THE TENANTS OF MALORY

VOL.III

BY

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The Tenants of Malory Vol.III by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

CHAPTER I

A LARK

"There's some 'Old Tom,' isn't there? Get it, and glasses and cold water, here," said Cleve to his servant, who, patient, polite, sleepy, awaited his master. "You used to like it—and here are cigars;" and he shook out a shower upon his drawing-room table cover. "And where did you want to go at this time of night?"

"To Wright's, to see the end of the great game of billiards—Seller and Culverin, you know; I've two pounds on it."

"I don't care if I go with you, just now. What's this?—When the devil did this come?" Cleve had picked up and at one pale glance read a little note that lay on the table; and then he repeated coolly enough —

"I say, when did this come?"

"Before one, sir, I think," said Shepperd.

"Get me my coat," and Shepperd disappeared.

"Pestered to death," he said, moodily. "See, you have got the things here, and cigars. I shan't be five minutes away. If I'm longer, don't wait for me; but finish this first."

Cleve had turned up the collar of his outer coat, and buttoned it across his chin, and pulled a sort of travelling cap down on his brows, and away he went, looking very pale and anxious.

He did not come back in five minutes; nor in ten, twenty, or forty minutes. The "Old Tom" in the bottle had run low; Sedley looked at his watch; he could wait no longer.

When he got out upon the flagway, he felt the agreeable stimulus of the curious "Old Tom" sufficiently to render a little pause expedient for the purpose of calling to mind with clearness the geographical bearings of Wright's billiard-rooms—whither accordingly he sauntered—eastward, along deserted and echoing streets, with here and there a policeman poking into an area, or loitering along his two-mile-an-hour duty march, and now and then regaled by the unearthly music of love-sick cats among the roofs.

These streets and squares, among which he had in a manner lost himself, had in their day been the haunts and quarters of fashion, a fairy world, always migrating before the steady march of business. Sedley had quite lost his reckoning. If he had been content to go by Ludgate-hill, he would have been at Wright's half an hour before. Sedley did not know these dingy and respectable old squares; he had not even seen a policeman for the last twenty minutes, and was just then quite of the Irish lawyer's opinion that life is not long enough for short cuts.

In a silent street he passed a carriage standing near a lamp. The driver on the flagway looked hard at him. Sedley was not a romantic being only; he had also his waggish mood, and loved a lark when it came. He returned the fellow's stare with a glance as significant, slackening his pace.

"Well?" said Sedley.

"Well!" replied the driver.

"Capital!" answered Sedley.

"Be you him?" demanded the driver, after a pause.

"No; be you?" answered Sedley.

The driver seemed a little puzzled, and eyed Sedley doubtfully; and Sedley looked into the carriage, which, however, was empty, and then at the house at whose rails it stood; but it was dark from top to bottom.

He had thoughts of stepping in and availing himself of the vehicle; but seeing no particular fun in the procedure, and liking better to walk, he merely said, nodding toward the carriage—

"Lots of room."

"Room enough, I dessay."

"How long do you mean to wait?"

"As long as I'm paid for."

"Give my love to your mother."

"Feard she won't vally it."

"Take care of yourself—for my sake."

Doubtless there was a retort worthy of so sprightly a dialogue; but Sedley could not hear distinctly as he paced on, looking up at the moon, and thinking how beautifully she used to shine, and was no doubt then shining, on the flashing blue sea at Cardyllian, and over the misty mountains. And he thought of his pretty cousin Agnes Etherage; and "Yes," said he within himself, quickening his pace, "if I win that two pounds at Wright's, I'll put two pounds to it, the two pounds I should have lost, that is—there's nothing extravagant in that—and give little Agnes something pretty; I said I would; and though it was only joke, still it's a promise."

Some tradesmen's bills that morning had frightened him, and as he periodically did, he had bullied himself into resolutions of economy, out of which he ingeniously reasoned himself again. "What shall it be? I'll look in to-morrow at Dymock and Rose's—they have lots of charming little French trifles. Where the deuce are we now?"

He paused, and looking about him, and then down a stable-lane between two old-fashioned houses of handsome dimensions, he saw a fellow in a great coat loitering slowly down it, and looking up vigilantly at the two or three windows in the side of the mansion.

"A robbery, by George!" thought Sedley, as he marked the prowling vigilance of the man, and his peculiar skulking gait.

He had no sort of weapon about him, not even a stick; but he is one of the best sparrers extant, and thinks pluck and "a fist-full of fives" well worth a revolver.

Sedley hitched his shoulders, plucked off the one glove that remained on, and followed him softly a few steps, dogging him down the lane, with that shrewd, stern glance which men exchange in the prize-ring. But when on turning about the man in the surtout saw that he was observed, he confirmed Sedley's suspicions by first pausing irresolutely, and ultimately withdrawing suddenly round the angle.

Sedley had not expected this tactique. For whatever purpose, the man had been plainly watching the house, and it was nearly three o'clock. Thoroughly blooded now for a

"lark," Sedley followed swiftly to the corner, but could not see him; so, as he returned, a low window in the side wall opened, and a female voice said, "Are you there?"

"Yes," replied Tom Sedley, confidentially drawing near.

"Take this."

"All right"—and thereupon he received first a bag and then a box, each tolerably heavy.

Sedley was amused. A mystification had set in; a quiet robbery, and he the receiver. He thought of dropping the booty down the area of the respectable house round the corner, but just then the man in the surtout emerged from the wing, so to speak, and marching slowly up the perspective of the lane, seemed about to disturb him, but once more changed his mind, and disappeared.

"What is to happen next?" wondered Tom Sedley. In a few minutes a door which opens from the back yard or garden of the house from which he had received his burthen, opened cautiously, and a woman in a cloak stepped out, carrying another bag, a heavy one it also seemed, and beckoning to him, said, so soon as he was sufficiently near—

"Is the carriage come?"

"Yes'm," answered Tom, touching his hat, and affecting as well as he could the ways of a porter or a cabman.

"When they comes," she resumed, "you'll bring us to where it is, mind, and fetch the things with you—and mind ye, no noise nor talking, and walk as light as you can."

"All right," said Tom, in the same whisper in which she spoke.

It could not be a robbery—Tom had changed his mind; there was an air of respectability about the servant that conflicted with that theory, and the discovery that the carriage was waiting to receive the party was also against it.

Tom was growing more interested in his adventure; and entering into the fuss and mystery of the plot.

"Come round, please, and show me where the carriage stands," said the woman, beckoning to Tom, who followed her round the corner.

She waited for him, and laid her hand on his elbow, giving him a little jog by way of caution.

"Hush—not a word above your breath, mind," she whispered; "I see that's it; well, it needn't come no nearer, mind."

"All right, ma'am."

"And there's the window," she added in a still more cautious whisper, and pointing with a nod and a frown at a window next the hall door, through the shutter of which a dim light was visible.

"Ha!" breathed Tom, looking wise, "and all safe there?"

"We're never sure; sometimes awake; sometimes not; sometimes quiet; sometimes quite wild-like; and the window pushed open, for hair! Hoffle he is!"

"And always was," hazarded Tom.

"Wuss now, though," whispered she, shaking her head ruefully, and she returned round the angle of the house and entered the door through which she had issued, and Tom set down his load not far from the same point.

Before he had waited many minutes the same door re-opened, and two ladies, as he judged them to be from something in their air and dress, descended the steps together, followed by the maid carrying the black-leather bag as before. They stopped just under the door, which the servant shut cautiously and locked; and then these three female figures stood for a few seconds whispering together; and after that they turned and walked up the lane towards Tom Sedley, who touched his hat as they approached, and lifted his load again.

The two ladies were muffled in cloaks. The taller wore no hat or bonnet; but had instead a shawl thrown over her head and shoulders, hood-wise. She walked, leaning upon the shorter lady, languidly, like a person very weak, or in pain, and the maid at the other side, placed her arm tenderly round her waist, under her mufflers, and aided her thus as she walked. They crossed the street at the end of the stable-lane, and walked at that side toward the carriage. The maid signed to Tom, who carried his luggage quickly to its destination on the box, and was in time to open the carriage-door.

"Don't you mind," said the woman, putting Tom unceremoniously aside, and herself aiding the taller lady into the old-fashioned carriage. As she prepared to get in, Tom for a moment fancied a recognition; something in the contour of the figure, muffled as it was, for a second struck him; and at the same moment all seemed like a dream, and he stepped backward involuntarily in amazement. Had he not seen the same gesture. The arm, exactly so, and that slender hand in a gardening glove, holding a tiny trowel, under the dark foliage of old trees.

The momentary gesture was gone. The lady leaning back, a muffled figure, in the corner of the carriage, silent. Her companion, who he thought looked sharply at him, from within, now seated herself beside her; and the maid also from her place inside, told him from the window—

"Bid him drive now where he knows, quickly," and she pulled up the window.

Tom was too much interested now to let the thread of his adventure go. So to the box beside the driver he mounted, and delivered the order he had just received.

Away he drove swiftly, Citywards, through silent and empty streets. Tom quickly lost his bearings; the gas lamps grew few and far between; he was among lanes and arches, and sober, melancholy streets, such as he had never suspected of an existence in such a region.

Here the driver turned suddenly up a narrow way between old brick walls, with tufts of dingy grass here and there at top, and the worn mortar lines overlaid with velvet moss. This short passage terminated in two tall brick piers, surmounted by worn and moss-grown balls of stone.

Tom jumped down and pushed back the rusty iron gates, and they drove into an unlighted, melancholy court-yard; and Tom thundered at a tall narrow hall-door, between chipped and worn pilasters of the same white stone, surmounted by some carved heraldry, half effaced.

Standing on the summit of the steps he had to repeat his summons, till the cavernous old mansion pealed again with the echo, before a light gave token of the approach of a living being to give them greeting.

Tom opened the carriage door, and let down the steps, perhaps a little clumsily, but he was getting through his duties wonderfully.

The party entered the spacious wainscoted hall, in which was an old wooden bench, on which, gladly, it seemed, the sick lady sat herself down. A great carved doorway opened upon a square second hall or lobby, through which the ray of the single candle glanced duskily, and touched the massive banisters of a broad staircase.

This must have been the house of a very great man in its day, a Lord Chancellor, perhaps, one of those Hogarthian mansions in which such men as my Lord Squanderfield might have lived in the first George's days.

"How could any man have been such an idiot," thought Sedley, filled with momentary wonder, "as to build a palace like this in such a place?"

"Dear me! what a place—what a strange place!" whispered the elder lady, "where are we to go?"

"Up-stairs, please'm," said the woman with a brass candlestick in her hand.

"I hope there's fire, and more light, and—and proper comfort there?"

"Oh! yes'm, please; everythink as you would like, please."

"Come, dear," said the old lady tenderly, giving her arm to the languid figure resting in the hall.

So guided and lighted by the servant they followed her up the great well staircase.

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CHAPTER II.

A NEW VOICE.

The ladies ascended, led by the maid with the candle, and closely followed by their own servant, and our friend Tom Sedley brought up the rear, tugging the box and the bag with him.

At the stair-head was a great gallery from which many doors opened. Tom Sedley halted close by the banister for orders, depositing his luggage beside him. The maid set the candle down upon a table, and opened one of these tall doors, through which he saw an angle of the apartment, a fire burning in the grate, and a pleasant splendour of candlelight; he saw that the floor was carpeted, and the windows curtained, and though there was disclosed but a corner of a large room, there were visible such pieces of furniture as indicated general comfort.

In a large arm-chair, at the further side of the fire-place, sat the lady who had thrilled him with a sudden remembrance. She had withdrawn the shawl that hung in hood-like fashion over her head, and there was no longer a doubt. The Beatrice Cenci was there—his Guido—very pale, dying he thought her, with her white hands clasped, and her beautiful eyes turned upward in an agony of prayer.

The old lady, Miss Sheckleton, came near, leaned over her, kissed her tenderly, and caressingly smoothed her rich chestnut hair over her temples, and talked gently in her ear, and raised her hand in both hers, and kissed it, and drawing a chair close to hers, she sat by her, murmuring in her ear with a countenance of such kindness and compassion, that Tom Sedley loved her for it.

Looking up, Miss Sheckleton observed the door open, and Tom fancied perceived him in the perspective through it, for she rose suddenly, shut it, and he saw no more. Tom had not discovered in the glance of the old lady any sign of recognition, and for the sake of appearances he had buttoned his gray wrapper close across his throat and breast so as to conceal the evidences of his ball costume; his shining boots, however, were painfully conspicuous, but for that incongruity there was no help.

And now the servant who had let them in told Tom to bring the box and bag into the servants' room, to which she led him across the gallery.

There was a large fire, which was pleasant, a piece of matting on the floor, a few kitchen utensils ranged near the fire-place, a deal table, and some common kitchen chairs. Dismal enough would the room have looked, notwithstanding its wainscoting, had it not been for the glow diffused by the fire.

By this fire, on a kitchen chair, and upon his own opera hat, which he wished specially to suppress, sat Tom Sedley, resolved to see his adventure one hour or so into futurity, before abandoning it, and getting home to his bed, and in the meantime doing his best to act a servant, as he fancied such a functionary would appear in his moments of ease unbending in the kitchen or the servants' hall. The maid who had received the visitors in the hall, Anne Evans by name, square, black-haired, slightly pitted with smallpox, and grave, came and sat down at the other side of the fire, and eyed Tom Sedley in silence.

Now and then Tom felt uncomfortably about his practical joke, which was degenerating into a deception. But an hour or so longer could not matter much; and might he not make himself really useful if the services of a messenger were required?

Anne Evans was considering him in silence, and he turned a little more toward the fire, and poked it, as he fancied a groom would poke a fire for his private comfort.

"Are you servant to the ladies?" at last she asked.

Tom smiled at the generality of the question, but interpreting in good faith—

"No," said he, "I came with the carriage."

"Servant to the gentleman?" she asked.

"What gentleman?"

"You know well."

Tom had not an idea, but could not well say so. He therefore poked the fire again, and said, "Go on, miss; I'm listening."

She did not go on, however, for some time, and then it was to say—

"My name is Anne Evans. What may your name be?"

"Can't tell that. I left my name at home," said Tom, mysteriously.

"Won't tell?"

"Can't."

"I'm only by the month. Come in just a week to-morrow," observed Anne Evans.

"They'll not part with you in a month, Miss Evans. No; they has some taste and feelin' among them. I wouldn't wonder if you was here for ever!" said Tom, with enthusiasm; "and what's this place, miss—this house I mean—whose house is it?"

"Can't say, only I hear it's bought for a brewery, to be took down next year."

"Oh, criky!" said Tom; "that's a pity."

There was a short pause.

"I saw you 'ide your 'at," said Anne Evans.

"Not 'ide it," said Tom; "only sits on it—always sits on my 'at."

Tom produced it, let it bounce up like a jack-in-a-box, and shut it down again.

Miss Evans was neither amused nor surprised.

"Them's hopera 'ats—first quality—they used to come in boxes on 'em, as long as from here to you, when I was at Mr. Potterton's, the hatter. Them's for gents—they air—and not for servants."

"The gov'nor gives me his old uns," said Tom, producing the best fib he could find.

"And them French boots," she added, meditatively.

"Perquisite likewise," said Tom.

Miss Anne Evans closed her eyes, and seemed disposed to take a short nap in her chair. But on a sudden she opened them to say—

"I think you're the gentleman himself."

"The old gentleman?" said Tom.

"No. The young un."

"I'm jest what I tell you, not objectin' to the compliment all the same," said Tom.

"And a ring on your finger?"

"A ring on my finger—yes. I wear it two days in the week. My grand-uncle's ring, who was a gentleman, being skipper of a coal brig."

"What's the lady's name?"

"Can't tell, Miss Evans; dussn't."

"Fuss about nothin'!" said she, and closed her eyes again, and opened them in a minute more, to add, "but I think you're him, and that's my belief."

"No, I ain't miss, as you'll see, by-and-by."

"Tisn't nothin' to me, only people is so close."

The door opened, and a tall woman in black, with a black net cap on, came quietly but quickly into the room.

"You're the man?" said she, with an air of authority, fixing her eyes askance on Tom.

"Yes 'm, please."

"Well, you don't go on no account, for you'll be wanted just now."

"No, ma'am."

"Where's the box and bag you're in charge of?"

"Out here," said Tom.

"Hish, man, quiet; don't you know there's sickness? Walk easy, can't you? please, consider."

Tom followed her almost on tip-toe to the spot where the parcels lay.

"Gently now; into this room, please," and she led the way into that sitting-room into which Tom Sedley had looked some little time since, from the stair-head.

The beautiful young lady was gone, but Miss Sheckleton was standing at the further door of the room with her hands clasped, and her eyes raised in prayer, and her pale cheeks wet with tears.

Hearing the noise, she gently closed the door, and hastily drying her eyes, whispered, "Set them down there," pointing to a sofa, on which Tom placed them accordingly. "Thanks—that will do. You may go."

When Sedley had closed the door—

"Oh, Mrs. Graver," whispered Anne Sheckleton, clasping her wrists in her trembling fingers, "is she very ill?"

"Well, ma'am, she is ill."

"But, oh, my God, you don't think we are going to lose her?" she whispered wildly, with her imploring gaze in the nurse's eyes.

"Oh, no, please God, ma'am, it will all be right. You must not fuss yourself, ma'am. You must not let her see you like this, on no account."

"Shall I send for him now?"

"No, ma'am; he'd only be in the way. I'll tell you when; and his man's here, ready to go, any minute. I must go back to her now, ma'am. Hish!"

And Mrs. Graver disappeared with a little rustle of her dress, and no sound of steps. That solemn bird floated very noiselessly round sick beds, and you only heard, as it were, the hovering of her wings.

And then, in a minute more, in glided Miss Sheckleton, having dried her eyes very carefully.

And now came a great knocking at the hall door, echoing dully through the house. It was Doctor Grimshaw, who had just got his coat off, and was winding his watch, when he

was called from his own bed-side by this summons, and so was here after a long day's work, to make a new start, and await the dawn in this chamber of pain.

In he came, and Miss Sheckleton felt that light and hope entered the room with him. Florid, portly, genial, with a light, hopeful step, and a good, decided, cheery manner, he inspired confidence, and seemed to take command, not only of the case, but of the ailment itself.

Miss Sheckleton knew this good doctor, and gladly shook his hand; and he recognised her with a hesitating look that seemed to ask a question, but was not meant to do so, and he spoke cheerfully to the patient, and gave his directions to the nurse, and in about half an hour more told good Anne Sheckleton that she had better leave the patient.

So, with the docility which an able physician inspires, good Anne Sheckleton obeyed, and in the next room—sometimes praying, sometimes standing and listening, sometimes wandering from point to point, in the merest restlessness—she waited and watched for more than an hour, which seemed to her longer than a whole night, and at last tapped very gently at the door, a lull having come for a time in the sick chamber, and unable longer to endure her suspense.

A little bit of the door was opened, and Anne Sheckleton saw the side of Mrs. Graver's straight nose, and one of her wrinkled eyes, and her grim mouth.

"How is she?" whispered Miss Sheckleton, feeling as if she was herself about to die.

"Pretty well, ma'am," answered the nurse, but with an awful look of insincerity, under which the old lady's heart sank down and down, as if it had foundered.

"One word to Dr. Grimshaw," she whispered, with white lips.

"You can't, ma'am," murmured the nurse, sternly, and about to shut the door in her face.

"Wait, wait," whispered the voice of kind old Doctor Grimshaw, and he came into the next room to Miss Sheckleton, closing the door after him.

"Oh, doctor!" she gasped.

"Well, Miss Sheckleton, I hope she'll do very well; I've just given her something—a slight stimulant—and I've every confidence everything will be well. Don't make yourself uneasy; it is not going on badly."

"Oh, Doctor Grimshaw, shall I send for him? He'd never forgive me; and I promised her, darling Margaret, to send."

"Don't send—on no account yet. Don't bring him here—he's better away. I'll tell you when to send."

The doctor opened the door.

"Still quiet?"

"Yes, sir," whispered Mrs. Graver.

Again he closed the door.

"Nice creature she seems. A relation of yours?" asked the Doctor.

"My cousin."

"When was she married?"

"About a year ago."

"Never any tendency to consumption?"

"Never."

"Nothing to make her low or weak? Is she hysterical?"

"No, hardly that, but nervous and excitable."

"I know; very good. I think she'll do very nicely. If anything goes the least wrong I'll let you know. Now stay quiet in there."

And he shut the door, and she heard his step move softly over the next room floor, so great was the silence; and she kneeled down and prayed as helpless people pray in awful peril; and more time passed, and more, slowly, very slowly. Oh, would the dawn ever come, and the daylight again?

Voices and moans she heard from the room. Again she prayed on her knees to the throne of mercy, in the agony of her suspense, and now over the strange roofs spread the first faint gray of the coming dawn; and there came a silence in the room, and on a sudden was heard a new tiny voice crying.

"The little child!" cried old Anne Sheckleton, springing to her feet, with clasped hands, in the anguish of delight, and such a gush of tears—as she looked up, thanking God with her smiles—as comes only in such moments.

Margaret's clear voice faintly said something; Anne could not hear what.

"A boy," answered the cheery voice of Doctor Grimshaw.

"Oh! he'll be so glad!" answered the faint clear voice in a kind of rapture.

"Of course he will," replied the same cheery voice. And another question came, too low for old Anne Sheckleton's ears.

"A beautiful boy! as fine a fellow as you could desire to look at. Bring him here, nurse."

"Oh! the darling!" said the same faint voice. "I'm so happy."

"Thank God! thank God! thank God!" sobbed delighted Anne Sheckleton, her cheeks still streaming in showers of tears as she stood waiting at the door for the moment of admission, and hearing the sweet happy tones of Margaret's voice sounding in her ears like the voice of one who had just now died, heard faintly through the door of heaven.

For thus it has been, and thus to the end, it will be—the "sorrow" of the curse is remembered no more, "for joy that a man is born into the world."

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CHAPTER III

CLEVE COMES

Tom Sedley was dozing in his chair, by the fire, when he was roused by Mrs. Graver's voice.

"You'll take this note at once, please, to your master; there's a cab at the door, and the lady says you mustn't make no delay."

It took some seconds to enable Tom to account for the scene, the actor and his own place of repose, his costume, and the tenor of the strange woman's language. In a little while, however, he recovered the context, and the odd passage in his life became intelligible.

Still half asleep, Tom hurried down-stairs, and in the hall, with a shock, read the address, "Cleve Verney, Esq." At the hall-door steps he found a cab, into which he jumped, telling the man to drive to Cleve Verney's lodgings.

There were expiring lights in the drawing-room, the blinds of which were up, and as the cab stopped at the steps a figure appeared at one of the windows, and Cleve Verney opened it, and told the driver, "Don't mind knocking, I'll go down."

"Come up-stairs," said Cleve, as he stood at the open door, addressing Sedley, and mistaking him for the person whom he had employed.

Up ran Tom Sedley at his heels.

"Hollo! Sedley—what brings you here?" said Cleve, when Tom appeared in the light of the candles. "You don't mean to say the ball has been going on till now—or is it a scrape?"

"Nothing—only this I've been commissioned to give you," and he placed Miss Sheckleton's note in his hand.

Cleve had looked wofully haggard and anxious as Tom entered. But his countenance changed now to an ashy paleness, and there was no mistaking his extreme agitation.

He opened the note—a very brief one it seemed—and read it.

"Thank God!" he said with a great sigh, and then he walked to the window and looked out, and returned again to the candles and read the note once more.

"How did you know I was up, Tom?"

"The lights in the windows."

"Yes. Don't let the cab go."

Cleve was getting on his coat, and speaking like a man in a dream.

"I say, Tom Sedley, how did you come by this note?" he said, with a sudden pause, and holding Miss Sheckleton's note in his fingers.

"Well, quite innocently," hesitated Sedley.

"How the devil was it, sir? Come, you may as well—by heaven, Sedley, you shall tell me the truth!"

Tom looked on his friend Cleve, and saw his eyes gleaming sharply on him, and his face very white.

"Of course I'll tell you, Cleve," said Tom, and with this exordium he stumbled honestly through his story, which by no means quieted Cleve Verney.

"You d——d little Paul Pry!" said he. "Well, you have got hold of a secret now, like the man in the iron mask, and by——you had better keep it."

A man who half blames himself already, and is in a position which he hates and condemns, will stand a great deal more of hard language, and even of execration, than he would under any other imaginable circumstances.

"You can't blame me half as much as I do myself. I assure you, Cleve, I'm awfully sorry. It was the merest lark—at first—and then —when I saw that beautiful—that young lady—"

"Don't talk of that lady any more; I'm her husband. There, you have it all, and if you whisper it to mortal you may ruin me; but one or other of us shall die for it!"

Cleve was talking in a state of positive exasperation.

"Whisper it!—tell it! You don't in the least understand me, Cleve," said Tom, collecting himself, and growing a little lofty; "I don't whisper or tell things; and as for daring or not daring, I don't know what you mean; and I hope, if occasion for dying came, I should funk it as little as any other fellow."

"I'm going to this d——d place now. I don't much care what you do: I almost wish you'd shoot me."

He struck his hand on the table, looking not at Tom Sedley, but with a haggard rage through the window, and away toward the gray east; and without another word to Sedley, he ran down, shutting the hall-door with a crash that showed more of his temper than of his prudence, and Tom saw him jump into the cab and drive away.

The distance is really considerable, but in Cleve's intense reverie time and space contracted, and before he fancied they had accomplished half the way, he found himself at the tall door and stained pilasters and steps of the old red-brick house.

Anne Evans, half awake, awaited his arrival on the steps. He ran lightly up the stairs, under her covert scrutiny; and, in obedience to Mrs. Graver's gesture of warning, as she met him with raised hand and her frowning "Hish" at the head of the stairs, he checked his pace, and in a whisper he made his eager inquiries. She was going on very nicely.

"I must see Miss Sheckleton—the old lady—where is she?" urged Cleve.

"Here, sir, please"—and Mrs. Graver opened a door, and he found tired Miss Sheckleton tying on her bonnet, and getting her cloak about her.

"Oh! Cleve, dear"—she called him "Cleve" now—"I'm so delighted; she's doing very well; the doctor's quite pleased with her, and it's a boy, Cleve, and—and I wish you joy with all my heart."

And as she spoke, the kind old lady was shaking both his hands, and smiling up into his handsome face, like sunshine; but that handsome face, though it smiled down darkly upon her, was, it seemed to her, strangely joyless, and even troubled.

"And Cleve, dear, my dear Mr. Verney—I'm so sorry; but I must go immediately. I make his chocolate in the morning, and he sometimes calls for it at half-past seven. This miserable attack that has kept him here, and the risk in which he is at every day he stays in this town, it is so distracting. And if I should not be at home and ready to see him when he calls, he'd be sure to suspect something; and I really see nothing but ruin from his temper and violence to all of us, if he were to find out how it is. So good-bye, and God bless you. The doctor says he thinks you may see her in a very little time—half an hour or so—if you are very careful not to let her excite or agitate herself; and—God bless you—I shall be back, for a little, in an hour or two."

So that kindly, fluttered, troubled, and happy old lady disappeared; and Cleve was left again to his meditations.

"Where's the doctor?" asked Cleve of the servant.

"In the sitting-room, please, sir, writing; his carriage is come, sir, please."

And thus saying, Mistress Anne Evans officiously opened the door, and Cleve entered. The doctor, having written a prescription, and just laid down his pen, was pulling on his glove.

Cleve had no idea that he was to see Doctor Grimshaw. Quite another physician, with whom he had no acquaintance, had been agreed upon between him and Miss Sheckleton. As it turned out, however, that gentleman was now away upon an interesting visit, at a country mansion, and Doctor Grimshaw was thus unexpectedly summoned.

Cleve was unpleasantly surprised, for he had already an acquaintance with that good man, which he fancied was not recorded in his recollection to his credit. I think if the doctor's eye had not been directed toward the door when he entered, that Cleve Verney would have drawn back; but that would not do now.

"Doctor Grimshaw?" said Cleve.

"Yes, sir;" said the old gentleman.

"I think, Doctor Grimshaw, you know me?"

"Oh, yes, sir; of course I do;" said the Doctor, with an uncomfortable smile, ever so little bitter, and a slight bow, "Mr. Verney, yes." And the doctor paused, looking toward him, pulling on his other glove, and expecting a question.

"Your patient, Doctor Grimshaw, doing very well, I'm told?"

"Nicely, sir—very nicely now. I was a little uncomfortable about her just at one time, but doing very well now; and it's a boy—a fine child. Good morning, sir."

He had taken up his hat.

"And Doctor Grimshaw, just one word. May I beg, as a matter of professional honour, that this—all this, shall be held as strictly secret—everything connected with it as strictly confidential?"

The doctor looked down on the carpet with a pained countenance. "Certainly, sir," he said, drily. "That's all, I suppose? Of course, Mr. Verney, I shan't—since such I suppose to be the wish of all parties—mention the case."

"Of all parties, certainly; and it is in tenderness to others, not to myself, that I make the request."

"I'm sorry it should be necessary, sir;" said Doctor Grimshaw, almost sternly. "I know Miss Sheckleton and her family; this poor young lady, I understand, is a cousin of hers. I am sorry, sir, upon her account, that any mystery should be desirable."

"It is desirable, and, in fact, indispensable, sir," said Cleve, a little stiffly, for he did not see what right that old doctor had to assume a lecturer's tone toward him.

"No one shall be compromised by me, sir," said the doctor, with a sad and offended bow.

And the Doctor drove home pretty well tired out. I am afraid that Cleve did not very much care whom he might compromise, provided he himself were secure. But even from himself the utter selfishness, which toned a character passionate and impetuous enough to simulate quite unconsciously the graces of magnanimity and tenderness, was hidden.

Cleve fancied that the cares that preyed upon his spirits were for Margaret, and when he sometimes almost regretted their marriage, that his remorse was principally for her, that all his caution and finesse were exacted by his devotion to the interests of his young wife, and that the long system of mystery and deception, under which her proud, frank, spirit was pining, was practised solely for her advantage.

So Cleve was in his own mind something of a hero—self-sacrificing, ready, if need be, to shake himself free, for sake of his love and his liberty, of all the intoxications and enervations of his English life, and fortis colonus, to delve the glebe of Canada or to shear the sheep of Australia. He was not conscious that all these were the chimeras of insincerity, that ambition was the breath of his nostrils, and that his idol was—himself.

And if he mistakes himself, do not others mistake him also, and clothe him with the nobleness of their own worship? Can it be that the lights and the music and the incense that surround him are but the tributes of a beautiful superstition, and that the idol in the midst is cold and dumb?

Cleve, to do him justice, was moved on this occasion. He did—shall I say?—yearn to behold her again. There was a revival of tenderness, and he waited with a real impatience to see her.

He did see her—just a little gleam of light in the darkened room; he stood beside the bed, clasping that beautiful hand that God had committed to his, smiling down in that beautiful face that smiled unutterable love up again into his own.

"Oh! Cleve, darling—oh, Cleve! I'm so happy."

The languid hands are clasped on his, the yearning eyes, and the smile, look up. It is like the meeting of the beloved after shipwreck.

"And look, Cleve;" and with just ever so little a motion of her hand she draws back a silken coverlet, and he sees in a deep sleep a little baby, and the beautiful smile of young maternity falls upon it like a blessing and a caress. "Isn't it a darling? Poor little thing! how quietly it sleeps. I think it is the dearest little thing that ever was seen—our little baby!"

Is there a prettier sight than the young mother smiling, in this the hour of her escape, upon the treasure she has found? The wondrous gift, at sight of which a new fountain of love springs up—never, while life remains, to cease its flowing. Looking on such a sight in silence, I think I hear the feet of the angels round the bed—I think I see their beautiful eyes smiling on the face of the little mortal, and their blessed hands raised over the head of the fair young mother.

The Tenants of Malory Vol.III by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

CHAPTER IV.

LOVE'S REMORSE

"Teach me, ye groves, some art to ease my pain,

Some soft resentments that may leave no stain

On her loved name, and then I will complain."

