adjacent, and a meadow to play in. Everything had been judiciously arranged, and, marshalling the children, we acquainted them with the programme. They were free for two hours to do as they pleased. They might play their games where they liked in forest or meadow. The band would play in the meadow. But a promise was to be exacted from them. They were to be kind to every living creature they came across; they were to kill nothing. Would they promise? 'Yes, sir; yes, marm; yes, miss! We won't 'urt nothink!' Very well, then. In two hours the horn would sound, three times. Like this. Listen. The musician who played the horn gave the signal. When they heard that again

they would know that dinner was ready; they were not to go too far away, else they would not hear it, and would lose their dinner. 'No fear, master!' they shouted. 'Let's give three cheers,' one of them cried. 'And look 'ere! The boys fust, and the gals arterwards.' So the cheers were given as directed, and the boys laughed heartily at the girls' piping voices. 'Now, then, you all understand---- But stop! what is this?' Here was Mr. Merrywhistle again, with another of his triumphantly-guilty looks, introducing new features into the programme. Two of the biggest boys were carrying a trunk towards us, and when it was opened, out came balls, and traps and bats, and rounder-sticks, and kites, and battledores and shuttlecocks, and skipping-ropes. The shout that arose as these things were given out was mightier than any that had preceded it, as the boys and girls, like wild birds released from prison, rushed off with their treasures.

'I suppose,' said Mrs. Silver, with the kindest of looks towards Mr. Merrywhistle, 'there is no reclaiming you.'

'I'm too old, I'm too old,' he replied deprecatingly. 'I hope you don't mind.'

Mind! Why, he had done just the very things that we had forgotten, and the very best things too, to keep the youngsters out of mischief. We had plenty to do. Here and there was a solitary one, who knew nobody in all that wild band, wandering by himself, and casting wistful glances at the other children who were playing. Here was a little fellow who had lost his brother, crying lustily. Here was a shy timid girl, absolutely without a friend. All these human strays--strays even among the forlorn crew of youngsters who were tasting a pure enjoyment for the first time in their lives--we collected together and formed into bands, instructing them how to play, and taking part in their games until they were sufficiently familiarised with each other to get along without help. The children who were unable to run about we arranged comfortably together in a place where they had a clear view of the sports. Rachel, by tacit consent, took this group under her care; and not long afterwards I saw her seated in the midst of them, and heard her telling them, in admirable language and with admirable tact, the best of those fairy stories which delight our childhood's days. Blind as Rachel was, she could see deeper into these children's hearts than we. They listened with almost breathless attention to every word that fell from her lips--and every word was sweet--and saw the scenes she painted, and learnt the lessons she taught. Among all our children there was no happier group than this over which she presided; and many whose limbs were straight and strong approached the deformed group, and listened in delight and wonder. During the whole of that day I noticed how the most forlorn and friendless of the children congregated about Rachel. Perhaps they saw in her blindness something akin to their own condition, and eyes that might have been mournful grew soft and tender beneath the influence of her sightlessness and kindly help. One of the most favourite pastimes of the day was dancing to the music of the band. Such dancing! Girls went round and

round in the waltz with a solemn enjoyment in their faces most wonderful to witness; boys, more demonstrative, executed amazing steps, and flung their arms and their legs about in an extraordinary manner. There were two champion dancers--boys of about twelve years of age--whose capers and comicalities attracted large audiences. These boys, by some means had secreted about their persons two immense pairs of 'nigger' shoes, which were now tied on to their feet. They danced, they sang, they asked conundrums of each other with amusing seriousness; and I was privately and gravely informed that they intended to become negro minstrels, and were saving up to buy a banjo. Dinner-time came, and the horn was blown. Such a scampering never was seen, and dull eyes lightened, and bright eyes grew brighter, at the sight of the well-stocked tables. If it were necessary, I could vulgarise this description by mention of certain peculiarities--forms of expression and such-like--which existed among our guests; but it is not necessary. No one's enjoyment was marred, and every youngster at our tables was perfectly happy. The children stood while I said grace. I said but a very few words, and that the brevity of the grace was appreciated was evidenced by a remark I overheard. 'That's proper! I thort the parson-chap was goin' to pray for a hour.' The children ate very heartily, and here and there, with the younger ones, we had to exercise a salutary check. But the older boys and girls were beyond our control. 'Tuck away, Sal!' cried one. 'It'll be all over to-morrer!' When the children--dinner being finished--were, at play again, we had a little leisure. Mrs. Silver, seated on a bench, looked around upon her family and friends, and said, with a satisfied smile,

'I really am tired, my dears.'

IV.

FOR MERCY'S SAKE, TELL ME! WHOSE VOICE WAS IT I HEARD JUST NOW?

I also was tired. I had been up very late three nights during the week, and on the night previous to this day I had had only four hours' sleep. Glad of the opportunity to enjoy a little quietude, I strolled from where the children and my friends were congregated, and walked towards the rise of a hill on the other side of which was a wooded knoll, where I supposed I should be quite alone. There it was my intention to stretch myself, and rest for fully half an hour by my watch.

The day had continued gloriously fine, and there was no sign of change. I had much to think about. An event of great importance in my private history was soon to take place, and I knew it, and was only waiting for the time. It made me sad to think that when that time came I should probably lose a friend--not an ordinary friend, but one to whom I owed my education and my present position. It will find record in its proper place, however, and needs no further reference here. I had mounted the hill, and was descending towards the clump of trees, when I saw, at a little distance, three persons sitting on the ground. One of them I knew. It was Mr. Merrywhistle, and he was attending to the wants of a very poorly-dressed girl, who was eating her dinner, which it was evident Mr. Merrywhistle had brought to her from the tables. There was a large quantity of wild flowers by the girl's side, which I judged she had gathered during the day, and in the midst of these flowers sat a child between two and three years of age, towards whom the girl directed many a look of full-hearted love. The face of the child fixed my attention; it was a dull, pale, mournful face, and there was an expression of weariness in the eyes which hurt me to see.

To detect Mr. Merrywhistle in an act of kindness did not surprise me; and yet I wondered how it was that he was here, in a certain sense clandestinely, with this poor girl, who had the look of the London streets upon her. Not wishing, however, to disturb the group, I walked slowly in the opposite direction; the conformation of the hill favoured me, so that I was very soon hidden from their sight, although really I was but a very few yards from them. I threw myself upon the ground, my thoughts dwelling upon the scene of which I had been an unseen witness. It struck me as strange that Mr. Merrywhistle and this poor girl were evidently well acquainted with one another; their familiar bearing convinced me of that. Then by what singular chance was it, or was it by chance at all, that they had met here in this sweet spot, so far away from her natural haunts? For there was no mistaking the type to which this poor girl belonged; it can be seen, multiplied and multiplying, in all our crowded cities, but not in country places

such as this in which we held our holiday. Could this be the same girl and child, I asked myself, whom Mr. Merrywhistle followed when he left me so abruptly on the night we walked together from Mrs. Silver's house? But presently my thoughts wandered to more refreshing themes. The many beautiful pictures of sweet charity and unselfishness I had witnessed this day came before me again, and I thanked God that my country held such noble specimens of true womanhood as Mrs. Silver, Mary, Ruth, and Rachel. And then, knowing full well the history of these girls, I contrasted their present lives with that of the poor girl in Mr. Merrywhistle's company. In the midst of my musings, and while I was contemplating the picture (to which my thoughts had wandered) of Rachel standing before us, as she had stood three days ago, with a child on each side of her, and the weeping mother behind--as I was contemplating this picture, and weaving idealisms about it, the sound of a harsh voice reached me, and dissolved my fancies. I recognised the voice immediately--it belonged to Jimmy Virtue, and it came from the direction where Mr. Merrywhistle and the poor girl were. Not quite trusting Jimmy Virtue, as I did not at that time, I rose to my feet, and walked towards the group, the disposition of which was now completely changed. The girl was standing in a half-frightened, half-defiant attitude, pressing her child to her breast; in the eager haste with which she had snatched the child from the ground, she had clutched some wild-flowers, and these were trailing to her feet; Jimmy Virtue, with head inclined, was holding up an angry finger; and Mr. Merrywhistle, with an expression of pain and distress on his features, seemed by his attitude to be mediating between them. The girl was the first to see me, and she turned to fly, as if every human face she saw were a new terror to her, or as if in me she recognised a man to be avoided. I hastened to her side, and laid my hand on her arm. With a convulsive shiver, but without a word and without resistance, she bowed her head to her baby's neck, and cowered to the ground, like a frightened animal. And there she crouched, a poor forlorn thing, ragged, defiant, panting, fearing, with the world sitting in judgment upon her.

* * * * *

Bear with me a little while. The memories connected with this poor girl fill my heart to overflowing. They belong not only to her and her mournful history; she is but one of many who are allowed to drift as the careless days glide by. If you do not enter into my feelings, bear with me, I pray.

And I must not flinch. To be true unto others, you must be true to yourself. My conscience, no less than my heart, approves of the course I pursued with reference to certain passages in this girl's career. Many who hold a high place in the world's esteem will differ from me, I know; some, who look with self-righteous eyes upon certain bad features in the lower social life of the people, and whose belief inclines them to touch not

lest they be defiled, will condemn me because I did not, from the very first, attempt to turn this girl's heart with prayer, believing themselves in its full efficacy for all forms of trouble. But let them consider that this girl-woman was already grown to strength; veined in her veins were hurtful fibres which once might have been easily removed, but which, by force of surrounding circumstance, were now so deeply rooted in her nature that they could only be weakened by patience, forbearance, tender handling, and some exercise of wise benevolence. Here was a mind to be dealt with utterly ignorant of those teachings, the following out of which renders life healthful and pleasant to contemplate; but here at the same time was a hungry stomach to be dealt with--a hungry stomach continually crying out, continually craving, which no words of prayer could satisfy. And I, a clergyman, who preach God's word in full belief and believe fully in His mercy and goodness, say to those who condemn for this reason, that words of prayer--otherwise lip-worship, and outward observances according to set forms--are, alone and in themselves, valueless and unacceptable in the eyes of God. Self-accusation, self-abasement, pleadings for mercy, unaccompanied by good deeds, go for naught. A merciful action, a kindly impulse practically acted upon--these are the prayers which are acceptable in His eyes.

* * * * *

I looked around for an explanation.

'Ah,' exclaimed Jimmy Virtue, threateningly, "ere's the parson! He'll tell you whether you're right or wrong.'

A proof that I, the parson, had been set up by Jimmy Virtue as a man to be feared. It was natural that the poor girl should shrink from my touch. Mr. Merrywhistle drew me aside.

'It is all my fault,' he said, in a tone of great emotion. 'I smuggled her here.'

'How did she come?' I asked. 'She was not in any of the vans.'

'I smuggled her in the cart that brought the provisions, and I bade the driver not to come too close to us, for fear poor Blade-o'-Grass should be discovered and sent back.'

'Poor who?'

'Blade-o'-Grass. That's the only name she has. It came into my mind the first night I saw you in Mrs. Silver's house. Mrs. Silver, you remember, was telling you the plan of this holiday, and was saying that you, who go so much among the poor, knew that there were numbers of poor children who had never seen the country, and that the sight of flowers and green fields would be to them like gentle rain to drooping blades of grass.'

'I remember well.'

'I don't know if Mrs. Silver used the expression purposely, but I thought immediately of this poor girl, whom everybody round about Stoney-alley, where she lives, knows as Blade-o'-Grass, and I thought what a fine thing it would be for her if I could smuggle her here with her baby, so that she might enjoy a day in the country, which she never set eyes on until now. She danced for joy, sir--yes, sir, she did!--when I asked her if she would like to come. And she has enjoyed herself so much, and has kept out of the way according to my instructions. See, Mr. Meadow, she has been gathering wildflowers, and has been talking and singing to her baby in a way it has made me glad to hear. Poor girl! poor girl! I have known her from a child, and, if you will forgive me for saying it, I think I almost love her. Although she has always stood in her own light--always, always! It was wrong of me to bring her here, but I did it for the best I have been told often I was doing wrong when I have foolishly thought I was doing good.'

'You have done no wrong,' I said emphatically, 'in bringing that poor girl here. I honour you for it. And now tell me what has occurred to spoil her pleasure, and what is the cause of Mr. Virtue's anger.'

'Why, you see, Mr. Meadow, that Jimmy Virtue, of whose rough manners you must not take any notice--you must not judge harshly of him because of them--has taken a liking to the girl.'

'Well?'

'He has been kind to her, I feel certain, though you'll never get him to acknowledge it--indeed, he'll tell you fibs to your face without ever a blush--and he has been trying for a long time to persuade her to come and live with him. She has persistently refused, and now he is angry with her. He is an old man and a lonely man, and he feels it perhaps; but, anyhow, it is as much for her good as his that he makes the offer. He says he will look upon her as a daughter, and it would be better for her than her present lot.'

'Why does she refuse?'

Mr. Merrywhistle hesitated.

'Tell me all,' I said, 'plainly and without disguise.'

'Well, Mr. Meadow, nothing on earth can induce her to leave Tom Beadle.'

'Who is he? What is he?'

'He is a thief, and the father of her child.'

Mr. Merrywhistle's voice trembled from sadness as he spoke these words. I understood it all now. To my grief, I knew what would be the answer to my next question; but it must be asked and answered.

'Is she married?'

'No.'

Golden Grain

We were but a few paces from Jimmy Virtue and Blade-o'-Grass, and our conversation had been carried on in a low tone. I turned towards them. Jimmy Virtue, in a heat, was wiping his glass eye. Blade-o'-Grass had not stirred from her crouching attitude. She might have been carved in stone, so motionless had she remained, and to discover any signs of life in her, you would have had to put your head down to her beating heart So she cowered among the wildflowers, with sweet breezes about her, with beautiful clouds above her.

'Now, parson,' said Jimmy Virtue, in a menacing tone, 'per'aps you'll tell that gal whether she's right or wrong!'

'I must first know,' I said, striving to induce gentleness in him by speaking gently myself, 'what it is I am to give an opinion upon.'

'I know that. Mind you, I ain't overfond o' parsons, as a rule, and I ain't overfond o' words, unless there's a reason for 'em. You see that gal there--she's a pretty article to look at, ain't she? Judge for yourself; you can tell pretty well what she is by 'er clothes and 'er babby, though she does 'ide 'er face. She's not so bad as you might make 'er out to be, that I must say; for I ain't a-goin' to take advantage of 'er. But you may make 'er out precious bad, what with one thing and another, and not be far wrong arter all. She's

got no 'ome to speak of; she's got no clothes to speak of; she's got no babby that she's got a right to. Well, I orfer that gal a 'ome in my leavin'-shop. I say to 'er, You can come and live along o' me, and I'll look arter you like a daughter; and I would, for I'm a man o' my word, though my word don't amount to much. Now what does she say, that gal, as couldn't lay 'er 'and on a 'arf-a-crown as she's got a right to, if it was to save 'er life--what does she say to my orfer? She says. No, and says as good as I'll see you further fust! Now, tell 'er whether she's right or wrong--tell 'er once and for all. You're a parson, and she'll believe you, per'aps.'

I beckoned him away, for I knew that his harsh tones no less than his words hurt the girl.

'Our mutual friend, Mr. Merrywhistle,' I said----

'That's right; our muchel friend, Mr. Merrywhistle. Though he's too soft-'earted, mind you! I've told 'im so a 'underd times.'

----'Has made me acquainted with some part of this poor girl's story. Don't speak so loudly and so angrily. She hears every word you say.'

'I know that,' he growled. 'She's got the cunnin' of a fox.'

'And, after all, she has a right to choose for herself; you can have no real claim upon her.'

'She ain't got no right,' he said vehemently, 'to choose for 'erself, and if I ain't got no claim on 'er, I'd like to know who 'as! I've knowed 'er from the time as she was a babby. She growed up almost under my eyes. She's played on my doorstep when she was a little 'un, and 'as been shoved off it many and many a time. I knowed 'er mother--I knowed 'er father, the mean thief! as run away afore she was born. No claim! Ain't that no claim, I'd like to know? And don't I know what she'll come to if she goes on much longer as she's a-goin' on now? It's a-comin' to the end, I tell you, and I want to stop it! Why, Tom Beadle, the man as she's a'----I put my finger to my lips, out of compassion for the poor girl----'the man as she ain't married to, was took up this mornin' by the peelers afore my very eyes'---- I caught his wrist, and pointing to Blade-o'-Grass, stopped his further speech. A moan came from the girl's lips, a shiver passed over her form, like a despairing wave. She struggled to her feet, and throwing her hair from her eyes, looked distractedly about her.

'O, why did I come?' she cried.

'Why did I come? Which is the road to London?'

And she ran a few steps wildly, but I ran after her and stopped her. She struggled to escape from me.

'Let me go!' she beseeched.

'Let me go! I want to git to London! I must git there at once! O Tom! Tom!'

'You would not get there tonight,' I said; 'it is eighteen miles away. You would never be able to walk so far with your baby. You must wait and go with us; we shall start in an hour.'

She shrank from my grasp and moaned upon the ground, and pressed her child closer to her bosom, with sighs and sobs and broken words of desolation.

'O baby! baby! baby! Tom's took up agin! What shall we do? O, what shall we do?'

Something like a vapour passed over my mind as the wail of this desolate girl fell upon my ear. I seemed to 'recognise in its tones something akin to the fond accents of a happier mother than she. I did not like to think of the resemblance, and I tried to shake off the impression that had stolen upon me; but it remained with me. It was in vain that I attempted to console Blade-o'-Grass; she paid no heed to my words. I was a stranger to her then.

'Your news is true?' I said to Jimmy Virtue.

'As I was comin' to the room this mornin',' he replied, 'I saw Tom Beadle with the peeler's grip on 'im, and the peeler told me he was wanted agin.'

'What for?'

'The old thing--pickin' pockets.'

This was a sad episode in our holiday-making. I could not leave Blade-o'-Grass alone. In her despair, in her belief that the hands and hearts of all were against her, she would be certain to take the first opportunity of escaping from us, and would thus bring further trouble on herself. I looked towards Mr. Merrywhistle; his face was turned from me. I called to him, and he came. I had a thought which I resolved to act upon. I desired him to keep by the side of Blade-o'-Grass until I returned, and I went at once in search of Rachel. The musicians were doing their best, merrily, and the children were dancing and playing joyously.

'This is a very happy day,' said Mrs. Silver, as I approached her; 'see how they are enjoying themselves, poor things. It will be a great remembrance for them.'

Her tone changed when she saw the anxiety in my face; she laid her hand upon my arm.

'You are in trouble.'

'Yes,' I said; 'but make your mind easy. It is nothing at all connected with our children. I will tell you about it by and by. Where is Rachel?'

'There, helping to get tea ready. You must come and have a cup, Mr. Meadow. 'It will refresh you.'

I said that I would, and I asked if she would spare Rachel for a little while. Yes, she answered, with a solicitous look. I smiled at her to reassure her. As I walked towards Rachel, I passed Ruth; she was suckling her baby. A white kerchief covered her bosom and her baby's face, and she raised a corner of it to whisper some endearing words to her treasure. Again the vapour passed over my mind. I trembled as I detected the resemblance in her voice to the voice of the hapless mother I had just left. But I was now close to Rachel. She smiled at me, knowing my step. I remember that that was the first occasion on which I called her by her Christian name.

'Rachel, I want you to help me. Mrs. Silver says she can spare you.'

Rachel took off her apron, and gave me her hand, and I led her to where Blade-o'-Grass was lying. As briefly as I could I told her all, and I asked her to comfort Blade-o'-Grass.

'Indeed, indeed, I will try, Mr. Meadow!' she said earnestly.

'We must not lose her; she must go back to London with us. In her present state of mind she believes every one to be against her. But she will trust you, Rachel, because----'

'Because I am blind,' she said sweetly. 'I will strive to do my best.' She paused a moment, and added, 'Is it not a good thing, Mr. Meadow, that I cannot see?'

I could not answer her; my emotion stopped my utterance. I left her with Blade-o'-Grass, and Mr. Merrywhistle and I stood apart from them.

'Give me your hand, my dear,' Rachel said. Blade-o'-Grass made no movement 'My dear, I am blind!'

Involuntarily, as if the claim were sisterly, and could not be denied, the hand of Blade-o'-Grass was held out to Rachel, and Rachel clasped it, and sat down by her side. What passed during the next few moments I did not hear; but I saw that Rachel was speaking to Blade-o'-Grass, and presently Blade-o'-Grass's baby was in the blind girl's arms, and the mother was looking wonderingly into her face. I acknowledged the wisdom of Rachel's act; by that tie she held Blade-o'-Grass to her. But up to this time Blade-o'-Grass had not spoken; Rachel had not won a word from her lips.

'Let us join our friends,' said Mr. Merrywhistle; 'we can leave them safely together now.'

'One moment,' I answered; 'I am waiting for something.'

What I was waiting for came presently. Rachel was fondling the child's hand, and holding it to her lips, when Blade-o'-Grass spoke. A look of terror flashed into Rachel's face. I was by her side in an instant, my hand in hers. She clung to it, and raised herself to her feet.

'Tell me,' she whispered, in a tone of suffering; 'for mercy's sake, tell me! Whose voice was it I heard just now?'

'It was Blade-o'-Grass that spoke,' I replied; 'the unhappy girl I told you of. She is younger than you are, my dear, and you hold her child in your arms. Comfort her, Rachel; she needs comfort sorely!'

'I have heard her voice before,' said Rachel, with sobs, 'and it reminds me--O, it reminds me of one I love so dearly, so dearly!'

'The greater reason, my dear, that you should aid her in her affliction. Her heart is bleeding, Rachel. Do not alarm her unnecessarily--she suspects everybody but you; she is looking towards us now, with struggling doubt in her face. Be strong, for pity's sake!'

She needed no other encouragement; I left them together, and when the time for our departure to London arrived, they were still sitting side by side. An expression of solemn pity rested on Rachel's face. She kissed Blade-o'-Grass and the child before they parted, and asked Blade-o'-Grass to kiss her. The poor girl did so, with grateful tears. Then I gave Blade-o'-Grass into the charge of Mr. Merrywhistle, and led Rachel to her friends. But only to Ruth did she cling; she clasped her arms round her sister's neck, and sobbed quietly on her shoulder.

'Why, Rachel!' exclaimed Ruth. 'Rachel, my dearest!'

'Let me be, Ruth dear!' sobbed Rachel. 'Let me be! Do not say anything to me. I shall be better presently.'

It was no easy matter getting our children together. We had to call them by name, and count them; it was an anxious task, and it occupied a longer time than we anticipated. And in the end there was one missing--Jacky Brown. None of the boys or girls could tell us where he was, and we were fully a quarter of an hour hunting for him. We were in great trouble, but at length we discovered him, with such a dirty face! sitting under one of the largest trees in the wood.

'Come, come, Jacky,' Mrs. Silver said, 'this isn't good of you. Didn't you hear the horn?'

'Yes, I 'eerd the 'orn, but I ain't a-comin',' was his confident reply.

'O Jacky, Jacky!' she remonstrated.

'I ain't a-goin' 'ome any more. I'm a-goin' to stop under this tree as long as ever I live, and I don't want to move.'

We absolutely had to use a little force with him, and while we carried the little fellow to the vans, he cried again and again that he didn't want to go home any more. References to Old Rookey had no effect upon him; he wanted to live among the trees always, and he was passionately grieved because he could not have his way. The children sang all along the road to London; and I was glad to see that the majority of them had bunches of wild-flowers in their hands. And thus the day ended happily--for all but one.

'We shall sleep well to-night,' said Mrs. Silver, with a satisfied sigh.

I did not, although I was thoroughly tired out.

V.

YOU'RE A PARSON, SIR, AND I PUT IT TO YOU. WHAT DO YOU SAY TO PARTING MOTHER AND CHILD?

It was not alone because Mr. Merrywhistle urged me that I took an interest in Blade-o'-Grass. I was impelled to do so by certain feelings of my own with reference to the poor girl. I became nervously desirous to learn her history, and I questioned Mr. Merrywhistle, He could tell me nothing, however, but the usual tale attached to such unhappy human waifs--a tale which I had heard, with slightly-varying forms of detail, many times before. I desired to learn something more definite--something which I scarcely dared to confess, even to myself, working as I was in the dark, and with only a vague impression or a morbid fancy for a basis. But then came the thought that Rachel shared the impression with me, and I continued my inquiries.

'Jimmy Virtue knows more about Blade-o'-Grass than I do,' said Mr. Merrywhistle, 'It was through him I first became acquainted with her.'

Jimmy Virtue was not very communicative; it was not in his nature to take easily to new friends.

'But you yourself,' I urged, 'spoke of her mother and father as if you knew them intimately.'

'Did I?' he replied. 'Ah! I ain't over-particular what I say sometimes, so you must put it down to that. You see, they were not long in this alley afore the father cut away, and the mother--well, she died! So what should I know of 'em? The mother was buried afore the kids was three weeks old.'

'The children!' I exclaimed, my heart beating fast at this discovery. 'Then the poor mother had twins?'

'Yes, there was two on 'em; as if one warn't enough, and more than enough! And then a woman--Mrs. Manning her name was--comes round a-beggin' for the babbies, and a nice row she kicked up about it. Arksed me what I'd lend on 'em--as if babbies warn't as cheap as dirt, and a deal sight more troublesome!'

'These twins, Mr. Virtue--were they both girls?'

