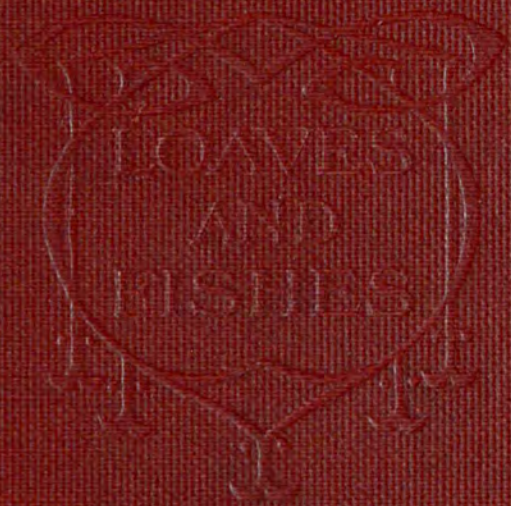
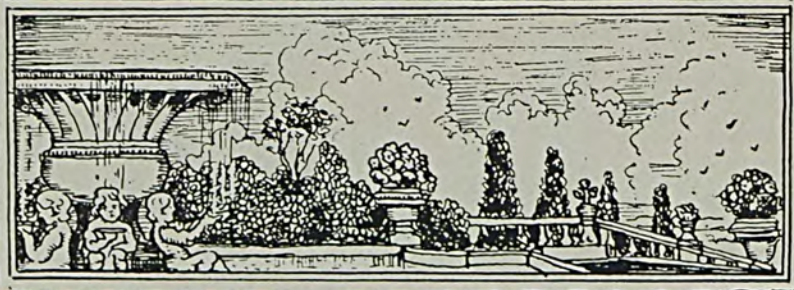

LOAVES
AND
FISHES

L.F. "The goatherd stood before him."—Chap. 1.

Loaves and Fishes

Bernard Capes



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CONTENTS.

A GALLOWS-BIRD.

In February of the year 1809, when the French were sat down before Saragossa—then enduring its second and more terrific siege within a period of six months—it came to the knowledge of the Duc d'Abrantes, at that time the General commanding, that his army, though undoubtedly the salt of the earth, was yet so little sufficient to itself in the matter of seasoning, that it was reduced to the necessity of flavouring its soup with the saltpetre out of its own cartridges. In this emergency, d'Abrantes sent for a certain Ducos, captain on the staff of General Berthier, but at present attached to a siege train before the doomed town, and asked him if he knew whence, if anywhere in the vicinity, it might be possible to make good the deficiency.

Now this Eugène Ducos was a very progressive evolution of the times, hatched by the rising sun, emerged stinging and splendid from the exotic quagmires of the past. A facile linguist, by temperament and early training an artist, he had flown naturally to the field of battle as to that field most fertile of daring new effects, whose surprises called for record rather than analysis. It was for him to collect the impressions which, later, duller wits should classify. And, in the meantime, here he was at twenty a captain of renown, and always a creature of the most unflagging resourcefulness.

"You were with Lefebvre-Desnouettes in Aragon last year?" demanded Junot.

"I was, General; both before the siege and during it."

"You heard mention of salt mines in this neighbourhood?"

"There were rumours of them, sir—amongst the hills of Ulebo; but it was never our need to verify the rumours."

"Take a company, now, and run them to earth. I will give you a week."

"Pardon me, General; I need no company but my own, which is ever the safest colleague."

Junot glared demoniacally. He was already verging on the madness which was presently to destroy him.

"The devil!" he shouted. "You shall answer for that assurance! Go alone, sir, since you are so obliging, and find salt; and at your peril be killed before reporting the result to me. Bones of God! is every skipjack with a shoulder-knot to better my commands?"

Ducos saluted, and wheeled impassive. He knew that in a few days Marshal Lannes was to supplant this maniac.

. . . . . .

Up and away amongst the intricate ridges of the mountains, where the half-unravelled knots of the Pyrenees flow down in threads, or clustered threads, which are combed by and by into the plains south of Saragossa, a dusky young goatherd loitered among the chestnut trees on a hot afternoon. This boy's beauty was of a supernal order. His elastic young cheeks glowed with colour; his eyebrows were resolute bows; his lips, like a pretty phrase of love, were set between dimples like inverted commas. And, as he stood, he coquetted like Dinorah to his own shadow, chasséd to it, spoke to it, upbraiding or caressing, as it answered to his movement on the ground before him:

"Ah, pretty one! ah, shameless! Art thou the shadow of the girl that Eugenio loved? Fie, fie! thou wouldst betray this poor Anita—mock the round limbs and little feet that will not look their part. Yet, betray her to her love returning, and Anita will fall

and kiss thee on her knees—kiss the very shadow of Eugenio's love. Ah, little shadow! take wings and fly to him, who promised quickly to return. Say I am good but sad, awaiting him; say that Anita suffers, but is patient. He will remember then, and come. No shadow of disguise shall blind him to his love. Go, go, before I repent and hold thee, jealous that mine own shadow should run before to find his lips."

She stooped, and, with a fantastic gesture, threw her soul upon the winds; then rose, and leaned against the tree, and began to sing, and sigh and murmur softly:

"At the gate of heaven are sold brogues
For the little bare-footed angel rogues—

Ah, little dear mother! it is the seventh month, and the sign is still delayed. No baby, no lover. Alack! why should he return to me, who am a barren olive! The husbandman asks a guerdon for his care. Give me my little doll, Santissima, or I will be naughty and drink holy water: give me the shrill wee voice, which pierces to the father's heart, when even passion loiters. Ah, come to me, Eugenio, my Eugenio!"