Next day, after dinner, Lord Verney said to Cleve, as they two sat alone, "I saw you at Lady Dorminster's last night. I saw you—about it. It seems to me you go to too many places, with the House to attend to; you stay too long; one can look in, you know. Sometimes one meets a person; I had a good deal of interesting conversation last night, for instance, with the French Ambassador. No one takes a hint better; they are very good listeners, the French, and that is the way they pick up so much information and opinion, and things. I had a cup of tea, and we talked about it, for half-an-hour, until I had got my ideas well before him. A very able man, a brilliant person, and seemed—he appeared to go with me—about it—and very well up upon our history—and things—and—and—looking at you, it struck me—you're looking a good deal cut up, about it—and—and as if you were doing too much. And I said, you know, you were to look about, and see if there was any young person you liked—that was suitable—and—that kind of thing; but you know you must not fatigue yourself, and I don't want to hurry you; only it is a step you ought to take with a view to strengthen your position—ultimately. And—and—I hear it is too late to consider about Ethel—that would have been very nice, it struck me; but that is now out of the question, I understand—in fact, it is certain, although the world don't know it yet; and therefore we must consider some other alliance; and I don't see any very violent hurry. We must look about—and—and—you'll want some money, Cleve, when you have made up your mind."

"You are always too good," said Cleve.

"I—I mean with your wife—about it;" and Lord Verney coughed a little. "There's never any harm in a little money; the more you get, the more you can do. I always was of that opinion. Knowledge is power, and money is power, though in different ways; that was

always my idea. What I want to impress on your mind, however, at this moment, particularly, is, that there is nothing very pressing as to time; we can afford a little time. The Onslow motto, you know, it conveys it, and your mother was connected with the Onslows."

It would not be easy to describe how the words of his noble uncle relieved Cleve Verney. Every sentence lifted a load from his burthen, or cut asunder some knot in the cordage of his bonds. He had not felt so much at ease since his hated conversation with Lord Verney in the library.

Not very long after this, Cleve made the best speech by many degrees he had ever spoken—a really forcible reply upon a subject he had very carefully made up, of which, in fact, he was a master. His uncle was very much pleased, and gave his hearers to understand pretty distinctly from what fountain he had drawn his inspiration, and promised them better things still, now that he had got him fairly in harness, and had him into his library, and they put their heads together; and he thought his talking with him a little did him no harm, Cleve's voice was so good, he could make himself heard—you must be able to reach their ears or you can hardly hope to make an impression; and Lord Verney's physician insisted on his sparing his throat.

So Lord Verney was pleased. Cleve was Lord Verney's throat, and the throat emitted good speeches, and everyone knew where the head was. Not that Cleve was deficient; but Cleve had very unusual advantages.

Tom Sedley and Cleve were on rather odd terms now. Cleve kept up externally their old intimacy when they met. But he did not seek him out in those moods which used to call for honest Tom Sedley, when they ran down the river together to Greenwich, when Cleve was lazy, and wanted to hear the news, and say what he liked, and escape from criticism of every kind, and enjoy himself indolently.

For Verney now there was a sense of constraint wherever Tom Sedley was. Even in Tom's manner there was a shyness. Tom had learned a secret, which he had not confided to him. He knew he was safe in Tom Sedley's hands. Still he was in his power, and Sedley knew it, and that galled his pride, and made an estrangement.

In the early May, "when winds are sweet though they unruly be," Tom Sedley came down again to Cardyllian. Miss Charity welcomed him with her accustomed emphasis upon the Green. How very pretty Agnes looked. But how cold her ways had grown.

He wished she was not so pretty—so beautiful, in fact. It pained him, and somehow he had grown strange with her; and she was changed, grave, and silent, rather, and, as it seemed, care less quite whether he was there or not, although he could never charge her with positive unkindness, much less with rudeness. He wished she would be rude. He would have liked to upbraid her. But her gentle, careless cruelty was a torture that justified no complaint, and admitted no redress.

He could talk volubly and pleasantly enough for hours with Charity, not caring a farthing whether he pleased her or not, and thinking only whether Agnes, who sat silent at her work, liked his stories and was amused by his fun; and went away elated for a whole night and day because a joke of his had made her laugh. Never had Tom felt more proud and triumphant in all his days.

But when Charity left the room to see old Vane Etherage in the study, a strange silence fell upon Tom. You could hear each stitch of her tambour-work. You could hear Tom's breathing. He fancied she might hear the beating of his heart. He was ashamed of his silence. He could have been eloquent had he spoken from that loaded heart. But he dare not, and failing this he must be silent.

By this time Tom was always thinking of Agnes Etherage, and wondering at the perversity of fate. He was in love. He could not cheat himself into any evasion of that truth—a tyrant truth that had ruled him mercilessly; and there was she pining for love of quite another, and bestowing upon him, who disdained it, all the treasure of her heart, while even a look would have been cherished with gratitude by Sedley.

What was the good of his going up every day to Hazelden, Tom Sedley thought, to look at her, and talk to Charity, and laugh, and recount entertaining gossip, and make jokes, and be agreeable, with a heavy and strangely suffering heart, and feel himself every day more and more in love with her, when he knew that the sound of Cleve's footsteps, as he

walked by, thinking of himself, would move her heart more than all Tom Sedley, adoring her, could say in his lifetime?

What a fool he was! Before Cleve appeared she was fancy free; no one else in the field, and his opportunities unlimited. He had lapsed his time, and occasion had spread its wings and flown.

"What beautiful sunshine! What do you say to a walk on the Green?" said Tom to Charity, and listening for a word from Agnes. She raised her pretty eyes and looked out, but said nothing.

"Yes. I think it would be very nice; and there is no wind. What do you say, Agnes?"

"I don't know. I'm lazy to-day, I think, and I have this to finish," said Agnes.

"But you ought to take a walk, Agnes; it would do you good; and Thomas Sedley and I are going for a walk on the Green."

"Pray, do," pleaded Tom, timidly.

Agnes smiled and shook her head, looking out of the window, and, making no other answer, resumed her work.

"You are very obstinate," remarked Charity.

"Yes, and lazy, like the donkeys on the Green, where you are going; but you don't want me particularly—I mean you, Charrie—and Mr. Sedley, I know, will excuse me, for I really feel that it would tire me to-day. It would tire me to death," said Agnes, winding up with an emphasis.

"Well, I'll go and put on my things, and if you like to come you can come, and if you don't you can stay where you are. But I wish you would not be a fool. It is a beautiful day, and nothing on earth to prevent you."

"I don't like the idea of a walk to-day. I know I should feel tired immediately, and have to bring you back again; and I've really grown interested in this little bit of work, and I feel as if I must finish it to-day."

"Why need you finish it to-day? You are such a goose, Agnes," said Charity, marching out of the room.

Tom remained there standing, his hat in his hand, looking out of the window—longing to speak, his heart being full, yet not knowing how to begin, or how to go on if he had begun.

Agnes worked on diligently, and looked out from the window at her side over the shorn grass and flower-beds, through the old trees in the foreground—over the tops of the sloping forest, with the back-ground of the grand Welsh mountains, and a glimpse of the estuary, here and there, seen through the leaves, stretching far off, in dim gold and gray.

"You like that particular window," said Tom, making a wonderful effort; "I mean, why do you like always to sit there?" He spoke in as careless a way as he could, looking still out of his window, which commanded a different view.

"This window! oh, my frame stands here always, and when one is accustomed to a particular place, it puts one out to change."

Then Agnes dropped her pretty eyes again to her worsted, and worked and hummed very faintly a little air, and Tom's heart swelled within him, and he hummed as faintly the same gay air.

"I thought perhaps you liked that view?" said Tom Sedley, arresting the music.

She looked out again.

"Well, it's very pretty."

"The best from these windows; some people think, I believe, the prettiest view you have," said Tom, gathering force, "the water is always so pretty."

"Yes, the water," she assented listlessly.

"Quite a romantic view," continued Sedley, a little bitterly.

"Yes, every pretty view is romantic," she acquiesced, looking out for a moment again. "If one knew exactly what romantic means—it's a word we use so often, and so vaguely."

"And can't you define it, Agnes?"

"Define it? I really don't think I could."

"Well, that does surprise me."

"You are so much more clever than I, of course it does."

"No, quite the contrary; you are clever—I'm serious, I assure you—and I'm a dull fellow, and I know it quite well—I can't define it; but that doesn't surprise me."

"Then we are both in the same case; but I won't allow it's stupidity—the idea is quite undefinable, and that is the real difficulty. You can't describe the perfume of a violet, but you know it quite well, and I really think flowers a more interesting subject than romance."

"Oh, really! not, surely, than the romance of that view. It is so romantic!"

"You seem quite in love with it," said she, with a little laugh, and began again with a grave face to stitch in the glory of her saint in celestial yellow worsted.

"The water—yes—and the old trees of Ware, and just that tower, at the angle of the house."

Agnes just glanced through her window, but said nothing.

"I think," said Sedley, "if I were peopling this scene, you know, I should put my hero in that Castle of Ware—that is, if I could invent a romance, which, of course, I couldn't." He spoke with a meaning, I think.

"Why should there be heroes in romances?" asked Miss Agnes, looking nevertheless toward Ware, with her hand and the needle resting idly upon the frame. "Don't you think a romance ought to resemble reality a little; and do you ever find such a monster as a hero in the world? I don't expect to see one, I know," and she laughed again, but Tom thought, a little bitterly, and applied once more diligently to her work, and hummed a few bars of her little air again.

And Tom, standing now in the middle of the room, leaning on the back of a chair, by way of looking still upon the landscape which they had been discussing, was really

looking, unobserved, on her, and thinking that there was not in all the world so pretty a creature.

Charity opened the door, equipped for the walk, and bearing an alpaca umbrella, such as few gentlemen would like to walk with in May Fair.

"Well, you won't come, I see. I think you are very obstinate. Come, Thomas Sedley. Good-bye, Agnes;" and with these words the worthy girl led forth my friend Tom, and as they passed the corner of the house, he saw Agnes standing in the window, looking out sadly, with her fingertips against the pane.

"She's lonely, poor little thing!" thought he, with a pang. "Why wouldn't she come? Listlessness—apathy, I suppose. How selfish and odious any trifling with a girl's affections is;" and then aloud to Charity, walking by her side, he continued, "You have not seen Cleve since the great day of Lord Verney's visit, I suppose?"

"No, nothing of him, and don't desire to see him. He has been the cause of a great deal of suffering, as you see, and I think he has behaved odiously. She's very odd; she doesn't choose to confide in me. I don't think it's nice or kind of her, but, of course, it's her own affair; only this is plain to me, that she'll never think of any one else now but Cleve Verney."

"It's an awful pity," said Tom Sedley, quite sincerely.

They were walking down that steep and soli tary road, by which Vane Etherage had made his memorable descent a few months since, now in deep shadow under the airy canopy of transparent leaves, and in total silence, except for the sounds, far below, of the little mill-stream struggling among the rocks.

"Don't you know Mr. Cleve Verney pretty well?"

"Intimately—that is, I did. I have not lately seen so much of him."

"And do you think, Thomas Sedley, that he will ever come forward?" said blunt Miss Charity.

"Well, I happen to know that Cleve Verney has no idea of anything of the kind. In fact, I should be deceiving you, if I did not say distinctly that I know he won't."

Tom was going to say he can't, but checked himself. However, I think he was not sorry to have an opportunity of testifying to this fact, and putting Cleve Verney quite out of the field of conjecture as a possible candidate.

"Then I must say," said Miss Charity, flushing brightly, "that Mr. Verney is a villain."

From this strong position Tom could not dislodge her, and finding that expostulation involved him in a risk of a similar classification, he abandoned Cleve to his fate.

Up and down the Green they walked until Miss Flood espied and arrested Charity Etherage, and carried her off upon a visit of philanthropy in her pony-carriage, and Tom Sedley transferred his charge to fussy, imperious Miss Flood; and he felt strangely incensed with her, and walked the Green, disappointed and bereft. Was not Charity Agnes's sister? While he walked with her, he could talk of Agnes. He was still in the halo of Hazelden, and near Agnes. But now he was adrift, in the dark. He sat down, looking toward the upland woods that indicate Hazelden, and sighed with a much more real pain than he had ever sighed toward Malory; and he thought evil of meddling Miss Flood, who had carried away his companion. After a time he walked away toward Malory, intending a visit to his old friend Rebecca Mervyn, and thinking all the way of Agnes Etherage.

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CHAPTER V.

MRS. MERVYN'S DREAM.

He found himself, in a little time, under the windows of the steward's house. Old Rebecca Mervyn was seated on the bench beside the door, plying her knitting-needles; she raised her eyes on hearing his step.

"Ha, he's come!" she said, lowering her hands to her knees, and fixing her dark wild gaze upon him, "I ought to have known it—so strange a dream must have had a meaning."

"They sometimes have, ma'am, I believe. I hope you are pretty well, Mrs. Mervyn."

"No, sir, I am not well."

"Very sorry, very sorry indeed, ma'am," said Tom Sedley. "I've often thought this must be a very damp, unhealthy place—too much crowded up with trees; they say nothing is more trying to health. You'd be much better, I'm sure, anywhere else."

"Nowhere else; my next move shall be my last. I care not how soon, sir."

"Pray, don't give way to low spirits; you really mustn't," said Tom.

"Tell me what it is, sir; for I know you have come to tell me something."

"No, I assure you; merely to ask you how you are, and whether I can be of any use."

"Oh! sir; what use?—no."

"Do you wish me to give any message to that fellow, Dingwell? Pray make use of me in any way that strikes you. I hear he is on the point of leaving England again."

"I'm glad of it," exclaimed the old lady. "Why do I say so? I'm glad of nothing; but I'm sure it's better. What business could he and Mr. Larkin, and that Jew, have with my child, who, thank God, is in Heaven, and out of the reach of their hands, evil hands, I dare say."

"So I rather think also, ma'am; and Mr. Larkin tried, did he?"

"Larkin;—yes, that was the name. He came here, sir, about the time I saw you; and he talked a great deal about my poor little child. It is dead, you know, but I did not tell him so. I promised Lady Verney I'd tell nothing to strangers—they all grow angry then. Mr. Larkin was angry, I think. But I do not speak—and you advised me to be silent—and though he said he was their lawyer, I would not answer a word."

"I have no doubt you acted wisely, Mrs. Mervyn; you cannot be too cautious in holding any communication with such people."

"I'd tell you, sir—if I dare; but I've promised, and I daren't. Till old Lady Verney's gone, I daren't. I know nothing of law papers—my poor head! How should I? And she could not half understand them. So I promised. You would understand them. Time enough—time enough."

"I should be only too happy, whenever you please," said Tom, making ready tender of his legal erudition.

"And you, sir, have come to tell me something; what is it?"

"I assure you I have nothing particular to say; I merely called to inquire how you are."

"Nothing more needless, sir; how can a poor lonely old woman be, whose last hope has perished and left her alone in the world? For twenty years—more, more than twenty—I have been watching, day and night; and now, sir, I look at the sea no more. I will never see those headlands again. I sit here, sir, from day to day, thinking; and, oh, dear, I wish it was all over."

"Any time you should want me, I should be only too happy, and this is my address."

"And you have nothing to tell me?"

"No, ma'am, nothing more than I said."

"It was wonderful: I dreamed last night I was looking toward Pendillion, watching as I used; the moon was above the mountain, and I was standing by the water, so that the sea came up to my feet, and I saw a speck of white far away, and something told me it was his sail at last, and nearer and nearer, very fast it came; and I walked out in the shallow water, with my arms stretched out to meet it, and when it came very near, I saw it was Arthur himself coming upright in his shroud, his feet on the water, and with his feet, hands, and face, as white as snow, and his arms stretched to meet mine; and I felt I was going to die; and I covered my eyes with my hands, praying to God to receive me, expecting his touch; and I heard the rush of the water about his feet, and a voice—it was yours, not his—said, 'Look at me,' and I did look, and saw you, and you looked like a man that had been drowned—your face as white as his, and your clothes dripping, and sand in your hair; and I stepped back, saying, 'My God! how have you come here?' and you said, 'Listen, I have great news to tell you;' and I waked with a shock. I don't believe in dreams more I believe than other people, but this troubles me still."

"Well, thank God, I have had no accident by land or by water," said Tom Sedley, smiling in spite of himself at the awful figure he cut in the old lady's vision; "and I have no news to tell, and I think it will puzzle those Jews and lawyers to draw me into their business, whatever it is. I don't like that sort of people; you need never be afraid of me, ma'am, I detest them."

"Afraid of you, sir! Oh no. You have been very kind. See, this view here is under the branches; you can't see the water from this, only those dark paths in the wood; and I walk round sometimes through that hollow and on the low road toward Cardyllian in the evening, when no one is stirring, just to the ash tree, from which you can see the old church and the churchyard; and oh! sir, I wish I were lying there."

"You must not be talking in that melancholy way, ma'am," said Tom, kindly; "I'll come and see you again if you allow me; I think you are a great deal too lonely here; you ought to go out in a boat, ma'am, and take a drive now and then, and just rattle about a little, and you can't think how much good it would do you; and—I must go—and I hope I shall find you a great deal better when I come back"—and with these words he took his leave, and as he walked along the low narrow road that leads by the inland track to Cardyllian, of which old Rebecca Mervyn spoke, whom should he encounter but Miss Charity coming down the hill at a brisk pace with Miss Flood in that lady's pony-carriage. Smiling, hat in hand, he got himself well against the wall to let them pass; but the ladies drew up, and Miss Charity had a message to send home if he, Thomas Sedley, would be so good as to call at Jones's they would find a messenger, merely to tell Agnes that she was going to dine with Miss Flood, and would not be home till seven o'clock.

So Tom Sedley undertook it; smiled and bowed his adieus, and then walked faster toward the town, and instead of walking direct to Mrs. Jones's, sauntered for a while on the Green, and bethought him what mistakes such messengers as Mrs. Jones could provide sometimes make, and so resolved himself to be Miss Charity's Mercury.

Sedley felt happier, with an odd kind of excited and unmeaning happiness, as he walked up the embowered steep toward Hazelden, than he had felt an hour or two before while walking down it. When he reached the little flowery platform of closely-mown grass, on which stands the pretty house of Hazelden, he closed the iron gate gently and looked toward the drawing-room windows that reach the grass, and felt a foolish flutter at his heart as he saw that the frame stood in Agnes's window without its mistress.

"Reading now, I suppose," whispered Tom, as if he feared to disturb her. "She has changed her place and she is reading;" and he began to speculate whether she sat on the ottoman, or on the sofa, or in the cushioned arm-chair, with her novel in her hands. But his sidelong glances could not penetrate the panes, which returned only reflections of the sky or black shadow, excepting of the one object, the deserted frame which stood close to their surface.

There was a time, not long ago either, when Tom Sedley would have run across the grass to the drawing-room windows, and had he seen Agnes within would have made a semi-burglarious entry through one of them. But there had come of late, on a sudden, a sort of formality in his relations with Agnes; and so he walked round by the hall-door, and found the drawing-rooms empty, and touching the bell, learned that Miss Agnes had gone out for a walk.

"I've a message to give her from Miss Charity; have you any idea which way she went?"

He found himself making excuses to the servant for his inquiry. A short time since he would have asked quite frankly where she was, without dreaming of a reason; but now had grown, as I say, a reserve, which has always the more harmless incidents of guilt. He was apprehensive of sus picion; he was shy even of this old servant, and was encountering this inquiry by an explanation of his motives.

"I saw her go by the beech-walk, sir," said the man.

"Oh! thanks; very good."

And he crossed the grass, and entered the beech-walk, which is broad and straight, with towering files of beech at each side, and a thick screen of underwood and evergreens, and turning the clump of rhododendrons at the entrance of the walk, he found himself, all on a sudden, quite close to Agnes, who was walking toward him.

She stopped. He fancied she changed colour: had she mistaken him for some one else?

"Well, Agnes, I see the sun and the flowers prevailed, though we couldn't; and I'm glad, at all events, that you have had a little walk."

"Oh! yes, after all, I couldn't really resist; and is Charity coming?"

"No, you are not to expect her till tea-time. She's gone with Miss Flood somewhere, and she sent me to tell you."

"Oh! thanks;" and Agnes hesitated, looking towards home, as if she intended returning.

"You may as well walk once more up and down; it does look so jolly, doesn't it?" said Tom; "pray do, Agnes."

"Well, yes, once more I will; but that is all, for I really am a little tired."

They set out in silence, and Tom, with a great effort, said,—

"I wonder, Agnes, you seem so cold, I mean so unfriendly, with me; I think you do; and you must be quite aware of it; you must, indeed, Agnes. I think if you knew half the pain you are giving me—I really do—that you wouldn't."

The speech was very inartificial, but it had the merit of going direct to the point, and Miss Agnes began,—

"I haven't been at all unfriendly."

"Oh! but you have—indeed you have—you are quite changed. And I don't know what I have done—I wish you'd tell me—to deserve it; because—even if there was—another—anything—no matter what—I'm an old friend, and I think it's very unkind; you don't perceive it, perhaps, but you are awfully changed."

Agnes laughed a very little, and she answered, looking down on the walk before her, as Sedley thought, with a very pretty blush; and I believe there was.

"It is a very serious accusation, and I don't deserve it. No, indeed, and even if it were true, it rather surprises me that it should in the least interest you; because we down here have seen so little of you that we might very reasonably suspect that you had begun to forget us."

"Well, I have been an awful fool, it is quite true, and you have punished me, not more than I deserve; but I think you might have remembered that you had not on earth a better friend—I mean a more earnest one—particularly you, Agnes, than I."

"I really don't know what I have done," pleaded she, with another little laugh.

"I was here, you know, as intimate almost as a brother. I don't say, of course, there are not many things I had no right to expect to hear anything about; but if I had, and been thought worthy of confidence, I would at all events have spoken honestly. But—may I speak quite frankly, Agnes? You won't be offended, will you?"

"No; I shan't—I'm quite sure."

"Well, it was only this—you are changed, Agnes, you know you are. Just this moment, for instance, you were going home, only because I came here, and you fancied I might join you in your walk; and this change began when Cleve Verney was down here staying at Ware, and used to walk with you on the Green."

Agnes stopped short at these words and drew back a step, looking at Sedley with an angry surprise.

"I don't understand you—I'm certain I don't. I can't conceive what you mean," she said.

Sedley paused in equal surprise.

"I—I beg pardon; I'm awfully sorry—you'll never know how sorry—if I have said anything to vex you; but I did think it was some influence or something connected with that time."

"I really don't pretend to understand you," said Agnes, coldly, with eyes, however, that gleamed resentfully. "I do recollect perfectly Mr. Cleve Verney's walking half-a-dozen times with Charity and me upon the Green, but what that can possibly have to do with your fancied wrongs, I cannot imagine. I fancied you were a friend of Mr. Verney's."

"So I was—so I am; but no such friend as I am of yours—your friend, Agnes. There's no use in saying it; but, Agnes, I'd die for you—I would indeed."

"I thought it very strange, your coming so very seldom to inquire for papa, when he was so poorly last year, when you were at Cardyllian. He did not seem to mind it; but considering, as you say, how much you once used to be here, it did strike me as very unkind—I may as well say what I really thought—not only unkind, but rude. So that if there has been any change, you need not look to other people for the cause of it."

"If you knew how I blame myself for that, I think, bad as it was, you'd forgive me."

"I think it showed that you did not very much care what became of us."

"Oh! Agnes, you did not think that—you never thought it. Unless you are happy, I can't be happy, nor even then unless I think you have forgiven me; and I think if I could be sure you liked me ever so little, even in the old way, I should be one of the happiest fellows in the world. I don't make any excuses—I was the stupidest fool on earth—I only throw myself on your mercy, and ask you to forgive me."

"I've nothing to forgive," said Agnes, with a cruel little laugh, but changing colour.

"Well—well, forget—oh, do! and shake hands like your old self. You've no idea how miserable I have been."

Lowering her eyes, with a very beautiful blush and a smile—a little shy, and so gratified—and a little silvery laugh, Agnes relented, and did give her hand to Tom Sedley.

"Oh, Agnes! Oh, Agnes! I'm so happy and so grateful! Oh, Agnes, you won't take it away—just for a moment."

She drew her hand to remove it, for Tom was exceeding his privilege, and kissing it.

"Now we are friends," said Agnes, laughing.

"Are we quite friends?"

"Yes, quite."

"You must not take your hand away—one moment more. Oh, Agnes! I can never tell you—never, how I love you. You are my darling, Agnes, and I can't live without you."

Agnes said something—was it reproof or repulse? He only knew that the tones were very sad and gentle, and that she was drawing her hand away.

"Oh, darling, I adore you! You would not make me miserable for life. There is nothing I won't do—nothing I won't try—if you'll only say you like me—ever so little. Do sit down here just for a moment"—there was a rustic seat beside them—"only for a moment."

She did sit down, and he beside her. That "moment" of Tom Sedley's grew as such moments will, like the bean that Jack sowed in his garden, till it reached—Titania knows whither! I know that Miss Charity on her return surprised it still growing.

"I made the tea, Agnes, fancying you were in your room. I've had such a search for you. I really think you might have told Edward where you were going. Will you drink tea with us, Thomas Sedley, this evening? though I am afraid you'll find it perfectly cold."

If Miss Charity had been either suspicious or romantic, she would have seen by a glance at the young people's faces what had happened; but being neither, and quite pre-occupied with her theory about Cleve Verney, and having never dreamed of Tom Sedley as possibly making his début at Hazelden in the character of a lover—she brought her prisoners home with only a vague sense now and then that there was either something a little odd in their manner or in her own perceptions, and she remarked, looking a little curiously at Tom, in reference to some query of hers,—

"I've asked you that question twice without an answer, and now you say something totally unmeaning."

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CHAPTER VI.

TOM HAS A "TALK" WITH THE ADMIRAL.

"Will you tell her?" whispered Sedley to Agnes.

"Oh, no. Do you," she entreated.

They both looked at Charity, who was preparing the little dog's supper of bread and milk in a saucer.

"I'll go in and see papa, and you shall speak to her," said Agnes.

Which Tom Sedley did, so much to her amazement that she set the saucer down on the table beside her, and listened, and conversed for half an hour; and the poodle's screams, and wild jumping and clawing at her elbow, at last reminded her that he had been quite forgotten.

So, while its mistress was apologising earnestly to poor Bijou, and superintending his attentions to the bread and milk, now placed upon the floor, in came Agnes, and up got Charity, and kissed her with a frank, beaming smile, and said, —

"I'm excessively glad, Agnes. I was always so fond of Thomas Sedley; and I wonder we never thought of it before."

They were all holding hands in a ring by this time.

"And what do you think Mr. Etherage will say?" inquired Tom.

"Papa! why of course he will be delighted," said Miss Charity. "He likes you extremely."

"But you know, Agnes might do so much better. She's such a treasure, there's no one that would not be proud of her, and no one could help falling in love with her, and the Ad—— I mean Mr. Etherage, may think me so presumptuous; and, you know, he may think me quite too poor."

"If you mean to say that papa would object to you because you have only four hundred a year, you think most meanly of him. I know I should not like to be connected with anybody that I thought so meanly of, because that kind of thing I look upon as really wicked; and I should be sorry to think papa was wicked. I'll go in and tell him all that has happened this moment."

In an awful suspense, pretty Agnes and Tom Sedley, with her hand in both his, stood side by side, looking earnestly at the double door which separated them from this conference.

In a few minutes they heard Vane Etherage's voice raised to a pitch of testy bluster, and then Miss Charity's rejoinder with shrill emphasis.

"Oh! gracious goodness! he's very angry. What shall we do?" exclaimed poor little Agnes, in wild helplessness.

"I knew it—I knew it—I said how it would be—he can't endure the idea, he thinks it such audacity. I knew he must, and I really think I shall lose my reason. I could not—I could not live. Oh! Agnes, I couldn't if he prevents it."

In came Miss Charity, very red and angry.

"He's just in one of his odd tempers. I don't mind one word he says to-night. He'll be quite different, you'll see, in the morning. We'll sit up here, and have a good talk about it, till it's time for you to go; and you'll see I'm quite right. I'm surprised," she continued, with severity, "at his talking as he did to-night. I consider it quite worldly and wicked! But I contented myself with telling him that he did not think one word of what he said, and that he knew he didn't, and that he'd tell me so in the morning; and instead of feeling it, as I thought he would, he said something intolerably rude."

Old Etherage, about an hour later, when they were all in animated debate, shuffled to the door, and put in his head, and looked surprised to see Tom, who looked alarmed to see him. And the old gentleman bid them all a glowering good night, and shortly afterwards they heard him wheeled away to his bed-room, and were relieved.

They sat up awfully late, and the old servant, who poked into the room oftener than he was wanted towards the close of their sitting, looked wan and bewildered with drowsiness; and at last Charity, struck by the ghastly resignation of his countenance, glanced at the French clock over the chimney-piece, and ejaculated—

"Why, merciful goodness! is it possible? A quarter to one! It can't possibly be. Thomas Sedley, will you look at your watch, and tell us what o'clock it really is?"

His watch corroborated the French clock.

"If papa heard this! I really can't the least conceive how it happened. I did not think it could have been eleven. Well, it is undoubtedly the oddest thing that ever happened in this house!"

In the morning, between ten and eleven, when Tom Sedley appeared again at the drawing-room windows, he learned from Charity, in her own emphatic style of

narration, what had since taken place, which was not a great deal, but still was uncomfortably ambiguous.

She had visited her father at his breakfast in the study, and promptly introduced the subject of Tom Sedley, and he broke into this line of observation—

"I'd like to know what the deuce Tom Sedley means by talking of business to girls. I'd like to know it. I say, if he has anything to say, why doesn't he say it, that's what I say. Here I am. What has he to say. I don't object to hear him, be it sense or be it nonsense—out with it! That's my maxim; and be it sense or be it nonsense, I won't have it at second-hand. That's my idea."

Acting upon this, Miss Charity insisted that he ought to see Mr. Etherage; and, with a beating heart, he knocked at the study door, and asked an audience.

"Come in," exclaimed the resonant voice of the Admiral. And Tom Sedley obeyed.

The Admiral extended his hand, and greeted Tom kindly, but gravely.

"Fine day, Mr. Sedley; very fine, sir. It's an odd thing, Tom Sedley, but there's more really fine weather up here, at Hazelden, than anywhere else in Wales. More sunshine, and a deal less rain. You'd hardly believe, for you'd fancy on this elevated ground we should naturally have more rain, but it's less, by several inches, than anywhere else in Wales! And there's next to no damp—the hygrometer tells that. And a curious thing, you'll have a southerly wind up here when it's blowing from the east on the estuary. You can see it, by Jove! Now just look out of that window; did you ever see such sunshine as that? There's a clearness in the air up here—at the other side, if you go up, you get mist—but there's something about it here that I would not change for any place in the world."

You may be sure Tom did not dispute any of these points.

"By Jove, Tom Sedley, it would be a glorious day for a sail round the point of Penruthyn. I'd have been down with the tide, sir, this morning if I had been as I was ten years ago; but a fellow doesn't like to be lifted into his yacht, and the girls did not care for sailing; so I sold her. There wasn't such a boat—take her for everything—in the world—never!"

"The Feather; wasn't she, sir?" said Tom.

"The Feather! that she was, sir. A name pretty well known, I venture to think. Yes, the Feather was her name."

"I have, sir; yes, indeed, often heard her spoken of," said Tom, who had heard one or two of the boatmen of Cardyllian mention her with a guarded sort of commendation. I never could learn, indeed, that there was anything very remarkable about the boat; but Tom would just then have backed any assertion of the honest Admiral's with a loyal alacrity, bordering, I am afraid, upon unscrupulousness.

"There are the girls going out with their trowels, going to poke among those flowers; and certainly, I'll do them justice to say, their garden prospers. I don't see such flowers anywhere; do you?"

"Nowhere!" said Tom, with enthusiasm.

"By, there they're at it—grubbing and raking. And, by-the-by, Tom, what was that? Sit down for a minute."

Tom felt as if he was going to choke, but he sat down.

"What was that—some nonsense Charity was telling me last night?"

Thus invited, poor Sedley, with many hesitations, and wanderings, and falterings, did get through his romantic story. And Mr. Etherage did not look pleased by the recital; on the contrary, he carried his head unusually high, and looked hot and minatory, but he did not explode. He continued looking on the opposite wall, as he had done as if he were eyeing a battle there, and he cleared his voice.

"As I understand it, sir, there's not an income to make it at all prudent. I don't want my girls to marry; I should, in fact, miss them very much; but if they do, there ought to be a settlement, don't you see? there should be a settlement, for I can't do so much for them as people suppose. The property is settled, and the greater part goes to my grand-nephew after me; and I've invested, as you know, all my stock and money in the quarry at Llanrwyd; and if she married you, she should live in London the greater part of the year. And I don't see how you could get on upon what you both have; I don't, sir. And I must say, I think you ought to have spoken to me before paying your addresses, sir. I don't think that's unreasonable; on the contrary, I think it reasonable, perfectly so, and only right and fair. And I must go further, sir; I must say this, I don't see, sir, without a proper competence, what pretensions you had to address my child."