'Yes, they was both gals, I 'eerd.'

'What became of the other child?'

I asked eagerly.

'What other?' demanded Jimmy Virtue surlily. 'I didn't know no other. Blade-o'-Grass was the only one left.'

And this was all the information I could elicit from him. I inquired of other old residents in Stoney-alley, but not one of them remembered anything worth hearing. I returned to Mr. Merrywhistle, and after narrating to him the fruitless result of my inquiries, I asked abruptly if he knew anything concerning the circumstances attending the birth of Ruth. The old man changed colour, and his manner became very nervous.

'I can see your drift,' he said in a troubled voice. 'In your mind, Ruth and Blade-o'-Grass are associated, as if some undiscovered tie exists between them. I once shared your suspicion. I saw in Blade-o'-Grass a likeness to Ruth, and I mentioned it to Mrs. Silver. But when Mrs. Silver adopted Ruth, the babe was orphaned indeed. Both father and mother were dead, and Ruth was the only child. It is impossible, therefore, that the likeness between Ruth and Blade-o'-Grass can be anything but accidental. Do not say anything of this to Ruth or Mrs. Silver; it would grieve them. Look at Ruth and Blade-o'-Grass; see them as they are, and think what a gulf separates them.'

A gulf indeed! But still I was not satisfied.

I found it much easier to learn the fullest particulars concerning Tom Beadle. Plainly and simply, he was a thief, and had been in prison a dozen times at least. The day following our holiday-making he was brought up at the police-court on a common charge of pickpocketing. Blade-o'-Grass begged me to intercede for him with the magistrate; but it was impossible for me to do so, as I knew nothing concerning him but what was bad. 'He loves me, sir, does Tom,' she pleaded; 'and I love 'im!' And said it as if it were a sufficient reason for his not being punished. It was impossible to reason with her on the matter; all that concerned herself and Tom Beadle she could look at from only one point of view. Whether he worked or whether he stole, nearly every farthing he obtained was spent in food. Blade-o'-Grass's standpoint was that she and Tom and the baby must have bread, and that if they could not get it one way they must get it another. Tom Beadle did work sometimes as a costermonger; but the difficulties in his way were very serious because of his antecedents, and he rebelled against these difficulties sullenly and savagely, and bruised his soul against them. He was no casuist, and made no attempt to excuse himself. He was simply a man at war with society, a man whose keen intellect had been sharpened and perfected in bad soil. As I write of him now, I can

see him slouching along in his patched clothes, with defiance in his mind. Watchful eyes have been upon him almost from his birth; they are upon him now, whichever way he turns, and he knows it, and has grown up in the knowledge. Respectability turns its back upon him--naturally, for he is its enemy. Even benevolence shrinks from him, for the spirit of cunning and ingratitude lurks in his every motion. I paint him as I knew him, in the plainest of colours. He had one redeeming trait in his character; he loved Blade-o'-Grass, after his fashion, with as much sincerity as good men love good women. His love for her had come to him naturally, as other worse qualities in his nature had come. By Blade-o'-Grass he was loved, as she had truly said, but with that deeper love of which only a woman's nature is capable. Hers was capable of the highest form of gratitude, of the highest form of love. She was faithful to Tom Beadle, and she loved her child with as perfect, ay, and as pure a love as can animate the breast of the most delicate lady in the land. Overshadowing these bright streaks of light was a darker line. When she was a mere babe, afterwards when she was a child, afterwards when she was a woman, she frequently suffered the pangs of hunger; she often knew what it was to want a crust of bread. From these sufferings came the singular and mournful idea that she had within her a ravenous creature which she called a tiger, and which, when she was hungry, tore at her entrails for food. This tiger had been the terror of her life, and it was with her an agonising belief that she had endowed her child with the tiger curse: I can find no other term of expression. From this belief nothing could drive her. Talk to her of its folly, of its impossibility, and you talked to stone. Her one unfailing answer was, 'Ah, I know; you can't. I feel it, and my baby feels it also.' I learnt the story of this tiger from her own lips. I found her waiting for me one morning at the corner of the street in which I lived. It was while Tom Beadle was undergoing his term of imprisonment. I stopped and spoke to her, and she asked might she say something to me. Yes, I answered, I could spare her a few minutes; and I led the way to my rooms.

'It was Mr. Wirtue as told me to come to you, sir,' she said; 'he ain't so 'ard on me as he was.'

'I am glad you are friends again,' I said. 'Will you have some bread-and-butter?'

'Yes, if you please, sir.'

I cut some bread-and-butter for her and her child, and I dissolved some preserved milk in warm water for her. She watched with keen interest the process of making this milk, and when she tasted it said, with a touch of humour of which she was quite unconscious:

'They won't want no more mothers by and by, sir, what with sich milk as this, and feedin'-bottles, and p'ramberlaters!'

While she was eating and giving her child to eat, she reverted to Jimmy Virtue.

'You see, sir, he was mad with me 'cause I wouldn't give up Tom; but I couldn't do that, sir, arter all we've gone through. We growed up together, sir. If you knowed all Tom's done for me, you'd wonder 'ow anybody could 'ave the 'eart to arks me to give 'im up. Tom 'as stuck to me through thick and thin, and I'll stick to 'im as long as ever I live! I've 'eerd talk of sich things as 'eart-strings. Well, sir, my 'eartstrings 'd break if I was to lose 'im. Leave Tom! Give 'im up now! No, sir; it wouldn't be natural, and what ain't natural can't be good.'

Blade-o'-Grass cut straight into the core of many difficulties with her unconsciously-uttered truisms. When she and her child had eaten all I had set before them, she opened the business she had come upon. Then it was that I heard the history of the tiger.

'It's inside o' me, sir; I was born with it. When I was little, there was a talk o' cuttin' me open, and takin' the tiger out; but they didn't do it, sir. Per'aps it'd been better for me if they 'ad.'

I attempted to reason her out of her fancy; but I soon saw how useless were my arguments. She shook her head with sad determination, and smiled piteously.

'It don't stand to reason as you can understand it, sir. You ain't got a tiger in your inside! I 'ave, and it goes a-tearin' up and down inside o' me, eatin' me up, sir, till I'm fit to drop down dead. It was beginnin' this mornin', sir, afore I seed you.'

'Did you have any breakfast, my poor girl?'

'Not much, sir; a slice o' bread and some water 'tween me and baby. You see, sir, Tom's not 'ere, and I've 'ad some bad days lately.'

'You don't feel the tiger now?'

'No, sir; it's gone to sleep.'

I sighed.

'I wish,' she continued, 'I could take somethin' as 'd kill it! I tried to ketch it once--yes, sir, I did; but it was no go. I 'adn't 'ad nothink to eat for a long time, and it was goin' on awful. Then, when I got some grub, I thought if I put it down on the table, and set it afore me with my mouth open, per'aps the tiger 'd see it, and come up and fetch it. I was almost frightened out o' my life as I waited for it; for I've never seed it, sir, and I don't

know what it's like. But it wouldn't come; it knows its book, the tiger does! I waited till I was that faint that I could 'ardly move, and I was forced to send the grub down to it. I never tried that move agin, sir.'

I told her I was sorry to hear that she had been unfortunate lately. She nodded her head with an air of weary resignation.

'It can't be 'elped, sir, I s'ppose. A good many societies 'as sprung up, and they're agin me, I think. O, yes, sir, we know all about 'em. It warn't very long ago that I was walkin' a long way from 'ome, with some matches in my 'and; I thort I'd try my luck where nobody knowed me. A gentleman stopped and spoke to me. "You're beggin'," he said. I didn't deny it, but I didn't say nothin', for fear o' the peelers. "It's no use your comin' 'ere," he said; "we've got a society in this neighbourhood, and we don't give nothink to the poor. Go and work." Then he went on to tell me--as if I cared to 'eer 'im! but he was one as liked to 'eer 'isself talk--that it was sich as me as was the cause of everythink that's bad. Well, sir, that made me open my eyes, and I couldn't 'elp arksing 'im if it was bad for me to try and git a bit o' bread for my baby; but he got into sich a passion that I was glad to git away from 'im. Another gentleman persuaded me to go to a orfice where they looked arter the likes o' me. I went, and when they 'eerd me out, they said they'd make inquiries into my case. Well, sir, they did make inquiries, and it come to the old thing that I've 'eerd over and over and over agin. They said they'd do somethink for me if I'd leave Tom; but when they spoke agin 'im I stood up for 'im, and they got angry, and said as I was no good. Then another party as I went to said they'd take my child--which I 'ad no business to 'ave, they said--if I liked, and that they'd give me ten shillin's to set me up in a stock of somethink to sell for my livin'. Part with my child!' exclaimed Blade-o'-Grass, snatching the little one to her lap, and looking around with fierce fear, as if enemies were present ready to tear her treasure from her. 'Sell my 'eart for ten shillin's! You're a parson, sir, and I put it to you. What do you say to partin' mother and child?'

What could I say? I was dumb. It was best to be so upon such straightforward questions propounded by a girl who, in her position and with her feelings, could understand and would recognise no logic but the logic of natural laws; it was best to be silent if I wished to do good, and I did wish it honestly, sincerely. The more I saw of Blade-o'-Grass, the more she interested me; the more she interested me, the more she pained me. I saw before me a problem, hard as a rock, sensitive as a flower--a problem which no roundabout legislation can solve in the future, or touch in the present. Other developments will to a certainty start up in time to come--other developments, and worse in all likelihood, because a more cultivated intelligence may be engaged in justifying what now ignorance is held to be some slight excuse for.

'Then, sir,' continued Blade-o'-Grass, driving her hard nails home, 'if I was one o' them unnatural mothers as don't care for their children, and took the orfer--'ow about the ten shillin's to set me up in a stock o' somethin' to sell? What do the peelers say to a gal as tries to sell anythin' in the streets? Why, there ain't a inch o' flagstone as she's got a right to set 'er foot on! And as for the kerb, as don't belong properly to nobody, and's not wanted for them as walks or them as rides, why, a gal daren't stand on it to save 'er life! And that's the way it goes, sir; that's the way it goes! But I beg your pardon, sir. I'm wanderin' away from what I come for, and I'm a-takin' up your time.'

'Go on, my poor girl,' I said; 'let me know what I can do for you.'

'It ain't for me, sir; it's for my baby.'

'What can I do for her, the poor little thing?' I asked, pinching the child's cheek, who showed no pleasure, however, at my caress; there dwelt in her face an expression of mournfulness which was native to her, and which nothing could remove. 'What can I do for her?'

'Pray for 'er!' implored Blade-o'-Grass, with all her soul in her eyes, from which the tears were streaming.

I started slightly, and waited for further explanation. Blade-o'-Grass regarded me earnestly before she spoke again.

'You see, sir, she was born with a tiger inside of 'er, the same as I was; it ain't 'er fault, the dear, it's mine. It breaks my 'eart to think as she'll grow up like me, and that the tiger'll never leave 'er. I talked to Mr. Wirtue about it yesterday, and he says to me, "Why don't you go to the parson, and arks 'im to pray the tiger out 'er?" And so I've come, sir. You'd 'ardly believe what I'd do if it was set me to do, if I could get the tiger away from my dear. I'd be chopped up, sir, I would! Mr. Wirtue says prayer'll do anythink, and that if I didn't believe 'im, I was to arks you if it won't I can't pray myself; I don't know 'ow to. So I've come to you to arks you to pray the tiger out of my baby!'

I scarcely remember in what terms I replied. I know, however, that I sent Blade-o'-Grass away somewhat consoled, saying that she would teach her baby to bless me every day of her life if my prayers were successful.

VI.

FOR THESE AND SUCH AS THESE.

And now it becomes necessary that I should say something concerning my private history. I have made mention of a friend to whom I owed my education and position, and whose friendship it saddened me to think I should probably soon lose. It is of this friend, in connection with myself, that I am about to speak.

His name was Fairhaven. He was a great speculator, and his ventures had been so successful that he had become famous in the stock and money markets. At this time he was nearly seve nty years of age, unmarried, and he had no family connection in which he took the slightest interest, none, indeed, which he would recognise. Although I was indebted to him in the manner I have stated, I did not see him, and did not even know his name, until I had arrived at manhood and had chosen my career. All that I knew was that he was very wealthy, and it was by almost the merest accident that I discovered his name and real position. I made this discovery at a critical time. A season of great distress had set in in my parish, and I became acquainted with much misery, which, for want of means, I was unable to alleviate. I yearned for money. Where could I obtain it? I thought of Mr. Fairhaven. I said to myself, 'He has been good to me, and he is a wealthy man, and might be willing to assist me. Surely he would not miss a little of his money, and I could do so much good with it!' I must explain that I had before this time endeavoured to ascertain the name of the gentleman who had befriended me when I was left an orphan, but I was told by his agents that it was his wish to remain unknown. I respected that wish, and did not prosecute my inquiries. Even now that I had accidentally discovered his name, I should not for my own sake have pressed myself upon him; but for the sake of those suffering ones whom I was unable to relieve for want of money, I determined to do so. When I presented myself to him, he regarded me attentively, and with some symptoms of agitation. I said I hoped he was not displeased with me for coming to him. No, he answered, he was not displeased; and he made me so welcome that I ventured to thank him for his past goodness to me. Then I made my appeal to him, and after some consideration he placed at my disposal the sum of a hundred pounds, intimating that the same amount would be paid to me every year, to spend according to my own discretion among the poor of my parish. I was overjoyed at this good result of my courage, and I thanked him cordially for his liberality. Up to this time I had received the money regularly, and had been enabled to do much good with it. I visited him occasionally to inform him how his money was expended, and even in the midst of his vaster operations, I think he was glad to hear of the good which sprang from the seed he placed in my hands to sow among my poor. After a time he asked me to visit him more frequently, saying that he was a lonely man, and that my visits were an

agreeable relief to him. I owed him too deep a debt of gratitude to refuse, and I saw him as often as the duties of my position would allow. As our intimacy ripened, I learned, from chance words which escaped from him now and then, that he was not satisfied with the groove in which I was working. Knowing that we were not in the slightest way related to each other, I was naturally curious to learn why he took so deep an interest in me; but when I approached the subject he stopped me somewhat sternly, and desired me to speak of other matters. The impression I had gained that he was dissatisfied with my career became strengthened in every succeeding interview. And one night he made me a startling proposition.

I have a clear remembrance of that night and all the details connected with it. We were conversing in the pleasant garden of his house, which was situated on the bank of the river Thames. From where we sat we commanded a clear view of the river. The tide was ebbing, and the river's water was flowing towards the sea. The heavens were bright, and the fragrant air was whispering among the leaves. The water was murmuring with a sweet sibillation as it flowed towards a mightier power, and the stars were flashing in its depths.

On that night Mr. Fairhaven said that he wished he had known me earlier in life; he would have chosen for me a different career; but it was not too late now. 'I am a childless man,' he said, 'and I have grown to love you.' He proposed that I should resign my office, and come and live with him as his heir; had I been his son he could not have expressed himself more affectionately towards me. He took me entirely into his confidence, and endeavoured to win my sympathy in his career. He showed me how he had risen to wealth--nay, he showed me by his books and by other evidence the wealth itself which he had accumulated. I was amazed at its extent. I had no idea that he was so rich. As a proof of the sincerity of his offer, he said he would settle a large sum of money on me immediately, and that the bulk of his fortune should be mine when he was dead. There were certain conditions attached to his proposal. I was to bear his name when he died, and I was to pledge myself on my honour to live fully up to my means, and to take what he considered to be the proper position in society of a man who possessed so large a fortune. 'Money has its duties,' he said--'duties which I perhaps have neglected, but which it shall be your pleasant task to perform.' In a word, I was to become a man of fashion, and I was to do whatever was necessary in the world of fashion to make the name of Fairhaven notable. He laid great stress upon this latter stipulation, and I understood that his money was not to be mine to do as I pleased with in any other way.

I listened to his proposal in silence. For a short while I was overwhelmed by the offer and by the generosity which prompted it. But even as I listened I felt that I could not accept it. The prospect he held out to me did not dazzle me. To my mind, the mere possession of a large amount of money has no attraction, and confers no distinction; to

possess it and to spend it in the way Mr. Fairhaven had set down appeared to my understanding a dreary task, and was distinctly inimical to the views I had formed of life and its duties. Besides, I had grown to love my labours; I was bound by the tenderest links of love and humanity to the people among whom I moved. Look where I would, I saw no higher lot in life than that which I had chosen, and--a selfish reason perhaps--I was happy in my choice.

I answered Mr. Fairhaven to this effect, and was about to refuse his offer absolutely, when he stopped me. I saw by his face that he anticipated what I was about to say. He did not want my answer then, he said; he wished me to take a certain time for reflection--a time extending over two years, and to expire on the anniversary of my thirty-third birthday. He asked me to study the matter well during this interval, and in the consideration of it to throw aside all false sentiment and eccentricity. He proposed to gain admission for me into certain circles, where I could see in full operation the machinery of the life he wished me to adopt; and he added--not as a threat, but simply as part of a resolution he had formed--that if, at the expiration of the allotted time, I did not accept his proposal, I must never expect to receive one shilling of his money. The time passed. At the expense of my duties I made leisure to move in the society in which he wished me to move; I studied its machinery; I made myself acquainted with its inner life, with its aims, desires, ambitions, results; as far as opportunity served, I probed its depths, and my resolution to decline Mr. Fairhaven's offer was strengthened. It is not for me here to state the reasons which led to the conclusion I formed. They sprang from my heart and my conscience; they were and are part of myself, which I could no more tear from myself than I could resist the course of time.

I visited Mr. Fairhaven on the appointed day, and acquainted him with my decision. I spoke in words and tone as gentle as I could command; for I bore in mind the great debt I owed him, and the exceeding generosity of his offer. He looked at me with eyes of doubt and surprise as I spoke, and turned from me when I finished. When he spoke it was in a hard cold tone.

'And that is your positive decision?' he said.

'Yes, sir.'

'There is nothing hidden behind it----or stay! Perhaps you have not had sufficient time for reflection. Let the matter rest for a little while longer.'

I told him that, if I had twenty years for reflection, my answer would be the same.

'You are aware,' he said, 'that you are inflicting a great disappointment upon me?

'I cannot but be aware of it, sir,' I replied, 'and it pains me exceedingly to know it.'

'You said a little while ago,' he said, referring to words I had used, 'that when I took you into my confidence, I endeavoured to win your sympathy in my career. Did I win it?'

'No, sir.'

'Why?'

I determined to speak frankly.

'It seemed to me that you had amassed money simply for its own sake, and not for the sake of the good uses to which it may be applied. According to my thinking, money is only sweet when it is well-earned and well-spent.'

I saw that he pondered over these words.

'Your life,' he said, 'must contain special attractions, that you are so wedded to it. You have made friends, doubtless.'

'Many, sir, thank God! Friends to whom I am deeply attached.'

'Tell me of them, and let me ascertain for myself the superior inducements of the life you lead to the life which you reject.'

I considered for a few moments, I thought of Mrs. Silver and her happy home and family; but connected with them in my mind were the less wholesome figures of Tom Beadle, Blade-o'-Grass, and Jimmy Virtue. As a foil to these, however, were the figures of Mr. Merrywhistle and Robert Truefit and his family. I resolved to show this picture in a complete form, as presenting a fair variety of those among whom my life was passed. As I mentioned the names of these persons and described them, Mr. Fairhaven wrote them on a leaf in his pocket-book. I laid the greatest stress upon the figures of Mrs. Silver and her family, and I endeavoured to show this part of the picture in bright colours. But I was honest throughout, and I spoke plainly of Tom Beadle, Blade-o'-Grass, and Jimmy Virtue. When the picture was completed, Mr. Fairhaven read the names aloud, and exclaimed angrily:

'A pretty circle of portraits truly! The principal of them thieves and gutter children! Andrew Meadow, it is incomprehensible to me. But your mind is set upon them evidently. Can anything I say move you from your resolution?'

'Nothing, sir.'

'Then here we part,' he said sternly and bitterly. 'As you cannot be moved from your resolution, I cannot be moved from mine. Not one shilling of my money shall you ever receive. I have striven hard for your good, and you reject me for these and such as these!'

He tapped the list scornfully, and rose. I understood from his action that I was dismissed. I knew it would be useless to attempt to soften him; he was a man of inflexible resolution.

'You need not trouble yourself,' he said, 'to call upon me again, unless I send for you. Goodnight.'

'Before I go, sir,' I said, very sad at heart, 'let me say how truly grateful I am to you for your past kindness to me. I shall hold you in my heart and mind with thankfulness and gratitude until my dying day.'

Then I walked sadly out of the peaceful garden towards the City, where lay my labour of love.

Two matters must be mentioned before I close this chapter.

The first is that before I acquainted Mr. Fairhaven with the decision I had arrived at, I endeavoured again to ascertain from what motive he had educated and befriended me when I was left an orphan. He refused distinctly to give me any explanation.

The next is that the hundred pounds a year he had hitherto given me to spend among my poor was stopped from that day. This grieved me exceedingly. I think I had never fully understood the power of money until then.

VII.

HEALTHY BODY MAKES HEALTHY MIND.

It was but natural that the loss of so good a friend as Mr. Fairhaven should have had an effect upon my spirits, and I felt it the more deeply because he had parted from me in anger. I did not for one moment doubt that I had decided rightly, but it would have been a happiness to me to have retained Mr. Fairhaven's friendship. I found myself brooding over it and growing melancholy. I sorely felt the need of sympathy, or at least of that consolation which one derives from unbosoming himself to his friends. Mrs. Silver saw my distress of mind, and with delicate tact led me to confide in her. I told her the story--the temptation, the trial, the result--and I asked her if I had done right. Only she and Rachel were present when I commenced to tell my story; and Rachel, divining by my first words that I was about to impart a confidence to Mrs. Silver, rose to leave the room; but I desired her to stay, and she resumed her seat and continued her work.

'Have I done right, dear friend?' I asked of Mrs. Silver when I had concluded.

I saw that she was much affected. 'Between friends such as we had grown to be but few words were needed. I was bending anxiously towards her as I asked the question. She took my hand and kissed me.

'I am old enough to be your mother,' she said; 'it gladdens me to know that we are friends.'

I was inexpressibly consoled and comforted. I looked towards Rachel. Her bosom was heaving, and a tender radiance was in her face. My heart leaped up as I saw. Immediately I turned to her she knew that I was gazing at her, and she rose hurriedly and left the room. Mrs. Silver looked at me with solemn tenderness and followed her blind child. From that moment a new tie seemed to be established between us, and I came and went as one of the family.

As regards private social life, I know of no happier phase of it than that which allows you to have only a few intimate friends, and which does not compel you to fritter away your hours among a host of acquaintances who have no heart-regard for you--paying a cold visit here, a cold visit there, glad when they are over; receiving these conventional visits in return, and uttering commonplaces the while which are devoid of meaning and have no suspicion of earnestness. Where you have within hail a few friends between whom and yourself a sincere esteem exists, room is given for earnest feeling to flower; the true heart-glow is felt, and you give and receive smiles which are not artificial, and speak and

hear words which are good and glad utterances. In time the ties which bind you and your friends grow as strong as ties of blood-kindred, and when a face is missed from the circle, you mourn for it with genuine grief and affection.

Such a phase of social life existed with the Silvers and their friends, of whom Robert Truefit was not the least esteemed. Wherever he was, the conversation was always animated. He was a man who thought for himself, and was not willing to be led unless his reason approved. Under any circumstances, Robert Truefit would not have been satisfied with going through the world blindfold. In no sense of the word an agitator, he was always ready to express his opinion, and you might depend that that opinion would be the result of a fairly-exercised judgment. He was contented with his position as an ordinary workman, but this does not imply that he was without ambition. He simply recognised that it is folly to knock your head against stones. In a new country, such as America, Canada, or any of the Australasian colonies, he would have risen by sheer force of character; but in England, with the ties that he had gathered about him, the chances were against him. I am anxious that the character of Robert Truefit should not be misunderstood. He was in no wise discontented with the groove in which he laboured. He was a good husband and a good father. Fond of an argument he certainly was; but he was not that kind of man who justifies himself by a proverb. He chafed at injustice to others, and he often expressed indignation at the neglect of public morality which, he contended, characterised the government of the country. 'They look after the trees,' he said, 'and neglect the flowers. It is a cant saying that you cannot make people moral by Act of Parliament. Keep dinning a thing in the people's ears, and, whether it be true or false, it will come to be believed in as something not to be controverted. They will believe that a bread pill will prolong life indefinitely, if it be advertised sufficiently. I say you can make people moral by Act of Parliament. You can make them clean and you can compel them to be decent, and those qualities go a very long way towards morality.'

We were all together one evening, talking of the good prospect that lay before Charley, who, firmly established as the overseer of a large printing establishment, was saving money with the view of setting up for himself in business, 'one of these fine days,' as he said. Ruth was busy upon something marvellous in the shape of a frock for baby, and much serious conversation was indulged in by the females on the subject of trimmings. Said Ruth,

'Charley, when baby grows up she shall write a book, and you shall print it.'

'Why,' exclaimed Charley, 'you don't want baby to be a bluestocking, do you, Ruth?

'She will be clever enough for anything,' said Ruth confidently. 'There, mother, don't you think she will look beautiful in this?' And Ruth held up the frock for inspection.

'I begin to think,' said Charley, 'that I am ambitious. Are you?' he asked of Robert Truefit.