She raised her head quickly on the word, and her heart leaped. It was to hear the sound of a footstep, on the stones far below, coming up the mountain side. She looked to her shirt and jacket. Ragged as they were, undeveloped as was the figure within them, she had been so jealous a housewife that there was not in all so much as an eyelet hole to attract a peeping Tom. Now, leaving her goats amongst the scattered boulders of the open, she backed into the groves, precautionally, but a little reluctant, because in her heart she was curious.

The footsteps came on toilfully, and presently the man who was responsible for them hove into sight. He wore the dress of an English officer, save for the shepherd's felt hat on his head; but his scarlet jacket

was knotted loosely by the sleeves about his throat, in order to the disposition of a sling which held his left arm crookt in a bloody swathe. He levered himself up with a broken spear-shaft; but he was otherwise weaponless. A pistol, in Ducos's creed, was the argument of a fool. He carried *his* ammunition in his brains.

Having reached a little plateau, irregular with rocks shed from the cliffs above, he sat down within the shadow of a grove of chestnut and carob trees, and sighed, and wiped his brow, and nodded to all around and below him.

"Yes, and yes, and of a truth," thought he: "here is the country of my knowledge. And yonder, deep and far amongst its myrtles and mulberries, crawls the Ebro; and to my right, a browner clod amongst the furrows of the valleys, heaves up the ruined monastery of St. Ildefonso, which Daguenet sacked, the radical; whilst I occupied (ah, the week of sweet malvoisie and sweeter passion!) the little inn at the junction of the Pampeluna and Saragossa roads. And what has become of Anita of the inn? Alack! if my little *fille de joie* were but here to serve me now!"

The goatherd slipped round the shoulder of a rock and stood before him, breathing hard. Her black curls were, for all the world, bandaged, as it might be, with a yellow napkin (though they were more in the way to give than take wounds), and crowned rakishly with a dusky sombrero. She wore a kind of gaskins on her legs, loose, so as to reveal the bare knees and a little over; and across her shoulders was slung a sunburnt shawl, which depended in a bib against her chest.

Now the one stood looking down and the other up, their visions magnetically meeting and blending, till the eyes of the goatherd were delivered of very stars of rapture.

Was this a spirit, thought Ducos, summoned of his

hot and necessitous desire? But the other had no such misgiving. All in a moment she had fallen on her brown knees before him, and was pitifully kissing his bandaged arm, while she strove to moan and murmur out the while her ecstasy of gratitude.

"Nariguita!" he murmured, rallying as if from a dream; "Nariguita!"

She laughed and sobbed.

"Ah, the dear little happy name from thy lips! A thousand times will I repeat it to myself, but never as thou wouldst say it. And now! Yes, Nariguita, Eugenio—thine own 'little nose'—thy child, thy baby, who never doubted that this day would come—O darling of my soul, that it would come!"—(she clung to him, and hid her face)—"Eugenio! though the blossom of our love delays its fruitage!"

He smiled, recovered from his first astonishment. Ministers of coincidence! In all the fantastic convolutions of war, the merry, the dance-maccabre, should not love's reunions have a place? It was nothing out of that context that here was he chanced again, and timely, upon that same sweet instrument which he had once played on, and done with, and thrown aside, careless of its direction. Now he had but to stoop and reclaim it, and the discarded strings, it seemed, were ready as heretofore to answer to his touch with any melody he listed.

He caressed her with real delight. She was something more than lovable. He made himself a very Judas to her lips.

"Anita, my little Anita!" he began glowingly; but she took him up with a fevered eagerness, answering the question of his eyes.

"So long ago, ah Dios! And thou wert gone; and the birds were silent; and under the heavy sky my father called me to him. He held a last letter of thine, which had missed my hands for his. Love, sick at our parting, had betrayed us. Oh, the letter!

how I swooned to be denied it! He was for killing me, a traitor. Well, I could not help but be. But Tia Joachina had pity on me, and dressed me as you see, and smuggled me to the hills, that I might at least have a chance to live without suffering wrong. And, behold! the heavens smiled upon me, knowing my love; and Señor Cangrejo took me to herd his goats. For seven months—for seven long, faithful months; until the sweetest of my heart's flock should return to pasture in my bosom. And now he has come, my lamb, my prince, even as he promised. He has come, drawing me to him over the hills, following the lark's song of his love as it dropped to earth far forward of his steps. Eugenio! Oh, ecstasy! Thou hast dared this for my sake?"

"Child," answered the admirable Ducos, "I should have dared only in breaking my word. *Un honnête homme n'a que sa parole.* That is the single motto for a poor captain, Nariguita. And who is this Señor Cangrejo?"

Some terror, offspring of his question, set her clinging to him once more.

"What dost thou here?" she cried, with immediate inconsistency—"a lamb among the wolves! Eugenio!"

"Eh!"—he took her up, with an air of bewilderment. "I am Sir Zhones, the English capitaine, though it loose me your favour, mamselle. Wat! Damn eet, I say!"

She fell away, staring at him; then in a moment gathered, and leapt to him again between tears and laughter.

"But this?" she asked, her eyes glistening; and she touched the bandage.