"None, sir; none in the world, Mr. Etherage. I know, sir, I've been thinking of my presumption ever since. I betrayed myself into it, sir; it was a kind of surprise. If I had reflected I should have come to you, sir; but—but you have no idea, sir, how I adore her." Tom's eye wandered after her through the window, among the flowers. "Or what it would be to me to—to have to"——

Tom Sedley faltered, and bit his lip, and started up quickly and looked at an engraving of old Etherage's frigate, which hung on the study wall.

He looked at it for some time steadfastly. Never was man so affected by the portrait of a frigate, you would have thought. Vane Etherage saw him dry his eyes stealthily two or three times, and the old gentleman coughed a little, and looked out of the window, and would have got up, if he could, and stood close to it.

"It's a beautiful day, certainly; wind coming round a bit to the south, though—south by east; that's always a squally wind with us; and—and—I assure you I like you, Tom; upon my honour I do, Tom Sedley—better, sir, than any young fellow I know. I think I do—I

am sure, in fact, I do. But this thing—it wouldn't do—it really wouldn't; no, Tom Sedley, it wouldn't do; if you reflect you'll see it. But, of course, you may get on in the world. Rome wasn't built in a day."

"It's very kind of you, sir; but the time's so long, and so many chances," said Sedley, with a sigh like a sob; "and when I go away, sir, the sooner I die, the happier for me."

Tom turned again quickly toward the frigate—the Vulcan—and old Etherage looked out of the window once more, and up at the clouds.

"Yes," said the admiral, "it will; we shall have it from south by east. And, d'ye hear, Tom Sedley? I—I've been thinking there's no need to make any fuss about this—this thing; just let it be as if you had never said a word about it, do you mind, and come here just as usual. Let us put it out of our heads; and if you find matters improve, and still wish it, there's nothing to prevent your speaking to me; only Agnes is perfectly free, you understand, and you are not to make any change in your demeanour—a—or—I mean to be more with my daughters, or anything marked, you understand. People begin to talk here, you know, in the club-house, on very slight grounds! and—and—you understand now; and there mustn't be any nonsense; and I like you, sir—I like you, Thomas Sedley; I do—I do, indeed, sir."

And old Vane Etherage gave him a very friendly shake by the hand, and Tom thanked him gratefully, and went away reprieved, and took a walk with the girls, and told them, as they expressed it, everything; and Vane Etherage thought it incumbent on him to soften matters a little by asking him to dinner; and Tom accepted; and when they broke up after tea, there was another mistake discovered about the hour, and Miss Charity most emphatically announced that it was perfectly unaccountable, and must never occur again; and I hope, for the sake of the venerable man who sat up, resigned and affronted, to secure the hall-door and put out the lamps after the party had broken up, that these irregular hours were kept no more at Hazelden.

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CHAPTER VII.

ARCADIAN RED BRICK, LILAC, AND LABURNUM.

As time proceeds, renewal and decay, its twin principles of mutation, are everywhere and necessarily active, applying to the moral as well as to the material world. Affections displace and succeed one another. The most beautiful are often the first to die. Characteristics in their beginning, minute and unsubstantial as the fairy brood that people the woodland air, enlarge and materialize till they usurp the dominion of the whole man, and the people and the world are changed.

Sir Booth Fanshawe is away at Paris just now, engaged in a great negotiation, which is to bring order out of chaos, and inform him at last what he is really worth per annum. Margaret and her cousin, Miss Sheckleton, have revisited England; their Norman retreat is untenanted for the present.

With the sorrow of a great concealment upon her, with other sorrows that she does not tell, Margaret looks sad and pale.

In a small old suburban house, that stands alone, with a rural affectation, on a little patch of shorn grass, embowered in lilacs and laburnums, and built of a deep vermillion brick, the residence of these ladies is established.

It is a summer evening, and a beautiful little boy, more than a year old, is sprawling, and babbling, and rolling, and laughing on the grass upon his back. Margaret, seated on the grass beside him, prattles and laughs with him, and rolls him about, delighted, and adoring her little idol.

Old Anne Sheckleton, sitting on the bench, smiling happily, under the window, which is clustered round with roses, contributes her quota of nonsense to the prattle.

In the midst of this comes a ring at the bell in the jessamine-covered wall, and a tidy little maid runs out to the green door, opens it, and in steps Cleve Verney.

Margaret is on her feet in a moment, with the light of a different love, something of the old romance, in the glad surprise, "Oh, darling, it is you!" and her arms are about his neck, and he stoops and kisses her fondly, and in his face for a moment, is reflected the glory of that delighted smile.

"Yes, darling. Are you better?"

"Oh, yes—ever so much; I'm always well when you are here; and look, see our poor little darling."

"So he is."

"We have had such fun with him—haven't we, Anne? I'm sure he'll be so like you."

"Is this in his favour, cousin Anne?" asked Cleve, taking the old lady's hand.

"Why should it not?" said she gaily.

"A question—well, I take the benefit of the doubt," laughed Cleve. "No, darling," he said to Margaret, "you mustn't sit on the grass; it is damp; you'll sit beside our Cousin Anne, and be prudent."

So he instead sat down on the grass, and talked with them, and prattled and romped with the baby by turns, until the nurse came out to convey him to the nursery, and he

was handed round to say what passes for "Good night," and give his tiny paw to each in turn.

"You look tired, Cleve, darling."

"So I am, my Guido; can we have a cup of tea?"

"Oh, yes. I'll get it in a moment," said active Anne Sheckleton.

"It's too bad disturbing you," said Cleve.

"No trouble in the world," said Anne, who wished to allow them a word together; "besides, I must kiss baby in his bed."

"Yes, darling, I am tired," said Cleve, taking his place beside her, so soon as old Anne Sheckleton was gone. "That old man"——

"Lord Verney, do you mean?"

"Yes; he has begun plaguing me again."

"What is it about, darling?"

"Oh, fifty things; he thinks, among others, I ought to marry," said Cleve, with a dreary laugh.

"Oh, I thought he had given up that," she said, with a smile that was very pale.

"So he did for a time; but I think he's possessed. If he happens to take up an idea that's likely to annoy other people, he never lets it drop till he teases them half to death. He thinks I should marry money and political connection, and I don't know what all, and I'm quite tired of the whole thing. What a vulgar little box this is—isn't it, darling? I almost wish you were back again in that place in France."

"But I can see you so much oftener here, Cleve," pleaded Margaret, softly, with a very sad look.

"And where's the good of seeing me here, dear Margaret? Just consider, I always come to you anxious; there's always a risk, besides, of discovery."

"Where you are is to me a paradise."

"Oh, darling, do not talk rubbish. This vulgar, odious little place! No place can be either—quite, of course—where you are. But you must see what it is—a paradise"—and he laughed peevishly—"of red brick, and lilacs, and laburnums—a paradise for old Mr. Dowlas, the tallow-chandler."

There was a little tremor in Margaret's lip, and the water stood in her large eyes; her hand was, as it were, on the coffin-edge; she was looking in the face of a dead romance.

"Now, you really must not shed tears over that speech. You are too much given to weeping, Margaret. What have I said to vex you? It merely amounts to this, that we live just now in the future; we can't well deny that, darling. But the time will come at last, and my queen enjoy her own."

And so saying he kissed her, and told her to be a good little girl; and from the window Miss Sheckleton handed them tea, and then she ran up to the nursery.

"You do look very tired, Cleve," said Margaret, looking into his anxious face.

"I am tired, darling," he said, with just a degree of impatience in his tone; "I said so—horribly tired."

"I wish so much you were liberated from that weary House of Commons."

"Now, my wise little woman is talking of what she doesn't understand—not the least; besides, what would you have me turn to? I should be totally without resource and pursuit—don't you see? We must be reasonable. No, it is not that in the least that tires me, but I'm really overwhelmed with anxieties, and worried by my uncle, who wants me to marry, and thinks I can marry whom I please—that's all."

"I sometimes think, Cleve, I've spoiled your fortunes," with a great sigh, said Margaret, watching his face.

"Now, where's the good of saying that, my little woman? I'm only talking of my uncle's teasing me, and wishing he'd let us both alone."

Here came a little pause.

"Is that the baby?" said Margaret, raising her head and listening.

"I don't hear our baby or any one else's," said Cleve.

"I fancied I heard it cry, but it wasn't."

"You must think of me more, and of that child less, darling—you must, indeed," said Cleve, a little sourly.

I think the poor heart was pleased, thinking this jealousy; but I fear it was rather a splenetic impulse of selfishness, and that the baby was, in his eyes, a bore pretty often.

"Does the House sit to-night, Cleve, darling?"

"Does it, indeed? Why it's sitting now. We are to have the second reading of the West India Bill on to-night, and I must be there—yes—in an hour"—he was glancing at his watch—"and heaven knows at what hour in the morning we shall get away."

And just at this moment old Anne Sheckleton joined them. "She's coming with more tea," she said, as the maid emerged with a little tray, "and we'll place our cups on the window-stone when we don't want them. Now, Mr. Verney, is not this a charming little spot just at this light?"

"I almost think it is," said Cleve, relenting. The golden light of evening was touching the formal poplars, and the other trees, and bringing out the wrinkles of the old bricks duskily in its flaming glow.

"Yes, just for about fifteen minutes in the twenty-four hours, when the weather is particularly favourable, it has a sort of Dutch picturesqueness; but, on the whole, it is not the sort of cottage that I would choose for a permanent dove-cot. I should fear lest my pigeons should choke with dust."

"No, there's no dust here; it is the quietest, most sylvan little lane in the world."

"Which is a wide place," said Cleve. "Well, with smoke then."

"Nor smoke either."

"But I forgot, love does not die of smoke or of anything else," said Cleve.

"No, of course, love is eternal," said Margaret.

"Just so; the King never dies. Les roix meurent-ils? Quelquefois, madame. Alas, theory and fact conflict. Love is eternal in the abstract; but nothing is more mortal than a particular love," said Cleve.

"If you think so, I wonder you ever wished to marry," said Margaret, and a faint tinge flushed her cheeks.

"I thought so, and yet I did wish to marry," said Cleve. "It is perishable, but I can't live without it," and he patted her cheek, and laughed a rather cold little laugh.

"No, love never dies," said Margaret, with a gleam of her old fierce spirit. "But it may be killed."

"It is terrible to kill anything," said Cleve.

"To kill love," she answered, "is the worst murder of all."

"A veritable murder," he acquiesced, with a smile and a slight shrug; "once killed, it never revives."

"You like talking awfully, as if I might lose your love," said she, haughtily; "as if, were I to vex you, you never could forgive."

"Forgiveness has nothing to do with it, my poor little woman. I no more called my love into being than I did myself; and should it die, either naturally or violently, I could no more call it to life, than I could Cleopatra or Napoleon Bonaparte. It is a principle, don't you see? that comes as direct as life from heaven. We can't create it, we can't restore it; and really about love, it is worse than mortal, because, as I said, I am sure it has no resurrection—no, it has no resurrection."

"That seems to me a reason," she said, fixing her large eyes upon him with a wild resentment, "why you should cherish it very much while it lives."

"And don't I, darling?" he said, placing his arms round her neck, and drawing her fondly to his breast, and in the thrill of that momentary effusion was something of the old feeling when to lose her would have been despair, to gain her heaven, and it seemed as if the scent of the woods of Malory, and of the soft sea breeze, was around them for a moment.

And now he is gone, away to that tiresome House—lost to her, given up to his ambition, which seems more and more to absorb him; and she remains smiling on their beautiful little baby, with a great misgiving at her heart, to see Cleve no more for four-and-twenty hours more.

As Cleve went into the House, he met old Colonel Thongs, sometime whip of the "outs."

"You've heard about old Snowdon?"

"No."

"In the Cabinet, by Jove!"

"Really?"

"Fact. Ask your uncle."

"By Jove, it is very unlooked for; no one thought of him; but I dare say he'll do very well."

"We'll soon try that."

It was a very odd appointment. But Lord Snowdon was gazetted; a dull man, but laborious; a man who had held minor offices at different periods of his life, and was presumed to have a competent knowledge of affairs. A dull man, owing all to his dulness, quite below many, and selected as a negative compromise for the vacant seat in the Cabinet, for which two zealous and brilliant competitors were contending.

"I see it all," thought Cleve; "that's the reason why Caroline Oldys and Lady Wimbledon are to be at Ware this autumn, and I'm to be married to the niece of a Cabinet minister."

Cleve sneered, but he felt very uneasy.

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRIUMVIRATE.

That night Lord Verney waited to hear the debate in the Commons—waited for the division,—and brought Cleve home with him in his brougham.

He explained to Cleve on the way how much better the debate might have been. He sometimes half regretted his seat in the Commons; there were so many things unsaid that ought to have been said, and so many things said that had better have been omitted. And at last he remarked—

"Your uncle Arthur, my unfortunate brother, had a great natural talent for speaking. It's a talent of the Verney's—about it. We all have it; and you have got it also; it is a gift of very decided importance in debate; it can hardly be over-estimated in that respect. Poor Arthur might have done very well, but he didn't, and he's gone—about it; and I'm very glad, for your own sake, you are cultivating it; and it would be a very great misfortune, I've been thinking, if our family were not to marry, and secure a transmission of those hereditary talents and—and things—and—what's your opinion of Miss Caroline Oldys? I mean, quite frankly, what sort of wife you think she would make."

"Why, to begin with, she's been out a long time; but I fancy she's gentle—and foolish; and I believe her mother bullies her."

"I don't know what you call bullying, my good sir; but she appears to me to be a very affectionate mother; and as to her being foolish—about it—I can't perceive it; on the contrary, I've conversed with her a good deal—and things—and I've found her very superior indeed to any young woman I can recollect having talked to. She takes an interest in things which don't interest or—or—interest other young persons; and she likes to be instructed about affairs—and, my dear Cleve, I think where a young person of merit—either rightly or wrongly interpreting what she conceives to be your attentions—

becomes decidedly épris of you, she ought to be—a—considered—her feelings, and things; and I thought I might as well mention my views, and go—about it—straight to the point; and I think you will perceive that it is reasonable, and that's the position—about it; and you know, Cleve, in these circumstances you may reckon upon me to do anything in reason that may still lie in my power—about it."

"You have always been too kind to me."

"You shall find me so still. Lady Wimbledon takes an interest in you, and Miss Caroline Oldys will, I undertake to say, more and more decidedly as she comes to know you better."

And so saying, Lord Verney leaned back in the brougham as if taking a doze, and after about five minutes of closed eyes and silence he suddenly wakened up and said—

"It is, in fact, it strikes me, high time, Cleve, you should marry—about it—and you must have money, too; you want money, and you shall have it."

"I'm afraid money is not one of Caroline's strong points."

"You need not trouble yourself upon that point, sir; if I'm satisfied I fancy you may. I've quite enough for both, I presume; and—and so, we'll let that matter rest."

And the noble lord let himself rest also, leaning stiffly back with closed eyes, and nodding and swaying silently with the motion of the carriage.

I believe he was only ruminating after his manner in these periods of apparent repose. He opened his eyes again, and remarked—

"I have talked over this affair carefully with Mr. Larkin—a most judicious and worthy person—about it—and you can talk to him, and so on, when he comes to town, and I should rather wish you to do so."

Lord Verney relapsed into silence and the semblance, at least, of slumber.

"So Larkin's at the bottom of it; I knew he was," thought Cleve, with a pang of hatred which augured ill for the future prospects of that good man. "He has made this alliance for the Oldys and Wimbledon faction, and I'm Mr. Larkin's parti, and am to settle the management of everything upon him; and what a judicious diplomatist he is—and how he has put his foot in it. A blundering hypocritical coxcomb—D—n him."

Then his thoughts wandered away to Larkin, and to his instrument, Mr. Dingwell, "who looks as if he came from the galleys. We have heard nothing of him for a year or more. Among the Greek and Malay scoundrels again, I suppose; the Turks are too good for him."

But Mr. Dingwell had not taken his departure, and was not thinking of any such step yet, at least. He had business still on his hands, and a mission unaccomplished.

Still in the same queer lodgings, and more jealously shut up during the daytime than ever, Mr. Dingwell lived his odd life, professing to hate England—certainly in danger there—he yet lingered on for a set purpose, over which he brooded and laughed in his hermitage.

To so chatty a person as Mr. Dingwell solitude for a whole day was irksome. Sarah Rumble was his occasional resource, and when she brought him his cup of black coffee he would make her sit down by the wall, like a servant at prayers, and get from her all the news of the dingy little neighbourhood, with a running commentary of his own flighty and savage irony, and he would sometimes entertain her, between the whiffs of his long pipe, with talk of his own, which he was at no pains to adapt to her comprehension, and delivered rather for his own sole entertainment.

"The world, the flesh, and the devil, ma'am. The two first we know pretty well—hey? the other we take for granted. I suppose there is somebody of the sort. We are all pigs, ma'am—unclean animals—and this is a sty we live in—slime and abomination. Strong delusion is, unseen, circling in the air. Our ideas of beauty, delights of sense, vanities of intellect—all a most comical and frightful cheat—egad! What fun we must be, ma'am, to the spirits who have sight and intellect! I think, ma'am, we're meant for their pantomime—don't you? Our airs, and graces, and dignities, and compliments, and beauties, and dandies—our metal coronets, and lawn sleeves, and whalebone wigs—fun, ma'am, lots of fun! And here we are, a wonderful work of God. Eh? Come, ma'am—a word in your ear—all putrefaction—pah! nothing clean but fire, and that makes us roar and vanish—a very odd position we're placed in; hey, ma'am?"

Mr. Dingwell had at first led Sarah Rumble a frightful life, for she kept the door where the children were peremptorily locked, at which he took umbrage, and put her on fatigue duty, more than trebling her work by his caprices, and requiting her with his ironies and sneers, finding fault with everything, pretending to miss money out of his desk, and every day threatening to invoke Messrs. Levi and Goldshed, and invite an incursion of the police, and showing in his face, his tones—his jeers pointed and envenomed by revenge—that his hatred was active and fiendish.

But Sarah Rumble was resolute. He was not a desirable companion for childhood of either sex, and the battle went on for a considerable time; and poor Sarah in her misery besought Messrs. Levi and Goldshed, with many tears and prayers, that he might depart from her; and Levi looked at Goldshed, and Goldshed at Levi, quite gravely, and Levi winked, and Goldshed nodded, and said, "A bad boy;" and they spoke comfortably, and told her they would support her, but Mr. Dingwell must remain her inmate, but they'd take care he should do her no harm.

Mr. Dingwell had a latch-key, which he at first used sparingly and timidly; with time, however, his courage grew, and he was out more or less every night. She used to hear him go out after the little household was in bed, and sometimes she heard him lock the hall-door, and his step on the stairs when the sky was already gray with the dawn.

And gradually finding company such as he affected out of doors, I suppose, he did not care so much for the seclusion of his fellow-lodgers, and ceased to resent it almost, and made it up with Sarah Rumble.

And one night, having to go up between one and two for a match-box to the lobby, she encountered Mr. Dingwell coming down. She was dumb with terror, for she did not know him, and took him for a burglar, he being somehow totally changed—she was too confused to recollect exactly, only that he had red hair and whiskers, and looked stouter.

She did not know him in the least till he laughed. She was near fainting, and leaned with her shoulder to the corner of the wall; and he said—

"I've to put on these; you keep my secret, mind; you may lose me my life, else."

And he took her by the chin, and gave her a kiss, and then a slap on the cheek that seemed to her harder than play, for her ear tingled with it for an hour after, and she uttered a little cry of fright, and he laughed, and glided out of the hall-door, and listened for the tread of a policeman, and peeped slily up and down the court; and then, with his cotton umbrella in his hand, walked quietly down the passage and disappeared.

Sarah Rumble feared him all the more for this little rencontre and the shock she had received, for there was a suggestion of something felonious in his disguise. She was, however, a saturnine and silent woman, with few acquaintances, and no fancy for collecting or communicating news. There was a spice of danger, too, in talking of this matter; so she took counsel of the son of Sirach, who says, "If thou hast heard a word, let it die with thee, and, behold, it will not burst thee."

Sarah Rumble kept his secret, and henceforward, at such hours kept close, when in the deep silence of the night she heard the faint creak of his stealthy shoe upon the stair, and avoided him as she would a meeting with a ghost.

Whatever were his amusements, Messrs. Goldshed and Levi grumbled savagely at the cost of them. They grumbled because grumbling was a principle of theirs in carrying on their business.

"No matter how it turns out, keep always grumbling to the man who led you into the venture, especially if he has a claim to a share of the profits at the close."

So whenever Mr. Larkin saw Messrs. Goldshed and Levi, he heard mourning and imprecation. The Hebrews shook their heads at the Christian, and chaunted a Jeremiad, in duet, together, and each appealed to the other for the confirmation of the dolorous and bitter truths he uttered. And the iron safe opened its jaws and disgorged the private ledger of the firm, which ponderous and greasy tome was laid on the desk with a pound, and opened at this transaction—the matter of Dingwell, Verney, &c.; and Mr. Levi would run his black nail along the awful items of expenditure that filled column after column.

"Look at that—look here—look, will you?—look, I say: you never sawed an account like that—never—all this here—look—down—and down—and down—and down—"

"Enough to frighten the Bank of England!" boomed Mr. Goldshed.

"Look down thish column," resumed Levi, "and thish, and thish, and thish—there's nine o' them—and not one stiver on th' other side. Look, look, look, look, look! Daam, it'sh all a quaag, and a quickshand—nothing but shink and shwallow, and give ush more"—and as he spoke Levi was knocking the knuckles of his long lean fingers fiercely upon the empty columns, and eyeing Larkin with a rueful ferocity, as if he had plundered and half-murdered him and his partner, who sat there innocent as the babes in the wood.

Mr. Larkin knew quite well, however, that so far from regretting their investment, they would not have sold their ventures under a very high figure indeed.

"And that beast Dingwell, talking as if he had us all in quod, by ——, and always whimperin', and whinin', and swearin' for more—why you'd say, to listen to his rot, 'twas him had us under his knuckle—you would—the lunatic!"

"And may I ask what he wants just at present?" inquired Mr. Larkin.

"What he always wants, and won't be easy never till he gets it—a walk up the mill, sir, and his head cropped, and six months' solitary, and a touch of corporal now and again. I never saw'd a cove as wanted a teazin' more; that's what he wants. What he's looking for, of course, is different, only he shan't get it, nohow. And I think, looking at that book there, as I showed you this account in—considering what me and the gov'nor here has done—'twould only be fair you should come down with summut, if you goes in for the lottery, with other gentlemen as pays their pool like bricks, and never does modest, by no chance."

"He has pushed that game a little too far," said Mr. Larkin; "I have considered his feelings a great deal too much."

"Yesh, but we have feelinsh. The Gov'nor has feelinsh; I have feelinsh. Think what state our feelinsh is in, lookin' at that there account," said Mr. Levi, with much pathos.

Mr. Larkin glanced toward the door, and then toward the window.

"We are quite alone?" said he, mildly.

"Yesh, without you have the devil in your pocket, as old Dingwell saysh," answered Levi, sulkily.

"For there are subjects of a painful nature, as you know, gentlemen, connected with this particular case," continued Mr. Larkin.

"Awful painful; but we'll sta-an' it," said Goldshed, with unctuous humour; "we'll sta-an' it, but wishes it over quick;" and he winked at Levi.

"Yesh, he wishes it over quick," echoed Levi; "the gov'nor and me, we wishes it over quick."

"And so do I, most assuredly; but we must have a little patience. If deception does lurk here—and you know I warned you I suspected it—we must not prematurely trouble Lord Verney."

"He might throw up the sponge, he might, I know," said Levi, with a nod.

"I don't know what course Lord Verney might think it right in such a case to adopt; I only know that until I am in a position to reduce suspicion to certainty, it would hardly consist with right feeling to torture his mind upon the subject. In the meantime he is—a—growing"——

"Growing warm in his berth," said Goldshed.

"Establishing himself, I should say, in his position. He has been incurring, I need hardly tell you, enormous expense in restoring (I might say re-building) the princely mansions of Ware, and of Verney House. He applied much ready money to that object, and has charged the estates with nearly sixty thousand pounds besides." Mr. Larkin lowered his tones reverentially at the mention of so considerable a sum.

"I know Sirachs, did nigh thirty thoushand o' that," said Mr. Goldshed.

"And that tends to—to—as I may say, steady him in his position; and I may mention, in confidence, gentlemen, that there are other measures on the tapis" (he pronounced taypis) "which will further and still more decidedly fix him in his position. It would pain us all deeply, gentlemen, that a premature disclosure of my uneasiness should inspire his lordship with a panic in which he might deal ruinously with his own interests, and, in fact, as you say, Mr. Levi, throw up the—the"——

"Sponge," said Levi, reflectively.

"But I may add," said Mr. Larkin, "that I am impatiently watching the moment when it may become my duty to open my suspicions fully to Lord Verney; and that I have reason to know that that moment cannot now be distant."

"Here's Tomlinshon comin' up, gov'nor," said Mr. Levi, jumping off the table on which he had been sitting, and sweeping the great ledger into his arms, he pitched it into its berth in the safe, and locked it into that awful prison-house.

"I said he would," said Goldshed, with a lazy smile, as he unlocked a door in the lumbering office table at which he sat. "Don't bring out them overdue renewals; we'll not want them till next week."

Mr. Tomlinson, a tall, thin man, in faded drab trousers, with a cotton umbrella swinging in his hand, and a long careworn face, came striding up the court.

"You won't do that for him?" asked Levi.

"No, not to-day," murmured Mr. Goldshed, with a wink. And Mr. Tomlinson's timid knock and feeble ring at the door were heard.

And Mr. Larkin put on his well-brushed hat, and pulled on his big lavender gloves, and stood up at his full length, in his black glossy coat, and waistcoat and trowsers of the accustomed hue, and presents the usual lavender-tinted effect, and a bland simper rests on his lank cheeks, and his small pink eyes look their adieux upon Messrs. Goldshed and Levi, on whom his airs and graces are quite lost; and with his slim silk umbrella between his great finger and thumb, he passes loftily by the cotton umbrella of Mr. Tomlinson, and fancies, with a pardonable egotism, that that poor gentleman, whose head is full of his bill-book and renewals, and possible executions, and preparing to deceive a villanous omniscience, and to move the compassion of Pandemonium—is thinking of him, and mistaking him, possibly, for a peer, or for some other type of British aristocracy.

The sight of that unfortunate fellow, Tomlinson, with a wife, and a seedy hat, and children, and a cotton umbrella, whose little business was possibly about to be knocked about his ears, moved a lordly pity in Mr. Larkin's breast, and suggested contrasts, also, of many kinds, that were calculated to elate his good humour; and as he stepped into the cab, and the driver waited to know "where," he thought he might as well look in upon the recluse of Rosemary Court, and give him, of course with the exquisite tact that was peculiar to him, a hint or two in favour of reason and moderation; for really it was quite true what Mr. Levi had said about the preposterous presumption of a person in Mr. Dingwell's position affecting the airs of a dictator.

So being in the mood to deliver a lecture, to the residence of that uncomfortable old gentleman he drove, and walked up the flagged passage to the flagged court-yard, and knocked at the door, and looked up at the square ceiling of sickly sky, and strode up the narrow stairs after Mrs. Rumble.

"How d'ye do, sir? Your soul, particularly, quite well, I trust. Your spiritual concerns flourishing to-day?" was the greeting of Mr. Dingwell's mocking voice.

"Thanks, Mr. Dingwell; I'm very well," answered Mr. Larkin, with a bow which was meant to sober Mr. Dingwell's mad humour.

Sarah Rumble, as we know, had a defined fear of Mr. Dingwell, but also a vague terror; for there was a great deal about him ill-omened and mysterious. There was a curiosity, too, active within her, intense and rather ghastly, about all that concerned him. She did not care, therefore, to get up and go away from the small hole in the carpet which she was darning on the lobby, and through the door she heard faintly some talk she didn't understand, and Mr. Dingwell's voice, at a high pitch, said—

"D—— you, sir, do you think I'm a fool? Don't you think I've your letter, and a copy of my own? If we draw swords, egad, sir, mine's the longer and sharper, as you'll feel. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, lawk!" gasped Sarah Rumble, standing up, and expecting the clash of rapiers.

"Your face, sir, is as white and yellow—you'll excuse me—as an old turban. I beg your pardon; but I want you to understand that I see you're frightened, and that I won't be bullied by you."

"I don't suppose, sir, you meditate totally ruining yourself," said Mr. Larkin, with dignity.

"I tell you, sir, if anything goes wrong with me, I'll make a clean breast of it—everything—ha, ha, ha!—upon my honour—and we two shall grill together."

Larkin had no idea he was going in for so hazardous and huge a game when he sat down to play. His vision was circumscribed, his prescience small. He looked at the beast he had imported, and wished him in a deep grave in Scutari, with a turbaned-stone over his head, the scheme quashed, and the stakes drawn.

But wishing would not do. The spirit was evoked—in nothing more manageable than at first; on the contrary, rather more insane. Nerve was needed, subtlety, patience, and he must manage him.

"Why the devil did you bring me here, sir, if you were not prepared to treat me properly? You know my circumstances, and you want to practise on my misfortunes, you vile rogue, to mix me up in your fraudulent machinations."

"Pray, sir, not so loud. Do—do command yourself," remonstrated Larkin, almost affectionately.

"Do you think I'm come all this way, at the risk of my life, to be your slave, you shabby, canting attorney? I'd better be where I was, or in kingdom come. By Allah! sir, you have

me, and I'm your master, and you shan't buy my soul for a piastre."

There came a loud knock at the hall-door, and if it had been a shot and killed them both, the debaters in the drawing-room could not have been more instantaneously breathless.

Down glided Sarah Rumble, who had been expecting this visit, to pay the taxman.

And she had hardly taken his receipt, when Mr. Larkin, very pink, endeavouring to smile in his discomfiture, and observing with a balmy condescension, "A sweet day, Mrs. Rumble," appeared in the hall, shook his ears a little, and adjusted his hat, and went forth, and Rosemary Court saw him no more for some time.

The Tenants of Malory Vol.III by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

CHAPTER IX.

IN VERNEY HOUSE.

Mr. Larkin got into his cab, and ordered the cabman, in a loud voice, to drive to Verney House.

"Didn't he know Verney House? He thought every cabman in London knew Verney House! The house of Lord Viscount Verney, in —— Square. Why it fills up a whole side of it!"

He looked at his watch. He had thirty-seven minutes to reach it in. It was partly to get rid of a spare half hour, that he had paid his unprofitable visit to Rosemary Court.

Mr. Larkin registered a vow to confer no more with Mr. Dingwell. He eased his feelings by making a note of this resolution in that valuable little memorandum book which he carried about with him in his pocket.

"Saw Mr. Dingwell this day—as usual impracticable and ill-bred to a hopeless degree—waste of time and worse—resolved that this gentleman being inaccessible to reason, is not to be argued, but DEALT with, should occasion hereafter arise for influencing his conduct."

Somewhere about Temple Bar, Mr. Larkin's cab got locked in a string of vehicles, and he put his head out of window, not being sorry for an opportunity of astonishing the citizens by calling to the driver—

"I say, my good fellow, can't you get on? I told Lord Verney to expect me at half-past one. Do, pray, get me out of this, any way, and you shall have a gratuity of half-a-crown.

Verney House is a good way from this. Do try. His lordship will be as much obliged to you as I am."

Mr. Larkin's assiduities and flatteries were, in truth, telling upon Lord Verney, with whom he was stealing into a general confidence which alarmed many people, and which Cleve Verney hated more than ever.

With the pretty mansion of Hazelden, the relations, as Lord Verney would have said of the House of Ware, were no longer friendly. This was another instance of the fragility of human arrangements, and the vanity of human hopes. The altar had been erected, the swine sacrificed, and the augurs and haruspices on both sides had predicted nothing but amity and concord. Game, fruit, and venison, went and came,—"Much good may it do your good heart." "It was ill-killed," &c. Master Shallow and Master Page could not have been more courteous on such occasions. But on the fête champêtre had descended a sudden procella. The roses were whirling high in the darkened air, the flatteries and laughter were drowned in thunder, and the fiddles and glasses smashed with hailstones as large as potatoes.