'I can't afford to be,' answered Robert Truefit, with a smile. 'In my position, and with my responsibilities, ambition would lead to discontent--discontent to unhappiness. I have seven pairs of feet to provide boots and shoes for, and you can guess what that means.'

I had heard and read a great deal of the extravagance and improvidence of the working-man, and looking upon Robert Truefit as a fair sample of the better class--better because right-minded and intelligent--I asked him if he was saving money for a rainy day, as the saying is.

'The only rainy day,' he said, 'for which I have been able to provide in the shape of money, is the day on which I shall die. Then my wife, if she is alive and if the company in which my life is insured is not dishonest, will receive two hundred pounds. Every year I pay the insurance a weight is taken from my heart; not so much because I am able to pay it, as because my children are a year nearer to the time when they will be able to work for their mother and assist her, should anything happen to me.' He gave me a bright look. 'I am endeavouring to train my young ones properly, and in that way perhaps I may say that I am saving up for a rainy day. But I see that you are anxious for further particulars. If you will give me a hint in what direction to let my tongue run, I shall be glad to oblige you.'

'Well,' I suggested; 'concerning income and expenditure.'

'I can give you a plain experience on those heads,' he said frankly, 'because I am, after a certain fashion, methodical, much more so than many of my mates. I put down my earnings every week in a little memorandum-book, and on the opposite side I put down the way in which my earnings are spent. This is a good lesson for my youngsters, who learn the value of system in the practical matters of life. You know, sir, that I have five children--two girls and three boys. The youngest is eleven months old, the eldest is ten years of age on his next birthday. Now, last year, from the first day to the last, I earned ninety-nine pounds ten shillings, and every farthing of my earnings, with the exception of thirty-eight shillings, which was spent in junketing, went in the necessaries of life and in paying my policy.'

'What were your out-door pleasures?'

'Once during the year we took the children to the Crystal Palace. We went once to the theatre to see a pantomime; and my eldest youngsters begged so hard to be taken to the

Brighton Aquarium on one of the Bank holidays, that I could not resist them; and really I was glad of the opportunity of seeing it myself. We had a capital day, and it did the children good in many ways; it opened the eyes of their minds, I may say. Our rent makes a big hole. We pay seventeen pounds a year, including taxes, for our house, which contains three rooms and a small kitchen or washhouse--quite as little as we can do with. Meat is another big item. Then, I work three miles away from home, and that's an item. In examining the figures, which Jane and I did very carefully when I balanced the account--we have the fear of that rainy day you have mentioned very strong upon us sometimes, I assure you, sir!--we could not find one item which was not properly in its place, and which in our opinion could have been set under the head of extravagance. Yet I know that there are political economists--I call them by the name they give themselves--who would not agree with me. The money spent in amusements I have no doubt they would say I ought to have saved: I deny it. We have a right--every human being has--to a reasonable share of healthful pleasure. "Your meat bill ought to have been a little less," they would also doubtless say: I deny it. We have little enough as it is; more than half the meat we eat is Australian meat--and we like it! The children's bodies must be healthfully nourished if they are to grow into right-minded, reasonable men and women. Healthy body makes healthy mind. Twenty-two shillings a year spent in reading! "Monstrous!" the political economists would exclaim. Why, my newspapers cost me not less than eight shillings a-year, and there's a weekly publication, and an occasional oddment for the children; and is my wife, or am I, not to read a work of fiction occasionally--or are these things not for such as we? It is they who are monstrous who set up such monstrous cries. So they would go through my book, and prove that out of my earnings of ninety-nine pounds ten shillings I ought to have saved a handsome sum. I have observed that it is only among the ranks of the well-to-do that you find your political economists. They argue from the wrong end--they themselves, mind you, being seated the while on a snug and comfortable elevation; they cast up lines of figures, and judge the life of an individual by means of a monster called Aggregate--which Aggregate, I take it, is, applied to such a purpose, the most absurd and unjust standpoint that mind of man could have invented.'

VIII.

THIS 'ERE FREE AND 'LIGHTENED COUNTRY OF OUR'N'S CRAMMED FULL O' TEMPLES O' LIBERTY.

The withdrawal of Mr. Fairhaven's hundred pounds a year compelled me to relinquish many plans I had formed. It was a sore blow to me, and I had to pinch and save in order to carry out promises I had made to some of my poor people. From the Silvers I received not only sympathy, but help in the shape of money, without which I am sure I could not have got along. Between Rachel and myself a confidence of a peculiar and affectionate nature was gradually established. I spoke to her freely of my troubles, and confided in her, and asked counsel of her. By what mysterious means it was that she--blind from her birth, and with no such knowledge of the world as comes from actual contact with it--could have gained the wise insight into character which she possessed, it is beyond my power to say. Perhaps it was because she did not doubt, and believed in the capacity for goodness in others.

A long time had now passed since the children's holiday in the country, and yet the incident of Rachel's distress on that day at the sound of Blade-o'-Grass's voice had never been referred to in any of our conversations. Truth to tell, I hesitated to open a subject which had caused so much pain to the blind maid; but I never lost sight of it. I was often on the verge of speaking about it, but I checked the impulse. One day, however, I referred to it, almost without thought.

'I knew,' said Rachel, 'that you would speak to me about it at some time or other, and I have thought it strange that you have not done so before now. I think it was out of consideration for me.' I did not answer. 'But you have had it in your mind?'

'Yes, Rachel, I have never forgotten it.'

'Nor I.' She clasped her hands upon her lap, and said quietly, 'Seeing that you were silent, I should have mentioned it myself, if I could have mustered sufficient courage; but I was too much afraid. Are we to speak of it now?'

'As you think fit, Rachel.'

'It will be best, perhaps. Mr. Meadow,' she said earnestly, 'it is not wrong for two persons to have a secret, If the keeping of it harms no one, and if the disclosure would bring pain to their friends?'

'Surely not in such a case, Rachel.'

'I am so glad to know it! Will you, then, let what we say to each other upon this subject remain a secret between us, unless you should think it will serve a good end one day to refer to it, or disclose it?'

'Yes, Rachel. This shall be a confidence between us.'

'That is good; it is a confidence between us.' She placed her hand upon mine for a moment, as if that action sealed the confidence. 'Mr. Meadow, I told you that I had heard the poor girl's voice before that day. It was when Ruth and Charley were courting. We had spent a happy day at the Exhibition with Charley, and we were walking home, when I heard some one utter words which ring in my ears now. It was Ruth's voice, but it was not Ruth who spoke. The words were: "For God's sake, Tom, bring home some money, for there's not a bit of bread in the cupboard!" Without stopping to think, I cried out to Ruth, and asked her if it was she who spoke. I told her what I had heard, and that the voice was like hers; and Ruth went to the poor girl, and gave her money.'

'It was Blade-o'-Grass you heard, Rachel. The man who finds food for her is named Tom.'

'I never spoke of it afterwards; I did not dare to, for my thoughts. Mr. Meadow, what is Blade-o'-Grass like? Describe her to me.'

I described the poor outcast as faithfully as it was possible for me to do. Rachel was silent for a little while; she was looking at the portrait.

'What colour is her hair, Mr. Meadow?'

'Dark-brown.'

'The same colour as Ruth's!' she exclaimed, in a tone of distress. 'And her eyes?'

'Dark-brown, also.'

'So are Ruth's.'

She twined her fingers nervously.

'She has a very pretty dimple, Rachel.'

Rachel uttered a sob of thankfulness.

'Ruth has no dimple,' she said gratefully.

I reflected seriously before I spoke. Such implicit faith did I have in Rachel's instincts that, without a shadow of direct evidence, indeed with all evidence against it, I was tempted still to believe that there was kinship between Ruth and Blade-o'-Grass. Yet what good purpose could possibly be served in tracing it? Would it not be bringing pain and shame to Ruth's door?----' No, no!' I cried, in my thoughts, 'pain doubtless, but not shame! Ruth has been too purely brought up for shame to touch her. She would stretch forth a sympathising hand to Blade-o'-Grass. With a loving heart and with loving words she would influence her for good: love would prevail where friendship failed. Blade-o'-Grass might by that influence be brought to see in their proper light the relations that existed between Tom Beadle the thief and herself, and might----'

Ah, me! ah, me! I paused here, in grief, too sorrowful to carry out the thread of my reflections. I had had but few interviews, with Blade-o'-Grass; but when, feeling my duty press heavily upon me, I had approached the subject which most grieved her friends, I had found her deaf and implacable to my words. She placed her back against the rock of natural affection, and every argument used against Tom Beadle struck her with a feather's weight. To break the tie seemed to me to be impossible. There remained, then, but one right thing to be done. To sanctify it by the sacrament of marriage, and thus fasten the hold which the thief had upon her. Let no man come between them then! This girl, in whom there was so much latent good, would be linked for life to a thief. His infamous life would be hers, his lot would be hers, and nothing should separate them but death!

At the date of my present conversation with Rachel, I had not seen Blade-o'-Grass for many weeks, and I knew that Tom Beadle was out of prison and at work again in his bad way. I determined to seek her out that very night. I had promised to visit Jimmy Virtue in company with Robert Truefit. Jimmy had expressed a wish to see us, and he would most likely be able to tell me where I could find Blade-o'-Grass. These thoughts occupied but a very few moments in passing through my mind; and I turned again to Rachel.

'When I heard poor Blade-o'-Grass,' I said to her, 'speak to her baby, her voice sounded strangely familiar to me. Yet it seems scarcely possible that what you and I have in our minds with reference to her should be more than fancy.'

But Rachel gently shook her head, and we diverged to other subjects.

Robert Truefit and I met by appointment, and walked together to Jimmy Virtue's leaving-shop. Jimmy Virtue was in his parlour, and upon our entrance he hastily gathered up an old pack of cards, with which he had been playing. The deal table was bare of cloth, and was smeared over with chalk figures representing many thousands of pounds.

'Hallo!' exclaimed Jimmy Virtue; 'there you are! I've been 'avin' a game of All-fours with Jack.'

I looked around for Jack, but saw no signs of him. There was but one tallow-candle burning in the room, and that was stuck in a ginger-beer bottle and was guttering down.

'I'll be with you in a minute,' said Jimmy Virtue; 'I've got a bundle to tie up in the shop.'

'This is a miserable place to live in,' I said to Robert Truefit when Jimmy Virtue had left the room. 'Who is Jack?'

'A shadow,' replied Robert Truefit; 'a shadow of Jimmy's creation, with whom he plays at cards in his loneliness, and cheats out of fabulous sums--money, Jack, and all being things of air. Look at the chalk-score on the table; Jimmy has won more than three thousand pounds of Jack. Is not truth stranger than fiction, Mr. Meadow? Jack sits there.'

Robert Truefit pointed to a chest upon which the imaginary Jack was supposed to sit while he was being robbed. So dimly-lighted was the room that I could easily have fancied a shadow was really sitting on the chest, gazing with lack-lustre eyes upon another shadow in Jimmy Virtue's chair, where Jimmy Virtue was not. A mournful picture of a desolate life, I thought.

Jimmy Virtue appeared to have forgotten us, for Robert Truefit and I had been ten minutes together, and were not disturbed.

'Is he attending to customers?' I asked.

'There's no customer in the shop,' said Robert Truefit, peeping in. He went into the shop, and I followed him. Jimmy Virtue was standing at the street-door, muttering to himself.

'That's the second time I've seed 'im 'ere,' he muttered, 'the second time this week; but it's been too dark to ketch a good sight of 'is face. Now, what does he come 'angin' about 'ere for?'

He was watching the figure of a man who was standing in that part of Stoney-alley where the deepest shadows lay.

'Do you know him, Jimmy?' asked Robert Truefit.

'He's a 'Postle,' replied Jimmy Virtue.

'An Apostle,' explained Robert Truefit to me. I wondered, not knowing what meaning might be attached to the word.

'He calls 'isself a Delegate, but I calls 'im a 'Postle--a 'Postle o' Liberty. I'd like to ketch a good sight of that there 'Postle's face. Pff! What's this a-runnin' in my 'ead?'

Golden Grain

He glared around with his one useful eye, as if shadows were jostling him on every side; and in a thoughtful mood he accompanied us to the parlour. There he opened the chest which formed Jack's resting-place, and diving to the bottom brought up a small wooden box. Without a word he opened the box, and turned out the contents. 'There's a rum lot o' things 'ere,' he said, after a long pause, during which he had been examining the articles, each of which was wrapped in paper, upon which there was writing. 'All gold and silver things that's never been called for. I didn't like to part with 'em. 'Ere's a bit o' coral, 'xactly like a foot and leg; this garter round the leg is gold. I lent fourteenpence on it to a cove as 'ad seen better days--so he told me. Them better days must ha' been a precious long time afore I set eyes on 'im! 'Ere's a bit o' jade with a band o' silver on it. That come from Chiney. 'Ere's a woman's likeness on a broach--enamel, it is a pretty face! 'tain't so pretty now, I'll be bound! I've 'ad this for thirty year. 'Ere's a----ah, 'ere it is!' He lighted upon something he had been seeking for. 'What do you call this, now?' he asked.

'I should call it a wedding-ring,' said Robert Truefit.

'So should I. I ain't 'ad many things like what's in this box brought to me to lend money on. Peddicuts, and gownds, and old boots is more in my line.'

He replaced all the things in the wooden box with the exception of the wedding-ring, which he put in his pocket.

'Now, then, Jimmy,' said Robert Truefit, 'tell us what you wanted to see us about.'

'Well, you know that place they calls Paul's-buildin's. It's been empty ever so long, and there's a large 'all in it.'

'I know it, Jimmy.'

'Well, that's what I wanted to talk to you about. The 'all's been taken for twelve bob a week by some fellers as 'as formed theirselves into a society called the Workin'-man's League--a society as is goin' to stick up for workin'man's rights and all that sort o' thing. And what do you think they've painted on the door. Bob? Why, The Temple o' Liberty! And this feller as comes 'angin' round 'ere to-night calls 'isself a Delegate. I calls 'im a 'Postle. It sounds better, don't it? 'Im and 'is mates meets three times a week at the Temple o' Liberty to take in members at tuppence a 'ead, and to collar subscriptions. Lord! they'd collar anythink, sich fellers as them! They do a pretty good stroke o' business altogether, I should say.'

'If Jimmy's not mistaken,' observed Robert Truefit to me, 'these are some of the men who live by the trade. But what makes you so interested in this one particular man, Jimmy?'

'I'd rather not say jist now, Bob. But I did ketch jist a glimpse of 'is face, and if I'm right, I've seed it afore. Per'aps I am right; per'aps I ain't. Any'ow this ain't the time to speak, 'cordin' to my judgment, till I'm more settled about it. There's a big meetin' next week at the Temple o' Liberty, and there'll be some tall speechifyin', I daresay. I'll 'ave a good look at that there 'Postle's face then. Will you go, Bob? and you, sir? This is a sort o' thing as ought to be looked into. If I was a workin'-man like Bob, I shouldn't be satisfied without I 'ad a finger in the pie--though there's nothin' good to be got out of it, mind you, unless you're a 'Postle! And if I was a parson, I'd think it my duty to 'eer what they've got to say for theirselves.'

We promised to accompany Jimmy Virtue to the meeting; and then I asked him if he knew where Blade-o'-Grass lived. He went into Stoney-alley with us, closing has shop-door, and pointed out the house.

'She's got a room on the third floor,' he said; 'she went into it last week. They about like birds, them gals do; it seems as they can't rest nowhere. But they allus comes back to the old spot! She was born about 'ere, and it's my opinion she'll die about 'ere. What are you goin' to do, Bob?

'I shall stop here until Mr. Meadow's visit is paid. Nay, sir,' he said, seeing that I was about to attempt to dissuade him, 'I shall wait for you. Our roads home are same, and perhaps you will allow me to walk part of the way with you.'

'I shall go,' said Jimmy Virtue, 'and smoke a pipe outside The True Briton's Delight. I've got the lonelies on me to-night, and Jack's not allus the best o' company; gits stupid like, and 's got no go in 'im. You'll see me there as you pass.'

I walked up the dark stairs until I came to the third floor, and knocked at the door of the only room in which there was a light. Blade-o'-Grass came to the door, and opened it. She curtseyed when she saw me, and asked me to come in. There was some anxiety in her face, but this was no new phase in her. I asked after the child.

'It's that as troubles me, sir,' she said. 'Come and look at it.'

The child was lying on the bed, with its eyes closed. Blade-o'-Grass touched her, and she opened her eyes; but there was no sign of recognition in her face, and no smile or look of gladness as the mother leaned over her. The expression was one of settled mournfulness; it appeared to me as if neither pain nor joy could affect it.

'She's been like this, sir,' whispered Blade-o'-Grass, 'for nigh on a week, and I don't know what to make of it. She lays there for hours without movin' and without speakin'. She don't complain a bit; but it can't be right, can it, sir? Speak to me, my life! Speak to me!'

But the child made no response to these and other endearing words; a mournful lethargy had fallen upon her, and she lay like one in a trance.

'She takes her food?'

'Yes, sir, but not much; she don't seem to care for it. She don't arks for none.'

'Has any doctor been to see her?'

'I've got no money, sir.'

I knew of a doctor of fair repute who was popular among the poor, and whose charge was eighteenpence a visit, with medicine included. I gave Blade-o'-Grass three shillings, and told her it would pay for two visits. She thanked me with tears in her eyes, and said that she would run for the doctor immediately I was gone.

'I wish to say a few words to you first, my dear; I will not detain you long.'

She placed a chair for me, and stood before me.

'Where is Tom?' I asked.

'I don't know, sir; I ain't seed 'im all day.'

'It is about him I wish to speak, Blade-o'-Grass.'

She looked distressed; but I was not to be discouraged.

'Is it not possible,' I continued, 'for him to get a living in any other way than the way he does?'

''Ow do I know, sir? I think Tom 'd do anythink to earn a pound a week. A pound a week! 'Ow 'appy we should be then! But 'ow's he to do it, sir? Tell us the way, sir.'

'Nay,' I said, 'he must find the way himself----'

She interrupted me impatiently. 'If I didn't know as you was a good friend to me, sir, I should think as you was mockin' of me, like the others. Don't you say it all over agin, sir!' she entreated, with a nervous movement of the hands. 'It makes me sick and mad-like! I've 'eerd it a 'underd times afore, and every time I arks which way we're to turn, I'm told that we've got to find out the way for ourselves.'

She looked towards her child, and I saw that she was anxious to go for the doctor. It would have been cruel to continue the theme then; but I could not leave her without carrying out my intention. I asked her if she had ever been to church.

'Once,' she answered.

'Only once!' I said sadly. 'That's all, sir; I never went agin. I stood near the door while the bells was ringin'. I like to 'eer them bells; they rest me like, and it was them as drawed me on. A lot o' fine people was comin' along the streets all round, and goin' in while I stood there. Some on 'em looked 'appy, 'specially the gals as was about the same age as me; but some on 'em looked orfle glum, as if they knowed they was bad uns, and was goin' to be preached to!--beggin' your pardon, sir. Some of the ladies was dressed beautiful, and more nor one on 'em 'eld their gownds away from me as they parsed, for fear I should 'ave spoiled 'em by touchin' 'em. One lady in lavender silk pulled 'er two little gals away because they was close to me, and looked at me as much as to say that I'd

got no business to be there. No more I 'ad, sir, I know. I remember them things, sir. All the people got in, and the bells stopped, and then I thought 'ow I should like to go in too. It took a deal o' courage to push open the door, and my 'eart was in my mouth when I did it; but that was nothin' to what come arterwards. When I was inside, I thort I should ha' dropped down with fright, a lot on 'em stared at me so 'ard-like; and what with that and the place bein' so grand, I turned all over like a jelly. Then a big man comes up to me, lookin' very stern and solemn. I thort he was a-goin' to give me in charge, and I was goin' to cry out and beg 'im not to, when he clapped 'is 'and on my mouth, and put me somewhere where I couldn't see nothink, and where I could only 'eer a drummin' in my ears like a lot o' flies, except when the people was a-singin'. But I was frightened all the while, and when the doors was throwed open, I run out as fast as I could, for fear somethin' 'd be done to me. I never went no more; it seemed to me as if I'd no right to go.'

'Do you know where my church is, child?'

'No, sir.'

I wrote the address on a piece of paper, and gave it to her.

'I can't read, sir,' she said, with a flush in her cheeks.

I begged her pardon, and told her the name of the church, and the street it was in. 'If you will come there, my dear, next Sabbath, I shall be glad to see you. And don't think you have no right there! You have as much right as the best-dressed lady in the church.'

She thanked me, and said she would come because I had been good to her.

'And bring Tom,' I said.

She shook her head. 'I don't think Tom'll come, sir.'

'Not for your sake?' I asked.

'Tom'll do almost anythink for me,' she said, tears gathering in her eyes.

'Do you know,' I said very gently, 'that living as you are living now with Tom gives great pain to your friends?'

She bit her lips rebelliously, and put on her dogged look.

'And that it is wrong in the sight of God?'

There was no softening of the dogged look; it hardened rather.

'And,' I continued, 'there is so simple and so good a way of atoning for this wrong--a way that will bring Tom nearer to you, that will bind him closer to you. If, as you say, Tom will do anything for you, ask him to marry you.'

The dogged look vanished; joy, wonder, took its place.

'Marry me!' she exclaimed softly. 'O Tom, if you would! if you would, Tom!'

'Is there any doubt of it?'

'I never arksed 'im, sir! I never arksed 'im!'

'Well, dear child, ask him now, and let me know.'

'Won't it cost money, sir? she asked anxiously.

'But little; and that little I will find.'

She held out her hands to me in thankfulness. She had learned to trust me.

'I'll arks Tom, sir. Though, mind!' she said, out of the noble chivalry of her nature; 'nothink that Tom can do can bring me nearer to 'im, or make 'im stick closer to me! But I'll do it, sir, because you think it's good, and because I think, too, it might be righter so.' She turned with a newborn joy in her face, and knelt by the bed, and as I went out of the room, I heard her whisper to her child, 'Baby! baby! me and Tom's goin' to git married! Ain't you glad, baby?'

Robert Truefit was waiting for me in Stoney-alley.

'I am glad you have come at this moment,' he said, as we walked out of the alley. 'You see those two men before us? One is Tom Beadle, and the other is the Delegate who roused Jimmy so strangely to-night.'

'They are not walking together; they do not seem to be acquainted.'

'No; but supposing this one to be an Apostle of Liberty, and that one a thief, it is well that they should be strangers.'

Their destination, however, was the same. They both paused before the door of The True Briton's Delight, and both entered the building, which was a triumph of architecture, with its gay decorations and pillars. The light that came from this bad palace was dazzling.

'A bright coffin,' observed Robert Truefit, 'for virtue and morality.'

Jimmy Virtue was leaning against one of the lamp-posts opposite the public-house, smoking his pipe.

'I've been thinkin', Bob,' he said, with reflective puffs, 'as I've been standin' watchin' the people go in and out, that this 'ere free and 'lightened country of our'n's crammed full o' Temples o' Liberty.'

'Crammed full of them!' exclaimed Robert Truefit, humouring his friend. 'Why, what kind of places, Jimmy?'

Jimmy Virtue extended his pipe in the direction of the True Briton's Delight.

'Them kind o' places,' he said.

Robert Truefit laughed. 'And where on earth, Jimmy, in those temples is liberty to be found?'

'At the bottom o' pewter pots,' replied Jimmy Virtue, with a flourish of his pipe. 'And the persevering way the free and 'lightened Briton searches for it in them pewter pots is a 'stonishing thing. Bob--a very 'stonishing thing!'

IX.

OPEN YOUR EYES, BABY! SPEAK TO ME! LOOK AT MOTHER, MY LIFE!

I looked in vain from my pulpit on the following Sabbath for Tom Beadle and Blade-o'-Grass, but they were not in church. I had introduced into my discourse on that day certain words applicable to the beauty and holiness of the marriage tie--words which I had designed especially for those two humblest members of my congregation, and which I had hoped they would have understood and appreciated. It pained me not to see them, and I was sure that some special circumstance had prevented Blade-o'-Grass at least from attending. I had promised to take a cup of tea with Ruth and her husband after the evening service, and if anything could have made me forget for the time the sorrow which oppressed me, it would have been the peaceful happiness which pervaded their bright and modest home. But the image of Blade-o'-Grass was too strongly fixed in my mind to be forgotten, and in the course of the evening my fancy placed that image by the side of Ruth, as the latter, with all a mother's love in her face, sat rocking the cradle with her foot. It was a terrible contrast, and I strove to banish the fancy; but it refused to leave my mind's eye. Let me, I thought, strive at all events to give it a more pleasing colouring. Ruth was dressed in a brown-stuff gown, and she had a piece of pink ribbon round her neck; she wore dainty white collar and cuffs, and her hair was done up in a simple knot. Merely to look at her as she sat rocking the cradle in which her baby was sleeping created that Home feeling to which all the humanising influences of life are due. In my fancy now I gave Blade-o'-Grass such a dress and such cuffs and collar; I placed the piece of ribbon round her neck, and arranged her hair in similar fashion; and then I placed her by the side of Ruth. It was wonderful; they were of the same height, and the colour of their hair and eyes was the same. But the look of peaceful happiness which dwelt in the face of Ruth was wanting in the face of Blade-o'-Grass. I gave the poor girl this; I banished the anxiety and sorrow from her face, and the likeness was perfect. As I gazed upon the picture, half-real, half-ideal, the sound of Ruth singing softly to her baby stole upon my ear, and the little tricks and turns of the voice which Nature varies in her myriad children with such marvellous skill as to make each distinctive in itself, or assimilative only where ties of blood exist, brought to me the voice of Blade-o'-Grass speaking to her child. I started to my feet to dispel the illusion, and bade Ruth and Charley good-night, for fear I might be tempted to disturb their happiness by even a mention of my thought.