"Ah! that," he answered. "Why, I was wounded, and taken prisoner by the French, you understand? Also, I escaped from my captors. It comes, blood and splint and all, from the smashed arm of a sabreur, who, indeed, had no longer need of it."

"For the love of Christ!" she cried in a panic. "Come away into the trees, where none will observe us!"

"Bah! I have no fear, I," said Ducos. But he rose, nevertheless, with a smile, and, catching up the goatherd, bore her into the shadows. There, sitting by her side, he assured her, the rogue, of the impatience with which he had anticipated, of the eagerness with which he had run to realise this longed-for moment. The escapade had only been rendered possible, he said truthfully, by the opportune demand for salt. Doubtless she would help him, for love's sake, to justify the venture to his General?

But, at that, she stared at him, troubled, and her lip began to quiver.

"Ah, God!" she cried; "then it was not I in the first place! Go thy ways, love; but for pity's heart-sake let me weep a little. Yes, yes, there is salt in the mountains, that I know, and where the caves lie. But there are also Cangrejo—whom you French ruined and made a madman—and a hundred like him, wild-cats hidden amongst the leaves. And there, too, are the homeless friars of St. Ildefonso; and, dear body of Christ! the tribunal of terror, the junta of women, who are the worst of all—lynx-eyed demons."

He smiled indulgently. Her terror amused him.

"Well, well," he said; "well, well. And what, then, is this junta?"

"It is a scourge," she whispered, shivering, "for traitors and for spies. It gathers nightly, at sunset, in the dip yonder, and there waters with blood its cross of death. This very evening, Cangrejo tells me——"

She broke off, cuddled closer to her companion, and clasping her hands and shrugging up her shoulders to him, went on awfully:

"Eugenio, there was a wagon-load of piastres coming secretly for Saragossa by the Tolosa road. It was badly convoyed. One of your generals got

scent of it. The guard had time to hide their treasure and disperse, but him whom they thought had betrayed them the tribunal of women claimed, and to-night——"

"Well, he will receive his wages. And where is the treasure concealed?"

"Ah! that I do not know."

Ducos got to his feet, and stretched and yawned.

"I have a fancy to see this meeting-place of the tribunal. Wilt thou lead me to it, Nariguita?"

"Mother of God, thou art mad!"

"Then I must go alone, like a madman."

"Eugenio, it is cursing and accurst. None will so much as look into it by day; and, at dusk, only when franked by the holy church."

"So greatly the better. Adios, Nariguita!"

It took them half an hour, descending cautiously, and availing themselves of every possible shelter of bush and rock, to reach a strangely formed amphitheatre set stark and shallow amongst the higher swales of the valley, but so overhung with scrub of myrtle and wild pomegranate as to be only distinguishable, and that scarcely, from above. A ragged track, mounting from the lower levels into this hollow, tailed off, and was attenuated into a point where it took a curve of the rocks at a distance below.

As Ducos, approaching the rim, pressed through the thicket, a toss of black crows went up from the mouth ahead of him, like cinders of paper spouted from a chimney. He looked over. The brushwood ceased at the edge of a considerable pit, roughly circular in shape, whose sides, of bare sloping sand, met and flattened at the bottom into an extended platform. Thence arose a triangular gibbet, a very rack in a devil's larder, all about which a hoard of little pitchy bird scullions were busy with the joints. Holy mother, how they squabbled, and flapped at one another with their sleeves, it seemed! The two carcasses which hung there appeared, for all their

heavy pendulosity, to reel and rock with laughter, nudging one another in eyeless merriment.

Ducos mentally calculated the distance to the gallows below from any available coign of concealment.

"One could not hide close enough to hear anything," he murmured, shaking his head in aggravation; "and this junta of ladies—it will probably talk. What if it were to discuss that very question of the piastres? Nariguita, will you go and be my little reporter at the ceremony?"

Anita, crouching in the brush behind him, whispered terrified: "It is impossible. They admit none but priests and women."

"And are not you a woman, most beautiful?"

"God forbid!" she said. "I am the little goatherd Ambrosio."

He stood some moments frowning. A scheme, daring and characteristic, was beginning to take shape in his brain.

"What is that clump of rags by the gallows?" he asked, without looking round.

"It is not rags; it is rope, Eugenio."

He thought again.

"And when do they come to hang this rascal?" he said.

"It is always at dusk. Oh, dear mother!" she whimpered, for the young man had suddenly slipped between the branches, and was going swiftly and softly down the pit-side.

Already the basin of sand was filled with the shadows from the hills. Ducos approached the gibbet. The last of the birds remaining arose and dispersed, quarrelling with nothing so much as the sunlight which they encountered above.

"It is an abominable task," said the aide-de-camp, looking up at the dangling bodies; "but—for the Emperor—always for the Emperor! That fellow, now, in the domino—it would make us appear of one

build. And as for complexion, why, he at least would have no eyes for the travesty. Mon Dieu! I believe it is a Providence."

There was a ladder leaned against the third and empty beam. He put it into position for the cloaked figure, and ran up it. The rope was hitched to a hook in the cross-piece. He must clasp and lever up his burden by main strength before he could slacken and detach the cord. Then, with an exclamation of relief, he let the body drop upon the sand beneath. He descended the ladder in excitement.

"Anita!" he called.

She had followed, and was at hand. She trembled, and was as pale as death.

"Help me," he panted—"with this—into the bush."

He had lifted *his* end by the shoulders.

"What devil possesses you? I cannot," she sobbed; "I shall die."