A general election had come and gone, and in that brief civil war old Vane Etherage was found at the wrong side. In Lord Verney's language neighbour meant something like vassal, and Etherage who had set up his banner and arrayed his power on the other side, was a rebel—the less forgivable that he had, as was authentically demonstrated, by this step himself inflicted that defeat in the county which had wounded Lord Verney to the quick.

So silence descended upon the interchange of civil speeches; the partridges and pheasants, winged from Ware in a new direction, and old Vane Etherage stayed his friendly hand also; and those tin cases of Irish salmon, from the old gentleman's fisheries, packed in ice, as fresh as if they had sprung from the stream only half an hour before, were no longer known at Ware; and those wonderful fresh figs, green and purple, which Lord Verney affected, for which Hazelden is famous, and which Vane Etherage was fond of informing his guests were absolutely unequalled in any part of the known world! England could not approach them for bulk and ripeness, nor foreign parts—and he had eaten figs wherever figs grow—for aroma and flavour, no longer crossed the estuary. Thus this game of beggar-my-neighbour began. Lord Verney recalled his birds, and Mr. Etherage withdrew his figs. Mr. Etherage lost his great black grapes; and Lord

Verney sacrificed his salmon, and in due time Lord Verney played a writ, and invited an episode in a court of law, and another, more formidable, in the Court of Chancery.

So the issues of the war were knit again, and Vane Etherage was now informed by his lawyers there were some very unpleasant questions mooted affecting the title to the Windermore estate, for which he payed a trifling rent to the Verneys.

So, when Larkin went into Verney House, he was closeted with its noble master for a good while, and returning to a smaller library—devoted to blue books and pamphlets—where he had left a despatch-box and umbrella during his wait for admission to his noble client, he found Cleve busy there.

"Oh, Mr. Larkin. How d'ye do? Anything to say to me?" said the handsome young man, whose eye looked angry though he smiled.

"Ah, thanks. No—no, Mr. Verney. I hope and trust I see you well; but no, I had not any communication to make. Shall I be honoured, Mr. Verney, with any communication from you?"

"I've nothing to say, thanks, except of course to say how much obliged I am for the very particular interest you take in my affairs."

"I should be eminently gratified, Mr. Verney, to merit your approbation; but I fear, sir, as yet I can hardly hope to have merited your thanks," said Mr. Larkin, modestly.

"You won't let me thank you; but I quite understand the nature and extent of your kindness. My uncle is by no means so reserved, and he has told me very frankly the care you have been so good as to take of me. He's more obliged even than I am, and so, I am told, is Lady Wimbledon also."

Cleve had said a great deal more than at starting he had at all intended. It would have been easy to him to have dismissed the attorney without allusion to the topic that made him positively hateful in his eyes; but it was not easy to hint at it, and quite command himself also, and the result illustrated the general fact that total abstinence is easier than moderation.

Now the effect of this little speech of Cleve's upon the attorney, was to abash Mr. Larkin, and positively to confound him, in a degree quite unusual in a Christian so armed on most occasions with that special grace called presence of mind. The blood mounted to his hollow cheeks, and up to the summit of his tall bald head; his eyes took their rat-like character, and looked dangerously in his for a second, and then down to the floor, and scanned his own boots; and he bit his lip, and essayed a little laugh, and tried to look innocent, and broke down in the attempt. He cleared his voice once or twice to speak, but said nothing; and all this time Cleve gave him no help whatsoever, but enjoyed his evident confusion with an angry sneer.

"I hope Mr. Cleve Verney," at length Mr. Larkin began, "where duty and expediency pull in opposite directions, I shall always be found at the right side."

"The winning side at all events," said Cleve.

"The right side, I venture to repeat. It has been my misfortune to be misunderstood more than once in the course of my life. It is our duty to submit to misinterpretation, as to other afflictions, patiently. I hope I have done so. My first duty is to my client."

"I'm no client of yours, sir."

"Well, conceding that, sir, to your uncle—to Lord Verney, I will say—to his views of what the interests of his house demand, and to his feelings."

"Lord Verney has been good enough to consult me, hitherto, upon this subject; a not quite unnatural confidence, I venture to think; more than you seem to suspect. He

seems to think, and so do I, that I've a voice in it, and has not left me absolutely in the hands—in a matter of so much importance and delicacy—of his country lawyer."

"I had no power in this case, sir; not even of mentioning the subject to you, who certainly, in one view, are more or less affected by it."

"Thank you for the concession," sneered Cleve.

"I make it unaffectedly, Mr. Cleve Verney," replied Larkin, graciously.

"My uncle, Lord Verney, has given me leave to talk to you upon the subject. I venture to decline that privilege. I prefer speaking to him. He seems to think that I ought to be allowed to advise a little in the matter, and that with every respect for his wishes; mine also are entitled to be a little considered. Should I ever talk to you, Mr. Larkin, it shan't be to ask your advice. I'm detaining you, sir, and I'm also a little busy myself."

Mr. Larkin looked at the young man a second or two a little puzzled; but encountering only a look of stern impatience, he made his best bow, and the conference ended.

A few minutes later, in came our old friend, Tom Sedley.

"Oh! Sedley! Very glad to see you here; but I thought you did not want to see my uncle just now; and this is the most likely place, except the library, to meet him in."

"He's gone; I saw him go out this moment. I should not have come in otherwise; and you mustn't send me away, dear Cleve, I'm in such awful trouble. Everything has gone wrong with us at Hazelden. You know that quarrying company—the slates, that odious fellow, Larkin, led him into, before the election and all the other annoyances began."

"You mean the Llanrwyd company?"

"Yes; so I do."

"But that's quite ruined, you know. Sit down."

"I know. He has lost—frightfully—and Mr. Etherage must pay up ever so much in calls beside; and unless he can get it on a mortgage of the Windermore estate, he can't possibly pay them—and I've been trying, and the result is just this—they won't lend it anywhere till the litigation is settled."

"Well, what can I do?" said Cleve, yawning stealthily into his hand, and looking very tired. I am afraid these tragic confidences of Tom Sedley's did not interest Cleve very much; rather bored him, on the contrary.

"They won't lend, I say, while this litigation is pending."

"Depend upon it they won't," acquiesced Cleve.

"And in the meantime, you know, Mr. Etherage would be ruined."

"Well, I see; but, I say again, what can I do?"

"I want you to try if anything can be done with Lord Verney," said Tom, beseechingly.

"Talk to my uncle? I wish, dear Tom, you could teach me how to do that."

"It can't do any harm, Cleve—it can't," urged Tom Sedley, piteously.

"Nor one particle of good. You might as well talk to that picture—I do assure you, you might."

"But it could be no pleasure to him to ruin Mr. Etherage!"

"I'm not so sure of that; between ourselves, forgiving is not one of his weaknesses."

"But I say it's quite impossible—an old family, and liked in the county—it would be a scandal for ever!" pleaded Tom Sedley, distractedly.

"Not worse than that business of Booth Fanshawe," said Cleve, looking down; "no, he never forgives anything. I don't think he perceives he's taking a revenge; he has not mind enough for repentance," said Cleve, who was not in good humour with his uncle just then.

"Won't you try? you're such an eloquent fellow, and there's really so much to be said."

"I do assure you, there's no more use than in talking to the chimney-piece; if you make a point of it, of course, I will; but, by Jove, you could hardly choose a worse advocate just now, for he's teasing me to do what I can't do. If you heard my miserable story, it would make you laugh; it's like a thing in a petite comédie, and it's breaking my heart."

"Well, then, you'll try—won't you try?" said Tom, overlooking his friend's description of his own troubles.

"Yes; as you desire it, I'll try; but I don't expect the slightest good from it, and possibly some mischief," he replied.

"A thousand thanks, my dear Cleve; I'm going down to-night. Would it be too much to ask you for a line, or, if it's good news, a telegram to Llwynan."

"I may safely promise you that, I'm sorry to say, without risk of trouble. You mustn't think me unkind, but it would be cruel to let you hope when there is not, really, a chance."

So Tom drove away to his club, to write his daily love letter to Agnes Etherage, in time for post; and to pen a few lines for old Vane Etherage, and try to speak comfortably to that family, over whose pretty home had gathered so awful a storm.

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CHAPTER X.

A THUNDER-STORM

"That night a child might understand

The de'il had business on his hand."

I ended my last chapter with mention of a metaphoric storm; but a literal storm broke over the city of London on that night, such as its denizens remembered for many a day after. The lightning seemed, for more than an hour, the continuous pulsations of light from a sulphurous furnace, and the thunder pealed with the cracks and rattlings of one long roar of artillery. The children, waked by the din, cried in their beds in terror, and Sarah Rumble got her dress about her, and said her prayers in panic.

After a while the intervals between the awful explosions were a little more marked, and Miss Rumble's voice could be heard by the children, comforting and reassuring in the brief lulls; although had they known what a fright their comforter was herself in, their confidence in her would have been impaired.

Perhaps there was a misgiving in Sarah Rumble's mind that the lightnings and thunders of irate heaven were invoked by the presence of her mysterious lodger. Was even she herself guiltless, in hiding under her roof-tree that impious old sinner, whom Rosemary Court disgorged at dead of night, as the churchyard does a ghost—about whose past history—whose doings and whose plans, except that they were wicked—she knew no more than about those of an evil spirit, had she chanced, in one of her spectre-seeing moods, to spy one moving across the lobby.

His talk was so cold and wicked; his temper so fiendish; his nocturnal disguises and outgoings so obviously pointed to secret guilt; and his relations with the meek Mr. Larkin, and with those potent Jews, who, grumbling and sullen, yet submitted to his caprices, as genii to those of the magician who has the secret of command,—that Mr. Dingwell had in her eyes something of a supernatural horror surrounding him. In the

thunderstorm, Sarah Rumble vowed secretly to reconsider the religious propriety of harbouring this old man; and amid these qualms, it was with something of fear and anger that, in a silence between the peals of the now subsiding storm, she heard the creak of his shoe upon the stair.

That even on such a night, with the voice of divine anger in the air, about his ears, he could not forego his sinister excursion, and for once at these hours remain decorously in his rooms! Her wrath overcame her fear of him. She would not have her house burnt and demolished over her head, with thunderbolts, for his doings.

She went forth, with her candle in her hand, and stood at the turn of the banister, confronting Mr. Dingwell, who, also furnished with a candle, was now about midway down the last flight of stairs.

"Egeria, in the thunder!" exclaimed the hard, scoffing tones of Mr. Dingwell; whom, notwithstanding her former encounter with him, she would hardly have recognised in his ugly disguise.

"A hoffle night for anyone to go out, sir," she said, rather sternly, with a courtesy at the same time.

"Hoffle, is it?" said Mr. Dingwell, amused, with mock gravity.

"The hofflest, sir, I think I hever 'ave remembered."

"Why, ma'am, it isn't raining; I put my hand out of the window. There's none of that hoffle rain, ma'am, that gives a fellow rheumatism. I hope there's no unusual fog—is there?"

"There, sir;" exclaimed she, as another loud peal rattled over Rosemary Court, with a blue glare through the lobby window and the fanlight in the hall. She paused, and lifted

her hand to her eyes till it subsided, and then murmured an ejaculation.

"I like thunder, my dear. It reminds me of your name, dear Miss Rumble;" and he prolonged the name with a rolling pronunciation. "Shakespeare, you know, who says everything better than anyone else in the world, makes that remarkable old gentleman, King Lear, say, 'Thunder, rumble thy bellyfull!' Of course, I would not say that in a drawing-room, or to you; but kings are so refined they may say things we can't, and a genius like Shakespeare hits it off."

"I would not go out, sir, on such a night, without I was very sure it was about something good I was a-going," said Miss Rumble, very pale.

"You labour under electro-phobia, my dear ma'am, and mistake it for piety. I'm not a bit afraid of that sort of artillery, ma'am. Here we are, two or three millions of people in this town; and two or three million of shots, and we'll see by the papers, I venture to say, not three shots tell. Don't you think if Jupiter really meant mischief he could manage something better?"

"I know, sir, it ought to teach us"—here she winced and paused; for another glare, followed by another bellow of the thunder, "long, loud, and deep," interposed. "It should teach us some godly fear, if we has none by nature."

Mr. Dingwell looked at his watch.

"Oh! Mr. Dingwell, it is hoffle. I wish you would only see it, sir."

"See the thunder—eh?"

"My poor mother. She always made us go down on our knees, and say our prayers—she would—while the thunder was."

"You'd have had rather long prayers to-night. How your knees must have ached—egad! I don't wonder you dread it, Miss Sarah."

"And so I do, Mr. Dingwell, and so I should. Which I think all other sinners should dread it also."

"Meaning me."

"And take warning of the wrath to come."

Here was another awful clap.

"Hoffle it is, Mr. Dingwell, and a warnin' to you, sent special, mayhap."

"Hardly fair to disturb all the town for me, don't you think?"

"You're an old man, Mr. Dingwell."

"And you're an old woman, Miss Sarah," said he—not caring to be reminded of his years by other people, though he playfully called himself on occasions an old "boy"—"as old as Abra ham's wife, whose namesake you are, though you have not lighted on an Abraham yet, nor become the mother of a great nation."

"Old enough to be good enough, as my poor mother used to say, sir; I am truly; and sorry I am, Mr. Dingwell, to see you, on this hoffle night, bent on no good. I'm afraid, sir—oh, sir, sir, oughtn't you think, with them sounds in your ears, Mr. Dingwell?"

"The most formidable thunder, my dear Sarah, proceeds from the silvery tongue of woman. I can stand any other. It frightens me. So, egad, if you please, I'll take refuge in the open air, and go out, and patter a prayer."

And with a nod and a smirk, having had fooling enough, he glided by Miss Rumble, who made him an appalled courtesy, and, setting down his candle on the hall-table, he said, touching his false whiskers with his finger tips, "Mind, not a word about these—upon my soul——you'd better not."

She made another courtesy. He stopped and looked at her for an answer.

"Can't you speak?" he said.

"No, sir—sure—not a word," she faltered.

"Good girl!" he said, and opened the door, with his latch-key in his pocket, on pitchy darkness, which was instantaneously illuminated by the lightning, and another awful roar of thunder broke over their heads.

"The voice of heaven in warning!" she murmured to herself, as she stood by the banisters, dazzled by the gleam, and listening to the reverberation ringing in her ears. "I pray God he may turn back yet."

He looked over his shoulder.

"Another shot, Miss Rumble—missed again, you see." He nodded, stepped out upon the flags, and shut the door. She heard his steps in the silence that followed, traversing the court.

"Oh dear! but I wish he was gone, right out—a hoffle old man he is. There's a weight on my conscience like, and a fright in my heart, there is, ever since he camed into the 'ouse. He is so presumptious. To see that hold man made hup with them rings and whiskers, like a robber or a play-actor! And defyin' the blessed thunder of heaven—a walking hout, a mockin' and darin' it, at these hours—Oh law!"

The interjection was due to another flash and peal.

"I wouldn't wonder—no more I would—if that flash was the death o' 'im!"

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CHAPTER XI.

THE PALE HORSE.

Sally Rumble knocked at the usual hour at the old man's door next morning.

"Come in, ma'am," he answered, in a weary, peevish voice. "Open the window-shutter, and give me some light, and hand me my watch, please."

All which she did.

"I have not closed my eyes from the time I lay down."

"Not ailing, sir, I hope?"

"Just allow me to count, and I'll tell you, my dear."

He was trying his pulse.

"Just as I thought, egad. The pale horse in the Revelation, ma'am, he's running a gallop in my pulse; it has been threatening the last three days, and now I'm in for it, and I should not be surprised, Miss Sally, if it ended in a funeral in our alley."

"God forbid, sir."

"Amen, with all my heart. Ay, the pale horse; my head's splitting; oblige me with the looking-glass, and a little less light will answer. Thank you—very good. Just draw the curtain open at the foot of the bed; please, hold it nearer—thank you. Yes, a ghost, ma'am—ha, ha—at last, I do suppose. My eyes, too—I've seen pits, with the water drying up, hollow—ay, ay; sunk—and—now—did you see? Well, look at my tongue—here"—and he made the demonstration; "you never saw a worse tongue than that, I fancy; that tongue, ma'am, is eloquent, I think."

"Please God, sir, you'll soon be better."

"Draw the curtain a bit more; the light falls oddly, or—does it?—my face. Did you ever see, ma'am, a face so nearly the colour of a coffin-plate?"

"Don't be talking, sir, please, of no such thing," said Sally Rumble, taking heart of grace, for women generally pluck up a spirit when they see a man floored by sickness. "I'll make you some whey or barley-water, or would you like some weak tea better?"

"Ay; will you draw the curtain close again, and take away the looking-glass? Thanks. I believe I've drunk all the water in the carafe. Whey—well, I suppose it's the right thing; caudle when we're coming in, and whey, ma'am, when we're going out. Baptism of Infants, Burial of the Dead! My poor mother, how she did put us through the prayer-book, and Bible—Bible. Dear me."

"There's a very good man, sir, please—the Rev. Doctor Bartlett, though he's gone rather old. He came in, and read a deal, and prayed, every day with my sister when she was sick, poor thing."

"Bartlett? What's his Christian name? You need not speak loud—it plays the devil with my head."

"The Reverend Thomas Bartlett, please, sir."

"Of Jesus?"

"What, sir, please?"

"Jesus College."

"Don't know, I'm sure, sir."

"Is he old?"

"Yes, sir, past seventy."

"Ha—well I don't care a farthing about him," said Mr. Dingwell.

"Will you, please, have in the apothecary, sir? I'll fetch him directly, if you wish."

"No—no apothecary, no clergyman; I don't believe in the Apostles' Creed, ma'am, and I do believe in the jokes about apothecaries. If I'm to go, I'll go quietly, if you please."

Honest Sally Rumble was heavy at heart to see this old man, who certainly did look ghastly enough to suggest ideas of the undertaker and the sexton, in so unsatisfactory a plight as to his immortal part. Was he a Jew?—there wasn't a hair on his chin—or a Roman Catholic?—or a member of any one of those multitudinous forms of faith which she remembered in a stout volume, adorned with woodcuts, and entitled "A Dictionary of all Religions," in a back parlour of her grand-uncle, the tallow-chandler?

"Give me a glass of cold water, ma'am," said the subject of her solicitude.

"Thank you—that's the best drink—slop, I think you call it—a sick man can swallow."

Sally Rumble coughed a little, and fidgeted, and at last she said: "Please, sir, would you wish I should fetch any other sort of a minister?"

"Don't plague me, pray; I believe in the prophet Rabelais and je m'en vais chercher un grand peutêtre—the two great chemists, Death, who is going to analyse, and Life, to re-combine me. I tell you, ma'am, my head is bursting; I'm very ill; I'll talk no more."

She hesitated. She lingered in the room, in her great perplexity; and Mr. Dingwell lay back, with a groan.

"I'll tell you what you may do: go down to your landlord's office, and be so good as to say to either of those d——d Jew fellows—I don't care which—that I am as you see me; it mayn't signify, it may blow over; but I've an idea it is serious; and tell them I said they had better know that I am very ill, and that I've taken no step about it."

With another weary groan Mr. Dingwell let himself down on his pillow, and felt worse for his exertion, and very tired and stupid, and odd about the head, and would have been very glad to fall asleep; and with one odd pang of fear, sudden and cold, at his heart, he thought, "I'm going to die—I'm going to die—at last—I'm going to die."

The physical nature in sickness acquiesces in death; it is the instructed mind that recoils; and the more versed about the unseen things of futurity, unless when God, as it were, prematurely glorifies it, the more awfully it recoils.

Mr. Dingwell was not more afraid than other sinners who have lived for the earthy part of their nature, and have taken futurity pretty much for granted, and are now going to test by the stake of themselves the value of their loose guesses.

No; he had chanced a great many things, and they had turned out for the most part better than he expected. Oh! no; the whole court, and the adjoining lanes, and, in short, the whole city of London, must go as he would—lots of company, it was not to be supposed it was anything very bad—and he was so devilish tired, over-fatigued—queer—worse than sea-sickness—that headache—fate—the change—an end—what was it? At all events, a rest, a sleep—sleep—could not be very bad; lots of sleep, sir, and the chance—the chance—oh, yes, things go pretty well, and I have not had my good luck yet. I wish I could sleep a bit—yes, let kingdom-come be all sleep—and so a groan, and the brain duller, and more pain, and the immense fatigue that demands the enormous sleep.

When Sarah Rumble returned, Mr. Dingwell seemed, she thought, a great deal heavier. He made no remark, as he used to do, when she entered the room. She came and stood by the bed-side, but he lay with his eyes closed, not asleep; she could see by the occasional motion of his lips, and the fidgety change of his posture, and his weary groanings. She waited for a time in silence.

"Better, sir?" she half-whispered, after a minute or two.

"No," he said, wearily.

Another silence followed, and then she asked, "Would you like a drink, Mr. Dingwell, sir?"

"Yes—water."

So he drank a very little, and lay down again.

Miss Sarah Rumble stayed in the room, and nearly ten minutes passed without a word.

"What did he say?" demanded Mr. Dingwell so abruptly that Sarah Rumble fancied he had been dreaming.

"Who, sir, please?"

"The Jew—landlord," he answered.

"Mr. Levi's a-coming up, sir, please—he expected in twenty minutes," replied she.

Mr. Dingwell groaned; and two or three minutes more elapsed, and silence seemed to have re-established itself in the darkened chamber, when Mr. Dingwell raised himself up with a sudden effort, and he said—

"Sarah Rumble, fetch me my desk." Which she did, from his sitting-room.

"Put your hand under the bolster, and you'll find two keys on a ring, and a pocket-book. Yes. Now, Sarah Rumble, unlock that desk. Very good. Put out the papers on the coverlet before me; first bolt the door. Thank you, ma'am. There are a parcel of letters among those, tied across with a red silk cord—just so. Put them in my hand—thank you—and place all the rest back again neatly—neatly, if you please. Now lock the desk; replace it, and come here; but first give me pen and ink, and bolt the door—try it again."

And as she did so he scrawled an address upon the blank paper in which these letters were wrapt.

The brown visage of his grave landlady was graver than ever, as she returned to listen for further orders.

"Mrs. Sarah Rumble, I take you for an honest person; and as I may die this time, I make a particular request of you—take this little packet, and slip it between the feather-bed and the mattress, as near the centre as your arm will reach—thank you—remember it's there. If I die, ma'am, you'll find a ten-pound note wrapped about it, which I give to you;

you need not thank—that will do. The letters addressed as they are you will deliver, without showing them, or saying one word to anyone but to the gentleman himself, into whose hands you must deliver them. You understand?"

"Yes, sir, please; I'm listening."

"Well, attend. There are two Jew gentlemen—your landlord, Mr. Levi, and the old Jew, who have been with me once or twice—you know them; that makes two; and there is Mr. Larkin, the tall gentleman who has been twice here with them, with the lavender waistcoat and trousers, the eye-glass with the black ribbon, the black frock coat—heigho! oh, dear, my head!—the red grizzled whiskers, and bald head."

"The religious gentleman, please, sir?"

"Exactly; the religious gentleman. Well, attend. The two Jews and the religious gentleman together make three; and those three gentlemen are robbers."

"What, sir?"

"Robbers—robbers! Don't you know what 'robbers' means? They are all three robbers. Now, I don't think they'll want to fiddle with my money till I'm dead."

"Oh, Lord, sir!"

"'Oh, Lord!' of course. That will do. They won't touch my money till I'm dead, if they trust you; but they will want my desk—at least Larkin will. I shan't be able to look after things, for my head is very bad, and I shall be too drowsy—soon knocked up; so give 'em the desk, if they ask for it, and these keys from under the pillow; and if they ask you if there are any other papers, say no; and don't you tell them one word about the letters you've put between the beds here. If you betray me—you're a religious woman—yes—and believe in God—may God d—n you; and He will, for you'll be accessory to the villany of

those three miscreants. And now I've done what in me lies; and that is all—my last testament."

And Mr. Dingwell lay down wearily. Sarah Rumble knew that he was very ill; she had attended people in fever, and seen them die. Mr. Dingwell was already perceptibly worse. As she was coming up with some whey, a knock came to the door, and opening it she saw Mr. Levi, with a very surly countenance, and his dark eyes blazing fiercely on her.

"How'sh Dingwell now?" he demanded, before he had time to enter, and shut the door; "worse, is he?"

"Well, he's duller, sir."

"In his bed? Shut the door."

"Yes, sir, please. Didn't get up this morning. He expected you two hours ago, sir."

Levi nodded.

"What doctor did you fetch?" he asked.

"No doctor, please, sir. I thought you and him would choose."

Levi made no answer; so she could not tell by his surly face, which underwent no change, whether he approved or not. He looked at his watch.

"Larkin wasn't here to-day?"

"Mr. Larkin? No, sir, please."

"Show me Dingwell's room, till I have a look at him," said the Jew, gloomily.

So he followed her up-stairs, and entered the darkened room without waiting for any invitation, and went to the window, and pulled open a bit of the shutter.

"What's it for?" grumbled Dingwell indistinctly from his bed.

"So you've bin and done it, you have," said the Jew, walking up with his hands in his pockets, and eyeing him from a distance as he might a glandered horse.

Dingwell was in no condition to retort on this swarthy little man, who eyed him with a mixture of disgust and malignity.

"How long has he been thish way?" said the Jew, glowering on Sarah Rumble.

"Only to-day in bed, please, sir; but he has bin lookin' awful bad this two or three days, sir."

"Do you back it for fever?"

"I think it's fever, sir."

"I s'pose you'd twig fever fasht enough? Seen lotsh of fever in your time?"

"Yes, sir, please."

"It ish fever, ten to one in fifties. Black death going, ma'am—my luck. Look at him there, d——n him, he'sh got it."

Levi looked at him surlily for a while with eyes that glowed like coals.

"This comsh o' them cursed holes you're always a-going to; there's always fever and everything there, you great old buck goat."

Dingwell made an effort to raise himself, and mumbled, half awake—

"Let me—I'll talk to him—how dare you—when I'm better—quiet"—and he laid down his head again.

"When you are, you cursed sink. Look at all we've lost by you."

He stood looking at Dingwell savagely.

"He'll die," exclaimed he, making an angry nod, almost a butt, with his head toward the patient, and he repeated his prediction with a furious oath.

"See, you'll send down to the apothecary's for that chloride of lime, and them vinegars and things—or—no; you must wait here, for Larkin will come; and don't you let him go, mind. Me and Mr. Goldshed will be here in no time. Tell him the doctor's coming; and us—and I'll send up them things from the apothecary, and you put them all about in plates on the floor and tables. Bad enough to lose our money, and cursed bad; but I won't take this—come out o' this room—if I can help."

And he entered the drawing-room, shutting Dingwell's door, and spitting on the floor, and then he opened the window.

"He'll die—do you think he'll die?" he exclaimed again.

"He's in the hands of God, sir," said Sally Rumble.

"He won't be long there—he'll die—I say he will—he will;" and the little Jew swore and stamped on the floor, and clapped his hat on his head, and ran down the stairs, in a paroxysm of business and fury.

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CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH HIS FRIENDS VISIT THE SICK.

Mr. Levi, when Sarah Rumble gave him her lodger's message, did not, as he said, "vally it a turn of a half-penny." He could not be very ill if he could send his attendant out of doors, and deliver the terms in which his messages were to be communicated. Mr. Levi's diagnosis was that Mr. Dingwell's attack was in the region of the purse or pocket-book, and that the "dodge" was simply to get the partners and Mr. Larkin together for the purpose of extracting more money.

Mr. Larkin was in town, and he had written to that gentleman's hotel; also he had told Mr. Goldshed, who took the same view, and laughed in his lazy diapason over the weak invention of the enemy.

Levi accordingly took the matter very easily, and hours had passed before his visit, which was made pretty late in the afternoon, and he was smiling over his superior sagacity in seeing through Dingwell's little dodge, as he walked into the court, when an officious little girl, in her mother's bonnet, running by his knee, said, pompously—

"You'd better not go there, sir."

"And why so, chickabiddy?" inquired Mr. Levi, derisively.

"No, you'd better not; there's a gentleman as has took the fever there."

"Where?" said Mr. Levi, suddenly interested.

"In Mrs. Rumble's."

"Is there?—how do you know?"

"Lucy Maria Rumbles, please, sir, she told me, and he's very bad."

The fashion of Levi's countenance was changed as he turned from her suddenly, and knocked so sharply at the door that the canary, hanging from the window in his cage over the way, arrested his song, and was agitated for an hour afterwards.

So Mr. Levi was now thoroughly aroused to the danger that had so suddenly overcast his hopes, and threatened to swallow in the bottomless sea of death the golden stake he had ventured.

It was not, nevertheless, until eight o'clock in the evening, so hard a thing is it to collect three given men [what then must be the office of whip to Whig or Tory side of the House? that the two Jews and Mr. Larkin were actually assembled in Mr. Dingwell's bed-room, now reeking with disinfectants and prophylactic fluids.

The party were in sore dismay, for the interesting patient had begun to maunder very preposterously in his talk. They listened, and heard him say—

"That's a lie—I say, I'd nail his tongue to the table. Bells won't ring for it—lots of bells in England; you'll not find 'em here, though."

And then it went off into a mumbling, and Mr. Goldshed, who was listening disconsolately, exclaimed, "My eyesh!"

"Well, how do you like it, guv'nor? I said he'd walk the plank, and so he will," said Levi. "He will—he will;" and Levi clenched his white teeth, with an oath.

"There, Mr. Levi, pray, pray, none of that," said Mr. Larkin.

The three gentlemen were standing in a row, from afar off observing the patient, with an intense scrutiny of a gloomy and, I may say, a savage kind.

"He was an unfortunate agent—no energy, except for his pleasures," resentfully resumed Mr. Larkin, who was standing furthest back of the three speculators. "Indolent, impracticable enough to ruin fifty cases; and now here he lies in a fever, contracted, you think, Mr. Levi, in some of his abominable haunts."

Mr. Larkin did not actually say "d—— him," but he directed a very dark, sharp look upon his acquaintance in the bed.

"Abawminable, to be sure, abawminable. Bah! It's all true. The hornies has their eye on him these seven weeks past—curse the beasht," snarled Mr. Levi, clenching his fists in his pockets, "and every da—a—m muff that helped to let me in for this here rotten business."

"Meaning me, sir?" said Mr. Larkin, flushing up to the top of his head a fierce pink.

Levi answered nothing, and Mr. Larkin did not press his question.

It is very easy to be companionable and good-humoured while all goes pleasantly. It is failure, loss, and disappointment, that try the sociable qualities; even those three amiable men felt less amicable under the cloud than they had under the sunshine.

So they all three looked in their several ways angrily and thoughtfully at the gentleman in the typhus fever, who said rather abruptly—

"She killed herself, sir; foolish 'oman! Capital dancing, gentlemen! Capital dancing, ladies! Capital—capital—admirable dancing. God help us!" and so it sunk again into mumbling.

"Capital da-a-ancing, and who pays the piper?" asked Mr. Goldshed, with a rather ferocious sneer. "It has cost us fifteen hundred to two thousand!"

"And a doctor," suggested Levi.

"Doctor, the devil! I say; I've paid through the nose," or, as he pronounced that organ through which his metallic declamation droned, noshe. "It's Mr. Larkin's turn now; it's all da-a-am rot; a warm fellow like you, Mr. Larkin, putting all the loss on me; how can I sta-a-an' that—sta-a-an' all the losses, and share the profits—ba-a-ah, sir; that couldn't pay nohow."

"I think," said Mr. Larkin, "it may be questionable how far a physician would be, just in this imminent stage of the attack, at all useful, or even desirable; but, Miss Rumble, if I understand you, he is quite compos—I mean, quite, so to speak, in his senses, in the early part of the day."

He paused, and Miss Rumble from the other side of the bed contributed her testimony.

"Well, that being so," began Mr. Larkin, but stopped short as Mr. Dingwell took up his parable, forgetting how wide of the mark the sick man's interpolations were.

"That's a vulture over there—devilish odd birds," said Mr. Dingwell's voice, with an unpleasant distinctness; "you just tie a turban on a stick," and then he was silent.

Mr. Larkin cleared his voice and resumed—

"Well, as I was saying, when the attack, whatever it is, has developed itself, a medical man may possibly be available; but in the mean time, as he is spared the possession of his faculties, and we all agree, gentlemen, whatever particular form of faith may be respectively ours, that some respect is due to futurity; I would say, that a clergyman, at all events, might make him advantageously a visit to-morrow, and afford him an opportunity at least of considering the interests of his soul."