It was a wintry night, and the snow was falling. I had other visits to make in pursuance of my duties, and it was quite eleven o'clock by the time I had completed my rounds. At that hour I was crossing the wonderful piece of road which connects the Mansion House with the Royal Exchange, and I bustled along briskly to keep myself warm. I was in the

open space in front of the Royal Exchange, and I was walking towards Leadenhall-street, when a woman hurriedly approached me from that direction. She came almost abruptly to my side, and, with a reckless movement of her body, in which every limb seemed to take its part, was about to accost me, when, as I turned my face towards hers, she uttered a suppressed cry of terror, and flew round the corner which leads to Threadneedle-street. I had not seen the woman's face, but the cry told me who she was. Shocked and surprised I ran after her, and, in her endeavour to escape me, the poor wandering soul fell upon the ground at the foot of the statue of one of America's greatest philanthropists. Even in that moment of trouble, the coincidence struck me as singular, and in the fleeting glance of admiration I cast upon the statue the thought flashed upon me that it would have been more charitable, and would have shown more true benevolence, had the vast sums the philanthropist gave to the poor of London been expended less after the fashion of a commercial speculation. That the merciful intentions of the testator--whose kind heart must have been filled with pity for the unmerited sufferings of the poor, and with a desire to relieve them--have been made to miss their mark by the manner in which the trust has been administered, there is, in my mind, not a shadow of a doubt.

'Blade-o'-Grass!' I exclaimed pityingly, and I stooped to raise the writhing form at my feet.

But she shrank from me and repulsed me with her hands; and bade me, in a desperate voice, to go, for the Lord's sake! and leave her to herself.

'Nay, dear child,' I said, 'I cannot leave you. Tell me what brings you out on such a night as this.'

'Don't arks me!' she cried, with a wild movement of her hands. 'O, my God! don't arks me. O, if I could die this minute, and take my child with me! O, if we could die together, the pair on us!'

She looked up to the dreary sky with a face as white as the falling snow. Never in my life had I witnessed such passion, such utter prostration of soul, and my heart bled for her--and bled the more as I observed her scanty clothing and the miserable coverings she wore on her feet. And then there came to me again the fancies I had raised concerning Blade-o'-Grass but a couple of hours ago in Ruth's cheerful room. The reality was before me, in all its naked truth. What a reality! Stone-deaf, blind, dumb, and utterly senseless to stern preaching and mild exhortation; to the torrent of words which comfortably-good creatures listen to from lip-philanthropists who, by some strange mental jugglery, really believe that they are doing good; to the raising of voices calling upon the fallen to turn and repent; to statistics which prove so much and do so little. Only to be affected,

only to be sensibly touched, only to be altered for the better by the angelic wand of practical benevolence, which sees, pities, and at once wisely relieves. I knew and recognised that it was from no fault of hers that this poor girl had fallen so low. Had fallen! no; she was born fallen, and had been kept so. There was no road open for her to traverse which would lead to pleasanter paths. Gardens and fair places she had seen, doubtless, and her soul must have yearned to them with sickening desire, but they were on far-off hills, and the gates that led to them were shut for such as she. As she lay before me now, looking upward to the sky, no fair places shone for her. Every principle of goodness, the exercise of which brings us present peace and future bliss, seemed to point at her in bitter mockery. The reward that waits on worthy endeavour--how could she hope to win it? The blessing that attends on a pure life--how could she hope to gain it? Despair and desolation surrounded and encompassed her. What words I used to comfort her, I do not remember; but I know that two quarters of the hour had chimed from the solemn bells--doubly solemn in my ears at this momentous time, and in hers also, for when they struck we both paused to listen--before she grew calmer and could speak with coherence; and then only was I able to draw from her lips an explanation of her terrible distress.

Her child was perilously ill. She had spent the money I gave her for the doctor, as I had directed. She thought her dear was a little better after the first visit, but the doctor had told her yesterday the child must have nourishing food, or he could give no hopes for it. What kind of nourishing food? she had asked. A little port wine, arrowroot, and jelly, was the answer. She repeated these last words bitterly. 'Threepence-ha'penny was all that we 'ad in the place, and there warn't a blessed thing in the room that we could ha' raised fourpence upon. What was I to do? I went on so about it to Tom that he said last night, "Keep up your pluck, old gal; I'll go and make a rise."' Nerved to daring deeds, as I understood, and determined to get money somehow, Tom Beadle left Blade-o'-Grass with a kiss; 'and I've never set eyes on 'im since!' There was but one inference--the usual one--to be drawn from his absence; he had been taken up again by the police. In the mean time the condition of the child was growing more perilous every hour. 'She never complained once, sir; if she'd ha' cried it'd ha' been a relief to me I think, but she never opened 'er lips, the pretty dear; and there she's been a-layin' all the day, with 'er eyes wide open, lookin' at somethin' as I couldn't see! When it got dark, sir, I 'adn't a farthin' in my pocket, and there wasn't a bit o' bread nor a drop o' milk in the cupboard. And all the while I kep' on thinkin' that my dear was a dyin', and that if I could get 'er a little jelly or a cup of arrerroot, she would git better. It drove me a'most mad, sir, but I tried to keep up my 'eart by thinkin' that Tom per'aps 'd come in directly, and make it all right. I 'ad a little bit o' candle left, and I lighted it, so that I might watch my dear's face; but it only lasted about a hour and then it went out. I laid down by my dear's side, and took 'er in my arms to warm 'er; she never spoke or moved, sir; 'er 'eart beat, that was all. I felt 'er eyes with my fingers, and they was still wide open. I began to git frightened. What

was it my dear was a-starin' at, and could she see it even in the dark? Well, sir, I laid so for a long time, until I fell asleep. 'Ow long I slep', sir, I can't tell, but when I woke up, my dear was moanin'--not cryin', sir, but moanin'. I tried to coax 'er to speak to me, but she didn't seem to know that 'er poor mother was by 'er side, and she never answered a word, but went on moanin'. O, sir! as I laid there in the dark listenin' to my dear, I thought I should ha' gone out of my mind! And then 'er poor 'ands--they're nothink but skin and bone, sir!--begun to wander about, and it seemed to me that she was searchin' and arksin' for somethin' to eat. What could I do, sir? what could I do? I run out to Mr. Wirtue's, but 'is place was shut; per'aps he'd ha' given me somethink, but I couldn't find 'im. Then I went back to my dear, and stood in the dark, fightin' with myself, and with sich thoughts comin' over me as made me 'ot and cold. I daren't tell you what they was, sir--I 'ardly know myself, but I feel that to be dead's better than them! And in the middle of it all, my dear's voice changed, and I knew that the tiger was tearin' at 'er. It was tearin' at me, too, and, with the fear of my dear's death starin' me in the face, I run out of the 'ouse. I didn't know where I was goin'. I wanted money--food for my dear! I think I was mad! And that's the way I met you. It's God truth, sir, every word of it!'

This was the story that, with sobs and gasps and many pauses for passion which she could not control, Blade-o'-Grass told me. I breathed a prayer of thankfulness that I was by her side in this awful crisis of her life. I felt that practical relief must be given at once. To leave her to her own resources in such a moment of terrible desperation would have weighed on my soul like a sin which could never be washed away. I looked around upon the bleak night; not a footfall was to be heard. The snow was turning to sleet; the streets were deserted; every door was closed.

Golden Grain

As I was considering what was best to be done, the bells began to chime again. It was twelve o'clock, and the Sabbath was at an end. From far and near the iron tongues, in solemn muffled tones, proclaimed the commencement of a new week's toil. For a few moments the air was filled with sound, and it would scarcely have surprised me to feel that the sleeping millions were suddenly aroused--to hear the din, the roar, the rattle of the roads--to see the anxious faces flashing all around me, and the streets peopled with the throngs that struggle this way and that, and contribute to the sum of the busy world. But with the last faint echo of the bells the fancy vanished; the night was more lonely and desolate than before, and Blade-o'-Grass was turning from me in despair.

'Come with me,' I said.

'Let me be!' she cried hoarsely. 'My child's starvin', and I'm goin' to get food for it--some'ow--or die in the streets!'

'I am going to help you. I am going to get food for you and your child.'

She grasped my hand with a convulsive movement, and sobs of hysterical joy escaped from her. But weakness and the revulsion of feeling overcame her, and she would have fallen to the ground again but for my support. By good fortune I heard the wheels of a cab.

'Can you keep up for a moment or two?' I whispered to her hurriedly. 'Take hold of these rails; they will support you. That's right--that's right! Do not stir till I return. I may be able to stop that cab, and it will take us to my place, where we can get food. Think of your child, and gather strength.'

I left her clinging to the rails and I ran after the cab, and hailed it. The driver drove on, shaking his head. But I ran by the side of the horse and entreated him so earnestly that he stopped. He said he was wet to the skin and tired out, and that he wanted to tumble into bed. But when he heard my rapidly-told story, and that the life of a little child might be saved or sacrificed by him, he hesitated not a moment.

Blade-o'-Grass was somewhat better and stronger when I returned to her, and we drove quickly to my lodgings. There I armed myself with candles, with what food there was in my cupboard, and with a little brandy which I fortunately had by me. Back to Stoney-alley we drove swiftly. On the road I urged Blade-o'-Grass to eat. She could not, she said; it would choke her if she tried.

'I can't go down this alley, sir,' the driver said, pulling up; 'it's too narrow.'

We alighted, and I paid the man his fare. He fumbled the money in his hand; hesitated; looked doubtfully at it.

'I hope you will think it enough,' I said. It was all the money I had about me.

With a rough tenderness he answered, 'I beg your pardon, sir; but I'd like to----' and he held sixpence towards Blade-o'-Grass.

'I will give it to her,' I said. 'God bless you!'

I shook hands with him, and he jumped on his box and rattled away, whistling his loudest.

We walked through the dark alley, unlighted by a single lamp, into the house, and up the dark stairs. The house contained many inhabitants, and we heard their breathing as we shuffled quietly along. When we reached Blade-o'-Grass's room, she paused at the door and listened.

'My dear's not moanin' now,' she whispered gladly. 'Per'aps she's asleep. We're a-comin', my dear, we're a-comin'! We've got somethin' nice to eat!'

By the time I lit a candle, I saw that Blade-o'-Grass had crept to the bed and was bending over her dear. She raised the child tenderly in her arms. I mixed a little brandy-and-water in a broken cup and approached them.

"Ad we better wake 'er? asked Blade-o'-Grass. I nodded. 'Baby! baby!' she cried.

She looked at me for a moment with a struggling fear in her eyes.

'Baby, my dear! 'Ere's somethin' nice for you! We're goin' to send the tiger to sleep; it sha'n't 'urt you any more. Baby! She don't answer me! For gracious God's sake, sir, come 'ere! Quick! Baby! my love, my 'eart! Mother's a-callin' to you. Open your eyes! Speak to me! Look at mother, my life!'

The fear in her eyes grew stronger, spread over her face and turned it deathly white. With a wild shudder she tore the child from the bed, and pressing her to her breast, turned to me with a look so agonising and despairing as blanched my face to the whiteness of hers.

'What's this!' she muttered piteously. 'For the good Lord's sake, tell me what is this?' She passed her hand over her child with swift and fierce tenderness, and with a scream that must have made terrible the dreams of the sleepers, cried, 'The tiger! the tiger! The tiger's killed my child! O, my 'eart, my life!' and fell to the ground, clasping her dear closer to her heart, and rocked to and fro in an agony of passionate ungovernable grief.

Alas! alas! The child, on whose face I had never seen a smile, had died during the mother's absence, and the tiger that had been the curse of her life would never more disturb her. Never more! Never more!

X.

NO, NO! BORN IN LOVE! IN LOVE!

I was busy writing on the following morning when Mr. Merrywhistle called upon me.

'You look tired,' he said.

I told him that I had been up all night with Blade-o'-Grass, and that her child was dead. He being her nearest and most faithful friend, I related to him the circumstance of my meeting Blade-o'-Grass on the previous night, and all that followed. The good old man shed tears, and was sincerely grieved.

'Can I do anything?' he asked.

'You can do a great deal,' I answered. 'There is the burial of the child.'

'I will see to that,' he interrupted; 'and the poor child shall be buried decently.'

This was a weight off my mind, for I knew by his words and his manner that he intended to defray the charges of the funeral out of his own purse; mine unfortunately was empty. I pressed his hand.

'Heaven forgive me for saying it,' he said, wiping the tears from his eyes, 'but it is a happier fate for the poor little thing to die, than to live as her mother has lived.'

Then, I told him, there was the mother herself to look after.

'I should not have remained with her so long, for I needed rest; but it was impossible for me to leave her. If she were left to herself and her thoughts, I am afraid that something bad would happen. Jimmy Virtue is with her now, and will remain until I send some one to relieve him, or go myself.'

'Jimmy is a good fellow,' said Mr. Merrywhistle, rising, 'but he's as poor as a church mouse, and must attend to his business. I will see to the poor girl, and when I am absent I will get some woman in the house to look after her. There, there! make your mind easy till tomorrow, and go to bed early tonight.'

I felt much relieved, and I rose the next morning thoroughly refreshed in mind and body. As early in the day as I could I walked towards Stoney-alley. On my way I met Mr.

Merrywhistle. I asked him after Blade-o'-Grass. He shook his head gravely, and said,

'I was anxious to see you about her. It is with her just as you described. If she were left to herself she would do something desperate.'

'Has Tom Beadle come home?'

'No, and I have heard nothing of him. His presence might arouse her from the awful melancholy which has fast hold of her. It is dreadful to see. She has not spoken a word since you left, and it is with the greatest difficult that the woman I have employed has induced her to touch food; I am sure she has not eaten sufficient to keep life in her. She sits by her dead child, looking at it with a blank look in her eyes that almost freezes my blood to see. Sometimes she turns her head, and gazes into one particular corner of the room, with a gaze so fixed and steadfast that I have half expected--I am very nervous, my dear sir--to see something start out of the wall.'

'She told me on the night I met her by the Royal Exchange, that her baby lay all the day with her eyes wide open, staring at something she couldn't see. She laid great stress on the words. Perhaps she is trying to discover what it was the poor child was gazing at.'

'I have been thinking, my dear sir----'

'Yes,' I said, gently, for he had paused.

----'That if you were to speak to her, not simply as a friend who is interested in her bodily welfare, but as a minister----'

'I understand you. Such thought was in my own mind. I have not forgotten my duty, believe me.'

Upon entering the room where the dead and the living lay, I saw at a glance that Mr. Merrywhistle had indeed well discharged his duty. It was cleaner and tidier than I had yet seen it. One or two humble and necessary pieces of furniture had been added, and on the window there was a clean white muslin blind, edged with black ribbon. The dead child was on the bed, with a white sheet over it, and Blade-o'-Grass was lying on the ground, with her hand beneath the sheet embracing the body. I motioned the woman in attendance from the room; she went softly, and I closed the door behind me. As I stood with the handle in my hand, I heard a knock. I opened the door, and saw one of the lodgers--a tail, gaunt woman, with a decided moustache--with a yellow basin in her hand. She dropped a curtsey.

'I've brought a little mutton broth for Blade-o'-Grass,' she said. 'Mind! It's 'ot!'

I thanked her, and taking the basin from her laid it aside. Then closing the door again, I approached Blade-o'-Grass, and placed my hand on her shoulder. She gazed at me with no sign of recognition, and turned her face again towards her child. I bent over the clay tenderly. The child looked well in death. Never in its life had its face worn so peaceful an expression. I sat on a chair beside the hapless mother, and spoke to her of that other and better life into which her child had entered; I spoke to her of the goodness of the all-beneficent God, of the comprehensive love which He, who watches over all His children, bears to the meanest of them. But my words touched her not; she made no movement in response to them, but sat motionless, with hopeless eyes fixed upon the child. I did not dare attempt to arouse her attention by sternness. Every word that came from my lips seemed to me to be dissolved into gentle utterance by the intense mother's love, which closed the door upon all outward sympathy. And still I continued,

'Think,' I said, in my most earnest tones, 'think but for a moment Cast your thoughts from your own misery and your own unhappiness, and let them dwell wholly and solely upon your child.'

A gleam that faintly expressed scornful wonder passed into her eyes. I hailed even that faint sign with gladness.

'The mother's love that dwells so strongly in your breast, is it as sweet as it should be, is it as perfect as it should be, if it blind you to the happier lot that lies before your child, and make you regardless of it? Love in its perfect form is shown in unselfishness. Are you unselfish in your grief? While your child lived you found your happiness and your consolation in her. But was she happy? Carry your thoughts to the many times that you saw her in pain, that she suffered hunger, that she cried because of the tiger that tormented her----'

A shiver passed over the form of Blade-o'-Grass; her stony gaze relaxed, and I saw that I had aroused her attention.

'----And think if a happier lot lies before her, as it does, if even now the power is given to her, by the wisdom and the goodness of God, to comprehend and be grateful for the love which has filled your heart from her birth--think but for a moment, if this be so, As It Is! whether you should not rather rejoice than mourn? By doing this you would show love in its most perfect form of unselfishness. All her pain is gone, all her sufferings have passed away, and the tiger is stilled for ever. Yes, this child, born in sin,'----

'No, no!' cried Blade-o'-Grass, in a piercing tone of anguish, springing to her feet, and pleading for her lost child in the strong agony of her soul. 'Born in love! In love--in love!'

'Born in love,' I said sadly, 'and yet in sin'----

'I didn't know,' she sobbed, sinking again to the foot of the bed. "Ow could I know; and 'ow could baby know? O, don't be 'ard on baby! O, my 'eart, my life! O, baby, baby!'

The mere utterance of the word so overwhelmed her, that for a time she was blind and deaf to all around her. Dark clouds encompassed her; she was conscious of nothing but the overpowering grief which was born of love; all else was blotted out from her comprehension. She and her dead baby were alone, distinct from every thing in nature. Divine sympathy for her touched her not; human love for her touched her not She did not ask for them; she did not know the good that lay in them. All that she desired, all that she yearned for, was her baby, and with that dear soul of her soul and heart of her heart in her arms, she would be content to wander into the Oblivion where peace was, where no gnawing hunger was, where no unkind looks were, where no pain was. In that Oblivion only one thing could live--her love for her baby.

I waited until she was calmer, and could heed my words.

'Your child is purified by its death. In the better life that lies beyond this, all her troubles, all her unconscious shame, all her sufferings are washed away and forgotten. Ah, my dear! think of it and be grateful for the Divine compassion that has brought peace to her suffering soul. She waits for you in the better land to reward you for your love; and until the Divine Hand is laid upon you, and calls upon you to join her there, let it be your consolation to know that she has been spared the misery that has fallen to your lot.'

She echoed wonderingly, with overflowing eyes,

'The better land that lays beyond this! She waits for me in the better land! Tell me.'

Then, in words as plain as I could find, I spoke to her of those Divine truths, of that Divine hope, without a belief in which our lives would be dark indeed.

'And the tiger!' she cried. 'Is the tiger with her? For the Lord's sake don't tell me that the tiger is with her there!'

These and other questions I had to answer to her satisfaction, and gradually, gradually the expression of stony despair left her features, and into her eyes there stole a softened look of hope and belief.

'She will see me there!' she sobbed. 'My dear will see me there, and will smile upon me! I shall 'old 'er in my arms! O, my dear, my dear!'

She knelt with me by the side of the lifeless clay, and repeated after me her first prayer, dwelling upon the words slowly and wistfully. Another voice joined ours in the prayer: Mr. Merrywhistle's; and she, recognising it, stretched out her hand to that faithfullest of friends. Side by side we knelt in silence when the prayer was done, and no sound was heard in the room but the quiet sobs of the bereaved mother. After a time she turned to me, and, in broken, grateful words, said that I had done her good. Yes, we had comforted her; thank God we had comforted her! With what fervent gratitude did I bless the gracious God for giving us the power of comforting that poor bruised heart!

Other comfort was given to her also. The Silvers had been told of the death, and Mrs. Silver and Rachel came and sat with Blade-o'-Grass. At first she shrank from Mrs. Silver, but no person could long resist the gentle tenderness of that good woman.

'She is truly your friend,' I said.

'I know it, I know it,' whispered Blade-o'-Grass humbly; 'but I'm not--not good enough.'

I repeated these words to Mrs. Silver, and with a beautiful smile she embraced the poor girl and kissed her.

'Will you not kiss me, my child?' Mrs. Silver asked.

The sobs that came from Blade-o'-Grass came from a heart overcharged with gratitude. But she was most at home with Rachel, and the two girls sat by the bed, while Mrs. Silver busied herself about the room. She stopped until the evening, and when she and Rachel were preparing to go, I saw an imploring look in Blade-o'-Grass's eyes. I stepped to her side.

'What is it you want, my dear?' She made no reply, but she looked at Rachel most wistfully and yearningly. I saw the thought and the wish that she was too humble to express.

'Let Rachel stop with her tonight,' I said to Mrs. Silver.

For one moment only did Mrs. Silver hesitate; her child had never slept away from her home.

'Rachel, my dear,' she said, 'will you stop to-night with Blade-o'-Grass?'

'O yes!' answered Rachel with cheerful willingness; 'I shall be glad to stop.'

With a gasp of joy Blade-o'-Grass caught Rachel's hand, and fondled it and kissed it again and again. Rachel released her hand, and placed her arm round Blade-o'-Grass's neck. The head of Blade-o'-Grass drooped to her breast, but Rachel's was lifted in simple trustfulness and love. We left to Mr. Merrywhistle the task of seeing to Rachel's comfort for the night.

'I shall be here very early in the morning,' said Mrs. Silver, as she kissed her child. She kissed Blade-o'-Grass again also, and went out of the room with Mr. Merrywhistle. I lingered behind for a moment or two. With Rachel's hand in mine I could not help saying to her,

'You gladden my heart, my dear.'

She flushed slightly, and trembled.

'I am glad you are pleased with me, Mr. Meadow. Good-night.'

'Good-night, my dear.'

We left Mr. Merrywhistle in Stoney-alley; he expressed his intention of sleeping in the house, and I saw Mrs. Silver home.

'How shall I thank you, dear madam,' I said as I stood with her in Buttercup-square, 'for the confidence you place in me?'

'Do you know what I have been thinking of as we walked along, Mr. Meadow?'

'No.'

'That it was a fortunate day for me when I wrote to ask you to assist us in our children's holiday. If it had pleased God to have given me a son of my own, I should have wished him to resemble you.'

I cannot resist writing these words here, for they were very pleasant to me.

The funeral took place on the Thursday. Rachel, Mrs. Silver, and Mr. Merrywhistle accompanied Blade-o'-Grass to the last resting-place of her child. The women brought some winter flowers with them. If anything could have soothed the heart of Blade-o'-Grass on that occasion, it was the sight of these flowers, as well as the tender consideration which lay in the act. Before the lid of the coffin was nailed down, Blade-o'-Grass, with trembling hands and white lips, placed some of these flowers in her dead child's hands; her tears rained upon them as she stooped and kissed the lifeless clay. She did not raise her head for many moments, and I heard her whisper to her dear to be sure and wait for her in the better land. I led her from the coffin, and bade her take heart.

'I do, sir, I do!' she sobbed. 'I remember every word you said.

Stoney-alley and the narrow streets through which we wended our way to the wider thoroughfares were thronged with poor people, and many a 'Lord love you!' came from their lips, and women pressed forward and asked Rachel, whose arm was round the weeping mother's waist, to shake hands with them. When we arrived at the churchyard, we found Jimmy Virtue waiting by the side of the grave. The simple service was soon ended, and the clay of the poor child was left to peace and God.

XI.

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE LIVED ON AN ISLAND----

There was a considerable stir in the immediate neighbourhood of the Temple of Liberty on the night of the great meeting. Paul's-buildings, now newly christened, was situated in a dimly-lighted narrow street, and had in its time played many parts. It had been a lecture-hall, a warehouse for old clothes, a dancing academy, a refuge for 'fat women' and 'living skeletons,' a home for the tamest of wild beasts; and it had brought misfortune upon all who had flown to it. It was a moot point whether the social regenerators who had christened it the Temple of Liberty would fare better than their predecessors.

On the night in question, little knots of men hung about the portico, in which dangled a dejected oil-lamp, the despondent light in which showed the way to liberty. The ostensible purpose for which the meeting was to be held was to pass resolutions condemnatory of a miscarriage of justice in one instance, and of a too-violent carrying out of the law in another; but it was generally understood that other and more important matters connected with the position of the working man were to be brought forward. There was no charge for admission, but before the proceedings commenced, the Secretary--whom we discovered to be the Delegate or 'Postle' whose appearance in Stoney-alley had caused so much mental disturbance to Jimmy Virtue--announced that the smallest subscription in aid of the defrayal of expenses would be thankfully received. 'Those who cannot afford more,' he said, 'can give their ha'penny or their penny in aid of the good cause. We know how the poor man is ground down, and the smallest subscription is in our eyes equal to the largest. In the same way,' he added, with a touch of cunning, 'as the poorest man should be equal to the richest in the eyes of justice!' 'Equaller!' cried an unreasoning demagogue, smelling strongly of beer, as he handed in a penny with a flourish, and with the air of one who, with that copper donation, was giving the deathblow to a bloated aristocracy.