"Ah, Nariguita! for my sake! There is no danger if thou art brave and expeditious."

Between them they tugged and trailed their load into the dense undergrowth skirting the open track, and there let it plunge and sink. Ducos removed the domino from the body, rolling and hauling at that irreverently. Then he saw how the wretch had been pinioned, wrists and ankles, beneath.

Carrying the cloak, he hastened back to the gallows. There he cautiously selected from the surplus stock of cord a length of some twelve feet, at either end of which he formed a loop. So, mounting the ladder, over the hook he hitched this cord by one end, and then, swinging himself clear, slid down the rope until he could pass both his feet into the lower hank.

"*Voilà*!" said he. "Come up and tie me to the other with some little pieces round the waist and knees and neck."

She obeyed, weeping. Her love and her duty were to this wonder of manhood, however dreadful his

counsel. Presently, trussed to his liking, he bade her fetch the brigand's cloak and button it over all.

"Now," said he, "one last sacramental kiss; and, so descending and placing the ladder and all as before, thou shalt take standing-room in the pit for this veritable dance of death."

A moment—and he was hanging there, to all appearance a corpse. The short rope at his neck had been so disposed and knotted—the collar of the domino serving—as to make him look, indeed, as if he strained at the tether's end. He had dragged his long hair over his eyes; his head lolled to one side; his tongue protruded. For the rest, the cloak hid all, even to his feet.

The goatherd snivelled.

"Ah, holy saints, he is dead!"

The head came erect, grinning.

"Eugenio!" she cried. "Oh, my God! Thou wilt be discovered—thou wilt slip and strangle! Ah, the crows—body of my body, the crows!"

"Imbecile! have I not my hands? See, I kiss one to thee. Now the sun sinks, and my ghostly vigil will be short. Pray heaven only they alight not on that in the bush. Nariguita, little heroine, this is my last word. Go hide thyself in the bushes above, and watch what a Frenchman, the most sensitive of mortals, will suffer to serve his Emperor."

It was an era, indeed, of sublime lusts and barbaric virtues, when men must mount upon stepping-stones, not of their dead selves, but of their slaughtered enemies, to higher things. Anita, like Ducos, was a child of her generation. To her mind the heroic purpose of this deed overpowered its pungency. She kissed her lover's feet; secured the safe disposition of the cloak about them; then turned and fled into hiding.

. . . . . .

At dusk, with the sound of footsteps coming up the pass, the crows dispersed. Eugène, for all his

self-sufficiency, had sweated over their persistence. A single more gluttonous swoop might at any moment, in blinding him, have laid him open to a general attack before help could reach him from the eyrie whence unwearying love watched his every movement. Now, common instance of the providence which waits on daring, the sudden lift and scatter of the swarm left his hearing sensible to the tinkling of a bridle, which came rhythmical from the track below. Immediately he fell, with all his soul, into the pose of death.

The cadence of the steely warning so little altered, the footsteps stole in so muffled and so deadly, that, peering presently through slit eyelids for the advent of the troop, it twitched his strung nerves to see a sinister congress already drawn soundless about the gibbet on which he hung. Perhaps for the first time in this stagnant atmosphere he realised the peril he had invited. But still the gambler's providence befriended him.

They were all women but two—the victim, a sullen, whiskered Yanguesian, strapped cuttingly to a mule, and a paunchy shovel-hatted Carmelite, who hugged a crucifix between his roomy sleeves.

Ducos had heard of these banded *vengeresses*. Now, he was Frenchman enough to appreciate in full the significance of their attitude, as they clustered beneath him in the dusk, a veiled and voiceless huddle of phantoms. "How," he thought, peeping through the dropped curtain of his hair, "will the adorables do it?" He had an hysterical inclination to laugh, and at that moment the monk, with a sudden decision to action, brushed against him and set him slowly twirling until his face was averted from the show.

Immediately thereon—as he interpreted sounds—the mule was led under the gallows. He heard the ladder placed in position, heard a strenuous shuffling as of concentrated movement. What he failed to

hear (at present) was any cry or protest from the victim. The beam above creaked, a bridle tinkled, a lighter drop of hoofs receded. A pregnant pause ensued, broken only by a slight noise, like rustling or vibrating—and then, in an instant, by a voice, chuckling, hateful—the voice of the priest.

"What! to hang there without a word, Carlos? Wouldst thou go, and never ask what is become of that very treasure thou soldst thy soul to betray? The devil has rounded on thee, Carlos; for after all it is thou that art lost, and not the treasure. That is all put away—shout it in the ears of thy neighbours up there—it is all put away, Carlos, safe in the salt mines of the Little Hump. Cry it to the whole world now. Thou mayst if thou canst. In the salt mines of the Little Hump. Dost hear? Ah, then, we must make thee answer."

With his words, the pit was all at once in shrill hubbub, noise indescribable and dreadful, the shrieking of harpies bidden to their prey. It rose demoniac—a very Walpurgis.

"No, no," thought Ducos, gulping under his collar. He was almost unnerved for the moment. "It is unlawful—they have no right to!"

He was twisting again, for all his mad will to prevent it. He would not look, and yet he looked. The monk, possessed, was thrashing the torn and twitching rubbish with his crucifix. The others, their fingers busy with the bodkins they had plucked from their mantillas, had retreated for the moment to a little distance.

Suddenly the Carmelite, as if in an uncontrollable frenzy, dropped his weapon, and scuttling to the mule, where it stood near at hand, tore a great horse pistol from its holster among the trappings, and pointed it at the insensible body.

