Pearl-Fishing

Choice Stories from Dickens' Household Words; Second Series

By

Charles Dickens

I.

THE YOUNG ADVOCATE.

Antoine de Chaulieu was the son of a poor gentleman of Normandy, with a long genealogy, a short rent-roll, and a large family. Jacques Rollet was the son of a brewer, who did not know who his grandfather was; but he had a long purse and only two children. As these youths flourished in the early days of liberty, equality, and fraternity, and were near neighbors, they naturally hated each other. Their enmity commenced at school, where the delicate and refined De Chaulieu being the only gentilhomme among the scholars, was the favorite of the master (who was a bit of an aristocrat in his heart) although he was about the worst dressed boy in the establishment, and never had a sou to spend; while Jacques Rollet, sturdy and rough, with smart clothes and plenty of money, got flogged six days in the week, ostensibly for being stupid and not learning his lessons—which, indeed, he did not—but, in reality, for constantly quarrelling with and insulting De Chaulieu, who had not strength to cope with him. When they left the academy, the feud continued in all its vigor, and was fostered by a thousand little circumstances arising out of the state of the times, till a separation ensued in consequence of an aunt of Antoine de Chaulieu's undertaking the expense of sending him to Paris to study the law, and of maintaining him there during the necessary period.

With the progress of events came some degree of reaction in favor of birth and nobility, and then Antoine, who had passed for the bar, began to hold up his head and endeavored to push his fortunes; but fate seemed against him. He felt certain that if he possessed any gift in the world it was that of eloquence, but he could get no cause to plead; and his aunt dying inopportunely, first his resources failed, and then his health. He had no sooner returned to his home, than, to complicate his difficulties completely, he fell in love with Mademoiselle Natalie de Bellefonds, who had just returned from Paris, where she had been completing her education. To expiate on the perfections of Mademoiselle Natalie, would be a waste of ink and paper; it is sufficient to say that she really was a very charming girl, with a fortune which, though not large, would have been a most desirable acquisition to De Chaulieu, who had nothing. Neither was the fair Natalie indisposed to listen to his addresses; but her father could not be expected to countenance the suit of a gentleman, however well-born, who had not a ten-sous piece in the world, and whose prospects were a blank.

While the ambitious and love-sick young barrister was thus pining in unwelcome obscurity, his old acquaintance, Jacques Rollet, had been acquiring

an undesirable notoriety. There was nothing really bad in Jacques' disposition, but having been bred up a democrat, with a hatred of the nobility, he could not easily accommodate his rough humor to treat them with civility when it was no longer safe to insult them. The liberties he allowed himself whenever circumstances brought him into contact with the higher classes of society, had led him into many scrapes, out of which his father's money had one way or another released him; but that source of safety had now failed. Old Rollet having been too busy with the affairs of the nation to attend to his business, had died insolvent, leaving his son with nothing but his own wits to help him out of future difficulties, and it was not long before their exercise was called for. Claudine Rollet, his sister, who was a very pretty girl, had attracted the attention of Mademoiselle de Bellefonds' brother, Alphonso; and as he paid her more attention than from such a quarter was agreeable to Jacques, the young men had more than one quarrel on the subject, on which occasions they had each, characteristically, given vent to their enmity, the one in contemptuous monosyllables, and the other in a volley of insulting words. But Claudine had another lover more nearly of her own condition of life; this was Claperon, the deputy-governor of the Rouen jail, with whom she made acquaintance during one or two compulsory visits paid by her brother to that functionary; but Claudine, who was a bit of a coquette, though she did not altogether reject his suit, gave him little encouragement, so that betwixt hopes, and fears, and doubts, and jealousies, poor Claperon led a very uneasy kind of life.

Affairs had been for some time in this position, when, one fine morning, Alphonse de Bellefonds was not to be found in his chamber when his servant went to call him; neither had his bed been slept in. He had been observed to go out rather late on the preceding evening, but whether or not he had returned, nobody could tell. He had not appeared at supper, but that was too ordinary an event to awaken suspicion; and little alarm was excited till several hours had elapsed, when inquiries were instituted and a search commenced, which terminated in the discovery of his body, a good deal mangled, lying at the bottom of a pond which had belonged to the old brewery. Before any investigations had been made, every person had jumped to the conclusion that the young man had been murdered, and that Jacques Rollet was the assassin. There was a strong presumption in favor of that opinion, which further perquisitions tended to confirm. Only the day before, Jacques had been heard to threaten M. de Bellefonds with speedy vengeance. On the fatal evening, Alphonse and Claudine had been seen together in the neighborhood of the now dismantled brewery; and as Jacques, betwixt poverty and democracy, was in bad odor with the prudent and respectable part of society, it was not easy for him to bring witnesses to character, or prove an unexceptionable alibi. As for the Bellefonds and De Chaulieus, and the aristocracy in general, they

entertained no doubt of his guilt; and finally, the magistrates coming to the same opinion, Jacques Rollet was committed for trial, and as a testimony of good will Antoine de Chaulieu was selected by the injured family to conduct the prosecution.

Here, at last, was the opportunity he had sighed for! So interesting a case, too, furnishing such ample occasion for passion, pathos, indignation! And how eminently fortunate that the speech which he set himself with ardor to prepare, would be delivered in the presence of the father and brother of his mistress, and perhaps of the lady herself! The evidence against Jacques, it is true, was altogether presumptive; there was no proof whatever that he had committed the crime; and for his own part he stoutly denied it. But Antoine de Chaulieu entertained no doubt of his guilt, and his speech was certainly well calculated to carry conviction into the bosom of others. It was of the highest importance to his own reputation that he should procure a verdict, and he confidently assured the afflicted and enraged family of the victim that their vengeance should be satisfied. Under these circumstances could anything be more unwelcome than a piece of intelligence that was privately conveyed to him late on the evening before the trial was to come on, which tended strongly to exculpate the prisoner, without indicating any other person as the criminal. Here was an opportunity lost. The first step of the ladder on which he was to rise to fame, fortune, and a wife, was slipping from under his feet!

Of course, so interesting a trial was anticipated with great eagerness by the public, and the court was crowded with all the beauty and fashion of Rouen. Though Jacques Rollet persisted in asserting his innocence, founding his defence chiefly on circumstances which were strongly corroborated by the information that had reached De Chaulieu the preceding evening,—he was convicted.

In spite of the very strong doubts he privately entertained respecting the justice of the verdict, even De Chaulieu himself, in the first flush of success, amid a crowd of congratulating friends, and the approving smiles of his mistress, felt gratified and happy; his speech had, for the time being, not only convinced others, but himself; warmed with his own eloquence, he believed what he said. But when the glow was over, and he found himself alone, he did not feel so comfortable. A latent doubt of Rollet’s guilt now burnt strongly in his mind, and he felt that the blood of the innocent would be on his head. It is true there was yet time to save the life of the prisoner, but to admit Jacques innocent, was to take the glory out of his own speech, and turn the sting of his argument against himself. Besides, if he produced the witness who had secretly given him the information, he should be self-condemned, for he could not conceal that he had been aware of the circumstance before the trial.

Matters having gone so far, therefore, it was necessary that Jacques Rollet

should die; so the affair took its course; and early one morning the guillotine was erected in the court-yard of the jail, three criminals ascended the scaffold, and three heads fell into the basket, which were presently afterwards, with the trunks that had been attached to them, buried in a corner of the cemetery.

Antoine de Chaulieu was now fairly started in his career, and his success was as rapid as the first step towards it had been tardy. He took a pretty apartment in the Hôtel de Marbœuf, Rue Grange-Batelière, and in a short time was looked upon as one of the most rising young advocates in Paris. His success in one line brought him success in another; he was soon a favorite in society, and an object of interest to speculating mothers; but his affections still adhered to his old love Natalie de Bellefonds, whose family now gave their assent to the match—at least, prospectively—a circumstance which furnished such an additional incentive to his exertions, that in about two years from the date of his first brilliant speech, he was in a sufficiently flourishing condition to offer the young lady a suitable home. In anticipation of the happy event, he engaged and furnished a suite of apartments in the Rue du Helder; and as it was necessary that the bride should come to Paris to provide her trousseau, it was agreed that the wedding should take place there, instead of at Bellefonds, as had been first projected; an arrangement the more desirable, that a press of business rendered M. de Chaulieu's absence from Paris inconvenient.

Brides and bridegrooms in France, except of the very high classes, are not much in the habit of making those honeymoon excursions so universal in this country. A day spent in visiting Versailles, or St. Cloud, or even the public places of the city, is generally all that precedes the settling down into the habits of daily life. In the present instance St. Denis was selected, from the circumstance of Natalie having a younger sister at school there; and also because she had a particular desire to see the Abbey.

The wedding was to take place on a Thursday; and on the Wednesday evening, having spent some hours most agreeably with Natalie, Antoine de Chaulieu returned to spend his last night in his bachelor apartments. His wardrobe and other small possessions, had already been packed up and sent to his future home; and there was nothing left in his room now, but his new wedding suit, which he inspected with considerable satisfaction before he undressed and lay down to sleep. Sleep, however, was somewhat slow to visit him; and the clock had struck one before he closed his eyes. When he opened them again, it was broad day-light; and his first thought was, had he overslept himself? He sat up in bed to look at the clock which was exactly opposite, and as he did so, in the large mirror over the fire-place, he perceived a figure standing behind him. As the dilated eyes met his own, he saw it was the face of Jacques Rollet. Overcome with horror he sunk back on his pillow, and it was some minutes before he ventured to look again in that direction; when he

did so, the figure had disappeared.

The sudden revulsion of feeling such a vision was calculated to occasion in a man elate with joy, may be conceived! For some time after the death of his former foe, he had been visited by not unfrequent twinges of conscience; but of late, borne along by success, and the hurry of Parisian life, these unpleasant remembrances had grown rarer, till at length they had faded away altogether. Nothing had been further from his thoughts than Jacques Rollet, when he closed his eyes on the preceding night, nor when he opened them to that sun which was to shine on what he expected to be the happiest day of his life! Where were the high-strung nerves now! The elastic frame! The bounding heart!

Heavily and slowly he arose from his bed, for it was time to do so; and with a trembling hand and quivering knees, he went through the processes of the toilet, gashing his cheek with the razor, and spilling the water over his well-polished boots. When he was dressed, scarcely venturing to cast a glance in the mirror as he passed it, he quitted the room and descended the stairs, taking the key of the door with him for the purpose of leaving it with the porter; the man, however, being absent, he laid it on the table in his lodge, and with a relaxed and languid step proceeded on his way to the church, where presently arrived the fair Natalie and her friends. How difficult it was now to look happy with that pallid face and extinguished eye!

“How pale you are! Has anything happened? You are surely ill?” were the exclamations that met him on all sides. He tried to carry it off as well as he could, but felt that the movements he would have wished to appear alert were only convulsive; and that the smiles with which he attempted to relax his features, were but distorted grimaces. However, the church was not the place for further inquiries; and while Natalie gently pressed his hand in token of sympathy, they advanced to the altar, and the ceremony was performed; after which they stepped into the carriages waiting at the door, and drove to the apartments of Madame de Bellefonds, where an elegant déjeuner was prepared.

“What ails you, my dear husband?” inquired Natalie, as soon as they were alone.

“Nothing, love,” he replied; “nothing, I assure you, but a restless night and a little overwork, in order that I might have to-day free to enjoy my happiness!”

“Are you quite sure? Is there nothing else?”

“Nothing, indeed; and pray don’t take notice of it, it only makes me worse!”

Natalie was not deceived, but she saw that what he said was true; notice made him worse; so she contented herself with observing him quietly, and saying nothing; but, as he felt she was observing him, she might almost better have spoken; words are often less embarrassing things than too curious eyes.

When they reached Madame de Bellefonds' he had the same sort of questioning and scrutiny to undergo, till he grew quite impatient under it, and betrayed a degree of temper altogether unusual with him. Then everybody looked astonished; some whispered their remarks, and others expressed them by their wondering eyes, till his brow knit, and his pallid cheeks became flushed with anger. Neither could he divert attention by eating; his parched mouth would not allow him to swallow anything but liquids, of which, however, he indulged in copious libations; and it was an exceeding relief to him when the carriage, which was to convey them to St. Denis, being announced, furnished an excuse for hastily leaving the table. Looking at his watch, he declared it was late; and Natalie, who saw how eager he was to be gone, threw her shawl over her shoulders, and bidding her friends good morning, they hurried away.

It was a fine sunny day in June; and as they drove along the crowded boulevards, and through the Porte St. Denis, the young bride and bridegroom, to avoid each others eyes, affected to be gazing out of the windows; but when they reached that part of the road where there was nothing but trees on each side, they felt it necessary to draw in their heads, and make an attempt at conversation, De Chaulieu put his arm round his wife's waist, and tried to rouse himself from his depression; but it had by this time so reacted upon her, that she could not respond to his efforts, and thus the conversation languished, till both felt glad when they reached their destination, which would, at all events, furnish them something to talk about.

Having quitted the carriage, and ordered a dinner at the Hôtel de l'Abbaye, the young couple proceeded to visit Mademoiselle Hortense de Bellefonds, who was overjoyed to see her sister and new brother-in-law, and doubly so when she found that they had obtained permission to take her out to spend the afternoon with them. As there is little to be seen at St. Denis but the Abbey, on quitting that part of it devoted to education, they proceeded to visit the church, with its various objects of interest; and as De Chaulieu's thoughts were now forced into another direction, his cheerfulness began insensibly to return. Natalie looked so beautiful, too, and the affection betwixt the two young sisters was so pleasant to behold! And they spent a couple of hours wandering about with Hortense, who was almost as well informed as the Suisse, till the brazen doors were open which admitted them to the Royal vault. Satisfied, at length, with what they had seen, they began to think of returning to the inn, the more especially as De Chaulieu, who had not eaten a morsel of food since the

previous evening, owned to being hungry; so they directed their steps to the door, lingering here and there as they went, to inspect a monument or a painting, when, happening to turn his head aside to see if his wife, who had stopt to take a last look at the tomb of King Dagobert, was following, he beheld with horror the face of Jacques Rollet appearing from behind a column! At the same instant his wife joined him, and took his arm, inquiring if he was not very much delighted with what he had seen. He attempted to say yes, but the word would not be forced out; and staggering out of the door, he alleged that a sudden faintness had overcome him.

They conducted him to the Hôtel, but Natalie now became seriously alarmed; and well she might. His complexion looked ghastly, his limbs shook, and his features bore an expression of indescribable horror and anguish. What could be the meaning of so extraordinary a change in the gay, witty, prosperous De Chaulieu, who, till that morning, seemed not to have a care in the world? For, plead illness as he might, she felt certain, from the expression of his features, that his sufferings were not of the body but of the mind; and, unable to imagine any reason for such extraordinary manifestations, of which she had never before seen a symptom, but a sudden aversion to herself, and regret for the step he had taken, her pride took the alarm, and, concealing the distress she really felt, she began to assume a haughty and reserved manner towards him, which he naturally interpreted into an evidence of anger and contempt. The dinner was placed upon the table, but De Chaulieu's appetite, of which he had lately boasted, was quite gone, nor was his wife better able to eat. The young sister alone did justice to the repast; but although the bridegroom could not eat, he could swallow champagne in such copious draughts, that ere long the terror and remorse that the apparition of Jacques Rollet had awakened in his breast were drowned in intoxication. Amazed and indignant, poor Natalie sat silently observing this elect of her heart, till overcome with disappointment and grief, she quitted the room with her sister, and retired to another apartment, where she gave free vent to her feelings in tears.

After passing a couple of hours in confidences and lamentations, they recollected that the hours of liberty granted, as an especial favor, to Mademoiselle Hortense, had expired; but ashamed to exhibit her husband in his present condition to the eyes of strangers, Natalie prepared to re-conduct her to the Maison Royale herself. Looking into the dining-room as they passed, they saw De Chaulieu lying on a sofa fast asleep, in which state he continued when his wife returned. At length, however, the driver of their carriage begged to know if Monsieur and Madame were ready to return to Paris, and it became necessary to arouse him. The transitory effects of the champagne had now subsided; but when De Chaulieu recollected what had happened, nothing could exceed his shame and mortification. So engrossing

indeed were these sensations that they quite overpowered his previous one, and, in his present vexation, he, for the moment, forgot his fears. He knelt at his wife's feet, begged her pardon a thousand times, swore that he adored her, and declared that the illness and the effect of the wine had been purely the consequences of fasting and over-work. It was not the easiest thing in the world to re-assure a woman whose pride, affection, and taste, had been so severely wounded; but Natalie tried to believe, or to appear to do so, and a sort of reconciliation ensued, not quite sincere on the part of the wife, and very humbling on the part of the husband. Under these circumstances it was impossible that he should recover his spirits or facility of manner; his gaiety was forced, his tenderness constrained; his heart was heavy within him; and ever and anon the source whence all this disappointment and woe had sprung would recur to his perplexed and tortured mind.

Thus mutually pained and distrustful, they returned to Paris, which they reached about nine o'clock. In spite of her depression, Natalie, who had not seen her new apartments, felt some curiosity about them, whilst De Chaulieu anticipated a triumph in exhibiting the elegant home he had prepared for her. With some alacrity, therefore, they stepped out of the carriage, the gates of the Hôtel were thrown open, the concierge rang the bell which announced to the servants that their master and mistress had arrived, and whilst these domestics appeared above, holding lights over the balustrades, Natalie, followed by her husband, ascended the stairs. But when they reached the landing-place of the first flight, they saw the figure of a man standing in a corner as if to make way for them; the flash from above fell upon his face, and again Antoine de Chaulieu recognized the features of Jacques Rollet!

From the circumstance of his wife's preceding him, the figure was not observed by De Chaulieu till he was lifting his foot to place it on the top stair: the sudden shock caused him to miss the step, and, without uttering a sound, he fell back, and never stopped till he reached the stones at the bottom. The screams of Natalie brought the concierge from below and the maids from above, and an attempt was made to raise the unfortunate man from the ground; but with cries of anguish he besought them to desist.

"Let me," he said, "die here! What a fearful vengeance is thine! Oh, Natalie, Natalie!" he exclaimed to his wife, who was kneeling beside him, "to win fame, and fortune, and yourself, I committed a dreadful crime! With lying words I argued away the life of a fellow-creature, whom, whilst I uttered them, I half believed to be innocent; and now, when I have attained all I desired, and reached the summit of my hopes, the Almighty has sent him back upon the earth to blast me with the sight. Three times this day—three times this day! Again! again!"—and as he spoke, his wild and dilated eyes fixed themselves on one of the individuals that surrounded him.

“He is delirious,” said they.

“No,” said the stranger! “What he says is true enough,—at least in part;” and bending over the expiring man, he added, “May Heaven forgive you, Antoine de Chaulieu! I was not executed; one who well knew my innocence saved my life. I may name him, for he is beyond the reach of the law now,—it was Claperon, the jailor, who loved Claudine, and had himself killed Alphonse de Bellefonds from jealousy. An unfortunate wretch had been several years in the jail for a murder committed during the frenzy of a fit of insanity. Long confinement had reduced him to idiocy. To save my life Claperon substituted the senseless being for me, on the scaffold, and he was executed in my stead. He has quitted the country, and I have been a vagabond on the face of the earth ever since that time. At length I obtained, through the assistance of my sister, the situation of concierge in the Hôtel Marbœuf, in the Rue Grange-Batelière. I entered on my new place yesterday evening, and was desired to awaken the gentleman on the third floor at seven o’clock. When I entered the room to do so, you were asleep, but before I had time to speak you awoke, and I recognized your features in the glass. Knowing that I could not vindicate my innocence if you chose to seize me, I fled, and seeing an omnibus starting for St. Denis, I got on it with a vague idea of getting on to Calais, and crossing the Channel to England. But having only a franc or two in my pocket, or indeed in the world, I did not know how to procure the means of going forward; and whilst I was lounging about the place, forming first one plan and then another, I saw you in the church, and concluding you were in pursuit of me, I thought the best way of eluding your vigilance was to make my way back to Paris as fast as I could; so I set off instantly, and walked all the way; but having no money to pay my night’s lodging, I came here to borrow a couple of livres of my sister Claudine, who lives in the fifth story.”

“Thank Heaven!” exclaimed the dying man; “that sin is off my soul! Natalie, dear wife, farewell! Forgive! forgive all!”

These were the last words he uttered; the priest, who had been summoned in haste, held up the cross before his failing sight; a few strong convulsions shook the poor bruised and mangled frame; and then all was still.

And thus ended the Young Advocate’s Wedding Day.

II.

THE LAST OF A LONG LINE.

Sir Roger Rockville of Rockville was the last of a very long line. It

extended from the Norman Conquest to the present century. His first known ancestor came over with William, and must have been a man of some mark, either of bone and sinew, or of brain, for he obtained what the Americans would call a prime location. As his name does not occur in the Roll of Battle Abbey, he was, of course, not of a very high Norman extraction; but he had done enough, it seems, in the way of knocking down Saxons, to place himself on a considerable eminence in this kingdom. The centre of his domains was conspicuous far over the country, through a high range of rock overhanging one of the sweetest rivers in England. On one hand lay a vast tract of rich marsh land, capable, as society advanced, of being converted into meadows; and on the other, as extensive moorlands, finely undulating, and abounding with woods and deer.

Here the original Sir Roger built his castle on the summit of the range of rock, with huts for his followers; and became known directly all over the country of Sir Roger de Rockville, or Sir Roger of the hamlet on the Rock. Sir Roger, no doubt, was a mighty hunter before the lord of the feudal district: it is certain that his descendants were. For generations they led a jolly life at Rockville, and were always ready to exchange the excitement of the chase for a bit of the civil war. Without that the country would have grown dull, and ale and venison lost their flavor. There was no gay London in those days, and a good brisk skirmish with their neighbors in helm and hauberk was the way of spending their season. It was their parliamentary debate, and was necessary to stir their blood. Protection and Free Trade were as much the great topics of interest as they are now, only they did not trouble themselves so much about Corn-bills. Their bills were of good steel, and their protective measures were arrows a cloth-yard long. Protection meant a good suit of mail; and a castle with its duly prescribed moats, bastions, portcullises, and donjon keep. Free Trade was a lively inroad into the neighboring baron’s lands, and the importation thence of goodly herds and flocks. Foreign cattle for home consumption was as striking an article in their markets as in ours, only the blows were expended on one another’s heads, instead of the heads of foreign bullocks—that is, bullocks from over the Welch or Scotch Marches, as from beyond the next brook.

Thus lived the Rockvilles for ages. In all the iron combats of those iron times they took care to have their quota. Whether it was Stephen against Matilda, or Richard against his father, or John against the barons; whether it were York or Lancaster, or Tudor or Stuart. The Rockvilles were to be found in the mêlée, and winning power and lands. So long as it required only stalwart frames and stout blows, no family cut a more conspicuous figure. The Rockvilles were at Bosworth Field. The Rockvilles fought in Ireland under Elizabeth. The Rockvilles were staunch defenders of the cause in the war of Charles I. with his Parliament. The Rockvilles even fought for James II. at the

Boyne, when three-fourths of the most loyal of the English nobility and gentry had deserted him in disgust and indignation. But from that hour they had been less conspicuous.

The opposition to the successful party, that of William of Orange, of course brought them into disgrace; and though they were never molested on that account, they retired to their estate, and found it convenient to be as unobtrusive as possible. Thenceforward you heard no more of the Rockvilles in the national annals. They became only of consequence in their own district. They acted as magistrates. They served as high sheriffs. They were a substantial county family, and nothing more. Education and civilization advanced; a wider and very different field of action and ambition opened upon the aristocracy of England. Our fleets and armies abroad, our legislature at home, law and the church, presented brilliant paths to the ambition of those thirsting for distinction, and the good things that follow it. But somehow the Rockvilles did not expand with this expansion. So long as it required only a figure of six feet high, broad shoulders, and a strong arm, they were a great and conspicuous race. But when the head became the member most in request, they ceased to go ahead. Younger sons, it is true, served in army and in navy, and filled the family pulpit, but they produced no generals, no admirals, no arch-bishops. The Rockvilles of Rockville were very conservative, very exclusive, and very stereotype. Other families grew poor, and enriched themselves again by marrying plebeian heiresses. New families grew up out of plebeian blood into greatness, and intermingled the vigor of their fresh earth with the attenuated aristocratic soil. Men of family became great lawyers, great statesmen, great prelates, and even great poets and philosophers. The Rockvilles remained high, proud, bigoted, and borné.

The Rockvilles married Rockvilles, or their first cousins, the Craigvilles, simply to prevent property going out of the family. They kept the property together. They did not lose an acre, and they were a fine, tall, solemn race—and nothing more. What ailed them?

If you saw Sir Roger Rockville,—for there was an eternal Sir Roger—filling his office of high sheriff,—he had a very fine carriage, and a very fine retinue in the most approved and splendid of antique costumes;—if you saw him sitting on the bench at quarter sessions, he was a tall, stately, and solemn man. If you saw Lady Rockville shopping, in her handsome carriage, with very handsomely attired servants; saw her at the county ball, or on the race-stand, she was a tall, aristocratic, and stately lady. That was in the last generation—the present could boast of no Lady Rockville.

Great outward respect was shown to the Rockvilles on account of the length of their descent, and the breadth of their acres. They were always, when any stranger asked about them, declared, with a serious and important air, to

be a very ancient, honorable, and substantial family. “Oh! a great family are the Rockvilles, a very great family.”

But if you came to close quarters with the members of this great and highly distinguished family, you soon found yourself fundamentally astonished; you had a sensation come over you, as if you were trying, like Moses, to draw water from a rock without his delegated power. There was a goodly outside of things before you, but nothing came of it. You talked, hoping to get talking in return, but you got little more than “noes” and “yeses,” and “oh! indeeds!” and “reallys,” and sometimes not even that, but a certain look of aristocratic dignity or dignification, that was meant to serve for all answers. There was a sort of resting on aristocratic oars or “sculls,” that were not to be too vulgarly handled. There was a feeling impressed on you, that eight hundred years of descent and ten thousand a-year in landed income did not trouble themselves with the trifling things that gave distinction to lesser people—such as literature, fine arts, politics, and general knowledge. These were very well for those who had nothing else to pride themselves on, but for the Rockvilles—oh! certainly they were by no means requisite.

In fact, you found yourself, with a little variation, in the predicament of Cowper’s people,

—— who spent their lives

In dropping buckets into empty wells,

And growing tired of drawing nothing up.

Who hasn’t often come across these “dry wells” of society; solemn gulfs out of which you can pump nothing up? You know them; they are at your elbow every day in large and brilliant companies, and defy the best sucking bucket ever invented to extract anything from them. But the Rockvilles were each and all of this adust description. It was a family feature, and they seemed, if either, rather proud of it. They must be so; for proud they were, amazing proud; and they had nothing besides to be proud of, except their acres, and their ancestors.

But the fact was, they could not help it. It was become organic. They had acted the justice of peace, maintained the constitution against upstarts and manufacturers, signed warrants, supported the church and the house of correction, committed poachers, and then rested on the dignity of their ancestors for so many generations, that their skulls, brains, constitutions, and nervous systems, were all so completely moulded into that shape and baked into that mould, that a Rockville would be a Rockville to the end of time, if God and Nature would have allowed it. But such things wear out. The American Indians and the Australian nations wear out; they are not

progressive, and as Nature abhors a vacuum, she does not forget the vacuum wherever it may be, whether in a hot desert, or in a cold and stately Rockville; —a very ancient, honorable, and substantial family, that lies fallow till the thinking faculty literally dies out.

For several generations there had been symptoms of decay about the Rockville family. Not in its property, that was as large as ever; not in their personal stature and physical aspect. The Rockvilles continued, as they always had been, a tall and not bad-looking family. But they grew gradually less prolific. For a hundred and fifty years past there had seldom been more than two, or at most three, children. There had generally been an heir to the estate, and another to the family pulpit, and sometimes a daughter married to some neighboring squire. But Sir Roger's father had been an only child, and Sir Roger himself was an only child. The danger of extinction to the family, apparent as it was, had never induced Sir Roger to marry. At the time that we are turning our attention upon him, he had reached the mature age of sixty. Nobody believed that Sir Roger now would marry; he was the last, and likely to be, of his line.

It is worth while here to take a glance at Sir Roger and his estate. They bore a strange contrast. The one bore all the signs of progress, the other of a stereotyped feudality. The estate which in the days of the first Sir Roger de Rockville had been half morass and half wilderness, was now cultivated to the pitch of British agricultural science. The marshlands beyond the river were one splendid expanse of richest meadows, yielding a rental of four solid pounds per acre. Over hill and dale on this side for miles, where formerly ran wild deer, and grew wild woodlands or furze-bushes, now lay excellent farms and hamlets, and along the ridge of the ancient cliffs rose the most magnificent woods. Woods, too, clothed the steep-hill sides, and swept down to the noble river, their very boughs hanging far out over its clear and rapid waters. In the midst of these fine woods stood Rockville Hall, the family seat of the Rockvilles. It reared its old brick walls above the towering mass of elms, and travellers at a distance recognized it for what it was, the mansion of an ancient and wealthy family.

The progress of England in arts, science, commerce, and manufacture, had carried Sir Roger's estate along with it. It was full of active and moneyed farmers, and flourished under modern influences. How lucky it would have been for the Rockville family had it done the same.

But amid this estate there was Sir Roger solitary, and the last of the line. He had grown well enough—there was nothing stunted about him, so far as you could see on the surface. In stature, he exceeded six feet. His colossal elms could not boast of a properer relative growth. He was as large a landlord, and as tall a justice of the peace, as you could desire; but, unfortunately, he

was, after all, only the shell of a man. Like many of his veteran elms, there was a very fine stem, only it was hollow. There was a man, just with the rather awkward deficiency of a soul.

And it were no difficult task to explain, either, how this had come about. The Rockvilles saw plainly enough the necessity of manuring their lands, but they scorned the very idea of manuring their family. What! that most ancient, honorable, and substantial family, suffer any of the common earth of humanity to gather about its roots! The Rockvilles were so careful of their good blood, that they never allied it to any but blood as pure and inane as their own. Their elms flourished in the rotten earth of plebeian accumulations, and their acres produced large crops of corn from the sewage of towns and fat sinks, but the Rockvilles themselves took especial care that no vulgar vigor from the rich heap of ordinary human nature should infuse a new force of intellect into their race. The Rockvilles needed nothing; they had all that an ancient, honorable, and substantial family could need. The Rockvilles had no need to study at school—why should they? They did not want to get on. The Rockvilles did not aspire to distinction for talent in the world—why should they? They had a large estate. So the Rockville soul, unused from generation to generation, grew —

Fine by degrees and spiritually less,

till it tapered off into nothing.

Look at the last of a long line in the midst of his fine estate. Tall he was, with a stoop in his shoulders, and a bowing of his head on one side, as if he had been accustomed to stand under the low boughs of his woods, and peer after intruders. And that was precisely the fact. His features were thin and sharp; his nose prominent and keen in its character; his eyes small, black, and peering like a mole’s, or a hungry swine’s. Sir Roger was still oracular on the bench, after consulting his clerk, a good lawyer,—and looked up to by the neighboring squires in election matters, for he was an unswerving tory. You never heard of a rational thing that he had said in the whole course of his life; but that mattered little, he was a gentleman of solemn aspect, of stately gait, and of a very ancient family.

With ten thousand a-year, and his rental rising, he was still, however, a man of overwhelming cares. What mattered a fine estate if all the world was against him? And Sir Roger firmly believed that he stood in that predicament. He had grown up to regard the world as full of little besides upstarts, radicals, manufacturers, and poachers. All were banded, in his belief, against the landed interest. It demanded all the energy of his very small faculties to defend himself and the world against them.

Unfortunately for his peace, a large manufacturing town had sprung up

within a couple of miles of him. He could see its red-brick walls, and its red-tiled roofs, and its tall smoke-vomiting chimneys, growing and extending over the slopes beyond the river. It was to him the most irritating sight in the world; for what were all those swarming weavers and spinners but arrant radicals, upstarts, sworn foes of the ancient institutions and the landed interests of England? Sir Roger had passed through many a desperate conflict with them for the return of members to parliament. They brought forward men that were utter wormwood to all his feelings, and they paid no more respect to him and his friends on such occasions than they did to the meanest creature living. Reverence for ancient blood did not exist in that plebeian and rapidly multiplying tribe. There were master manufacturers there actually that looked and talked as big as himself, and entre nous, a vast deal more cleverly. The people talked of rights and franchises, and freedom of speech and of conscience, in a way that was really frightful. Then they were given most inveterately to running out in whole and everlasting crowds on Sundays and holidays into the fields and woods; and as there was no part of the neighborhood half so pleasant as the groves and river banks of Rockville, they came swarming up there in crowds that were enough to drive any man of acres frantic.

Unluckily, there were roads all about Rockville; foot roads, and high roads, and bridle roads. There was a road up the river side, all the way to Rockville woods, and when it reached them, it divided like a fork, and one prong or footpath led straight up a magnificent grove of a mile long, ending close to the hall; and another ran all along the river side, under the hills and branches of the wood.

Oh, delicious were these woods! In the river there were islands, which were covered in summer with the greenest grass, and the freshest of willows, and the clear waters rushed around them in the most inviting manner imaginable. And there were numbers of people extremely ready to accept this delectable invitation of these waters. There they came in fine weather, and as these islands were only separated from the main-land by a little and very shallow stream, it was delightful for lovers to get across—with laughter, and treading on stepping stones, and slipping off the stepping-stones up to the ankles into the cool brook, and pretty screams, and fresh laughter, and then landing on those sunny, and to them really enchanted, islands. And then came fishermen, solitary fishermen, and fishermen in rows; fishermen lying in the flowery grass, with fragrant meadow-sweet and honey-breathing clover all about their ears; and fishermen standing in file, as if they were determined to clear all the river of fish in one day. And there were other lovers, and troops of loiterers, and shouting roysterers, going along under the boughs of the wood, and following the turns of that most companionable of rivers. And there were boats going up and down; boats full of young people, all holiday finery and

mirth, and boats with duck-hunters and other, to Sir Roger, detestable marauders, with guns and dogs, and great bottles of beer. In the fine grove, on summer days, there might be found hundreds of people. There were pic-nic parties, fathers and mothers with whole families of children, and a grand promenade of the delighted artisans and their wives or sweethearts.