'What's that Secretary 'Postle's name?' muttered Jimmy Virtue as he looked at a small handbill of the proceedings. 'Mark Mallard! H'm! Mark Mallard.' And then turned his attention to a study of Mark Mallard's face, which seemed, indeed, to be the principal reason for Jimmy Virtue's presence on the occasion.

'You are strangely interested in that secretary, Jimmy,' observed Robert Truefit.

'You let me alone,' replied Jimmy Virtue; 'I'm a puzzlin' out somethin'. I've got my considerin' cap on.'

And as he was evidently engaged in an intricate mental process, we did not disturb him.

The Temple of Liberty held probably nearly two hundred persons, and it was quite full. We three were among the earliest arrivals, and occupied the front seat directly facing the platform. I noticed that there was a large number of decently-clad working men present, some with earnest faces, who had evidently come with the intention of arguing matters out in a certain sense fairly. Many members of the new Working-man's League were also present, and these were prepared to support their officers through thick and thin. The chief of these officers and the principal speaker among them was the Secretary, Mark Mallard, who was voted to the chair. He was a common-looking man between fifty and sixty years of age, and his face bore strong marks of a life's discontent of mind; a man, thought I, who would be envious of his neighbour's ox, but too indolent to work for that which he envied. The unfavourable opinion I formed of him became strengthened as I studied the signs in his face: he was evidently an unfit man to be a leader in any good cause. But he could speak in a fairly-fluent style and with a certain rough readiness which found favour with many among his audience. He was not eloquent, but ready-tongued, and from long practice, as I judged, knew how to make such use of his materials as would best please the kind of assemblage he was addressing now. He first proceeded to give a brief account of the establishment in the neighbourhood of the new Working-man's League, a branch, he said, of a greater institution which was to set everything right for the working man--and by the working man he meant the poor man. Throughout the whole of the proceedings he placed idle poverty and honest labour on one pedestal, and sought to prove--and did prove to many only too ready to believe--how the poor man was ground down, oppressed, and crushed by the 'ruthless' heel of the rich. The Working-man's League would seek to bring about a different state of things; its aim was to give the working man the rights which were unlawfully denied to him in the present condition of things, and to prove that the real power of the nation lay in labour, and not in capital. This, of course, was received with cheers. The orator showed no originality either in his propositions or in his mode of placing them before his hearers; but they were none the less enthusiastically received on that account. Fairly sifted and summed up, his utterances amounted to nothing more than the usual declamation concerning the rich and the poor, and the atrocious injustice of a state of things which allows one man to have more money in his purse than another. The old platitudes which cling to the vexed subject came trippingly off his tongue. If, he said, the real power of the country lay in labour and not in capital, then labour should govern the country; but to show the unfairness of things, and the howl that the moneyocracy raised at the slightest attempt to set things right, let them bring to mind how, if a working man tried to get into Parliament, he was hounded down and barked at by the wealthy classes. Well, if the wealthy classes, and he was sorry to say the middle classes also, denied justice to the working man, the time had come for the working man to set up shop for himself. He did

not lose sight of the ostensible purpose for which the meeting was called. He detailed two instances of the mal-administration of justice which had gone the round of the papers and had created some noise.

Golden Grain

There is nothing that so impresses a meeting composed of ordinary minds, such as this was, as the bringing forward of small facts which have already been commented on among themselves. One instance of the miscarriage of justice was where a gentleman-farmer had flogged a labourer to within an inch of his life, and was punished for the offence by a fine of five pounds inflicted by another gentleman-farmer, before whom, as a magistrate, the case was brought. 'What was five pounds to him?' asked the speaker. 'What's five pounds to the man who has thousands in the bank? Five pounds or three months' imprisonment! Why, the rich farmer pulled out the money with a grin on his face, and was heard to say afterwards that what he'd done was the proper thing to do to such scum--meaning the working man--when they dared to say they were not well enough paid, and couldn't support a family on twelve shillings a week. Twelve shillings a week! That was the sum this agricultural labourer had starved upon--him and his wife and children--for more than twenty years. And he became a union-man, and spoke up for his rights; and his master marked him, and nigh killed him for it. Was that five pounds' fine justice, I should like to know?' The other instance was that of a labouring man who, under more aggravating circumstances, had thrashed a gentleman and beat him severely, and who was put in prison for six months for the offence. 'And while he was in prison,' said the speaker, 'how was his wife to get bread for her children? After this, will any one dare to say that there's not one law for the rich and another for the poor? And shall this state of things be allowed to continue?'

The recapitulation of these familiar illustrations accomplished more than could have been accomplished by volumes of rhetoric, and cries of 'No, no!' came from all parts of the hall.

'The mischief is,' whispered Robert Truefit to me, 'that these instances are true. See how intent Jimmy is upon our worthy chairman.'

After the passing of resolutions condemning the judicial decisions in the strongest terms, other and more daring matter was gone into; and then I saw plainly, what I had hitherto only suspected, that the Working-man's League was in reality a republican club (in the shell), the promoters of which were ready with fiery words to inflame the minds

of the ignorant against all recognised authority. One of the great points that Mark Mallard made was, that he, like themselves, was a working man.

'Look at my clothes; look at my hands! They are the same as yours, and I have as little money in my pocket, I daresay, as any of you.'

'Yes,' growled Jimmy Virtue; 'and you're as ready as any on us to be treated to a pint o' beer.'

'Order, order!' cried some.

'Quite as ready to be treated,' said Mark Mallard, with a frown at Jimmy Virtue, which Jimmy received with a sneer; 'and as ready,' he added, brightening up, 'to treat when my turn comes. We're rowing in the same boat, you and me.' ('I'm 'anged if we are!' growled Jimmy Virtue under his breath.) But Mark Mallard proceeded: 'I'm not being rowed; I'm rowing, as all of you are; and we'll all row together, and show our muscle.'

There was a murmur of approval at this figure of speech; and thus encouraged, the speaker proceeded. The cunning skill with which he mingled familiar matters was enough to mislead any but fairly-balanced minds--royal pensions dating back hundreds of years; manhood suffrage; attempts to interfere with the poor man's beer; justices' justice; the price of meat and coals; one man rolling in his carriage while another starved in rags; bank and other directors who had ruined thousands of poor families living, after exposure, on the fat of the land; the starvation price which capital put upon labour, as instanced in the condition of the agricultural labourers--all these were brought forward and artfully handled to prove into what a deplorable and abominable Slough of Despond the Rights of Man had been trodden by masters and gentlemen.

During the whole time Mark Mallard was speaking, Jimmy Virtue had scarcely once removed his eyes from the man's face; and he had openly expressed his disapproval of the false conclusions drawn by the speaker. At first Mark Mallard had endeavoured to bully Jimmy Virtue into silence, but Jimmy Virtue was the last man in the world to be so bullied, and he expressed his dissent in stronger terms every time the attempt was made. I noticed that Mark Mallard was gradually drawn to observe the close manner in which he was being watched by Jimmy Virtue, and I saw that he grew uneasy and nervous beneath the steady gaze of my eccentric friend. From that time Mark Mallard took no open notice of Jimmy Virtue, but nevertheless looked at him stealthily every now and then. He wound up his most lengthy speech with a peroration in which the Rights of Man and the boast that he, like themselves, was a working man, were the two most conspicuous features; and having resumed his seat amid applause, was wiping his

forehead, when Jimmy Virtue rose suddenly, and said in a loud tone that he wanted to ask the Delegate a question or two.

Cries of 'Hear, hear!' and 'No, no!' responded to this announcement; and the latter, on a secret sign from Mark Mallard to his immediate supporters, were swelling into a roar, which would have speedily silenced those who were curious to hear Jimmy Virtue, when Robert Truefit leaped upstanding on to the bench, and cried, in a ringing voice which quelled the tumult,

'Fair play! fair play!'

The appeal, strengthened by the manly manner in which it was made, was taken up and indorsed in different parts of the room. In the midst of this counterbalancing excitement, Robert Truefit leaned down to Jimmy Virtue, and asked hurriedly,

'Jimmy, what is it you are about to do?

'You stick to me. Bob,' replied Jimmy Virtue; 'I know what I'm about You stick to me, and you'll 'ear somethin' as'll interest you. The warmint!' His features were working in an extraordinary manner, and his last two words were intended to apply to Mark Mallard.

'Look here, mates,' cried Robert Truefit, commanding and compelling silence by his earnest voice and action, 'we've been called together to-night to discuss certain matters affecting the working man. How can we discuss these matters, and arrive at a proper understanding--and from that point to a proper solution--of the difficulties which surround us, unless we give fair play to those who wish to speak? ('Hear, hear, hear! Well said, mate; go on.') 'I am a working man. My name's Robert Truefit, and I'm a working mason in Mr. Turner's yard. Some of you know me, perhaps; I think I see a face or two that I've seen before.' ('You do. Bob, you do. Go it, old fellow! Fair play! fair play!' And a distinct voice from a gray-haired man in a corner of the room, saying, 'There ain't a man in London that's got the real interest of the working man more at heart than Robert Truefit. And he's got a wife and six children as 'd be a credit to the best man as ever trod shoe-leather.' This statement elicited cheers for Robert Truefit, and 'Another for the old woman!' and 'Another for the kids!' which were given heartily. Then a laughable episode occurred by Robert Truefit saying, in correction, 'No, mate; I've only five young ones;' and a voice replying, 'Never mind, old man; you can soon make it up half a dozen!' A great many who had listened listlessly to Mark Mallard's platitudes now shifted on their seats, as if the meeting was beginning to be interesting.)

'This man here,' continued Robert Truefit, 'who wants to ask Mr. Mark Mallard a question or two, is a friend of mine. He's a rum 'un to look at, but he's sound at bottom.' (Cries of 'Let's see him! Let's have a look at him!') 'Wait a bit. I don't know what he's going to say any more than you do; but he has told me that he knows what he's about, and I believe him, as I'd believe anything else he says.' ('Hurrah for the rum 'un to look at!') 'And now to those who have made up their minds beforehand not to hear what he has got to say, all I've got to do with them is to direct their attention to the name of this hall, written up over the chairman's head. Look at it. "The Temple of Liberty!" A big name, mates, for such a little room as this, but it will do if it prove to be what it professes to be. Great things have been accomplished in little places before to-night; even now, I've no doubt, busy hands and busy minds are at work in common garrets and kitchens, and the world will be the better for their labours by and by, I hope. Let those who wrote "The Temple of Liberty" at the head of this hall--Mr. Mark Mallard, I presume, is chiefly responsible for it--take it down if we are not to have a fair hearing.' ('Bravo, Bob! You're a sound man, you are!') 'I hope so. I cry "Shame" on those who would deny us a hearing! Why, if there were masters and gentlemen among us who wanted to be heard, I hope we are manly enough to listen to them. Beg for fair play, indeed! Why, it's an Englishman's boast that he makes a clear ring for all who, believing they have right on their side, have the pluck to stand up for themselves and their opinions; and we're not to be told to-night that in this respect we are a nation of liars. Whatever our opinions, however much we may differ about this and that, we're Englishmen, and we're proud of it! Shall we, then, scream out--as we do--for liberty of speech, and deny it to one of ourselves?'

Robert Truefit had done his work well. From all parts of the room the cry arose, 'Get on to the platform, mate!' and in obedience to that request Robert Truefit jumped on to the platform, and assisted Jimmy Virtue to get up after him. They pulled off their caps, and stood side by side, facing the meeting. Immediately the people caught sight of Jimmy Virtue's eccentric face and form, a shout of laughter came from them, which the cause of it received most good-humouredly. But his earnestness of purpose was apparent in the midst of the good-humoured nods with which he responded to the merriment his appearance created. When silence was restored, Jimmy Virtue said:

'I want to ask the honourable Delegate a question or two as you'll see the drift on presently. If he'll 'ave the kindness to step forward----'

'Well, here I am,' said the Chairman, rising; 'and now be quick with your questions, for there's a deal of business to be got through.'

'Some on us want to be sure,' replied Jimmy Virtue, 'that you're the proper person to conduct the business; I'm one o' them as wants to be convinced.' He referred to the handbill. Your name's Mark Mallard.'

'That's my name. What's yours?'

'Jimmy Virtue; and it's the name as I was christened by, and I never 'ad no occasion to take no other. Can the honourable Delegate say as much as that?'

'What do you mean by this fooling?' blustered Mark Mallard. 'What has my name to do with the object of this meeting?'

Some of those present were evidently asking this question of themselves, but when Jimmy Virtue said excitedly, 'You wait a bit, and you'll 'eer somethin' as'll open your eyes!' their curiosity became a check to their impatience.

'Now,' continued Jimmy Virtue, 'you've talked a good deal about the Rights o' Man, and you say you're a workin' man yourself. For my part, I've got a big respect for the Rights o' Man, and I wish with all my 'eart that every man 'ad his rights; though what the world'd do if it was all rights and no wrongs, it's beyond me to answer. But about you're bein' a workin' man, Mr. Delegate. What kind o' workin' man? What's your trade?--that's what I want to know. What's your trade, and where do you work?'

Mark Mallard held out his arms to the meeting in remonstrance, and was about to protest against the introduction of such irrelevant matter, when Jimmy Virtue stopped him.

'No; I bar that! No shirkin'. No runnin' away from what I'm a-coming to. If you're a workin'-man you've got a trade, and you're not one o' the sort this meeting's come to 'eer if you're ashamed of it.' ('Hear, hear, mate!') 'There's a 'underd men 'ere as 'd be willin', if they was asked, to say what their trade is and what shop they work for. And why'd they be ready and willin' to say? Because they ain't got nothink to be ashamed on--that's why!'

But here Mark Mallard called out authoritatively that it was time this nonsense was put a stop to. 'We are not here to discuss personalities,' he said; 'we have higher matters in hand. The condition of the working man has become too serious to be pushed out of sight by one who is evidently no friend to the good cause. As chairman of this meeting----'

'Say Captain,' suggested Robert Truefit quietly.

'Well, as Captain, if it pleases you better----'

'It does,' said Robert Truefit, pushing his way to the front again, 'for it fits the story I'm going to tell.'

'We want no stories,' shouted Mark Mallard; and a few of his followers took up the cry.

'A story,' continued Robert Truefit, not heeding the interruption, 'which concerns the business for which we have been called together, and which concerns I won't say all here, but every honest-minded man I see before me.'

The meeting here was convulsed with laughter. Jimmy Virtue, in his excitement, had taken out his glass eye, and was polishing it vigorously with his red cotton handkerchief, perfectly unconscious that he was doing anything extraordinary.

'Go it, old chap,' cried a number of voices, 'with your one eye!'

'I can see as far,' retorted Jimmy Virtue, 'with my one eye as you can with two. And look 'ere, mates. This' (holding up the piece of glass) 'is the only sham thing I've got about me.'

This hit told well, and when the laughter had subsided there were calls for Robert Truefit's story.

'I won't keep you long, mates, and I'll commence after a good old-fashioned style. Once upon a time there lived on an island a great number of persons of all stations and degrees. Some were born with silver spoons in their mouths, some with iron ladles. Some were poor, some were rich; some idled and lived well; some worked all the working hours of the day and lived hard. These last were like ourselves, working men; and whilst they had much to be grateful for, they had also, no doubt, much to complain of. Many of them were married and had children; others were courting and on their road to wedlock. The wages they earned were about the same as we earn--say, from twenty to forty-five shillings a week--and they found they had as much as they could do to squeeze out a sufficient and reasonable subsistence for their families. This pressed heavily upon them, and they began to murmur at the inequality of things. "We can't enjoy ourselves as we ought," they said to one another; "we can't afford to eat meat every day; we can't afford to go to the theatres; we can't afford a holiday; we can't make any provision for sickness, or for the time when we are too old to work." These complaints they made, and a hundred others, many of which were undoubtedly well-founded from their point of view--and you will agree with me that the point of view which comes home to their own doors is the only point of view from which nine hundred and ninety-nine men out of a thousand care to argue, whether they be rich or poor. Some sensible and straightforward workmen among them resolved to agitate their grievances in such a manner as to make

things better for their children, if not for themselves. You know, I daresay, what is the meaning of the Constitution: it is a system of fundamental principles for the government of rational and social beings. Well, these men were sensible enough to recognise that the Constitution by which they were governed, and which was accountable for the burdens which pressed heavily upon them, was not a creation, but a growth--a steady gradual growth of many centuries. Let us liken it to an old and deeply-rooted tree, which by undue favour or by force of circumstance had grown crooked--but a tree, nevertheless, from which they drew food and protection. The common sense of these men told them that desolation and misery would fall upon them if by violent and sudden means they strove to force the crooked tree straight. The violent straining of the fibres would weaken them, and would so destroy the power of reproduction that the tree would not be able to bear sufficient food for those who lived in the shadow of its branches. And as to planting another, and expecting it to grow up and have healthy limbs in a night----well, you know what a foolish expectation that would have been! "But," they said, "we can sow the seed for another and a healthier tree, and while it grows we will wait, and watch, and assist it to the extent of our wisdom, and we'll work steadily on the while--like men!" There were others who were for more violent means--with as much reason as would exist in the man who, having suffered all his life from an internal hereditary disease, goes abruptly to a physician, and demands a dose of medicine that shall cure him on the spot. But the sensible men were the most powerful body, although possibly not the most numerous, and they worked steadily on, educating their children, and taking advantage of those aids which their own persistence and the natural advancement of the times brought to them. In the midst of this, there comes to the island a ship, and the Captain, convening a meeting of working men, says, "I am one of yourselves, and I know a means of remedying your grievances. Sail under my colours, and the oligarchs who monopolise the fat of the land shall be mown down like chaff. There shall be no waiting! You shall have as much fresh meat every day as you can eat; you shall have good clothes always; you sha'n't know what it is to be pinched; you shall have a man's rights--full measure! And these things shall be accomplished at once." He spoke confidently and boldly, and his words were tempting, and made an impression even upon those whose views were in favour of more temperate action than he advocated. But some among them asked of themselves, "What is it that we are asked to do?" And they thought, after all, that there were worse lots than that they had to bear. Many of their homes were happy, though poor. By their own firesides they enjoyed the greatest blessings of life. They loved their wives; they loved their children. They saw these stems of theirs growing to womanhood and manhood under their loving protection. "If we stagger," they said to themselves, "they will fall and get hurt." And we know,' said Robert Truefit, with intense and heartfelt earnestness, 'we who are husbands and fathers--we know how our own hearts bleed when those who are dear to us suffer! Said these men to themselves, as they looked around upon other communities and other countries, "Here is a community that strove to accomplish by force what we are striving

to accomplish by steady and reasonable means. What do we see as the result? Fire, pillage, murder, civil war; food-fields laid waste, homes burnt to the ground, families in mourning, lives wrecked! Shall we bring these things upon ourselves and upon our wives and children?" But still the captain urged his views. "Well, then," said they, turning to him'--and Robert Truefit with a startlingly significant movement turned towards Mark Mallard--'"prove to us at all events that you are honest--prove to us that you are one of ourselves--that the name you go by is your own, and has always been your own. Some of us fear that you have hoisted false colours, and they don't want to sail under them. Prove to us that our fears are unfounded, and then, when we are satisfied as to your honesty and integrity, we will give a more careful attention to the temptations you hold out, and shall be the better able to judge of their value.'"

Robert Truefit paused, and from the hearty cheers that were given as he retreated a step and laid his hand on Jimmy Virtue's shoulder, it was evident that his sentiments were indorsed by the better class of men in the meeting, and that they would not allow him or his friend to be put down. Mark Mallard saw that there was no escape for him, and without the slightest suspicion of the shot Jimmy Virtue was about to fire, said, in a blustering tone,

'Now, then, say what you've got to say, and be done with it.'

'I will,' replied Jimmy Virtue; 'and as you don't seem willin' to say what's your trade, I won't press you there. I'll just be satisfied with an answer to two questions, and I'll put 'em both in one breath.' The "two" men were standing in front of the platform in a line by themselves, and the eyes of all were upon them. Crooking the forefinger of his right hand, extending his arm, and bending forward towards Mark Mallard with an earnestness there was no withstanding, Jimmy Virtue said, 'Tell this meetin' if you ever lived in a place they calls Stoney-alley, and then tell 'em what's become of the wife you left there to starve!'

Mark Mallard staggered as if shot, and a deathly paleness came into his face.

'I knowed it!' cried Jimmy Virtue. 'Look at 'im, mates, look at 'im! I never set my eyes on a man but what I'd swear to 'im ag'in if there was fifty year atween! Look 'ere, mates'--(Jimmy's excitement was wonderful to witness)--'Look 'ere, mates. This man 'as come 'ere and starts a Temple o' Liberty 'as got no more right to the name of Mark Mallard than I've got to the name of Tippitiwitchet. Twenty-two year ago he lived four doors from where my shop is now in Stoney-alley. All the while he lives there he never does a stroke o' work, but passes his time in pot-'ouses, drinkin' the beer as is given to 'im freely because he's got the gift o' the gab, as we've 'eerd to-night. Don't think, mates, I'm agin a poor man 'avin 'is beer; I ain't one as 'd rob 'im of it. I'm for it! though I do believe

at the same time that the poor man makes a sight too much of it--a blessed sight too much--as if 'is liberty and the whole blessed constitootion depended on it! Well, this man goes about pot-'ouses talkin' o' the Rights o' Man and leavin' 'is wife to starve. He pawns every blessed thing of 'er'n he can lay 'is 'ands on--she's 'eavy in the family-way, mind you!--he pawns 'er weddin' ring, and 'ere it is. I lent 'im money on it myself. And a week afore 'is wife's confined; he carries out the Rights o' Man, and makes a end of 'em, so to speak, by cuttin' away, and leavin' 'er without a loaf o' bread, or as much as 'd buy one! Nothin' more 's 'eerd of 'im; 'is wife she's confined with twins, and dies a week arterwards from sorrer and starvation. And I put it to you, mates,--I put it to you, whether a mean thief like 'im is the proper sort o' man to set up a Temple o' Liberty and to come preachin' to us about the Rights o' Man!'

It is impossible to describe the storm of agitation that ensued; I know that the men present, stirred to honest indignation, would have dealt violently with Mark Mallard if they could have laid hand on him; but by strenuous means we saved him from their anger, and he escaped safely through a door at the back of the platform. When he was gone, Robert Truefit said in an agitated tone, 'For heaven's sake, Jimmy, tell us who that man is.'

Golden Grain

'That man, Bob,' replied Jimmy Virtue, dabbing his face with his handkerchief, 'is Blade-o'-Grass's father. I knowed 'im agin, the thief, directly I set eyes on 'im!'

The meeting broke up in confusion; but not before the placard with the Temple of Liberty written on it had been torn into a thousand pieces.

XII.

IN THE DIM TWILIGHT OF THAT HOLY DAY.

It was but a little past nine o'clock when the meeting was over, and the night, though cold, was fine. When we were clear of the Temple of Liberty, Robert Truefit suggested that we should stroll as far as London-bridge, and talk over what had occurred. The principal question that arose in our conversation was what Mark Mallard would do. I was inclined to believe that he would make inquiries after his children, but Jimmy Virtue shook his head.

'You'll never 'eer of him agin,' Jimmy said. 'He's got no feelin' and no 'eart, and it ain't likely as he'd show his face in Stoney-alley. Sich fellers as 'im ain't got the pluck of a mouse. No, no; we sha'n't 'eer nothin' more o' Mr. Mark Mallard, and a good job too. What'd be the good of sich a father as 'im to Blade-o'-Grass?'

We agreed not to mention what had occurred to Blade-o'-Grass, as it could serve no good purpose. Jimmy Virtue and I united in praising Robert Truefit for the admirable part he had played at the meeting.

'Bob ought to do more o' that sort o' thing,' said Jimmy; 'that's what I've told 'im over and over agin.'

'And grow into an agitator!' exclaimed Robert Truefit. 'No, Jimmy; I haven't time for the business. When it comes into my way naturally, as it has come tonight, well and good. But I have my own little commonwealth at home to look after; it takes all my time to administer to that properly.'

We retraced our steps towards Stoney-alley, and found the neighbourhood in a state of great excitement. In answer to our inquiries we learned that there had been a fire in Stoney-alley. As we hurried thither, we were greeted by exclamations of

'Ah, there he is! There's the old un! Wonder bow he'll take it!'

We soon ascertained the meaning of these remarks. Jimmy Virtue's leaving-shop was a heap of ashes. A house on each side was partially burnt; but the only building completely destroyed was his shop. How long ago did it occur? A hundred tongues volunteered information. Not an hour ago; but, bless your heart! it was all over in twenty minutes. The place burnt like a piece of tinder; it was nearly all wood, you see, sir. The old man must have left a candle burning. To the questions which elicited these and other

answers, Jimmy Virtue listened quietly, taking no part in them. The alley was strewn with rickety furniture and beds which, in the first alarm, the occupants of the adjoining houses had brought into the streets for safety; now that the danger was over, they were carrying their furniture back to their rooms. When it became buzzed about that Jimmy Virtue had arrived on the scene of action, there came surging around him a number of girls and women clamorously demanding their little bits of things, valueless perhaps in themselves, but a great loss doubtless to the poor people who had pledged them.