"Scum of all devils!" he bellowed. "In fire descend to fire that lasts eternal!"

He pulled the trigger. There was a flash and shattering explosion. A blazing hornet stung Ducos in the leg. He may have started and shrieked. Any cry or motion of his must have passed unnoticed in the screaming panic evoked of the crash. He clung on with his hands and dared to raise his head. The mouth of the pass was dusk with flying skirts. Upon the sands beneath him, the body of the priest, a shapeless bulk, was slowly subsiding and settling, one fat fist of it yet gripping the stock of a pistol which, overgorged, had burst as it was discharged.

. . . . . .

The reek of the little tragedy had hardly dissipated before Ducos found himself. The sentiment of revolt, deriving from his helpless position, had been indeed but momentary. To feel his own accessibility to torture, painted torture to him as an inhuman lust. With the means to resist, or escape, at will, he might have sat long in ambush watching it; even condoning it as an extravagant posture of art.

With a heart full of such exultation over the success of his trick that for the moment he forgot the pain of his wound, he hurriedly unpicked the knots of the shorter cords about him, and, jumping to the ground, waited until the shadow of a little depressed figure came slinking across the sand towards him.

"Eugenio!" it whispered; "what has happened? Oh! art thou hurt?"

She ran into his arms, sobbing.

"I am hurt," said Ducos. "Quick, child! unstrap this from my arm and bind it about my calf. Didst hear? But it was magnificent! Two birds with a single stone. The piastres in pickle for us. Didst see, moreover? Holy Emperor! it was laughable. I would sacrifice a decoration to be witness of the meeting of those two overhead. It should be the Yanguesian for my money, for he has at least his teeth left. Look how he shows them, bursting with

rage! Quick, quick, quick! we must be up and away, before any of those others think of returning."

"And if one should," she said, "and mark the empty beam?"

"What does it matter, nevertheless! I must be off to-night, after thou hast answered me one single question."

"Off? Eugenio! Oh! not without me?"

"God, little girl! In this race I must not be hampered by so much as a thought. But I will return for thee—never fear."

He still sat in his domino. She knelt at his feet, stanching the flow from the wound the pistol had made in his leg. At his words she looked up breathlessly into his face; then away, to hide her swimming eyes. In the act she slunk down, making herself small in the sand.

"Eugenio! My God! we are watched!"

He turned about quickly.

"Whence?"

"From the mouth of the pass," she whispered.

"I can see nothing," he said. "Hurry, nevertheless! What a time thou art! There, it is enough of thy bungling fingers. Help me to my feet and out of this place. Come!" he ended angrily.

He had an ado to climb the easy slope. By the time they were entered amongst the rocks and bushes above, it was black dusk.

"Whether wouldst thou, dearest?" whispered the goatherd.

He had known well enough a moment ago—to some point, in fact, whence she could indicate to him the direction of the Little Hump, where the treasure lay; afterwards, to the very hill-top where some hours earlier they had foregathered. But he would not or could not explain this. Some monstrous blight of gloom had seized his brain at a swoop. He thought it must be one of the crows, and he stumbled

along, raving in his heart. If she offered to help him now, he would tear his arm furiously from her touch. She wondered, poor stricken thing, haunting him with tragic eyes. Then at last her misery and desolation found voice:

"What have I done? I will not ask again to go with thee, if that is it. It was only one little foolish cry of terror, most dear—that they should suspect, and seize, and torture me. But, indeed, should they do it, thou canst trust me to be silent."

He stopped, swaying, and regarded her demoniacally. His face was a livid and malignant blot in the thickening dusk. To torture her? What torture could equal his at this moment? She sought merely to move him by an affectation of self-renunciation. That, of course, called at once for extreme punishment. He must bite and strangle her to death.

He moved noiselessly upon her. She stood spell-bound before him. All at once something seemed to strike him on the head, and, without uttering a sound, he fell forward into the bush.

. . . . . .

Ducos opened his eyes to the vision of so preternaturally melancholy a face, that he was shaken with weak laughter over the whimsicality of his own imagination. But, in a very little, unwont to dreaming as he was, the realisation that he was looking upon no apparition, but a grotesque of fact, silenced and absorbed him.

Presently he was moved to examine his circumstances. He was lying on a heap of grass mats in a tiny house built of boards. Above him was a square of leaf-embroidered sky cut out of a cane roof; to his left, his eyes, focussing with a queer stiffness, looked through an open doorway down precipices of swimming cloud. That was because he lay in an eyrie on the hillside. And then at once, into his white field of vision, floated the

dismal long face, surmounted by an ancient cocked-hat, slouched and buttonless, and issuing like an august Aunt Sally's from the neck of a cloak as black and dropping as a pall.

The figure crossed the opening outside, and wheeled, with the wind in its wings. In the act, its eyes, staring and protuberant, fixed themselves on those of the Frenchman. Immediately, with a little stately gesture expressive of relief and welcome, it entered the hut.

"By the mercy of God!" exclaimed the stranger in his own tongue. Then he added in English: "The Inglese recovers to himself?"

Ducos smiled, nodding his head; then answered confidently, feeling his way: "A little, sir, I tank you. Thees along night. Ah! it appear all one pain."

The other nodded solemnly in his turn:

"A long night indeed, in which the sunksink tree very time."

"Comment!" broke out the aide-de-camp hoarsely, and instantly realised his mistake.