In the times prior to the sudden growth of the neighboring town, Great Stockington, and to the simultaneous development of the love-of-nature principle in the Stockingtonians, nothing had been thought of all these roads. The roads were well enough till they led to these inroads. Then Sir Roger aroused himself. This must be changed. The roads must be stopped. Nothing was easier to his fancy. His fellow-justices, Sir Benjamin Bullockshed and Squire Sheepshank, had asked his aid to stop the like nuisances, and it had been done at once. So Sir Roger put up notices all about, that the roads were to be stopped by an Order of Session, and these notices were signed, as required by law, by their worships of Bullockshed and Sheepshank. But Sir Roger soon found that it was one thing to stop a road leading from One-man-Town to Lonely Lodge, and another to attempt to stop those from Great Stockington to Rockville.

On the very first Sunday after the exhibition of those notice-boards, there was a ferment in the grove of Rockville, as if all the bees in the county were swarming there, with all the wasps and Hornets to boot. Great crowds were collected before each of these obnoxious placards, and the amount of curses vomited forth against them was really shocking for any day, but more especially for a Sunday. Presently there was a rush at them; they were torn down, and simultaneously pitched into the river. There were great crowds swarming all about Rockville all that day, and with looks so defiant that Sir Roger more than once contemplated sending off for the Yeoman Cavalry to defend his house, which he seriously thought in danger.

But so far from being intimidated from proceeding, this demonstration only made Sir Roger the more determined. To have so desperate and irreverent a population coming about his house and woods, now presented itself in a much more formidable aspect than ever. So, next day, not only were the placards once more hoisted, but rewards offered for the discovery of the offenders, attended with all the maledictions of the insulted majesty of the law. No notice was taken of this, but the whole of Great Stockington was in a buzz and an agitation. There were posters plastered all over the walls of the town, four times as large as Sir Roger’s notices, in this style:—

“Englishmen! your dearest rights are menaced! The Woods of Rockville, your ancient, rightful, and enchanting resorts, are to be closed to you. Stockingtonians! the eyes of the world are upon you. ‘Awake! arise! or be forever fallen!’ England expects every man to do his duty! And your duty is to

resist and defy the grasping soil-lords, to seize on your ancient Patrimony!”

“Patrimony! Ancient and rightful resort of Rockville!” Sir Roger was astounded at the audacity of this upstart, plebeian race. “What! they actually claimed Rockville, the heritage of a hundred successive Rockvilles, as their own. Sir Roger determined to carry it to the Sessions; and at the Sessions was a magnificent muster of all his friends. There was Sir Roger himself in the chair; and on either hand, a prodigious row of county squirearchy. There was Sir Benjamin Bullockshed, and Sir Thomas Tenterhook, and all the squires,—Sheepshank, Ramsbottom, Turnbull, Otterbrook, and Swagsides. The Clerk of the Session read the notice for the closing of all the footpaths through the woods of Rockville, and declared that this notice had been duly, and for the required period publicly posted. The Stockingtonians protested by their able lawyer Daredeville, against any order for the closing of these ancient woods—the inestimable property of the public.

“Property of the public!” exclaimed Sir Roger. “Property of the public!” echoed the multitudinous voices of indignant Bullocksheds, Tenterhooks, and Ramsbottoms. “Why, Sir, do you dispute the right of Sir Roger Rockville to his own estate?”

“By no means;” replied the undaunted Daredeville; “the estate of Rockville is unquestionably the property of the honorable baronet, Sir Roger Rockville; but the roads through it are the as unquestionable property of the public.”

The whole bench looked at itself; that is, at each other, in wrathful astonishment. The swelling in the diaphragms of the squires Otterbrook, Turnbull, and Swagsides, and all the rest of the worshipful row, was too big to admit of utterance. Only Sir Roger himself burst forth with an abrupt—“Impudent fellows! But I’ll see them —— first!”

“Grant the order!” said Sir Benjamin Bullockshed; and the whole bench nodded assent. The able lawyer Daredeville retired with a pleasant smile. He saw an agreeable prospect of plenty of grist to his mill. Sir Roger was rich, and so was Great Stockington. He rubbed his hands, not in the least like a man defeated, and thought to himself, “Let them go at it—all right.”

The next day the placards on the Rockville estate were changed for others bearing “Stopped by Order of Sessions!” and alongside of them were huge carefully painted boards, denouncing on all trespassers prosecutions according to law. The same evening came a prodigious invasion of Stockingtonians—tore all the boards and placards down, and carried them on their shoulders to Great Stockington, singing as they went, “See, the Conquering Heroes come!” They set them up in the centre of the Stockington market-place, and burnt them, along with an effigy of Sir Roger Rockville.

That was grist at once to the mill of the able lawyer Daredeville. He looked on, and rubbed his hands. Warrants were speedily issued by the Baronets of Bullockshed and Tenterhook, for the apprehension of the individuals who had been seen carrying off the notice-boards, for larceny, and against a number of others for trespass. There was plenty of work for Daredeville and his brethren of the robe; but it all ended, after the flying about of sundry mandamuses and assize trials, in Sir Roger finding that though Rockville was his, the roads through it were the public's.

As Sir Roger drove homeward from the assize, which finally settled the question of these footpaths, he heard the bells in all the steeples of Great Stockington burst forth with a grand peal of triumph. He closed fast the windows of his fine old carriage, and sunk into a corner; but he could not drown the intolerable sound. "But," said he, "I'll stop their pic-nic-ing. I'll stop their fishing. I'll have hold of them for trespassing and poaching!" There was war henceforth between Rockville and Great Stockington.

On the very next Sunday there came literally thousands of the jubilant Stockingtonians to Rockville. They had brought baskets, and were for dining, and drinking success to all footpaths. But in the great grove there were keepers, and watchers, who warned them to keep the path, that narrow well-worn line up the middle of the grove. "What! were they not to sit on the grass?"—"No!"—"What! were they not to pic-nic?"—"No! not there!"

The Stockingtonians felt a sudden damp on their spirits. But the river bank! The cry was. "To the river bank! There they would pic-nic." The crowd rushed away down the wood, but on the river bank they found a whole regiment of watchers, who pointed again to the narrow line of footpath, and told them not to trespass beyond it. But the islands! they went over to the islands. But there too were Sir Roger's forces, who warned them back! There was no road there —- all found there would be trespassers, and be duly punished.

The Stockingtonians discovered that their triumph was not quite so complete as they had flattered themselves. The footpaths were theirs, but that was all. Their ancient license was at an end. If they came there, there was no more fishing; if they came in crowds, there was no more pic-nic-ing; if they walked through the woods in numbers, they must keep to Indian file, or they were summoned before the county magistrates for trespass, and were soundly fined; and not even the able Daredeville would undertake to defend them.

The Stockingtonians were chop-fallen, but they were angry and dogged; and they thronged up to the village and the front of the hall. They filled the little inn in the hamlet—they went by scores, and roving all over the churchyard, read epitaphs

That teach the rustic moralists to die,

but don’t teach them to give up their old indulgences very good-humoredly. They went and sat in rows on the old churchyard wall, opposite to the very windows of the irate Sir Roger. They felt themselves beaten, and Sir Roger felt himself beaten. True, he could coerce them to the keeping of the footpaths—but, then, they had the footpaths! True, thought the Stockingtonians, we have the footpaths, but then the pic-nic-ing, and the fishing, and the islands! The Stockingtonians were full of sullen wrath, and Sir Roger was—oh, most expressive old Saxon phrase—HAIRSORE! Yes, he was one universal wound of vexation and jealousy of his rights. Every hair in his body was like a pin sticking into him. Come within a dozen yards of him; nay, at the most, blow on him, and he was excruciated—you rubbed his sensitive hairs at a furlong’s distance.

The next Sunday the people found the churchyard locked up, except during service, when beadles walked there, and desired them not to loiter and disturb the congregation, closing the gates, and showing them out like a flock of sheep the moment the service was over. This was fuel to the already boiling blood of Stockington. The week following, what was their astonishment to find the much frequented inn gone! it was actually gone! not a trace of it; but the spot where it had stood for ages, turfed, planted with young spruce trees, and fenced off with post and rail! The exasperated people now launched forth an immensity of fulminations against the churl Sir Roger, and a certain number of them resolved to come and seat themselves in the street of the hamlet and there dine; but a terrific thunderstorm, which seemed in league with Sir Roger, soon routed them, drenched them through, and on attempting to seek shelter in the cottages, the poor people said they were very sorry, but it was as much as their holdings were worth, and they dare not admit them.

Sir Roger had triumphed! It was all over with the old delightful days at Rockville. There was an end of pic-nic-ing, of fishing, and of roving in the islands. One sturdy disciple of Izaak Walton, indeed, dared to fling a line from the banks of Rockville grove, but Sir Roger came upon him and endeavored to seize him. The man coolly walked into the middle of the river, and, without a word, continued his fishing.

“Get out there!” exclaimed Sir Roger, “that is still on my property.” The man walked through the river to the other bank, where he knew that the land was rented by a farmer. “Give over,” shouted Sir Roger, “I tell you the water is mine.”

“Then,” said the fellow, “bottle it up, and be hanged to you! Don’t you see it is running away to Stockington?”

There was bad blood between Rockville and Stockington forever. Stockington was incensed, and Sir Roger was hairsore.

A new nuisance sprung up. The people of Stockington looked on the cottagers of Rockville as sunk in deepest darkness under such a man as Sir Roger and his cousin the vicar. They could not pic-nic, but they thought they could hold a camp-meeting; they could not fish for roach, but they thought they might for souls. Accordingly there assembled crowds of Stockingtonians on the green of Rockville, with a chair and a table, and a preacher with his head bound in a red handkerchief; and soon there was a sound of hymns, and a zealous call to come out of the darkness of the spiritual Babylon. But this was more than Sir Roger could bear; he rushed forth with all his servants, keepers, and cottagers, overthrew the table, and routing the assembly, chased them to the boundary of his estate.

The discomfited Stockingtonians now fulminated awful judgments on the unhappy Sir Roger, as a persecutor and a malignant. They dared not enter again on his parish, but they came to the very verge of it, and held weekly meetings on the highway, in which they sang and declaimed as loudly as possible, that the winds might bear their voices to Sir Roger’s ears.

To such a position was now reduced the last of the long line of Rockville. The spirit of a policeman had taken possession of him. He had keepers and watchers out on all sides, but that did not satisfy him. He was perpetually haunted with the idea that poachers were after his game, that trespassers were in his woods. His whole life was now spent in stealing to and fro in his fields and plantations, and prowling along his river side. He lurked under hedges, and watched for long hours under the forest trees. If any one had a curiosity to see Sir Roger, they had only to enter his fields by the wood side, and wander a few yards from the path, and he was almost sure to spring out over the hedge, and in angry tones demand their name and address. The descendant of the chivalrous and steel-clad De Rockvilles was sunk into a restless spy on his own ample property. There was but one idea in his mind—encroachment. It was destitute of all other furniture but the musty technicalities of warrants and commitments. There was a stealthy and skulking manner in everything that he did. He went to church on Sundays, but it was no longer by the grand iron gate opposite to his house, that stood generally with a large spider’s web woven over the lock, and several others in different corners of the fine iron tracery, bearing evidence of the long period since it had been opened. How different to the time when the Sir Roger and Lady of Rockville had had these gates thrown wide on a Sunday morning, and, with all their train of household servants at their back, with true antique dignity, marched with much proud humility into the house of God. Now, Sir Roger—the solitary, suspicious, undignified Sir Roger, the keeper and policeman of his own property—stole in at a little side gate from his paddock, and back the same way, wondering all the time whether there was not somebody in his pheasant preserves, or Sunday trespassers in his grove.

If you entered his house, it gave you as cheerless a feeling as its owner. There was the conservatory, so splendid with rich plants and flowers in his mother's time—now a dusty receptacle of hampers, broken hand-glasses, and garden tools. These tools could never be used, for the gardens were grown wild. Tall grass grew in the walks, and the huge unpruned shrubs disputed the passage with you. In the wood above the gardens, reached by several flights of fine, but now moss-grown, steps, there stood a pavilion, once clearly very beautiful. It was now damp and ruinous—its walls covered with greenness and crawling insects. It was a great lurking-place of Sir Roger when on the watch for poachers.

The line of the Rockvilles was evidently running fast out. It had reached the extremity of imbecility and contempt—it must soon reach its close.

Sir Roger used to make his regular annual visit to town; but of late, when there, he had wandered restlessly about the streets, peeping into the shop-windows; and if it rained, standing under entries for hours together, till it was gone over. The habit of lurking and peering about, was upon him; and his feet bore him instinctively into those narrow and crowded alleys where swarm the poachers of the city—the trespassers and anglers in the game preserves and streams of humanity. He had lost all pleasures in his club; the most exciting themes of political life retained no piquancy for him. His old friends ceased to find any pleasure in him. He was become the driest of all dry wells. Poachers, and anglers, and Methodists, haunted the wretched purlieus of his fast fading-out mind, and he resolved to go to town no more. His whole nature was centred in his woods. He was forever on the watch; and when at Rockville again, if he heard a door clap when in bed, he thought it a gun in his woods, and started up, and was out with his keepers.

Of what value was that magnificent estate to him?—those superb woods; those finely-hanging cliffs; that clear and riant river coming travelling on, and taking a noble sweep below his windows,—that glorious expanse of neat verdant meadows stretching almost to Stockington, and enlivened by numerous herds of the most beautiful cattle—those old farms and shady lanes overhung with hazel and wild rose; the glittering brook, and the songs of woodland birds—what were they to that worn-out old man, that victim of the delusive doctrine of blood, of the man-trap of an hereditary name?

There the poet could come, and feel the presence of divinity in that noble scene, and hear sublime whispers in the trees, and create new heavens and earths from the glorious chaos of nature around him, and in one short hour live an empyrean of celestial life and love. There could come the very humblest children of the plebeian town, and feel a throb of exquisite delight pervade their bosoms at the sight of the very flowers on the sod, and see heaven in the infinite blue above them. And poor Sir Roger, the holder, but not the possessor

of all, walked only in a region of sterility, with no sublimer ideas than poachers and trespassers—no more rational enjoyment than the brute indulgence of hunting like a ferret, and seizing his fellow-men like a bull-dog. He was a specimen of human nature degenerated, retrograded from the divine to the bestial, through the long-operating influences of false notions and institutions, continued beyond their time. He had only the soul of a keeper. Had he been only a keeper, he had been a much happier man.

His time was at hand. The severity which he had long dealt out towards all sorts of offenders made him the object of the deepest vengeance. In a lonely hollow of his woods, watching at midnight with two of his men, there came a sturdy knot of poachers. An affray ensued. The men perceived that their old enemy, Sir Roger, was there; and the blow of a hedge-stake stretched him on the earth. His keepers fled—and thus ignominiously terminated the long line of the Rockvilles. Sir Roger was the last of his line, but not of his class. There is a feudal art of sinking, which requires no study; and the Rockvilles are but one family among thousands who have perished in its practice.

In Great Stockington there lived a race of paupers. From the year of the 42d of Elizabeth, or 1601, down to the present generation, this race maintained an uninterrupted descent. They were a steady and unbroken line of paupers, as the parish books testify. From generation to generation their demands on the parish funds stand recorded. There were no lacunæ in their career; there never failed an heir to these families; fed on the bread of idleness and legal provision, these people nourished, increased, and multiplied. Sometimes compelled to work for the weekly dole which they received, they never acquired a taste for labor, or lost the taste for the bread for which they did not labor. These paupers regarded this maintenance by no means as a disgrace. They claimed it as a right,—as their patrimony. They contended that one-third of the property of the Church had been given by benevolent individuals for the support of the poor, and that what the Reformation wrongfully deprived them of, the great enactment of Elizabeth rightfully—and only rightfully—restored.

Those who imagine that all paupers merely claimed parish relief because the law ordained it, commit a great error. There were numbers who were hereditary paupers, and that on a tradition carefully handed down, that they were only manfully claiming their own. They traced their claims from the most ancient feudal times, when the lord was as much bound to maintain his villein in gross, as the villein was to work for the lord. These paupers were, in fact, or claimed to be, the original adscripti glebæ, and to have as much a claim to parish support as the landed proprietor had to his land. For this reason, in the old Catholic times, after they had escaped from villenage by running away and remaining absent from their hundred for a year and a day, dwelling for that period in a walled town, these people were among the most

diligent attendants at the Abbey doors, and when the Abbeys were dissolved, were, no doubt, among the most daring of these thieves, vagabonds, and sturdy rogues, who, after the Robin Hood fashion, beset the highways and solitary farms of England, and claimed their black mail in a very unceremonious style. It was out of this class that Henry VIII. hanged his seventy-two thousand during his reign, and, as it is said, without appearing materially to diminish their number.

That they continued to “increase, multiply, and replenish the earth,” overflowing all bounds, overpowering by mere populousness all the severe laws against them of whipping, burning in the hand, in the forehead or the breast, and hanging, and filling the whole country with alarm, is evident by the very act itself of Elizabeth.

Among these hereditary paupers who, as we have said, were found in Stockington, there was a family of the name of Deg. This family had never failed to demand and enjoy what it held to be its share of its ancient inheritance. It appeared from the parish records, that they had practised in different periods the crafts of shoe-making, tailoring, and chimney-sweeping; but since the invention of the stocking frame, they had, one and all of them, followed the profession of stocking-weavers, or as they were there called, stockingers. This was a trade which required no extreme exertion of the physical or intellectual powers. To sit in a frame, and throw the arms to and fro, was a thing that might either be carried to a degree of extreme diligence, or be let down into a mere apology for idleness. An “idle stockinger” was there no very uncommon phrase, and the Degs were always classed under that head. Nothing could be more admirably adapted than this trade for building a plan of parish relief upon. The Degs did not pretend to be absolutely without work, or the parish authorities would soon have set them to some real labor,—a thing that they particularly recoiled from, having a very old adage in the family, that “hard work was enough to kill a man.” The Degs were seldom, therefore, out of work, but they did not get enough to meet and tie. They had but little work if times were bad, and if they were good, they had large families and sickly wives or children. Be times what they would, therefore, the Degs were due and successful attendants at the parish pay-table. Nay, so much was this a matter of course, that they came at length not even to trouble themselves to receive their pay, but sent their young children for it; and it was duly paid. Did any parish officer, indeed, turn restive, and decline to pay a Deg, he soon found himself summoned before a magistrate, and such pleas of sickness, want of work, and poor earnings brought up, that he most likely got a sharp rebuke from the benevolent but uninquiring magistrate, and acquired a character for hard-heartedness that stuck to him.

So parish overseers learned to let the Degs alone; and their children

regularly brought up to receive the parish money for their parents, were impatient as they grew up to receive it for themselves. Marriages in the Deg family were consequently very early, and there were plenty of instances of married Degs claiming parish relief under the age of twenty, on the plea of being the parent of two children. One such precocious individual being asked by a rather verdant officer why he had married before he was able to maintain a family, replied, in much astonishment, that he had married in order to maintain himself by parish assistance. That he never had been able to maintain himself by his labor, nor ever expected to do it; his only hope, therefore, lay in marrying and becoming the father of two children, to which patriarchal rank he had now attained, and demanded his “pay.”

Thus had lived and flourished the Degs on their ancient patrimony, the parish, for upwards of two hundred years. Nay, we have no doubt whatever that, if it could have been traced, they had enjoyed an ancestry of paupers as long as the pedigree of Sir Roger Rockville himself. In the days of the most perfect villenage, they had, doubtless, eaten the bread of idleness, and claimed it as a right. They were numerous, improvident, ragged in dress, and fond of an ale-house and of gossip. Like the blood of Sir Roger, their blood had become peculiar through a long persistence of the same circumstances. It was become pure pauper blood. The Degs married, if not entirely among Degs, yet among the same class. None but a pauper would dream of marrying a Deg. The Degs, therefore, were in constitution, in mind, in habit, and in inclination, paupers. But a pure and unmixed class of this kind does not die out like an aristocratic stereotype. It increases and multiplies. The lower the grade, the more prolific, as is sometimes seen on a large and even national scale. The Degs threatened, therefore, to become a most formidable clan in the lower purlieus of Stockington, but luckily there is so much virtue even in evils, that one, not rarely cures another. War, the great evil, cleared the town of Degs.

Fond of idleness, of indulgence, of money easily got, and as easily spent, the Degs were rapidly drained off by recruiting parties during the last war. The young men enlisted, and were marched away; the young women married soldiers that were quartered in the town from time to time, and marched away with them. There were, eventually, none of the once numerous Degs left except a few old people, whom death was sure to draft off at no distant period with his regiment of the line which has no end. Parish overseers, magistrates, and master manufacturers, felicitated themselves at this unhoped-for deliverance from the ancient family of the Degs.

But one cold, clear winter evening, the east wind piping its sharp sibilant ditty in the bare-shorn hedges, and poking his sharp fingers into the sides of well broad-clothed men by way of passing jest, Mr. Spires, a great manufacturer of Stockington, driving in his gig some seven miles from the

town, passed a poor woman with a stout child on her back. The large ruddy-looking man in the prime of life, and in the great-coat and thick-worsted gloves of a wealthy traveller, cast a glance at the wretched creature trudging heavily on, expecting a pitiful appeal to his sensibilities, and thinking it a bore to have to pull off a glove and dive into his pocket for a copper; but to his surprise there was no demand, only a low curtsey, and the glimpse of a face of singular honesty of expression, and of excessive weariness.

Spires was a man of warm feelings; he looked earnestly at the woman, and thought he had never seen such a picture of fatigue in his life. He pulled up and said,

“You seem very tired, my good woman.”

“Awfully tired, sir.”

“And are you going far to-night?”

“To Great Stockington, sir, if God give me strength.”

“To Stockington!” exclaimed Mr. Spires. “Why you seem ready to drop. You’ll never reach it. You’d better stop at the next village.”

“Ay, sir, it’s easy stopping for those that have money.”

“And you’ve none, eh?”

“As God lives, sir, I’ve a sixpence, and that’s all.”

Mr. Spires put his hand in his pocket, and held out to her the next instant half-a-crown.

“There stop, poor thing—make yourself comfortable—it’s quite out of the question to reach Stockington. But stay—are your friends living in Stockington—what are you?”

“A poor soldier’s widow, sir. And may God Almighty bless you!” said the poor woman, taking the money, the tears standing in her large brown eyes as she curtsied very low.

“A soldier’s widow,” said Mr. Spires. She had touched the softest place in the manufacturer’s heart, for he was a very loyal man, and vehement champion of his country’s honor in the war. “So young,” said he, “how did you lose your husband?”

“He fell, sir,” said the poor woman; but she could get no further; she suddenly caught up the corner of her gray cloak, covered her face with it, and burst into an excess of grief.

The manufacturer felt as if he had hit the woman a blow by his careless question; he sat watching her for a moment in silence, and then said, “Come,

get into the gig, my poor woman; come, I must see you to Stockington.”

The poor woman dried her tears, and heavily climbed into the gig, expressing her gratitude in a very touching and modest manner. Spires buttoned the apron over her, and taking a look at the child, said in a cheerful tone to comfort her, “Bless me, but that is a fine thumping fellow, though. I don’t wonder you are tired, carrying such a load.”

The poor woman pressed the stout child, apparently two years old, to her breast, as if she felt it a great blessing and no load: the gig drove rapidly on.

Presently Mr. Spires resumed his conversation.

“So you are from Stockington?”

“No, sir; my husband was.”

“So: what was his name?”

“John Deg, sir.”

“Deg?” said Mr. Spires. “Deg, did you say?”

“Yes, sir.”

The manufacturer seemed to hitch himself off towards his own side of the gig, gave another look at her, and was silent. The poor woman was somewhat astonished at his look and movement, and was silent too.

After awhile Mr. Spires said again, “And do you hope to find friends in Stockington? Had you none where you came from?”

“None, sir, none in the world!” said the poor woman, and again her feelings seemed too strong for her. At length she added, “I was in service, sir, at Poole, in Dorsetshire, when I married; my mother only was living, and while I was away with my husband, she died. When—when the news came from abroad—that—when I was a widow, sir, I went back to my native place, and the parish officers said I must go to my husband’s parish, lest I and my child should become troublesome.”

“You asked relief of them?”

“Never; oh, God knows, never! My family have never asked a penny of a parish. They would die first, and so would I, sir; but they said I might do it, and I had better go to my husband’s parish at once—and they offered me money to go.”

“And you took it, of course?”

“No, sir; I had a little money, which I had earned by washing and laundering, and I sold most of my things, as I could not carry them, and came

off. I felt hurt, sir; my heart rose against the treatment of the parish, and I thought I should be better among my husband's friends—and my child would, if anything happened to me; I had no friends of my own."

Mr. Spires looked at the woman in silence. "Did your husband tell you anything of his friends? What sort of a man was he?"

"Oh, he was a gay young fellow, rather, sir; but not bad to me. He always said his friends were well off in Stockington."

"He did!" said the manufacturer, with a great stare, and as if bolting the words from his heart in a large gust of wonder.

The poor woman again looked at him with a strange look. The manufacturer whistled to himself, and giving his horse a smart cut with the whip, drove on faster than ever. The night was fast settling down; it was numbing cold; a gray fog rose from the river as they thundered over the old bridge; and tall engine chimneys, and black smoky houses loomed through the dusk before them. They were at Stockington.

As they slackened their pace up a hill at the entrance of the town, Mr. Spires again opened his mouth.

"I should be sorry to hurt your feelings, Mrs. Deg," he said, "but I have my fears that you are coming to this place with false expectations. I fear your husband did not give you the truest possible account of his family here."

"Oh, Sir! What—what is it?" exclaimed the poor woman; "in God's name, tell me!"

"Why, nothing more than this," said the manufacturer, "that there are very few of the Degs left here. They are old, and on the parish, and can do nothing for you."

The poor woman gave a deep sigh, and was silent.

"But don't be cast down," said Mr. Spires. He would not tell her what a pauper family it really was, for he saw that she was a very feeling woman, and he thought she would learn that soon enough. He felt that her husband had from vanity given her a false account of his connections; and he was really sorry for her.

"Don't be cast down," he went on, "you can wash and iron, you say; you are young and strong; those are your friends. Depend on them, and they'll be better friends to you than any other."

The poor woman was silent, leaning her head down on her slumbering child, and crying to herself; and thus they drove on, through many long and narrow streets, with gas flaring from the shops, but with few people in the

streets, and these hurrying shivering along the payment, so intense was the cold. Anon they stopped at a large pair of gates; the manufacturer rung a bell, which he could reach from his gig, and the gates presently were flung open, and they drove into a spacious yard, with a large handsome house, having a bright lamp burning before it, on one side of the yard, and tall warehouses on the other.

“Show this poor woman and her child to Mrs. Craddock’s, James,” said Mr. Spires, “and tell Mrs. Craddock to make them very comfortable; and if you will come to my warehouse to-morrow,” added he, addressing the poor woman, “perhaps I can be of some use to you.”

The poor woman poured out her heartfelt thanks, and following the old man servant, soon disappeared, hobbling over the pebbly pavement with her living load, stiffened almost to stone by her fatigue and her cold ride.

We must not pursue too minutely our narrative. Mrs. Deg was engaged to do the washing and getting up of Mr. Spire’s linen, and the manner in which she executed her task insured her recommendations to all their friends. Mrs. Deg was at once in full employ. She occupied a neat house in a yard near the meadows below the town, and in those meadows she might be seen spreading out her clothes to whiten on the grass, attended by her stout little boy. In the same yard lived a shoemaker, who had two or three children of about the same age as Mrs. Deg’s child. The children, as time went on, became play-fellows. Little Simon might be said to have the free run of the shoemaker’s house, and he was the more attracted thither by the shoemaker’s birds, and by his flute, on which he often played after his work was done.

Mrs. Deg took a great friendship for this shoemaker; and he and his wife, a quiet, kind-hearted woman, were almost all the acquaintances that she cultivated. She had found out her husband’s parents, but they were not of a description that at all pleased her. They were old and infirm, but they were of the true pauper breed, a sort of person, whom Mrs. Deg had been taught to avoid and to despise. They looked on her as a sort of second parish, and insisted that she should come and live with them, and help to maintain them out of her earnings. But Mrs. Deg would rather her little boy had died than have been familiarized with the spirit and habits of those old people. Despise them she struggled hard not to do, and she agreed to allow them sufficient to maintain them on condition that they desisted from any further application to the parish. It would be a long and disgusting story to recount all the troubles, annoyance, and querulous complaints, and even bitter accusations that she received from these connections, whom she could never satisfy; but she considered it one of her crosses in her life, and patiently bore it, seeing that they suffered no real want, so long as they lived, which was for years; but she would never allow her little Simon to be with them alone.

The shoemaker neighbor was a stout protection to her against the greedy demands of these old people, and of others of the old Degs, and also against another class of inconvenient visitors, namely, suitors, who saw in Mrs. Deg a neat and comely young woman with a flourishing business, and a neat and soon well-furnished house, a very desirable acquisition. But Mrs. Deg had resolved never again to marry, but to live for her boy, and she kept her resolve in firmness and gentleness.

The shoemaker often took walks in the extensive town meadows to gather groundsell and plantain for his canaries and gorse-linnets, and little Simon Deg delighted to accompany him with his own children. There William Watson, the shoemaker, used to point out to the children the beauty of the flowers, the insects, and other objects of nature; and while he sate on a stile and read in a little old book of poetry, as he often used to do, the children sate on the summer grass, and enjoyed themselves in a variety of plays.

The effect of these walks, and the shoemaker's conversation on little Simon Deg was such as never wore out of him through his whole life, and soon led him to astonish the shoemaker by his extraordinary conduct. He manifested the utmost uneasiness at their treading on the flowers in the grass; he would burst with tears if they persisted in it; and when asked why, he said they were so beautiful, and that they must enjoy the sunshine, and be very unhappy to die. The shoemaker was amazed, but indulged the lad's fancy. One day he thought to give him a great treat, and when they were out in the meadows, he drew from under his coat, a bow and arrow, and shot the arrow high up in the air. He expected to see him in an ecstacy of delight; his own children clapped their hands in transport, but Simon stood silent, and as if awestruck. "Shall I send up another?" asked the shoemaker.

"No, no," exclaimed the child, imploringly. "You say God lives up there, and he mayn't like it."

The shoemaker laughed, but presently he said, as if to himself, "There is too much imagination there. There will be a poet, if we don't take care."

The shoemaker offered to teach Simon to read, and to solidify his mind, as he termed it, by arithmetic, and then to teach him to work at his trade. His mother was very glad; and thought shoemaking would be a good trade for the boy; and that with Mr. Watson she should have him always near her. He was growing now a great lad, and was especially strong, and of a frank and daring habit. He was especially indignant at any act of oppression of the weak by the strong, and not seldom got into trouble by his championship of the injured in such cases amongst the boys of the neighborhood.

He was now about twelve years of age; when, going one day with a basket of clothes on his head to Mr. Spires's for his mother, he was noticed by Mr.

Spires himself from his counting-house window. The great war was raging; there was much distress amongst the manufacturers; and the people were suffering and exasperated against their masters. Mr. Spires, as a staunch tory, and supporter of the war, was particularly obnoxious to the work-people, who uttered violent threats against him. For this reason his premises were strictly guarded, and at the entrance of his yard, just within the gates, was chained a huge and fierce mastiff, his chain allowing him to approach near enough to intimidate any stranger, though not to reach him. The dog knew the people who came regularly about, and seemed not to notice them, but on the entrance of a stranger, he rose up, barked fiercely, and came to the length of his chain. This always drew the attention of the porter, if he were away from his box, and few persons dared to pass till he came.

Simon Deg was advancing with the basket of clean linen on his head, when the dog rushed out, and barking loudly, came exactly opposite to him, within a few feet. The boy, a good deal startled at first, reared himself with his back against the wall, but at a glance perceiving that the dog was at the length of his tether, he seemed to enjoy his situation, and stood smiling at the furious animal, and lifting his basket with both hands above his head, nodded to him, as if to say, “Well, old boy, you’d like to eat me, wouldn’t you?”

Mr. Spires, who sate near his counting-house window at his books, was struck with the bold and handsome bearing of the boy, and said to a clerk, “What boy is that?”

“It is Jenny Deg’s,” was the answer.

“Ha! that boy! Zounds! how boys do grow! What that’s the child that Jenny Deg was carrying when she came to Stockington; and what a strong, handsome, bright-looking fellow he is now!”

As the boy was returning, Mr. Spires call him to the counting-house door, and put some questions to him as to what he was doing and learning, and so on. Simon, taking off his cap with much respect, answered in such a clear and modest way, and with a voice that had so much feeling and natural music in it, that the worthy manufacturer was greatly taken with him.

“That’s no Deg,” said he, when he again entered the counting-house, “not a bit of it. He’s all Goodrick, or whatever his mother’s name was, every inch of him.”

The consequences of that interview was, that Simon Deg was very soon after perched on a stool in Mr. Spires’ counting-house, where he continued till he was twenty-two. Mr. Spires had no son, only a single daughter; and such were Simon Deg’s talents, attention to business, and genial disposition, that at that age Mr. Spires gave him a share in the concern. He was himself now

getting less fond of exertion than he had been, and placed the most implicit reliance on Simon's judgment and general management. Yet no two men could be more unlike in their opinions beyond the circle of trade. Mr. Spires was a staunch tory of the staunch old school. He was for Church and King, and for things remaining forever as they had been. Simon, on the other hand, had liberal and reforming notions. He was for the improvement of the people, and their admission to many privileges. Mr. Spires was, therefore, liked by the leading men of the place, and disliked by the people. Simon's estimation was precisely in the opposite direction. But this did not disturb their friendship; it required another disturbing cause—and that came.

Simon Deg and the daughter of Mr. Spires, grew attached to each other; and, as the father had thought Simon worthy of becoming a partner in the business, neither of the young people deemed that he would object to a partnership of a more domestic description. But here they made a tremendous mistake. No sooner was such a proposal hinted it, than Mr. Spires burst forth with the fury of all the winds from the bag of Ulysses.

"What! a Deg aspire to the hand of the sole heiress of the enormously opulent Spires?"

The very thought almost cut the proud manufacturer off with an apoplexy. The ghosts of a thousand paupers rose up before him, and he was black in the face. It was only by a prompt and bold application of leeches and lancet, that the life of the great man was saved. But there was an end of all further friendship between himself and the expectant Simon. He insisted that he should withdraw from the concern, and it was done. Simon, who felt his own dignity deeply wounded too, for dignity he had, though the last of a long line of paupers—his own dignity, not his ancestors'—took silently, yet not unrespectfully, his share—a good, round sum, and entered another house of business.