"Oh! da—a—m his shoul, it's his body. We must try to keep him together," said Mr. Goldshed, impatiently. "If he dies the money's all lost, every shtiver; if he don't, he's a sound speculation; we must raise a doctor among us, Mr. Larkin."

"It is highly probable indeed that before long the unfortunate gentleman may require medical advice," said Mr. Larkin, who had a high opinion of the "speculation," whose pulse was at this moment unfortunately at a hundred and twenty. "The fever, my dear sir, if such it be, will have declared itself in a day or two; in the meantime, nursing is all that is really needful, and Miss Rumble, I have no doubt, will take care that the unhappy gentleman is properly provided in that respect."

The attorney, who did not want at that moment to be drawn into a discussion on contributing to expenses, smiled affectionately on Miss Rumble, to whom he assigned the part of good Samaritan.

"He'll want some one at night, sir, please; I could not undertake myself, sir, for both day and night," said brown Miss Rumble, very quietly.

"There! That'sh it!" exclaimed Levi, with a vicious chuckle, and a scowl, extending his open hand energetically toward Miss Rumble, and glaring from Mr. Larkin to his partner.

"Nothing but pay; down with the dust, Goldshed and Levi. Bleed like a pair o' beashtly pigs, Goldshed and Levi, do! There's death in that fellow's face, I say. It's all bosh, doctors and nurses; throwing good money after bad, and then, five pounds to bury him, drat him!"

"Bury? ho, no! the parish, the workhoushe-authorities shall bury him," said Mr. Goldshed, briskly.

"Dead—dead—dead, as a Mameluke—dead as a Janizary—eh? eh?—bowstrung!" exclaimed, Mr. Dingwell, and went off into an indistinct conversation in a foreign language.

"Stuff a stocking down his throat, will you?" urged Mr. Levi; a duty, however, which no one undertook.

"I see that cove's booked; he looks just like old Solomon's looked when he had it. It isn't no use; all rot, throwing good money arter bad, I say; let him be; let him die."

"I'll not let him die; no, he shan't. I'll make him pay. I made the Theatre of Fascination pay," said Mr. Goldshed serenely, alluding to a venture of his devising, by which the partnership made ever so much money in spite of a prosecution and heavy fines and other expenses.

"I say 'tisn't my principle to throw up the game, by no means—no—with my ball in hand, and the stakes in the pocket—never!"

Here Mr. Goldshed wagged his head slowly with a solemn smile, and Mr. Dingwell, from the bed, said with a moan—

"Move it, will you? That way—I wish you'd help—b-bags, sir—sacks, sir—awfully hard lying—full of ears and—ay—noses—egad!—why not? cut them all off, I say. D—n the

Greeks! Will you move it? Do move that sack—it hurts his ribs—ribs—I never got the bastinado."

"Not but what you deserved it," remarked Mr. Levi.

And Mr. Dingwell's babbling went on, but too indistinctly to be unravelled.

"I say," continued Mr. Goldshed, sublimely, "if that 'ere speculative thing in the bed there comes round, and gets all square and right, I'll make him pay. I'm not funked—who's afraid—wiry old brick!"

"I think so," acquiesced Mr. Larkin with gentle solemnity; "Mr. Dingwell is certainly, as you say, wiry. There are many things in his favour, and Providence, Mr. Goldshed—Providence is over us all."

"Providence, to be sure," said Mr. Goldshed, who did not disdain help from any quarter. "Where does he keep his money, ma'am?"

"Under his bolster, please, sir—under his head," answered Sarah Rumble.

"Take it out, please," said Mr. Goldshed.

She hesitated.

"Give the man hish money, woman, ca-a-ant you?" bawled Mr. Levi fiercely, and extending his arm toward the bed.

"You had better—yes, ma'am, the money belongs to Messrs. Goldshed and Levi," said Mr. Larkin, interposing in the character of the vir pietate gravis.

Sally Rumble, recollecting Mr. Dingwell's direction, "Let 'em have the money, too, if they press for it," obeyed, and slid her hand under his bolster, and under his head, from the other side where she was standing; and Dingwell, feeling the motion, I suppose, raised his head and stared with sunken eyes dismally at the three gentlemen, whom he plainly did not recognise, or possibly saw in the shapes of foxes, wolves, or owls, which Æsop would have metaphorically assigned them, and with a weary groan he closed his wandering eyes again, and sank down on the pillow.

Miss Rumble drew forth a roll of bank-notes with a string tied round them.

"Take the money, Levi," said Goldshed, drawing a step backward.

"Take it yourself, guv'nor," said Levi, waving back Miss Sally Rumble, and edging back a little himself.

"Well," said Goldshed, quietly, "I see you're afraid of that infection."

"I believe you," answered Levi.

"So am I," said Goldshed, uneasily.

"And no wonder!" added Mr. Larkin, anticipating himself an invitation to accept the questionable trust.

"Put them notes down on the table there," said Mr. Goldshed.

And the three gentlemen eyed the precious roll of paper as I have seen people at a chemical lecture eye the explodable compounds on the professor's table.

"I tell you what, ma'am," said Goldshed, "you'll please get a dry bottle and a cork, and put them notes into it, and cork it down, ma'am, and give it to Mr. Levi."

"And count them first, please, Miss Rumble—shan't she, Mr. Goldshed?" suggested Mr. Larkin.

"What for?—isn't the money ours?" howled Mr. Levi, with a ferocious stare on the attorney's meek face.

"Only, Mr. Goldshed, with a view to distinctness, and to prevent possible confusion in any future account," said Mr. Larkin, who knew that Dingwell had got money from the Verneys, and thought that if there was anything recovered from the wreck he had as good a right to his salvage as another.

Mr. Goldshed met his guileless smile with an ugly sneer, and said—

"Oh, count them, to be sure, for the gentleman. It isn't a ha'penny to me."

So Miss Rumble counted seventy-five pounds in bank notes and four pounds in gold, which latter Mr. Goldshed committed to her in trust for the use of the patient, and the remainder were duly bottled and corked down according to Mr. Goldshed's grotesque precaution, and in this enclosure Mr. Levi consented to take the money in hand, and so it was deposited for the night in the iron safe in Messrs. Goldshed and Levi's office, to be uncorked in the morning by old Rosenthal, the cashier, who would, no doubt, be puzzled by the peculiarity of the arrangement, and with the aid of a cork-screw, lodged to the credit of the firm.

Mr. Goldshed next insisted that Dingwell's life, fortunately for that person, was too important to the gentlemen assembled there to be trifled with; and said that sage—

"We'll have the best doctor in London—six pounds' worth of him—d'y see? And under him a clever young doctor to look in four times a day, and we'll arrange with the young 'un on the principal of no cure no pay—that is, we'll give fifty pounds this day six weeks, if the party in bed here is alive at that date."

And upon this basis I believe an arrangement was actually completed. The great Doctor Langley, when he called, and questioned Miss Rumble, and inspected the patient, told Mr. Levi, who was in waiting, that the old gentleman had been walking about in a fever for more than a week before he took to his bed, and that the chances were very decidedly against his recovery.

A great anxiety overcame Mr. Larkin like a summer cloud, and the serene sunshine of that religious mind was overcast with storm and blackness. For the recovery of Mr. Dingwell were offered up, in one synagogue at least, prayers as fervent as any ever made for that of our early friend Charles Surface, and it was plain that never was patriarch, saint, or hero, mourned as the venerable Mr. Dingwell would be, by at least three estimable men, if the fates were to make away with him on this critical occasion.

The three gentlemen, as they left his room on the evening I have been describing, cast their eyes upon Mr. Dingwell's desk, and hesitated, and looked at one another, darkly, for a moment in silence.

"There'sh no reason why we shouldn't," drawled Mr. Goldshed.

"I object to the removal of the desk," said Mr. Larkin, with a shake of his head, closing his eyes, and raising his hand as if about to pronounce a benediction on the lid of it. "If he's spared it might become a very serious thing—I decidedly object."

"Who want'sh to take the man's desk!" drawled Mr. Goldshed, surlily.

"Who want'sh to take it?" echoed Levi, and stared at him with an angry gape.

"But there will be no harm, I shay, in looking what paper'sh there," continued Mr. Goldshed. "Does he get letters?"

"Only two, sir, please, as I can remember, since he came here."

"By po-sht, or by ha-a-an'?" inquired Goldshed.

"By 'and, sir, please; it was your Mr. Solomons as fetched 'em here, sir."

He lifted up the desk, swayed it gently, and shook it a little, looking at it as if it were a musical box about to strike up, and so set it down again softly. "There'sh papersh in that box," he hummed thoughtfully to himself.

"I think I may speak here," said Mr. Larkin, looking up sadly and loftily, as he placed his hat upon his bald head, "with some little authority as a professional man—if in no higher capacity—and I may take upon myself to say, that by no possibility can the contents of that desk affect the very simple and, in a certain sense, direct transactions in which our clients' interests, and in a degree ours also, are involved, and I object on higher grounds still, I hope, to any irregularity as respects that desk."

"If you're confident, Mr. Larkinsh, there'sh nothing in it can affect the bushiness we're on, I would not give you a cancel' Queen's head for the lot."

"Perfectly confident, my dear Mr. Goldshed."

"He'sh perfectly confident," repeated Mr. Levi in his guv'nor's ear, from over his shoulder.

"Come along then," said Mr. Goldshed, shuffling slowly out of the room, with his hands in his pockets.

"It's agreed then, gentlemen, there's no tampering with the desk?" urged Mr. Larkin, entreatingly.

"Shertainly," said Mr. Goldshed, beginning to descend the stairs.

"Shertainly," repeated Mr. Levi, following him.

And the three gentlemen, in grave and friendly guise, walked away together, over the flagged court. Mr. Larkin did not half like taking the arms of these gentlemen, but the quarter of the town was not one where he was likely to meet any of either the spiritual or the terrestrial aristocracy with whom he desired specially to stand well. So he moved along conscious, not unpleasantly, of the contrast which a high-bred gentleman must always present in juxtaposition with such persons as Goldshed and Levi. They walked through the dingy corridor called Caldwell Alley, and through Ive's Lane, and along the market, already flaring and glaring with great murky jets of gas wavering in the darkening stalls, and thence by the turn to the left into the more open street, where the cab-stand is, and then having agreed to dine together at the "Three Roses" in Milk Lane in half an hour, the gentlemen parted—Messrs. Goldshed and Levi to fly in a cab to meet their lawyer at their office, and Mr. Larkin to fly westward to his hotel, to inquire for a letter which he expected. So smiling they parted; and, so soon as Mr. Larkin was quite out of sight, Mr. Levi descended from their cab, and with a few parting words which he murmured in Mr. Goldshed's ear, left him to drive away by himself, while he retraced his steps at his leisure to Rosemary Court, and finding the door of Miss Rumble's house open with Lucy Maria at it, entered and walked straight up to Mr. Dingwell's drawing-room, with a bunch of small keys in his hand, in his coat-pocket.

He had got just two steps into the room towards the little table on which the patient's desk stood, when from the other side of that piece of furniture, and the now open desk, there rose up the tall form of Mr. Jos. Larkin, of the Lodge.

The gentlemen eyed one another for a few seconds in silence, for the surprise was great. Mr. Larkin did not even set down the parcel of letters, which he had been sorting like a hand at whist, when Mr. Levi had stepped in to divert his attention.

"I thought, Mr. Larkinsh, I might as well drop in just to give you a lift," said Levi, with an elaborate bow, a politeness, and a great smile, that rather embarrassed the good attorney.

"Certainly, Mr. Levi, I'm always happy to see you—always happy to see any man—I have never done anything I am ashamed of, nor shrunk from any duty, nor do I mean to do so now."

"Your hands looksh pretty full."

"Yes, sir, pretty tolerably full, sir," said Mr. Larkin, placing the letters on the desk; "and I may add so do yours, Mr. Levi; those keys, as you observe, might have given one a lift in opening this desk, had I not preferred the other course," said Mr. Larkin, loftily, "of simply requesting Mr. Dingwell's friend, the lady at present in charge of his papers, to afford me, at her own discretion, such access to the papers possibly affecting my client as I may consider necessary or expedient, as his legal adviser."

"You have changed your view of your duty, rather; haven't you, Mr. Larkinsh?"

"No, sir, no; simply my action on a point of expediency. Of course, there was some weight, too, sir, in the suggestions made by a gentleman of Mr. Goldshed's experience and judgment; and I don't hesitate to say that his—his ideas had their proper weight with me. And I may say, once for all, Mr. Levi, I'll not be hectored, or lectured, or bullied

by you, Mr. Levi," added Mr. Larkin, in a new style, feeling, perhaps, that his logical and moral vein was not quite so happy as usual.

"Don't frighten ush, Larkins, pray don't, only just give me leave to see what them letters is about," said Levi, taking his place by him; "did you put any of them in your pocket?"

"No, sir; upon my soul, Mr. Levi, I did no such thing," said Mr. Larkin, with a heartiness that had an effect upon the Jew. "The occasion is so serious that I hardly regret having used the expression," said Mr. Larkin, who had actually blushed at his own oath. "There was just one letter possibly worth looking at."

"That da-a-am foolish letter you wrote him to Constantinople?"

"I wrote him no foolish letter, sir. I wrote him no letter, sir, I should fear to have posted on the market cross, or read from the pulpit, Mr. Levi. I only wonder, knowing all you do of Mr. Dingwell's unfortunate temper, and reckless habits of assertion, that you should attach the smallest weight to an expression thrown out by him in one of his diabolical and—and—lament able frenzies. As to my having abstracted a letter of his—an imputation at which I smile—I can, happily, cite evidence other than my own." He waved his hand toward Miss Rumble. "This lady has happily, I will say, been in the room during my very brief examination of my client's half-dozen papers. Pray, madam, have I taken one of these—or, in fact, put it in my pocket?"

"No, sir, please," answered Miss Rumble, who spoke in good faith, having, with a lively remembrance of Mr. Dingwell's description of the three gentlemen who had visited the sick that day, as "three robbers," kept her eye very steadily upon the excellent Mr. Larkin, during the period of his search.

Mr. Levi would have liked to possess that letter. It would have proved possibly a useful engine in the hands of the Firm in future dealings with the adroit and high-minded Mr. Larkin. It was not to be had, however, if it really existed at all; and when some more ironies and moralities had been fired off on both sides, the gentlemen subsided into

their ordinary relations, and ultimately went away together to dine on turtle, sturgeon, salmon, and I know not what meats, at the famous "Three Roses" in Milk Lane.

The Tenants of Malory Vol.III by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. DINGWELL THINKS OF AN EXCURSION.

If Mr. Dingwell had been the most interesting, beautiful, and, I will add, wealthy of human beings, instead of being an ugly and wicked old bankrupt, Messrs. Goldshed, Levi, and Larkin could not have watched the progress of his complaint with greater trepidation, or hailed the first unequivocal symptoms of his recovery with more genuine delight. I doubt if any one of them would have experienced the same intense happiness at the restoration of wife, child, or parent.

They did not, it is true, re-assemble in Mr. Dingwell's apartments in Rosemary Court. There was not one of those gentlemen who did not set a proper value upon his own life; and they were content with the doctor's report. In due course, the oracle pronounced Mr. Dingwell out of danger, but insisted on change of air.

Well, that could be managed, of course. It must be managed, for did not the doctor say, that without it the patient might not ultimately recover. If it could have been dispensed with, the risk would have been wisely avoided. But Mr. Dingwell's recovery depended on it, and Mr. Dingwell must be made to recover.

Whither should they send him? Stolen treasure or murdered body is jealously concealed by the malefactor; but not more shrinkingly than was Mr. Dingwell by those gentlemen who had him in charge. Safe enough he was while he remained in his dingy seclusion in Rosemary Court, where he lay as snugly as Asmodeus in the magician's phial, and secure against all but some such accident as the irruption of the student Don Cleophas Leandro Peres Zambullo, through the skylight. But where was to be found a rural habitation—salubrious and at the same time sufficiently secret. And if they did light upon one resembling that where the water-fiends played their pranks—

"On a wild moor, all brown and bleak,

Where broods the heath-frequenting grouse,

There stood a tenement antique—

Lord Hoppergollop's country house.

"Here silence reigned with lips of glue,

And undisturbed, maintained her law,

Save when the owl cried—'Whoo! whoo! whoo!'

Or the hoarse crow croaked—'Caw! caw! caw!'"

If I say they did find so eligible a mansion for their purpose, was it likely that their impracticable and incorrigible friend, Mr. Dingwell, would consent to spend six weeks in the "deserted mansion" as patiently as we are told Molly Dumpling did?

I think not. And when the doctor talked of country air, the patient joked peevishly about the "grove of chimneys," and "the sweet shady side of Pall Mall."

"I think, Mrs. Rumble," said he, one day, "I'm not going to die this bout at all events. I'm looking better, I think—eh?"

"Looking very bad, sir, please. I can't see no improvement," said Sarah Rumble.

"Well, ma'am, you try to keep my spirits up, thank you. I'm shut up too much—that's the sole cause of it now. If I could creep out a bit at night."

"God forbid, sir."

"Thank you, ma'am, again. I say if I could get out a little I should soon get my strength back again; but sitting in this great padded chair I might as well be in bed; can't go out in the daytime you know—too many enemies. The owl's been moulting, ma'am—devilish sick—the moulting owl. If the old bird could flutter out a bit. I'm living like a monk, I

was going to say —egad, I wish I was. Give me those d—— bitters; they haven't done me a bit of good—thanks."

"If you was to go to the country, sir," insinuated Miss Sarah Rumble.

"Yes, if I was, as you express it, I should die in a week. If air could have killed me, the curious atmosphere of this charming court would have killed me long ago. I'm not one of those air-plants, ma'am. What I want is a little fillip, ma'am—a little amusement—anything out of this prison; and I'm not going to squat on a moor, or to roost in a wood, to please a pack of fellows that don't care if I were on the treadmill, provided they could take me out whenever they want me. My health, indeed! They simply want me out of the way. My health! Their consideration for me is truly affecting. We'll not mind the bitters, yet. It's time for my claret."

He drank it, and seemed to doze for a little. Mrs. Rumble quickly settled the medicine bottles and other things that had been put out of their places, every now and then looking at the sunken face of the old man, in his death-like nap—his chin sunk on his breast, the stern carving of his massive forehead, the repulsive lines of a grim selfishness, and a certain evil shadow, made that face in its repose singularly unlovely.

Suddenly he waked.

"I say, Mrs. Rumble, I've been thinking—what about that old clergyman you mentioned—that Mr. Bartlett. I think I will see him—suppose he lectures me; his hard words won't break my bones, and I think he'd amuse me; so you may as well get him in, any time—I don't care when."

Sarah Rumble was only too glad to give her wicked tenant a chance, such as it was, and next day, at about one o'clock, a gentle-looking old clergyman, with thin white hair, knocked at his door, and was admitted. It was the Rev. Thomas Bartlett.

"I can't rise, sir, to receive you—you'll excuse me; but I'm still very ill," said Mr. Dingwell.

"Pray don't stir, sir," said the clergyman.

"I can't," said Mr. Dingwell. "Will you kindly sit in that chair, near the fire? What I have to say is private, and if you please we'll speak very low. My head isn't recovered yet."

"Certainly," said the old gentleman, placing himself as Dingwell wished.

"Thank you very much, sir. Now I can manage it. Isn't your name Thomas, sir—the Reverend Thomas Bartlett?" said Mr. Dingwell, looking at him shrewdly from under his white eyebrows.

"That's my name, sir."

"My name's Dingwell. You don't remember? I'll try to bring it to your mind. About twenty-nine years ago you were one of the curates at St. Wyther's in the Fields?"

"Yes, sir, I was," answered the clergyman, fixing his eyes in turn inquisitively on him.

"I was the witness—do you remember me, now—to the ceremony, when that unfortunate fellow, Verney, married Miss—I have a note of her name—hang it!—Rebecca, was it?—Yes, Rebecca—it was Rebecca Mervyn. You married Verney to Miss Mervyn, and I witnessed it."

"I remember very well, sir, that a gentleman did accompany Mr. Verney; and I remember the marriage extremely well, because there occurred very distressing

circumstances respecting that Mr. Verney not very long after, which fixed that marriage in my mind; but having seen you once only, sir, I can't pretend to recollect your face."

"There has been some time, too, sir, since then," said Mr. Dingwell, with a cynical sneer, and a shrug. "But I think I should have recognized you; that's perhaps owing to my having a remarkably retentive memory for faces; however it's of no great consequence here. It isn't a matter of identification at all. I only want to know, as Verney's dead, whether you can tell what has become of that poor lady, or can find any clue to her whereabouts—there was a baby—a little child—if they are still living."

"She did write to me twice, sir, within a few years after the marriage. He treated her very ill, sir," said the clergyman.

"Infamously, I fancy," said Dingwell; "and how long ago was that, sir?"

"Oh! a long time; twenty—ay, five—ay, eight-and-twenty years since," said the old gentleman.

Dingwell laughed.

His visitor stared.

"Yes, it's a good while," said Mr. Dingwell; "and looking over that gulf, sir, you may fill your glass, and sing—

"'Many a lad I liked is dead,

And many a lass grown old.'

Eight-and-twenty years! Gad, sir, she's had time to grow gray; and to be dead and buried; and to serve a handsome period of her term in purgatory. I forgot, though; you

don't follow me there. I was thinking of the French curé, who made part of my journey here with me."

"No, sir; Church of England, thank God; the purest faith; the most scriptural, I believe, on earth. You, sir, I assume, are of the same Church," said he.

"Well, I can't say I am, sir; nor a Catholic, nor a Quaker," said the invalid.

"I hope, sir, there's no tendency to rationalism?"

"No, sir, I thank you; to no ism whatsoever invented by any other man; Dingwellism for Dingwell; Smithism for Smith. Every man has a right to his opinion, in my poor judgment."

"And pray, sir, if neither Romanist nor Protestant, what are you?" inquired the clergyman, as having a right to ask.

"Porcus de gruge epicuri, at your service," said the sick man, with a feeble smirk.

"I had hoped, sir, it might have been for some profitable purpose you had sent for me," said the disappointed pastor.

"Well, sir, I was baptized in the Church of England, although I don't subscribe the Articles; so I served in your regiment, you see, though I don't wear the uniform any longer."

"I thought, sir, you might have wished some conversation upon religious subjects."

"And haven't we had it, sir?—sorry we don't agree. I'm too old to turn out of my own way; but, though I can't learn yours, I shall be happy to teach you something of mine, if you wish it."

"I think, sir, as I have other calls to make," said the old clergyman, much offended, and rising to take his leave as he spoke. "I had better wish you a good afternoon."

"Pray, sir, stay a moment; I never knew a clergyman in such a hurry before to leave a sick man; as no man knows, according to your theory, when he's going to be converted—and how should I? The mildew of death is whitening each of us at this moment; the last golden sands are running out. D— it, give me a chance."

This incongruous harangue was uttered so testily—even fiercely—that the good clergyman was puzzled, and began to doubt in what state his fever might have left Mr. Dingwell's brain.

"Don't you see, sir? Do sit down—a little patience won't do either of us any harm."

"Certainly, sir," hesitated the clergyman, looking hard at him, "but I have not a great deal of time."

"Nor I a great deal of strength; I shan't keep you long, sir."

The Rev. Thomas Bartlett sat down again, and glanced meekly an invitation to Mr. Dingwell to begin.

"Nine-and-twenty years, sir, since you married that unlucky pair. Now, I need not say by what particular accidents, for the recollection is painful, I was in after-life thrown into the society of that unfortunate ill-used dog, poor Arthur Verney; I knew him intimately. I was the only friend he had left, and I was with him when he died, infamously neglected by all his family. He had just got his half-yearly payment of a beggarly annuity, on which

he subsisted; he—the rightful Viscount Verney, and the head of his family—ha, ha, ha! By Jove, sir, I can't help laughing, though I pity him. Having that little sum in his hand, said he to me, 'You take charge of this for my son, if you can find him; and I rely on your friendship to look him up if ever you revisit England; this is for him; and he was baptized by the Rev. Thomas Bartlett, as my wife wrote to tell me just eight-and-twenty years ago, and he, no doubt, can enable you to trace him.' That's what he said—what say you, sir?"

"Old Lady Verney placed the child in charge of the gentleman who then managed the Verney property. I heard all about it from a Mr. Wynne Williams, a Welsh lawyer. The child died when only a year old; you know he would have been the heir apparent."

"Poor Arthur said no, sir. I asked him—a Scotch marriage, or some of those crooked wed-locks on which they found bigamies and illegitimacies. 'No,' Arthur said, 'he has no technical case, and he may be miserably poor; this is all I can do, and I charge you with it.' It was very solemn, sir. Where does that lawyer live?"

"At this moment I can't recollect, sir—some place near which the Verneys have estates."

"Cardyllian?"

"The very place, sir."

"I know it, sir; I've been there when I was a boy. And his name was Wynne Williams?"

"I think it was," said the clergyman.

"And you have nothing more to say about the poor child?" asked Mr. Dingwell.

"There is nothing more, I fancy, sir," said Mr. Bartlett. "Can I give you any more information?"

"Not any, sir, that I can think of at present. Many thanks, Mr. Bartlett, for your obliging call. Wait a moment for the servant."

And Mr. Dingwell, thinking fiercely, rang his hand-bell long and viciously.

"Ha! Mrs. Rumble; you'll show this gentleman out. Good-bye, sir, and many thanks."

"Good day, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha! It's a good subject, and a fertile!" muttered Mr. Dingwell, so soon as he was alone.

For the rest of that evening Mr. Dingwell seemed to find ample amusement in his own thoughts, and did not trouble Mrs. Rumble with that contemptuous and cynical banter, which she was obliged to accept, when he pleased, for conversation.

The only thing she heard him say was—"I'll go there."

Now Malory had already been proved to be a safe hiding place for a gentleman in Mr. Dingwell's uncomfortable circumstances. The air was unexceptionable, and Lord Verney was easily persuaded to permit the old man to sojourn, for a few weeks, in the Steward's House, under the care of old Mrs. Mervyn's servant, aided by one provided by Messrs. Goldshed and Levi.

There were two rooms in the steward's house which old Mrs. Mervyn never used, and some furniture removed from the Dower House adjoining, rendered them tolerably

comfortable. A letter from old Lady Verney opened and explained the request, which amounted to a command, that she would permit the invalid, in whom Lord Verney took an interest, to occupy, for a fortnight or so, the spare rooms in the Steward's House.

So all was made ready, and the day fixed for Mr. Dingwell's arrival.

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CHAPTER XIV.

A SURPRISE.

Mr. Dingwell, already much more like himself, having made the journey by easy stages, was approaching Malory by night, in a post-chaise. Fatigue, sickness, or some other cause, perhaps, exasperated his temper specially that night.

Well made up in mufflers, his head was frequently out at the window.

"The old church, by Jove!" he muttered, with a dismal grin, as going slowly down the jolty hill: beneath the ancient trees, the quaint little church of Llanderris and its quiet churchyard appeared at the left of the narrow road, white in the moonlight.

"A new crop of fools, fanatics, and hypocrites come up, since I remember them, and the old ones gone down to enrich that patch of ground and send up their dirty juice in nettles, and thistles, and docks. 'In sure and certain hope.' Why should not they, the swine! as well as their masters, cunning, and drunken, and sneaks. I'd like to pay a fellow to cut their epitaphs. Why should I spare them a line of truth. Here I am, plain Mr. Dingwell. They don't care much about me; and when my Lord Verney went down the other day, to show them what a fool they have got for a master, amid congenial rejoicings, I don't hear that they troubled their heads with many regrets for my poor friend Arthur. Ha! There's the estuary, and Pendillion. These things don't change, my Lord Verney. Pity Lord Verney doesn't wear as well as Pendillion. There is Ware, over the water, if we had light to see it—to think of that shabby little whey-faced fool! Here we are; these are the trees of Malory, egad!"

And with a shrug he repeated Homer's words, which say—"As are the generations of leaves, such are those of men."

Up the avenue of Malory they were driving, and Dingwell looked out with a dismal curiosity upon the lightless front of the old house.

"Cheerful reception!" he muttered. "Suppose we pick a hole in your title—a hole in your pocket—hey!"

Dingwell's servant was at the door of the steward's house as they drew up, and helped the snarling old invalid down.

When he got to the room the servant said—

"There's coffee, and everythink as you desired."

"I'll take breath first, if you please—coffee afterwards."

"Mrs. Mervyn hopes, sir, as how you'll parding her to-night, being so late, and not in good 'ealth herself, which she would been hup to receive you hotherwise," said the man, delivering his message eloquently.

"Quite time enough to-morrow, and to-morrow—and to-morrow; and I don't care if our meeting creeps away, as that remarkable person, William Shakespeare, says—'in this petty pace.' This is more comfortable, egad! than Rosemary Court. I don't care, I say, if it creeps in that pretty pace, till we are both in heaven. What's Hecuba to me, or I to Hecuba? So help me off with these things."

Lord Verney, on whom, in his moods, Mr. Dingwell commented so fully, was dispensing his hospitalities just then, on the other side of the estuary, at his princely mansion of Ware. The party was, it is true, small—very small, in fact. Lady Wimbledon had been there, and the Hon. Caroline Oldys, but they were now visiting Cardyllian at the Verney Arms.

Mr. Jos. Larkin, to his infinite content, was at Ware, and deplored the unchristian feelings dis played by Mr. Wynne Williams, whom he had by this time formally supplanted in the management of Lord Verney's country affairs, and who had exhibited "a nasty feeling," he "might say a petulance quite childish," last Sunday, when Mr. Larkin had graced Cardyllian Church with his personal devotions, and refused to vacate, in his favour, the small pew which he held as proprietor of Plasdwllyn, but which Mr. Larkin chose to think he occupied in virtue of his former position of solicitor to Lord Verney.

Cleve Verney being still in London, received one morning from his uncle the following short and astounding note, as he sat at breakfast:—

"My Dear Cleve—The time having arrived for taking that step, which the stability of our house of Verney has long appeared to demand, all preliminaries being satisfactorily adjusted, and the young lady and Lady Wimbledon, with a very small party of their relations, as you may have observed by the public papers, at present at the hotel of Cardyllian, nothing remains unaccomplished by way of preparation, but your presence at Ware, which I shall expect on Friday next, when you can meet Miss Caroline Oldys in those new and more defined relations which our contemplated alliance suggests. That event is arranged to take place on the Wednesday following. Mr. Larkin, who reports to me the substance of a conversation with you, and who has my instructions to apprise you fully of any details you may desire to be informed of, will see you on the morning of to-morrow, in the library at Verney House, at a quarter-past eleven o'clock. He leaves Ware by the mail train to-night. You will observe that the marriage, though not strictly private, is to be conducted without éclat, and has not been anywhere announced. This will explain my not inviting you to bring down any friend of yours to Ware for the occasion."

So it ends with the noble lord's signature, and a due attestation of the state of his affections towards Cleve.

With the end of his uncle's letter, an end of that young gentleman's breakfast—only just begun—came also.

Cleve did not start up and rap out an oath. On the contrary, he sat very still, with something, almost a smile, on his pale, patient face. In a little while he folded the letter up gently, and put it in his pocket. Then he did get up and go to the window looking out upon the piece of ground at the rear of Verney House, and the sooty leaves and sparrows that beautified it. For a long time he enjoyed that view, and then took a swift walk for nearly half an hour in the streets—drowsy, formal streets—in that quarter of the town, involving little risk of interruption.

His wife—what a hell was now in that word! and why? Another man would have found in it a fountain of power and consolation. His wife, his little boy, were now in France. He thought of them both sourly enough. He was glad they were so far off. Margaret would have perceived the misery of his mind. She would have been poking questions at him, and he would neither have divulged nor in anything have consulted her. In the motive of this reserve, which harmonised with his character, may have mingled a suspicion that his interest and hers might not, in this crisis, have required quite the same treatment.

It was about eleven o'clock as he entered Verney House again. In a quarter of an hour more that villanous attorney, to whose vulgar machinations he attributed his present complicated wretchedness, would be with him.

Without any plan, only hating that abominable Christian, and resolved to betray neither thought nor emotion which could lead him to suspect, ever so faintly, the truth, he at length heard him announced, as a man who has seen his death-warrant hears the approach of the executioner. Mr. Larkin entered, with his well-brushed hat in his hand, his bald head shining as with a glory, a meek smile on his lips, a rat-like shrinking observation in his eyes.