"Ah! devil take the French!" said he explanatorily. "I been in their camp so long that to catch their lingo. But I spik l'Espagnol, señor. It shall be good to us to converse there."

The other bowed impenetrably. His habit of a profound and melancholy aloofness might have served for mask to any temper of mind but that which, in real fact, it environed—a reason, that is to say, more lost than bedevilled under the long tyranny of oppression.

"I have been ill, I am to understand?" said Ducos, on his guard.

"For three days and nights, señor. My goatherd came to tell me how a wounded English officer was lying on the hills. Between us we conveyed you hither."

"*Ah, Dios!* I remember. I had endeavoured to carry muskets into Saragossa by the river. I was hit in the leg; I was captured; I escaped. For two days

I wandered, señor, famished and desperate. At last in these mountains I fell as by a stroke from heaven."

"It was the foul blood clot, señor. It balked your circulation. There was the brazen splinter in the wound, which I removed, and God restored you. What fangs are theirs, these reptiles! In a few days you will be well."

"Thanks to what ministering angel?"

"I am known as Don Manoel di Cangrejo, señor, the most shattered, as he was once the most prosperous of men. May God curse the French! May God" (his wild, mournful face twitched with strong emotion) "reward and bless these brave allies of a people more wronged than any the world has yet known!"

"Noble Englishman!" said he by and by, "thou hast nothing at present but to lie here and accept the grateful devotion of a heart to which none but the inhuman denies humanity."

Ducos looked his thanks.

"If I might rest here a little," he said; "if I might be spared——"

The other bowed, with a grave understanding.

"None save ourselves, and the winds and trees, señor. I will nurse thee as if thou wert mine own child."

He was as good as his word. Ducos, pluming himself on his perspicacity, accepting the inevitable with philosophy, lent himself during the interval, while feigning a prolonged weakness, to recovery. That was his, to all practical purposes, within a couple of days, during which time he never set eyes on Anita, but only on Anita's master. Don Manoel would often come and sit by his bed of mats; would even sometimes retail to him, as to a trusted ally, scraps of local information. Thus was he posted, to his immense gratification, in the topical after-history of his own exploit at the gallows.

"It is said," whispered Cangrejo awfully, "that one of the dead, resenting so vile a neighbour, impressed a goatherd into his service, and, being assisted from the beam, walked away. Truly it is an age of portents."

On the third morning, coming early with his bowl of goat's milk and his offering of fruits, he must apologise, with a sweet and lofty courtesy, for the necessity he was under of absenting himself all day.

"There is trouble," he said—"as when is there not? I am called to secret council, señor. But the boy Ambrosio has my orders to be ever at hand shouldst thou need him."

Ducos's heart leapt. But he was careful to deprecate this generous attention, and to cry *Adios!* with the most perfect assumption of composure.

He was lying on his elbow by and by, eagerly listening, when the doorway was blocked by a shadow. The next instant Anita had sprung to and was kneeling beside him.

"Heart of my heart, have I done well? Thou art sound and whole? Oh, speak to me, speak to me, that I may hear thy voice and gather its forgiveness!"

For what? She was sobbing and fondling him in a very lust of entreaty.

"Thou hast done well," he said. "So, we were seen indeed, Anita?"

"Yes," she wept, holding his face to her bosom. "And, oh! I agonise for thee to be up and away, Eugenio, for I fear."

"Hush! I am strong. Help me to my legs, child. So! Now, come with me outside, and point out, if thou canst, where lies the Little Hump."

She was his devoted crutch at once. They stood in the sunlight, looking down upon the hills which fell from beneath their feet—a world of tossed and petrified rapids. At their backs, on a shallow plateau under eaves of rock, Cangrejo's eyrie clung to the mountain-side.

"There," said the goatherd, indicating with her finger, "that mound above the valley—that little hill, fat-necked like a great mushroom, which sprouts from its basin among the trees?"

"Wait! mine eyes are dazzled."

"Ah, poor sick eyes! Look, then! Dost thou not see the white worm of the Pampeluna road—below yonder, looping through the bushes?"

"I see it—yes, yes."

"Now, follow upwards from the big coil, where the pine tree leans to the south, seeming a ladder between road and mound."

"Stay—I have it."

"Behold the Little Hump, the salt mine of St. Ildefonso, and once, they say, an island in the midst of a lake, which burst its banks and poured forth and was gone. And now thou knowest, Eugenio?"

He did not answer. He was intently fixing in his memory the position of the hill. She waited on his mood, not daring to risk his anger a second time, with a pathetic anxiety. Presently he heaved out a sigh, and turned on her, smiling.

"It is well," he said. "Now conduct me to the spot where we met three days ago."

It was surprisingly near at hand. A labyrinthine descent—by way of aloe-horned rocks, with sandy bents and tufts of harsh juniper between—of a hundred yards or so, and they were on the stony plateau which he remembered. There, to one side, was the coppice of chestnuts and locust trees. To the other, the road by which he had climbed went down with a run—such as he himself was on thorns to emulate—into the valleys trending to Saragossa. His eyes gleamed. He seated himself down on a boulder, controlling his impatience only by a violent effort.

"Anita," he said, drilling out his speech with slow emphasis, "thou must leave me here alone awhile. I would think—I would think and plan, my heart. Go,

wait on thy goats above, and I will return to thee presently."

She sighed, and crept away obedient. Oh, forlorn, most forlorn soul of love, which, counting mistrust treason, knows itself a traitor! Yet Anita obeyed, and with no thought to eavesdrop, because she was in love with loyalty.