For several years there appeared to be a feud and a bitterness between the former friends; yet it showed itself in no other manner than by a careful avoidance of each other. The continental war came to an end; the manufacturing distress increased exceedingly. There came troublous times, and a fierce warfare of politics. Great Stockington was torn asunder by rival parties. On one side stood pre-eminent, Mr. Spires; on the other towered conspicuously, Simon Deg. Simon was grown rich, and extremely popular. He was on all occasions the advocate of the people. He said that he had sprung from, and was one of them. He had bought a large tract of land on one side of the town; and intensely fond of the country and flowers himself, he had divided this into gardens, built little summer-houses in them, and let them to the artisans. In his factory he had introduced order, cleanliness, and ventilation. He had set up a school for the children in the evenings, with a

reading-room and conversation-room for the work-people, and encouraged them to bring their families there, and enjoy music, books, and lectures. Accordingly, he was the idol of the people, and the horror of the old school of the manufacturers.

“A pretty upstart and demagogue I’ve nurtured,” said Mr. Spires often to his wife and daughter, who only sighed and were silent.

Then came a furious election. The town, for a fortnight, more resembled the worst corner of Tartarus than a Christian borough. Drunkenness, riot, pumping on one another, spencering one another, all sorts of violence and abuse ruled and raged till the blood of all Stockington was at boiling heat. In the midst of the tempest were everywhere seen, ranged on the opposite sides, Mr. Spires, now old and immensely corpulent, and Simon Deg, active, buoyant, zealous, and popular beyond measure. But popular though, he still was, the other and old tory side triumphed. The people were exasperated to madness; and when the chairing of the successful candidate commenced, there was a terrific attack made on the procession by the defeated party. Down went the chair, and the new member, glad to escape into an inn, saw his friends mercilessly assailed by the populace. There was a tremendous tempest of sticks, brick-bats, paving-stones, and rotten eggs. In the midst of this, Simon Deg, and a number of his friends, standing at the upper window of a hotel, saw Mr. Spires knocked down, and trampled on by the crowd. In an instant, and, before his friends had missed him from among them, Simon Deg was then darting through the raging mass, cleaving his way with a surprising vigor, and gesticulating, and no doubt shouting vehemently to the rioters, though his voice was lost in the din. In the next moment his hat was knocked off, and himself appeared in imminent danger; but, another moment, and there was a pause, and a group of people were bearing somebody from the frantic mob into a neighboring shop. It was Simon Deg, assisting in the rescue of his old friend and benefactor, Mr. Spires.

Mr. Spires was a good deal bruised, and wonderfully confounded and bewildered by his fall. His clothes were one mass of mud, and his face was bleeding copiously; but when he had had a good draught of water, and his face washed, and had time to recover himself, it was found that he had received no serious injury.

“They had like to have done for me though,” said he.

“Yes, and who saved you?” asked a gentleman.

“Ay, who was it? who was it?” asked the really warm-hearted manufacturer; “let me know? I owe him my life.”

“There he is!” said several gentlemen, at the same instant pushing forward

Simon Deg.

“What, Simon!” said Mr. Spires, starting to his feet. “Was it thee, my boy?” He did more, he stretched out his hand; the young man clasped it eagerly, and the two stood silent, and with a heartfelt emotion, which blended all the past into forgetfulness, and the future into a union more sacred than esteem.

A week hence and Simon Deg was the son-in-law of Mr. Spires. Though Mr. Spires had misunderstood Simon, and Simon had borne the aspect of opposition to his old friend in defence of conscientious principle, the wife and daughter of the manufacturer had always understood him, and secretly looked forward to some day of recognition and re-union.

Simon Deg was now the richest man in Stockington. His mother was still living to enjoy his elevation. She had been his excellent and wise house-keeper, and she continued to occupy that post still.

Twenty-five years afterwards, when the worthy old Spires was dead, and Simon Deg had himself two sons attained to manhood; when he had five times been mayor of Stockington, and had been knighted on the presentation of a loyal address; still his mother was living to see it; and William Watson, the shoe-maker, was acting as the sort of orderly at Sir Simon’s chief manufactory. He occupied the Lodge, and walked about, and saw that all was safe, and moving on as it should do.

It was amazing how the most plebeian name of Simon Peg had slid, under the hands of the Heralds, into the really aristocratical one of Sir Simon Degge. They had traced him up a collateral kinship, spite of his own consciousness, to a baronet of the same name of the county of Stafford, and had given him a coat of arms that was really astonishing.

It was some years before this that Sir Roger Rockville breathed his last. His title and estate had fallen into litigation. Owing to two generations having passed without any issue of the Rockville family except the one son and heir, the claims, though numerous, were so mingled with obscuring circumstances, and so equally balanced, that the lawyers raised quibbles and difficulties enough to keep the property in Chancery, till they had not only consumed all the ready money and rental, but had made frightful inroads into the estate itself. To save the remnant, the contending parties came to a compromise. A neighboring squire, whose grandfather had married a Rockville, was allowed to secure the title, on condition that the rest carried off the residuum of the estate. The woods and lands of Rockville were announced for sale!

It was at this juncture that old William Watson reminded Sir Simon Degge of a conversation in the great grove of Rockville, which they had held at the

time that Sir Roger was endeavoring to drive the people thence. “What a divine pleasure might this man enjoy,” said Simon Deg to his humble friend, “if he had a heart capable of letting others enjoy themselves.”

“But we talk without the estate,” said William Watson, “what might we do if we were tried with it?”

Sir Simon was silent for a moment; then observed that there was sound philosophy in William Watson’s remark. He said no more, but went away; and the next day announced to the astonished old man that he had purchased the groves and the whole ancient estate of Rockville!

Sir Simon Degge, the last of a long line of paupers, was become the possessor of the noble estate of Sir Roger Rockville of Rockville, the last of a long line of aristocrats!

The following summer, when the hay was lying in fragrant cocks in the great meadows of Rockville, and on the little islands in the river, Sir Simon Degge, Baronet of Rockville,—for such was now his title—through the suggestion of a great lawyer, formerly recorder of the borough of Stockington to the crown—held a grand fête on the occasion of his coming to reside at Rockville Hall, henceforth the family seat of the Degges. His house and gardens had been restored to the most consummate order. For years Sir Simon had been a great purchaser of works of art and literature, paintings, statuary, books, and articles of antiquity, including rich armor and precious works in ivory and gold.

First and foremost he gave a great banquet to his wealthy friends, and no man with a million and a half is without them—and in abundance. In the second place, he gave a substantial dinner to all his tenantry, from the wealthy farmer of five hundred acres to the tenant of a cottage. On this occasion he said, “Game is a great subject of heart-burning, and of great injustice to the country. It was the bane of my predecessor; let us take care it is not ours. Let every man kill the game on the land that he rents—then he will not destroy it utterly, nor allow it to grow into a nuisance. I am fond of a gun myself, but I trust to find enough for my propensity to the chase in my own fields and woods—if I occasionally extend my pursuit across the lands of my tenants, it shall not be to carry off the first-fruits of their feeding, and I shall still hold the enjoyment as a favor.”

We need not say that this speech was applauded most vociferously. Thirdly, and lastly, he gave a grand entertainment to all his work-people, both of the town and the country. His house and gardens were thrown open to the inspection of the whole assembled company. The delighted crowd admired immensely the pictures and the pleasant gardens. On the lawn, lying between the great grove and the hall, an enormous tent was pitched, or rather a vast

canvas canopy erected, open on all sides, in which was laid a charming banquet; a military band from Stockington barracks playing during the time. Here Sir Simon made a speech as rapturously received as that to the farmers. It was to the effect, that all the old privileges of wandering in the grove, and angling, and boating on the river, were restored. The inn was already rebuilt in a handsome Elizabethan style, larger than before, and to prevent it ever becoming a fane of intemperance, he had there posted as landlord, he hoped for many years to come, his old friend and benefactor, William Watson. William Watson should protect the inn from riot, and they themselves the groves and river banks from injury.

Long and loud were the applauses which this announcement occasioned. The young people turned out upon the green for a dance, and in the evening, after an excellent tea—the whole company descended the river to Stockington in boats and barges decorated with boughs and flowers, and singing a song made by William Watson for the occasion, called “The Health of Sir Simon, last and first of his Line.”

Years have rolled on. The groves and river banks and islands of Rockville are still greatly frequented, but are never known to be injured: poachers are never known there, for four reasons. First, nobody would like to annoy the good Sir Simon; secondly, game is not very numerous there; thirdly, there is no fun in killing it where there is no resistance; and fourthly, it is vastly more abundant in other proprietors’ demesnes, and it is fun to kill it there, where it is jealously watched, and there is a chance of a good spree with the keepers.

And with what different feelings does the good Sir Simon look down from his lofty eyrie, over the princely expanse of meadows, and over the glittering river, and over the stately woods to where Great Stockington still stretches farther and farther its red brick walls, its red-tiled roofs, and its tall smoke-vomiting chimneys. There he sees no haunts of crowded enemies to himself or any man. No upstarts, nor envious opponents, but a vast family of human beings, all toiling for the good of their families and their country. All advancing, some faster, some slower, to a better education, a better social condition, a better conception of the principles of art and commerce, and a clearer recognition of their rights and their duties, and a more cheering faith in the upward tendency of humanity.

Looking on this interesting scene from his distant and quiet home, Sir Simon sees what blessings flow—and how deeply he feels them in his own case—from a free circulation, not only of trade, but of human relations. How this corrects the mischiefs, moral and physical, of false systems and rusty prejudices;—and he ponders on schemes of no ordinary beauty and beneficence yet to reach his beloved town through them. He sees lecture halls and academies, means of sanitary purification, and delicious recreation, in

which baths, wash-houses, and airy homes figure largely; while public walks extend all round the great industrial hive, including wood, hills, meadow, and river in their circuit of many miles. There he lived and labored; there live and labor his sons; and there he trusts his family will continue to live and labor to all future generations; never retiring to the fatal indolence of wealth, but aiding onwards its active and ever-expanding beneficence.

Long may the good Sir Simon live and labor to realize these views. But already in a green corner of the pleasant churchyard of Rockville may be read this inscription on a marble headstone:—"Sacred to the Memory of Jane Deg, the mother of Sir Simon Degge, Bart., of Rockville. This stone is erected in honor of the best of Mothers by the most grateful of sons."

III.

THE GENTLEMAN BEGGAR

AN ATTORNEY'S STORY.

One morning, about five years ago, I called by appointment on Mr. John Balance, the fashionable pawnbroker, to accompany him to Liverpool, in pursuit for a Levanting customer,—for Balance, in addition to pawning, does a little business in the sixty per cent. line. It rained in torrents when the cab stopped at the passage which leads past the pawning boxes to his private door. The cabman rang twice, and at length Balance appeared, looming through the mist and rain in the entry, illuminated by his perpetual cigar. As I eyed him rather impatiently, remembering that trains wait for no man, something like a hairy dog, or a bundle of rags, rose up at his feet, and barred his passage for a moment. Then Balance cried out with an exclamation, in answer apparently to a something I could not hear, "What, man alive!—slept in the passage!—there, take that, and get some breakfast for Heaven's sake!" So saying, he jumped into the "Hansom," and we bowled away at ten miles an hour, just catching the Express as the doors of the station were closing. My curiosity was full set,—for although Balance can be free with his money, it is not exactly to beggars that his generosity is usually displayed; so when comfortably ensconced in a coupé, I finished with—

"You are liberal with your money this morning; pray, how often do you give silver to street cadgers?—because I shall know now what walk to take when flats and sharps leave off buying law."

Balance, who would have made an excellent parson if he had not been bred to a case-hardening trade, and has still a soft bit left in his heart that is always

fighting with his hard head, did not smile at all, but looked as grim as if squeezing a lemon into his Saturday night's punch. He answered slowly, "A cadger—yes; a beggar—a miserable wretch, he is now; but let me tell you, Master David, that that miserable bundle of rags was born and bred a gentleman; the son of a nobleman, the husband of an heiress, and has sat and dined at tables where you and I, Master David, are only allowed to view the plate by favor of the butler. I have lent him thousands, and been well paid. The last thing I had from him was his court suit; and I hold now his bill for one hundred pounds that will be paid, I expect, when he dies."

"Why, what nonsense you are talking! you must be dreaming this morning. However, we are alone, I'll light a weed, in defiance of Railway law, you shall spin that yarn; for, true or untrue, it will fill up the time to Liverpool."

"As for yarn," replied Balance, "the whole story is short enough; and as for truth, that you may easily find out if you like to take the trouble. I thought the poor wretch was dead, and I own it put me out meeting him this morning, for I had a curious dream last night."

"Oh, hang your dreams! Tell us about this gentleman beggar that bleeds you of half-crowns—that melts the heart even of a pawnbroker!"

"Well, then, that beggar is the illegitimate son of the late Marquis of Hoopborough by a Spanish lady of rank. He received a first-rate education, and was brought up in his father's house. At a very early age he obtained an appointment in a public office, was presented by the marquis at court, and received into the first society, where his handsome person and agreeable manners made him a great favorite. Soon after coming of age, he married the daughter of Sir E. Bumper, who brought him a very handsome fortune, which was strictly settled on herself. They lived in splendid style, kept several carriages, a house in town, and a place in the country. For some reason or other, idleness, or to plead his lady's pride he said, he resigned his appointment. His father died, and left him nothing; indeed, he seemed at that time very handsomely provided for.

"Very soon Mr. and Mrs. Molinos Fitz-Roy began to disagree. She was cold, correct—he was hot and random. He was quite dependent on her, and she made him feel it. When he began to get into debt, he came to me. At length some shocking quarrel occurred; some case of jealousy on the wife's side, not without reason, I believe; and the end of it was Mr. Fitz-Roy was turned out of doors. The house was his wife's, the furniture was his wife's, and the fortune was his wife's—he was, in fact, her pensioner. He left with a few hundred pounds ready money, and some personal jewellery, and went to a hotel. On these and credit he lived. Being illegitimate, he had no relations; being a fool, when he spent his money he lost his friends. The world took his

wife's part, when they found she had the fortune, and the only parties who interfered were her relatives, who did their best to make the quarrel incurable. To crown all, one night he was run over by a cab, was carried to a hospital, and lay there for months, and was during several weeks of the time unconscious. A message to the wife, by the hands of one of his debauched companions, sent by a humane surgeon, obtained an intimation that 'if he died, Mr. Croak, the undertaker to the family, had orders to see to the funeral,' and that Mrs. Molinos was on the point of starting for the Continent, not to return for some years. When Fitz-Roy was discharged, he came to me limping on two sticks, to pawn his court suit, and told me his story. I was really sorry for the fellow, such a handsome, thoroughbred-looking man. He was going then into the west somewhere, to try to hunt out a friend. 'What to do, Balance,' he said, 'I don't know. I can't dig, and unless somebody will make me their gamekeeper, I must starve or beg, as my Jezebel bade me when we parted!'

"I lost sight of Molinos for a long time, and when I next came upon him it was in the Rookery of Westminster, in a low lodging-house, where I was searching with an officer for stolen goods. He was pointed out to me as the 'gentleman cadger,' because he was so free with his money when 'in luck.' He recognized me, but turned away then. I have since seen him, and relieved him more than once, although he never asks for anything. How he lives, Heaven knows. Without money, without friends, without useful education of any kind, he tramps the country, as you saw him, perhaps doing a little hop-picking or hay-making, in season, only happy when he obtains the means to get drunk. I have heard through the kitchen whispers that you know come to me, that he is entitled to some property; and I expect if he were to die his wife would pay the hundred pound bill I hold; at any rate, what I have told you I know to be true, and the bundle of rags I relieved just now is known in every thieves' lodging in England as the 'gentleman cadger.' "

This story produced an impression on me,—I am fond of speculation, and like the excitement of a legal hunt as much as some do a fox-chase. A gentleman a beggar, a wife rolling in wealth, rumors of unknown property due to the husband; it seemed as if there were pickings for me amidst this carrion of pauperism.

Before returning from Liverpool, I had purchased the gentleman beggar's acceptance from Balance. I then inserted in the "Times" the following advertisement: "Horatio Molinos Fitz-Roy.—If this gentleman will apply to David Discount, Esq., Solicitor, St. James's, he will hear of something to his advantage. Any person furnishing Mr. F.'s correct address, shall receive 1l. 1s. reward. He was last seen," &c. Within twenty-four hours I had ample proof of the wide circulation of the "Times." My office was besieged with beggars of every degree, men and women, lame and blind, Irish, Scotch, and English,

some on crutches, some in bowls, some in go-carts. They all knew him as “the gentleman,” and I must do the regular fraternity of tramps the justice to say that not one would answer a question until he made certain that I meant the “gentleman” no harm.

One evening, about three weeks after the appearance of the advertisement, my clerk announced “another beggar.” There came in an old man leaning upon a staff, clad in a soldier’s great coat all patched and torn, with a battered hat, from under which a mass of tangled hair fell over his shoulders and half concealed his face. The beggar, in a weak, wheezy, hesitating tone, said, “You have advertised for Molinos Fitz-Roy. I hope you don’t mean him any harm; he is sunk, I think, too low for enmity now; and surely no one would sport with such misery as his.” These last words were uttered in a sort of piteous whisper.

I answered quickly, “Heaven forbid I should sport with misery; I mean and hope to do him good, as well as myself.”

“Then, Sir, I am Molinos Fitz-Roy!”

While we were conversing candles had been brought in. I have not very tender nerves—my head would not agree with them—but I own I started and shuddered when I saw and knew that the wretched creature before me was under thirty years of age and once a gentleman. Sharp, aquiline features, reduced to literal skin and bone, were begrimed and covered with dry fair hair; the white teeth of the half-open mouth chattered with eagerness, and made more hideous the foul pallor of the rest of the countenance. As he stood leaning on a staff half bent, his long, yellow bony fingers clasped over the crutch-head of his stick, he was indeed a picture of misery, famine, squalor, and premature age, too horrible to dwell upon. I made him sit down, sent for some refreshment, which he devoured like a ghoul, and set to work to unravel his story. It was difficult to keep him to the point; but with pains I learned what convinced me that he was entitled to some property, whether great or small there was no evidence. On parting, I said “Now Mr. F., you must stay in town while I make proper inquiries. What allowance will be enough to keep you comfortably?”

He answered humbly after much pressing, “Would you think ten shillings too much!”

I don’t like, if I do those things at all, to do them shabbily, so I said, “Come every Saturday and you shall have a pound.” He was profuse in thanks of course, as all such men are as long as distress lasts.

I had previously learned that my ragged client’s wife was in England, living in a splendid house in Hyde Park Gardens, under her maiden name. On

the following day the Earl of Owing called upon me, wanting five thousand pounds by five o'clock the same evening. It was a case of life or death with him, so I made my terms and took advantage of his pressure to execute a coup de main. I proposed that he should drive me home to receive the money, calling at Mrs. Molinos in Hyde Park Gardens, on our way. I knew that the coronet and liveries of his father, the Marquis, would ensure me an audience with Mrs. Molinos Fitz-Roy.

My scheme answered. I was introduced into the lady's presence. She was, and probably is, a very stately, handsome woman, with a pale complexion, high solid forehead, regular features, thin, pinched, self-satisfied mouth. My interview was very short. I plunged into the middle of the affair, but had scarcely mentioned the word husband, when she interrupted me with "I presume you have lent this profligate person money, and want me to pay you." She paused, and then said, "He shall not have a farthing." As she spoke, her white face became scarlet.

"But, Madam, the man is starving. I have strong reasons for believing he is entitled to property, and if you refuse any assistance, I must take other measures." She rang the bell, wrote something rapidly on a card; and, as the footman appeared, pushed it towards me across the table, with the air of touching a toad, saying, "There, Sir, is the address of my solicitors; apply to them if you think you have any claim. Robert, show the person out, and take care he is not admitted again."

So far I had effected nothing; and, to tell the truth, felt rather crest-fallen under the influence of that grand manner peculiar to certain great ladies and to all great actresses.

My next visit was to the attorneys Messrs'. Leasem and Fashun, of Lincoln's Inn Square, and there I was at home. I had had dealings with the firm before. They are agents for half the aristocracy, who always run in crowds like sheep after the same wine-merchants, the same architects, the same horse-dealers, and the same law-agents. It may be doubted whether the quality of law and land management they get on this principle is quite equal to their wine and horses. At any rate, my friends of Lincoln's Inn, like others of the same class, are distinguished by their courteous manners, deliberate proceedings, innocence of legal technicalities, long credit and heavy charges. Leasem, the elder partner, wears powder and a huge bunch of seals, lives in Queen Square, drives a brougham, gives the dinners and does the cordial department. He is so strict in performing the latter duty, that he once addressed a poacher who had shot a Duke's keeper, as "my dear creature," although he afterwards hung him.

Fashun has chambers in St. James Street, drives a cab, wears a tip, and

does the grand haha style.

My business lay with Leasem. The interviews and letters passing were numerous. However, it came at last to the following dialogue:—

“Well, my dear Mr. Discount,” began Mr. Leasem, who hates me like poison. “I’m really very sorry for that poor dear Molinos—knew his father well; a great man, a perfect gentleman; but you know what women are, eh, Mr. Discount? My client won’t advance a shilling, she knows it would only be wasted in low dissipation. Now don’t you think (this was said very insinuatingly)—don’t you think he had better be sent to the work-house; very comfortable accommodation there, I can assure you—meat twice a week, and excellent soup; and then, Mr. D., we might consider about allowing you something for that bill.”

“Mr. Leasem, can you reconcile it to your conscience to make such an arrangement. Here’s a wife rolling in luxury, and a husband starving!”

“No, Mr. Discount, not starving; there is the work-house, as I observed before; besides, allow me to suggest that these appeals to feeling are quite unprofessional—quite unprofessional.”

“But, Mr. Leasem, touching this property which the poor man is entitled to.”

“Why, there again, Mr. D., you must excuse me; you really must. I don’t say he is, I don’t say he is not. If you know he is entitled to property, I am sure you know how to proceed; the law is open to you, Mr. Discount—the law is open; and a man of your talent will know how to use it.”

“Then, Mr. Leasem, you mean that I must in order to right this starving man, file a Bill of Discovery to extract from you the particulars of his rights. You have the Marriage Settlement, and all the information, and you decline to allow a pension, or afford any information; the man is to starve, or go to the work-house?”

“Why, Mr. D., you are so quick and violent, it really is not professional; but you see (here a subdued smile of triumph), it has been decided that a solicitor is not bound to afford such information as you ask, to the injury of his client.”

“Then you mean that this poor Molinos may rot and starve, while you keep secret from him, at his wife’s request, his title to an income, and that the Court of Chancery will back you in this iniquity?”

I kept repeating the word “starve,” because I saw it made my respectable opponent wince. “Well, then, just listen to me. I know that in the happy state of our equity law, Chancery can’t help my client; but I have another plan; I

shall go hence to my office, issue a writ, and take your client's husband in execution—as soon as he is lodged in jail, I shall file his schedule in the Insolvent Court, and when he comes up for his discharge, I shall put you in the witness-box, and examine you on oath, 'touching any property of which you know the insolvent to be possessed,' and where will be your privileged communications then?"

The respectable Leasem's face lengthened in a twinkling, his comfortable confident air vanished, he ceased twiddling his gold chain, and at length he muttered, "Suppose we pay the debt?"

"Why, then, I'll arrest him the day after for another."

"But, my dear Mr. Discount, surely such, conduct would not be quite respectable?"

"That's my business; my client has been wronged, I am determined to right him, and when the aristocratic firm of Leasem and Fashun takes refuge, according to the custom of respectable repudiators, in the cool arbors of the Court of Chancery, why, a mere bill-discounting attorney, like David Discount, need not hesitate about cutting a bludgeon out of the Insolvent Court."

"Well, well, Mr. D., you are so warm—so fiery; we must deliberate, we must consult. You will give me until the day after to-morrow, and then we'll write you our final determination; in the, meantime send us copy of your authority to act for Mr. Molinos Fitz-Roy."

Of course I lost no time in getting the gentleman beggar to sign a proper letter.

On the appointed day came a communication with the L. and F. seal, which I opened not without unprofessional eagerness. It was as follows:

"In re Molinos Fitz-Roy and Another.

"Sir,—In answer to your application on behalf of Mr. Molinos Fitz-Roy, we beg to inform you that under the administration of a paternal aunt who died intestate, your client is entitled to two thousand five hundred pounds eight shillings and sixpence, Three per Cents; one thousand five hundred pounds nineteen shillings and fourpence, Three per Cents Reduced; one thousand pounds, Long Annuities; five hundred pounds, Bank Stock; three thousand five hundred pounds, India Stock, besides other securities, making up about ten thousand pounds, which we are prepared to transfer over to Mr. Molinos Fitz-Roy's direction forthwith."

Here was a windfall! It quite took away my breath.

At dusk came my gentleman beggar, and what puzzled me was how to break the news to him. Being very much overwhelmed with business that day,

I had not much time for consideration. He came in rather better dressed than when I first saw him, with only a week's beard on his chin; but, as usual, not quite sober. Six weeks had elapsed since our first interview. He was still the humble, trembling, low-voiced creature, I first knew him.

After a prelude, I said, "I find, Mr. F., you are entitled to something; pray, what do you mean to give me in addition to my bill for obtaining it?" He answered rapidly, "Oh, take half; if there is one hundred pounds, take half; if there is five hundred pounds, take half."

"No, no, Mr. F., I don't do business in that way, I shall be satisfied with ten per cent."

It was so settled. I then led him out into the street, impelled to tell the news, yet dreading the effect; not daring to make the revelation in my office for fear of a scene.

I began hesitatingly, "Mr. Fitz-Roy, I am happy to say that I find you are entitled to.... ten thousand pounds!"

"Ten thousand pounds!" he echoed. "Ten thousand pounds!" he shrieked. "Ten thousand pounds!" he yelled, seizing my arm violently.

"You are a brick,—— Here, cab! cab!" Several drove up—the shout might have been heard a mile off. He jumped in the first.

"Where to?" said the driver.

"To a tailor's, you rascal!"

"Ten thousand pounds! ha, ha, ha!" he repeated hysterically, when in the cab; and every moment grasping my arm. Presently he subsided, looked me straight in the face, and muttered with agonizing fervor, "What a jolly brick you are!"

The tailor, the hosier, the bootmaker, the hairdresser, were in turn visited by this poor pagan of externals. As by degrees under their hands he emerged from the beggar to the gentleman, his spirits rose; his eyes brightened; he walked erect, but always nervously grasping my arm; fearing, apparently, to lose sight of me for a moment, lest his fortune should vanish with me. The impatient pride with which he gave his order to the astonished tradesman for the finest and best of everything, and the amazed air of the fashionable hairdresser when he presented his matted locks and stubble chin to be "cut and shaved," may be acted—it cannot be described.

By the time the external transformation was complete, and I sat down in a café in the Haymarket opposite a haggard but handsome thoroughbred-looking man, whose air, with the exception of the wild eyes and deeply-browned face, did not differ from the stereotyped men about town sitting around us, Mr.

Molinos Fitz-Roy had already almost forgotten the past; he bullied the waiter, and criticized the wine, as if he had done nothing else but dine and drink and scold there all the days of his life.

Once he wished to drink my health, and would have proclaimed his whole story to the coffee-room assembly in a raving style. When I left he almost wept in terror at the idea of losing sight of me. But, allowing for these ebullitions—the natural result of such a whirl of events—he was wonderfully calm and self-possessed.

The next day his first care was to distribute fifty pounds among his friends the cadgers, at a house of call in Westminster, and formally to dissolve his connection with them; those present undertaking for the "fraternity," that for the future he should never be noticed by them in public or private.

I cannot follow his career much further. Adversity had taught him nothing. He was soon again surrounded by the well-bred vampires who had forgotten him when penniless; but they amused him, and that was enough. The ten thousand pounds were rapidly melting when he invited me to a grand dinner at Richmond, which included a dozen of the most agreeable, good-looking, well-dressed dandies of London, interspersed with a display of pretty butterfly bonnets. We dined deliciously, and drank as men do of iced wines in the dog-days—looking down from Richmond Hill.

One of the pink bonnets crowned Fitz-Roy with a wreath of flowers; he looked—less the intellect—as handsome as Alcibiades. Intensely excited and flushed, he rose with a champagne glass in his hand to propose my health.

The oratorical powers of his father had not descended on him. Jerking out sentences by spasms, at length he said, "I was a beggar—I am a gentleman—thanks to this——"

Here he leaned on my shoulder heavily a moment, and then fell back. We raised him, loosened his neckcloth—

"Fainted!" said the ladies—

"Drunk!" said the gentlemen—

He was dead!

IV.

"EVIL IS WROUGHT BY WANT OF THOUGHT."

"It must come some day; and come when it will, it will be hard to do, so

we had best go at once, Sally. I shall have more trouble with Miss Isabel than you will with Miss Laura; for I am twice the favorite you are."

So said Fanny to her cousin, who had just turned to descend the staircase of Aldington Hall, where they had both lived since they were almost children, in attendance on the two daughters of the old baronet, who were near their own ages, and had always treated them with great kindness.

"I am not sure of that," replied Sally, "for Miss Laura is so seldom put out, that when once she is vexed, she will be hard to comfort; and I am sure, Fanny, she loves me every bit as well as Miss Isabel does you, though it is her way to be so quiet. I dare say she will cry when I say I must go; but then John would be like to cry too, if I put him off longer."

This consideration restored Sally's courage, and she proceeded with Fanny to the gallery into which the rooms of their young mistresses opened; but here Fanny's heart failed her; and, stopping short, she said,

"Suppose we tell them to wait awhile longer, as the young ladies are going to travel. We might as well see the world first, and marry in a year or two. But still," added she, after a pause, "I could not find it in my heart to say so to Thomas; and I promised him to speak to-day."

Each cousin then knocked at the door of her mistress. Laura was not in her room, and Sally went to seek her below stairs; but Isabel called to Fanny to go in.

Fanny obeyed, and walking forward a few steps, faltered out, with many blushes, that as young Thomas had kept company with her for nearly a twelvemonth, and had taken and furnished a little cottage, and begged hard to take her home to it; she was sorry to say, that if Miss Isabel would give her leave, she wished to give warning and to go from her service in a month.

Fanny's most sanguine wishes or fears, must have been surpassed by the burst of surprise and grief that followed her modest statement. Isabel reproached her; refused to take her warning; declared she would never see her again if she left the Hall, and that rather than be served by any but her dear Fanny, she would wait upon herself all her life. Fanny expostulated, and told her mistress that, foreseeing her unwillingness to lose her, she had already put Thomas off several months; and that at last, to gain further delay, she had run the risk of appearing selfish, by refusing to marry him till he had furnished a whole cottage for her. This, she said he had—by working late and early—accomplished in a surprisingly short time, and had the day before claimed the reward of his industry. "And now, Miss," added she, "he gets quite pale, and begins to believe I do not love him, and yet I do, better than all the world, and could not find it in my heart to vex him, and make him look sad again.

Yesterday he seemed so happy, when I promised to be his wife in a month." Here Fanny burst into tears. Her sobs softened Isabel, who consented to let her go; and after talking over her plans, became as enthusiastic in promoting, as she had at first been, in opposing them. Thomas was to take Fanny over to see the cottage, that evening, and Isabel, in the warmth of her heart, promised to accompany them. Fanny thanked her with a curtesy, and thought how pleased she ought to be at such condescension in her young mistress, but could not help fearing that her sweetheart would not half appreciate the favor.

After receiving many promises of friendship and assistance, Fanny hastened to report to Sally the success of her negotiation. Sally was sitting in their little bedroom, thoughtful, and almost sad. She listened to Fanny's account; and replied in answer to her questions concerning Miss Laura's way of taking her warning, "I am afraid, Fanny, you were right in thinking yourself the greatest favorite, for Miss Laura seemed almost pleased at my news; she took me by the hand, and said, 'I am very glad to hear you are to marry such a good young man as every one acknowledges John Maythorn to be, and you may depend upon my being always ready to help you, if you want assistance.' She then said a deal about my having lived with her six years, and not having once displeased her, and told me that master had promised my mother and yours too, that his young ladies should see after us all our lives. This was very kind, to be sure; but then Miss Isabel promised you presents whether you wanted assistance or not, and is to give you a silk gown and a white ribbon for the wedding, and is to go over to the cottage with you; now Miss Laura did not say a word of any such thing."

Fanny tried to comfort her cousin by saying it was Miss Laura's quiet way; but she could not help secretly rejoicing that her own mistress was so generous and affectionate.

In the evening the two sweethearts came to lead their future wives to the cottages, which were near each other, and at about a mile from the Hall. John had a happy walk. He learned from Sally that he was to "take her home" in a month, and was so pleased at the news, that he could scarcely be happier when she bustled about, exclaiming at every new sight in the pretty bright little cottage. The tea-caddy, the cupboard of china, and a large cat, each called forth a fresh burst of joy. Sally thought everything "the prettiest she had ever seen;" and when John made her sit in the arm-chair and put her feet on the fender, as if she were already mistress of the cottage, she burst into sobs of joy. We will not pause to tell how her sobs were stopped, nor what promises of unchanging kindness, were made in that bright little kitchen; but we may safely affirm that Sally and John were happier than they had ever been in their lives, and that old Mrs. Maythorn, who was keeping the cottage for Sally, felt all her fondest wishes were fulfilled as she saw the two lovers depart.

Fanny and Thomas, who had left them at the cottage door, walked on to their own future home, quite overwhelmed by the honor Miss Isabel was conferring on them by walking at their side.

“You see, Miss,” said Thomas, as he turned the key of his cottage-door, “there is nothing to speak of here, only such things as are necessary, and all of the plainest; but it will do well enough for us poor folks;” and as he threw open the door, he found to his surprise that what had seemed to him yesterday so pretty and neat, now looked indeed “all of the plainest.” The very carpet, and metal teapot, which he had intended as surprises for Fanny, he was now ashamed of pointing out to her, and he apologized to Isabel for the coarse quality of the former, telling her it was only to serve till he could get a better.