'Where's my Sunday 'at?' demanded one. 'Where's my gal's boots?' another. 'Where's my flannin-peddicoat?' another. 'Where's my crinoline?' 'Where's my chignon?' 'Where's my old man's waistcoat?'

These and a hundred other inquiries were literally hurled at Jimmy Virtue. He simply glared at the women, and told them to look for their things among the ashes.

'Are you insured, Jimmy?' asked Robert Truefit.

No; he was not insured for a shilling. His clients still continuing to badger him, he turned savagely upon them, and said he couldn't help the fire occurring; they were a parcel of fools; and they were welcome to any odds and ends of rags they could find. Suddenly he darted forward into the midst of the smouldering ruins, and fished-out an old greasy pack of cards burnt round the edges.

'Saved them!' he muttered triumphantly. 'I might 'ave lost every game with a new pack. There's one good thing--Jack's safe. When I'm out, he's never at 'ome.'

I really think that the saving of that pack of cards with which he played for great sums with his shadowy victim, Jack, was a perfect consolation to him for the burning of all the rest; but indeed he did not seem to be in any way depressed by the misfortune which had overtaken him.

'Well,' he said, 'it's no good starin' at it any longer. Bob, you'd better go 'ome. Good-night, Mr. Meadow.'

Robert Truefit and I looked at each other.

'Mr. Virtue,' I said, 'you've no bed to sleep in to-night; and you'll feel lonely by yourself after what has occurred. Will you come home with me? I can make you up a rough bed in my room.'

'Thank you, sir,' he replied, with a set expression on his face; 'I was afraid you or Bob 'd say somethink o' that sort to me. I shouldn't be surprised, now, if you'd orfer to 'elp me in other ways. How long 'ave you and me known each other. Bob?'

'For more than ten years, old fellow.'

'I'll trouble you, Bob, not to "old-feller" me; it sounds special, and it don't suit me jist now. More than ten year, eh? So it is, Bob; so it is. You've found me a pretty obstinate old chap--pig'eaded you might say, eh?'

'Well, Jimmy, you are rather--'

'Pig-'eaded--that's the word. Now, look 'ere, you two! Pig'eaded I am, and pig-'eaded I'm goin' to be, to the last. If either o' you--you, Bob, or you, sir--ever orfers me anythink agin--bed, money, grub, I don't care what!--you can say good-bye from that blessed minute to Jimmy Virtue. I must be nigh on seventy year old--I can't speak for two or three year one way or another, but I must be nigh on seventy if I'm a day--and I've never took charity yet; and I don't mean to begin now. I've never pocketed no money as I didn't work for--except Jack's, and that's a matter 'twixt 'im and me--and I ain't a-going to begin that game at my time o' life. So I'll thank you to say good-night, and leave Jimmy Virtue to 'isself.'

'You might as well talk to the Monument,' said Robert Truefit, as we walked home, 'as talk to Jimmy after what he has said. He'll die before he'll take a penny-piece. We must humour the old fellow, and hope for the best.'

The following day I learned that Tom Beadle was undergoing another term of six months' imprisonment for pickpocketing. I went to him to tell him of the death of his child, and I took a piece of black crape with me for his cap. I had never spoken to him before, and I was wishful to know something of his nature, so that I might judge in what way I could best impress him to act for the good of the girl who clung to him with so much devotion. He received me with cunning civility; his lynx eyes watched every word from my lips, as if in every word might be concealed a trap. In his mind he classed me with those who wished Blade-o'-Grass to desert him, and therefore I was his enemy. I knew, also, that the fact of my being a minister was an additional argument against me in his eyes. But he must be civil to me, because Blade-o'-Grass had told him I had been kind to her. His eyes moistened when he heard of the death of his child, and his grief grew stronger in the brief pause that ensued. But after a time he said it was the best thing that could have happened to the little thing. I told him, also, of the kindness of Mr. Merrywhistle, and that it was he who had borne the expenses of the funeral.

'Yes,' was Tom Beadle's careless comment, 'the old chap's 'elped Blade-o'-Grass a good many times, on and off. He's knowed 'er since she was a kid.'

There was not a trace of gratitude in his voice.

'She has made other friends as well,' I said.

A jealous gleam shot into his eyes.

'What friends? Swells?'

'Friends,' I answered, 'who sympathise deeply with her, and who would help her if they could.'

'What's to 'inder 'em?'

I did not answer him. I left it to him to gather from my silence that it was he who barred the way to a better kind of life for the poor girl; that it was her entire devotion to him that kept her down.

'I know what you're drivin' at; it's me as 'inders 'em,' he said, with a sneer. 'Well, that's nothink new. Blade-o'-Grass and me's 'eerd that often enough. The way they'd 'elp 'er is by tellin' 'er to cut away from me. I don't think the old gal 'd do that. I'd bet a penny you've been tryin' to persuade 'er.'

'On the contrary; I have begged her to ask you to do something that will bring her closer to you.'

'Gammon!' he sneered. 'What is it you wanted 'er to ask me?

'That you should marry her.'

He looked at me in blank wonder. 'Marry 'er!' he exclaimed. He was evidently puzzled, and he ransacked his mind for motives and reasons; but all his cunning wit could not assist him.

'It's me as 'inders people from 'elpin' Blade-o'-Grass, and yet the parson wants me to many 'er!'

I saw this expressed in his face, and I saw also a deep suspicion that some treachery to himself lay behind the proposition.

'I'll think on it,' he said aloud. 'Will you take 'er a letter from me?'

'Yes; I will write it for you if you like.'

'Thank you for nothink!' he replied with a leer. 'I'll get it done through the governor. He'll 'ave to read it, you know, before it goes. Will you take your solemn oath you won't open it?'

'I promise you not to open it.'

'And you won't read it to 'er? You'll give it to the old gal 'erself, and tell 'er she's got to git some one else to read it?

I made this promise as well; and when I left with the letter, I think he was half inclined to believe that my words and sympathy were genuine. I gave an account of this interview to Mrs. Silver.

'I have been thinking all the morning of the poor girl,' she said. 'My servant is going to leave me to get married. I will take Blade-o'-Grass in her place, if she will come. It will be a home for her, and I may be able to do her some good.'

The proposal delighted me, and I went at once to Blade-o'-Grass to acquaint her with it. She thanked me and Mrs. Silver most gratefully, but said she could not accept the offer. 'No, sir, not to save my life.'

'But why?' I asked in grief and annoyance. 'Your refusal is unreasonable.'

'You don't understand, sir. Read Tom's letter. You'll see what part of it I mean.'

She gave me the letter I had brought her from Tom Beadle. The words she referred to were these:

'When I come out, we'll get married. And mind! So long as you are true to me, I will be true to you. But if you run away from Stoney-alley, and go with them friends of yours, I shall know what that means.'

'It means, sir,' said Blade-o'-Grass, 'as Tom'll think I've deserted 'im. So you see, sir, I can't go to Mrs. Silver's. Don't you fear for me, sir; Mr. Wirtue is a real good friend to me now; he's took the next room to this, and he's always bringin' things to me.'

Since the night of the fire I had not seen Jimmy Virtue; and I went at once to his room. He did not reply to my knock; and when I opened the door, I found him playing cribbage with his shadow-companion. He was so intent upon the game that he did not know I was in the room until I was close to him.

'Ah, Mr. Meadow, sir, I didn't 'eer yer. Take a chair.'

I noticed that his face was pinched and careworn; and I asked him if he was not well.

'Well enough,' he replied. 'I can't expect to be too well. My time's comin'. Yes, I'm near the end on it. I dreamt last night they was diggin' my grave.' He pushed the cards from him impatiently. 'Look 'ere, Mr. Meadow, take an old man's advice. Don't lead a lonely life; git somethin' about you to love, and as'll love you; if ever you git a chance, snap at it, or you'll rue the day! A nice thing for a man to play a game--it's life as I'm talkin' of--and when he comes to the end of it, to find out that he's played it all wrong! Do you think it's worth 'avin'?'

'What?'

'Life. Is it worth 'avin'?'

'Surely, surely. It would be sinful to think otherwise.'

'O, I don't put myself up for anythink good! And don't you think I'm different to what I was because I've been dropped upon by bad luck. But what's it worth 'avin' for?'

'For itself; for the good that there is in it; for the good that one can do; for that it is a preparation for the better life to come.'

'Yes, yes; Blade-o'-Grass 'as been tellin' me. She says 'er baby's there. Well, it's a good thing for her to look forward to. There's nobody there for me, though; a good job then for me that I don't believe. No,' he said, holding up a warning finger; 'don't preach to me! I won't stand it! I've made my bed, and I've got to lay on it.'

As I wished to divert his mind from gloomy thought, I did not pursue the subject, but related what had passed concerning Tom Beadle and Blade-o'-Grass, and asked if he had anything to advise.

'Why not marry 'em at once,' he said, 'if you think sich a lot o' good is comin' out of it? I think it's about the worst thing as could 'appen to 'er.'

'I have my plan already settled,' I replied, 'and if I can carry it out, it will be the redemption of both of them. Marry them at once, you say. But Tom is in prison!'

'Is there any law agin marryin' 'em there? I daresay you could manage it if you tried.'

I had not thought of that, and I resolved to act at once upon the suggestion. There were serious difficulties in the way, but I was fortunate enough to gain the sympathy of the governor and the chaplain of the prison, who, when they heard the story of Blade-o'-Grass, were most eager to aid me in carrying out my design. With their assistance, then, all obstacles were overcome, and the day was fixed for the ceremony. I decided that the marriage should be consecrated early in the morning of Christmas-day.

"Ow about the weddin'-ring?' asked Jimmy Virtue.

I said that I would have it ready on the morning of the ceremony.

'You'll 'ave to measure 'er finger,' he said; 'let's do it now.'

We were conversing in his room. He called Blade-o'-Grass, and she entered.

'We're a-goin' to measure your finger for the weddin'-ring. Hold on, Mr. Meadow, don't you say a word! Give us your 'and, Blade-o'-Grass.'

The blood mounted to her face as she held out her hand. Jimmy Virtue took a wedding-ring from his pocket, looked at it curiously, and placed it on her finger.

'See, Mr. Meadow,' he said, 'it just fits. This is my present, Blade-o'-Grass.'

She thanked him tearfully, and kissed the ring, and held it to her lips.

'It's 'er mother's,' whispered Jimmy Virtue to me.

The sun rose bright and clear on Christmas-day. How well I remember the morning! It is three years since that time, and every incident is as clear to my mind as if it had occurred but yesterday. Punctually at half-past eight o'clock Blade-o'-Grass was at my lodgings; she was nervous and very pale, and had evidently had but little sleep during the night. I had never seen her so neatly dressed, and I expressed my pleasure at her appearance.

'Mrs. Silver and Miss Rachel brought the things to me yesterday, sir,' she said. 'They are too good to me, sir--too good.'

'It gives them pleasure.'

'I don't deserve it, sir.'

'You can deserve it. If you could do something for them in return for their kindness, you would?'

'That I would, sir, and grateful to be able to.'

'Come, we are going to walk to their house now. It is a bright Christmas morning, is it not?'

'Yes, sir, I never remember sich a Christmas as this.'

'May it prove the commencement of a happy life for you, my dear!'

She turned from me and sobbed quietly. When she recovered we walked together to Buttercup-square. Then Blade-o'-Grass told me how one Christmas night, very soon after her baby was born, she had stood for more than an hour at the door of Mrs. Silver's house, in the midst of a heavy fall of snow, with her dear in her arms, waiting for Mr. Merrywhistle.

'If it 'adn't been for 'im, sir, we should 'ave been found dead in the snow, baby and me!'

'He is a good man, my dear. He is coming with us this morning. Do not cry. This is a bright day for all of us. Rachel, also, is coming.'

'O, sir!' she said, with quivering lips. 'What 'ave I done that you should all be so good to me?'

'It will be in your power to repay us all, my dear.'

'Will you tell me 'ow, sir?'

'By and by, my dear. The time will come.'

We found Rachel with her hat and shawl on, ready to accompany us. She gave Blade-o'-Grass a little present--a silk neckguard which she had worked, with a jet cross hanging

to it. Mr. Merrywhistle came in almost at our heels, rubbing his hands, and saying what a fine morning it was. By a quarter to ten o'clock we four were at the prison gates, where Jimmy Virtue was waiting for us; he had smartened himself up for the occasion, but his face looked worn and aged. Time was telling fast upon him.

The governor of the prison had kindly set apart a private room for us, and there the ceremony was performed. Tom Beadle, when he first entered, looked half shamefaced and half defiant; but the solemnity of the prayers had its effect upon him, and after a time he drew his breath in short gasps, and the words he had to repeat after me came tremblingly from his lips. Jimmy Virtue gave Blade-o'-Grass away. So these two human waifs were joined together according to God's holy ordinance, and were made man and wife.

The last words were said, and I prepared to go to my church. Tom Beadle and Blade-o'-Grass were standing a little apart from us; there was a dazed expression in his face, as if he could not fully realise what had occurred, but it softened as he gazed into Blade-o'-Grass's eyes, and saw the look of full-hearted love with which she was regarding him.

'Are you glad, old woman?' he asked.

'I am very, very 'appy, Tom!' she said.

Then Rachel, as had been arranged between us, asked Tom whether his wife might spend the day with her. He hesitated a moment or two, but the better part of his nature had been awakened, and he could not resist Blade-o'-Grass's pleading look.

'Tom told me,' said Blade-o'-Grass, as we walked to church, 'that he feels as if he was just born like.'

We wanted Jimmy Virtue to spend the day with the Silvers, but he refused, saying that he could pass the time well enough with Jack. 'I'm pig-'eaded, you know,' he added; 'that's what I am; and you ain't goin' to redemption me!' And so left us abruptly.

That happy Christmas day was an era indeed in Blade-o'-Grass's life. It was spent very peacefully; and every one strove in a quiet way to make Blade-o'-Grass feel that she was in the midst of friends. I watched her closely during the day, and I saw that new thoughts were stirring in her mind. In the evening we were sitting together in the parlour; the candles were not lighted, and the conversation was carried on in low tones. Blade-o'-Grass had removed to the window, where she sat, watching the birth of night. I drew a chair close to her.

'Mr. Meadow,' she whispered, 'I've been thinkin'----'

'Yes, my dear.'

'That if me and Tom 'ad 'ad a 'ome like this we might 'ave been different to what we are.' She paused, and I did not speak, for I saw that she was struggling to say something more. 'I'm almost sorry I came 'ere, sir.'

'Why, my dear?'

'It's ungrateful of me to say it; but seein' what I've seen 'ere today'll make me miserable to-morrer in Stoney-alley.'

I made no attempt to console her. I strove to prepare her for the end I had in view.

'This is a happy home, indeed, Blade-o'-Grass, and other homes as happy have sprung from it.'

I recalled to her mind the circumstance, which Rachel had narrated to me, of Ruth assisting her one day when she was beseeching Tom Beadle to bring home some money as there was no bread in the cupboard.

'I remember the young lady well, sir,' said Blade-o'-Grass; 'and I thought of 'er orfen, though I never set eyes on 'er since then.'

'She will be here presently. She is married, and has a baby.'

Blade-o'-Grass turned from me, trembling, and hid her face in her hands.

'She and her husband have a very happy home, not far from where we are sitting. If you had a home like theirs----'

'O, sir! for pity's sake, don't mock me!'

'Listen, my dear. Do you believe that we have your happiness and well-doing very close to our hearts?'

'If I didn't believe it, sir, I wouldn't be fit to live.'

'Then believe this as well. Such a happy home as Ruth's and this may be yours, if you have the courage to make a sacrifice. No, not yet! nor will I tell you what it is until the

time comes. But think of it, and believe in it. Even if you doubted me, and Rachel told you it would be a good thing to do----'

She looked lovingly at Rachel.

'I think, sir, that whatever she told me to do I would do, though I was sure to die the next minute.'

'You would be right, Blade-o'-Grass. All that she says and does is sweet and good.'

* * * * *

Ah, Rachel, my wife, how my heart yearned to you then! How tenderly, in the dim twilight of that Holy Day, did my thoughts dwell upon you in purest love! In the solemn pause that ensued I endeavoured to strengthen my heart by inward prayer. If the priceless gift of your love were denied to me, I might still hope that your friendship would sweeten my life.

* * * * *

Blade-o'-Grass laid her hand timidly upon mine, and whispered to me that the prospect I had held out was like heaven to her.

Soon after this, Charley, and Ruth with her baby, came in quietly, and I brought Ruth and Blade-o'-Grass together.

* * * * *

I see them standing side by side at the window. I see Ruth showing her baby to Blade-o'-Grass. I see Blade-o'-Grass's hands tremble and wander. I see her stretch forth her arms convulsively, and presently I see her sitting on a low stool, with the baby in her lap, sobbing quietly over the child, whose fingers caress her face, pityingly as it seems. Ruth sinks upon her knees by the side of the bereaved mother, and their arms are round each other's neck. Night's shadows steal upon them, and wrap them in a peaceful embrace.

XIII.

HIS SOUL IS IN YOUR HANDS TO SAVE AND PURIFY!

I had many opportunities of seeing Tom Beadle during his term of imprisonment, and I soon became engaged in the contemplation of a subject which has been studied and pondered over by thousands of earnest minds, but never, I believe, with greater seriousness than at the present time. Here was a man, with a man's strength, not unwilling to do his work in the world, if he knew the way to do it. Of a low type he certainly was, but he had grown into his condition through no fault of his own. I penetrated the crust of his character, and I found behind it much material which could be worked to a good end. Gradually I won his confidence, and, in answer to certain remarks of mine affecting his career and character, he answered me in plain terms and with a rough shrewdness which greatly impressed me in his favour, I saw that he was helpless; that, in this country, society could do nothing for him, and that he would be utterly lost if he were left to himself and his own resources. If he were lost, Blade-o'-Grass would be lost also.

Golden Grain

'It will be a happy task accomplished,' I thought, 'if I can save these two from the certain degradation which lies before them--if I can make their after-life happy in an honourable way, and worthy of the respect of men.'

Tom Beadle gave me a great proof of his confidence. I asked him to allow Blade-o'-Grass to visit the Silvers and Ruth, and he consented with but little pressure. I took care that she was frequently in one or other of the houses. She liked best to be with Ruth and Ruth's baby, whom she often begged to be allowed to nurse. I said to her one day when she was in Ruth's house, having spent a few happy hours there,

'If you and Tom had such a home as this----'

'It'd be like 'eaven, sir,' she answered. 'Don't speak of it, sir. It breaks my 'eart to think of it!'

But I knew that the plan I had in view would give them such a home, after a time, if they were willing to endure a present sacrifice. I knew it from a letter which I had received

from Canada a week after Christmas. The letter was from Richard. I give it in its entirety:

'My dear Mr. Meadow,--I can now, I think, send you a letter which will give you satisfaction. My dear mother, and Ruth, and Mary, write so much about you, that I feel, although I have never seen you, as if I was talking to an old friend; and I feel very proud, I assure you, that you should write to me as you have written, and should place so much confidence in me. I cannot express to you how much I have thought of the story you have told me. I can see Tom Beadle and Blade-o'-Grass as plainly as if they stood before me. I can see what they were when they were children (I saw it often, my dear Mr. Meadow, when I was in London), and what they are likely to become, if a helping hand is not stretched forth to save them. You say you place your hopes in me, and that if it is out of my power to help you, you will not know which way to turn to accomplish what you desire. My dearly-beloved mother has written to me also, urging me to try and do something, and I need not say what an incentive that has been to me.

'Now let me tell you. It has been my good fortune to make the acquaintance of a farmer, at whose house I spend my day of rest every week. His name is Gibson. Is it letting you into a secret, when I tell you that he has a daughter, and that I hope some day, please God!----Well, dear Mr. Meadow, you must finish the uncompleted sentence yourself. And yet I must tell you that I do love her, with all my heart! You are not the first I have told. My dear mother knows all about it.

'Mr. Gibson has a large farm, and employs eighteen hands, who all receive fair wages, and have made comfortable homes for themselves. The Sabbath before last, Mr. Gibson was telling me the history of some of the men he has employed, and it suddenly flashed upon me that it was in his power to do what you desire with respect to Tom Beadle.

'Well, dear Mr. Meadow, I told him the story, and I gave him your letters and my dear mother's letters to read. Annie--that is his daughter--was present, and I spoke with all my earnestness. When I had finished, Annie was crying, and I myself was very nearly crying too. It would take too long for me to tell all that passed, but Mr. Gibson said he would keep the letters for a week, and that he would consider whether he could do anything. When I wished Annie good-night, I asked her if she would help me with her father, and she said she would--and said, too, how she wished that she knew you and my dear mother and sisters! You have no idea, Mr. Meadow, what a dear good girl she is.

'I didn't have one good night's rest all the week for thinking of what Mr. Gibson would say, and last Sabbath I went to his house with a trembling heart. We go to the same church, and after church we took a walk. It was a fine cold morning--you should have

seen how Annie looked! Well, but I must not wander from the subject. Then Mr. Gibson told me he had read all your letters, more than once he said, and that he had made up his mind. This is what he says. If Tom Beadle will come out to us, Mr. Gibson will take him into his service, and will give him fair wages. He will work and live on the farm, and Mr. Gibson will do all he can for him. But Mr. Gibson made conditions. Tom Beadle must come out by himself, and must bind himself to work for Mr. Gibson for five years. "At the end of that time," Mr. Gibson said, "he will, if he is industrious, have a home of his own and money in his pocket. Then he can send for his wife, and they will have a good future before them." Mr. Gibson put it this way. "Tom Beadle," he says, "must do something to show that he is worthy of the confidence that is to be placed in him; he has to grow out of old bad ways into new good ones. Give him something to work for," said Mr. Gibson, "something to look forward to, and the chances of his turning out right are more in his favour." Well, dear Mr. Meadow, that is how it stands. If Tom Beadle will come over, there is a home for him at once, and there is honest good work, with fair wages, for him to commence at, right away.

'I hope you will be satisfied and pleased with this. I am sure it will turn out right. I will make a friend of Tom Beadle, and he shall not go wrong, if we can help it. Annie will help too, I am sure. I do not write any news about myself; dear mother will tell you all about me. I am getting along famously. With affectionate esteem, my dear Mr. Meadow, believe me to be most faithfully yours,

'Richard Silver.'

I deemed it wise not to disclose the contents of this letter to Blade-o'-Grass until the day before Tom Beadle was to come out of prison. I had persuaded her to spend a few hours of that day with Ruth, and when I went to Ruth's house in the evening, I found that Blade-o'-Grass had gone to her home in Stoney-alley. About nine o'clock in the night I went to her room, to play the great stake upon which her future rested, and as I walked through the labyrinth of narrow thoroughfares which led to Stoney-alley, I prayed fervently that my mission would be successful. Blade-o'-Grass's room was very clean and tidy; she had been busy making preparations for the return of Tom Beadle. When I entered, her work was done, and she was sitting with her head resting on her hand.

'Don't disturb yourself, my dear,' I said; 'I have come to have a long chat with you. You have been busy, I see.'

'Yes,' she said; 'Tom's comin' 'ome to-morrer.'

I noticed that there was sadness in her tone.

'You are glad?' I said.

'Yes, sir, of course I'm glad. But I've been thinkin' of a good many things. I've been thinkin' of baby, and--and----'

She bit her lips, as if that effort were necessary to restrain the expression of what was in her mind.

'Don't hide anything from me, my dear; tell me what you've been thinking of.'

'I 'ardly know 'ow to tell it, sir. My thoughts seem as if they was turnin' agin myself. I see that I must ha' been goin' on wrong all my life, and that Tom 's been doin' the same. And my 'eart's fit to break, when I think it can't be altered now!'

'It can be altered, my child.'

She looked at me imploringly.

'You've said somethin' like that afore, sir; but it's all dark to me. Tom'll come 'ome to-morrer, and things'll go on in the old way, and per'aps he'll be took up agin before long----'

She could not proceed for her tears.

'You see, my dear, that the life he is leading is wrong.'

'I see it, sir--I see it. It'd be better, arter what you've told me, if Tom and me was to die to-morrer!'

'Our lives are not in our own hands, my dear. What has been done in the past has been done in ignorance, and the shame of it can be wiped away. It is shame, my dear. Place yourself and Tom by the side of Ruth and her husband.'

She uttered a cry, as if a knife had struck her. But I continued:

'Place your home by the side of theirs. See the happy future that lies before them, and think of what lies before you, if, as you have said, things go on with you in the same old way.'

She covered her face with her hands. I was striking her hard, but I knew it was necessary for the sacrifice I was about to call upon her to make. I drew a picture of the two homes. I placed children in them, and contrasted their appearance, their lives, their chances of happiness. I did not spare her; I spoke with all my strength and earnestness. Suddenly she interrupted me with wild looks and in a wild tone.

'What are you tellin' me all this for?'

'Because it is in your power to choose between them,' I replied. 'Not only for yourself, but for Tom. His future is in your hands to shape to a good end, if you have the courage to make a sacrifice. Nay, not only his future in this world--his soul is in your hands to save and purify!'

She parted the hair from her eyes, and gazed at me as if she were in a dream.

'Will you do this? Will you save your husband from the net of crime and shame in which he is entangled?'

'Will I do it?' she cried, in a tone of wonder. 'Can you arks me? Show me the way!'

I did. I told her the end I had been working for. I read Richard's letter to her, and dilated upon the prospect it held out.