The moment he was well convinced of her retreat, Ducos got to his legs with an immense sigh of relief. Love, he thought, could be presuming, could be obtuse, could be positively a bore. It all turned upon the context of the moment; and the present was quick with desires other than for endearments. For it must be related that the young captain, having manœuvred matters to this accommodating pass, was designing nothing less than an instant return, on the wings of transport, to the blockading camp, whence he proposed returning, with a suitable force and all possible despatch, to seize and empty of its varied treasures the salt mine of St. Ildefonso.

"Pouf!" he muttered to himself in a sort of ecstatic aggravation; "this accursed delay! But the piastres are there still—I have Cangrejo's word for it."

He turned once, before addressing himself to flight, to refocus in his memory the position of the mound, which still from here was plainly visible. In the act he pricked his ears, for there was a sound of footsteps rising up the mountain path. He dodged behind a boulder. The footsteps came on—approached him—paused—so long that he was induced at last to peep for the reason. At once his eyes encountered other eyes awaiting him. He laughed, and left his refuge. The newcomer was a typical Spanish Romany—slouching, filthy, with a bandage over one eye.

"God be with thee, Caballero!" said the Frenchman defiantly.

To his astonishment, the other broke into a little scream of laughter, and flung himself towards him.

"Judge thou, now," said he, "which is the more wide-awake adventurer and the better actor!"

"My God!" cried Ducos; "it is de la Platière!"

"Hush!" whispered the mendicant. "Are we private? Ah, bah! Junot should have sent me in the first instance."

"I have been hurt, thou rogue. Our duel of wits is yet postponed. In good time hast thou arrived. This simplifies matters. Thou shalt return, and I remain. Hist! come away, and I will tell thee all."

Half an hour later, de la Platière—having already, for his part, mentally absorbed the details of a certain position—swung rapidly, with a topical song on his lips, down the path he had ascended earlier. The sound of his footfalls receded and died out. The hill regathered itself to silence. Ducos, on terms with destiny and at peace with all the world, sat for hours in the shadow of the trees.

Perhaps he was not yet Judas enough to return to Anita, awaiting him in Cangrejo's eyrie. But at length, towards evening, fearing his long absence might arouse suspicion or uneasiness, he arose and climbed the hill. When he reached the cabin, he found it empty and silent. He loitered about, wondering and watchful. Not a soul came near him. He dozed; he awoke; he ate a few olives and some bread; he dozed again. When he opened his eyes for the second time, the shadows of the peaks were slanting to the east. He got to his feet, shivering a little. This utter silence and desertion discomforted him. Where was the girl? God! was it possible after all that she had betrayed him? He might have questioned his own heart as to that; only, as luck would have it, it was such a tiresomely deaf organ. So, let him think. De la Platière, with his men (as calculated), would be posted in the Pampeluna road, round the spur of the hill below, an hour after sunset—that was to say, at fifteen minutes to six. No doubt by then the alarm

would have gone abroad. But no great resistance to a strong force was to be apprehended. In the meantime—well, in the meantime, until the moment came for him to descend under cover of dark and assume the leadership, he must possess his soul in patience.

The sun went down. Night flowing into the valleys seemed to expel a moan of wind; then all dropped quiet again. Darkness fell swift and sudden like a curtain, but no Anita appeared, putting it aside, and Ducos was perplexed. He did not like this bodiless, shadowless subscription to his scheming. It troubled him to have no one to talk to—and deceive. He was depressed.

By and by he pulled off, turned inside-out, and resumed his scarlet jacket, which he had taken the provisional precaution to have lined with a sombre material. As he slipped in his arms, he started and looked eagerly into the lower vortices of dusk. In the very direction to which his thoughts were engaged, a little glow-worm light was burning steadily from the thickets. What did it signify—Spaniards or French, ambush or investment? Allowing—as between himself on the height and de la Platière on the road below—for the apparent discrepancy in the time of sunset, it was yet appreciably before the appointed hour. Nevertheless, this that he saw made the risk of an immediate descent necessary.

Bringing all his wits, his resolution, his local knowledge to one instant focus, he started, going down at once swiftly and with caution. The hills rose above him like smoke as he dropped; the black ravines were lifted to his feet. Sometimes for scores of paces he would lose sight altogether of the eye of light; then, as he turned some shoulder of rock, it would strike him in the face with its nearer radiance, so that he had to pause and readjust his vision to the new perspective. Still, over crabbed ridges and by dip of

thorny gulches he descended steadily, until the mound of the Little Hump, like a gigantic thatched kraal, loomed oddly upon him through the dark.

And, lo! the beacon that had led him down unerring was a great lantern hung under the sagging branch of a chestnut tree at the foot of the mound —a lantern, the lurid nucleus of a little coil of tragedy.

A cluster of rocks neighboured the clearing about the tree. To these Ducos padded his last paces with a catlike stealth—crouching, hardly breathing; and now from that coign of peril he stared down.

A throng of armed guerrillas, one a little forward of the rest, was gathered about a couple more of their kidney, who, right under the lantern, held the goatherd Anita on her knees in a nailing grip. To one side, very phantoms of desolation, stood Cangrejo and another. The faces of all, densely shadowed in part by the rims of their sombreros, looked as if masked; their mouths, corpselike, showed a splint of teeth; their ink-black whiskers hummocked on their shoulders.