“Yes,” answered she, “this is not half good enough for my little Fanny, she must have a real Brussels carpet. I will send her one. I will make your cottage so pretty, Fanny, you shall have a nice china tea set, not these common little things, and I will give you some curtains for the window.” Thomas blushed as this deficiency was pointed out. “Why, Miss,” said he, “I meant to have trained the rose tree over the window, I thought that would be shady, and sweet in the summer, and in the winter, why, we should want all the day-light; but then to be sure, curtains will be much better.”

“Yes, Thomas,” replied the young lady, “and warm in the winter; you could not be comfortable with a few bare rose stalks before your window, when the snow was on the ground.” This had not occurred to Thomas, who now said faintly, “Oh, no, Miss,” and felt that curtains were indispensable to comfort.

Similar deficiencies or short-comings were discovered everywhere, so that even Fanny, who would at first be pleased with all she saw, in spite of the numerous defects that seemed to exist everywhere, gradually grew silent and ashamed of her cottage. She did her utmost to conceal from Thomas how entirely she agreed with her mistress, and as this generous young lady finished every remark, by saying “I will get you one,” or “I will send you another,” she felt that all would be right before long.

As Thomas closed the door, he wondered how in his wish to please Fanny he could have deceived himself so completely as to the merits of his cottage and furniture; but he too comforted himself by remembering how his kind patroness was to remedy all the defects; “though,” thought he, “I should have liked better to have done it all well myself.”

The lady and the two lovers walked homewards, almost without speaking, till they overtook John and Sally, who were whispering and laughing, talking of their cottage, Mrs. Maythorn’s joy at seeing them happy, their future plans for themselves and her, and all in so confused a way, that though twenty new subjects were started and discussed, none came to and conclusion, but that

John and Sally loved each other and were very, very happy.

“What ails you, Thomas?” said John. “Has any one robbed your house? I told you it was not safe to leave it,” but seeing Miss Isabel, he touched his hat and fell back to where Fanny was talking to her cousin. Isabel, however, left them that she might take a short cut through the park, while they went round by the road.

At the end of the walk, Sally was half inclined to be dissatisfied with her furniture, so much had Fanny boasted of the improvements that were to be made in her own, but she could not get rid of the first impression it had made on her, and in a few days she quite forgot the want of curtains and carpet, and could only remember the happy time when she sat in the arm-chair with her foot on the fender.

As the month drew to a close, the two sisters made presents to their maids. Laura gave Sally a merino dress, a large piece of linen, a cellar full of coals, and a five pound note. Isabel gave Fanny a silk gown that cost three guineas, a beautiful white bonnet ribbon, a small chimney glass (for which she kindly went into debt), three left-off muslin dresses, a painting done by her own hand, in a handsome gilt frame, and a beautiful knitted purse. Besides all this, she told Fanny it was still her intention to get the other things she had promised for the cottage, as soon as she had paid for the chimney glass. “I am very sorry,” she said, “that just now I am so poor, for unfortunately, as you know, I have had to pay for those large music volumes I ordered when I was in London, and which after all I never used. It always happens that I am poor when I want to make presents.”

Fanny stopped her mistress with abundant thanks for the beautiful things she had already given her. “I am sure, Miss,” said she, “I shall scarcely dare wear these dresses, they look so lady-like and fine; Sally will seem quite strange by me. And this purse too, Miss; I never saw anything so smart.”

Isabel was quite satisfied that she had eclipsed her sister in the number and value of her gifts, but she still assured Fanny she had but made a beginning. Large and generous indeed, were this young lady’s intentions.

On the wedding morning Isabel rose early and dressed herself without assistance, then crossing to the room of the two cousins, she entered without knocking. Sally was gone, and Fanny lay sleeping alone.

“How pretty she is!” said Isabel to herself. “She ought to be dressed like a lady to-day. I will see to it;” then glancing proudly at the silk gown, which was laid out with all the other articles of dress, ready for the coming ceremony, her heart swelled with consciousness of her own generosity. “I have done nothing yet,” continued she; “she has been with me nearly six years, and always

pleased me entirely, then papa promised her mother that he should befriend her as long as we both lived, and he has charged us both to do our utmost for our brides. Laura has bought Sally a shawl, I ought to give one too—what is this common thing? Fanny! Fanny! wake up. I am come to be your maid to-day, for you shall be mistress on your wedding morning and have a lady to dress you. What is this shawl? It will not do with a silk dress, wait a minute," and off she darted, leaving Fanny sitting up and rubbing her eyes trying to remember what her young mistress had said. Before she was quite conscious, Isabel returned with a Norfolk shawl of fine texture and design, but somewhat soiled. "There," said she, throwing it across the silk gown, "those go much better together. I will give it you, Fanny."

"Thank you, Miss," said Fanny, in a tone of hesitation; "but—but suppose, Miss, I was to wear Thomas' shawl just to-day, as he gave it me for the wedding, and John got Sally one like it—I think, Miss—don't you think, Miss, it might seem unkind to wear any other just to-day?"

"Why, it is just to-day I want to make you look like a lady, Fanny; no, no, you must not put on that white cotton-looking shawl with a silk dress, and this ribbon," said Isabel, taking up the bonnet, proudly. Fanny looked sad, but the young mistress did not see this, for she was examining the white silk gloves that lay beside the bonnet. "These," thought she, "are not quite right, they look servantish, but my kid gloves would not fit her, besides, I have none clean, and it is well, perhaps, that she should have a few things to mark her rank. Yes, they will do."

There was so much confusion between the lady's offering help, and the maid's modestly refusing it, that the toilette was long in completing. At last, however, Isabel was in ecstasies. "Look," said she, "how the bonnet becomes you! and the Norfolk shawl, too, no one would think you were only a lady's-maid, Fanny. Stop, I will get a ribbon for your throat." Off she flew, and was back again in five minutes. "But what is that for, Fanny? Are you afraid it will rain this bright morning?"

Fanny had, in Isabel's absence, folded Thomas' shawl, and hung it across her arm. "I thought, Miss," answered she, blushing, "that I might just carry it to show Thomas that I did not forget his present, or think it too homely to go to church with me."

"Impossible," said Isabel, who, to do her justice, we must state, was far too much excited to suspect that she was making Fanny uncomfortable; "you will spoil all. There, put the shawl away,—that's right, you look perfect. Go down to your bridegroom, I hear his voice in the hall, I will not come too, though I should like above all things to see his surprise, but I should spoil your meeting, and I am the last person in the world to do anything so selfish. One

thing more, Fanny: I shall give you two guineas, that you may spend three or four days at L——, by the sea-side; no one goes home directly, you would find it very dull to settle down at once in your cottage; tell Thomas so." Isabel then retired to her room, wishing heartily that she could part with half her prettiest things, that she might heap more favors on the interesting little bride.

Laura's first thought that morning had also been of the little orphan, who had served her so long and faithfully, and whom her father had commended to her special care. She, too, had risen early, but without dressing herself, she went across to Sally. Sally was asleep, with the traces of tears on her cheeks; Laura looked at her for a few moments, and remembered how, when both were too young to understand the distinction of rank, they had been almost play-mates; she wiped from her own eyes a little moisture that dimmed them, then putting her hand gently on Sally's shoulder, she said, "Wake, Sally, I call you early that you may have plenty of time to dress me first and yourself afterwards. I know you would not like to miss waiting on me, or to do it hurriedly for the last time. You have been crying, Sally, do not color about it, I should think ill of you if you were not sorry to leave us, you cannot feel the parting more than I do. I dare say I shall have hard work to keep dry eyes all day, but we must do our best, Sally, for it will not for John to think I grudge you to him, or that you like me better than you do him."

"Oh, no, Miss!" replied Sally, who felt at that moment that she could scarcely love any one better than her kind mistress. "Still John will not be hard upon me for a few tears," added she, putting the sheet to her eyes.

"Come, come, Sally, this will not do, jump up and dress yourself quickly, that you may be ready to brush my hair when I return from the dressing-room; you must do it well to day, for you know I am not yet suited with a maid, and do it myself to-morrow."

This roused Sally, who dressed in great haste and was soon at her post. Laura asked her many questions about her plans for the future, and found with pleasure that most things had been well considered and arranged. "There is only one thing, Miss," said Sally, in conclusion, "that we are sorry for, and it is that we cannot offer old Mrs. Maythorn a home. She has no child but John, and will sadly feel his leaving her."

"But why cannot she live with you and work as she does now, so as to pay you for what she costs?"

"Why, Miss, where she is she works about the house for her board, and does a trifle outdoors besides, that gets her clothing. John says it makes him feel quite cowardly, as it were, to see his old mother working at scrubbing and scouring, making her poor back ache, when he is so young and strong; yet we scarcely know if we could undertake for her altogether. I wish we could."

“How much would it cost you?”

“A matter of four shillings a week; besides, we must get a bed and bedding. That we could put up in the kitchen, if we bought it to shut up in the day-time, and, as John says, Mrs. Maythorn would help us nicely when we get some little ones. But it would cost a deal of money to begin and go on with.”

“I will think of this for you, Sally. It would be easy for me to give you four shillings a week now, but I may not always be able to do it. I may marry a poor man, or one who will not allow me to spend my money as I please, and were Mrs. Maythorn to give up her present employments, she would not be able to get them back again three or four years hence, nor would she, at her age, be able to meet with others; and if you would find it difficult to keep her now, you would much more when you have a little family; so we must do nothing hastily. I will consult papa; he will tell me directly whether I shall be right in promising you the four shillings a week. If I do promise it, you may depend on always having it.”

“Oh, thank you, thank you, Miss, for the thought: I will tell John directly I see him; the very hope will fill him with joy.”

“No,” said Laura, “do not tell him yet, Sally, for you would be sorry to disappoint him afterwards, if I could not undertake it. Wait a day or two, and I will give you an answer; or, if possible, it shall be sooner. Now, thank you for the nice brushing: I will put up my hair while you go and dress; it is getting late. If you require assistance, and Fanny is not in your room, tap at my door, for I shall be pleased to help you to-day.”

Laura was not called in; but when she thought the toilette must be nearly completed, went to Sally with the shawl which she had bought for her the day before. As she entered, Sally was folding the white one John had given her. “I have brought you a shawl,” said Laura, “which I want you to wear to-day; it is much handsomer than that you are folding. See, do you like it?”

“Yes, Miss,” said Sally, “it is a very good one, I see,” and she began to re-fold the other; but Laura noticed the expression of disappointment with which she made the change, and taking up the plain shawl, said, “I do not know whether this does not suit your neat muslin dress better than mine. Did you buy it yourself, Sally?”

“No, Miss, it was John’s present; but I will put on yours this morning, if you please, Miss, and I can wear John’s any day.”

“No, no,” replied Laura, “you must put on John’s to-day. It matters but little to me when you wear mine, so long as it does you good service; but John will feel hurt if you cast his present aside on your wedding-day, because some one else has given you a shawl worth a few shillings more.” So Laura put the

white shawl on the shoulders of Sally, who valued it more than the finest Cashmere in the world.

As Sally went down stairs, she saw Fanny in tears on the landing. “I cannot think how it is,” answered she, in reply to Sally’s questioning, “but just on this day, when I thought to feel so happy, I am quite low. Miss Isabel has been so kind, she has dressed me, and quite flustered me with her attentions. See what nice things she has given me—this shawl—though for that matter, I’d rather have worn Thomas’s. Oh, how nice you look. Dear, so neat and becoming your station, and with John’s shawl, too, but then Miss Laura has made you no present.”

“Yes, a good shawl and a promise besides, but I well tell you about that another time. Let us go in now, they must be waiting for us.”

Fanny felt so awkward in her fine clothes, that she could scarcely be prevailed on to encounter the gaze of the servants; but her good-natured cousin promising to explain that all her dress was given and chosen by her mistress, she at last went into the hall. Sally’s explanation was only heard by a few of the party, and as Fanny, in trying to conceal herself from the gaze of the astonished villagers, slunk behind old Mrs. Maythorn, she had the mortification of hearing her say to John, in the loud whisper peculiar to deaf people, “I am so glad, John, the neat one is yours; I should be quite frightened to see you take such a fine lady as Fanny to the altar; it makes me sorry for Thomas to see her begin so smart.”

When the ceremony was over, the party returned to the Hall, where a hospitable meal had been provided for all the villagers of good character who chose to partake of it. It was a merry party, for even Fanny, when every one had seen her finery long enough to forget it, forgot it herself. Thomas was very good-natured about the shawl, and delighted at the prospect of spending a few days at L——. He and Fanny talked of the boat-excursions they would have, the shells they would gather for a grotto in their garden, and the long rambles they would take by the sea-side, till they wondered how ever they could have been contented with the prospect of going to their cottage at once.

As the pony-chaise which the good baronet had lent for the day, drove up to take the bridal party to L——, for John and Sally were also to spend one day there, the two young ladies came to take leave of their protégées. Laura said, “Good-bye, Sally, I have consulted papa, and will undertake to allow you four shillings a week as long as Mrs. Maythorn lives. Here is a sovereign towards expenses; you will not, I am sure, mind changing your five pound note for the rest.”

Isabel said, “Good-bye, Fanny. I am very, very sorry to disappoint you of your treat at L——, but I intended to have borrowed the two pounds of Miss

Laura, and I find she cannot lend them to me. Never mind, I am sure you will be happy enough in your little cottage. I never saw such a sweet little place as it is." So the bridal party drove away.

In less than a week the cousins were established in their new abode. Sally settled and happy; but Fanny, unsettled, always expected the new carpet, the china tea-set, and the various other alterations that Isabel had suggested and promised to make. The young lady, however, was unfortunate with her money. At one time she lost a bank-note; at another, just as she was counting out money for the Brussels carpet, the new maid entered to tell her that sundry articles of dress were "past mending," and must be immediately replaced. One thing after another nipped her generous intentions in the bud, and at last she was obliged to set out for her long-expected journey to France without having done more towards the fulfilment of her promises than call frequently on Fanny, to remind her that all her present arrangements were temporary, and that she should shortly have almost everything new. "Good-bye, Fanny," said she at parting; "I shall often write to you, and send you money. I will not make any distinct promise, for I dare say I shall be able to do more than I should like to say now."

Laura had given Sally a great many useful things for her cottage, but made no promise at parting. She said, "Be sure you write to me, Sally, from time to time, to say how you are going on, and tell me if you want help."

When Isabel was gone, Fanny saw that she must accustom herself to her cottage as it was, and banish from her mind the idea of the long-anticipated improvements. It was, however, no easy task. The window once regarded as bare and comfortless still seemed so, in spite of Fanny's reasoning that it was no worse than Sally's, which always looked cheerful and pretty. To be sure, John, who did not think of getting curtains, had trained a honeysuckle over it, still that made but little show at present. The carpet, too, so long regarded as a coarse temporary thing, never regained the beauty it first had to the eye of Thomas, as he laid it down the evening before he took Fanny to the cottage; and Fanny could never forget, as she arranged her tea-things, that Miss Isabel had called them "common little things;" so of all the other pieces of furniture that the young lady had remarked upon. Sally's house was, in reality, more homely than her cousin's, yet as she had never entertained a wish that it should be better, and as Laura had been pleased with all its arrangements, she bustled about it with perfect satisfaction; and even to Fanny it seemed replete with the comfort her own had always wanted.

At the end of three months Isabel enclosed an order for three pounds to Fanny, desiring her to get a Brussels carpet, and if there was a sufficient remainder, to replace the tea seat.

“I would rather,” said Fanny to her cousin, “put up with the old carpet and china, and get a roll of fine flannel, some coals, an extra blanket or two, and a cradle for the little one that’s coming, for it will be cold weather when I am put to bed; but I suppose as Miss Isabel has set her mind on the carpet and china, I must get them.”

A week or two after John was invited, with his wife and mother, to drink tea from Fanny’s new china. It was very pretty, so was the carpet, and so was Fanny making tea, elated with showing her new wealth.

“Is not Miss Isabel generous?” asked she, as she held the milk-pot to be admired.

“I sometimes wish Miss Laura had as much money to spare,” replied Sally; “for she lets me lay it out as I please, and I could get a number of things for three guineas.”

“Fie, Sally,” said her husband; “are not three shillings to spend as one pleases, better than three guineas laid out to please some one else?”

“Nonsense, John,” said Fanny, pettishly; “how can a carpet for my kitchen be bought to please any one but me?”

“John isn’t far wrong either,” answered her husband; “but the carpet is very handsome, and does please you and me too, now it is here.”

Time passed on, and Fanny gave birth to a little girl. Isabel stood sponsor for her by proxy, sending her an embroidered cloak and lace cap, and desiring that she should be called by her own name. Little Bella was very sickly, and as her mother had not been able to procure her good warm clothing, or lay in a large stock of firing, she suffered greatly from cold during the severe winter that followed her birth. The spring and summer did not bring her better health; and as Fanny always attributed her delicacy to the want of proper warmth in her infancy, she took a great dislike to the Brussels carpet, which now lay in a roll behind a large chest, having been long ago taken up as a piece of inconvenient luxury in a kitchen. “I wish you could find a corner for it in your cottage, Sally,” said she, “for I never catch a sight of it without worrying myself to think how much flannels and coals I might have bought with the money it cost.”

Laura frequently sent Sally small presents of money, but Isabel, though not so regular as her sister, surprised every one by the splendor of her presents, when they did come. As Bella entered her second year she received from her godmother a beautiful little carriage, which Thomas said must have “spoilt a five-pound note.” This was Isabel’s last gift, for it was at about this time that she accepted an offer from a French count, and became so absorbed in her own affairs, that she forgot Fanny and Bella too. Poor Bella grew more and

more sickly every month; the apothecary ordered her beef tea, arrowroot, and other strengthening diet, but work was slack with Thomas, and it was with difficulty that he could procure her the commonest food. “I am sure,” said Fanny to her cousin, as little Bella was whining on her knee, “that if only Miss Isabel were here, she would set us all right. She never could bear to see even a stranger in distress.”

“I wish,” said Thomas, “that great folks would think a little of what they don’t see. I’ll lay anything Miss Isabel gives away a deal of money, more than enough to save our little one, to a set of French impostors that cry after her in the street, and yet, when she knows our child is ill, she never cares, because she can’t see it grow thin, or hear it cry.”

“For shame, Thomas,” said his wife, “do not speak so rudely of the young lady. Have you forgotten the pretty carriage she sent Bella, and how pleased we were when it came?”

“I don’t mean any harm,” answered her husband; “only it strikes me that Miss was pleased to buy the carriage because it was pretty, and seemed a great thing to send us, and that she wouldn’t have cared a straw to give us a little cash, that would have served us every bit as well.”

“I never heard you so ungrateful, Thomas. Of course she wouldn’t, because she wished to please us.”

“Or herself, as John said; but maybe I am wrong; only it goes to my heart to see the child want food while there is a filagree carriage in the yard that cost more than would keep her for six months.”

“Well, cheer up,” said Sally; “Miss Laura will be coming home soon, and I’ll lay anything she won’t let Bella die of want.”

“I’m afraid she won’t think of giving to me, Sally,” said Fanny despondingly; “I was never her maid, you know.”

“You wouldn’t fear, if you knew Miss Laura as I do, Fanny; she never cares who she helps so long as the person is deserving, and in want. She has no pride of that sort.”

Isabel’s marriage was put off, and Laura’s return, consequently, postponed. As Bella grew worse every day, and yet no help came, the unselfish Sally wrote to her patroness, telling her of poor Fanny’s distress, and begging her either to send her help, or speak on her behalf to her sister.

Isabel was dressing for a party when Laura showed her Sally’s letter. “Poor Fanny,” said she, “I wish I had known it before I bought this wreath. I have, absolutely, not a half-franc in the world. Will you buy the wreath of me at half-price, it has not even been taken from its box.”

“I do not want it,” said Laura, “but I will lend you some money.”

“No, I cannot borrow more,” said her sister despondingly. “I owe you already for the flowers, the brooch, the bill you paid yesterday, and I know not what else besides; but I will tell Eugène there is a poor Englishwoman in distress, I am sure he will send her something.”

Eugène gave her a five-franc piece.

It was late one frosty evening when Sally ran across to her cousin’s cottage, delighted to be the bearer of the long hoped-for letter. Fanny was sitting on the fender before a small fire, hugging her darling to her breast, and breathing on its little face to make the air warmer. “I’m afraid,” said she, in answer to Sally’s inquiries, “that the child won’t be here long;” and she wiped away a few hot tears that had forced their way as she sat listening to the low moans of the little sufferer.

“But I have good news for you,” said her cousin, cheerfully. “Here is a letter from Miss Isabel at last. I would not tell you before, but I wrote to Miss Laura, saying how you were expecting every week to be put to bed again, and how Bella was wasting away, and see, I was right about her, she has sent you a sovereign, and her sister’s letter, no-doubt, contains a pretty sum.”

Fanny started up, and could scarcely breathe as she broke the seal. What was her disappointment on seeing an order for five shillings!

“I am very sorry, my good Fanny,” said Isabel, “that just now I have no money. A charitable gentleman sends you five shillings, and as soon as I possibly can, I will let you have a large sum. I have not yet paid for the carriage I sent you, and as the bill has been given me several times, I must discharge it before I send away more money. I hope that by this time, little Bella is better.”

Fanny laid her child upon the bed, and putting her face by its side, shed bitter tears. Sally did not speak, and so both remained till Thomas came in from his work. Fanny would have hidden the letter from him, but he saw and seized it in a moment.

“Five guineas for a carriage, and five shillings for a child’s life,” said he with a sneer, as he laid it down. “Do not look for the large sum, Fanny, you won’t get it; but I will work hard, and bury the child decently.”

Fanny felt no inclination to defend her mistress. For the first time, it occurred to her that Thomas and John might be right in their judgment of her. She raised Bella, as Thomas, who had been twisting up the money order, was about to throw it in the fire. He caught a sight of the child’s wan face, and, advancing to the bed, said, in a softened tone, “Do you know father, pretty

one?” and as Bella smiled faintly, he added, “I will do anything for your sake. Here, Fanny, take the money, and get the child something nourishing.”

Bella seemed to revive from getting better food; and the apothecary held out great hope of her ultimate recovery, if the improved diet could be continued; but expenses fell heavily on Thomas, Fanny was put to bed with a fine strong little boy, and, although Sally and Mrs. Maythorn devoted themselves to her and Bella, the anxiety she suffered from being separated from her invalid child, added to her former constant uneasiness, and want of proper food, brought on a fever that threatened her life. In a few days she became quite delirious. During this time Isabel was married, and Laura returned to England.

When Fanny regained her consciousness she was in the dark, but she could see some one standing by the window. On her speaking the person advanced to her side. “Do not be startled to find me here,” said a sweet soft voice. “Sally has watched by your side for three nights, and when I came this evening she looked so ill that I insisted on her going to bed; then, as we could find no one on whose care and watchfulness we could depend, I took her place. You have been in a sound sleep. Dr. Hart said you would wake up much better. Are you better?”

“Yes, ma’am, a deal better; but where am I, and who is it with me?”

“You are in your own pretty cottage, and Miss Laura is with you. You expected me home, did you not?”

“Oh, thank God; who sent you, dear Miss Laura? How is—but may-be I had best not ask just while I am so weak. Is the dear boy well?”

“Yes, quite well; and Bella is much better. I have sent her for a few days to L——, with Mrs. Maythorn; the sea air will do her good.”

“Oh, thank you—thank you—dear young lady, for the thought. I seem so bound up in that dear child, that nothing could comfort me for her loss. How good and kind you are, Miss—you do all so well and so quietly!”

“Yes, Fanny, dear,” said Thomas, coming from behind the curtain and stooping to kiss his wife. “Miss Laura has saved you and Bella, and me, too, for I couldn’t have lived if you had died; and has found me work; and all without making one great present, or doing anything one could speak about. I’ll tell you what it is, wife, dear, Miss Isabel does all for the best, but it is just as she feels at the moment. Now Miss Laura—if I may be so bold to speak, Miss—Miss Laura does not give to please her own feelings, but to do good. I can’t say it well, but do you say it for me, Miss; I want Fanny to know the right words, to teach the little ones by-and-by. You know what I wish to say, Miss Laura.”

“Yes, Thomas,” said Laura, blushing, “but I do not say you are right. You mean, I think, that my sister acts from impulse, and I from principle. Is that it?”

“I suppose that’s it, Miss,” said Thomas, considering, and apparently not quite satisfied.

“You have no harder meaning, I am sure,” said Laura, quietly, “because I love my sister very much.”

“Certainly not, Miss,” returned Thomas. “But, myself, if I may take the liberty of gratefully saying so, I prefer to be acted to on principle, and think it a good deal better than impulse.”

V.

BED.

“Oh, Sleep! it is a gentle thing,

Beloved from pole to pole!”

Was the heart’s cry of the Ancient Mariner at the recollection of the blessed moment when the fearful curse of life in death fell off him, and the heavenly sleep first “slid into his soul.” “Blessings on sleep!” said honest Sancho Panza: “it wraps one all around like a mantle!”—a mantle for the weary human frame, lined softly, as with the down of the eider-duck, and redolent of the soothing odors of the poppy. The fabled cave of Sleep was in the land of Darkness. No ray of the sun, or moon, or stars, ever broke upon that night without a dawn. The breath of somniferous flowers floated in on the still air from the grotto’s mouth. Black curtains hung round the ever-sleeping god; the Dreams stood around his couch; Silence kept watch at the portals. Take the winged Dreams from the picture, and what is left? The sleep of matter.

The dreams that come floating through our sleep, and fill the dormitory with visions of love or terror—what are they? Random freaks of the fancy? Or is sleep but one long dream, of which we see only fragments, and remember still less? Who shall explain the mystery of that loosening of the soul and body, of which night after night whispers to us, but which day after day is unthought of? Reverie, sleep, trance—such are the stages between the world of man and the world of spirits. Dreaming but deepens as we advance. Reverie deepens into the dreams of sleep—sleep into trance—trance borders on death. As the soul retires from the outer senses, as it escapes from the trammels of

the flesh, it lives with increased power within. Spirit grows more spirit-like as matter slumbers. We can follow the development up to the last stage. What is beyond?

"And in that sleep of death, what dreams may come!"

says Hamlet—pausing on the brink of eternity, and vainly striving to scan the inscrutable. Trance is an awful counterpart of sleep and death—mysterious in itself, appalling in its hazards. Day after day noise has been hushed in the dormitory—month after month it has seen a human frame grow weaker and weaker, wanner, more deathlike, till the hues of the grave colored the face of the living. And now he lies, motionless, pulseless, breathless. It is not sleep—is it death?

Leigh Hunt is said to have perpetrated a very bad pun connected with the dormitory, and which made Charles Lamb laugh immoderately. Going home together late one night, the latter repeated the well-known proverb, "A home's a home, however homely." "Ay," added Hunt, "and a bed's a bed, however bedly." It is a strange thing, a bed. Somebody has called it a bundle of paradoxes; we go to it reluctantly, and leave it with regret. Once within the downy precincts of the four posts, how loth we are to make our exodus into the wilderness of life. We are as enamored of our curtained dwelling as if it were the land of Goshen or the cave of Circe. And how many fervent vows have those dumb posts heard broken! every fresh perjury rising to join its cloud of hovering fellows, each morning weighing heavier and heavier on our sluggard eyelids. A caustic proverb says,—we are all "good risers at night;" but woe's me for our agility in the morning. It is a failing of our species, ever ready to break out in all of us, and in some only vanquished after a struggle painful as the sundering of bone and marrow. The Great Frederic of Prussia found it easier, in after life, to rout the French and Austrians, than in youth to resist the seductions of sleep. After many single-handed attempts at reformation, he had at last to call to his assistance an old domestic, whom he charged, on pain of dismissal, to pull him out of bed every morning at two o'clock. The plan succeeded, as it deserved to succeed. All men of action are impressed with the importance of early rising. "When you begin to turn in bed, its time to turn out," says the old Duke; and we believe his practice has been in accordance with his precept. Literary men—among whom, as Bulwer says, a certain indolence seems almost constitutional—are not so clear upon this point: they are divided between Night and Morning, though the best authorities seem in favor of the latter. Early rising is the best elixir vitæ: it is the only lengthener of life that man has ever devised. By its aid the great Buffon was able to spend half a century—an ordinary lifetime—at his desk; and yet had time to be the most modish of all the philosophers who then graced the gay metropolis of France.

Sleep is a treasure and a pleasure; and, as you love it, guard it warily. Over-indulgence is ever suicidal, and destroys the pleasure it means to gratify. The natural times for our lying down and rising up are plain enough. Nature teaches us, and unsophisticated mankind followed her. Singing birds and opening flowers hail the sunrise, and the hush of groves and the closed eyelids of the parterre mark his setting. But “man hath sought out many inventions.” We prolong our days into the depths of night, and our nights into the splendor of day. It is a strange result of civilization! It is not merely occasioned by that thirst for varied amusement which characterizes an advanced stage of society —it is not that theatres, balls, dancing, masquerades, require an artificial light, for all these are or have been equally enjoyed elsewhere beneath the eye of day. What is the cause, we really are not philosopher enough to say; but the prevalence of the habit must have given no little pungency to honest Benjamin Franklin’s joke, when, one summer, he announced to the Parisians as a great discovery—that the sun rose each morning at four o’clock; and that, whereas, they burnt no end of candles by sitting up at night, they might rise in the morning and have light for nothing. Franklin’s “discovery,” we dare say, produced a laugh at the time, and things went on as before. Indeed, so universal is this artificial division of day and night, and so interwoven with it are the social habits, that we shudder at the very idea of returning to the natural order of things. A Robespierre could not carry through so stupendous a revolution. Nothing less than an avatar of Siva the destroyer—Siva with his hundred arms, turning off as many gas-pipes, and replenishing his necklace of human skulls by decapitating the leading conservatives—could have any chance of success; and, ten to one, with our gassy splendors, and seducing glitter, we should convert that pagan devil ere half his work was done.

But of all the inventions which perverse ingenuity has sought out, the most incongruous, the most heretical against both nature and art, is reading in bed. Turning rest into labor, learning into ridicule. A man had better be up. He is spoiling two most excellent things by attempting to join them. Study and sleep —how incongruous! It is an idle coupling of opposites, and shocks a sensible man as much as if he were to meet in the woods the apparition of a winged elephant. Only fancy an elderly or middle-aged man (for youth is generally orthodox on this point), sitting up in bed, spectacles on his nose, a Kilmarnock on his head, and his flannel jacket round his shivering shoulders,—doing what? Reading? It may be so—but he winks so often, possibly from the glare of the candle, and the glasses now and then slip so far down on his nose, and his hand now and then holds the volume so unsteadily, that if he himself didn’t assure us to the contrary, we should suppose him half asleep. We are sure it must be a great relief to him when the neglected book at last tumbles out of bed to such a distance that he cannot recover it.

Nevertheless, we have heard this extraordinary custom excused on the no

less extraordinary ground of its being a soporific. For those who require such things, Marryat gives a much simpler recipe—namely, to mentally repeat any scraps of poetry you can recollect; if your own, so much the better. The monks of old, in a similar emergency, used to repeat the seven Penitential Psalms. Either of these plans, we doubt not, will be found equally efficacious, if one is able to use them—if anxiety of mind does not divert him from his task, or the lassitude of illness disable him for attempting it. Sleep, alas! is at times fickle and coy; and, like most sublunary friends, forsakes us when most wanted. Reading in that repertory of many curious things, the "Book of the Farm," we one day met with the statement that "a pillow of hops will ensure sleep to a patient in a delirious fever when every other expedient fails." We made a note of it. Heaven forbid that the recipe should ever be needed for us or ours! but the words struck a chord of sympathy in our heart with such poor sufferers, and we saddened with the dread of that awful visitation. The fever of delirium! when incoherent words wander on the lips of genius; when the sufferer stares strangely and vacantly on his ministering friends, or starts with freezing horror from the arms of familiar love! Ah! what a dread tenant has the dormitory then. No food taken for the body, no sleep for the brain! a human being surging with diabolic strength against his keepers—a human frame gifted with superhuman vigor only the more rapidly to destroy itself! Less fearful to the eye, but more harrowing to the soul, is the dormitory whose walls enclose the sleepless victim of Remorse. No poppies or mandragora for him! His malady ends only with the fever of life. Ends? Grief, anxiety, "the thousand several ills that flesh is heir to," pass away before the lapse of time or the soothings of love, and sleep once more folds its dove-like wings above the couch.

"If there be a regal solitude," says Charles Lamb, "it is a bed. How the patient lords it there; what caprices he acts without control! How king-like he sways his pillow,—tumbling and tossing, and shifting, and lowering, and thumping, and flatting, and moulding it to the ever-varying requisitions of his throbbing temples. He changes sides oftener than a politician. Now he lies full-length, then half-length, obliquely, transversely, head and feet quite across the bed; and none accuses him of tergiversation. Within the four curtains he is absolute. They are his Mare Clausum. How sickness enlarges the dimensions of a man's self to himself! He is his own exclusive object. Supreme selfishness is inculcated on him as his only duty. 'Tis the two Tables of the Law to him. He has nothing to think of but how to get well. What passes out of doors or within them, so he hear not the jarring of them, affects him not."

In this climate a sight of the sun is prized; but we love to see it most from bed. A dormitory fronting the east, therefore, so that the early sunbeams may rouse us to the dewy beauties of morning, we love. Let there also be festooned roses without the window, that on opening it the perfume may pervade the realms of bed. Our night-bower should be simple—neat as a fairy's cell, and

ever perfumed with the sweet air of heaven. It is not a place for showy things, or costly. As fire is the presiding genius in other rooms, so let water, symbol of purity, be in the ascendant here; water, fresh and unturbid as the thoughts that here make their home—water, to wash away the dust and sweat of a weary world. Let no fracas disturb the quiet of the dormitory. We go there for repose. Our tasks and our cares are left outside, only to be put on again with our hat and shoes in the morning. It is an asylum from the bustle of life—it is the inner shrine of our household gods—and should be respected accordingly. We never entered during the ordinary process of bed-making—pillows tossed here, blankets and sheets pitched hither and thither in wildest confusion, chairs and pitchers in the middle of the floor, feathers and dust everywhere—without a jarring sense that sacrilege was going on, and that the genius loci had departed. Rude hands were profaning the home of our slumbers!