'There is no chance for Tom here,' I said; 'there is in that new land, and with such friends as he will have about him. I believe it is in your power to persuade him to go. He loves you, and would do much for you. The separation will not be a very long one. Five years will soon pass, and then you will both be young. While he is working out the commencement of a good and better life there, you can stop with Mrs. Silver; she bids me offer you a home. Will you make the sacrifice?--a sacrifice that in all your after-life you will bless us for persuading you to make. My dear sister,'--she bowed her head to her breast convulsively as I thus addressed her--'it will be your salvation, and his. All our hearts are set upon it for your good and his. I know how you will suffer in parting from him, but the love's sacrifice that you will make for him will be a truer test of love than all you have hitherto done.'

She was silent for a long, long time before she spoke.

'When will he 'ave to go, sir?'

'A ship sails from Liverpool the day after to-morrow.'

'So soon!' she cried, clasping her hands.

'It is best so. Every hour that he passes here after he is out of prison is an hour of peril to you both. I will myself accompany him to Liverpool to-morrow. Let him commence his baptism at once, and in the new land work out his regeneration. He will thank you for it by and bye. Shall I tell you what I see in a few years from this present moment, my dear?'

'If you please, sir,' she said, tears streaming down her face.

'I see you and Tom in the new land living happily in your own little home. I see you standing at the door in the morning looking after him, as he goes to his work, and he turning round to smile upon you. I see him, when he is out of your sight, exchanging friendly greetings with men whose respect he has earned; no longer ashamed to look men in the face, my dear, but walking with head erect, without fear, as one can do who earns his bread honestly. I see him coming home at night, when his day's work is done, and you, perhaps, reading to him----'

'Reading, sir!'

'Yes, my dear, reading. Reading a letter, perhaps, that Mrs. Silver, or Ruth, or Mr. Merrywhistle has written to you and Tom. It will come--you will learn while he is away. I see your cupboard well stocked, your house prettily furnished, yourselves comfortably clothed. Perhaps Richard--Ruth's brother--and his wife come in to see you, and you talk together of the dear ones at home, bound to you as to him, my dear, by links of love. I hear you thank God before you sleep for all His goodness to you. I see you helping some poor child who has been left orphaned and helpless as you were left----'

'O, sir!'

'It will come, my dear, if you live, as surely as we are speaking together at this minute. I see you, perhaps, with a baby in your arms, like the dear one who has passed away from you----'

She caught my hand hysterically, and I paused. I saw that my work was done. I will not set down here what she said when she was calmer. When I left her she was animated by a high resolve, and I knew that she would not falter.

'What time will you be 'ere in the mornin', sir?' she asked, as she stood with me at the street-door in Stoney-alley.

'At twelve o'clock, my dear.'

'Tom'll be ready to go with you then, sir. It'll 'urt 'im to leave me, sir, but he'll do it for my sake. I know 'im, sir!'

'Good-night, my dear; God bless you!'

'And you, sir,' she said, kissing my hand.

I was punctual to my appointment on the following day. Blade-o'-Grass heard my step on the stairs, and came into the passage to meet me.

'Tom's inside, sir.'

I looked into her face, and saw in the anguish expressed there the marks of the conflict she had passed through.

'He's ready to go with you, sir.'

Tom Beadle's face bore marks of trouble also, and he evidently had not made up his mind whether he should receive me as a friend or an enemy.

'I feel as if I was bein' transported,' he said in a dogged manner.

'You will live to thank us, Tom,' I said, as I held out my hand to him. He hesitated a moment or two before he took it, and then he gripped it fiercely.

'Look 'ere!' he exclaimed hoarsely. 'Is it all goin' to turn out as you've told 'er? Take your oath on it! Say, May I drop down dead if it won't all come right!'

'As surely as I believe in a better life than this, so surely do I believe that this is your only chance of bestowing happiness upon the woman who loves you with her whole heart and soul.'

'I wouldn't do it but for 'er!' he said, and turned to Blade-o'-Grass. She crept into his arms, and clasped him to her faithful heart, and kissed him again and again. I went into the passage, and I heard her tell him, in a voice broken by sobs, how she loved him, and would love him, and him only, till death, and after death, and how she would count the minutes while he was away, till the blessed time came when they would be together again. Powerful as was her influence over him, it would not have been perfect if he had not had some good and tender qualities in his nature. I felt that the words that were

passing between them in this crisis of their lives were sacred, and I went downstairs to the street-door. I found Mr. Merrywhistle there.

'I have a cab waiting for you,' he said, 'and a box.'

'A box!'

'With some clothes in it for Tom Beadle, my dear sir. It will make a good impression upon him. And here are two sovereigns for him.'

'Give them to him yourself, Mr. Merrywhistle,' I said; 'he will be down presently.'

Tom Beadle joined us in a few minutes.

'Mr. Merrywhistle has brought a box of clothes for you, Tom,' I said; 'and he has something else for you also.'

'It's only a matter of a couple of sovereigns, Tom,' said Mr. Merrywhistle, stammering as if he were committing an act of meanness instead of an act of kindness. 'They may come useful to you when you land in Canada.'

Tom took the money and thanked him; then said that he had forgotten to say something to Blade-o'-Grass, and ran up-stairs. I learnt afterwards that he had given her the money, and had insisted, despite her entreaties, that she should take it.

I did not leave Tom Beadle until the ship sailed. He related to me the whole story of his life, and asked me once,

'Won't the old devil break out in me when I'm on the other side o' the water?'

'Not if you are strong, Tom--not if you keep your thoughts on Blade-o'-Grass, and think of the perfect happiness you can bestow upon her by keeping in the right path.'

'I'll try to, sir. No man's ever tried 'arder than I mean to.'

When I thought of the friends that were waiting on the other side of the Atlantic to help him, and encourage him, and keep him straight, I was satisfied that all would turn out well.

I returned to London with a light heart. It was nearly nine o'clock at night when I reached home. I lit my lamp, and saw upon my table a large envelope, addressed to me

in a lawyer's handwriting. I opened the letter, and found that it contained a sealed packet, and the following note, dated from Chancery-lane:

'Sir,--In accordance with instructions received from our late client, Mr. James Fairhaven, we forward to you the enclosed packet, seven days after his death.--We are, sir, your obedient servants,

'Wilson, Son, & Baxter.

'To Andrew Meadow, Esq.'

The news of the death of my benefactor and old friend, Mr. Fairhaven, shocked and grieved me. It was a sorrowful thought that he had parted from me in anger. If I had known of his illness, I am sure I should have gone to him, despite his prohibition. But I did not know; and even the consolation of following to the grave the last remains of the man who had so generously befriended me had been denied to me. I passed a few minutes in sorrowful reflection, and then took up the sealed packet. It was addressed, in his own handwriting, to Andrew Meadow, and was very bulky. The manuscript it contained was headed,

'James Fairhaven's last words to
Andrew Meadow.'

It was with a beating heart I prepared to read what he had written.

XIV.

IT IS SUNRISE. A GOLDEN MIST IS RISING FROM THE WATERS.

On two occasions you have expressed to me your wish to know what it was that induced me to take an interest in you when you were left an orphan, friendless, as you might have supposed. As the answer to your inquiry would have disclosed one of the secrets of my life, I refused to answer. But tonight, sitting, as I am sitting, alone in this desolate house, I am impelled to write an answer in my own way--impelled by the resurrection of certain memories which have arisen about me during the last hour, and which cling to me now with terrible tenacity. For the only time in my life that I can remember I will indulge myself by a free outpouring of what is in my mind, setting no restraint upon myself, as has hitherto invariably been my rule. I do this the more readily, as these words will certainly not be read by you until I am dead, and may never be read by you at all, for the whim may seize me to destroy them. To this extent I may therefore think that I am speaking to myself only--making confession to myself only. I strip myself of all reserve; the mere expression of this resolution gives me relief.

I am not writing in my study; it was my first intention to do so, but the room was close and warm, and when the door was shut a stifling feeling came upon me, as if other forms besides my own were there, although I was the only living presence in it. Directly the fancy seized me, it grew to such monstrous proportions that, with a vague fear, I brought my papers away, and felt when I left the room as if I had escaped from a prison. I am writing now in the large drawing-room, by the window which looks out upon the garden and the river, where you and I have sometimes sat and conversed. The night is dark; the river and the banks beyond are dark; the garden is filled with shadows. The only light to be seen is where I am sitting writing by the light of a reading-lamp. The other portions of the room, and the garden, and the river, and the river's banks are wrapped in gloom. I open the window; I can breathe more freely now.

Certain words you spoke to me, during our last interview, have recurred to me many times, against my wish, for I have endeavoured vainly to forget them. According to your thinking, you said, money, was only sweet when it was well-earned and well-spent. Well-earned? I have worked hard for the money which I have gained. I have toiled and laboured and schemed for it, and it is mine. Has it not been well earned? I ask this question of myself, not of you; for I believe your answer, if you could give it to me, would not please me. Well spent? I do not know--I never considered. I have gone on accumulating. 'Money makes money,' I used to hear over and over again. Money has made money for me. Well, it is mine. The thought intrudes itself, For how long? This

thought hurts me; I am an old man. For how many years longer will my money be mine? But I go on accumulating and adding; it is the purpose of my life.

It has been the purpose of my life since I was a young man. Then I was clerk to a great broker. I became learned in money; I knew all its values and fractions; it took possession of my mind, and I determined to become rich. It seemed to me that money was the only thing in life worth living for; I resolved to live for it, and for it only, and to obtain it. I have lived for it--I have obtained it--and I sit now in my grand house, a desolate man, with a weight upon my heart which no words can express.

How still and quiet everything is around me! I might be in a deserted land, alone with my wealth, and the end of my life is near! 'Money is only sweet when it is well-earned and well-spent?' Are you right, or am I? Has my life been a mistake?

The great broker in whose employ I was, noticed my assiduity and my earnestness. There were other clerks of the same age as myself in the office, but I was the most able among them, and I rose above them. Little by little I became acquainted with the mysteries of money-making, and it was not long before I commenced to take advantage of the knowledge I gained. I began to trade upon the plots and schemes of the money men. Others lost; I gained. Others were ruined; I was prospering. In time to come, I said, I shall ride in my brougham--like my master. In time to come, I shall own a fine house--like my master. I never paused to consider whether he was happy. I knew that he was rich; I knew that he had a fine wife and a fine daughter, a fine house and a fine carriage. His wife was a fine lady--a fashionable lady--who, when I saw her in her carriage, looked as if life were a weariness to her; her daughter was growing into the likeness of her mother. I know now that he was an unhappy man, and that his pleasures were not derived through home associations.

A clerk--Sydney by name--over whose head I had risen, had often invited me to visit him; I spent one Sunday with him. He lived half-a-dozen miles from the City, and his salary at the time I visited him was a hundred and seventy-five pounds a year. I was then making, with my salary and speculations, at least a thousand. He was a married man, with a pretty wife and a baby. The house in which they lived was small, and there was a garden attached to it. After dinner we sat in the garden and talked; he told his wife what a clever fellow I was, and how I had risen over all of them. I told him that he could do as well as I if he chose, although I was inwardly sure he could not, for his qualities were different from mine. 'You have only to speculate,' I said. He returned a foolish answer. 'This is my speculation,' he said, pinching his wife's cheek. 'Is it a good one?' his wife asked merrily. I do not know what there was in the look he gave her which caused her to bend towards him and kiss him; I think there were tears in her eyes too. 'Well,' I said, 'every one to his taste.' 'Just so,' he replied, with his arm round his wife's waist In the

evening, your mother, then a single girl, came in with her father. They and the Sydneys were friends.

Golden Grain

Now, to whom am I speaking? To myself or to you? Shall I go on with my confession, and go on without moral trickery, or shall I tear up these sheets, and deaden my memory with excess of some kind? It is rather late in life for me to commence this latter course. I have often been drunk with excitement, but never with wine. My life has been a steady one, and it has been my study to keep a guard over myself. Indeed, it has been necessary for success, and I have succeeded. 'When the wine is in, the wit is out'--a true proverb. Why am I debating about my course? I have already decided that I will speak plainly, and will strip myself of all reserve. When I have finished, I can destroy. I will not waver; I will go on to the end.

Even if you do read what I write, it will not matter to me. I shall have gone, and shall not know. Stop, though. You, as a clergyman, would tell me otherwise, and would doubtless, if you had the opportunity, enlighten my darkness, to use a common phrase. I have never considered it before; but I suppose I am a Christian. Is that a phrase also? To speak without reserve, as I have resolved to do, it is to me nothing more than a name. If the question, What has been your religion? were put to me, and I were compelled to answer (again without moral trickery), I should answer, Money. These reflections have come to me without foreshadowing, and I set them down. If they cause you to be sad, think for a moment. How many Christians do you know? I could argue with you now, if you were here. Christianity, as I have heard (not as I have seen), cannot mean a set belief in certain narrow doctrines; it cannot include trickery and false-dealing in worldly matters. It means, as I have heard and not seen, the practical adoption of a larger view of humanity than now obtains. Certain self-sacrifices, certain tolerations, which are not seen except in the quixotic, are included in this larger view. I repeat my question: How many Christians do you know?

A bitter mood is upon me; it may divert me from my purpose. I will lay down my pen, and look into the shadows.

What have I seen after an interval of I do not know how many minutes? Shadows in the future. Shadows from the past. Shadows all around me as I sit--in the room, in the garden, in the river. Stay. I see a light coming into the sky. The waters of the river are trembling. The moon is rising.

Andrew, I loved your mother. I never told her this, in words; but she knew it. There was a time, I have sometimes thought, when I might have won her. But I held back until, so far as she herself was concerned, it was too late. If she had not met your father--(she had not seen him when I first knew her)--and if she had not loved him, I should still have held back. For my design then was to many money, if I married at all. My master had married money. Other rich men, to whose height I had hoped to rise, had married money. I would do the same. Love was a dream to be blotted out. It stopped advancement. I strove to blot out my love for your mother, but I could not. I did the next best thing; I strove to conceal it. Even in that attempt, however, I was not successful. The Sidneys whose house I frequently visited in the hope of meeting her, saw it, and threw us much together. Mrs. Sydney said to me once, out of her ignorance, 'See how happy we are! You can be the same if you please.' I smiled, but did not reply. I could be the same, if I pleased! Why, I could have bought them up twenty times over. Sydney himself owed me money, having been duped by a friend, as foolish persons almost always are. I have never been duped by a friend in all my long life. I have lost money in the way of business, but I have never been duped by a friend. Life is an intellectual battle. Those win whose wits are the sharpest.

Your mother and I grew very intimate. I interested her in my career, although I never entered into the details of my successes. I told her only the results. Her father encouraged our intimacy. I had already lent him money. About this time I saw signs of an approaching panic. I said to myself, 'This is your chance; there will be precious pickings in the ruins. Sharpen your wits; now is your time.' I gathered in my money; I studied the signs, with a cool head. I mentioned the matter, under the seal of secrecy, to your mother. 'If all goes well,' I said, 'in six months I shall be worth so-and-so.' Your mother answered, 'But how about the people with whom all will go ill?' I said gaily, 'What is one man's meat is another man's poison. If I don't gather, others will.' The panic came and parsed, and did not leave me a mourner. England was strewn with wrecks, but I was safe; I was one of the fortunate wreckers. It was an anxious time; sharp wits were about, but few sharper than mine; and every man's hand was against his neighbour. Thousands of weak ones lost their all, and thousands more were bruised to death in rash attempts to recover what they had lost I saw them struggling all around me, and I saw here and there a foolish one holding out a helping hand, and being dragged into the whirlpool for his pains. When the storm passed, and the sky became clear, the land was filled with mourning. Among the foolish ones was Sydney. How could such a man expect to get on in the world? 'Self-preservation is the first law of nature.' What wisdom there is in many of these proverbs! There were very few smiling faces after the storm; but mine was one. I had netted thirty thousand pounds. This was the solid commencement of my fortune.

During this time I had but little leisure, and I saw scarcely anything of your mother. Now that the struggle was over, I went to her to tell her of my successes. Then I learned that her father had been ruined in the panic, and that if it had not been for a friend who sacrificed his small fortune for them, they would have been turned out of house and home. This friend was your father. He was a friend also to Sydney; and it was with his money, I believe, that Sydney discharged his debt to me; I had other security, but I was glad that there was no need to enforce it.

I held my passion in full control when I was told that your mother was engaged to be married. It was bitter to bear, but I argued with myself that it was best so; I might have done a foolish thing. A coldness sprang up between the Sydneys and me, and our intimacy weakened. It was natural, for our positions were very different from what they were a few months before. I had risen, and he had fallen. We were not upon an equality.

I never saw your mother after she was married. Engrossed in the purpose of my life, deeply engaged in schemes involving large interests, rising and prospering, amassing and accumulating, I lost sight of her. But I did not forget her. Now and again, in my calmer moments, when a great venture had been brought to a successful issue and I had added to my store, or when the fever of a great speculation was over, I thought of her with a certain tenderness and a certain regret; but I strove to find happiness in my money. Did I find it? No.

No; I did not find it. Looking back into my life, with all its cares and anxious struggles, I know that I was never happy. Looking upon myself now, as I sit in my great house, an old man, writing my confession, I know that I am an utterly miserable man. Yet are not most men unhappy? It seems so to me. Then I am no different from others, and under any other circumstances I should be as I am. Should I? Supposing I had married, and had children who loved me. There would be consolation in that, surely. Children, wife, friends, who loved me! Answer me, Myself. Is there one living being in the world who thinks of you with affection, who pauses now and then to give you a thought of love? Answer honestly. Not one!

Is it fancy, and am I working myself into a morbid state of feeling? From the dense shadows that lurk in the corners of the room, seemed to come an echo of the unspoken words--Not one! The air seemed to carry the words to the river--Not one! The river is flowing to the sea--to the vast unseen waters which in my present mood I liken to the future into which my life will sink, unremembered, unblessed!

Most men are unhappy, I have said. Well, it is so in my experience. Yet the Sydneys were happy; I am sure of it. Even after the panic which enriched me and impoverished him, I have seen him on the top of an omnibus, after business hours, on his way home, with

happiness in his face. Home! Is this my house a home? I have seen glimpses of happiness also elsewhere, and always, as I now recognise, in connection with women and children.

I thought often of your mother; but years passed, and I made no effort to see her. One day among my letters was one with a black envelope. I have the letter by me now. Knowing what I was about to write, I brought it with me from my study. You will recognise your mother's writing. I place it after these words, so that--should these s come to your hands--you may read it in its natural order.

'My dear Sir,--You will be surprised to receive a letter from me, but not angry, I hope. You will regard it with kindly feelings, perhaps, when I tell you that when you read it I shall be in my grave. I come to you a suppliant, and with all the earnestness of my soul I pray that I may not write in vain. My husband--whom I shall soon see again--died three years since, leaving me with a child, a boy, in whom you will see a resemblance to the girl to whom you used to confide your hopes and plans. He has his father's mouth, but he has my eyes and hair. I was very very happy with my husband, who was a good man, but not fortunate in worldly matters. I used sometimes to wish that you could have visited us, and seen our happy little home. But you were too far removed from us in station; I often heard of your great successes in life, and was very very glad to know that you had gained what you most desired. When my husband died, he left me very poor. Can you guess now--you who must receive so many applications from the unfortunate--my purpose in writing to you?

'The doctor tells me I have not many days to live. I may live a month, he says; I may die tomorrow; and my child will be left quite penniless and unprovided for. I made up my mind to write before my strength fails me. Will you befriend my orphan boy? I do not know what words to use to strengthen my appeal. If you were to ask me what it is I wish you to do, and I could answer from my grave, I would say. Arm him for the battle of life; give him some sort of plain and useful education; and when he is old enough, put him in some way so that he may be able to work for his living. Will you do this, for the sake of old times, for the sake of the girl you used to like to chat with, for the sake of charity? When I write my name to this letter, I will kneel down and pray to the Almighty that you will not turn a deaf ear to my appeal, and I will bless you with my dying breath. As you read these words, think that I am by your side, imploring you to say, "Yes, I will do this out of pity for the orphan and his dead mother, and for the sake of old times." God prosper you in all your undertakings!--Your old friend and suppliant, ISABEL.'

You know now why I interested myself in you. Yes, I think there is one living being who will remember me with affection when I am gone.

I am thinking of you now, Andrew, and I am considering whether I shall carry out an idea which has occurred to me with reference to my money. I have nearly run my span of life. Death may, in the natural order of things, claim me at any moment. Say it claims me to-morrow, and I die without a will, what will become of the great fortune I shall leave behind me? Litigation will ensue. The lawyers will have a banquet You said once, 'If there were in the world one lawyer where now there are a hundred, the world would be the better for it, and justice would be more easily administered.' Well, the law shall not juggle with my money if I live another week; neither shall you have it for your own use; no, not one shilling of it. And yet, if I keep in my present mind, you shall have the entire control of it, and shall have the power of disposing of it in any way you please--except for your own benefit. I know that I can trust you thoroughly; there is not another man in the world whom I would dream of placing such confidence in. It was my desire that you should take my name after my death, and spend my money in such a manner as to make the name a great one in society. As that satisfaction is denied to me, and as you say that 'money is only sweet when it is well-spent,' use mine in fulfilment of your sentiment. The more I think of it the more am I disposed to regard my scheme with favour. To-morrow morning I will go to my lawyer, who will communicate with you after my death. You may be sure that everything will be plainly set down, and that you will not be able to appropriate the money to your own private use. But I must be just. Every labourer is worthy of his hire. If the administration of the trust occupies the chief portion of your time, you shall be warranted in drawing from the funds the sum of one hundred and fifty pounds per annum--to cease immediately your labours cease.

* * * * *

It is long past midnight. As I look out of window, I see that the moon has risen, and that the heavens are filled with stars. My garden is really beautiful now, with the light shining upon it. I have never seen my property present so fair an aspect as it does at this present moment. The river is very beautiful also. I will go out and stroll along the banks, or sit and muse, as the whim seizes me. Shall I wish you 'Good-night before I go? No, I will wait until I return.

* * * * *

Three hours have passed since I wrote the last words. I have heard no human voice, and yet it seems to me that I have heard voices. The air has grown very sweet. Flecks of gold are coming into the sky. I have watched their faint colour grow strong. It is sunrise. A

golden mist is rising from the waters. I cannot tell you what has passed through my mind during the last few hours. I cannot tell you what is in it now. I can scarcely comprehend it myself, but I feel happier than I have felt for some time. I cannot wish you Good-night, for the night has passed. Good-morning, Andrew!

XV.

FAIRHAVEN.

The perusal of this remarkable document affected me beyond power of description. My mother's letter to Mr. Fairhaven brought her dear figure vividly to my mind's eye, and I sobbed from happiness. It was love that had accomplished this wonderful thing--love, which death cannot destroy.

I read the latter portion of the document again and again, until I could almost repeat the words from memory. 'Good-morning, Andrew,' were Mr. Fairhaven's last words to me. Ah, yes! In the night of his life the morning had dawned sweetly and holily. I blessed him for his noble revenge. I prayed for strength, for wisdom, to worthily fulfil the solemn trust reposed in me.

But in what way to apply it, so that unalloyed good might spring from its use? My heart cried out, 'Teach me! Show me the way!' An answer came. Side by side I saw the figures of Ruth and Blade-o'-Grass. 'Look here and here,' a voice seemed to say to me. 'See this one trodden into the mire. See this one tended, cared for, raised to purity and usefulness.' I trembled with mingled fear and happiness. A great thought loomed upon my mind, like a sunrise to my soul.

I placed my hand upon my heart to still its beating. I was alone, and I yearned for the presence of friends in whom I could confide. Should I go to those who were dearest to me--to Rachel and to Mrs. Silver, and tell them this wonderful news? I started to my feet with the intention of proceeding at once to Buttercup-square. I placed the precious document in my breast-pocket, and I buttoned my coat tightly and securely. But what, after all, if it should prove a mockery? No, I would wait until I had assured myself. I knew what hopes would be raised in their breasts, and I would spare them a possible disappointment.

If it were not mockery--if it were true, clear, incontestable--this immense fortune was at my disposal to do as I pleased with. Not to spend upon myself; to spend upon others; to sow and reap the crop. Golden Grain!

But before it grew to fulness and ripeness, before it waved in perfect comeliness in the eyes of God and man, to watch the tender green leaves springing from the beneficent earth, smiling in the face of the bright sun, with nature's health-giving tears glistening upon them--to watch them gather sufficient strength to resist the attacks of wind and

storm and adverse circumstances, each Blade of Grass a thing of beauty---- Ah, Golden Grain! Golden Grain indeed!

I could not sleep on that night I rose many times, and paced the room, praying for sunrise. And then, when the business of the day had fairly commenced, I was in the office of Mr. Fairhaven's lawyers. The principal member of the firm received me. He eyed me with curiosity through his golden spectacles.

'I expected you would call,' he observed, as he motioned me to a seat.

'Are you acquainted,' I asked, 'with the contents of the packet you sent to me yesterday?'

He answered me like a lawyer.

'It came to me sealed; my instructions were to forward it.'

I placed it in his hands, and he read it, slowly and attentively.

'I was in doubt,' he said, as he handed it back to me, 'whether you were a relative of the late Mr. Fairhaven.'

'You see that I am not'

'I see. It is all the more remarkable because of that.'

'The will,' I said, and paused. He took up my words.

'----Is in exact accordance with the terms of the letter.'

He opened his safe, and produced the will. He referred to the date of the letter.