"Oh! Mr. Larkin," said Mr. Cleve Verney, with a smile. "My uncle said you would look in to-day. We have often talked the matter over together, you know, my uncle and I, and I'm not sure that you can tell me very much that I don't know already. Sit down, pray."

"Thanks. I think it was chiefly to let you know what he can do for you. I need not say to you, my dear Mr. Verney, how generous Lord Verney is, and what an uncle, Mr. Verney, he has been to you."

Here was a little glance of the pink eyes at the ceiling, and a momentary elevation of his large hand, and a gentle, admiring shake of the bald head.

"No; of course. It is entirely as his attorney, sir, acquainted with details which he has directed you to mention to me, that he speaks of your call here. I had a letter this morning."

"Quite so. It was to mention that although he could not, of course, in prudence, under the circumstances, think of settling anything—which amounts, in fact, to an alienation—a step which in justice to himself and the integrity of the family estates, he could not concede or contemplate; he yet—and he wishes it at the same time to be understood, strictly, as his present intention—means to make you an allowance of a thousand pounds a year."

"Rather a small allowance, don't you think, for a man with a seat in the House to marry on?" observed Cleve.

"Pardon me; but he does not contemplate your immediate marriage, Mr. Verney," answered Larkin.

"Rather a sudden change of plan, considering that he fixed Wednesday next, by his letter," said Cleve, with a faint sneer.

"Pardon me, again; but that referred to his own marriage—Lord Verney's contemplated marriage with the Honourable Miss Oldys."

"Oh!" said Cleve, looking steadily down on the table. "Oh! to be sure."

"That alliance will be celebrated on Wednesday, as proposed."

Mr. Larkin paused, and Cleve felt that his odious eyes were reading his countenance. Cleve could not help turning pale, but there was no other visible symptom of his dismay.

"Yes; the letter was a little confused. He has been urging me to marry, and I fancied he had made up his mind to expedite my affair; and it is rather a relief to me to be assured it is his own, for I'm in no particular hurry—quite the reverse. Is there anything more?"

"I meant to ask you that question, Mr. Verney. I fancied you might possibly wish to put some questions to me. I have been commissioned, within certain limits, to give you any information you may desire." Mr. Larkin paused again.

Cleve's blood boiled. "Within certain limits, more in my uncle's confidence than I am, that vulgar, hypocritical attorney!" He fancied beside that Mr. Larkin saw what a shock the news was, and that he liked, with a mean sense of superiority, making him feel that he penetrated his affectation of indifference.

"It's very thoughtful of you; but if anything strikes me I shall talk to my uncle. There are subjects that would interest me more than those on which he would be at all likely to talk with you."

"Quite possibly," said Mr. Larkin. "And what shall I report to his lordship as the result of our conversation?"

"Simply the truth, sir."

"I don't, I fear, make myself clear. I meant to ask whether there was anything you wished me to add. You can always reckon upon me, Mr. Verney, to convey your views to Lord Verney, if there should ever happen to be anything you feel a delicacy about opening to his lordship yourself."

"Yes, I shall write to him," answered Cleve, drily.

And Cleve Verney rose, and the attorney, simpering and bowing grandly, took his departure.

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CHAPTER XV.

CLAY RECTORY BY MOONLIGHT.

As the attorney made his astounding announcement, Cleve had felt as if his brain, in vulgar parlance, turned! In a moment the world in which he had walked and lived from his school-days passed away, and a chasm yawned at his feet. His whole future was subverted. A man who dies in delusion, and awakes not to celestial music and the light of paradise, but to the trumpet of judgment and the sight of the abyss, will quail as Cleve did.

How he so well maintained the appearance of self-possession while Mr. Larkin remained, I can't quite tell. Pride, however, which has carried so many quivering souls, with an appearance of defiance, through the press-room to the drop, supported him.

But now that scoundrel was gone. The fury that fired him, the iron constraint that held him firm was also gone, and Cleve despaired.

Till this moment, when he was called on to part with it all, he did not suspect how entirely his ambition was the breath of his nostrils, or how mere a sham was the sort of talk to which he had often treated Margaret and others about an emigrant's life and the Arcadian liberty of the Antipodes.

The House-of-Commons life—the finest excitement on earth—the growing fame, the peerage, the premiership in the distance—the vulgar fingers of Jos. Larkin had just dropped the extinguisher upon the magic lamp that had showed him these dazzling illusions, and he was left to grope and stumble in the dark among his debts, with an obscure wife on his arm, and a child to plague him also. And this was to be the end! A precarious thousand a-year—dependent on the caprice of a narrow, tyrannical old man, with a young wife at his ear, and a load of debts upon Cleve's shoulders, as he walked over the quag!

It is not well to let any object, apart from heaven, get into your head and fill it. Cleve had not that vein of insanity which on occasion draws men to suicide. In the thread of his destiny that fine black strand was not spun. So blind and deep for a while was his plunge into despair, that I think had that atrabilious poison, which throws out its virus as suddenly as latent plague, and lays a felo-de-se to cool his heels and his head in God's prison, the grave—had a drop or two, I say, of that elixir of death been mingled in his blood, I don't think he would ever have seen another morrow.

But Cleve was not thinking of dying. He was sure—in rage, and blasphemy, and torture, it might be—but still he was sure to live on. Well, what was now to be done? Every power must be tasked to prevent the ridiculous catastrophe which threatened him with ruin; neither scruple, nor remorse, nor conscience, nor compunction should stand in the way. We are not to suppose that he is about to visit the Hon. Miss Caroline Oldys with a dagger in one hand and a cup of poison in the other, nor with gunpowder to blow up his uncle and Ware, as some one did Darnley and the house of Kirk of Field. Simply his mind was filled with the one idea, that one way or another the thing must be stopped.

It was long before his ideas arranged themselves, and for a long time after no plan of operations which had a promise of success suggested itself. When at length he did decide, you would have said no wilder or wickeder scheme could have entered his brain.

It was a moonlight night. The scene a flat country, with a monotonous row of poplars crossing it. This long file of formal trees marks the line of a canal, fronting which at a distance of about a hundred yards stands a lonely brick house, with a few sombre elms rising near it; a light mist hung upon this expansive flat. The soil must have been unproductive, so few farmsteads were visible for miles around. Here and there pools of water glimmered coldly in the moonlight; and patches of rushes and reeds made the fields look ragged and neglected.

Here and there, too, a stunted hedge-row showed dimly along the level, otherwise unbroken, and stretching away into the haze of the horizon. It is a raw and dismal landscape, where a murder might be done, and the scream lose itself in distance unheard—where the highwayman, secure from interruption, might stop and plunder the chance wayfarer at his leisure—a landscape which a fanciful painter would flank with a distant row of gibbets.

The front of this square brick house, with a little enclosure, hardly two yards in depth, and a wooden paling in front, and with a green moss growing damply on the piers and the door-steps, and tinging the mortar between the bricks, looks out upon a narrow old road, along which just then were audible the clink and rattle of an approaching carriage and horses.

It was past one o'clock. No hospitable light shone from the windows, which on the contrary looked out black and dreary upon the vehicle and steaming horses which pulled up in front of the house.

Out got Cleve and reconnoitred.

"Are you quite sure?"

"Clay Parsonage—yes, sir," said the driver.

Cleve shook the little wooden gate, which was locked; so he climbed the paling, and knocked and rang loud and long at the hall-door.

The driver at last reported a light in an upper window.

Cleve went on knocking and ringing, and the head of the Rev. Isaac Dixie appeared high in the air over the window-stool.

"What do you want, pray?" challenged that suave clergyman from his sanctuary.

"It's I—Cleve Verney. Why do you go to bed at such hours? I must see you for a moment."

"Dear me! my dear, valued pupil! Who could have dreamed?—I shall be down in one moment."

"Thanks—I'll wait;" and then to the driver he said—"I shan't stay five minutes; mind, you're ready to start with me the moment I return."

Now the hall-door opened. The Rev. Isaac Dixie—for his dress was a compromise between modesty and extreme haste, and necessarily very imperfect—stood in greater part behind the hall-door; a bed-room candlestick in his fingers, smiling blandly on his "distinguished pupil," who entered without a smile, without a greeting—merely saying:—

"Where shall we sit down for a minute, old Dixie?"

Holding his hand with the candle in it across, so as to keep his flowing dressing-gown together; and with much wonder and some misgivings, yet contriving his usual rosy smile, he conducted his unexpected visitor into his "study."

"I've so many apologies to offer, my very honoured and dear friend; this is so miserable, and I fear you are cold. We must get something; we must, really, manage something—some little refreshment."

Dixie placed the candle on the chimney-piece, and looked inquiringly on Cleve.

"There's some sherry, I know, and I think there's some brandy."

"There's no one up and about?" inquired Cleve.

"Not a creature," said the Rector; "no one can hear a word, and these are good thick walls."

"I've only a minute; I know you'd like to be a bishop, Dixie?"

Cleve, with his muffler and his hat still on, was addressing the future prelate, with his elbow on the chimney-piece.

"Nolo episcopari, of course, but we know you would, and there's no time now for pretty speeches. Now, listen, you shall be that, and you shall reach it by two steps—the two best livings in our gift. I always keep my word; and when I set my heart on a thing I bring it about, and so sure as I do any good, I'll bend all my interest to that one object."

The Rev. Isaac Dixie stared hard at him, for Cleve looked strangely, and spoke as sternly as a villain demanding his purse. The Rector of Clay looked horribly perplexed. His countenance seemed to ask, "Does he mean to give me a mitre or to take my life, or is he quite right in his head?"

"You think I don't mean what I say, or that I'm talking nonsense, or that I'm mad. I'm not mad, it's no nonsense, and no man was ever more resolved to do what he says." And Cleve who was not given to swearing, did swear a fierce oath. "But all this is not for nothing; there's a condition; you must do me a service. It won't cost you much—less trouble, almost, than you've taken for me to-night, but you must do it."

"And may I, my dear and valued pupil, may I ask?" began the rev. gentleman.

"No, you need not ask, for I'll tell you. It's the same sort of service you did for me in France," said Cleve.

"Ah! ah!" ejaculated the clergyman, very uneasily. "For no one but you, my dear and admirable pupil, could I have brought myself to take that step, and I trust that you will on reconsideration——"

"You must do what I say," said Cleve, looking and speaking with the same unconscious sternness, which frightened the Rector more than any amount of bluster. "I hardly suppose you want to break with me finally, and you don't quite know all the consequences of that step, I fancy."

"Break with you? my admirable patron! desert my dear and brilliant pupil in an emergency? Certainly not. Reckon upon me, my dear Mr. Verney, whenever you need my poor services, to the uttermost. To you all my loyalty is due, but unless you made a very special point of it, I should hesitate for any other person living, but yourself, to incur a second time——"

"Don't you think my dear, d—d old friend, I understand the length, and breadth, and depth, of your friendship; I know how strong it is, and I'll make it stronger. It is for me—yes, in my own case you must repeat the service, as you call it, which you once did me, in another country."

The Rev. Isaac Dixie's rosy cheeks mottled all over blue and yellow; he withdrew his hand from his dressing-gown, with an unaffected gesture of fear; and he fixed a terrified gaze upon Cleve Verney's eyes, which did not flinch, but encountered his, darkly and fixedly, with a desperate resolution.

"Why, you look as much frightened as if I asked you to commit a crime; you marvellous old fool, you hardly think me mad enough for that?"

"I hardly know, Mr. Verney, what I think," said Dixie, looking with a horrible helplessness into his face.

"Good God! sir; it can't be anything wrong?"

"Come, come, sir; you're more than half asleep. Do you dare to think I'd commit myself to any man, by such an idiotic proposal? No one but a lunatic could think of blasting himself, as you—but you can't suppose it. Do listen, and understand if you can; my wife, to whom you married me, is dead, six months ago she died; I tell you she's dead."

"Dear me! I'm very much pained, and I will say shocked; the deceased lady, I should not, my dear pupil, have alluded to, of course; but need I say, I never heard of that affliction?"

"How on earth could you? You don't suppose, knowing all you do, I'd put it in the papers among the deaths?"

"No, dear me, of course," said the Rev. Isaac Dixie, hastily bringing his dressing-gown again together. "No, certainly."

"I don't think that sort of publication would answer you or me. You forget it is two years ago and more, a good deal more. I don't though, and whatever you may, I don't want my uncle to know anything about it."

"But, you know, I only meant, you hadn't told me; my dear Mr. Verney, my honoured pupil, you will see—don't you perceive how much is involved; but this—couldn't you put this upon some one else? Do—do think."

"No, in no one's power, but yours, Dixie;" and Cleve took his hand, looking in his face, and wrung it so hard that the rev. gentleman almost winced under the pressure, of administering which I dare say Cleve was quite unconscious. "No one but you."

"The poor—the respected lady—being deceased, of course you'll give me a note to that effect under your hand; you'll have no objection, in this case, to my taking out a special licence?"

"Special devil! are you mad? Why, anyone could do it with that. No, it's just because it is a little irregular, nothing more, and exacts implicit mutual confidence, that I have chosen you for it."

Dixie looked as if the compliment was not an unmixed pleasure.

"I still think, that—that having performed the other, there is some awkwardness, and the penalties are awful," said he with increasing uneasiness, "and it does strike me, that if my dear Mr. Verney could place his hand upon some other humble friend, in this particular case, the advantages would be obvious."

"Come, Dixie," said Cleve, "I'm going; you must say yes or no, and so decide whether you have seen the last of me; I can't spend the night giving you my reasons, but they are conclusive. If you act like a man of sense, it's the last service I shall ever require at your hands, and I'll reward you splendidly; if you don't, I not only cease to be your friend, but I become your enemy. I can strike when I like it—you know that; and upon my soul I'll smash you. I shall see my uncle to-morrow morning at Ware, and I'll tell him distinctly the entire of that French transaction."

"But—but pray, my dear Mr. Verney, do say, did I refuse—do I object? you may command me, of course. I have incurred I may say a risk for you already, a risk in form."

"Exactly, in form; and you don't increase it by this kindness, and you secure my eternal gratitude. Now you speak like a man of sense. You must be in Cardyllian to-morrow evening. It is possible I may ask nothing of you; if I do, the utmost is a technical irregularity, and secrecy, which we are both equally interested in observing. You shall stay a week in Cardyllian mind, and I, of course, frank you there and back, and while you remain—it's my business. It has a political aspect, as I shall explain to you by-and-bye, and so soon as I shall have brought my uncle round, and can avow it, it will lead the way rapidly to your fortune. Shall I see you in Cardyllian to-morrow evening?"

"Agreed, sir!—agreed, my dear Mr. Verney. I shall be there, my dear and valued pupil—yes."

"Go to the Verney Arms; I shall probably be looking out for you there; at all events I shall see you before night."

Verney looked at his watch, and repeated "I shall see you to-morrow;" and without taking leave, or hearing as it seemed the Rev. Isaac Dixie's farewell compliments and benedictions, he walked out in gloomy haste, as if the conference was not closed, but only suspended by the approaching parenthesis of a night and a day.

From the hall-table the obsequious divine took the key of the little gate, to which, in slippers and dressing-gown, he stepped blandly forth, and having let out his despotic pupil, and waved his adieu, as the chaise drove away, he returned, and locked up his premises and house, with a great load at his heart.

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CHAPTER XVI.

AN ALARM.

Cleve reached the station, eight miles away from the dismal swamp I have described, in time to catch the mail train. From Llwynan he did not go direct to Ware, but drove instead to Cardyllian, and put up at the Verney Arms early next morning.

By ten o'clock he was seen, sauntering about the streets, talking with old friends, and popping into the shops and listening to the gossip of the town. Cleve had a sort of friendliness that answered all electioneering purposes perfectly, and that was the measure of its value.

Who should he light upon in Castle Street but Tom Sedley! They must have arrived by the same train at Llwynan. The sight of Tom jarred intensely upon Cleve Verney's nerves. There was something so strange in his looks and manner that Sedley thought him ill. He stopped for a while to talk with him at the corner of Church Street, but seemed so obviously disposed to escape from him, that Sedley did not press his society, but acquiesced with some disgust and wonder in their new relations.

Tom Sedley had been with Wynne Williams about poor Vane Etherage's affairs. Honest Wynne Williams was in no mood to flatter Lord Verney, the management of whose affairs he had, he said, "resigned." The fact was that he had been, little by little, so uncomfortably superseded in his functions by our good friend Jos. Larkin, and the fashion of Lord Verney's countenance was so manifestly changed, that honest Wynne Williams felt that he might as well do a proud thing, and resign, as wait a little longer for the inevitable humiliation of dismissal.

"I'm afraid my friend the admiral is in bad hands; worse hands than Larkin's he could hardly have fallen into. I could tell you things of that fellow, if we had time—of course strictly between ourselves, you know—that would open your eyes. And as to his lordship—well, I suppose most people know something of Lord Verney. I owe him nothing, you know; it's all ended between us, and I wash my hands of him and his

concerns. You may talk to him, if you like; but you'll find you might as well argue with the tide in the estuary there. I'd be devilish glad if I could be of any use; but you see how it is; and to tell you the truth, I'm afraid it must come to a regular smash, unless Lord Verney drops that nasty litigation. There are some charges, you know, upon the property already; and with that litigation hanging over it, I don't see how he's to get money to pay those calls. It's a bad business, I'm afraid, and an awful pity. Poor old fellow!—a little bit rough, but devilish good-hearted."

Tom Sedley went up to Hazelden. The Etherage girls knew he was coming, and were watching for him at the top of the steep walk.

"I've been talking, as I said I would, to Wynne Williams this morning," he said, after greetings and inquiries made and answered, "and he had not anything important to advise; but he has promised to think over the whole matter."

"And Wynne Williams is known to be the cleverest lawyer in the world," exclaimed Miss Charity, exulting. "I was afraid, on account of his having been so lately Lord Verney's adviser, that he would not have been willing to consult with you. And will he use his influence, which must be very great, with Lord Verney?"

"He has none; and he thinks it would be quite useless my talking to him."

"Oh! Is it possible? Well, if he said that, I never heard such nonsense in the course of my life. I think old Lord Verney was one of the very nicest men I ever spoke to in the course of my life; and I'm certain it is all that horrid Mr. Larkin, and a great mistake; for Lord Verney is quite a gentleman, and would not do anything so despicable as to worry and injure papa by this horrid business, if only you would make him understand it; and I do think, Thomas Sedley, you might take that trouble for papa."

"I'll go over to Ware, and try to see Lord Verney, if you think my doing so can be of the least use," said Tom, who knew the vanity of arguing with Miss Charity.

"Oh, do," said pretty Agnes, and that entreaty was, of course, a command; so without going up to see old Etherage, who was very much broken and ill, his daughters said; and hoping possibly to have some cheering news on his return, Tom Sedley took his leave for the present, and from the pier of Cardyllian crossed in a boat to Ware.

On the spacious steps of that palatial mansion, as Mr. Larkin used to term it, stood Lord Verney, looking grandly seaward, with compressed eyes, like a near-sighted gentleman as he was.

"Oh! is she all right?" said Lord Verney.

"I—I don't know, Lord Verney," replied Tom Sedley. "I came to" —

"Oh—aw—Mr.—Mr.—how d'ye do, sir," said Lord Verney, with marked frigidity, not this time giving him the accustomed finger.

"I came, Lord Verney, hoping you might possibly give me five minutes, and a very few words, about that unfortunate business of poor Mr. Vane Etherage."

"I'm unfortunately just going out in a boat—about it; and I can't just now afford time, Mr.—a—Mr."—

"Sedley is my name," suggested Sedley, who knew that Lord Verney remembered him perfectly.

"Sedley—Mr. Sedley; yes. As I mentioned, I'm going in a boat. I'm sorry I can't possibly oblige you; and it is very natural you, who are so intimate, I believe, with Mr. Etherage, should take that side of the question—about it; but I've no reason to call those proceedings unfortunate; and—and I don't anticipate—and, in fact, people usually look after their own concerns—about it." Lord Verney, standing on the steps, was looking over Sedley's head, as he spoke, at the estuary and the shipping there.

"I'm sure, Lord Verney, if you knew how utterly ruinous, how really deplorable, the consequences of pursuing this thing—I mean the lawsuit against him—may be—I am sure—you would stop it all."

Honest Tom spoke in the belief that in the hesitation that had marked the close of the noble lord's remarks there was a faltering of purpose, whereas there was simply a failure of ideas.

"I can't help your forming opinions, sir, though I have not invited their expression upon my concerns and—and affairs. If you have anything to communicate about those proceedings, you had better see Mr. Larkin, my attorney; he's the proper person. Mr. Etherage has taken a line in the county to wound and injure me, as, of course, he has a perfect right to do; he has taken that line, and I don't see any reason why I should not have what I'm entitled to. There's the principle of government by party, you're aware; and we're not to ask favours of those we seek to wound and injure—about it; and that's my view, and idea, and fixed opinion. I must wish you good morning, Mr. Sedley. I'm going down to my boat, and I decline distinctly any conversation upon the subject of my law business; I decline it distinctly, Mr. Sedley—about it," repeated the peer peremptorily; and as he looked a good deal incensed, Tom Sedley wisely concluded it was time to retire; and so his embassage came to an end.

Lord Verney crossed the estuary in his yacht, consulting his watch from time to time, and re connoitering the green and pier of Cardyllian through his telescope with considerable interest. A little group was assembled near the stair, among whose figures he saw Lady Wimbledon. "Why is not Caroline there?" he kept asking himself, and all the time searching that little platform for the absent idol of his heart.

Let us deal mercifully with this antiquated romance; and if Miss Caroline Oldys forebore to say, "Go up, thou baldhead," let us also spare the amorous incongruity. Does any young man love with the self-abandonment of an old one? Is any romance so romantic as the romance of an old man? When Sancho looked over his shoulder, and saw his master in his shirt, cutting capers and tumbling head-over-heels, and tearing his hair in his love-madness, that wise governor and man of proverbs forgot the grotesqueness of the exhibition in his awe of that vehement adoration. So let us. When does this noble

frenzy exhibit itself in such maudlin transports, and with a self-sacrifice so idolatrously suicidal, as in the old? Seeing, then, that the spirit is so prodigiously willing, let us bear with the spectacle of their infirmities, and when one of these sighing, magnanimous, wrinkled Philanders goes by, let us not hiss, but rather say kindly, "Vive la bagatelle!" or, as we say in Ireland, "More power!"

He was disappointed. Miss Caroline Oldys had a very bad headache, Lady Wimbledon said, and was in her room, in care of her maid, so miserable at losing the charming sail to Malory.

Well, the lover was sorely disappointed, as we have said; but there was nothing for it but submission, and to comfort himself with the assurances of Lady Wimbledon that Caroline's headaches never lasted long, and that she was always better for a long time, when they were over. This latter piece of information seemed to puzzle Lord Verney.

"Miss Oldys is always better after an attack than before it," said Cleve, interpreting for his uncle.

"Why, of course. That's what Lady Wimbledon means, as I understand it," said Lord Verney, a little impatiently. "It's very sad; you must tell me all about it; but we may hope to find her, you say, quite recovered when we return?"

Cleve was not of the party to Malory. He returned to the Verney Arms. He went up to Lady Wimbledon's drawing-room with a book he had promised to lend her, and found Miss Caroline Oldys.

Yes, she was better. He was very earnest and tender in his solicitudes. He was looking ill, and was very melancholy.

Two hours after her maid came in to know whether she "pleased to want anything?" and she would have sworn that Miss Caroline had been crying. Mr. Cleve had got up from beside her, and was looking out of the window.

A little later in the day, old Lady Calthorpe, a cousin of Lady Wimbledon's, very feeble and fussy, and babbling in a querulous treble, was pushed out in her Bath-chair, Cleve and Miss Caroline Oldys accompanying, to the old castle of Cardyllian.

On the step of the door of the Verney Arms, as they emerged, whom should they meet, descending from the fly that had borne him from Llwynan, but the Rev. Isaac Dixie. That sleek and rosy gentleman, with flat feet, and large hands, and fascinating smile, was well pleased to join the party, and march blandly beside the chair of the viscountess, invigorating the fainting spirit of that great lady by the balm of his sympathy and the sunshine of his smile.

So into the castle they went, across the nearly obliterated moat, where once a drawbridge hung, now mantled with greenest grass, under the grim arches, where once the clanging portcullis rose and fell, and into the base court, and so under other arches into the inner court, surrounded by old ivy-mantled walls.

In this seclusion the old Lady Calthorpe stopped her chair to enjoy the sweet air and sunshine, and the agreeable conversation of the divine, and Cleve offered to guide Miss Caroline Oldys through the ruins, an exploration in which she seemed highly interested.

Cleve spoke low and eloquently, but I don't think it was about the architecture. Time passed rapidly, and at last Miss Oldys whispered—

"We've been too long away from Lady Calthorpe. I must go back. She'll think I have deserted her."

So they emerged from the roofless chambers and dim corridors, and Cleve wished from the bottom of his heart that some good or evil angel would put off his uncle's nuptials for another week, and all would be well—well!

Yes—what was "well," if one goes to moral ideals for a standard? We must run risks—we must set one side of the book against the other. What is the purpose and the justification of all morality but happiness? The course which involves least misery is alternatively the moral course. And take the best act that ever you did, and place it in that dreadful solvent, the light of God's eye, and how much of its motive will stand the test? Yes—another week, and all will be well; and has not a fertile mind like his, resource for any future complication, as for this, that may arise?

Captain Shrapnell was not sorry to meet this distinguished party as they emerged, and drew up on the grass at the side, and raised his hat with a reverential smile, as the old lady wheeled by, and throwing a deferential concern suddenly into his countenance, he walked a few paces beside Cleve, while he said—

"You've heard, of course, about your uncle, Lord Verney?"

"No?" answered Cleve, on chance.

"No?—Oh?—Why it's half an hour ago. I hope it's nothing serious; but his groom drove down from Malory for the doctor here. Something wrong with his head—suddenly, I understand, and Old Lyster took his box with him, and a bottle of leeches—that looks serious, eh?—along with him."

Shrapnell spoke low, and shook his head.

"I—I did not hear a word of it. I've been in the castle with old Lady Calthorpe. I'm very much surprised."

There was something odd, shrewd old Shrapnell fancied in the expression of Cleve's eye, which for a moment met his. But Cleve looked pale and excited, as he said a word in a very low tone to Miss Oldys, and walked across the street accompanied by Shrapnell, to the doctor's shop.

"Oh!" said Cleve, hastily stepping in, and accosting a lean, pale youth, with lank, black hair, who paused in the process of braying a prescription in a mortar as he approached. "My uncle's not well, I hear—Lord Verney—at Malory?"

The young man glanced at Captain Shrapnell.

"The doctor told me not to mention, sir; but if you'd come into the back-room"——

"I'll be with you in a moment," said Cleve Verney to Shrapnell, at the same time stepping into the sanctum, and the glass door being shut, he asked, "What is it?"

"The doctor thought it must be apoplexy, sir," murmured the young man, gazing with wide open eyes, very solemnly, in Cleve's face.

"So I fancied," and Cleve paused, a little stunned; "and the doctor's there, at Malory, now?"

"Yes, sir; he'll be there a quarter of an hour or more by this time," answered the young man.

Again Cleve paused.

"It was not fatal—he was still living?" he asked very low.

"Yes, sir—sure."

Cleve, forgetting any form of valediction, passed into the shop.

"I must drive down to Malory," he said; and calling one of those pony carriages which ply in Cardyllian, he drove away, with a wave of his hand to the Captain, who was sorely puzzled to read the true meaning of that handsome mysterious face.

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CHAPTER XVII.

A NEW LIGHT.

It was all over Cardyllian by this time that the viscount was very ill—dying perhaps—possibly dead. Under the transparent green shadow of the tall old trees, down the narrow road to Malory, which he had so often passed in other moods, more passionate, hardly perhaps less selfish, than his present, was Cleve now driving, with brain and heart troubled and busy—"walking, as before, in a vain shadow, and disquieting himself in vain." The daisies looked up innocently as the eyes of children, into his darkened gaze. Had fate after all taken pity on him, and was here by one clip of the inexorable shears a deliverance from the hell of his complication?

As Cleve entered the gate of Malory he saw the party from Cardyllian leaving in the yacht on their return. Lady Wimbledon, it turned out, had remained behind in charge of Lord Verney. On reaching the house, Cleve learned that Lord Verney was alive—was better in fact.

Combining Lady Wimbledon's and the doctor's narratives, what Cleve learned amounted to this. Lord Verney, who affected a mysterious urgency and haste in his correspondence, had given orders that his letters should follow him to Malory that day. One of these letters, with a black seal and black-bordered envelope, proved to be a communication of considerable interest. It was addressed to him by the clergyman who had charge of poor old Lady Verney's conscience, and announced that his care was ended, and the Dowager Lady, Lord Verney's mother, was dead.

As the doctor who had attended her was gone, and no one but servants in the house, he had felt it a duty to write to Lord Verney to apprise him of the melancholy event.

The melancholy event was no great shock to Lord Verney, her mature son of sixty-four, who had sometimes wondered dimly whether she would live as long as the old Countess of Desmond, and go on drawing her jointure for fifty years after his own demise. He had been a good son; he had nothing to reproach himself with. She was about ninety years of age; the estate was relieved of £, per annum. She had been a religious woman too, and was, no doubt, happy. On the whole the affliction was quite supportable.

But no affliction ever came at a more awkward time. Here was his marriage on the eve of accomplishment—a secret so well kept up to yesterday that no one on earth, he fancied, but half a dozen people, knew that any such thing was dreamed of. Lord Verney, like other tragedians in this theatre of ours, was, perhaps, a little more nervous than he seemed, and did not like laughter in the wrong place. He did not want to be talked over, or, as he said, "any jokes or things about it." And therefore he wished the event to take mankind unawares, as the Flood did. But this morning, with a nice calculation as to time, he had posted four letters, bound, like Antonio's argosies, to different remote parts of the world—one to Pau, another to Lisbon, a third to Florence, and a fourth for Geneva, to friends who were likely to spread the news in all directions—which he cared nothing about, if only the event came off at the appointed time. With the genius of a diplomatist, he had planned his remaining dispatches, not very many, so as to reach their less distant destinations at the latest hour, previous to that of his union. But the others were actually on their way, and he supposed a month or more must now pass before it could take place with any decorum, and, in the meantime, all the world would be enjoying their laugh over his interesting situation.

Lord Verney was very much moved when he read this sad letter; he was pathetic and peevish, much moved and irritated, and shed some tears. He withdrew to write a note to the clergyman, who had announced the catastrophe, and was followed by Lady Wimbledon, who held herself privileged, and to her he poured forth his "ideas and feelings" about his "poor dear mother who was gone, about it;" and suddenly he was seized with a giddiness so violent that if a chair had not been behind him he must have fallen on the ground.

It was something like a fit; Lady Wimbledon was terrified; he looked so ghastly, and answered nothing, only sighed laboriously, and moved his white lips. In her distraction, she threw up the window, and screamed for the servants; and away went Lord Verney's open carriage, as we have seen, to Cardyllian, for the doctor.

By the time that Cleve arrived, the attack had declared itself gout—fixed, by a mustard bath "nicely" in the foot, leaving, however, its "leven mark" upon the head where it had flickered, in an angrily inflamed eye.

Here was another vexation. It might be over in a week, the doctor said; it might last a month. But for the present it was quite out of the question moving him. They must contrive, and make him as comfortable as they could. But at Malory he must be contented to remain for the present.

He saw Cleve for a few minutes.

"It's very unfortunate—your poor dear grandmother—and this gout; but we must bow to the will of Providence; we have every consolation in her case. She's, no doubt, gone to heaven, about it; but it's indescribably untoward the whole thing; you apprehend me—the marriage—you know—and things; we must pray to heaven to grant us patience under these cross-grained, unintelligible misfortunes that are always persecuting some people, and never come in the way of others, and I beg you'll represent to poor Caroline how it is. I'm not even to write for a day or two; and you must talk to her, Cleve, and try to keep her up, for I do believe she does like her old man, and does not wish to see the poor old fellow worse than he is; and, Cleve, I appreciate your attention and affection in coming so promptly;" and Lord Verney put out his thin hand and pressed Cleve's. "You're very kind, Cleve, and if they allow me I'll see you to-morrow, and you'll tell me what's in the papers, for they won't let me read; and there will be this funeral, you know—about it—your poor dear grandmother; she'll of course—she'll be buried; you'll have to see to that, you know; and Larkin, you know—he'll save you trouble, and—and—hey! ha, ha—hoo! Very pleasant! Good gracious, what torture! Ha!—Oh, dear! Well, I think I've made everything pretty clear, and you'll tell Caroline—its only a flying gout—about it—and—and things. So I must bid you good-bye, dear Cleve, and God bless you."