A sense of security pervades the dormitory. A healthy man in bed is free from everything but dreams, and once in a life-time, or after adjudging the Cheese Premium at an Agricultural Show—the nightmare. We once heard a worthy gentleman, blessed with a very large family of daughters, declare he had no peace in his house except in bed. There we feel as if in a city of refuge, secure alike from the brawls of earth and the storms of heaven. Lightning, say old ladies, won't come through, blankets. Even tigers, says Humboldt, "will not attack a man in his hammock." Hitting a man when he's down is stigmatized as villanous all the world over; and lions will rather sit with an empty stomach for hours than touch a man before he awakes. Tricks upon a sleeper! Oh, villanous! Every perpetrator of such unutterable treachery should be put beyond the pale of society. The First of April should have no place in the calendar of the dormitory. We would have the maxim, "Let sleeping dogs lie," extended to the human race. And an angry dog, certainly, is a man roused needlessly from his slumbers. What an outcry we Northmen raised against the introduction of Greenwich time, which defrauded us of fifteen minutes' sleep in the morning; and how indiscriminate the objurgations lavished upon printers' devils! Of all sinners against the nocturnal comfort of literary men, these imps are the foremost; and possibly it was from their malpractices in such matters that they first acquired their diabolic cognomen.

The nightcap is not an elegant head-dress, but its comfort is undeniable. It is a diadem of night; and what tranquillity follows our self-coronation! It is priceless as the invisible cap of Fortunatus; and, viewless beneath its folds, our cares cannot find us out. It is graceless. Well; what then? It is not meant for the garish eye of day, nor for the quizzing glass of our fellow-men, or of the ridiculing race of women; neither does it outrage any taste for the beautiful in the happy sleeper himself. We speak as bachelors, to whom the pleasures of a manifold existence are unknown. Possibly the æsthetics of night are not uncared for when a man has another self to please, and when a pair of lovely

eyes are fixed admiringly on his upper story; but such is the selfishness of human nature, that we suspect this abnegation of comfort will not long survive the honeymoon. The French, ever enamored of effect, and who, we verily believe, even sleep, “posé,” sometimes substitute the many-colored silken handkerchief for the graceless “bonnet-de-nuit.” But all such substitutes are less comfortable and more troublesome; and of all irritating things, the most irritable is a complex operation in undressing. *Æ*sthetics at night, and for the weary! No, no. The weary man frets at every extra button or superfluous knot, he counts impatiently every second that keeps him from his couch, and flies to the arms of sleep as to those of his mistress. Nevertheless, French novelette writers make a great outcry against nightcaps. We remember an instance. A husband—rather good-looking fellow—suspects that his wife is beginning to have too tender thoughts towards a glossy-ringletted Lothario who is then staying with them. So, having accidentally discovered that Lothario slept in a huge peeked nightcowl, and knowing that ridicule would prove the most effectual disenchanter, he fastened a string to his guest’s bell, and passed it into his own room.

At the dead of night, when all were fast asleep, suddenly Lothario’s bell rang furiously. Upstarted the lady—“their guest must be ill;”—and, accompanied by her husband, elegantly coiffed in a turbaned silk handkerchief, she entered the room whence the alarum had sounded. They find Lothario sitting up in bed—his cowl rising pyramid-fashion, a fool’s cap all but the bells—bewildered and in ludicrous consternation at being surprised thus by the fair Angelica; and, unable to conceal his chagrin, he completes his discomfiture by bursting out in wrathful abuse of his laughing host for so betraying his weakness for nightcaps.

The Poetry of the Dormitory! It is an inviting but too delicate a subject for our rough hands. Do not the very words call up a vision? By the light of the stars we see a lovely head resting on a downy pillow; the bloom of the rose is on that young cheek, and the half-parted lips murmur as in a dream: “Edward!” Love is lying light at her heart, and its fairy wand is showing her visions. May her dreams be happy! “Edward!” Was it a sigh that followed that gentle invocation? What would the youth give to hear that murmur,—to gaze like yonder stars on his slumbering love. Hush! are the morning-stars singing together—a lullaby to soothe the dreamer? A low dulcet strain floats in through the window; and soon, mingling with the breathings of the lute, the voice of youth. The harmony penetrates through the slumbering senses to the dreamer’s heart; and ere the golden curls are lifted from the pillow, she is conscious of all. The serenade begins anew. What does she hear?

“Stars of the summer night!

Far in yon azure deeps,

Hide, hide your golden light!

She sleeps!

My lady sleeps!

Sleeps!

Dreams of the summer night!

Tell her her lover keeps

Watch! while in slumbers light

She sleeps

My lady sleeps!

Sleeps!”

VI.

THE HOME OF WOODRUFFE THE GARDENER.

I.

“How pleased the boy looks, to be sure!” observed Woodruffe to his wife, as his son Allan caught up little Moss (as Maurice had chosen to call himself before he could speak plain) and made him jump from the top of the drawers upon the chair, and then from the chair to the ground. “He is making all that racket just because he is so pleased he does not know what to do with himself.”

“I suppose he will forgive Fleming now for carrying off Abby,” said the mother. “I say, Allan, what do you think now of Abby marrying away from us?”

“Why, I think it’s a very good thing. You know she never told me that we should go and live where she lived, and in such a pretty place, too, where I may have a garden of my own, and see what I can make of it—all fresh from the beginning, as father says.”

“You are to try your hand at the business, I know,” replied the mother, “but I never heard your father, nor any one else, say that the place was a pretty one. I did not think new railway stations had been pretty places at all.”

“It sounds so to him, naturally,” interposed Woodruffe. “He hears of a south aspect, and a slope to the north for shelter, and the town seen far off; and that sounds all very pleasant. And then, there is the thought of the journey, and

the change, and the fun of getting the ground all into nice order, and, best of all, the seeing his sister so soon again. Youth is the time for hope and joy, you know, love."

And Woodruffe began to whistle, and stepped forward to take his turn at jumping Moss, whom he carried in one flight from the top of the drawers to the floor. Mrs. Woodruffe smiled, as she thought that youth was not the only season, with some people, for hope and joy.

Her husband, always disposed to look on the bright side, was particularly happy this evening. The lease of his market-garden ground was just expiring. He had prospered on it; and would have desired nothing better than to live by it as long as he lived at all. He desired this so much that he would not believe a word of what people had been saying for two years past, that his ground would be wanted by his landlord on the expiration of the lease, and that it would not be let again. His wife had long foreseen this; but not till the last moment would he do what she thought should have been done long before—offer to buy the ground. At the ordinary price of land, he could accomplish the purchase of it; but when he found his landlord unwilling to sell, he bid higher and higher, till his wife was so alarmed at the rashness, that she was glad when a prospect of entire removal opened. Woodruffe was sure that he could have paid off all he offered at the end of a few years; but his partner thought it would have been a heavy burden on their minds, and a sad waste of money; and she was therefore, in her heart, obliged to the landlord for persisting in his refusal to sell.

When that was settled, Woodruffe became suddenly sure that he could pick up an acre or two of land somewhere not far off. But he was mistaken; and, if he had not been mistaken, market-gardening was no longer the profitable business it had been, when it enabled him to lay by something every year. By the opening of a railway, the townspeople, a few miles off, got themselves better supplied with vegetables from another quarter. It was this which put it into the son-in-law's head to propose the removal of the family into Staffordshire, where he held a small appointment on a railway. Land might be had at a low rent near the little country station where his business lay; and the railway brought within twenty minutes' distance a town where there must be a considerable demand for garden produce. The place was in a raw state at present; and there were so few houses, that, if there had been a choice of time, the Flemings would rather have put off the coming of the family till some of the cottages already planned had been built; but the Woodruffes must remove in September, and all parties agreed that they should not mind a little crowding for a few months. Fleming's cottage was to hold them all till some chance of more accommodation should offer.

"I'll tell you what," said Woodruffe, after standing for some time, half

whistling and thinking, with that expression on his face which his wife had long learned to be afraid of, “I’ll write to-morrow—let’s see—I may as well do it to-night;” and he looked round for paper and ink. “I’ll write to Fleming, and get him to buy the land for me at once.”

“Before you see it?” said his wife, looking up from her stocking mending.

“Yes. I know all about it, as much as if I were standing on it this moment; and I am sick of this work—of being turned out just when I had made the most of a place, and got attached to it. I’ll make a sure thing of it this time, and not have such a pull at my heart-strings again. And the land will be cheaper now than later; and we shall go to work upon it with such heart, if it is our own! Eh?”

“Certainly, if we find, after seeing it, that we like it as well as we expect. I would just wait till then.”

“As well as we expect! Why, bless my soul! don’t we know all about it? It is not any land-agent or interested person, that has described it to us; but our own daughter and her husband; and do not they know what we want? The quantity at my own choice; the aspect capital; plenty of water (only too much, indeed); the soil anything but poor, and sand and marl within reach to reduce the stiffness; and manure at command, all along the railway, from half-a-dozen towns; and osier-beds at hand (within my own bounds if I like) giving all manner of convenience for fencing, and binding, and covering! Why, what would you have?”

“It sounds very pleasant, certainly.”

“Then, how can you make objections? I can’t think where you look, to find any objections?”

“I see none now, and I only want to be sure that we shall find none when we arrive.”

“Well! I do call that unreasonable! To expect to find any place on earth altogether unobjectionable! I wonder what objection could be so great as being turned out of one after another, just as we have got them into order. Here comes our girl. Well, Becky, I see how you like the news! Now, would not you like it better still if we were going to a place of our own, where we should not be under any landlord’s whims? We should have to work, you know, one and all. But we would get the land properly manured, and have a cottage of our own in time; would not we? Will you undertake the pigs, Becky?”

“Yes, father; and there are many things I can do in the garden too. I am old and strong, now; and I can do much more than I have ever done here.”

“Aye; if the land was our own,” said Woodruffe, with a glance at his wife.

She said no more, but was presently up stairs putting Moss to bed. She knew, from long experience, how matters would go. After a restless night, Woodruffe spoke no more of buying the land without seeing it; and he twice said, in a meditative, rather than a communicative way, that he believed it would take as much capital as he had to remove his family, and get his new land into fit condition for spring crops.

II.

“You may look out now for the place. Look out for our new garden. We are just there now,” said Woodruffe to the children as the whistle sounded, and the train was approaching the station. It had been a glorious autumn day from the beginning; and for the last hour, while the beauty of the light on fields and trees and water had been growing more striking, the children, tired with the novelty of all that they had seen since morning, had been dropping asleep. They roused up suddenly enough at the news that they were reaching their new home; and thrust their heads to the windows, eagerly asking on which side they were to look for their garden. It was on the south, the left-hand side; but it might have been anywhere, for what they could see of it. Below the embankment was something like a sheet of gray water, spreading far away.

“It is going to be a foggy night,” observed Woodruffe. The children looked into the air for the fog, which had always, in their experience, arrived by that way from the sea. The sky was all a clear blue, except where a pale green and a faint blush of pink streaked the west. A large planet beamed clear and bright; and the air was so transparent that the very leaves on the trees might almost be counted. Yet could nothing be seen below for the gray mist which was rising, from moment to moment.

Fleming met them as they alighted; but he could not stay till he had seen to the other passengers. His wife was there. She had been a merry-hearted girl; and now, still so young, as to look as girlish as ever, she seemed even merrier than ever. She did not look strong, but she had hardly thrown off what she called “a little touch of the ague;” and she declared herself perfectly well when the wind was anywhere but in the wrong quarter. Allan wondered how the wind could go wrong. He had never heard of such a thing before. He had known the wind too high, when it did mischief among his father’s fruit trees; but it had never occurred to him that it was not free to come and go whence and whither it would, without blame or objection.

“Come—come home,” exclaimed Mrs. Fleming, “Never mind about your bags and boxes! My husband will take care of them. Let me show you the way home.”

She let go the hands of the young brothers, and loaded them, and then herself, with parcels, that they might not think they were going to lose

everything, as she said; and then tripped on before to show the way. The way was down steps, from the highest of which two or three chimney-tops might be seen piercing the mist which hid everything else. Down, down, down went the party, by so many steps that little Moss began to totter under his bundle.

“How low this place lies!” observed the mother.

“Why, yes;” replied Mrs. Fleming. “And yet I don’t know. I believe it is rather that the railway runs high.”

“Yes, yes; that is it,” said Woodruffe. “What an embankment this is! If this is to shelter my garden to the north—”

“Yes, yes, it is. I knew you would like it,” exclaimed Mrs. Fleming. “I said you would be delighted. I only wish you could see your ground at once; but it seems rather foggy, and I suppose we must wait till the morning. Here we are at home.”

The travellers were rather surprised to see how very small a house this “home” was. Though called a cottage, it had not the look of one. It was of a red brick, dingy, though evidently new; and, to all appearance, it consisted of merely a room below, and one above. On walking round it, however, a sloping roof in two directions gave a hint of further accommodation.

When the whole party had entered, and Mrs. Fleming had kissed them all round, her glance at her mother asked, as plainly as any words, “Is not this a pleasant room?”

“A pretty room, indeed, my dear,” was the mother’s reply, “and as nicely furnished as one could wish.”

She did not say anything of the rust which her quick eye perceived on the fire-irons and the door-key, or of the damp which stained the walls just above the skirting-board. There was nothing amiss with the ceiling, or the higher parts of the wall,—so it might be an accident.

“But, my dear,” asked the mother, seeing how sleepy Moss looked, “Where are you going to put us all? If we crowd you out of all comfort, I shall be sorry we came so soon.”

As Mrs. Fleming led the way upstairs, she reminded her family of their agreement not to mind a little crowding for a time. If her mother thought there was not room for all the newly arrived in this chamber, they could fit out a corner for Allan in the place where she and her husband were to sleep.

“All of us in this room?” exclaimed Becky.

“Yes, Becky; why not? Here, you see, is a curtain between your bed and the large one; and your bed is large enough to let little Moss sleep with you.

And here is a morsel of a bed for Allan in the other corner; and I have another curtain ready to shut it in."

"But," said Becky, who was going on to object. Her mother stopped her by a sign.

"Or," continued Mrs. Fleming, "if you like to let Allan and his bed and curtain come down to our place, you will have plenty of room here; much more than my neighbors have, for the most part. How it will be when the new cottages are built, I don't know. We think them too small for new houses; but, meantime, there are the Brookes sleeping seven in a room no bigger than this, and the Vines six in one much smaller."

"How do they manage, now?" asked the mother. "In case of illness, say; and how do they wash and dress?"

"Ah! that is the worst part of it. I don't think the boys wash themselves—what we should call washing—for weeks together; or at least only on Saturday nights. So they slip their clothes on in two minutes; and then their mother and sisters can get up. But there is the pump below for Allan, and he can wash as much as he pleases."

It was not till the next day that Mrs. Woodruffe knew—and then it was Allan who told her—that the pump was actually in the very place where the Flemings slept,—close by their bed. The Flemings were, in truth, sleeping in an outhouse, where the floor was of brick, the swill-tub stood in one corner, the coals were heaped in another, and the light came in from a square hole high up, which had never till now been glazed. Plenty of air rushed in under the door, and yet some more between the tiles,—there being no plaster beneath them. As soon as Mrs. Woodruffe had been informed of this, and had stepped in, while her daughter's back was turned, to make her own observations, she went out by herself for a walk,—so long a walk, that it was several hours before she reappeared, heated and somewhat depressed. She had roamed the country round, in search of lodgings; and finding none,—finding no occupier who really could possibly spare a room on any terms,—she had returned convinced that, serious as the expense would be, she and her family ought to settle themselves in the nearest town,—her husband going to his business daily by the third-class train, till a dwelling could be provided for them on the spot.

When she returned, the children were on the watch for her; and little Moss had strong hopes that she would not know him. He had a great cap of rushes on his head, with a heavy bulrush for a feather; he was stuck all over with water-flags and bulrushes, and carried a long osier wand, wherewith to flog all those who did not admire him enough in his new style of dress. The children were clamorous for their mother to come down, and see the nice places where they got these new playthings; and she would have gone, but that their father

came up, and decreed it otherwise. She was heated and tired, he said; and he would not have her go till she was easy and comfortable enough to see things in the best light.

Her impression was that her husband was, more or less (and she did not know why), disappointed; but he did not say so. He would not hear of going off to the town, being sure that some place would turn up soon,—some place where they might put their heads at night; and the Flemings should be no losers by having their company by day. Their boarding all together, if the sleeping could but be managed, would be a help to the young people,—a help which it was pleasant to him, as a father, to be able to give them. He said nothing about the land that was not in praise of it. Its quality was excellent; or would be when it had good treatment. It would take some time and trouble to get it in order,—so much that it would never do to live at a distance from it. Besides, no trains that would suit him ran at the proper hours; so there was an end of it. They must all rough it a little for a time, and expect their reward afterwards.

There was nothing that Woodruffe was so hard to please in as the time when he should take his wife to see the ground. It was close at hand; yet he hindered her going in the morning, and again after their early dinner. He was anxious that she should not be prejudiced, or take a dislike at first; and in the morning, the fog was so thick that everything looked dank and dreary; and in the middle of the day, when a warm autumn sun had dissolved the mists, there certainly was a most disagreeable smell hanging about. It was not gone at sunset; but by that time Mrs. Woodruffe was impatient, and she appeared—Allan showing her the way—just when her husband was scraping his feet upon his spade, after a hard day of digging.

“There, now!” said he, good-humoredly, striking his spade into the ground, “Fleming said you would be down before we were ready for you; and here you are!—Yes, ready for you. There are some planks coming, to keep your feet out of the wet among all this clay.”

“And yours, too, I hope,” said the wife. “I don’t mind such wet, after rain, as you have been accustomed to; but to stand in a puddle like this is a very different thing.”

“Yes—so ’tis. But we’ll have the planks; and they will serve for running the wheelbarrow, too. It is too much for Allan, or any boy, to run the barrow in such a soil as this. We’ll have the planks first; and then we’ll drain, and drain, and get rare spring crops.”

“What have they given you this artificial pond for,” asked the wife, “if you must drain so much?”

“That is no pond. All the way along here, on both sides the railway, there is the mischief of these pits. They dig out the clay for bricks, and then leave the places—pits like this, some of them six feet deep. The railways have done a deal of good for the poor man, and will do a great deal more yet; but, at present, this one has left those pits.”

“I hope Moss will not fall into one. They are very dangerous,” declared the mother, looking about for the child.

“He is safe enough there, among the osiers,” said the father. “He has lost his heart outright to the osiers. However, I mean to drain and fill up this pit, when I find a good out-fall; and then we will have all high and dry, and safe for the children. I don’t care so much for the pit as for the ditches there. Don’t you notice the bad smell?”

“Yes, indeed, that struck me the first night.”

“I have been inquiring to-day, and I find there is one acre in twenty hereabouts occupied with foul ditches like that. And then the overflow from them and the pits, spoils many an acre more. There is a stretch of water-flags and bulrushes, and nasty coarse grass and rushes, nothing but a swamp, where the ground is naturally as good as this; and, look here! Fleming was rather out, I tell him, when he wrote that I might graze a pony on the pasture below, whenever I have a market-cart. I ask him if he expects me to water it here.”

So saying, Woodruffe led the way to one of the ditches which, instead of fences, bounded his land; and, moving the mass of weed with a stick, showed the water beneath, covered with a whitish bubbling scum, the smell of which was insufferable.

“There is plenty of manure there,” said Woodruffe; “that is the only thing that can be said for it. We’ll make manure of it, and sweep out the ditch, and deepen it, and narrow it, and not use up so many feet of good ground for a ditch that does nothing but poison us. A fence is better than a ditch any day. I’ll have a fence, and still save ten feet of ground, the whole way down.”

“There is a great deal to do here,” observed the wife.

“And good reward when it is done,” Woodruffe replied. “If I can fall in with a stout laborer, he and Allan and I can get our spring crops prepared for; and I expect they will prove the goodness of the soil. There is Fleming. Supper is ready, I suppose.”

The children were called, but both were so wet and dirty that it took twice as long as usual to make them fit to sit at table; and apologies were made for keeping supper waiting. The grave half-hour before Moss’s bed-time was occupied with the most solemn piece of instruction he had ever had in his life.

His father carried him up to the railway, and made him understand the danger of playing there. He was never to play there. His father would go up with him once a day, and let him see a train pass; and this was the only time he was ever to mount the steps, except by express leave. Moss was put to bed in silence, with his father's deep, grave voice, sounding in his ears.

"He will not forget it," declared his father. "He will give us no trouble about the railway. The next thing is the pit. Allan, I expect you to see that he does not fall into the pit. In time, we shall teach him to take care of himself; but you must remember, meanwhile, that the pit is six feet deep—deeper than I am high; and that the edge is the same clay that you slipped on so often this morning."

"Yes, father," said Allan, looking as grave as if power of life and death were in his hands.

III.

One fine morning in the next spring, there was more stir and cheerfulness about the Woodruffes' dwelling than there had been of late. The winter had been somewhat dreary; and now the spring was anxious; for Woodruffe's business was not, as yet, doing very well. His hope, when he bought his pony and cart, was to dispatch by railway to the town the best of his produce, and sell the commoner part in the country neighborhood, sending his cart round within the reach of a few miles. As it turned out, he had nothing yet to send to the town, and his agent there was vexed and displeased. No radishes, onions, early salads, or rhubarb were ready, and it would be some time yet before they were.

"I am sure I have done everything I could," said Woodruffe to Fleming, as they both lent a hand to put the pony into the cart. "Nobody can say that I have not made drains enough, or that they are not deep enough; yet the frost has taken such a hold that one would think we were living in the north of Scotland, instead of in Staffordshire."

"It has not been a severe season either," observed Fleming.

"There's the vexation," replied Woodruffe. "If it had been a season which set us at defiance, and made all sufferers alike, one must just submit to a loss, and go on again, like one's neighbors. But, you see, I am cut out, as my agent says, from the market. Everybody else has spring vegetables there, as usual. It is no use telling him that I never failed before. But I know what it is. It is yonder great ditch that does the mischief."

"Why, we have nothing to do with that."

"That is the very reason. If it was mine or yours, do you think I should not

have taken it in hand long ago? All my draining goes for little while that shallow ditch keeps my ground a continual sop. It is all uneven along the bottom;—not the same depth for three feet together anywhere, and not deep enough by two feet in any part. So there it is, choked up and putrid; and, after an hour or two of rain, my garden gets such a soaking that the next frost is destruction."

"I will speak about it again," said Fleming. "We must have it set right before next winter."

"I think we have seen enough of the uselessness of speaking," replied Woodruffe, gloomily. "If we tease the gentry any more, they may punish you for it. I would show them my mind by being off,—throwing up my bargain at all costs, if I had not put so much into the ground that I have nothing left to move away with."

"Don't be afraid for me," said Fleming, cheerfully. "It was chiefly my doing that you came here, and I must try my utmost to obtain fair conditions for you. We must remember that the benefit of your outlay has all to come."

"Yes; I can't say we have got much of it yet."

"By next winter," continued Fleming, "your privet hedges and screens will have grown up into some use against the frost; and your own drainage——. Come, come, Allan, my boy! be off! It is getting late."

Allan seemed to be idling, re-arranging his bunches of small radishes, and little bundles of rhubarb, in their clean baskets, and improving the stick with which he was to drive; but he pleaded that he was waiting for Moss, and for the parcel which his mother was getting ready for Becky.

"Ah I my poor little girl!" said Woodruffe. "Give my love to her, and tell her it will be a happy day when we can send for her to come home again. Be sure you observe particularly, to tell us how she looks; and, mind, if she fancies anything in the cart,—any radishes, or whatever else, because it comes out of our garden, be sure you give it her. I wish I was going myself with the cart, for the sake of seeing Becky; but I must go to work. Here have I been all the while, waiting to see you off. Ah! here they come! you may always have notice now of who is coming by that child's crying."

"O, father! not always!" exclaimed Allan.

"Far too often, I'm sure. I never knew a child grow so fractious. I am saying, my dear," to his wife, who now appeared with her parcel, and Moss in his best hat, "that boy is the most fractious child we ever had; and he is getting too old for that to begin now. How can you spoil him so?"

"I am not aware," said Mrs. Woodruffe, her eyes filling with tears, "that I

treat him differently from the rest; but the child is not well. His chilblains tease him terribly, and I wish there may be nothing worse."

"Warm weather will soon cure the chilblains, and then I hope we shall see an end of the fretting.—Now, leave off crying this minute, Moss, or you don't go. You don't see me cry with my rheumatism, and that is worse than chilblains, I can tell you."

Moss tried to stifle his sobs, while his mother put more straw into the cart for him, and cautioned Allan to be careful of him, for it really seemed as if the child was tender all over. Allan seemed to succeed best as comforter. He gave Moss the stick to wield, and showed him how to make believe to whip the pony, so that before they turned the corner, Moss was wholly engrossed with what he called driving.

"Yes, yes," said Woodruffe, as he turned away to go to the garden, "Allan is the one to manage, him. He can take as good care of him as any woman without spoiling him!"

Mrs. Woodruffe submitted to this in silence; but with the feeling that she did not deserve it.

Becky had had no notice of this visit from her brothers; but no such visit could take her by surprise; for she was thinking of her family all day long, every day, and fancying she should see them whichever way she turned. It was not her natural destination to be a servant in a farm-house; she had never expected it,—never been prepared for it. She was as willing to work as any girl could be; and her help in the gardening was beyond what most women are capable of; but it was a bitter thing to her to go among strangers, and toil for them, when she knew that she was wanted at home by father and mother, and brothers, and just at present by her sister too; for Mrs. Fleming's confinement was to happen this spring. The reason why Becky was not at home while so much wanted there was, that there really was no accommodation for her. The plan of sleeping all huddled together as they were at first would not do. The girl herself could not endure it; and her parents felt that she must be got out at any sacrifice. They had inquired diligently till they found a place for her in a farm-house, where the good wife promised protection, and care, and kindness; and fulfilled her promise to the best of her power.

"I hope they do well by you here, Becky," asked Allan, when the surprise caused by his driving up with a dash had subsided, and everybody had retired, to leave Becky with her brothers for the few minutes they could stay. "I hope they are kind to you here."

"O, yes,—very kind. And I am sure you ought to say so to father and mother."

Becky had jumped into the cart, and had her arms round Moss, and her head on his shoulder. Raising her head, and with her eyes filling as she spoke, she inquired anxiously how the new cottages went on, and when father and mother were to have a home of their own again. She owned, but did not wish her father and mother to hear of it, that she did not like being among such rough people as the farm servants. She did not like some of the behavior that she saw; and, still less, such talk as she was obliged to overhear. When would a cottage be ready for them?

“Why, the new cottages would soon be getting on now,” Allan said; but he didn’t know, nobody fancied the look of them. He saw them just after the foundations were laid; and the enclosed parts were like a clay-puddle. He did not see how they were ever to be improved; for the curse of wet seemed to be on them, as upon everything about the Station. Fleming’s cottage was the best he had seen, after all, if only it was twice as large. If anything could be done to make the new cottages what cottages should be, it would be done: for everybody agreed that the railway gentlemen desired to do the best for their people, and to set an example in that respect; but it was beyond anybody’s power to make wet clay as healthy as warm gravel. Unless they could go to work first to dry the soil, it seemed a hopeless sort of affair.

“But, I say, Becky,” pursued Allan, “you know about my garden—that father gave me a garden of my own.”

Becky’s head was turned quite away; and she did not look round, when she replied,

“Yes; I remember. How does your garden get on?”

There was something in her voice which made her brother lean over and look into her face; and, as he expected, tears were running down her cheeks.

“There now!” said he, whipping the back of the cart with his stick; “something must be done, if you can’t get on here.”

“O! I can get on. Be sure you don’t tell mother that I can’t get on, or anything about it.”

“You look healthy, to be sure.”

“To be sure I am. Don’t say any more about it. Tell me about your garden.”

“Well: I am trying what I can make of it, after I have done working with father. But it takes a long time to bring it round.”

“What! is the wet there, too?”

“Lord, yes! The wet was beyond everything at first. I could not leave the spade in the ground ten minutes, if father called me, but the water was

standing in the hole when I went back again. It is not so bad now, since I made a drain to join upon father's principal one; and father gave me some sand, and plenty of manure; but it seems to us that manure does little good. It won't sink in when the ground is so wet."

"Well, there will be the summer next, and that will dry up your garden."

"Yes. People say the smells are dreadful in hot weather, though. But we seem to get used to that. I thought it sickly work, just after we came, going down to get osiers, and digging near the big ditch that is our plague now: but somehow, it does not strike me now as it did then, though Fleming says it is getting worse every warm day. But come—I must be off. What will you help yourself to? And don't forget your parcel."

Becky's great anxiety was to know when her brothers would come again. O! very often, she was assured—oftener and oftener as the vegetables came forward; whenever there were either too many or too few to send to the town by rail.

After Becky had jumped down, the farmer and one of the men were seen to be contemplating the pony.

"What have you been giving your pony lately?" asked the farmer of Allan. "I ask as a friend, having some experience of this part of the country. Have you been letting him graze?"

"Yes, in the bit of meadow that we have leave for. There is a good deal of grass there, now. He has been grazing there these three weeks."

"On the meadow where the osier beds are? Ay! I knew it by the look of him. Tell your father that if he does not take care, his pony will have the staggers in no time. An acquaintance of mine grazed some cattle there once; and in a week or two, they were all feverish, so that the butcher refused them on any terms; and I have seen more than one horse in the staggers, after grazing in marshes of that sort."

"There is fine thick grass there, and plenty of it," said Allan, who did not like that anybody but themselves should criticise their new place and plans.

"Ay, ay; I know," replied the farmer. "But if you try to make hay of that grass, you'll be surprised to find how long it takes to make, and how like wool it comes out at last. It is a coarse grass, with no strength in it; and it must be a stronger beast than this that will bear feeding on it. Just do you tell your father what I say, that's all; and then he can do as he pleases; but I would take a different way with that pony, without loss of time, if it was mine."

Allan did not much like taking this sort of message to his father, who was not altogether so easy to please as he used to be. If anything vexed him ever so

little, he always began to complain of his rheumatism—and he now complained of his rheumatism many times in a day. It was managed, however, by tacking a little piece of amusement and pride upon it. Moss was taught, all the way as they went home, after selling their vegetables, how much everything sold for; and he was to deliver the money to his father, and go through his lesson as gravely as any big man. It succeeded very well. Everybody laughed. Woodruffe called the child his little man-of-business; gave him a penny out of the money he brought; and when he found that the child did not like jumping as he used to do, carried him up to the railway to listen for the whistle, and see the afternoon train come up, and stop a minute, and go on again.

IV.

Fleming did what he could to find fair play for his father-in-law. He spoke to one and another—to the officers of the railway, and to the owners of neighboring plots of ground, about the bad drainage, which was injuring everybody; but he could not learn that anything was likely to be done. The ditch—the great evil of all—had always been there, he was told, and people never used to complain of it. When Fleming pointed out that it was at first a comparatively deep ditch, and that it grew shallower every year from the accumulations formed by its uneven bottom, there were some who admitted that it might be as well to clean it out; yet nobody set about it. And it was truly a more difficult affair now than it would have been at an earlier time. If the ditch was shallower, it was much wider. It had once been twelve feet wide, and it was now eighteen. When any drain had been flowing into it, or after a rainy day, the contents spread through and over the soil on each side, and softened it, and then the next time any horse or cow came to drink, the whole bank was made a perfect bog; for the poor animals, however thirsty, tried twenty places to find water that they could drink before going away in despair. Such was the bar in the way of poor Woodruffe’s success with his ground. Before the end of summer his patience was nearly worn out. During a showery and gleamy May and a pleasant June, he had gone on as prosperously as he could expect under the circumstances; and he confidently anticipated that a seasonable July and August would set him up. But he had had no previous experience of the peculiarities of ill-drained land; and the hot July and August, from which he hoped so much, did him terrible mischief. The drought which would have merely dried and pulverized a well-drained soil, leaving it free to profit much by small waterings, baked the overcharged soil of Woodruffe’s garden into hard hot masses of clay, amidst which his produce died off faster and faster every day, even though he and all his family wore out their strength with constant watering. He did hope, he said, that he should have been spared drought at least; but it seemed as if he was to have every plague in turn; and the drought seemed, at the time, to be the worst of all.

One day Fleming saw a welcome face in one of the carriages; Mr. Nelson, a director of the railway, who was looking along the line to see how matters went. Though Mr. Nelson was not exactly the one, of all the directors, whom Fleming would have chosen to appeal to, he saw that the opportunity must not be lost; and he entreated him to alight, and stay for the next train.

“Eh! what!” said Mr. Nelson; “what can you want with us here? A station like this! Why, one has to put on spectacles to see it!”

“If you would come down, sir, I should be glad to show you....”

“Well; I suppose I must.”

As they were standing on the little platform, and the train was growing smaller in the distance, Fleming proceeded to business. He told of the serious complaints that were made for a distance of a few miles on either hand, of the clay pits left by the railway brickmakers, to fill with stagnant waters.

“Pho! pho! Is that what you want to say?” replied Mr. Nelson. “You need not have stopped me just to tell me that. We hear of those pits all along the line. We are sick of hearing of them.”

“That does not mend the matter in this place,” observed Fleming. “I speak freely, sir, but I think it my duty to say that something must be done. I heard a few days ago, more than the people hereabouts know,—much more than I shall tell them—of the fever that has settled on particular points of our line; and I now assure you, sir, that if the fever once gets a hold in this place, I believe it may carry us all off before anything can be done. Sir, there is not one of us within half a mile of the station that has a wholesome dwelling.”

“Pho! pho! you are a croaker,” declared Mr. Nelson. “Never saw such a dismal fellow! Why, you will die of fright, if ever you die of anything.”

“Then, sir, will you have the goodness to walk round with me, and see for yourself what you think of things. It is not only for myself and my family that I speak. In an evil day I induced my wife’s family to settle here, and....”

“Ay! that is a nice garden,” observed Mr. Nelson, as Fleming pointed to Woodruffe’s land. “You are a croaker, Fleming. I declare I think the place is much improved since I saw it last. People would not come and settle here if the place was like what you say.”

Instead of arguing the matter, Fleming led the way down the long flight of steps. He was aware that leading the gentleman among bad smells and over shoes in a foul bog would have more effect than any argument was ever known to have on his contradictious spirit.

“You should have seen worse things than these, and then you would not be so discontented,” observed Mr. Nelson, striking his stick upon the hard-baked

soil, all intersected with cracks. “I have seen such a soil as this in Spain, some days after a battle, when there were scores of fingers and toes sticking up out of the cracks. What would you say to that?—eh?”