'I received my instructions,' he said, 'from the late Mr. Fairhaven on the morning following the day on which he wrote this communication.'

'I should have wished to attend his funeral,' I said, 'if I had but known! Even without this, it would have been my earnest desire. I owe much to him.'

'I received no instructions that have not complied with.'

'You saw my dear friend before his death?'

'Frequently. Two days before his death, indeed. You are aware that he died rather suddenly.'

'I was not aware. I am glad to know that he did not suffer long.'

'Up to the last his intellect was remarkably clear.' He said this with a half smile.

'You put stress upon that,' I observed.

'Undoubtedly, my dear sir. It is an important point.'

'In what way?'

He gave me an odd look, and said: 'The late Mr. Fairhaven must have relations. The will he has made is undoubtedly an eccentric one. Has it occurred to you that its validity may be disputed?'

'No.'

'It will be,' he said dryly; 'and that is the reason why it is important to be able to prove that his intellect was clear to the last. You need have no fear, Mr. Meadow. The will cannot be shaken.'

I thanked him for the assurance, and asked him if he was acquainted with the extent of the property.

'It will probably realise,' he answered, 'not less--yes, I should certainly say not less--than two hundred and thirty thousand pounds.'

'A vast fortune, indeed,' I said, with a beating heart at this confirmation of my hopes.

'And made out of nothing,' he added. 'He commenced life as a poor clerk. I have heard it said of him that whatever he touched turned to gold.'

I left to the lawyer the management of everything connected with Mr. Fairhaven's will. As he had predicted, it was disputed, on the ground of the testator's incapacity. But it was proved, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that Mr. Fairhaven was in the full possession of his reasoning faculties not only at the time he made his will, but up to the very day of his death. The validity of the will was unhesitatingly upheld by the judges, and the property came into my possession. Nevertheless the case was not finally settled until after the lapse of many months, and during this time the newspapers were busy upon

Mr. Fairhaven's eccentricity. 'It remains to be seen,' said an influential paper, in a leading article, 'and it is a matter of much curiosity, how the legatee will administer his trust' I found myself quite a public character, and I was inundated with applications and with letters of advice. But my resolution was already formed.

I did not disclose this resolution to the Silvers while the matter was in the law-courts. So great was my anxiety that I feared, even up to the last moment, that some chance or quibble of the law would deprive me of the means for carrying it out. Not until everything was settled, not until the property was declared to be mine incontestably, not until it was realised, and the money invested in the Funds, did I consider myself free to open my mind to my dear friends. I had my last interview with the lawyer; he had acted throughout in the most straightforward manner, and I thanked him sincerely.

'And yet,' he remarked, 'you said once to Mr. Fairhaven that if there were in the world one lawyer where now there are a hundred, the world would be the better for it.'

'I think so still,' I replied.

'Strange,' he said, with a touch of pleasant satire, 'that the world has never been able to get along without us.'

'Never!' I exclaimed. 'Nay, you must be mistaken.'

'I am not mistaken. I can go as far back as the days of Abraham for proof. Did not that patriarch buy "the field of Ephron, which was in Macphelah, which was before Mamre; the field, and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all the borders round about?" The very words we read in Genesis. Do you mean to tell me that any one but a lawyer could have written such a description? We have our uses, my dear sir!'

I smiled. I was too happy to argue with him, and we parted the best of friends. In the evening I found myself, as I had designed, in Buttercup-square. I knocked at Mrs. Silver's door, and she herself opened it. Only Rachel and she were at home. I had kept her fully acquainted with the progress of affairs, and she knew that I expected to have my final interview with the lawyer on this day.

'All is settled,' I said. 'What do you see in my face?'

'Happiness.'

'It is in my heart. This is a supreme moment in my life. I feel that I am about to commence a great work.' Mrs. Silver did not reply, but looked earnestly at me. I noticed also that Rachel suspended her sewing. 'The vast fortune that Mr. Fairhaven left has been safely invested in Consols. What income, do you think, is derivable from the money?'

'I am afraid to guess.'

'What would you say to nearly nine thousand pounds a year?'

'As much as that?' asked Mrs. Silver, with an exclamation of astonishment.

'Quite as much. What is to be done with this great sum, of which I am the steward?'

'It is a grave question,' she said; 'one not easily answered.'

'Still I have not found it difficult to decide. When I first received Mr. Fairhaven's letter an inspiration fell upon me, and my resolution was formed. But I did not dare to consult you upon it, for I feared that the means of carrying it out would slip from me. Now I am free to speak. Listen to me in silence, and when I have unfolded my plan, tell me what you think of it. The inspiration that fell on me on the first disclosure of this good fortune came, my dearest friend, from you, and from the history and influence of your happy home. During the interval that has passed since that eventful day I have thought deeply over my scheme, and have matured it to some extent in my mind. I have not been so wrapt up in it as to be regardless of other modes of expending the money in a good and useful way; but, in the continual contemplation of it, I have become more and more strengthened in my belief that my first thoughts are the happiest and the best. I know the solemnity of the trust reposed in me, and from this moment I consecrate my life to it, convinced that I shall find true happiness in it. I propose to establish on a large scale a Home for the poorest orphaned and friendless children, whom we shall adopt while they are very young, and educate and rear in such a manner as shall make them good and useful members of society. We will take them from the gutters, and rescue them from ignorance and crime; and as they grow up we will draft them into the ranks of honest bread-winners, either in this or in other countries, and fill their places with other poor children. There shall be no distinctive mark of charity upon them; they shall be so brought up as to be proud of the Home in which they are armed for the battle of life. There are numerous matters of detail which need not be discussed and decided upon at present; such as establishing schools of trade in our Home, so that the children may be usefully employed until they take their places in the ranks of out-door workers. I have seen a large building, with ground attached, which will suit our purpose admirably; the rental is three hundred pounds a year. I requires a great deal of alteration, which the

proprietor is willing to make if he can let it on a long lease. There is sufficient available land round the building for playgrounds and gardens. The children themselves shall learn to be the gardeners. This, in brief, is my scheme, of which I ask your approval. I see many beautiful pictures in the future in connection with it, the contemplation of which makes me supremely happy. I see men and women in whom have been implanted the seeds of cleanliness, industry, virtue, and religion, living their useful lives, and some among them rising even to eminence in this and other lands--men and women who, without this Home, would be lurking about in rags and want, and filling the public houses and prisons. I see them marrying, and bringing up their children in the right path, and holding out a helping hand to others. I see the means for enlarging our Home coming from some of the prosperous ones, out of the gratitude of their hearts. And when the time comes for me to render an account of my stewardship, I trust I shall have earned the approval of Him from whom all blessings are derived. Tell me, dear friend, do you think my scheme a good one?'

Golden Grain

Mrs. Silver took my hand in hers, and retained it. She was too agitated to speak, but I saw perfect approval in her sweet face, and in the sweet face of Rachel. I continued:

'In his first proposition to me to make me his heir, Mr. Fairhaven expressed a wish that I should take his name after his death, and spend his money in such a manner as to make the name a great one in society. I shall call our Home, Fairhaven; and thus his goodness will be perpetuated. I look to you, dear madam, to assist me in my scheme, and I ask you to enlist under my banner, as I once enlisted under yours.'

She gave me the assurance of her fullest help, and said she had never hoped such happiness would be hers as to assist in the development of a scheme which she described as noble and good.

'And now,' I said, in tones which trembled with emotion, for I was approaching a subject very dear to my heart, 'if I might be permitted to say a few words privately to you----'

Rachel rose and left the room. I followed her form with wistful eyes, and when I turned to Mrs. Silver I saw that good woman regarding me more attentively than she had hitherto done. I paused for awhile before I resumed.

'I am about to speak of a selfish subject--myself. In Mr. Fairhaven's letter to me, he states that every labourer is worthy of his hire, and that if the administration of the trust

he has reposed in me occupies the chief portion of my time, I am warranted in drawing from the funds an annual salary of one hundred and fifty pounds. As I shall make my home at Fairhaven, and shall devote all my time to the furtherance of my scheme, I believe I am fairly entitled to that sum. If I were possessed of private means I would not accept one shilling of the money for my own use; I would cheerfully give my labours without fee and without reward. But it is otherwise with me, and in the annual statement which I shall draw up and endeavour to get published in the papers, I shall place the sum of a hundred and fifty pounds as the fixed salary paid to the general manager of the Home. I am justified in doing that, am I not?'

'Quite justified.'

'The income I have hitherto received for my labours has been sufficient for my personal needs, but not more than sufficient. I have felt this sorely, for with those means I have not dared to indulge in the contemplation of the dearest wish and hope of my heart. But now all is clear before me, and I may speak without hesitation.'

My agitation communicated itself to her; I saw the signs of it in her face.

'Not very long ago you said something to me which was very sweet to my ear. You said that if it had pleased God to give you a son of your own, you would have wished him to resemble me. I have thought of these words very often. Have you sufficient confidence in me to give into my care one whom I love with all the strength of my heart and soul? Will you give me Rachel for my wife? Will you let me call you Mother?'

I leant towards her eagerly; she looked at me with solemn affection.

'I am proud of you,' she said, 'and I love you as if you were my own. But have you well considered? Rachel is blind----'

'Not to me--not to me, Mother! To make her my wife is the dearest hope of my heart.'

'If I seem to hesitate,' she said tearfully, 'it is because I love you. I would trust you with the dearest treasure I have.'

'If you hesitate,' I replied, 'I shall think that you begin to doubt me. You must believe what I say. Rachel's love will crown my life with perfect happiness.'

I have cause to remember and bless that night. Before I left the house Rachel and I plighted our troth to each other. The dear girl, while confessing that she loved me, actually needed persuasion to accept me as her husband. She was full of doubts of

herself, and of her fitness, being blind, to fulfil a wife's duties. Pure, gentle heart! Her presence would sweeten and add lustre to a palace. It was decided that we should not be married until Fairhaven was fairly established, and this I knew would occupy some considerable time.

So now, with everything fair before me, I set to work upon my scheme. The house and grounds I had mentioned to Mrs. Silver as being suitable for the Home, I took on a long lease, in which a purchasing clause was inserted. The necessary alterations were carefully discussed, and were commenced as soon as possible. As I had resolved, I made my scheme public, through the medium of the newspapers, the writers in which gave me the most generous assistance and encouragement. To my surprise, not one thought my idea quixotic; and before Fairhaven was ready to receive inmates, its name became famous not only in this, but in other countries. Every hour of my time was occupied, and I think I may fairly say I earned my wages. It would occupy too much space here to narrate the details of my work; they were numerous and onerous--more so than I had contemplated; but I did not shrink from them, and the assistance I received from the Silvers was of incalculable value to me. Letters poured in upon me, and among them were some addressed to the Master of Fairhaven. It pleased my friends to adopt this title for me, and I accepted it with pride and pleasure.

One of the most gratifying features of the movement was that many of the letters contained subscriptions in money in aid of the Home. These subscriptions it was necessary to acknowledge, and I thought it would be a good thing to acknowledge them in the newspapers. I did so; and the result was astonishing. Stimulated by the example, money was sent to me from all quarters and from all kinds of people, even from the poorest. Before many weeks had elapsed I found that the work of answering these letters was too much for me.

'You want a secretary,' said Mrs. Silver.

'I have been thinking of it,' I said; 'and I have thought of offering the situation to some one whom you know.'

'To whom?'

'To Mary. The work will be no harder for her than that which she already accomplishes in the telegraph office.'

Mrs. Silver was delighted with the suggestion, and Mary was offered and accepted the situation. Thus the work went on harmoniously, and a fortnight before Christmas the Home was in a sufficiently forward state to commence operations. I had schemed that

the inauguration should take place on Christmas-day, and I proposed that all my friends--the Silvers and their children, Mr. Merrywhistle, Jimmy Virtue, Robert Truefit and his family, and Blade o'-Grass--should spend the day at Fairhaven. It was thus arranged, and this Christmas two years, Fairhaven received more than sixty poor orphaned children, and the good work was actually commenced.

I must mention here that Blade-o'-Grass had lived with Mrs. Silver from the time of Tom Beadle's departure; and on this, our inauguration day, I found her assistance with the children peculiarly valuable.

'This is the anniversary of your wedding-day, my dear,' I said to Blade-o'-Grass.

'Yes, sir,' she answered; 'there are only four years now to wait. Did you know I had a letter last night from Tom?'

'No, my dear.'

She gave me the letter, and I found that it was written--very badly, of course--by Tom Beadle himself. He was learning to read as well, he said in the letter; Richard was his tutor.

'You are getting along also, my dear, with your reading and writing.'

'Yes, sir. It's a good letter, isn't it?

It was a good letter. Everything was turning out as I had hoped. The different life which Tom was leading was having its effect upon him, and he was beginning to look forward. From Richard's letters to me I knew that he had had some trouble with Tom at first; Tom had not taken too kindly to the restrictions of his time which regular labour imposes; but this feeling--the natural result of the vagrant life he had hitherto led--was passing away, and Tom's mind was nearly settled. In his letter, which I held in my mind, there was a message of goodwill to all who had been kind to Blade-o'-Grass.

'Now, my dear,' I said, as I returned the letter, 'I have a proposition to make to you. You have four years to wait before you wish us good-bye, and sail for your new home in another land. What do you say to living at Fairhaven until that day comes? You shall be one of my matrons--I want those about me whom I can depend upon--and I can afford to pay you twenty pounds a year for your services. You will have a little purse to give Tom when you see him, and that will be an agreeable surprise to him. What do you say to my proposition?'

She could not answer me immediately; but when she was sufficiently recovered to speak, she told me that she had yearned to be allowed to stop at Fairhaven, but that she should not have been able to muster courage to ask me--not deeming herself capable enough or good enough. She accepted the offer gratefully, but begged me not to pay her money.

'Let me work for you for love, sir!' she pleaded.

'No, my dear,' I said firmly, 'not entirely for love. Why! I take money for my services, and so shall you! It is just and right.'

From that time until this, Blade-o'-Grass has not spent a day away from Fairhaven, and she is the most valuable assistant I have in the Home. I shall miss her sorely when she goes. Her influence over the children is wonderful, and they, as well as we, love her very sincerely.

The year that followed was even busier than the preceding year. So much had to be seen to! Rachel and I decided to wait until everything was settled and in far working order before we were married. We had another reason for the delay. The rooms in Fairhaven that I had set aside for ourselves required to be furnished, and the money for the furniture could not be taken out of the general fund. I had to earn the money before I could offer Rachel a home which she could call properly her own. During the year subscriptions continued to flow in upon us, without any appeal being made. The charitable heart of England is not hard to touch. And one day, to my intense delight and joy, a letter came from a Great Lady, containing a cheque for a large amount. The letter itself is a bright testimonial in favour of the good work.

I could tarry with pleasure over this portion of my story, but my time is drawing short. My holiday is nearly at an end--the day after to-morrow my wife and I return to Fairhaven. We have enjoyed our honeymoon beyond description, although it is winter. Many a happy walk have we taken in the crisp cold air; many a happy evening have we spent by the cheerful fireside, Rachel busy with her needle, and I reading to her what I have written; breaking off every now and then to talk of the dear house in Buttercup-square, and of the dear ones in it; of the children at home in Fairhaven, and of the happy future there is before us, and we hope before them. The house in which we have been living during our honeymoon is completely covered with ivy up to the very chimneys, and the wrens find shelter there, and leave not a crumb of the bread we scatter for them every morning upon our windowsill. The holly-bushes are bright with crimson berries; Christmas will be with us soon; a bunch of Christmas-roses is on my table now. But one eventful circumstance remains to be narrated.

It was the autumn of last year; I had called into see Mrs. Silver early in the morning, to consult her on some arrangements for the Home. She asked after all there, and we fell a-talking, as we often did, about Blade-o'-Grass, who was very much changed in appearance from what she was. A stranger, looking upon her now for the first time, would never have guessed what her previous life had been; her dress was neat and modest, her hair was done up in a simple knot, hope and happiness dwelt in her face. Day by day she was strengthening her hold upon all our hearts; her gentle behaviour to the children, her gratitude and her love for all around her, her patience, her cheerful willingness, were very pleasant to behold. Mrs. Silver and I spoke of one fancy which Blade-o'-Grass indulged in. She seemed to have set Ruth before her as a model; and in the matter of dress and the fashion of her hair, she copied Ruth as closely as she could. The subject of her resemblance to Ruth had never been touched upon by any of us since my conversation with Rachel, although I am sure it was in the mind of my friends as it was in my own. But it seemed to be avoided by general and unexpressed consent. I was telling Mrs. Silver that before I left Fairhaven, Ruth had come with her child to spend the day there with Blade-o'-Grass, when the servant entered to say that a visitor wished to see Mrs. Silver very particularly.

'She says she don't think you know her, ma'am, but that she'll tell you who she is herself.'

'Let her come in, Emma.'

The visitor proved to be a tidily-dressed woman, of about fifty or fifty-five years of age; she looked like a farmer's wife. If I wished to describe her by a word, I should use the word 'comfortable.' In her dress and general appearance she was eminently a comfortable woman. She looked at Mrs. Silver very earnestly, and took the chair that was offered to her. There was something very homely and genial about her; and although I felt somewhat curious to know her errand, I asked Mrs. Silver if I should retire.

'Not unless this lady wishes it,' said Mrs. Silver.

'Love your heart!' was the reply, in a pleasant tone; 'I don't wish it if you don't. And I hope you'll forgive the liberty I've took in coming here; but I couldn't rest without seeing you, after coming all these miles.'

'You have come a long way, then,' said Mrs. Silver; 'you must be tired.'

The visitor laughed. 'I've come sixteen thousand miles over the water, all the way from Australia, and I'm going back there next month, please God!'

'You are an Englishwoman?'

'O yes, ma'am; I was born in London. Me and my husband emigrated eighteen year ago. It was the best day's work we ever done, though I love the old country, ma'am; but we were driven out of it, in a manner of speaking. My husband was a carpenter--he's a builder now, and we've done well, thank God, and our children are in the way of doing well too.'

'I am glad to hear it.'

'I'm the mother of fourteen, ma'am--twelve of them living.'

'That's a large family.'

'Not a bit too large out there; too large here for a poor man, but not there. I've been longing these five or six years past to come and see the old country once more before I die; and four months ago, my man said, "Well, mother, if your mind's set on it, we'd best go and get it over." So we've come, and we sha'n't lose anything by it. He's busy this morning looking at a steam-plough we're going to take back for our eldest son, who has a farm--if you'll excuse me for rambling on in this way, ma'am.'

'It interests me to hear you.'

'When a person comes back to the old spots, after being away for so many years, all sorts of curious feelings comes over her. It seemed to me as if I was in a dream when I walked through Stoney-alley this morning----'

'Stoney-alley!'

'I lived there a long time, ma'am; but I never knew until this morning what a dreadful place it is. I think I should die if I was compelled to live there again. There's the old shops there, just the same as they were eighteen years ago--all except Mr. Virtue's leaving-shop, which I was told was burnt down. You look as if you knew the place, sir.'

'I know it well,' I said, 'and Mr. Virtue also.'

'Ah, he was a queer old man! but he had a heart, though he was so grumpy! But I mustn't ramble. I've come to make a confession to you, ma'am, and to ask you after some one I nursed in these arms when she was a baby.'

Mrs. Silver turned pale.

'I've nothing to blame myself for, ma'am; what was done was done for the best. Do you remember anything that, occurred last Christmas-eve come twenty-three year ago?'

'Yes, I remember it well; very well,' replied Mrs. Silver, in an agitated tone. 'I have cause to remember it with gratitude. It was on that night, Andrew, that Ruth came to us; it was on that night I visited Stoney-alley, the place where this good woman lived.'

'You came to the very house in which I lived, ma'am, and you took away--bless your loving heart for it!--one of the sweetest children that ever breathed. The landlady brought her to you out of these very arms. Ruth, you say her name is. Tell me, ma'am--tell me--you know what it is I want to ask.'

'She is well and happy.'

'Thank God for that!'

'But you say the landlady gave me the child out of your arms. You are not her mother----' Mrs. Silver was unable to proceed.

'Love your dear heart, no! The poor child's mother was dead. But the landlady only told you half the truth when she told you that. She said there was only one baby--she didn't tell you that the poor mother was confined with twin-girls. On the Christmas-eve that you came to Stoney-alley I had them both on my knees--the sweet little things! They hadn't a friend, and we were too poor to take care of them. We had a large family of our own, and our hands were as full as full can be! As I was nursing the dears, the landlady came into the room in a flare of excitement, and said that there was a kind lady downstairs--it was you, ma'am--who wanted to adopt an orphan child, and who would give it a home and bring it up properly. The landlady said that if she had told you there was twins left in that way, she was sure you wouldn't be willing to part them, and that it would be a good thing, at all events, if one of the poor little ones could be taken care of. My husband thought so too; and though it cut me to the heart to part the dears, I felt it was the best thing we could do. We were a long time choosing between them; they were so much alike that we could hardly tell which was which; but one of them had a pretty dimple, and we kept that one, and sent the other down to you. If you remember, ma'am, you left your name and address with the landlady, and I never parted with the piece of paper you wrote it on, for I didn't know what might turn up. That is how I've found you out now.'

Mrs. Silver looked at me in distress.

'There is no need for sorrow here,' I said. 'If what I suspect is true, it is but a confirmation of what has been in my thoughts and in Rachel's also for a long time.' I turned to our visitor. 'I should know your name; Mr. Virtue has told me of you, and of your kindness to these babes. You collected money for them before they were a fortnight old.'

'Yes,' she assented with pleasant nods, 'and Mr. Virtue himself gave me a penny. My name is Mrs. Manning.'

'Tell me. What became of the other child?'

'That's what I want to know. If she's alive now, poor thing! she must be a woman grown; very different, ma'am, I'm afraid, from the child that you adopted. But if she wants a friend I'll be that friend. I'll take her back with me, if she'll come--my man wouldn't mind! She'd have a chance out there; and what's a mouth more or less at a full table, as ours is, thank God! a slice off a cut loaf is never missed.'

'You good soul! I said, pressing her hand. 'We want to know all you can tell us about the other child. Do you remember what name she was known by?'

'Ah, that I do, and a curious way it was how she came by that name! You see, ma'am, two or three blades of grass happened to sprout up in our back-yard, and the child took to watching them, and fell quite in love with them, poor little dear! This went on for three or four days, till one morning, when she was sitting by the side of the blades of grass, a lodger, hurrying along, happened to tread them down. The child was in a dreadful way, ma'am, and, as children will do, she hit at the man with her little fists. He pushed her down with his foot, not intending to hurt her, I do believe; and I ran out, and blew him up for his unkindness. He laughed, and said it was a fine fuss to kick up about two or three blades of grass, and that it was a good job for the child that she wasn't a blade of grass herself, or she might have been trod down with the others. From that time the child began to be called little Blade-o'-Grass, and that was the only name I ever knew her to have.'

'Ruth is at Fairhaven,' I said to Mrs. Silver.

'We will go there at once,' said Mrs. Silver, rising. 'This will be a joyful day for both of them. You will accompany us,' to Mrs. Manning. 'You would like to see these sisters whom you nursed and were good to in their helplessness?'

'It's what I've been praying for, ma'am. Many and many a time, over the water, has my man and me talked of them, and wondered what has become of them. Fairhaven! It's a pretty name; but are they both there? and what kind of a place, is Fairhaven?'

'You shall see for yourself,' replied Mrs. Silver, with tearful smiles. 'And on the way the Master of Fairhaven shall tell you the story of these sisters' lives.'

How the good creature cried and laughed over the story I need not here describe. When I came to the end her delight knew no bounds. She shook hands with me and Mrs. Silver, her honest face beaming with joy, and said, under her breath, 'Well, this is the happiest day!'

Blade-o'-Grass and Ruth were in the garden. As we approached them Mrs. Manning raised her hands in astonishment, and whispering to us that they were as like each other as two peas, asked which was Blade-o'-Grass and which was Ruth. We told her; and, in her motherly homely fashion, she held out her arms to them. Blade-o'-Grass passed her hands over her eyes and gazed earnestly at Mrs. Manning.

'Do you remember me, my dear?' asked the good woman. 'I've come a long way to see you--sixteen thousand miles--to see both of you, my dears! I nursed you both on my knees before you were a week old----'

Her motherly heart overflowed towards the girls, and Mrs. Silver and I stole away and left them together. We did not disturb them for fully half-an-hour. Then we went softly towards them. Blade-o'-Grass was kneeling by the side of Ruth, looking into her sister's face with a look of unutterable love. Ruth's arm was embracing Blade-o'-Grass, and Mrs. Manning was standing, with clasped hands, contemplating the sisters with ineffable gladness.

My story is told.

I write these last words at Fairhaven. The morning after our arrival home, I stood upon the threshold of our little snuggery, which is built on an elevation, with my arm around my wife's waist, describing to her the picture which I saw. It was the play-hour of the day, and the grounds were filled with children, comfortably dressed. We have nearly three hundred children in our Home. Immediately before me, in the centre of a group of young ones, who were clustering round her, was Blade-o'-Grass, strengthened and chastened by the troubles she has experienced, beautified by the better sphere of life which she now occupies. The innate goodness of her nature has made her beloved by all. Of all our sisters she is the dearest.

We are making great preparations for Christmas. May it be as happy a time to you, dear reader, as, in all human probability, it will be to us and to the little ones who are in our charge!

THE END.