So Cleve did see Caroline Oldys at the Verney Arms, and talked a great deal with her, in a low tone, while old Lady Wimbledon dozed in her chair, and, no doubt, it was all about his uncle's "flying gout."

That night our friend Wynne Williams was sitting in his snuggery, a little bit of fire was in the grate, the air being sharp, his tea-things on the table, and the cozy fellow actually reading a novel, with his slippered feet on the fender.

It was half-past nine o'clock, a rather rakish hour in Cardyllian, when the absorbed attorney was aroused by a tap at his door.

I think I have already mentioned that in that town of the golden age, hall-doors stand open, in evidence of "ancient faith that knows no guile," long after dark.

"Come in," said Wynne Williams; and to his amazement who should enter, not with the conventional smile of greeting, but pale, dark, and wo-begone, but the tall figure of Mrs. Rebecca Mervyn.

Honest Wynne Williams never troubled himself about ghosts, but he had read of spectral illusions, and old Mrs. Mervyn unconsciously encouraged a fancy that the thing he greatly feared had come upon him, and that he was about to become a victim to that sort of hallucination. She stood just a step within the door, looking at him, and he, with his novel, on his knee, stared at her as fixedly.

"She's dead," said the old lady.

"Who?" exclaimed the attorney.

"The Dowager Lady Verney," she continued, rather than answered.

"I was so much astonished, ma'am, to see you here; you haven't been down in the town these twelve years, I think. I could scarce believe my eyes. Won't you come in, ma'am? Pray do." The attorney by this time was on his legs, and doing the honours, much relieved, and he placed a chair for her. "If it's any business, ma'am, I'll be most happy, or any time you like."

"Yes, she's dead," said she again.

"Oh, come in, ma'am—do—so is Queen Anne," said the attorney, laughing kindly. "I heard that early to-day; we all heard it, and we're sorry, of course. Sit down, ma'am. But then she was not very far from a hundred, and we're all mortal. Can I do anything for you, ma'am?"

"She was good to me—a proud woman—hard, they used to say; but she was good to me—yes, sir—and so she's gone, at last. She was frightened at them—there was something in them—my poor head—you know—I couldn't see it, and I did not care—for the little child was gone; it was only two months old, and she was ninety years; it's a long time, and now she's in her shroud, poor thing! and I may speak to you."

"Do, ma'am—pray; but it's growing late, and hadn't we better come to the point a bit?"

She was sitting in the chair he had placed for her, and she had something under her cloak, a thick book it might be, which she held close in her arms. She placed it on the table and it turned out to be a small tin box with a padlock.

"Papers, ma'am?" he inquired.

"Will you read them, sir, and see what ought to be done—there's the key?"

"Certainly, ma'am;" and having unlocked it, he disclosed two little sheaves of papers, neatly folded and endorsed.

The attorney turned these over rapidly, merely reading at first the little note of its contents written upon each. "By Jove!" he exclaimed; he looked very serious now, with a

frown, and the corners of his mouth drawn down, like a man who witnesses something horrible.

"And, ma'am, how long have you had these?"

"Since Mr. Sedley died."

"I know; that's more than twenty years, I think; did you show them to anyone?"

"Only to the poor old lady who's gone."

"Ay, I see."

There was a paper endorsed "Statement of Facts," and this the attorney was now reading.

"Now, ma'am, do you wish to place these papers in my hands, that I may act upon them as the interests of those who are nearest to you may require?"

She looked at him with a perplexed gaze, and said, "Yes, sir, certainly."

"Very well, ma'am; then I must go up to town at once. It's a very serious affair, ma'am, and I'll do my duty by you."

"Can you understand them, sir?"

"N—no—that is, I must see counsel in London; I'll be back again in a day or two. Leave it all to me, ma'am, and the moment I know anything for certain, you shall know all about it."

The old woman asked the question as one speaks in their sleep, without hearing the answer. Her finger was to her lip, and she was looking down with a knitted brow.

"Ay, she was proud—I promised—proud—she was—very high—it will be in Penruthyn, she told me she would be buried there—Dowager Lady Verney! I wish, sir, it had been I."

She drew her cloak about her and left the room, and he accompanied her with the candle to the hall-door, and saw her hurry up the street.

Now and then a passenger looked at the tall cloaked figure gliding swiftly by, but no one recognised her.

The attorney was gaping after her in deep abstraction, and when she was out of sight he repeated, with a resolute wag of his head—

"I will do my duty by you—and a serious affair, upon my soul! A very serious affair it is."

And so he closed the door, and returned to his sitting-room in deep thought, and very strange excitement, and continued reading those papers till one o'clock in the morning.

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CHAPTER XVIII

MR. DINGWELL AND MRS. MERVYN CONVERSE

Cleve was assiduous in consoling Miss Caroline Oldys, a duty specially imposed upon him by the voluntary absence of Lady Wimbledon, who spent four or five hours every day at Malory, with an equally charitable consideration for the spirits of Lord Verney, who sat complaining in pain and darkness.

Every day he saw more or less of the Rev. Isaac Dixie, but never alluded to his midnight interview with him at Clay Rectory. Only once, a little abruptly, he had said to him, as they walked together on the green——

"I say, you must manage your duty for two Sundays more—you must stay here for the funeral—that will be on Tuesday week."

Cleve said no more; but he looked at him with a fixed meaning in his eye, with which the clergyman somehow could not parley.

At the post-office, to which Miss Oldys had begged his escort, a letter awaited him. His address was traced in the delicate and peculiar hand of that beautiful being who in those very scenes had once filled every hour of his life with dreams, and doubts, and hopes; and now how did he feel as those slender characters met his eye? Shall I say, as the murderer feels when some relic of his buried crime is accidentally turned up before his eyes—chilled with a pain that reaches on to doomsday—with a tremor of madness—with an insufferable disgust?

Smiling, he put it with his other letters in his pocket, and felt as if every eye looked on him with suspicion—with dislike; and as if little voices in the air were whispering, "It is from his wife—from his wife—from his wife."

Tom Sedley was almost by his side, and had just got his letters—filling him, too, with dismay—posted not ten minutes before from Malory, and smiting his last hope to the centre.

"Look at it, Cleve," he said, half an hour later. "I thought all these things might have softened him—his own illness and his mother's death; and the Etherages—by Jove, I think he'll ruin them; the poor old man is going to leave Hazelden in two or three weeks, and—and he's utterly ruined I think, and all by that d—d lawsuit, that Larkin knows perfectly well Lord Verney can never suc ceed in; but in the meantime it will be the ruin of that nice family, that were so happy there; and look—here it is—my own letter returned—so insulting—like a beggar's petition; and this note—not even signed by him."

"Lord Verney is indisposed; he has already expressed his fixed opinion upon the subject referred to in Mr. Sedley's statement, which he returns; he declines discussing it, and refers Mr. Sedley again to his solicitor."

So, disconsolate Sedley, having opened his griefs to Cleve, went on to Hazelden, where he was only too sure to meet with a thoroughly sympathetic audience.

A week passed, and more. And now came the day of old Lady Verney's funeral. It was a long procession—tenants on horseback, tenants on foot—the carriages of all the gentlemen round about.

On its way to Penruthyn Priory the procession passed by the road, ascending the steep by the little church of Llanderris, and full in view, through a vista in the trees, of the upper windows of the steward's house.

Our friend Mr. Dingwell, whose journey had cost him a cold, got his clothes on for this occasion, and was in the window, with a field-glass, which had amused him on the road from London.

He had called up Mrs. Mervyn's servant girl to help him to the names of such people as she might recognise.

As the hearse, with its grove of sable plumes, passed up the steep road, he was grave for a few minutes; and he said—

"That was a good woman. Well for you, ma'am, if you have ever one-twentieth part of her virtues. She did not know how to make her virtues pleasant, though; she liked to have people afraid of her; and if you have people afraid of you, my dear, the odds are they'll hate you. We can't have everything—virtue and softness, fear and love—in this queer world. An excellent—severe—most ladylike woman. What are they stopping for now? Oh! There they go again. The only ungenteel thing she ever did is what she has begun to do now—to rot; but she'll do it alone, in the dark, you see; and there is a right and a wrong, and she did some good in her day."

The end of his queer homily he spoke in a tone a little gloomy, and he followed the hearse awhile with his glass.

In two or three minutes more the girl thought she heard him sob; and looking up, with a shock, perceived that his face was gleaming with a sinister laugh.

"What a precious coxcomb that fellow Cleve is—chief mourner, egad—and he does it pretty well. 'My inky cloak, good mother.' He looks so sorry, I almost believe he's thinking of his uncle's wedding. 'Thrift, Horatio, thrift!' I say, miss—I always forget your name. My dear young lady, be so good, will you, as to say I feel better to-day, and should be very happy to see Mrs. Mervyn, if she could give me ten minutes?"

So she ran down upon her errand, and he drew back from the window, suffering the curtain to fall back as before, darkening the room; and Mr. Dingwell sat himself down, with his back to the little light that entered, drawing his robe-de-chambre about him and resting his chin on his hand.

"Come in, ma'am," said Mr. Dingwell, in answer to a tap at the door, and Mrs. Mervyn entered. She looked in the direction of the speaker, but could see only a shadowy outline, the room was so dark.

"Pray, madam, sit down on the chair I've set for you by the table. I'm at last well enough to see you. You'll have questions to put to me. I'll be happy to tell you all I know. I was with poor Arthur Verney, as you are aware, when he died."

"I have but one hope now, sir—to see him hereafter. Oh, sir! did he think of his unhappy soul—of heaven."

"Of the other place he did think, ma'am. I've heard him wish evil people, such as clumsy servants and his brother here, in it; but I suppose you mean to ask was he devout—eh?"

"Yes, sir; it has been my prayer, day and night, in my long solitude. What prayers, what prayers, what terrible prayers, God only knows."

"Your prayers were heard, ma'am; he was a saint."

"Thank God!"

"The most punctual, edifying, self-tormenting saint I ever had the pleasure of knowing in any quarter of the globe," said Mr. Dingwell.

"Oh! thank God."

"His reputation for sanctity in Constantinople was immense, and at both sides of the Bosphorus he was the admiration of the old women and the wonder of the little boys, and an excellent Dervish, a friend of his, who was obliged to leave after having been

bastinadoed for a petty larceny, told me he has seen even the town dogs and the asses hold down their heads, upon my life, as he passed by, to receive his blessing!"

"Superstition—but still it shows, sir"——

"To be sure it does, ma'am."

"It shows that his sufferings—my darling Arthur—had made a real change."

"Oh! a complete change, ma'am. Egad, a very complete change, indeed!"

"When he left this, sir, he was—oh! my darling! thoughtless, volatile"——

"An infidel and a scamp—eh? So he told me, ma'am."

"And I have prayed that his sufferings might be sanctified to him," she continued, "and that he might be converted, even though I should never see him more."

"So he was, ma'am; I can vouch for that," said Mr. Dingwell.

Again poor Mrs. Mervyn broke into a rapture of thanksgiving.

"Vastly lucky you've been, ma'am; all your prayers about him, egad, seem to have been granted. Pity you did not pray for something he might have enjoyed more. But all's for the best—eh?"

"All things work together for good—all for good," said the old lady, looking upward, with her hands clasped.

"And you're as happy at his conversion, ma'am, as the Ulema who received him into the faith of Mahomet—happier, I really think. Lucky dog! what interest he inspires, what joy he diffuses, even now, in Mahomet's paradise, I dare say. It's worth while being a sinner for the sake of the conversion, ma'am."

"Sir—sir, I can't understand," gasped the old lady, after a pause.

"No difficulty, ma'am, none in the world."

"For God's sake, don't; I think I'm going mad" cried the poor woman.

"Mad, my good lady! Not a bit. What's the matter? Is it Mahomet? You're not afraid of him?"

"Oh, sir, for the Lord's sake tell me what you mean?" implored she, wildly.

"I mean that, to be sure; what I say," he replied. "I mean that the gentleman complied with the custom of the country—don't you see?—and submitted to Kismet. It was his fate, ma'am; it's the invariable condition; and they'd have handed him over to his Christian compatriots to murder, according to Frank law, otherwise. So, ma'am, he shaved his head, put on a turban—they wore turbans then—and, with his Koran under his arm, walked into a mosque, and said his say about Allah and the rest, and has been safe ever since."

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried the poor old lady, trembling in a great agony.

"Ho! no, ma'am; 'twasn't much," said he, briskly.

"All, all; the last hope!" cried she, wildly.

"Don't run away with it, pray. It's a very easy and gentlemanlike faith, Mahometanism—except in the matter of wine; and even that you can have, under the rose, like other things here, ma'am, that aren't quite orthodox; eh?" said Mr. Dingwell.

"Oh, Arthur, Arthur!" moaned the poor lady distractedly, wringing her hands.

"Suppose, ma'am, we pray it may turn out to have been the right way. Very desirable, since Arthur died in it," said Mr. Dingwell.

"Oh, sir, oh! I couldn't have believed it. Oh, sir, this shock—this frightful shock!"

"Courage, madam! Console yourself. Let us hope he didn't believe this any more than the other," said Mr. Dingwell.

Mrs. Mervyn leaned her cheek on her thin clasped hands, and was rocking herself to and fro in her misery.

"I was with him, you know, in his last moments," said Mr. Dingwell, shrugging sympathetically, and crossing his leg. "It's always interesting, those last moments—eh?—and exquisitely affecting, even—particularly if it isn't very clear where the fellow's going."

A tremulous moan escaped the old lady.

"And he called for some wine. That's comforting, and has a flavour of Christianity, eh? A relapse, don't you think, very nearly?—at so un convivial a moment. It must have been principle; eh? Let us hope."

The old lady's moans and sighs were her answers.

"And now that I think on it, he must have died a Christian," said Mr. Dingwell, briskly.

The old lady looked up, and listened breathlessly.

"Because, after we thought he was speechless, there was one of those what-d'ye-call-'ems—begging dervish fellows—came into the room, and kept saying one of their long yarns about the prophet Mahomet, and my dying friend made me a sign; so I put my ear to his lips, and he said distinctly, 'He be d—d!'—I beg your pardon; but last words are always precious."

Here came a pause.

Mr. Dingwell was quite bewildering this trembling old lady.

"And the day before," resumed Mr. Dingwell, "Poor Arthur said, 'They'll bury me here under a turban; but I should like a mural tablet in old Penruthyn church. They'd be ashamed of my name, I think; so they can put on it the date of my decease, and the simple inscription, Check-mate.' But whether he meant to himself or his creditors I'm not able to say."

Mrs. Mervyn groaned.

"It's very interesting. And he had a message for you, ma'am. He called you by a name of endearment. He made me stoop, lest I should miss a word, and he said, 'Tell my little linnet,' said he"—

But here Mr. Dingwell was interrupted. A wild cry, a wild laugh, and—"Oh, Arthur, it's you!"

He felt, as he would have said, "oddly" for a moment—a sudden flood of remembrance, of youth. The worn form of that old outcast, who had not felt the touch of human kindness for nearly thirty years, was clasped in the strain of an inextinguishable and angelic love—in the thin arms of one likewise faded and old, and near the long sleep in which the heart is fluttered and pained no more.

There was a pause, a faint laugh, a kind of sigh, and he said—

"So you've found me out."

"Darling, darling! you're not changed?"

"Change!" he answered, in a low tone. "There's a change, little linnet, from summer to winter; where the flowers were the snow is. Draw the curtain, and let us look on one another."

The Tenants of Malory Vol.III by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

CHAPTER XIX

THE GREEK MERCHANT SEES LORD VERNEY

Our friend, Wynne Williams, made a much longer stay than he had expected in London. From him, too, Tom Sedley received about this time a mysterious summons to town, so urgent and so solemn that he felt there was something extraordinary in it; and on consultation with the Etherage girls, those competent advisers settled that he should at once obey it.

Tom wrote to Agnes on the evening of his arrival—

"I have been for an hour with Wynne Williams; you have no notion what a good fellow he is, and what a wonderfully clever fellow. There is something very good in prospect for me, but not yet certain, and I am bound not to tell a human being. But you, I will, of course, the moment I know it for certain. It may turn out nothing at all; but we are working very hard all the same."

In the meantime, down at Malory, things were taking a course of which the good people of Cardyllian had not a suspicion.

With a little flush over his grim, brown face, with a little jaunty swagger, and a slight screwing of his lips, altogether as if he had sipped a little too much brandy-and-water—though he had nothing of the kind that day—giggling and chuckling over short sentences; with a very determined knitting of his eyebrows, and something in his eyes unusually sinister, which a sense of danger gives to a wicked face, Mr. Dingwell walked down the clumsy stairs of the steward's house, and stood within the hatch.

There he meditated for a few moments, with compressed lips, and a wandering sweep of his eyes along the stone urns and rose bushes that stood in front of the dwarf wall, which is backed by the solemn old trees of Malory.

"In for a penny, in for a pound."

And he muttered a Turkish sentence, I suppose equivalent; and thus fortified by the wisdom of nations, he stepped out upon the broad gravel walk, looked about him for a second or two, as if recalling recollections, in a sardonic mood, and then walked round the corner to the front of the house, and up the steps, and pulled at the door bell; the knocker had been removed in tenderness to Lord Verney's irritable nerves.

Two of his tall footmen in powder and livery were there, conveyed into this exile from Ware; for calls of inquiry were made here, and a glimpse of state was needed to overawe the bumpkins.

"His lordship was better; was sitting in the drawing-room; might possibly see the gentleman; and who should he say, please?"

"Say, Mr. Dingwell, the great Greek merchant, who has a most important communication to make."

His lordship would see Mr. Dingwell. Mr. Dingwell's name was called to a second footman, who opened a door, and announced him.

Lady Wimbledon, who had been sitting at the window reading aloud to Lord Verney at a little chink of light, abandoned her pamphlet, and rustled out by another door, as the Greek merchant entered.

Dim at best, and very unequal was the light. The gout had touched his lordship's right eyeball, which was still a little inflamed, and the doctor insisted on darkness.

There was something diabolically waggish in Mr. Dingwell's face, if the noble lord could only have seen it distinctly, as he entered the room. He was full of fun; he was enjoying a coming joke, with perhaps a little spice of danger in it, and could hardly repress a giggle.

The Viscount requested Mr. Dingwell to take a chair, and that gentleman waited till the servant had closed the door, and then thanked Lord Verney in a strange nasal tone, quite unlike Mr. Dingwell's usual voice.

"I come here, Lord Verney, with an important communication to make. I could have made it to some of the people about you—and you have able professional people—or to your nephew; but it is a pleasure, Lord Verney, to speak instead to the cleverest man in England."

The noble lord bowed a little affably, although he might have questioned Mr. Dingwell's right to pay him compliments in his own house; but Mr. Dingwell's fiddlestick had touched the right string, and the noble instrument made music accordingly. Mr. Dingwell, in the dark, looked very much amused.

"I can hardly style myself that, Mr. Dingwell."

"I speak of business, Lord Verney; and I adopt the language of the world in saying the cleverest man in England."

"I'm happy to say my physician allows me to listen to reading, and to talk a little, and there can be no objection to a little business either," said Lord Verney, passing by the compliment this time, but, on the whole, good-humouredly disposed toward Mr. Dingwell.

"I've two or three things to mention, Lord Verney; and the first is money."

Lord Verney coughed drily. He was suddenly recalled to a consciousness of Mr. Dingwell's character.

"Money, my lord. The name makes you cough, as smoke does a man with an asthma. I've found it all my life as hard to keep, as you do to part with. If I had but possessed Lord Verney's instincts and abilities, I should have been at this moment one of the wealthiest men in England."

Mr. Dingwell rose as he said this, and bowed towards Lord Verney.

"I said I should name it first; but as your lordship coughs, we had, perhaps, best discuss it last. Or, indeed, if it makes your lordship cough very much, perhaps we had better postpone it, or leave it entirely to your lordship's discretion—as I wouldn't for the world send this little attack into your chest."

Lord Verney thought Mr. Dingwell less unreasonable, but also more flighty, than he had supposed.

"You are quite at liberty, sir, to treat your subjects in what order you please. I wish you to understand that I have no objection to hear you; and—and you may proceed."

"The next is a question on which I presume we shall find ourselves in perfect accord. I had the honour, as you are very well aware, of an intimate acquaintance with your late brother, the Honourable Arthur Verney, and beyond measure I admired his talents, which were second in brilliancy only to your own. I admired even his principles—but I see they make you cough also. They were, it is true, mephitic, sulphurous, such as might well take your breath, or that of any other moral man, quite away; but they had what I call the Verney stamp upon them; they were perfectly consistent, and quite harmonious. His, my lord, was the intense and unflinching rascality, if you permit me the phrase, of a man of genius, and I honoured it. Now, my lord, his adventures were curious, as you are aware, and I have them at my fingers' ends—his crimes, his escape, and, above all, his life in Constantinople—ha, ha, ha! It would make your hair stand on end. And to think

he should have been your brother! Upon my soul! Though, as I said, the genius—the genius, Lord Verney—the inspiration was there. In that he was your brother."

"I'm aware, sir, that he had talent, Mr. Dingwell, and could speak—about it. At Oxford he was considered the most promising young man of his time—almost."

"Yes, except you; but you were two years later."

"Yes, exactly. I was precisely two years later about it."

"Yes, my lord, you were always about it; so he told me. No matter what it was—a book, or a boot-jack, or a bottle of port, you were always about it. It was a way you had, he said—about it."

"I wasn't aware that anyone remarked any such thing—about it," said Lord Verney, very loftily.

It dawned dimly upon him that Mr. Dingwell, who was a very irregular person, was possibly intoxicated. But Mr. Dingwell was speaking, though in a very nasal, odd voice, yet with a clear and sharp articulation, and in a cool way, not the least like a man in that sort of incapacity. Lord Verney concluded, therefore, that Mr. Dingwell was either a remarkably impertinent person, or most insupportably deficient in the commonest tact. I think he would have risen, even at the inconvenience of suddenly disturbing his flannelled foot, and intimated that he did not feel quite well enough to continue the conversation, had he not known something of Mr. Dingwell's dangerous temper, and equally dangerous knowledge and opportunities; for had they not subsidized Mr. Dingwell, in the most unguarded manner, and on the most monstrous scale, pending the investigation and proof before the Lords? "It was inevitable," Mr. Larkin said, "but also a little awkward; although they knew that the man had sworn nothing but truth." Very awkward, Lord Verney thought, and therefore he endured Mr. Dingwell.

But the "great Greek merchant," as, I suppose half jocularly, he termed himself, not only seemed odious at this moment, by reason of his impertinence, but also formidable to Lord Verney, who, having waked from his dream that Dingwell would fly beyond the Golden Horn when once his evidence was given, and the coronet well fixed on the brows of the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney, found himself still haunted by this vampire bat, which hung by its hooked wing, sometimes in the shadows of Rosemary Court—sometimes in those of the old Steward's House—sometimes hovering noiselessly nearer—always with its eyes upon him, threatening to fasten on his breast, and drain him.

The question of money he would leave "to his discretion." But what did his impertinence mean? Was it not minatory? And to what exorbitant sums in a choice of evils might not "discretion" point?

"This d—d Mr. Dingwell," thought Lord Verney "will play the devil with my gout. I wish he was at the bottom of the Bosphorus."

"Yes. And your brother, Arthur—there were points in which he differed from you. Unless I'm misinformed, he was a first-rate cricketer, the crack bat of their team, and you were nothing; he was one of the best Grecians in the university, and you were plucked."

"I—I don't exactly see the drift of your rather inaccurate and extremely offensive observations, Mr. Dingwell," said Lord Verney, wincing and flushing in the dark.

"Offensive? Good heaven! But I'm talking to a Verney, to a man of genius; and I say, how the devil could I tell that truth could offend, either? With this reflection I forgive myself, and I go on to say what will interest you."

Lord Verney, who had recovered his presence of mind, here nodded, to intimate that he was ready to hear him.

"Well, there were a few other points, but I need not mention them, in which you differed. You were both alike in this—each was a genius—you were an opaque and

obscure genius, he a brilliant one; but each being a genius, there must have been a sympathy, notwithstanding his being a publican and you a—not exactly a Pharisee, but a paragon of prudence."

"I really, Mr. Dingwell, must request—you see I'm far from well, about it—that you'll be so good as a little to abridge your remarks; and I don't want to hear—you can easily, I hope, understand—my poor brother talked of in any but such terms as a brother should listen to."

"That arises, Lord Verney, from your not having had the advantage of his society for so very many years. Now, I knew him intimately, and I can undertake to say he did not care twopence what any one on earth thought of him, and it rather amused him painting infernal caricatures of himself, as a fiend or a monkey, and he often made me laugh by the hour—ha, ha, ha! he amused himself with revealed religion, and with everything sacred, sometimes even with you—ha, ha, ha—he had certainly a wonderful sense of the ridiculous."

"May I repeat my request, if it does not appear to you very unreasonable?" again interrupted Lord Verney, "and may I entreat to know what it is you wish me to understand about it, in as few words as you can, sir?"

"Certainly, Lord Verney; it is just this. As I have got materials, perfectly authentic, from my deceased friend, both about himself—horribly racy, you may suppose—ha, ha, ha—about your grand-uncle Pendel—you've heard of him, of course—about your aunt Deborah, poor thing, who sold mutton pies in Chester,—I was thinking—suppose I write a memoir—Arthur alone deserves it; you pay the expenses; I take the profits, and I throw you in the copyright for a few thousand more, and call it, 'Snuffed-out lights of the Peerage,' or something of the kind? I think something is due to Arthur—don't you?"

"I think you can hardly be serious, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Perfectly serious, upon my soul, my lord. Could anything be more curious? Eccentricity's the soul of genius, and you're proud of your genius, I hope."

"What strikes me, Mr. Dingwell, amounts, in short, to something like this. My poor brother, he has been unfortunate, about it, and—and worse, and he has done things, and I ask myself why there should be an effort to obtrude him, and I answer myself, there's no reason, about it, and therefore I vote to have everything as it is, and I shall neither contribute my countenance, about it, nor money to any such undertaking, or—or—undertaking."

"Then my book comes to the ground, egad."

Lord Verney simply raised his head with a little sniff, as if he were smelling at a snuff-box.

"Well, Arthur must have something, you know."

"My brother, the Honourable Arthur Kiffyn Verney, is past receiving anything at my hands, and I don't think he probably looked for anything, about it, at any time from yours."

"Well, but it's just the time for what I'm thinking of. You wouldn't give him a tombstone in his lifetime, I suppose, though you are a genius. Now, I happen to know he wished a tombstone. You'd like a tombstone, though not now—time enough in a year or two, when you're fermenting in your lead case."

"I'm not thinking of tombstones at present, sir, and it appears to me that you are giving yourself a very unusual latitude—about it."

"I don't mean in the mausoleum at Ware. Of course that's a place where people who have led a decorous life putrify together. I meant at the small church of Penruthyn, where the scamps await judgment."

"I—a—don't see that such a step is properly for the consideration of any persons—about it—outside the members of the Verney family, or more properly, of any but the representatives of that family," said Lord Verney, loftily, "and you'll excuse my not admitting, or—or, in fact, admitting any right in anyone else."

"He wished it immensely."

"I can't understand why, sir."

"Nor I; but I suppose you all get them—all ticketed—eh? and I'd write the epitaph, only putting in essentials, though, egad! in such a life it would be as long as a newspaper."

"I've already expressed my opinion, and—and things, and I have nothing to add."

"Then the tombstone comes to the ground also?"

"Anything more, sir?"

"But, my lord, he showed an immense consideration for you."

"I don't exactly recollect how."

"By dying—you've got hold of everything, don't you see, and you grudge him a tablet in the little church of Penruthyn, by gad! I told your nephew he wished it, and I tell you he wished it; it's not stinginess, it's your mean pride."

"You seem, Mr. Dingwell, to fancy that there's no limit to the impertinence I'll submit to."

"I'm sure there's none almost—you better not ring the bell—you better think twice—he gave me that message, and he also left me a mallet—quite a toy—but a single knock of it would bring Verney House, or Ware, or this place, about your ears."

The man was speaking in quite another voice now, and in the most awful tones Lord Verney had ever heard in his life, and to his alarmed and sickly eyes it seemed as if the dusky figure of his visitor were dilating in the dark like an evoked Genii.

"I—I think about it—it's quite unaccountable—all this." Lord Verney was looking at the stranger as he spoke, and groping with his left hand for the old-fashioned bell-rope which used to hang near him in the library in Verney House, forgetting that there was no bell of any sort within his reach at that moment.

"I'm not going to take poor dear Arthur's mallet out of my pocket, for the least tap of it would make all England ring and roar, sir. No, I'll make no noise; you and I, sir, tête-à-tête. I'll have no go-between; no Larkin, no Levi, no Cleve; you and I'll settle it alone. Your brother was a great Grecian, they used to call him Οδυσσευσ --Ulysses. Do you remember? I said I was the great Greek merchant? We have made an exchange together. You must pay. What shall I call myself, for Dingwell isn't my name. I'll take a new one--Το μεν πρωτον Ουτιν ἑαυτον επικαλει--επειδανδε διεφευγε και εξω ην βελους Οδυσσυν ονομαζεσθαι εφη. In English--at first he called himself Outis--Nobody; but so soon as he had escaped, and was out of the javelin's reach, he said that he was named Odusseus--Ulysses, and here he is. This is the return of Ulysses!"

There had been a sudden change in Mr. Dingwell's Yankee intonation. The nasal tones were heard no more. He approached the window, and said, with a laugh, pulling the shutter more open—

"Why, Kiffyn, you fool, don't you know me?"

There was a silence.

"My great God! my great God of heaven!" came from the white lips of Lord Verney.

"Yes; God's over all," said Arthur Verney, with a strange confusion, between a sneer and something more genuine.

There was a long pause.

"Ha, ha, ha! don't make a scene! Not such a muff?" said Dingwell.

Lord Verney was staring at him with a face white and peaked as that of a corpse, and whispering still—"My God! my great God!" so that Dingwell, as I still call him, began to grow uneasy.

"Come; don't you make mountains of molehills. What the devil's all this fuss about? Here, drink a little of this." He poured out some water, and Lord Verney did sip a little, and then gulped down a good deal, and then he looked at Arthur again fixedly, and groaned.

"That's right—never mind. I'll not hurt you. Don't fancy I mean to disturb you. I can't, you know, if I wished it ever so much. I daren't show—I know it. Don't suppose I want to bully you; the idea's impracticable. I looked in merely to tell you, in a friendly way, who I am. You must do something handsome for me, you know. Devil's in it if a fellow can't get a share of his own money, and, as I said before, we'll have no go-betweens, no Jews or attorneys. D—n them all—but settle it between ourselves, like brothers. Sip a little more water."

"Arthur, Arthur, I say, yes; good God, I feel I shall have a good deal to say; but—my head, and things—I'm a little perplexed still, and I must have a glass of wine, about it, and I can't do it now; no, I can't."

"I don't live far away, you know; and I'll look in to-morrow—we're not in a hurry."

"It was a strange idea, Arthur. Good Lord, have mercy on me!"

"Not a bad one; eh?"

"Very odd, Arthur!—God forgive you."

"Yes, my dear Kiffyn, and you, too."

"The coronet—about it? I'm placed in a dreadful position, but you shan't be compromised, Arthur. Tell them I'm not very well, and some wine, I think—a little chill."

"And to-morrow I can look in again, quietly," said the Greek merchant, "or whenever you like, and I shan't disclose our little confidence."

"It's going—everything, everything; I shall see it by-and-by," said Lord Verney, helplessly.

And thus the interview ended, and Mr. Dingwell in the hall gave the proper alarm about Lord Verney.

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CHAPTER XX

A BREAK-DOWN

About an hour after, a message came down from Malory for the doctor.

"How is his lordship?" asked the doctor, eagerly.

"No, it isn't him, sure; it is the old lady is taken very bad."

"Lady Wimbledon?"

"No, sure. Her ladyship's not there. Old Mrs. Mervyn."

"Oh!" said the doctor, tranquillized. "Old Rebecca Mervyn, is it? And what may be the matter with the poor old lady?"

"Fainting like; one fainting into another, sure; and her breath almost gone. She's very bad—as pale as a sheet."

"Is she talking at all?"

"No, not a word. Sittin' back in her chair, sure."

"Does she know you, or mind what you say to her?"