“We may have a chance of seeing that here,” replied Fleming; “if the plague comes, and comes too fast for the coffin-makers,—a thing which has happened more than once in England, I believe.”

Mr. Nelson stopped to laugh; but he certainly attended more to business as he went on; and Fleming, who knew something of his ways, had hopes that if he could only keep his own temper, this visit of the director might not be without good results.

In passing through Woodruffe’s garden, very nice management was necessary. Woodruffe was at work there, charged with ire against railway directors and landed proprietors, whom, amidst the pangs of his rheumatism, he regarded as the poisoners of his land and the bane of his fortunes; while, on the other hand, Mr. Nelson, who had certainly never been a market gardener, criticized and ridiculed everything that met his eye. What was the use of such a tool-house as that?—big enough for a house for them all. What was the use of such low fences?—of such high screens?—of making the walks so wide?—sheer waste?—of making the beds so long one way, and so narrow another?—of planting or sowing this and that?—things that nobody wanted. Woodruffe had pushed back his hat in preparation for a defiant reply, when Fleming caught his eye, and, by a good-tempered smile, conveyed to him that they had an oddity to deal with. Allan, who had begun by listening reverently, was now looking from one to another in great perplexity.

“What is that boy here for, staring like a dunce? Why don’t you send him to school? You neglect a parent’s duty if you don’t send him to school.”

Woodruffe answered by a smile of contempt, walked away, and went to work at a distance.

“That boy is very well taught,” Fleming said, quietly. “He is a great reader, and will soon be fit to keep his father’s accounts.”

“What does he stare in that manner for, then? I took him for a dunce.”

“He is not accustomed to hear his father called in question, either as a gardener or a parent.”

“Pho! pho! I might as well have waited, though, till he was out of hearing. Well, is this all you have to show me? I think you make a great fuss about nothing.”

“Will you walk this way?” said Fleming, turning down towards the osier beds, without any compassion for the gentleman’s boots or olfactory nerves.

For a long while Mr. Nelson affected to admire the reed, and water-flags, and marsh-blossoms, declared the decayed vegetation to be peat soil, very fine peat, which the ladies would be glad of for their heaths in the flower-garden,—and thought there must be good fowling here in winter. Fleming quietly turned over the so-called peat with a stick, letting it be seen that it was a mere dung-heap of decayed rushes, and wished Mr. Nelson would come in the fowling season, and see what the place was like.

“The children are merry enough, however,” observed the gentleman. “They can laugh here, much as in other places. I advise you to take a lesson from them, Fleming. Now, don’t you teach them to croak.”

The laughter sounded from the direction of the old brick-ground; and thither they now turned. Two little boys were on the brink of a pit, so intent on watching a rat in the water and on pelting it with stones, that they did not see that anybody was coming to disturb them. In answer to Mr. Nelson’s question, whether they were vagrants, and why vagrants were permitted there, Fleming answered that the younger one—the pale-faced one—was his little brother-in-law; the other—

“Ay, now, you will be telling me next that the pale face is the fault of this place.”

“It certainly is,” said Fleming. “That child was chubby enough when he came.”

“Pho, pho! a puny little wretch as ever I saw—puny from its birth, I have no doubt of it. And who is the other—a gypsy?”

“He looks like it,” replied Fleming. On being questioned, Moss told that the boy lived near, and he had often played with him lately. Yes, he lived near, just beyond those trees; not in a house, only a sort of house the people had made for themselves. Mr. Nelson liked to lecture vagrants, even more than other people; so Moss was required to show the way, and his dark-skinned playfellow was not allowed to skulk behind.

Moss led his party on, over the tufty hay-colored grass, skipping from bunch to bunch of rushes, round the osier-beds, and at last straight through a clump of elders, behind whose screen now appeared the house, as Moss had called it, which the gypsies had made for themselves. It was the tilt of a wagon, serving as a tent. Nobody was visible but a woman, crouching under the shadow of the tent, to screen from the sun that which was lying across her lap.

“What is that that she’s nursing? Lord bless me! Can that be a child?” exclaimed Mr. Nelson.

“A child in the fever,” replied Fleming.

“Lord bless me!—to see legs and arms hang down like that!” exclaimed the gentleman; and he forthwith gave the woman a lecture on her method of nursing—scolded her for letting the child get a fever—for not putting it to bed—for not getting a doctor to it—for being a gypsy, and living under an alder clump. He then proceeded to inquire whether she had anybody else in the tent, where her husband was, whether he lived by thieving, how they would all like being transported, whether she did not think her children would all be hanged, and so on. At first, the woman tried a facetious and wheedling tone, then a whimpering one, and, finally, a scolding one. The last answered well. Mr. Nelson found that a man, to say nothing of a gentleman, has no chance with a woman with a sore heart in her breast, and a sick child in her lap, when once he has driven her to her weapon of the tongue. He said afterwards, that he had once gone to Billingsgate, on purpose to set two fisherwomen quarrelling, that he might see what it was like. The scene had fulfilled all his expectations; but he now declared that it could not compare with this exhibition behind the alders. He stood a long while, first trying to overpower the woman’s voice; and, when that seemed hopeless, poking about among the rushes with his stick, and finally, staring in the woman’s face, in a mood between consternation and amusement;—thus he stood, waiting till the torrent should intermit; but there was no sign of intermission; and when the sick child began to move and rouse itself, and look at the strangers, as if braced by the vigor of its mother’s tongue, the prospect of an end seemed farther off than ever. Mr. Nelson shrugged his shoulders, signed to his companions, and walked away through the alders. The woman was not silent because they were out of sight. Her voice waxed shriller as it followed them, and died away only in the distance. Moss was grasping Fleming’s hand with all his might when Mr. Nelson spoke to him, and shook his stick at him, asking him how he came to play with such people, and saying that if ever he heard him learning to scold like that woman, he would beat him with that stick; so Moss vowed he never would.

When the train was in sight by which Mr. Nelson was to depart, he turned to Fleming, with the most careless air imaginable, saying, “Have you any medicine in your house?—any bark?”

“Not any. But I will send for some.”

“Ay, do. Or,—no—I will send you some. See if you can’t get these people housed somewhere, so that they may not sleep in the swamp. I don’t mean in any of your houses, but in a barn, or some such place. If the physic comes before the doctor, get somebody to dose the child. And don’t fancy you are all going to die of the fever. That is the way to make yourselves ill; and it is all nonsense, too, I dare say.”

“Do you like that gentleman?” asked Moss, sapiently, when the train was whirling Mr. Nelson out of sight. “Because I don’t—not at all.”

“I believe he is kinder than he means, Moss. He need not be so rough; but I know he does kind things sometimes.”

“But, do you like him?”

“No, I can’t say I do.”

Before many hours were over, Fleming was sorry that he had admitted this, even to himself; and for many days after he was occasionally heard telling Moss what a good gentleman Mr. Nelson was, for all his roughness of manners. With the utmost speed, before it would have been thought possible, arrived a surgeon from the next town, with medicines, and the news that he was to come every day while there was any fear of fever. The gypsies were to have been cared for; but they were gone. The marks of their fire and a few stray feathers which showed that a fowl had been plucked, alone told where they had encamped. A neighbor, who loved her poultry yard, was heard to say that the sick child would not die for want of chicken broth, she would be bound; and the nearest farmer asked if they had left any potato-peels and turnip tops for his pig. He thought that was the least they could do after making their famous gypsy stew (a capital dish, it was said) from his vegetables. They were gone; and if they had not left fever behind, they might be forgiven, for the sake of the benefit of taking themselves off. After the search for the gypsies was over, there was still an unusual stir about the place. One and another stranger appeared and examined the low grounds, and sent for one and another of the neighboring proprietors, whether farmer, or builder, or gardener, or laborer; for every one who owned or rented a yard of land on the borders of the great ditch, or anywhere near the clay-pits or osier-beds.

It was the opinion of the few residents near the Station that something would be done to improve the place before another year; and everybody said that it must be Mr. Nelson’s doings, and that it was a thousand pities that he did not come earlier, before the fever had crept thus far along the line.

V.

For some months past, Becky had believed without a doubt, that the day of her return home would be the very happiest day of her life. She was too young to know yet that it is not for us to settle which of our days shall be happy ones, nor what events shall yield us joy. The promise had not been kept that she should return when her father and mother removed into the new cottage. She had been told that there really was not, even now, decent room for them all; and that they must at least wait till the hot weather was completely over before they crowded the chamber, as they had hitherto done. And then, when autumn

came on, and the creeping mists from the low grounds hung round the place from sunset till after breakfast the next day, the mother delayed sending for her daughter, unwilling that she should lose the look of health which she alone now, of all the family, exhibited. Fleming and his wife and babe prospered better than the others. The young man's business lay on the high ground, at the top of the embankment. He was there all day while Mr. Woodruffe and Allan were below, among the ditches and the late and early fogs. Mrs. Fleming was young and strong, full of spirit and happiness; and so far fortified against the attacks of disease, as a merry heart strengthens nerve and bone and muscle, and invigorates all the vital powers. In regard to her family, her father's hopeful spirit seemed to have passed into her. While he was becoming permanently discouraged, she was always assured that everything would come right next year. The time had arrived for her power of hope to be tested to the utmost. One day this autumn, she admitted that Becky must be sent for. She did not forget, however, to charge Allan to be cheerful, and make the best of things, and not frighten Becky by the way.

It was now the end of October. Some of the days were balmy elsewhere—the afternoons ruddy; the leaves crisp beneath the tread; the squirrel busy after the nuts in the wood; the pheasants splendid among the dry ferns in the brake, the sportsman warm and thirsty in his exploring among the stubble. In the evenings the dwellers in country houses called one another out upon the grass, to see how bright the stars were, and how softly the moonlight slept upon the woods. While it was thus in one place, in another, and not far off, all was dank, dim, dreary and unwholesome; with but little sun, and no moon or stars; all chill, and no glow; no stray perfumes, the last of the year, but sickly scents coming on the steam from below. Thus it was about Fleming's house, this latter end of October, when he saw but little of his wife, because she was nursing her mother in the fever, and when he tried to amuse himself with his young baby at meal-times (awkward nurse as he was) to relieve his wife of the charge for the little time he could be at home. When the baby cried, and when he saw his Abby look wearied, he did wish, now and then, that Becky was at home; but he was patient, and helpful, and as cheerful as he could be, till the day which settled the matter. On that morning he felt strangely weak, barely able to mount the steps to the station. During the morning, several people told him he looked ill; and one person did more. The porter sent a message to the next large Station that somebody must be sent immediately to fill Fleming's place, in case of his being too ill to work. Somebody came; and before that, Fleming was in bed—certainly down in the fever. His wife was now wanted at home; and Becky must come to her mother.

Though Becky asked questions all the way home, and Allan answered them as truthfully as he knew how, she was not prepared for what she found—her father aged and bent, always in pain, more or less, and far less furnished

with plans and hopes than she had ever known him; Moss, fretful and sickly, and her mother unable to turn herself in her bed. Nobody mentioned death. The surgeon who came daily, and told Becky exactly what to do, said nothing of anybody dying of the fever, while Woodruffe was continually talking of things that were to be done when his wife got well again. It was sad, and sometimes alarming, to hear the strange things that Mrs. Woodruffe said in the evenings when she was delirious; but if Abby stepped in at such times, she did not think much of it, did not look upon it as any sign of danger; and was only thankful that her husband had no delirium. His head was always clear, she said, though he was very weak. Becky never doubted, after this, that her mother was the most severely ill of the two; and she was thunderstruck when she heard one morning the surgeon's answers to her father's questions about Fleming. He certainly considered it a bad case; he would not say that he could not get through; but he must say it was contrary to his expectation. When Becky saw her father's face as he turned away and went out, she believed his heart was broken.

"But I thought," said she to the surgeon, "I thought my mother was most ill of the two."

"I don't know that," was the reply, "but she is very ill. We are doing the best we can. You are, I am sure," he said, kindly; "and we must hope on, and do our best till a change comes. The wisest of us do not know what changes may come. But I could not keep your father in ignorance of what may happen in the other house."

No appearances alarmed Abby. Because there was no delirium, she apprehended no danger. Even when the fatal twitchings came, the arm twitching as it lay upon the coverlid, she did not know it was a symptom of anything. As she nursed her husband perfectly well, and could not have been made more prudent and watchful by any warning, she had no warning. Her cheerfulness was encouraged, for her infant's sake, as well as for her husband's and her own. Some thought that her husband knew his own case. A word or two,—now a gesture, and now a look,—persuaded the surgeon and Woodruffe that he was aware that he was going. His small affairs were always kept settled; he had probably no directions to give; and his tenderness for his wife showed itself in his enjoying her cheerfulness to the last. When, as soon as it was light, one December morning, Moss was sent to ask if Abby could possibly come for a few minutes, because mother was worse, he found his sister alone, looking at the floor, her hands on her lap, though her baby was fidgetting in its cradle. Fleming's face was covered, and he lay so still that Moss, who had never seen death, felt sure that all was over. The boy hardly knew what to do; and his sister seemed not to hear what he said. The thought of his mother,—that Abby's going might help or save her,—moved him to act.

He kissed Abby, and said she must please go to mother; and he took the baby out of the cradle, and wrapped it up, and put it into its mother's arms; and fetched Abby's bonnet, and took her cloak down from its peg, and opened the door for her, saying, that he would stay and take care of everything. His sister went without a word; and, as soon as he had closed the door behind her, Moss sank down on his knees before the chair where she had been sitting, and hid his face there till some one came for him,—to see his mother once more before she died.

As the two coffins were carried out, to be conveyed to the churchyard together, Mr. Nelson, who had often been backward and forward during the last six weeks, observed to the surgeon that the death of such a man as Fleming was a dreadful loss.

"It is that sort of men that the fever cuts off," said the surgeon. "The strong man, in the prime of life, at his best period, one may say, for himself and for society, is taken away,—leaving wife and child helpless and forlorn. That is the ravage that the fever makes."

"Well; would not people tell you that it is our duty to submit?" asked Mr. Nelson, who could not help showing some emotion by voice and countenance.

"Submit!" said the surgeon. "That depends on what the people mean who use the word. If you or I were ill of the fever, we must resign ourselves, as cheerfully as we could. But if you ask me whether we should submit to see more of our neighbors cut off by fever as these have been, I can only ask in return, whose doing it is that they are living in a swamp, and whether that is to go on? Who dug the clay pits? Who let that ditch run abroad, and make a filthy bog? Are you going to charge that upon Providence and talk of submitting to the consequences? If so, that is not my religion."

"No, no. There is no religion in that," replied Mr. Nelson, for once agreeing in what was said to him. "It must be looked to."

"It must," said the surgeon, as decidedly as if he had been a railway director, or king and parliament in one.

VI.

"I wonder whether there is a more forlorn family in England than we are now," said Woodruffe, as he sat among his children, a few hours after the funeral.

His children were glad to hear him speak, however gloomy might be his tone. His silence had been so terrible that nothing that he could say could so weigh upon their hearts. His words, however, brought out his widowed daughter's tears again. She was sewing—her infant lying in her lap. As her

tears fell upon its face, it moved and cried. Becky came and took it up, and spoke cheerfully to it. The cheerfulness seemed to be the worst of all. Poor Abby laid her forehead to the back of her chair, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

“Ay, Abby,” said her father, “your heart is breaking, and mine too. You and I can go to our rest, like those that have gone before us; but I have to think of what will become of these young things.”

“Yes, father,” said Becky gently, but with a tone of remonstrance, “you must endeavor to live, and not make up your mind to dying, because life has grown heavy and sad.”

“My dear, I am ill—very ill. It is not merely that life is grown intolerable to me. I am sure I could not live long in such misery of mind; but I am breaking up fast.”

The young people looked at each other in dismay. There was something worse than the grief conveyed by their father’s words in the hopeless daring—the despair—of his tone when he ventured to say that life was unendurable.

Becky had the child on one arm; with the other hand she took down her father’s plaid from its peg, and put it round his rheumatic shoulders, whispering in his ear a few words about desiring that God’s will should be done.

“My dear,” he replied, “it was I who taught you that lesson when you were a child on my knee, and it would be strange if I forgot it when I want so much any comfort that I can get. But I don’t believe (and if you ask the clergyman, he will tell you that he does not believe) that it is God’s will that we, or any other people, should be thrust into a swamp like this, scarcely fit for the rats and the frogs to live in. It is man’s doing, not God’s, that the fever makes such havoc as it has made with us. The fever does not lay waste healthy places.”

“Then why are we here?” Allan ventured to say. “Father, let us go.”

“Go! I wonder how or where! I can’t go, or let any of you go. I have not a pound in the world to spend in moving, or in finding new employment. And if I had, who would employ me? Who would not laugh at a crippled old man asking for work and wages?”

“Then, father, we must see what we can do here, and you must not forbid us to say ‘God’s will be done!’ If we cannot go away, it must be His will that we should stay and have as much hope and courage as we can.”

Woodruffe threw himself back in his chair. It was too much to expect that he would immediately rally; but he let the young people confer, and plan, and cheer each other.

The first thing to be done, they agreed, was to move hither, whenever the dismal rain would permit it, all Abby's furniture that could not be disposed of to her husband's successors. It would fit up the lower room. And Allan and Becky settled how the things could stand so as to make it at once a bed-room and sitting-room. If, as Abby had said, she meant to try to get some scholars, and keep a little school, room must be left to seat the children.

"Keep a school?" exclaimed Woodruffe, looking round at Abby.

"Yes, father," said Abby, raising her head. "That seems to be a thing that I can do; and it will be good for me to have something to do. Becky is the stoutest of us all, and...."

"I wonder how long that will last," groaned the father.

"I am quite stout now," said Becky; "and I am the one to help Allan with the garden. Allan and I will work under your direction, father, while your rheumatism lasts; and...."

"And what am I to do?" asked Moss, pushing himself in.

"You shall fetch and carry the tools," said Becky; "that is, when the weather is fine, and when your chilblains are not very bad. And you shall be bird-boy when the sowing season comes on."

"And we are going to put up a pent-house for you, in one corner, you know, Moss," said his brother. "And we will make it so that there shall be room for a fire in it, where father and you may warm yourselves, and always have dry shoes ready."

"I wonder what our shoe leather will have cost us by the time the spring comes," observed Woodruffe. "There is not a place where we ever have to take the cart or the barrow that is not all mire and ruts; not a path in the whole garden that I call a decent one. Our shoes are all pulled to pieces; while the frost, or the fog, or something or other, prevents our getting any real work done. The waste is dreadful. Nothing should have made me take a garden where none but summer crops are to be had, if I could have foreseen such a thing. I never saw such a thing before,—never—as market-gardening without winter and spring crops. Never heard of such a thing!"

Becky glanced towards Allan, to see if he had nothing to propose. If they could neither mend the place nor leave it, it did seem a hard case. Allan was looking into the fire, musing. When Moss announced that the rain was over, Allan started, and said he must be fetching some of Abby's things down, if it was fair. Becky really meant to help him; but she also wanted opportunity for consultation, as to whether it could really be God's will that they should neither be able to mend their condition nor to escape from it. As they mounted

the long flight of steps, they saw Mr. Nelson issue from the Station, looking about him to ascertain if the rain was over, and take his stand on the embankment, followed by a gentleman who had a roll of paper in his hand. As they stood, the one was seen to point with his stick, and the other with his roll of paper, this way and that. Allan set off in that direction, saying to his sister, as he went,

“Don’t you come. That gentleman is so rude, he will make you cry. Yes, I must go, and I won’t get angry; I won’t indeed. He may find as much fault as he pleases; I must show him how the water is standing in our furrows.”

“Hallo! what do you want here?” was Mr. Nelson’s greeting, when, after a minute or two, he saw Allan looking and listening. “What business have you here, hearkening to what we are saying?”

“I wanted to know whether anything is going to be done below there. I thought, if you wished it, I could tell you something about it.”

“You! what, a dainty little fellow like you?—a fellow that wears his Sunday clothes on a Tuesday, and a rainy Tuesday too! You must get working clothes and work.”

“I shall work to-morrow, Sir. My mother and my brother-in-law were buried to-day.”

“Lord bless me! You should have told me that. How should I know that unless you told me?” He proceeded in a much gentler tone, however, merely remonstrating with Allan for letting the wet stand in the furrows, in such a way as would spoil any garden. Allan had a good ally, all the while, in the stranger, who seemed to understand everything before it was explained. The gentleman was, in fact, an agricultural surveyor—one who could tell, when looking abroad from a height, what was swamp and what meadow; where there was a clean drain, and where an uneven ditch; where the soil was likely to be watered, and where flooded by the winter rains; where genially warmed, and where fatally baked by the summer’s sun. He had seen, before Allan pointed it out, how the great ditch cut across between the cultivated grounds and the little river into which those grounds should be drained; but he could not know, till told by Allan, who were the proprietors and occupiers of the parcels of land lying on either side the ditch. Mr. Nelson knew little or nothing under this head, though he contradicted the lad every minute; was sure such an one did not live here, nor another there; told him he was confusing Mr. Smith and Mr. Brown; did not believe a word of Mr. Taylor having bought yonder meadow, or Mrs. Scott now renting that field. All the while, the surveyor went on setting down the names as Allan told them; and then observed that they were not so many but that they might combine, if they would, to drain their properties, if they could be relieved of the obstruction of the ditch—if the

surveyor of highways would see that the ditch were taken in hand. Mr. Nelson pronounced that there should be no difficulty about the ditch, if the rest could be managed; and then, after a few whispered words between the gentlemen, Allan was asked first, whether he was sure that he knew where every person lived whose name was down in the surveyor's book; and next, whether he would act as guide to-morrow. For a moment he thought he should be wanted to move Abby's things; but, remembering the vast importance of the plan which seemed now to be fairly growing under his eye, he replied that he would go; he should be happy to make it his day's work to help, ever so little, towards what he wished above everything in the world.

"What makes you in such a hurry to suppose we want to get a day's work out of you for nothing?" asked Mr. Nelson. He thrust half-a-crown into the lad's waistcoat pocket, saying that he must give it back again, if he led the gentleman wrong. The gentleman had no time to go running about the country on a fool's errand; Allan must mind that. As Allan touched his hat, and ran down the steps, Mr. Nelson observed that boys with good hearts did not fly about in that way, as if they were merry, on the day of their mother's funeral.

"Perhaps he is rather thinking of saving his father," observed the surveyor.

"Well; save as many of them as you can. They seem all going to pot as it is."

When Allan burst in, carrying nothing of Abby's, but having a little color in his cheeks for once, his father sat up in his chair, the baby suddenly stopped crying, and Moss asked where he had been. At first, his father disappointed him by being listless—first refusing to believe anything good, and then saying that any good that could happen now was too late; and Abby could not help crying all the more because this was not thought about a year sooner. It was her poor husband that had made the stir; and now they were going to take his advice the very day that he was laid in his grave. They all tried to comfort her, and said how natural it was that she should feel it so; yet, amidst all their sympathy, they could not help being cheered that something was to be done at last.

By degrees, and not slow degrees, Woodruffe became animated. It was surprising how many things he desired Allan to be sure not to forget to point out to the surveyor, and to urge upon those he was to visit. At last he said he would go himself. It was a very serious business, and he ought to make an effort to have it done properly. It was a great effort, but he would make it. Not rheumatism, nor anything else, should keep him at home. Allan was glad at heart to see such signs of energy in his father, though he might feel some natural disappointment at being left at home, and some perplexity as to what, in that case, he ought to do about the half-crown, if Mr. Nelson should be gone

home. The morning settled this, however. The surveyor was in his gig. If Allan could hang on, or keep up with it, it would be very well, as he would be wanted to open the gates, and to lead the way in places too wet for his father, who was not worth such a pair of patent waterproof tall boots as the surveyor had on.

The circuit was not a very wide one; yet it was dark before they got home. There are always difficulties in arrangements which require combined action. Here there were different levels in the land, and different tempers and views among the occupiers. Mr. Brown had heard nothing about the matter, and could not be hurried till he saw occasion. Mr. Taylor liked his field best, wet—would not have it drier on any account, for fear of the summer sun. When assured that drought took no hold on well-dried land in comparison with wet land, he shook with laughter, and asked if they expected him to believe that. Mrs. Scott, whose combination with two others was essential to the drainage of three portions, would wait another year. They must go on without her; and after another year, she would see what she would do. Another had drained his land in his own way long ago, and did not expect that anybody would ask him to put his spade into another man's land, or to let any other man put his spade into his. These were all the obstructions. Everybody else was willing, or at least, not obstructive. By clever management, it was thought that the parties concerned could make an island of Mrs. Scott and her field, and win over Mr. Brown by the time he was wanted, and show Mr. Taylor that, as his field could no longer be as wet as it had been, he might as well try the opposite condition—they promising to flood his field as often and as thoroughly as he pleased, if he found it the worse for being drained. They could not obtain all they wished, where everybody was not as wise as could be wished; but so much was agreed upon as made the experienced surveyor think that the rest would follow; enough, already, to set more laborers to work than the place could furnish. Two or three stout men were sent from a distance; and when they had once cut a clear descent from the ditch to the river, and had sunk the ditch to seven feet deep, and made the bottom even, and narrowed it to three feet, it was a curious thing to see how ready the neighbors became to unite their drains with it. It used to be said, that here—however it might be elsewhere—the winter was no time for digging; but that must have meant that no winter-digging would bring a spring crop; and that therefore it was useless. Now, the sound of the spade never ceased for the rest of the winter; and the laborers thought it the best winter they had ever known for constant work. Those who employed the labor hoped it would answer—found it expensive—must trust it was all right, and would yield a profit by and by. As for the Woodruffes, they were too poor to employ laborers. But some little hope had entered their hearts again, and brought strength, not only to their hearts, but to their very limbs. They worked like people beginning the world. As poor Abby could keep the house and sew,

while attending to her little school, Becky did the lighter parts (and some which were far from light) of the garden work, finding easy tasks for Moss; and Allan worked like a man at the drains. They had been called good drains before; but now, there was an outfall for deeper ones; and deeper they must be made. Moreover, a strong rivalry arose among the neighbors about their respective portions of the combined drainage; and under the stimulus of ambition, Woodruffe recovered his spirits and the use of his limbs wonderfully. He suffered cruelly from his rheumatism; and in the evenings felt as if he could never more lift a spade; yet, not the less was he at work again in the morning, and so sanguine as to the improvement of his ground, that it was necessary to remind him, when calculating his gains, that it would take two years, at least, to prove the effects of his present labors.

VII.

It was observed by Woodruffe's family, during one week of spring of the next year, that he was very absent. He was not in low spirits, but absorbed in thought, and much devoted to making calculations with pencil and paper. At last, out it came, one morning at breakfast.

"I wonder how we should all like to have Harry Hardiman to work with us again?"

Every one looked up. Harry! where was Harry? Was he here? Was he coming?

"Why, I will tell you what I have been thinking," said their father. "I have thought long and carefully, and I believe I have made up my mind to send for Harry, to come and work for us as he used to do. We have not labor enough on the ground. Two stout men to the acre is the smallest allowance for trying what could be made of the place."

"That is what Taylor and Brown are employing now on the best part of their land," said Allan; "that is, when they can get the labor. There is such difference between that and one man to four or five acres, as there was before, that they can't always get the labor."

"Just so; and therefore," continued Woodruffe, "I am thinking of sending for Harry. Our old neighborhood was not prosperous when we left it, and I fancy it cannot have improved since; and Harry might be glad to follow his master to a thriving neighborhood; and he is such a careful fellow that I dare say he has money for the journey,—even if he has a wife by this time, as I suppose he has."

Moss looked most pleased, where all were pleased, at the idea of seeing Harry again. His remembrance of Harry was of a tall young man, who used to carry him on his shoulders, and wheel him in the empty water-barrel, and

sometimes offer to dip him into it when it was full, and show him how to dig in the sand-heap with his little wooden spade.

“Your rent, to be sure, is much lower than in the old place,” observed Abby.

“Why, we must not build upon that,” replied the father; “rent is rising here, and will rise. My landlord was considerate in lowering mine to £3 per acre, when he saw how impossible it was to make it answer; and he says he shall not ask more yet on account of the labor I laid out at the time of the drainage. But when I have partly repaid myself, the rent will rise to £5; and, in fact, I have made my calculations in regard to Harry’s coming at a higher rent than that.”

“Higher than that?”

“Yes; I should not be surprised if I found myself paying, as market-gardeners near London do, ten pounds per acre before I die.”

“Or rather, to let the ground to me for that, father,” said Allan, “when it is your own property, and you are tired of work, and disposed to turn it over to me. I will pay you ten pounds per acre then, and let you have all the cabbages you can eat besides. It is capital land, and that is the truth. Come—shall that be a bargain?”

Woodruffe smiled, and said he owed a duty to Allan. He did not like to see him so hard worked as to be unable to take due care of his own corner of the garden;—unable to enter fairly into the competition for the prizes at the Horticultural Show in the summer. Becky now, too, ought to be spared from all but occasional help in the garden. Above all, the ground was now in such an improving state that it would be waste not to bestow due labor upon it. Put in the spade where you would, the soil was loose and well-aired as needs be: the manure penetrated it thoroughly; the frost and heat pulverized, instead of binding it; and the crops were succeeding each other so fast, that the year would be a very profitable one.

“Where will Harry live, if he comes?” asked Abby.

“We must get another cottage added to the new row. Easily done! Cottages so healthy as these new ones pay well. Good rents are offered for them,—to save doctors’ bills and loss of time from sickness;—and, when once a system of house-drainage is set a-going, it costs scarcely more in adding a cottage to a group, to make it all right, than to run it up upon solid clay as used to be the way here. Well, I have a good mind to write to Harry to-day. What do you think of it,—all of you?”

Fortified by the opinion of all his children, Mr. Woodruffe wrote to Harry.

Meantime, Allan and Becky went to cut the vegetables that were for sale that day; and Moss delighted himself in running after and catching the pony in the meadow below. The pony was not very easily caught, for it was full of spirit. Instead of the woolly insipid grass that it used to crop, and which seemed to give it only fever and no nourishment, it now fed on sweet fresh grass, which had no sour stagnant water soaking its roots. The pony was so full of play this morning that Moss could not get hold of it. Though much stronger than a year ago, he was not yet anything like so robust as a boy of his age should be; and he was growing heated, and perhaps a little angry, as the pony galloped off towards some distant trees, when a boy started up behind a bush, caught the halter, brought the pony round with a twitch, and led him to Moss. Moss fancied he had seen the boy before, and then his white teeth reminded Moss of one thing after another.

“I came for some marsh plants,” said the boy. “You and I got plenty once somewhere hereabouts, but I cannot find them now.”

“You will not find any now. We have no marsh now.”

The stranger said he dared not go back without them; mother wanted them badly. She would not believe him if he said he could not find any. There were plenty about two miles off, along the railway, among the clay-pits, he was told; but none nearer. The boy wanted to know where the clay-pits hereabouts were. He could not find one of them.

“I will show you one of them,” said Moss; “the one where you and I used to hunt rats.” And, leading the pony, he showed his old gypsy play-fellow all the improvements, beginning with the great ditch,—now invisible from being covered in. While it was open, he said, it used to get choked, and the sides were plastered after rain, and soon became grass-grown, so that it was found worth while to cover it in; and now it would want little looking to for years to come. As for the clay-pit, where the rats used to pop in and out,—it was now a manure-pit, covered in. There was a drain into it from the pony’s stable and from the pig-styes; and it was near enough to the garden to receive the refuse and sweepings. A heavy lid, with a ring in the middle, covered the pit, so that nobody could fall in in the dark, and no smell could get out. Moss begged the boy to come a little further, and he would show him his own flower-bed; and when the boy was there, he was shown everything else: what a cart-load of vegetables lay cut for sale; and what an arbor had been made of the pent-house under which Moss used to take shelter, when he could do nothing better than keep off the birds; and how fine the ducks were,—the five ducks that were so serviceable in eating off the slugs; and what a comfortable nest had been made for them to lay their eggs in, beside the water-tank in the corner; and what a variety of scarecrows the family had invented,—each having one, to try which would frighten the sparrows most. While Moss was telling how difficult it was

to deal with the sparrows, because they could not be frightened for more than three days by any kind of scarecrow, he heard Allan calling him, in a tone of vexation, at being kept waiting so long. In an instant the stranger boy was off, —leaping the gate, and flying along the meadow till he was hidden behind a hedge.

Two or three days after this one of the ducks was missing. The last time that the five had been seen together was when Moss was showing them to his visitor. The morning after Moss finally gave up hope, the glass of Allan's hotbed was found broken, and in the midst of the bed itself was a deep foot-track, crushing the cucumber plants, and, with them, Allan's hopes of a cucumber prize at the Horticultural Exhibition in the summer. On more examination, more mischief was discovered, some cabbages had been stolen, and another duck was missing. In the midst of the general concern, Woodruffe burst out a-laughing. It struck him that the chief of the scarecrows had changed his hat; and so he had. The old straw hat which used to flap in the wind so serviceably was gone, and in its stead appeared a helmet,—a saucepan full of holes, battered and split, but still fit to be a helmet to a scarecrow.

"I could swear to the old hat," observed Woodruffe, "if I should have the luck to see it on anybody's head."

"And so could I," said Becky, "for I mended it,—bound it with black behind, and green before, because I had not green ribbon enough. But nobody would wear it before our eyes."

"That is why I suspect there are strangers hovering about. We must watch."

Now Moss, for the first time, bethought himself of the boy he had brought in from the meadow; and now, for the first time, he told his family of that encounter.

"I never saw such a simpleton," his father declared. "There, go along and work! Now, don't cry, but hold up like a man and work."

Moss did cry; he could not help it; but he worked too. He would fain have been one of the watchers, moreover; but his father said he was too young. For two nights he was ordered to bed, when Allan took his dark lantern, and went down to the pent-house; the first night accompanied by his father, and the next by Harry Hardiman, who had come on the first summons. By the third evening, Moss was so miserable that his sisters interceded for him, and he was allowed to go down with his old friend Harry.

It was a starlight night, without a moon. The low country lay dim, but unobscured by mist. After a single remark on the fineness of the night, Harry was silent. Silence was their first business. They stole round the fence as if they had been thieves themselves, listened for some time before they let

themselves in at the gate, passed quickly in, and locked the gate (the lock of which had been well oiled), went behind every screen, and along every path, to be sure that no one was there, and finally, perceiving that the remaining ducks were safe, settled themselves in the darkness of the pent-house.