"Well, no. She's a-holdin' that old white-headed man's hand that's been so long bad there, and a-lookin' at him; but I don't think she hears nor sees nothin' myself."

"Apoplexy, or the heart, more likely," ruminated the doctor. "Will you call one of those pony things for me?"

And while the pony-carriage was coming to the door, he got a few phials together and his coat on, being in a hurry; for he was to play a rubber of billiards at the club for five shillings at seven o'clock.

In an hour's time after the interview with Arthur Verney, Lord Verney had wonderfully collected his wits. His effects in that department, it is true, were not very much, and perhaps the more easily brought together. He wrote two short letters—marvellously short for him—and sent down to the Verney Arms to request the attendance of Mr. Larkin.

Lord Verney was calm; he was even gentle; spoke, in his dry way, little, and in a low tone. He had the window-shutter opened quite, and the curtains drawn back, and seemed to have forgotten his invalided state, and everything but the revolution which in a moment had overtaken and engulfed him—to which great anguish with a dry resignation he submitted.

Over the chimney was a little oval portrait of his father, the late Lord Verney, taken when they wore the hair long, falling back upon their shoulders. A pretty portrait, refined, handsome, insolent. How dulled it was by time and neglect—how criss-crossed over with little cracks; the evening sun admitted now set it all aglow.

"A very good portrait. How has it been overlooked so long? It must be preserved; it shall go to Verney House. To Verney House? I forgot."

Mr. Jos. Larkin, in obedience to this sudden summons, was speedily with Lord Verney. With this call a misgiving came. The attorney smiled blandly, and talked in his meekest and happiest tones; but people who knew his face would have remarked that sinister contraction of the eye to which in moments of danger or treachery he was subject, and which, in spite of his soft tones and child-like smile, betrayed the fear or the fraud of that vigilant and dangerous Christian.

When he entered the room, and saw Lord Verney's face pale and stern, he had no longer a doubt.

Lord Verney requested Mr. Larkin to sit down, and prepare for something that would surprise him.

He then proceeded to tell Mr. Larkin that the supposed Mr. Dingwell was, in fact, his brother, the Hon. Arthur Verney, and that, therefore, he was not Lord Verney, but only as before, the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney.

Mr. Larkin saw that there was an up-hill game and a heavy task before him. It was certain now, and awful. This conceited and foolish old nobleman, and that devil incarnate, his brother, were to be managed, and those Jew people, who might grow impracticable; and doors were to be muffled, and voices lowered, and a stupendous secret kept. Still he did not despair—if people would only be true to themselves.

When Lord Verney came to that part of his brief narrative where, taking some credit dismally to himself for his penetration, he stated that "notwithstanding that the room was dark and his voice disguised, I recognized him; and you may conceive, Mr. Larkin, that when I made the discovery I was a good deal disturbed about it."

Mr. Larkin threw up his eyes and hands—

"What a world it is, my dear Lord Verney! for so I persist in styling you still, for this will prove virtually no interruption."

At the close of his sentence the attorney lowered his voice earnestly.

"I don't follow you, sir, about it," replied Lord Verney, disconsolately; "for a man who has had an illness, he looks wonderfully well, and in good spirits and things, and as likely to live as I am, about it."

"My remarks, my lord, were directed rather to what I may term the animus—the design—of this, shall I call it, demonstration, my lord, on the part of your lordship's brother."

"Yes, of course, the animus, about it. But it strikes me he's as likely to outlive me as not."

"My lord, may I venture, in confidence and with great respect, to submit, that your lordship was hardly judicious in affording him a personal interview?"

"Why, I should hope my personal direction of that conversation, and—and things, has been such as I should wish," said the peer, very loftily.

"My lord, I have failed to make myself clear. I never questioned the consummate ability with which, no doubt, your lordship's part in that conversation was sustained. What I meant to convey is, that considering the immense distance socially between you, the habitual and unde viating eminence of your lordship's position, and the melancholy circle in which it has been your brother's lot to move, your meeting him face to face for the purpose of a personal discussion of your relations, may lead him to the absurd conclusion that your lordship is, in fact, afraid of him."

"That, sir, would be a very impertinent conclusion."

"Quite so, my lord, and render him proportionably impracticable. Now, I'll undertake to bring him to reason." The attorney was speaking very low and sternly, with contracted eyes and a darkened face. "He has been married to the lady who lives in the house adjoining, under the name of Mrs. Mervyn, and to my certain knowledge inquiries have been set in motion to ascertain whether there has not been issue of that marriage."

"You may set your mind perfectly at rest with regard to that marriage, Mr. Larkin; the whole thing was thoroughly sifted—and things—my father undertook it, the late Lord Verney, about it; and so it went on, and was quite examined, and it turned out the poor woman had been miserably deceived by a mock ceremony, and this mock thing was the whole thing, and there's nothing more; the evidence was very deplorable, and—and quite satisfactory."

"Oh! that's a great weight off my mind," said Larkin, trying to smile, and looking very much disappointed, "a great weight, my lord."

"I knew it would—yes," acquiesced Lord Verney.

"And simplifies our dealings with the other side; for if there had been a good marriage, and concealed issue male of that marriage, they would have used that circumstance to extort money."

"Well, I don't see how they could, though; for if there had been a child, about it—he'd have been heir apparent, don't you see? to the title."

"Oh!—a—yes—certainly, that's very true, my lord; but then there's none, so that's at rest."

"I've just heard," interposed Lord Verney, "I may observe, that the poor old lady, Mrs. Mervyn, is suddenly and dangerously ill."

"Oh! is she?" said Mr. Larkin very uneasily, for she was, if not his queen, at least a very valuable pawn upon his chess-board.

"Yes; the doctor thinks she's actually dying, poor old soul!"

"What a world! What is life? What is man?" murmured the attorney with a devout feeling of the profoundest vexation. "It was for this most melancholy character," he continued; "you'll pardon me, my lord, for so designating a relative of your lordship's—the Honourable Arthur Verney, who has so fraudulently, I will say, presented himself again as a living claimant. Your lordship is aware of course—I shall be going up to town possibly by the mail train to-night—that the law, if it were permitted to act, would remove that obstacle under the old sentence of the Court."

"Good God! sir, you can't possibly mean that I should have my brother caught and executed?" exclaimed Lord Verney, turning quite white.

"Quite the reverse, my lord. I'm—I'm unspeakably shocked that I should have so misconveyed myself," said Larkin, his tall bald head tinged to its top with an ingenuous

blush. "Oh no, my lord, I understand the Verney feeling too well, thank God, to suppose anything, I will say, so entirely objectionable. I said, my lord, if it were permitted, that is, allowed by simple non-interference— your lordship sees—and it is precisely because non-interference must bring about that catastrophe—for I must not conceal from your lordship the fact that there is a great deal of unpleasant talk in the town of Cardyllian already —that I purpose running up to town to-night. There is a Jew firm, your lordship is aware, who have a very heavy judgment against him, and the persons of that persuasion are so interlaced, as I may say, in matters of business, that I should apprehend a communication to them from Goldshed and Levi, who, by-the-by, to my certain knowledge—what a world it is!—have a person here actually watching Mr. Dingwell, or in other words, the unhappy but Honourable Arthur Verney, in their interest." (This was in effect true, but the name of this person, which he did not care to disclose, was Josiah Larkin.) "If I were on the spot, I think I know a way effectually to stop all action of that sort."

"You think they'd arrest him, about it?" said Lord Verney.

"Certainly, my lord."

"It is very much to be deprecated," said Lord Verney.

"And, my lord, if you will agree to place the matter quite in my hands, and peremptorily to decline on all future occasions, conceding a personal interview, I'll stake my professional character, I effect a satisfactory compromise."

"I—I don't know—I don't see a compromise—there's nothing that I see, to settle," said Lord Verney.

"Every thing, my lord. Pardon me—your lordship mentioned that, in point of fact, you are no longer Lord Verney; that being so—technically, of course—measures must be taken—in short, a—a quiet arrangement with your lordship's brother, to prevent any disturbance, and I undertake to effect it, my lord; the nature of which will be to prevent the return of the title to abeyance, and of the estates to the management of the trustees,

whose claim for mesne rates and the liquidation of the mortgage, I need not tell your lordship, would be ruinous to you."

"Why, sir—Mr. Larkin—I can hardly believe, sir—you can't mean, or think it possible, sir, that I should lend myself to a deception, and—and sit in the House of Peers by a fraud, sir! I'd much rather die in the debtor's prison, about it; and I consider myself dishonoured by having involuntarily heard such an—an idea."

Poor, pompous, foolish Lord Verney stood up, so dignified and stern in the light of his honest horror, that Mr. Larkin, who despised him utterly, quailed before a phenomenon he could not understand.

Nothing confounded our friend Larkin, as a religious man, so much as discovering, after he had a little unmasked, that his client would not follow, and left him, as once or twice had hap pened, alone with his dead villanous suggestion, to account for it how he could.

"Oh dear!—surely, my lord, your lordship did not imagine," said Mr. Larkin, doing his best, "I was—I, in fact—I supposed a case. I only went the length of saying that I think—and with sorrow I think it—that your lordship's brother has in view an adjustment of his claim, and meant to extract, I fear, a sum of money when he disclosed himself, and conferred with your lordship. I meant, merely, of course, that as he thought this I would let him think it, and allow him to disclose his plans, with a view, of course, to deal with that information—first, of course, with a view to your lordship's honour, and next your lordship's safety; but if your lordship did not see your way clearly to it"——

"No, I don't see—I think it most objectionable—about it. I know all that concerns me; and I have written to two official persons—one, I may say, the Minister himself—apprizing them of the actual position of the title, and asking some information as to how I should proceed in order to divest myself of it and the estates."

"Just what I should have expected from your lordship's exquisite sense of honour," said Mr. Larkin, with a deferential bow, and a countenance black as thunder.

That gigantic machine of torture which he had been building and dove-tailing, with patient villany, at Lord Verney's word fell with a crash, like an enchanted castle at its appointed spell. Well was it for Lord Verney that the instinct of honour was strong in him, and that he would not suffer his vulgar tempter to beguile him into one indefensible concealment. Had he fallen, that tempter would have been his tyrant. He would have held everything in trust for Mr. Jos. Larkin. The effigy of Lord Verney would, indeed, have stood, on state occasions, robed and coronetted, with his order, driven down to the House, and sat there among hereditary senators; all around him, would have been brilliant and luxurious, and the tall bald head of the Christian attorney would have bowed down before the out-going and the in-coming of the phantom. But the real peer would have sat cold and dark enough, in Jos. Larkin's dungeon—his robe on the wall, a shirt of Nessus—his coronet on a nail, a Neapolitan "cap of silence"—quite tame under the rat-like eye of a terror from which he never could escape.

There was a silence here for some time. Lord Verney leaned back with closed eyes, exhausted. Mr. Larkin looked down on the carpet smiling faintly, and with the tip of one finger scratching his bald head gently. The attorney spoke —"Might I suggest, for the safety of your lordship's unhappy brother, that the matter should be kept strictly quiet—just for a day or two, until I shall have made arrangements for his—may I term it—escape."

"Certainly," said Lord Verney, looking away a little. "Yes—that must, of course, be arranged; and—and this marriage—I shall leave that decision entirely in the hands of the young lady." Lord Verney was a little agitated. "And I think, Mr. Larkin, I have said everything at present. Good evening."

As Mr. Larkin traversed the hall of Malory, scratching the top of his bald head with one finger, in profound and black rumination, I am afraid his thoughts and feelings amounted to a great deal of cursing and swearing.

"Sweet evening," he observed suddenly to the surprised servant who opened the door for him. He was now standing at the threshold, with his hands expanded as if he expected rain, and smiling villianously upward toward the stars.

"Sweet evening," he repeated, and then biting his lip and looking down for a while on the gravel, he descended and walked round the corner to the Steward's House.

The Tenants of Malory Vol.III by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

CHAPTER XXI.

MR. LARKIN'S TWO MOVES.

The hatch of the Steward's House stood open, and Mr. Larkin entered. There was a girl's voice crying in the room next the hall, and he opened the door.

The little girl was sobbing with her apron to her eyes, and hearing the noise she lowered it and looked at the door, when the lank form of the bald attorney and his sinister face peering in met her eyes, and arrested her lamentation with a new emotion.

"It's only I—Mr. Larkin," said he. He liked announcing himself wherever he went. "I want to know how Mrs. Mervyn is now."

"Gone dead, sir—about a quarter of an hour ago;" and the child's lamentation recommenced.

"Ha! very sad. The doctor here?"

"He's gone, sir."

"And you're certain she's dead?"

"Yes, sure, sir," and she sobbed on.

"Stop that," he said, sternly, "just a moment—thanks. I want to see Mr. Dingwell, the old gentleman who has been staying here—where is he?"

"In the drawing-room, sir, please," said the child, a good deal frightened. And to the drawing-room he mounted.

Light was streaming from a door a little open, and a fragrance also of a peculiar tobacco, which he recognised as that of Mr. Dingwell's chibouque. There was a sound of feet upon the floor of the room above, which Mr. Larkin's ear received as those of persons employed in arranging the dead body.

I would be perhaps wronging Mr. Dingwell, as I still call him, to say that he smoked like a man perfectly indifferent. On the contrary, his countenance looked lowering and furious—so much so that Mr. Larkin removed his hat, a courtesy which he had intended studiously to omit.

"Oh! Mr. Dingwell," said he, "I need not introduce myself."

"No, I prefer your withdrawing yourself and shutting the door," said Dingwell.

"Yes, in a moment, sir. I merely wish to mention that Lord Verney—I mean your brother, sir—has fully apprized me of the conversation with which you thought it prudent to favour him."

"You'd rather have been the medium yourself, I fancy. Something to be made of such a situation? Hey! but you shan't."

"I don't know what you mean, sir, by something to be made. If I chose to mention your name and abode in the city, sir, you'd not enjoy the power of insulting others long."

"Pooh, sir! I've got your letter and my brother's secret. I know my strength. I'm steering the fire-ship that will blow you all up, if I please; and you talk of flinging a squib at me, you blockhead! I tell you, sir, you'll make nothing of me; and now you may as well withdraw. There are two things in this house you don't like, though you'll have enough of them one day; there's death up stairs, sir, and some thing very like the devil here."

Mr. Larkin thought he saw signs of an approaching access of the Dingwell mania, so he made his most dignified bow, and at the door remarked, "I take my leave, sir, and when next we meet I trust I may find you in a very different state of mind, and one more favourable to business."

He had meditated a less covert sneer and menace, but modified his speech prudently as he uttered it; but there was still quite enough that was sinister in his face, as he closed the door, to strike Mr. Dingwell's suspicion.

"Only I've got that fellow in my pocket, I'd say he was bent on mischief; but he's in my pocket; and suppose he did, no great matter, after all—only dying. I'm not gathering up my strength; no—I shall never be the same man again—and life so insipid—and that poor old doll up stairs. So many things going on under the stars, all ending so!"

Yes—so many things. There was Cleve, chief mourner to-day, chatting now wonderfully gaily, with a troubled heart, and a kind of growing terror, to that foolish victim who no more suspected him than he did the resurrection of his uncle Arthur, smoking his chibouque only a mile away.

There, too, far away, is a pale, beautiful young mother, sitting on the bed-side of her sleeping boy, weeping silently, as she looks on his happy face, and—thinks.

Mr. Dingwell arrayed in travelling costume, suddenly appeared before Lord Verney again.

"I'm not going to plague you—only this. I've an idea I shall lose my life if I don't go to London to-night, and I must catch the mail train. Tell your people to put the horses to your brougham, and drop me at Llwynan."

Lord Verney chose to let his brother judge for himself in this matter, being only too glad to get rid of him.

Shrieking through tunnels, thundering through lonely valleys, gliding over wide, misty plains, spread abroad like lakes, the mail train bore Arthur Verney, and also—each unconscious of the other's vicinity—Mr. Jos. Larkin toward London.

Mr. Larkin had planned a checkmate in two moves. He had been brooding over it in his mufflers, sometimes with his eyes shut, sometimes with his eyes open—all night, in the corner of his carriage. When he stepped out in the morning, with his despatch-box in his hand, whom should he meet in the cold gray light upon the platform, full front, but Mr. Dingwell. He was awfully startled.

Dingwell had seen him, too; Larkin had felt, as it were, his quick glance touch him, and he was sure that Dingwell had observed his momentary but significant change of countenance. He, therefore, walked up to him, touched him on the arm, and said, with a smile—

"I thought, sir, I recognized you. I trust you have an attendant? Can I do anything for you? Cold, this morning. Hadn't you better draw your muffler up a little about your face?" There was a significance about this last suggestion which Mr. Dingwell could not mistake, and he complied. "Running down again to Malory in a few days, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Dingwell.

"So shall I, and if quite convenient to you, I should wish, sir, to talk that little matter over much more carefully, and—can I call a cab for you? I should look in upon you to-day only I must be at Brighton, not to return till to-morrow, and very busy then, too."

They parted. Dingwell did not like it.

"He's at mischief. I've thought of every thing, and I can't see any thing that would answer his game. I don't like his face."

Dingwell felt very oddly. It was all like a dream; an unaccountable horror overcame him. He sent out for a medicine that day, which the apothecary refused to give to Mrs. Rumble. But he wrote an explanatory note alleging that he was liable to fits, and so got back just a little, at which he pooh'd and psha'd, and wrote to some other apothecaries, and got together what he wanted, and told Mrs. Rumble he was better.

He had his dinner as usual in his snuggery in Rosemary Court, and sent two letters to the post by Mrs. Rumble. That to Lord Verney contained Larkin's one unguarded letter inviting him to visit England, and with all the caution compatible with being intelligible, but still not enough—suggesting the audacious game which had been so successfully played. A brief and pointed commentary in Mr. Dingwell's handwriting, accompanied this.

The other enclosed to Wynne Williams, to whose countenance he had taken a fancy; the certificate of his marriage to Rebecca Mervyn, and a reference to the Rev. Thomas Bartlett; and charged him to make use of it to quiet any unfavourable rumours about that poor lady, who was the only human being he believed who had ever cared much about him.

When Wynne Williams opened this letter he lifted up his hands in wonder.

"A miracle, by heaven!" he exclaimed. "The most providential and marvellous interposition—the only thing we wanted!"

"Perhaps I was wrong to break with that villain, Larkin," brooded Mr. Dingwell. "We must make it up when we meet. I don't like it. When he saw me this morning his face looked like the hangman's."

It was now evening, and having made a very advantageous bargain with the Hebrew gentleman who had that heavy judgment against the late Hon. Arthur Verney, an outlaw, &c.—Mr. Lar kin played his first move, and amid the screams of Mrs. Rumble, old Dingwell was arrested on a warrant against the Hon. Arthur Verney, and went away, protesting it was a false arrest, to the Fleet.

Things now looked very awful, and he wrote to Mr. Larkin at his hotel, begging of him to come and satisfy "some fools" that he was Mr. Dingwell. But Jos. Larkin was not at his inn. He had not been there that day, and Dingwell began to think that Jos. Larkin had, perhaps, told the truth for once, and was actually at Brighton. Well, one night in the Fleet was not very much; Larkin would appear next morning, and Larkin could, of

course, manage the question of identity, and settle everything easily, and they would shake hands, and make it up. Mr. Dingwell wondered why they had not brought him to a sponging-house, but direct to the prison. But as things were done under the advice of Mr. Jos. Larkin, in whom I have every confidence, I suppose there was a reason.

Mr. Dingwell was of a nature which danger excites rather than cows. The sense of adventure was uppermost. The situation by an odd reaction stimulated his spirits, and he grew frolicsome. He felt a recklessness that recalled his youth. He went down to the flagged yard, and made an acquaintance or two, one in slippers and dressing-gown, another in an evening coat buttoned across his breast, and without much show of shirt. "Very amusing and gentlemanlike men," he thought, "though out at elbows a little;" and not caring for solitude, he invited them to his room, to supper; and they sat up late; and the gentleman in the black evening coat—an actor in difficulties—turned out to be a clever mimic, an inimitable singer of comic songs, and an admirable raconteur—"a very much cleverer man than the Prime Minister, egad!" said Mr. Dingwell.

One does see very clever fellows in odd situations. The race is not always to the swift. The moral qualities have something to do with it, and industry everything; and thus very dull fellows are often in very high places. The curse implies a blessing to the man who accepts its condition. "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread." Labour is the curse and the qualification, also; and so the dullard who toils shall beat the genius who idles.

Dingwell enjoyed it vastly, and lent the pleasant fellow a pound, and got to his bed at three o'clock in the morning, glad to have cheated so much of the night. But tired as he was by his journey of the night before, he could not sleep till near six o'clock, when he fell into a doze, and from it he was wakened oddly.

It was by Mr. Jos. Larkin's "second move." Mr. Larkin has great malice, but greater prudence. No one likes better to give the man who has disappointed him a knock, the condition being that he disturbs no interest of his own by so doing. Where there is a proper consideration, no man is more forgiving. Where interest and revenge point the same way, he hits very hard indeed.

Mr. Larkin had surveyed the position carefully. The judgment of the criminal court was still on record, nullum tempus occurrit, &c. It was a case in which a pardon was very

unlikely. There was but one way of placing the head of the Honourable Kiffyn Fulke Verney firmly in the vacant coronet, and of establishing him, Jos. Larkin Esq., of the Lodge, in the valuable management of the estates and affairs of that wealthy peerage. It was by dropping the extinguisher upon the flame of that solitary lamp, the Hon. Arthur Verney. Of course Jos. Larkin's hand must not appear. He himself communicated with no official person. That was managed easily and adroitly.

He wrote, too, from Brighton to Lord Verney at Malory, the day after his interview with that ex-nobleman, expressing the most serious unea siness, in consequence of having learned from a London legal acquaintance at Brighton, that a report prevailed in certain quarters of the city, that the person styling himself Mr. Dingwell had proved to be the Hon. Arthur Verney, and that the Verney peerage was, in consequence, once more on the shelf. "I treated this report slightly, in very serious alarm notwithstanding for your brother's safety," wrote Mr. Larkin, "and your lordship will pardon my expressing my regret that you should have mentioned, until the Hon. Arthur Verney had secured an asylum outside England, the fact of his being still living, which has filled the town unfortunately with conjecture and speculation of a most startling nature. I was shocked to see him this morning on the public platform of the railway, where, very possibly, he was recognised. It is incredible how many years are needed to obliterate recollection by the hand of time. I quietly entreated him to conceal his face a little, a precaution which, I am happy to add, he adopted. I am quite clear that he should leave London as expeditiously and secretly as possible, for some sequestered spot in France, where he can, without danger, await your lordship's decision as to plans for his ultimate safety. May I entreat your lordship's instantaneous attention to this most urgent and alarming subject. I shall be in town to-morrow evening, where my usual address will reach me, and I shall, without a moment's delay, apply myself to carry out whatever your lordship's instructions may direct."

"Yes, he has an idea of my judgment—about it," said Lord Verney when he had read this letter, "and a feeling about the family—very loyal—yes, he's a very loyal person; I shall turn it over, I will—I'll write to him."

Mr. Dingwell, however, had been wakened by two officers with a warrant by which they were ordered to take his body and consign it to a gaoler. Mr. Dingwell read it, and his instinct told him that Jos. Larkin was at the bottom of his misfortune, and his heart sank.

"Very well, gentlemen," said he, briskly, "very good; it is not for me; my name is Dingwell, and my solicitor is Mr. Jos. Larkin, and all will be right. I must get my clothes on, if you please."

And he sat up in the bed, and bit his lip, and raised his eyebrows, and shrugged his shoulders drearily.

"Poor linnet—ay, ay—she was not very wise, but the only one—I've been a great fool—let us try."

There came over his face a look of inexpressible fatigue and something like resignation—and he looked all at once ten years older.

"I'll be with you, I'll be with you, gentlemen," he said very gently.

There was a flask with some noyeau in it, relics of last night's merry-making, to which these gentlemen took the liberty of helping themselves.

When they looked again at their prisoner he was lying nearly on his face, in a profound sleep, his chin on his chest.

"Choice stuff—smell o' nuts in it," said constable Ruddle, licking his lips. "Git up, sir; ye can take a nap when you git there."

There was a little phial in the old man's fingers; the smell of kernels was stronger about the pillow. "The old man of the mountains" was in a deep sleep, the deepest of all sleeps—death.

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CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION.

And now all things with which, in these pages, we are concerned, are come to that point at which they are best settled in a very few words.

The one point required to establish Sedley's claim to the peerage—the validity of the marriage—had been supplied by old Arthur Verney, as we have seen, the night before his death.

The late Lord Verney of unscrupulous memory, Arthur's father, had, it was believed, induced Captain Sedley, in whose charge the infant had been placed, to pretend its death, and send the child in reality to France, where it had been nursed and brought up as his. He was dependent for his means of existence upon his employment as manager of his estates, under Lord Verney; and he dared not, it was thought, from some brief expressions in a troubled letter among the papers placed by old Mrs. Mervyn in Wynne Williams's hands, notwithstanding many qualms of conscience, disobey Lord Verney. And he was quieted further by the solemn assurance that the question of the validity of the pretended marriage had been thoroughly sifted, and that it was proved to have been a nullity.

He carefully kept, however, such papers as were in his possession respecting the identity of the child, and added a short statement of his own. If that old Lord Verney had suspected the truth that the marriage was valid, as it afterwards proved, he was the only member of his family who did so. The rest had believed honestly the story that it was fraudulent and illusory. The apparent proof of the child's death had put an end to all interest in further investigating the question, and so the matter rested, until time and events brought all to light.

The dream that made Malory beautiful in my eyes is over. The image of that young fair face—the beautiful lady of the chestnut hair and great hazel eyes haunts its dark woods less palpably, and the glowing shadow fades, year by year, away.

In sunny Italy, where her mother was born, those eyes having looked their last on Cleve and on "the boy," and up, in clouded hope to heaven—were closed, and the slender bones repose. "I think, Cleve, you'll sometimes remember your poor Margaret. I know you'll always be very kind to the little boy—our darling, and if you marry again, Cleve, she'll not be a trouble to you, as I have been; and you said, you'll sometimes think of me. You'll forget all my jealousy, and temper, and folly, and you'll say—'Ah, she loved me.'"

And these last words return, though the lips that spoke them come no more; and he is very kind to that handsome boy—frank, generous, and fiery like her, with the great hazel eyes and beautiful tints, and the fine and true affections. At times comes something in the smile, in the tone as he talks, in the laugh that thrills his heart with a strange yearning and agony. Vain remorse! vain the yearnings; for the last words are spoken and heard; not one word more while the heavens remain, and mortals people the earth!

Sedley—Lord Verney we should style him—will never be a politician, but he has turned out a thoroughly useful business-like and genial country gentleman. Agnes, now Lady Verney, is, I will not say how happy; I only hope not too happy.

Need I say that the cloud that lowered for a while over the house of Hazelden has quite melted into air, and that the sun never shone brighter on that sweet landscape? Miss Etherage is a great heiress now, for Sedley, as for sake of clearness I call him still, refused a dot with his wife, and that handsome inheritance will all belong to Charity, who is as emphatic, obstinate, and kind-hearted as ever. The admiral has never gone down the mill-road since his introduction to the Honourable Kiffyn Fulke Verney at the foot of the hill. He rolls in his chair safely along the level uplands, and amuses himself with occasional inspections of Ware through his telescope; and tells little Agnes, when he sees her, what she was doing on a certain day, and asks who the party with the phaeton and grays, who called on Thursday at two o'clock, were, and similar questions; and likes to hear the news, and they say is growing more curious as years increase. He and Charity have revived their acquaintance with écarté and piquet, and play for an hour or so very snugly in the winter evenings. Miss Charity is a little cross when she loses, and won't let old Etherage play more than his allotted number of games; and locks up the cards; and is growing wife-like with the admiral; but is quite devoted to him, and will make him live, I think, six years longer than any one else could.

Sedley wrote a very kind letter to the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney, to set his mind at ease about mesne rates, and any other claims whatso ever, that might arise against him, in consequence of his temporary tenure of the title and estates, and received from Vichy a very affronted reply, begging him to take whatever course he might be advised, as he distinctly objected to being placed under any kind of personal obligation, and trusted that he would not seek to place such a construction upon a compulsory respect for the equities of the situation, and the decencies enforced by public opinion; and he declared his readiness to make any sacrifice to pay him whatever his strict legal rights entitled him to the moment he had made up his mind to exact them.

The Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney is, of course, quite removed from his sphere of usefulness and distinction—parliamentary life—and spends his time upon the Continent, and is remarkably reserved and impertinent, and regarded with very general respect and hatred.

Sedley has been very kind, for Cleve's sake, to old Sir Booth Fanshawe, with whom he is the only person on earth who has an influence.

He wrote to the baronet, who was then in Paris, disclosing the secret of Cleve's marriage. The old man burst into one of his frenzies, and wrote forthwith a frantic letter direct to his mortal enemy, the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney, railing at Cleve, railing at him, and calling upon him, in a tone of preposterous menace, to punish his nephew! Had he been left to himself, I dare say he would have made Cleve feel his resentment. But thus bullied he said—"Upon my life I'll do no such thing. I'm in the habit of thinking before I take steps, about it—with Booth Fanshawe's permission, I'll act according to my own judgment, and I dare say the girl has got some money, and if it were not good for Cleve in some way, that old person would not be so angry." And so it ended for the present.

The new Lord Verney went over expressly to see him, and in the same conversation, in which he arranged some law business in the friendliest way, and entirely to Sir Booth Fanshawe's satisfaction, he discussed the question of Cleve's marriage. At first the baronet was incensed; but when the hurly-burly was done he came to see, with our friend Tom, whose peerage gave his opinion weight on the subject of marriages and family relations, that the alliance was not so bad—on the contrary, that it had some very strong points to recommend it.

The Rev. Isaac Dixie has not got on in the Church, and is somehow no favourite at Ware. The Hon. Miss Caroline Oldys is still unmarried, and very bitter on the Verneys, uncle and nephew; people don't understand why, though the reader may. Perhaps she thinks that the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney ought to have tried again, and was too ready to accept a first refusal. Her hatred of Cleve I need not explain.

With respect to Mr. Larkin, I cite an old Dutch proverb, which says, "Those who swim deep and climb high seldom die in their beds." In its fair figurative sense it applies satisfactorily to the case of that profound and aspiring gentleman who, as some of my readers are aware, fell at last from a high round of the ladder of his ambition, and was drowned in the sea beneath. No—not drowned; that were too painless, and implies extinction. He fell, rather, upon that black flooring of rock that rims the water, and was smashed, but not killed.

It was, as they will remember, after his introduction to the management of the affairs of the Wylder, Brandon, and Lake families, and on the eve, to all appearance, of the splendid consummation of his subtle and audacious schemes, that in a moment the whole scaffolding of his villany gave way, and he fell headlong—thenceforth, helpless, sprawling, backbroken, living on from year to year, and eating metaphoric dust, like the great old reptile who is as yet mangled but not killed.

Happy fly the years at Ware. Many fair children have blessed the union of pretty Agnes Etherage and the kindly heir of the Verneys. Cleve does not come himself; he goes little to any gay country houses. A kind of lassitude or melancholy is settling and deepening upon him. To one passage of his life he looks back with a quickly averted glance, and an unchanging horror—the time when he was saved from a great crime, as it were, by the turning of a die. "Those three dreadful weeks," he says within himself, "when I was mad!" But his handsome son is constantly at Ware, where he is beloved by its master and mistress like one of their own children. One day Lord Verney ran across to Malory in his yacht, this boy with him. It was an accidental tête-à-tête, and he talked to the boy a great deal of his "poor mama," as he sauntered through the sunny woods of Malory; and he brought him to the refectory, and pointed out to him from the window, the spot where he had seen her, with her trowel in her hand, as the morning sun threw the shadow of the spreading foliage over her, and he described her beauty to him; and he walked down with him to Cardyllian, the yacht was appointed to meet them at the pier,

and brought him into the church, to the pew where he was placed, and showed him the seat where she and Anne Sheckleton sat on the Sunday when he saw her first, and looked for a while silently into that void shadow, for it is pleasant and yet sad to call up sometimes those old scenes and images that have made us feel, when we were younger; and somehow good Lady Verney did not care to hear her husband upon this theme.

So for the present the story of the Verneys of Malory is told. Years hence, when we shall not be here to read it, the same scenes and family may have a new story to tell; for time, with his shuttle and the threads of fate, is ever weaving new romance.


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