There they sat, hour after hour, listening. If there had been no sound, perhaps they could not have borne the effort; but the sense was relieved by the bark of a dog at a distance, and then by the hoot of the owl that was known to have done them good service in mousing, many a time; and once, by the passage of a train on the railway above. When these were all over, poor Moss had much ado to keep awake, and at last his head sank on Harry's shoulder, and he forgot where he was, and everything else in the world. He was awakened by Harry's moving, and then whispering quite into his ear:—

"Sit you still. I hear somebody yonder. No—sit you still. I won't go far—not out of call; but I must get between them and the gate."

With his lantern under his coat, Harry stole forth, and Moss stood up, all alone in the darkness and stillness. He could hear his heart beat, but nothing else, till footsteps on the path came nearer and nearer. They came quite up; they came in, actually into the arbor; and then the ducks were certainly fluttering. In an instant more, there was a gleam of light upon the white plumage of the ducks, and then light enough to show that this was the gypsy boy, with a dark lantern hung round his neck, and, at the same moment, to show the gypsy boy that Moss was there. The two boys stood, face to face, motionless from utter amazement, and the ducks had scuttled and waddled away before they recovered themselves. Then, Moss flew at him in a glorious passion, at once of rage and fear.

"Leave him to me, Moss," cried Harry, casting light upon the scene from his lantern, while he collared the thief with the other hand. "Let go, I say, Moss. There, now we'll go round and be sure whether there is any one else in the garden, and then we'll lodge this young rogue where he will be safe."

Nobody was there, and they went home in the dawn, locked up the thief in the shed, and slept through what remained of the night.

It was about Mr. Nelson's usual time for coming down the line; and it was observed that he now always stopped at this station till the next train passed,—probably because it was a pleasure to him to look upon the improvement of the place. It was no surprise therefore to Woodruffe to see him standing on the embankment after breakfast; and it was natural that Mr. Nelson should be immediately told that the gypsies were here again, and how one of them was caught thieving.

"Thieving! So you found some of your property upon him, did you!"

“Why, no. I thought myself that it was a pity that Moss did not let him alone till he had laid hold of a duck or something.”

“Pho! pho! don’t tell me you can punish the boy for theft, when you can’t prove that he stole anything. Give him a whipping, and let him go.”

“With all my heart. It will save me much trouble to finish off the matter so.”

Mr. Nelson seemed to have some curiosity about the business; for he accompanied Woodruffe to the shed. The boy seemed to feel no awe of the great man whom he supposed to be a magistrate, and when asked whether he felt none, he giggled and said “No;” he had seen the gentleman more afraid of his mother than anybody ever was of him, he fancied. On this, a thought struck Mr. Nelson. He would now have his advantage of the gypsy woman, and might enjoy, at the same time, an opportunity of studying human nature under stress—a thing he liked, when the stress was not too severe. So he passed a decree on the spot that, it being now nine o’clock, the boy should remain shut up without food till noon, when he should be severely flogged, and driven from the neighborhood; and with this pleasant prospect before him, the young rogue remained, whistling ostentatiously, while his enemies locked the door upon him.

“Did you hear him shoot the bolt?” asked Woodruffe. “If he holds to that, I don’t know how I shall get at him at noon.”

“There, now, what fools people are! Why did you not take out the bolt? A pretty constable you would make! Come—come this way. I am going to find the gypsy-tent again. You are wondering that I am not afraid of the woman, I see; but, you observe, I have a hold over her this time. What do you mean by allowing those children to gather about your door? You ought not to permit it.”

“They are only the scholars. Don’t you see them going in? My daughter keeps a little school, you know, since her husband’s death.”

“Ah, poor thing! poor thing!” said Mr. Nelson, as Abby appeared on the threshold, calling the children in.

Mr. Nelson always contrived to see some one or more of the family when he visited the station; but it so happened, that he had never entered the door of their dwelling. Perhaps he was not himself fully conscious of the reason. It was, that he could not bear to see Abby’s young face within the widow’s cap, and to be thus reminded that hers was a case of cruel wrong; that if the most ordinary thought and care had been used in preparing the place for human habitation, her husband might be living now, and she the happy creature that she would never be again.

On his way to the gypsies, Mr. Nelson saw some things that pleased him in his heart, though he found fault with them all. What business had Woodruffe with an additional man in his garden? It could not possibly answer. If it did not, the fellow must be sent away again. He must not burden the parish. The occupiers here seemed all alike. Such a fancy for new labor! One, two, six men at work on the land within sight at that moment, over and above what there used to be! It must be looked to. Humph! he could get to the alders dryshod now; but that was owing solely to the warmth of the spring. It was nonsense to attribute everything to drainage. Drainage was a good thing; but fine weather was better.

The gypsy-tent was found behind the alders as before, but no longer in a swamp. The woman was sitting on the ground at the entrance as before, but not now with a fevered child laid across her knees. She was weaving a basket.

“Oh, I see,” said Woodruffe, “this is the way our osiers go.”

“You have not many to lose, now-a-days,” said the woman.

“You are welcome to all the rushes you can find,” said Woodruffe; “but where is your son?”

Some change of countenance was seen in the woman; but she answered carelessly that the children were playing yonder.

“The one I mean is not there,” said Woodruffe, “We have him safe—caught him stealing my ducks.”

She called the boy a villain—disowned him, and so forth; but when she found the case a hopeless one, she did not, and, therefore, probably could not scold—that is, anybody but herself and her husband. She cursed herself for coming into this silly place, where now no good was to be got. When she was brought to the right point of perplexity about what to do, seeing that it would not do to stay, and being unable to go while her boy was in durance, she was told that his punishment should be summary, though severe, if she would answer frankly certain questions. When she had once begun giving her confidence, she seemed to enjoy the license. When her husband came up, he looked as if he only waited for the departure of his visitors to give his wife the same amount of thrashing that her son was awaiting elsewhere. She vowed that they would never pitch their tent here again. It used to be the best station in their whole round—the fogs were so thick! From sunset to long after sunrise, it had been as good as a winter night, for going where they pleased without fear of prying eyes. There was not a poultry-yard or pig-stye within a couple of miles round, where they could not creep up through the fog. And they escaped the blame, too; for the swamp and ditches used to harbor so much vermin, that the gypsies were not always suspected, as they were now.

Till lately, people shut themselves into their homes, or the men went to the public-house in the chill evenings; and there was little fear of meeting any one. But now that the fogs were gone, people were out in their gardens, on these fine evenings, and there were men in the meadows, returning from fishing; for they could angle now, when their work was done, without the fear of catching an ague in the marsh as they went home.

Mr. Nelson used vigorously his last opportunity of lecturing these people. He had it all his own way, for the humility of the gypsies was edifying. Woodruffe fancied he saw some finger-talk passing, the while, though the gypsies never looked at each other, or raised their eyes from the ground. Woodruffe had to remind the Director that the whistle of the next train would soon be heard; and this brought the lecture to an abrupt conclusion. On his finishing off with, “I expect, therefore, that you will remember my advice, and never show your face here again, and that you will take to a proper course of life in future, and bring up your son to honest industry;” the woman, with a countenance of grief, seized one hand and covered it with kisses, and the husband took the other hand and pressed it to his breast.

“We must make haste,” observed Mr. Nelson, as he led the way quickly back; “but I think I have made some impression upon them. You see now the right way to treat these people. I don’t think you will see them here again.”

“I don’t think we shall.”

As he reached the steps the whistle was heard, and Mr. Nelson could only wave his hand to Woodruffe, rush up the embankment, and throw himself panting into a carriage. Only just in time!

By an evening train he re-appeared. When thirty miles off, he had wanted his purse, and it was gone. It had no doubt paid for the gypsies’ final gratitude.

Of course, a sufficient force was immediately sent to the alder clump; but there was nothing there but some charred sticks, and some clean pork bones, this time, instead of feathers of fowls, and a cabbage leaf or two. The boy had had his whipping at noon, after a conference with his little brother at the keyhole, which had caused him to withdraw the bolt, and offer no resistance. Considering his cries and groans, he had run off with surprising agility, and was now, no doubt, far away.

VIII.

The gypsies came no more. The fogs came no more. The fever came no more, at least, in such a form as to threaten the general safety. Where it still lingered, it was about those only who deserved it,—in any small farm-house, where the dung-yard was too near the house; and in some cottage where the slatternly inmates did not mind a green puddle or choked ditch within reach of

their noses. More dwellings arose, as the fertility of the land increased, and invited a higher kind of tillage; and among the prettiest of them was one which stood in the corner,—the most sunny corner,—of Woodruffe's paddock. Harry Hardiman and his wife and child lived there, and the cottage was Woodruffe's property.

Yet Woodruffe's rent had been raised, and pretty rapidly. He was now paying eight pounds per acre for his garden-ground, and half that for what was out of the limits of the garden. He did not complain of it; for he was making money fast. His skill and industry deserved this; but skill and industry could not have availed without opportunity. His ground once allowed to show what it was worth, he treated it well; and it answered well to the treatment. By the railway he obtained what manure he wanted from the town; and he sent it back by the railway to town in the form of crisp celery and salads, wholesome potatoes and greens, luscious strawberries, and sweet and early peas. He knew that a Surrey gardener had made his ground yield a profit of two hundred and twenty pounds per acre. He thought that, with his inferior market, he should do well to make his yield one hundred and fifty pounds per acre; and this, by close perseverance, he attained. He could have done it more easily if he had enjoyed good health; but he never enjoyed good health again. His rheumatism had fixed itself too firmly to be entirely removed; and for many days in the year, he was compelled to remain within doors, or to saunter about in the sun, seeing his boys and Harry at work, but unable to help them.

From the time that Allan's work became worth wages in addition to his subsistence, his father let him rent half a rood of the garden-ground for three years, saying—

"I limit it to three years, my boy, because that term is long enough for you to show what you can do. After three years, I shall not be able to spare the ground at any rent. If you fail, you have no business to rent ground. If you succeed, you will have money in your pocket wherewith to hire land elsewhere. Now you have to show us what you can do."

"Yes, father," was Allan's short but sufficient reply.

It was observed by the family that, from this time forward, Allan's eye was on every plot of ground in the neighborhood which could, by possibility, ever be offered for hire; yet did his attention never wander from that which was already under his hand. And that which was so great an object to him became a sort of pursuit to the whole family. Moss guarded Allan's frames, and made more and more prodigious scarecrows. Their father gave his very best advice. Becky, who was no longer allowed, as a regular thing, to work in the garden, found many a spare half-hour for hoeing and weeding, and trimming and tying up, in Allan's beds; and Abby found, as she sat in her little school, that she

could make nets for his fruit trees. It was thus no wonder that, when a certain July day in the second year arrived, the whole household was in a state of excitement, because it was a sort of crisis in Allan's affairs.

Though breakfast was early that morning, Becky and Allan and Moss were spruce in their best clothes. A hamper stood at the door, and Allan was packing in another, which had no lid, two or three flower-pots, which presented a glorious show of blossom. Abby was putting a new ribbon on her sister's straw bonnet; and Harry was in waiting to carry up the hampers to the station. It was the day of the Horticultural Show at the town. Woodruffe had been too unwell to think of going till this morning; but now the sight of the preparations, and the prospect of a warm day, inspired him, and he thought he would go. At last he went, and they were gone. Abby never went up to the station; nobody ever asked her to go there, not even her own child, who perhaps had not thought of the possibility of it. But when the train was starting, she stood at the upper window with her child, and held him so that he might lean out, and see the last carriage disappear as it swept round the curve. After that the day seemed long, though Harry came up at the dinner-hour to say what he thought of the great gooseberry in particular, and of everything else that Allan had carried with him. It was holiday time, and there was no school to fill up the day. Before the evening, the child became restless, and Abby fell into low spirits, as she was apt to do when left long alone; so that Harry stopped suddenly at the door when he was rushing in to announce that the train was within sight.

"Shall I take the child, Miss?" said Harry. (He always called her "Miss.") "I will carry him—— But, sure, here they come! Here comes Moss,—ready to roll down the steps! My opinion is that there's a prize."

Moss was called back by a voice which everybody obeyed. Allan should himself tell his sister the fortune of the day, their father said.

There were two prizes, one of which was for the wonderful plate of gooseberries; and at this news Harry nodded, and declared himself anything but surprised. If that gooseberry had not carried the day, there would have been partiality in the judges, that was all; and nobody could suppose such a thing as that. Yet Harry could have told, if put upon his honor, that he was rather disappointed that everything that Allan carried had not gained a prize. When he mentioned one or two, his master told him he was unreasonable; and he supposed he was.

Allan laid down upon the table, for his sister's full assurance, his sovereign, and his half-sovereign, and his tickets. She turned away rather abruptly, and seemed to be looking whether the kettle was near boiling for tea. Her father went up to her; and on his first whispered words, the sob broke

forth which made all look round.

“I was thinking of one, too, my dear, that I wish was here at this moment. I can feel for you, my dear.”

“But you don’t know—you don’t know—you never knew——.” She could not go on.

“What don’t I know, my dear?”

“That he constantly blamed himself for saying anything to bring you here. He said you had never prospered from the hour you came, and now——”

And now Woodruffe could not speak, as the past came fresh upon him. In a few moments, however, he rallied, saying,

“But we must consider Allan. He must not think that his success makes us sad.”

Allan declared that it was not about gaining the prizes that he was chiefly glad. It was because it was now proved what a fair field he had before him. There was nothing that might not be done with such a soil as they had to deal with now.

Harry was quite of this opinion. There were more and more people set to work upon the soil all about them; and the more it was worked the more it yielded. He never saw a place of so much promise. And if it had a bad name in regard to healthiness, he was sure that was unfair,—or no longer fair. He and his were full of health and happiness, as they hoped to see everybody else in time; and, for his part, if he had all England before him, or the whole world, to choose a place to live in, he would choose the very place he was in, and the very cottage, and the very ground to work on that had produced such a gooseberry and such strawberries as he had seen that day.

VII.

THE WATER-DROPS.

A FAIRY TALE.

I.

THE SUITORS OF CIRRHA, AND THE YOUNG LADY; WITH A REFERENCE TO HER PAPA.

Far in the west there is a land mountainous, and bright of hue, wherein the rivers run with liquid light; the soil is all of yellow gold; the grass and foliage

are of resplendent crimson; where the atmosphere is partly of a soft green tint, and partly azure. Sometimes on summer evenings we see this land, and then, because our ignorance must refer all things that we see, to something that we know, we say it is a mass of clouds made beautiful by sunset colors. We account for it by principles of Meteorology. The fact has been omitted from the works of Kaemtz or Daniell; but, notwithstanding this neglect, it is well known in many nurseries, that the bright land we speak of, is a world inhabited by fairies. Few among fairies take more interest in man's affairs than the good Cloud Country People; this truth is established by the story I am now about to tell.

Not long ago there were great revels held one evening in the palace of King Cumulus, the monarch of the western country. Cirrha, the daughter of the king, was to elect her future husband from a multitude of suitors. Cirrha was a maiden delicate and pure, with a skin white as unfallen snow; but colder than the snow her heart had seemed to all who sought for her affections. When Cirrha floated gracefully and slowly through her father's hall, many a little cloud would start up presently to tread where she had trodden. The winds also pursued her; and even men looked up admiringly whenever she stepped forth into their sky. To be sure they called her Mackerel and Cat's Tail, just as they call her father Ball of Cotton; for the race of man is a coarse race, and calling bad names appears to be a great part of its business here below.

Before the revels were concluded, the King ordered a quiet little wind to run among the guests, and bid them all come close to him and to his daughter. Then he spoke to them as follows:—

"Worthy friends! there are among you many suitors to my daughter Cirrha, who is pledged this evening to choose a husband. She bids me tell you that she loves you all; but since it is desirable that this our royal house be strengthened by a fit alliance with some foreign power, she has resolved to take as husband one of those guests who have come hither from the principality of Nimbus." Now, Nimbus is that country, not seldom visible from some parts of our earth, which we have called the Rain-Cloud. "The subjects of the Prince of Nimbus," Cumulus continued, "are a dark race, it is true, but they are famed for their beneficence."

Two winds, at this point, raised between themselves a great disturbance, so that there arose a universal cry that somebody should turn them out. With much trouble they were driven out from the assembly; thereupon, quite mad with jealousy and disappointment, they went howling off to sea, where they played pool-billiards with a fleet of ships, and so forgot their sorrow.

King Cumulus resumed his speech, and said that he was addressing himself, now, especially to those of his good friends who came from Nimbus.

“To-night, let them retire to rest, and early the next morning let each of them go down to Earth; whichever of them should be found on their return to have been engaged below in the most useful service to the race of man, that son of Nimbus should be Cirrha’s husband.”

Cumulus, having said this, put a white nightcap on his head, which was the signal for a general retirement. The golden ground of his dominions was covered for the night, as well as the crimson trees, with cotton. So the whole kingdom was put properly to bed. Late in the night the moon got up, and threw over King Cumulus a silver counterpane.

II.

THE ADVENTURES OF NEBULUS AND NUBIS.

The suitors of the Princess Cirrha, who returned to Nimbus, were a-foot quite early the next morning, and petitioned their good-natured Prince to waft them over London. They had agreed among themselves, that by descending there, where men were densely congregated, they should have a greater chance of doing service to the human race. Therefore the Rain-Cloud floated over the great City of the World, and, as it passed at sundry points, the suitors came down upon rain-drops to perform their destined labor. Where each might happen to alight depended almost wholly upon accident; so that their adventures were but little better than a lottery for Cirrha’s hand. One, who had been the most magniloquent among them all, fell with his pride upon the patched umbrella of an early breakfast woman, and from thence was shaken off into a puddle. He was splashed up presently, mingled with soil, upon the corduroys of a laborer, who stopped for breakfast on his way to work. From thence, evaporating, he returned crest-fallen to the Land of Clouds.

Among the suitors there were two kind-hearted fairies, Nebulus and Nubis, closely bound by friendship to each other. While they were in conversation, Nebulus, who suddenly observed that they were passing over some unhappy region, dropped, with a hope that he might bless it. Nubis passed on, and presently alighted on the surface of the Thames.

The district which had wounded the kind heart of Nebulus was in a part of Bermondsey, called Jacob’s Island. The fairy fell into a ditch; out of this, however, he was taken by a woman, who carried him to her own home, among other ditch-water, within a pail. Nebulus abandoned himself to complete despair, for what claim could he now establish on the hand of Cirrha? The miserable plight of the poor fairy we may gather from a description given by a son of man of the sad place to which he had descended. “In this Island may be seen, at any time of the day, women dipping water, with pails attached by ropes to the backs of the houses, from a foul fetid ditch, its banks coated with a compound of mud and filth, and strewed with offal and carrion; the water to

be used for every purpose, culinary ones not excepted; although close to the place whence it is drawn, filth and refuse of various kinds are plentifully showered into it from the outhouses of the wooden houses overhanging its current, or rather slow and sluggish stream; their posts or supporters rotten, decayed, and in many instances broken, and the filth dropping into the water, to be seen by any passer by. During the summer, crowds of boys bathe in the putrid ditches, where they must come in contact with abominations highly injurious."

So Nebulus was carried in a pail out of the ditch to a poor woman's home, and put into a battered saucepan with some other water. Thence, after boiling, he was poured into an earthen tea-pot over some stuff of wretched flavor, said to be tea. Now, thought the fairy, after all, I may give pleasure at the breakfast of these wretched people. He pictured to himself a scene of love as preface to a day of squalid toil, but he experienced a second disappointment. The woman took him to another room of which the atmosphere was noisome; there he saw that he was destined for the comfort of a man and his two children, prostrate upon the floor beneath a heap of rags. These three were sick; the woman swore at them, and Nebulus shrunk down into the bottom of the tea-pot. Even the thirst of fever could not tolerate too much of its contents, so Nebulus, after a little time, was carried out and thrown into a heap of filth upon the gutter.

Nubis, in the meantime, had commenced his day with hope of a more fortunate career. On falling first into the Thames he had been much annoyed by various pollutions, and been surprised to find, on kissing a few neighbor drops, that their lips tasted inky. This was caused, they said, by chalk pervading the whole river in the proportion of sixteen grains to the gallon. That was what made their water inky to the taste of those who were accustomed to much purer draughts. "It makes," they explained, "our river-water hard, according to man's phrase; so hard as to entail on multitudes who use it, some disease, with much expense and trouble."

"But all the mud and filth," said Nubis, "surely no man drinks that?"

"No," laughed the River-Drops, "not all of it. Much of the water used in London passes through filters, and a filter suffers no mud or any impurity to pass, except what is dissolved. The chalk is dissolved, and there is filth and putrid gas dissolved."

"That is a bad business," said Nubis, who already felt his own drops exercising that absorbent power for which water is so famous, and incorporating in their substance matters that the Rain-Cloud never knew.

Presently Nubis found himself entangled in a current, by which he was sucked through a long pipe into a meeting of Water-Drops, all summoned from the Thames. He himself passed through a filter, was received into a reservoir,

and, having asked the way of friendly neighbors, worked for himself with small delay a passage through the mainpipe into London.

Bewildered by his long, dark journey underground, Nubia at length saw light, and presently dashed forth out of a tap into a pitcher. He saw that there was fixed under the tap a water-butt, but into this he did not fall. A crowd of women holding pitchers, saucepans, pails, were chattering and screaming over him, and the anxiety of all appeared to be to catch the water as it ran out of the tap, before it came into the tub or cistern. Nubis rejoiced that his good fortune brought him to a district in which it might become his privilege to bless the poor, and his eye sparkled as his mistress, with many rests upon the way, carried her pitcher and a heavy pail upstairs. She placed both vessels, full of water, underneath her bed, and then went out again for more, carrying a basin and a fish-kettle. Nubis pitied the poor creature, heartily wishing that he could have poured out of a tap into the room itself to save the time and labor of his mistress.

The pitcher wherein the good fairy lurked, remained under the bed through the remainder of that day, and during the next night, the room being, for the whole time, closely tenanted. Long before morning, Nubis felt that his own drops and all the water near him had lost their delightful coolness, and had been busily absorbing smells and vapors from the close apartment. In the morning, when the husband dipped a teacup in the pitcher, Nubis readily ran into it, glad to escape from his unwholesome prison. The man putting the water to his lips, found it so warm and repulsive, that, in a pet, he flung it from the window, and it fell into the water-butt beneath.

The water-butt was of the common sort, described thus by a member of the human race:—“Generally speaking, the wood becomes decomposed and covered with fungi; and indeed, I can best describe their condition by terming them filthy.” This water-butt was placed under the same shed with a neglected cesspool, from which the water—ever absorbing—had absorbed pollution. It contained a kitten among other trifles. “How many people have to drink out of this butt?” asked Nubis. “Really I cannot tell you,” said a neighbor Drop. “Once I was in a butt in Bethnal Green, twenty-one inches across, and a foot deep, which was to supply forty-eight families. People store for themselves, and when they know how dirty these tubs are, they should not use them.” “But the labor of dragging water home, the impossibility of taking home abundance, the pollution of keeping it in dwelling-rooms and under beds.” “Oh, yes,” said the other Drop; “all very true. Besides, our water is not of a sort to keep. In this tub there is quite a microscopic vegetable garden, so I heard a doctor say who yesterday came hither with a party to inspect the district. One of them said he had a still used only for distilling water, and that one day, by chance, the bottoms of a series of distillations boiled to dryness.

Thereupon, the dry mass became heated to the decomposing point, and sent abroad a stench plain to the dullest nose as the peculiar stench of decomposed organic matter. It infected, he said, the produce of many distillations afterwards." "I tell you what," said Nubis, "water may come down into this town innocent enough, but it's no easy matter for it to remain good among so many causes of corruption. Heigho!" Then he began to dream of Princess Cirrha and the worthy Prince of Nimbus, until he was aroused by a great tumult. It was an uproar caused by drunken men. "Why are those men so?" said Nubis to his friend. "I don't know," said the Water-Drop, "but I saw many people in that way last night, and I have seen them so at Bethnal Green." A woman pulled her husband by, with loud reproaches for his visits to the beer-shop. "Why," cried the man, with a great oath, "where would you have me go for drink?" Then, with another oath, he kicked the water-butt in passing —"You would not have me to go there!" All the bystanders laughed approvingly, and Nubis bade adieu to his ambition for the hand of Cirrha.

III.

NEPHELO GOES INTO POLITE SOCIETY, AND THEN INTO A DUNGEON—HIS ESCAPE, RECAPTURE, AND HIS PERILOUS ASCENT INTO THE SKY, SURROUNDED BY A BLAZE OF FIRE.

Nephelo was a light-hearted subject of the Prince of Nimbus. It is he who often floats, when the whole cloud is dark, as a white vapor on the surface. For love of Cirrha, he came down behind a team of rain-drops and leaped into the cistern of a handsome house at the west end of London.

Nephelo found the water in the cistern greatly vexed at riotous behavior on the part of a large number of animalcules. He was told that Water-Drops had been compelled to come into that place, after undergoing many hardships, and had unavoidably brought with them germs of these annoying creatures. Time and place favoring, nothing could hinder them from coming into life; the cistern was their cradle, although many of them were already anything but babes. Hereupon, Nephelo himself was dashed at by an ugly little fellow like a dragon; but an uglier little fellow, who might be a small Saint George, pounced at the dragon, and the heart of the poor fairy was the scene of contest.

After awhile there was an arrival of fresh water from a pipe, the flow of which stirred up the anger of some decomposing growth which lined the sides and bottom of the cistern. So there was a good deal of confusion caused, and it was some time before all parties settled down into their proper places.

"The sun is very hot," said Nephelo. "We all seem to be getting very warm." "Yes, indeed," said a Lady-Drop; "it's not like the cool Cloud-Country. I have been poisoned in the Thames, half filtered, and made frowzy by standing, this July weather, in an open reservoir. I've travelled in pipes laid

too near the surface to be cool, and now am spoiling here. I know if water is not cold it can't be pleasant." "Ah," said an old Drop, with a small eel in one of his eyes; "I don't wonder at hearing tell that men drink wine, and tea, and beer." "Talking of beer," said another, "is it a fact that we're of no use to the brewers? Our character's so bad, they can't rely on us for cooling the worts, and so sink wells, in order to brew all the year round with water cold enough to suit their purposes." "I know nothing of beer," said Nephelo; "but I know that if the gentlemen and ladies in this cistern were as cold as they could wish to be, there wouldn't be so much decomposition going on among them." "Your turn in, sir," said a polite Drop, and Nephelo leaped nimbly through the place of exit into a china jug placed ready to receive him. He was conveyed across a handsome kitchen by a cook, who declared her opinion that the morning's rain had caused the drains to smell uncommonly. Nephelo then was thrown into a kettle.

Boiling is to an unclean Water-Drop, like scratching to a bear, a pleasant operation. It gets rid of the little animals by which it had been bitten, and throws down some of the impurity with which it had been soiled. So, after boiling, water becomes more pure, but it is, at the same time, more greedy than ever to absorb extraneous matter. Therefore, the sons of men who boil their vitiated water ought to keep it covered afterwards, and if they wish to drink it cold, should lose no time in doing so. Nephelo and his friends within the kettle danced with delight under the boiling process. Chattering pleasantly together, they compared notes of their adventures upon earth, discussed the politics of Cloud-Land, and although it took them nearly twice as long to boil as it would have done had there been no carbonate of lime about them, they were quite sorry when the time was come for them to part. Nephelo then, with many others, was poured out into an urn. So he was taken to the drawing-room, a hot iron having, in a friendly manner, been put down his back, to keep him boiling.

Out of the urn into the tea-pot; out of the tea-pot into the slop-basin; Nephelo had only time to remark a matron tea-maker, young ladies knitting, and a good-looking young gentleman upon his legs, laying the law down with a tea-spoon, before he (the fairy, not the gentleman) was smothered with a plate of muffins. From so much of the conversation as Nephelo could catch, filtered through muffin, it appeared that they were talking about tea.

"It's all very well for you to say, mother, that you're confident you make tea very good, but I ask—no, there I see you put six spoonfuls in for five of us. Mother, if this were not hard water—(here there was a noise as of a spoon hammering upon the iron)—two spoonfuls less would make tea of a better flavor and of equal strength. Now, there are three hundred and sixty-five times and a quarter tea-times in the year ——"

“And how many spoonfuls, brother, to the quarter of a tea-time?”

“Maria, you’ve no head for figures. I say nothing of the tea consumed at breakfast. Multiply——”

“My dear boy, you have left school; no one asks you to multiply. Hand me the muffin.”

Nephelo, released, was unable to look about him, owing to the high walls of the slop-basin which surrounded him on every side. The room was filled with pleasant sunset light, but Nephelo soon saw the coming shadow of the muffin-plate, and all was dark directly afterwards.

“Take cooking, mother. M. Soyer says you can’t boil many vegetables properly in London water. Greens won’t be greens; French beans are tinged with yellow, and peas shrivel. It don’t open the pores of meat, and make it succulent, as softer water does. M. Soyer believes that the true flavor of meat cannot be extracted with hard water. Bread does not rise so well when made with it. Horses——”

“My dear boy, M. Soyer don’t cook horses.”

“Horses, Dr. Playfair tells us, sheep, and pigeons, will refuse hard water if they can get it soft, though from the muddiest pool. Race-horses, when carried to a place where the water is notoriously hard, have a supply of softer water carried with them to preserve their good condition. Not to speak of gripes, hard water will assuredly produce what people call a staring coat.”

“Ah, no doubt, then, it was London water that created Mr. Blossomley’s blue swallow-tail.”

“Maria, you make nonsense out of everything. When you are Mrs. Blossomley——”

“Now pass my cup.”

There was a pause and a clatter. Presently the muffin-plate was lifted, and four times in succession there were black dregs thrown into the face of Nephelo. After the perpetration of these insults he was once again condemned to darkness.

“When you are Mrs. Blossomley, Maria,” so the voice went on, “when you are Mrs. Blossomley, you will appreciate what I am now going to tell you about washerwomen.”

“Couldn’t you postpone it, dear, until I am able to appreciate it. You promised to take us to Rachel to-night.”

“Ah!” said another girlish voice, “you’ll not escape. We dress at seven. Until then—for the next twelve minutes you may speak. Bore on, we will

endure.”

“As for you, Catherine, Maria teaches you, I see, to chatter. But if Mrs. B. would object to the reception of a patent mangle as a wedding present from her brother, she had better hear him now. Washerwoman’s work is not a thing to overlook, I tell you. Before a shirt is worn out, there will have been spent upon it five times its intrinsic value in the washing-tub. The washing of clothes costs more, by a great deal, than the clothes themselves. The yearly cost of washing to a household of the middle class amounts, on the average, to about a third part of the rental, or a twelfth part of the total income. Among the poor, the average expense of washing will more probably be half the rental if they wash at home, but not more than a fourth of it if they employ the Model Wash-houses. The weekly cost of washing to a poor man averages certainly not less than fourpence halfpenny. Small tradesmen, driven to economize in linen, spend perhaps not more than ninepence; in the middle and upper classes, the cost weekly varies from a shilling to five shillings for each person, and amounts very often to a larger sum. On these grounds, Mr. Bullar, Honorary Secretary to the Association for Promoting Baths and Wash-houses, estimates the washing expenditure of London at a shilling a week for each inhabitant, or, for the whole, five millions of pounds yearly. Professor Clark—”

“My dear Professor Tom, you have consumed four of your twelve minutes.”

“Professor Clark judges from such estimates as can be furnished by the trade, that the consumption of soap in London is fifteen pounds to each person per annum—twice as much as is employed in other parts of England. That quantity of soap costs six-and-eightpence; water, per head, costs half as much, or three-and-fourpence; or each man’s soap and water costs throughout London, on an average, ten shillings for twelve months. If the hardness of the water be diminished, there is a diminution in the want of soap. For every grain of carbonate of lime dissolved in each gallon of any water, Mr. Donaldson declares two ounces of soap more for a hundred gallons of that water are required. Every such grain is called a degree of hardness. Water of five degrees of hardness requires, for example, two ounces of soap; water of eight degrees of hardness, then will need fifteen; and water of sixteen degrees, will demand thirty-two. Sixteen degrees, Maria, is the hardness of Thames water—of the water, mother, which has poached upon your tea-caddy. You see, then, that when we pay for the soap we use at the rate of six-and-eightpence each, since the unusual hardness of our water causes us to use a double quantity, every man in London pays at an average rate of three-and-fourpence a year his tax for a hard water through the cost of soap alone.”

“Now you must finish in five minutes, brother Tom.”

“But soap is not the only matter that concerns the washerwoman and her customers. There is labor, also, and the wear and tear; there is a double amount of destruction to our linen, involved in the double time of rubbing and the double soaping, which hard water compels washerwomen to employ. So that, when all things have been duly reckoned up in our account, we find that the outlay caused by the necessities for washing linen in a town supplied like London with exceedingly hard water, is four times greater than it would be if soft water were employed. The cost of washing, as I told you, has been estimated at five millions a-year. So that, if these calculations be correct, more than three millions of money, nearly four millions, is the amount filched yearly from the Londoners by their hard water through the wash-tub only. To that sum, Mrs. Blossomley, being of a respectable family and very partial to clean linen, will contribute of course much more than her average proportion.”

“Well, Mr. Orator, I was not listening to all you said, but what I heard I do think much exaggerated.”

“I take it, sister, from the Government Report; oblige me by believing half of it, and still the case is strong. It is quite time for people to be stirring.”

“So it is, I declare. Your twelve minutes are spent, and we will always be ready for the play. If you talk there of water, I will shriek.”

Here there arose a chatter which Nephelo found to be about matters that, unlike the water topic, did not at all interest himself. There was a rustle and a movement; and a creaking noise approached the drawing-room, which Nephelo discovered presently to be caused by papa’s boots as he marched upstairs after his post-prandial slumberings. There was more talk uninteresting to the fairy; Nephelo, therefore, became drowsy; his drowsiness might at the same time have been aggravated by the close confinement he experienced in an unwholesome atmosphere beneath the muffin-plate. He was aroused by a great clattering; this the maid caused who was carrying him down stairs upon a tray with all the other tea-things.

From a sweet dream of nuptials with Cirrha, Nephelo was awakened to the painful consciousness that he had not yet succeeded in effecting any great good for the human race; he had but rinsed a teapot. With a faint impulse of hope the desponding fairy noticed that the slop-basin in which he sat was lifted from the tray, in a few minutes after the tray had been deposited upon the kitchen-dresser. Pity poor Nephelo! By a remorseless scullery-maid he was dashed rudely from the basin into a trough of stone, from which he tumbled through a hole placed there on purpose to engulf him,—tumbled through into a horrible abyss.

This abyss was a long dungeon running from back to front beneath the house, built of bricks—rotten now, and saturated with moisture. Some of the

bricks had fallen in, or crumbled into nothingness; and Nephelo saw that the soil without the dungeon was quite wet. The dungeon-floor was coated with pollutions, travelled over by a sluggish shallow stream, with which the fairy floated. The whole dungeon's atmosphere was foul and poisonous. Nephelo found now what those exhalations were which rose through every opening in the house, through vent-holes and the burrowings of rats; for rats and other venom tenanted this noisome den. This was the pestilential gallery called by the good people of the house, their drain. A trap door at one end confined the fairy in this place with other Water-Drops, until there should be collected a sufficient body of them to negotiate successfully for egress.

The object of this door was to prevent the ingress of much more foul matter from without; and its misfortune was, that in so doing it necessarily pent up a concentrated putrid gas within. At length Nephelo escaped; but, alas! it was from a Newgate to a Bastille—from the drain into the sewer. This was a long-vaulted prison running near the surface underneath the street. Shaken by the passage overhead of carriages, not a few bricks had fallen in; and Nephelo hurrying forward, wholly possessed by the one thought—could he escape?—fell presently into a trap. An oyster-shell had fixed itself upright between two bricks unevenly jointed together; much solid filth had grown around it; and in this Nephelo was caught. Here he remained for a whole month, during which time he saw many floods of water pass him, leaving himself with a vast quantity of obstinate encrusted filth unmoved. At the month's end there came some men to scrape, and sweep, and cleanse; then with a sudden flow of water, Nephelo was forced along, and presently, with a large number of emancipated foulnesses, received his discharge from prison, and was let loose upon the River Thames.

Nephelo struck against a very dirty Drop.

"Keep off, will you?" the Drop exclaimed. "You are not fit to touch a person, sewer-bird."

"Why, where are you from, my sweet gentleman?"

"Oh! I? I've had a turn through some Model Drains. Tubular drains they call 'em. Look at me; isn't that clear?"

"There's nothing clear about you," replied Nephelo. "What do you mean by Model Drains?"

"I mean I've come from Upper George Street through a twelve-inch pipe four or five times faster than one travels over an old sewer-bed; travelled express, no stoppage."

"Indeed!"

“Yes. Impermeable, earthenware, tubular pipes, accurately dove-tailed. I come from an experimental district. When it’s all settled, there’s to be water on at high pressure everywhere, and an earthenware drain pipe under every tap, a tube of no more than the necessary size. Then these little pipes are to run down the earth; and there’s not to be a great brick drain running underneath each house into the street; the pipes run into a larger tube of earthenware that is to be laid at the backs of all the houses; these tubes run into larger ones, but none of them very monstrous; and so that there is a constant flow, like circulation of the blood; and all the pipes are to run at last into one large conduit, which is to run out of town with all the sewage matter and discharge so far down the Thames, that no return tide ever can bring it back to London. Some is to go branching off into the fields to be manure.”

“Humph!” said Nephelo. “You profess to be very clever. How do you know all this?”

“Know? Bless you, I’m a regular old Thames Drop. I’ve been in the cisterns, in the tumblers, down the sewers, in the river, up the pipes, in the reservoirs, in the cisterns, in the teapots, down the sewers, in the river, up the pipes, in the reservoirs, in the cisterns, in the saucepans, down the sewers, in the Thames—”

“Hold! Stop there now!” said Nephelo. “Well, so you have heard a great deal in your lifetime. You’ve had some adventures, doubtless?”

“I believe you,” said the Cockney-Drop. “The worst was when I was pumped once as fresh water into Rotherhithe. That place is below high-water mark; so are Bermondsey and St. George’s, Southwark. Newington, St. Olave’s, Westminster, and Lambeth, are but little better. Well, you know, drains of the old sort always leak, and there’s a great deal more water poured into London than the Londoners have stowage room for, so the water in low districts can’t pass off at high water, and there’s a precious flood. We sopped the ground at Rotherhithe, but I thought I never should escape again.”

“Will the new pipes make any difference to that?”

“Yes; so I am led to understand. They are to be laid with a regular fall, to pass the water off, which, being constant, will be never in excess. The fall will be to a point of course below the water level, and at a convenient place the contents of these drains are to be pumped up into the main sewer. Horrible deal of death caused, Sir, by the damp in those low districts. One man in thirty-seven died of cholera in Rotherhithe last year, when in Clerkenwell, at sixty-three feet above high water, there died but one in five hundred and thirty. The proportion held throughout.”

“Ah, by the bye, you have heard, of course, complainings of the quality of

water. Will the Londoners sink wells for themselves?”

“Wells! What a child you are! Just from the clouds, I see. Wells in a large town get horribly polluted. They propose to consolidate and improve two of the best Thames Water Companies, the Grand Junction and Vauxhall, for the supply of London, until their great scheme can be introduced; and to maintain them afterwards as a reserve guard in case their great scheme shouldn’t prove so triumphant as they think it will be.”

“What is this great scheme, I should like to know?”

“Why, they talk of fetching rain-water from a tract of heath between Bagshot and Farnham. The rain there soaks through a thin crust of growing herbage, which is the only perfect filter, chemical as well as mechanical—the living rootlets extract more than we can, where impurity exists. Then, Sir, the rain runs into a large bed of silicious sand, placed over marl; below the marl there is silicious sand again—Ah, I perceive you are not geological.”

“Go on.”

“The sand, washed by the rains of ages, holds the water without soiling it more than a glass tumbler would, and the Londoners say that in this way, by making artificial channels and a big reservoir, they can collect twenty-eight thousand gallons a day of water nearly pure. They require forty thousand gallons, and propose to get the rest in the same neighborhood from tributaries of the River Wey, not quite so pure, but only half as hard as Thames water, and unpolluted.”

“How is it to get to London?”

“Through a covered aqueduct. Covered for coolness’ sake, and cleanliness. Then it is to be distributed through earthenware pipes, laid rather deep, again for coolness’ sake in the first instance, but for cleanliness as well. The water is to come in at high pressure, and run in iron or lead pipes up every house, scale every wall. There is to be a tap in every room, and under every tap there is to be the entrance to a drain-pipe. Where water supply ends, drainage begins. They are to be the two halves of a single system. Furthermore, there are to be numbers of plugs opening in every street, and streets and courts are to be washed out every morning, or every other morning, as the traffic may require, with hose and jet. The Great Metropolis mustn’t be dirty, or be content with rubbing a finger here and there over its dirt. It is to have its face washed every morning, just before the hours of business. The water at high pressure is to set people’s invention at work upon the introduction of hydraulic apparatus for cranes, et cætera, which now cause much hand labor and are scarcely worth steam-power. Furthermore—”

“My dear friend,” cried Nephelo, “you are too clever. More than half of

what you say is unintelligible to me."

"But the grand point," continued the garrulous Thames drop, "is the expense. The saving of cisterns, ball-cocks, plumbers' bills, expansive sewer-works, constant repairs, hand labor, street-sweeping, soap, tea, linen, fuel, steam-boilers now damaged by incrustation, boards, salaries, doctors' bills, time, parish rates—"

The catalogue was never ended, for the busy Drop was suddenly entangled among hair upon the corpse of a dead cat, which fate also the fairy narrowly escaped, to be in the next minute sucked up as Nubis had been sucked, through pipes into a reservoir. Weary with the incessant chattering of his conceited friend, whose pride he trusted that a night with puss might humble, Nephelo now lurked silent in a corner. In a dreamy state he floated with the current underground, and was half sleeping in a pipe under some London street, when a great noise of trampling overhead, mingled with cries, awakened him.

"What is the matter now?" the fairy cried.

"A fire, no doubt, to judge by the noise," said a neighbor quietly. Nephelo panted now with triumph. Cirrha was before his eyes. Now he could benefit the race of man.

"Let us get out," cried Nephelo; "let us assist in running to the rescue."

"Don't be impatient," said a drowsy Drop. "We can't get out of here till they have found the Company's turncock, and then he must go to this plug and that plug in one street, and another, before we are turned off."

"In the meantime the fire—"

"Will burn the house down. Help in five minutes would save a house. Now the luckiest man will seldom have his premises attended to in less than twenty."

Nephelo thought here was another topic for his gossip in the Thames. The plugs talked of with a constant water-supply would take the sting out of the Fire-Fiend.

Presently among confused movements, confused sounds, amid a rush of water, Nephelo burst into the light—into the vivid light of a great fire that leapt and roared as Nephelo was dashed against it! Through the red flames and the black smoke in a burst of steam, the fairy reascended hopeless to the clouds.

IV.

RASCALLY CONDUCT OF THE PRINCE OF NIMBUS.

The Prince of Nimbus, whose good-nature we have celebrated, was not

good for nothing. Having graciously permitted all the suitors of the Princess Cirrha to go down to earth and labor for her hand, he took advantage of their absence, and, having the coast clear, importuned the daughter of King Cumulus with his own addresses. Cirrha was not disposed to listen to them, but the rogue her father was ambitious. He desired to make a good alliance, and that object was better gained by intermarriage with a prince than with a subject. “There will be an uproar,” said the old man, “when those fellows down below come back. They will look black and no doubt storm a little, but we’ll have our royal marriage notwithstandstanding.” So the Prince of Nimbus married Cirrha, and Nephelo arrived at the court of King Cumulus one evening during the celebration of the bridal feast. His wrath was seen on earth in many parts of England in the shape of a great thunderstorm on the 16th of July. The adventures of the other suitors, they being thus cheated of their object, need not be detailed. As each returns he will be made acquainted with the scandalous fraud practised by the Prince of Nimbus, and this being the state of politics in Cloud-Land at the moment when we go to press, we may fairly expect to witness five or six more thunderstorms before next winter. Each suitor, as he returns and finds how shamefully he has been cheated, will create a great disturbance; and no wonder. Conduct so rascally as that of the Prince of Nimbus is enough to fill the clouds with uproar.

VIII.

AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY.

In one of the dirtiest and most gloomy streets leading to the Rue Saint Denis, in Paris, there stands a tall and ancient house, the lower portion of which is a large mercer’s shop. This establishment is held to be one of the very best in the neighborhood, and has for many years belonged to an individual on whom we will bestow the name of Ramin.

About ten years ago, Monsieur Ramin was a jovial red-faced man of forty, who joked his customers into purchasing his goods, flattered the pretty grisettes outrageously, and now and then gave them a Sunday treat at the barrier, as the cheapest way of securing their custom. Some people thought him a careless, good-natured fellow, and wondered how, with his off-hand ways, he contrived to make money so fast, but those who knew him well saw that he was one of those who “never lost an opportunity.” Others declared that Monsieur Ramin’s own definition of his character was, that he was a “bon enfant,” and that “it was all luck.” He shrugged his shoulders and laughed when people hinted at his deep scheming in making, and his skill in taking

advantage of Excellent Opportunities.

He was sitting in his gloomy parlor one fine morning in Spring, breakfasting from a dark liquid honored with the name of onion soup, glancing at the newspaper, and keeping a vigilant look on the shop through the open door, when his old servant Catherine suddenly observed:—

“I suppose you know Monsieur Bonelle has come to live in the vacant apartment on the fourth floor?”

“What!” exclaimed Monsieur Ramin in a loud key.

Catherine repeated her statement, to which her master listened in total silence.

“Well!” he said, at length, in his most careless tones, “what about the old fellow?” and he once more resumed his triple occupation of reading, eating, and watching.

“Why,” continued Catherine, “they say he is nearly dying, and that his housekeeper, Marguerite, vowed he could never get up stairs alive. It took two men to carry him up; and when he was at length quiet in bed, Marguerite went down to the porter’s lodge and sobbed there a whole hour, saying, ‘Her poor master had the gout, the rheumatics, and a bad asthma; that though he had been got up stairs, he would never come down again alive; that if she could only get him to confess his sins and make his will, she would not mind it so much; but that when she spoke of the lawyer or the priest, he blasphemed at her like a heathen, and declared he would live to bury her and everybody else.’ ”

Monsieur Ramin heard Catherine with great attention, forgot to finish his soup, and remained for five minutes in profound rumination, without so much as perceiving two customers who had entered the shop and were waiting to be served. When aroused, he was heard to exclaim:

“What an excellent opportunity!”

Monsieur Bonelle had been Ramin’s predecessor. The succession of the latter to the shop was a mystery. No one ever knew how it was that this young and poor assistant managed to replace his patron. Some said that he had detected Monsieur Bonelle in frauds which he threatened to expose, unless the business were given up to him as the price of his silence; others averred that, having drawn a prize in the lottery, he had resolved to set up a fierce opposition over the way, and that Monsieur Bonelle, having obtained a hint of his intentions, had thought it most prudent to accept the trifling sum his clerk offered, and avoid a ruinous competition. Some charitable souls—moved no doubt by Monsieur Bonelle’s misfortune—endeavored to console and pump

him; but all they could get from him was the bitter exclamation, “To think I should have been duped by him!” For Ramin had the art, though then a mere youth, to pass himself off on his master as an innocent provincial lad. Those who sought an explanation from the new mercer, were still more unsuccessful. “My good old master,” he said in his jovial way, “felt in need of repose, and so I obligingly relieved him of all business and botheration.”

Years passed away; Ramin prospered, and neither thought nor heard of his “good old master.” The house, of which he tenanted the lower portion, was offered for sale; he had long coveted it, and had almost concluded an agreement with the actual owner, when Monsieur Bonelle unexpectedly stepped in at the eleventh hour, and by offering a trifle more secured the bargain. The rage and mortification of Monsieur Ramin were extreme. He could not understand how Bonelle, whom he had thought ruined, had scraped up so large a sum; his lease was out, and he now felt himself at the mercy of the man he had so much injured. But either Monsieur Bonelle was free from vindictive feelings, or those feelings did not blind him to the expediency of keeping a good tenant; for though he raised the rent, until Monsieur Ramin groaned inwardly, he did not refuse to renew the lease. They had met at that period; but never since.

“Well, Catherine,” observed Monsieur Ramin to his old servant on the following morning, “how is that good Monsieur Bonelle getting on?”

“I dare say you feel very uneasy about him,” she replied with a sneer.

Monsieur Ramin looked up and frowned.

“Catherine,” said he, dryly, “you will have the goodness, in the first place, not to make impertinent remarks; in the second place, you will oblige me by going up stairs to inquire after the health of Monsieur Bonelle, and say that I sent you.”

Catherine grumbled and obeyed. Her master was in the shop, when she returned in a few minutes, and delivered with evident satisfaction the following gracious message:

“Monsieur Bonelle desires his compliments to you, and declines to state how he is; he will also thank you to attend to your own shop, and not to trouble yourself about his health.”

“How does he look?” asked Monsieur Ramin with the most perfect composure.

“I caught a glimpse of him, and he appears to me to be rapidly preparing for the good offices of the undertaker.”

Monsieur Ramin smiled, rubbed his hands, and joked merrily with a dark-

eyed grisette, who was cheapening some ribbon for her cap. That girl made an excellent bargain that day.

Towards dusk the mercer left the shop to the care of his attendant, and softly stole up to the fourth story. In answer to his gentle ring, a little old woman opened the door, and giving him a rapid look, said briefly,

“Monsieur is inexorable; he won’t see any doctor whatever.”

She was going to shut the door in his face, when Ramin quickly interposed, under his breath, with, “I am not a doctor.”

She looked at him from head to foot.

“Are you a lawyer?”

“Nothing of the sort, my good lady.”

“Well, then, are you a priest?”

“I may almost say, quite the reverse.”

“Indeed, you must go away; master sees no one.”

Once more she would have shut the door, but Ramin prevented her.

“My good lady,” said he, in his most insinuating tones, “it is true I am neither a lawyer, a doctor, nor a priest. I am an old friend, a very old friend of your excellent master; I have come to see good Monsieur Bonelle in his present affliction.”

Marguerite did not answer, but allowed him to enter, and closed the door behind him. He was going to pass from the narrow and gloomy ante-chamber into an inner room—whence now proceeded a sound of loud coughing—when the old woman laid her hand on his arm, and raising herself on tip-toe to reach his ear, whispered:

“For Heaven’s sake, sir, since you are his friend, do talk to him; do tell him to make his will, and hint something about a soul to be saved, and all that sort of a thing: do, sir!”

Monsieur Ramin nodded and winked in a way that said “I will.” He proved, however, his prudence by not speaking aloud, for a voice from within sharply exclaimed,

“Marguerite, you are talking to some one. Marguerite, I will see neither doctor nor lawyer; and if any meddling priest dare—”

“It is only an old friend, sir;” interrupted Marguerite, opening the inner door.

Her master, on looking up, perceived the red face of Monsieur Ramin

peeping over the old woman's shoulder, and irefully cried out,

"How dare you bring that fellow here? And you, sir, how dare you come?"

"My good old friend, there are feelings," said Ramin, spreading his fingers over the left pocket of his waistcoat,—"there are feelings," he repeated, "that cannot be subdued. One such feeling brought me here. The fact is, I am a good-natured, easy fellow, and I never bear malice. I never forget an old friend, but love to forget old differences when I find one party in affliction."

He drew a chair forward as he spoke, and composedly seated himself opposite to his late master.

Monsieur Bonelle was a thin old man, with a pale sharp face, and keen features. At first, he eyed his visitor from the depths of his vast arm-chair; but, as if not satisfied with this distant view, he bent forward, and laying both hands on his thin knees, he looked up into Ramin's face with a fixed and piercing gaze. He had not, however, the power of disconcerting his guest.

"What did you come here for?" he at length asked.

"Merely to have the extreme satisfaction of seeing how you are, my good old friend. Nothing more."

"Well, look at me—and then go."

Nothing could be so discouraging; but this was an Excellent Opportunity, and when Monsieur Ramin had an excellent opportunity in view, his pertinacity was invincible. Being now resolved to stay, it was not in Monsieur Bonelle's power to banish him. At the same time, he had tact enough to render his presence agreeable. He knew that his coarse and boisterous wit had often delighted Monsieur Bonelle of old, and he now exerted himself so successfully as to betray the old man two or three times into hearty laughter.

"Ramin," said he, at length, laying his thin hand on the arm of his guest, and peering with his keen glance into the mercer's purple face, "you are a funny fellow, but I know you; you cannot make me believe you have called just to see how I am, and to amuse me. Come, be candid for once; what do you want?"

Ramin threw himself back in his chair, and laughed blandly, as much as to say, "Can you suspect me?"

"I have no shop now out of which you can wheedle me," continued the old man; "and surely you are not such a fool as to come to me for money."

"Money?" repeated the draper, as if his host had mentioned something he never dreamt of. "Oh no!"

Ramin saw it would not do to broach the subject he had really come about,

too abruptly, now that suspicion seemed so wide awake—the opportunity had not arrived.

“There is something up, Ramin, I know; I see it in the twinkle of your eye; but you can’t deceive me again.”

“Deceive you?” said the jolly schemer, shaking his head reverentially. “Deceive a man of your penetration and depth? Impossible! The bare supposition is flattery. My dear friend,” he continued, soothingly, “I did not dream of such a thing. The fact is, Bonelle, though they call me a jovial, careless, rattling dog, I have a conscience; and, somehow, I have never felt quite easy about the way in which I became your successor downstairs. It was rather sharp practice, I admit.”

Bonelle seemed to relent.

“Now for it,” said the Opportunity-hunter to himself—“By-the-by,” (speaking aloud,) “this house must be a great trouble to you in your present weak state? Two of your lodgers have lately gone away without paying—a great nuisance, especially to an invalid.”

“I tell you I’m as sound as a colt.”

“At all events, the whole concern must be a great bother to you. If I were you, I would sell the house.”

“And if I were you,” returned the landlord, dryly, “I would buy it—”

“Precisely,” interrupted the tenant, eagerly.

“That is, if you could get it. Phoo! I knew you were after something. Will you give eighty thousand francs for it?” abruptly asked Monsieur Bonelle.

“Eighty thousand francs!” echoed Ramin. “Do you take me for Louis Philippe or the Bank of France?”

“Then, we’ll say no more about it—are you not afraid of leaving your shop so long?”

Ramin returned to the charge, heedless of the hint to depart. “The fact is, my good old friend, ready money is not my strong point just now. But if you wish very much to be relieved of the concern, what say you to a life annuity? I could manage that.”

Monsieur Bonelle gave a short, dry, churchyard cough, and looked as if his life were not worth an hour’s purchase. “You think yourself immensely clever, I dare say,” he said. “They have persuaded you that I am dying. Stuff! I shall bury you yet.”

The mercer glanced at the thin fragile frame, and exclaimed to himself,

“Deluded old gentleman!” “My dear Bonelle,” he continued, aloud, “I know well the strength of your admirable constitution; but allow me to observe that you neglect yourself too much. Now, suppose a good sensible doctor—”

“Will you pay him?” interrogated Bonelle sharply.

“Most willingly,” replied Ramin, with an eagerness that made the old man smile. “As to the annuity, since the subject annoys you, we will talk of it some other time.”

“After you have heard the doctor’s report,” sneered Bonelle.

The mercer gave him a stealthy glance, which the old man’s keen look immediately detected. Neither could repress a smile; these good souls understood one another perfectly, and Ramin saw that this was not the Excellent Opportunity he desired, and departed.

The next day Ramin sent a neighboring medical man, and heard it was his opinion that if Bonelle held on for three months longer, it would be a miracle. Delightful news!

Several days elapsed, and although very anxious, Ramin assumed a careless air, and did not call upon his landlord, or take any notice of him. At the end of the week old Marguerite entered the shop to make a trifling purchase.

“And how are we getting on up-stairs?” negligently asked Monsieur Ramin.

“Worse and worse, my good Sir,” she sighed. “We have rheumatic pains, which make us often use expressions the reverse of Christian-like, and yet nothing can induce us to see either the lawyer or the priest; the gout is getting nearer to our stomach every day, and still we go on talking about the strength of our constitution. Oh, Sir, if you have any influence with us, do, pray do, tell us how wicked it is to die without making one’s will or confessing one’s sins.”

“I shall go up this very evening,” ambiguously replied Monsieur Ramin.

He kept his promise, and found Monsieur Bonelle in bed, groaning with pain, and in the worst of tempers.

“What poisoning doctor did you send?” he asked, with an ireful glance; “I want no doctor, I am not ill; I will not follow his prescription; he forbade me to eat; I will eat.”

“He is a very clever man,” said the visitor. “He told me that never in the whole course of his experience has he met with what he called so much ‘resisting power’ as exists in your frame. He asked me if you were not of a long-lived race.”

“That is as people may judge,” replied Monsieur Bonelle. “All I can say is, that my grandfather died at ninety, and my father at eighty-six.”

“The doctor owned that you had a wonderfully strong constitution.”

“Who said I hadn’t?” exclaimed the invalid feebly.

“You may rely on it, you would preserve your health better if you had not the trouble of these vexatious lodgers. Have you thought about the life annuity?” said Ramin as carelessly as he could, considering how near the matter was to his hopes and wishes.

“Why, I have scruples,” returned Bonelle, coughing. “I do not wish to take you in. My longevity would be the ruin of you.”

“To meet that difficulty,” quickly replied the mercer, “we can reduce the interest.”

“But I must have high interest,” placidly returned Monsieur Bonelle.

Ramin, on hearing this, burst into a loud fit of laughter, called Monsieur Bonelle a sly old fox, gave him a poke in the ribs, which made the old man cough for five minutes, and then proposed that they should talk it over some other day. The mercer left Monsieur Bonelle in the act of protesting that he felt as strong as a man of forty.

Monsieur Ramin felt in no hurry to conclude the proposed agreement. “The later one begins to pay, the better,” he said, as he descended the stairs.

Days passed on, and the negotiation made no way. It struck the observant tradesman that all was not right. Old Marguerite several times refused to admit him, declaring her master was asleep; there was something mysterious and forbidding in her manner that seemed to Monsieur Ramin very ominous. At length a sudden thought occurred to him; the housekeeper—wishing to become her master’s heir—had heard his scheme and opposed it. On the very day that he arrived at this conclusion, he met a lawyer, with whom he had formerly had some transactions, coming down the staircase. The sight sent a chill through the mercer’s commercial heart, and a presentiment—one of those presentiments that seldom deceive—told him it was too late. He had, however, the fortitude to abstain from visiting Monsieur Bonelle until evening came; when he went up, resolved to see him in spite of all Marguerite might urge. The door was half-open, and the old housekeeper stood talking on the landing to a middle-aged man in a dark cassock.

“It is all over! The old witch has got the priests at him,” thought Ramin, inwardly groaning at his own folly in allowing himself to be forestalled.

“You cannot see Monsieur to-night,” sharply said Marguerite, as he attempted to pass her.

“Alas! is my excellent friend so very ill?” asked Ramin, in a mournful tone.

“Sir,” eagerly said the clergyman, catching him by the button of his coat, “if you are indeed the friend of that unhappy man, do seek to bring him into a more suitable frame of mind. I have seen many dying men, but never so much obstinacy, never such infatuated belief in the duration of life.”

“Then you think he really is dying?” asked Ramin; and, in spite of the melancholy accent he endeavored to assume, there was something so peculiar in his tone, that the priest looked at him very fixedly as he slowly replied,

“Yes, Sir, I think he is.”

“Ah!” was all Monsieur Ramin said; and as the clergyman had now relaxed his hold of the button, Ramin passed in spite of the remonstrances of Marguerite, who rushed after the priest. He found Monsieur Bonelle still in bed in a towering rage.

“Oh! Ramin, my friend,” he groaned, “never take a housekeeper, and never let her know you have any property. They are harpies, Ramin,—harpies! such a day as I have had; first, the lawyer, who comes to write down ‘my last testamentary dispositions,’ as he calls them; then the priest, who gently hints that I am a dying man. Oh, what a day!”

“And did you make your will, my excellent friend?” softly asked Monsieur Ramin, with a keen look.

“Make my will?” indignantly exclaimed the old man; “make my will? what do you mean, Sir? do you mean to say I am dying?”

“Heaven forbid!” piously ejaculated Ramin.

“Then why do you ask me if I have been making my will?” angrily resumed the old man. He then began to be extremely abusive.

When money was in the way, Monsieur Ramin, though otherwise of a violent temper, had the meekness of a lamb. He bore the treatment of his host with the meekest patience, and having first locked the door so as to make sure that Marguerite would not interrupt them, he watched Monsieur Bonelle attentively, and satisfied himself that the Excellent Opportunity he had been ardently longing for had arrived. “He is going fast,” he thought; “and unless I settle the agreement to-night, and get it drawn up and signed to-morrow, it will be too late.”

“My dear friend,” he at length said aloud, on perceiving that the old gentleman had fairly exhausted himself and was lying panting on his back, “you are indeed a lamentable instance of the lengths to which the greedy lust of lucre will carry our poor human nature. It is really distressing to see

Marguerite, a faithful, attached servant, suddenly converted into a tormenting harpy by the prospect of a legacy! Lawyers and priests flock around you like birds of prey, drawn hither by the scent of gold! Oh, the miseries of having delicate health combined with a sound constitution and large property!”

“Ramin,” groaned the old man, looking inquiringly into his visitor’s face, “you are again going to talk to me about that annuity—I know you are!”

“My excellent friend, it is merely to deliver you from a painful position.”

“I am sure, Ramin, you think in your soul I am dying,” whimpered Monsieur Bonelle.

“Absurd, my dear Sir. Dying? I will prove to you that you have never been in better health. In the first place you feel no pain.”

“Excepting from rheumatism,” groaned Monsieur Bonelle.

“Rheumatism! who ever died of rheumatism? and if that be all—”

“No, it is not all,” interrupted the old man with great irritability; “what would you say to the gout getting higher and higher up every day?”

“The gout is rather disagreeable, but if there is nothing else—”

“Yes, there is something else,” sharply said Monsieur Bonelle. “There is an asthma that will scarcely let me breathe, and a racking pain in my head that does not allow me a moment’s ease. But if you think I am dying, Ramin, you are quite mistaken.”

“No doubt, my dear friend, no doubt; but in the meanwhile, suppose we talk of this annuity. Shall we say one thousand francs a year.”

“What?” asked Bonelle, looking at him very fixedly.

“My dear friend, I mistook; I meant two thousand francs per annum,” hurriedly rejoined Ramin.

Monsieur Bonelle closed his eyes, and appeared to fall into a gentle slumber. The mercer coughed; the sick man never moved.

“Monsieur Bonelle.”

No reply.

“My excellent friend.”

Utter silence.

“Are you asleep?”

A long pause.

“Well, then, what do you say to three thousand?”

Monsieur Bonelle opened his eyes.

“Ramin,” said he, sententiously, “you are a fool; the house brings me in four thousand as it is.”

This was quite false, and the mercer knew it; but he had his own reasons for wishing to seem to believe it true.

“Good Heavens!” said he, with an air of great innocence, “who could have thought it, and the lodgers constantly running away. Four thousand? Well, then, you shall have four thousand.”

Monsieur Bonelle shut his eyes once more, and murmured “The mere rental—nonsense!” He then folded his hands on his breast, and appeared to compose himself to sleep.

“Oh, what a sharp man of business he is!” Ramin said, admiringly; but for once omnipotent flattery failed in its effect; “So acute!” continued he, with a stealthy glance at the old man, who remained perfectly unmoved. “I see you will insist upon making it the other five hundred francs.”

Monsieur Ramin said this as if five thousand five hundred francs had already been mentioned, and was the very summit of Monsieur Bonelle’s ambition. But the ruse failed in its effect; the sick man never so much as stirred.

“But, my dear friend,” urged Monsieur Ramin in a tone of feeling remonstrance, “there is such a thing as being too sharp, too acute. How can you expect that I shall give you more when your constitution is so good, and you are to be such a long liver?”

“Yes, but I may be carried off one of those days,” quietly observed the old man, evidently wishing to turn the chance of his own death to account.

“Indeed, and I hope so,” muttered the mercer, who was getting very ill-tempered.

“You see,” soothingly continued Bonelle, “you are so good a man of business, Ramin, that you will double the actual value of the house in no time. I am a quiet, easy person, indifferent to money; otherwise this house would now bring me in eight thousand at the very least.”

“Eight thousand!” indignantly exclaimed the mercer. “Monsieur Bonelle, you have no conscience. Come now, my dear friend, do be reasonable. Six thousand francs a-year (I don’t mind saying six) is really a very handsome income for a man of your quiet habits. Come, be reasonable.” But Monsieur Bonelle turned a deaf ear to reason, and closed his eyes once more. What between opening and shutting them for the next quarter of an hour, he at length induced Monsieur Ramin to offer him seven thousand francs.

“Very well, Ramin, agreed,” he quietly said; “you have made an unconscionable bargain.” To this succeeded a violent fit of coughing.

As Ramin unlocked the door to leave, he found old Marguerite, who had been listening all the time, ready to assail him with a torrent of whispered abuse for duping her “poor dear innocent old master into such a bargain.” The mercer bore it all very patiently; he could make allowances for her excited feelings, and only rubbed his hands and bade her a jovial good evening.

The agreement was signed on the following day, to the indignation of old Marguerite, and the mutual satisfaction of the parties concerned.

Every one admired the luck and shrewdness of Ramin, for the old man every day was reported worse; and it was clear to all that the first quarter of the annuity would never be paid. Marguerite, in her wrath, told the story as a grievance to every one; people listened, shook their heads, and pronounced Monsieur Ramin to be a deuced clever fellow.

A month elapsed. As Ramin was coming down one morning from the attics, where he had been giving notice to a poor widow who had failed in paying her rent, he heard a light step on the stairs. Presently a sprightly gentleman, in buoyant health and spirits, wearing the form of Monsieur Bonelle, appeared. Ramin stood aghast.

“Well, Ramin,” gaily said the old man, “how are you getting on? Have you been tormenting the poor widow up stairs? Why, man, we must live and let live!”

“Monsieur Bonelle,” said the mercer, in a hollow tone, “may I ask where are your rheumatics?”

“Gone, my dear friend,—gone.”

“And the gout that was creeping higher and higher every day,” exclaimed Monsieur Ramin, in a voice of anguish.

“It went lower and lower, till it disappeared altogether,” composedly replied Bonelle.

“And your asthma——”

“The asthma remains, but asthmatic people are proverbially long-lived. It is, I have been told, the only complaint that Methuselah was troubled with.” With this, Bonelle opened his door, shut it, and disappeared.

Ramin was transfixed on the stairs; petrified with intense disappointment, and a powerful sense of having been duped. When discovered, he stared vacantly, and raved about an Excellent Opportunity of taking his revenge.

The wonderful cure was the talk of the neighborhood, whenever Monsieur

Bonelle appeared in the streets, jauntily flourishing his cane. In the first frenzy of his despair, Ramin refused to pay; he accused every one of having been in a plot to deceive him; he turned off Catherine and expelled his porter; he publicly accused the lawyer and priest of conspiracy; brought an action against the doctor, and lost it. He had another brought against him for violently assaulting Marguerite, in which he was cast in heavy damages. Monsieur Bonelle did not trouble himself with useless remonstrances, but, when his annuity was refused, employed such good legal arguments as the exasperated mercer could not possibly resist.

Ten years have elapsed, and MM. Ramin and Bonelle still live on. For a house which would have been dear at fifty thousand francs, the draper has already handed over seventy thousand.

The once red-faced, jovial Ramin, is now a pale, haggard man, of sour temper and aspect. To add to his anguish, he sees the old man thrive on that money which it breaks his heart to give. Old Marguerite takes a malicious pleasure in giving him an exact account of their good cheer, and in asking him if he does not think Monsieur looks better and better every day. Of one part of this torment Ramin might get rid, by giving his old master notice to quit, and no longer having him in his house. But this he cannot do; he has a secret fear that Bonelle would take some Excellent Opportunity of dying without his knowledge, and giving some other person an Excellent Opportunity of personating him, and receiving the money in his stead.

The last accounts of the victim of Excellent Opportunities represent him as being gradually worn down with disappointment. There seems every probability of his being the first to leave the world; for Bonelle is heartier than ever.

THE END.