So, in the moment of Ducos's alighting on it, was the group postured—silent, motionless, as if poised on the turn of some full tide of passion. And then, in an instant, a voice boomed up to him.

"Confess!" it cried, vibrating: "him thou wert seen with at the gallows; him whom thou foisted, oh! unspeakable, thou devil's doxy! on the unsuspecting Cangrejo; him, thy Frankish gallant and spy" (the voice guttered, and then, rising, leapt to flame) —"what hast thou done with him? where hidden? Speak quickly and with truth, if, traitor though thou be, thou wouldst be spared the traitor's estrapade."

"Alguazil, I cannot say. Have mercy on me!"

Ducos could hardly recognise the child in those agonised tones.

The inquisitor, with an oath, half wheeled.

"Pignatelli, father of this accursed—if by her duty thou canst prevail?"

A figure—agitated, cadaverous, as sublimely dehumanised as Brutus—stepped from Cangrejo's side and tossed one gnarled arm aloft.

"No child of mine, alguazil!" it proclaimed in a shrill, strung cry. "Let her reap as she hath sown, alguazil!"

Cangrejo leapt, and flung himself upon his knees by the girl.

"Tell Don Manoel, chiquita. God! little boy, that being a girl (ah, naughty!) is half absolved. Tell him, tell him—ah, there—now, now, now! He, thy lover, was in the cabin. I left him prostrate, scarce able to move. When the council comes to seek him, he is gone. Away, sayst thou? Ah, child, but I must know better! It could not be far. Say where—give him up—let him show himself only, chiquita, and the good alguazil will spare thee. Such a traitor, ah, Dios! And yet I have loved, too."

He sobbed, and clawed her uncouthly. Ducos, in his eyrie, laughed to himself, and applauded softly, making little cymbals of his thumb-nails.

"But he will not move her," he thought—and, on the thought, started; for from his high perch his eye had suddenly caught, he was sure of it, the sleeking of a French bayonet in the road below.

"Master!" cried Anita, in a heart-breaking voice; "he is gone—they cannot take him. Oh, don't let them hurt me!"

The alguazil made a sign. Cangrejo, gobbling and resisting, was dragged away. There was a little ugly, silent scuffle about the girl; and, in a moment, the group fell apart to watch her being hauled up to the branch by her thumbs.

Ducos looked on greedily.

"How long before she sets to screaming?" he thought, "so that I may escape under cover of it."

So long, that he grew intolerably restless—wild, furious. He could have cursed her for her endurance.

But presently it came, moaning up all the scale of suffering. And, at that, slinking like a rat through its run, he went down swiftly towards the road—to meet de la Platière and his men already silently breaking cover from it.

And, on the same instant, the Spaniards saw them.

. . . . . .

"Peste!" whispered de la Platière. "We could have them all at one volley but for that!"

Between the French force, ensconced behind the rocks whither Ducos had led them, and the Spaniards who, completely taken by surprise, had clustered foolishly in a body under the lantern, hung the body of Anita, its torture suspended for the moment because its poor wits were out.

"How, my friend!" exclaimed Ducos. "But for what?"

"The girl, that is all."

"She will feel nothing. No doubt she is half dead already. A moment, and it will be too late."

"Nevertheless, I will not," said de la Platière.

Ducos stamped ragingly.

"Give the word to me. She must stand her chance. For the Emperor!" he choked—then shrieked out, "Fire!"

The explosion crashed among the hills and echoed off.

A dark mass, which writhed and settled beyond the lantern shine, seemed to excite a little convulsion of merriment in the swinging body. That twitched and shook a moment; then relaxed, and hung motionless.

THE RAVELLED SLEAVE.

Sleep, that knits up the ravelled sleave of care.

I SHOULD like to preface my subject with a *Caractère* in the style of La Bruyère, as thus :—

Pamphilus is what the liberal call a reserved man, and the intolerant a secretive. He certainly has an aggravating way of appearing to make Asian mysteries of the commonplaces of life. He traffics in silence as others do in gossip. The "Ha!" with which he accepts your statement of fact or conjecture seems to imply on his part both a shrewder than ordinary knowledge of your subject, and a curiosity to study in you the popular view. One feels oddly superficial in his company, and, resentful of the imposition, blunders into self-assertive vulgarities which one knows to be misrepresentations of oneself. Do still waters always run deep? Pamphilus, it would appear, has founded his conduct on the fallacy, as if he had never observed the placid waters of the Rhine slipping over their shallow levels. One finds oneself speculating if, could one but once lay bare, suddenly, the jealous secrets of Pamphilus's bosom, one would be impressed with anything but their unimportance. Yet, strangely, scepticism and irritation despite, one likes him, and takes pleasure in his company.

Possibly the fact that he cultivates so few friends makes of his lonely preferences a flattery. Then, too, loquacity is not invariably a brimming intellect's overflow. It is better, on the whole, if one has very little to say, to keep that little in reserve for a rainy day. Too many of us, having the conceit of our inheritance, think that we, also, can feed a multitude on five loaves and a couple of fishes. But we must adulterate largely

 to do it.

Pamphilus, again, has the winning, persuasive "presence." He is thirty-three, but still in his physical and mental attributes a big-eyed wondering boy. You can mention to him nothing so ordinary, but his eager "Yes? Yes?" startles you into trying to improve upon your subject with a touch of humour, a flower of observation, for his rare delectation. Is he worth the effort? You don't know. You don't know whether or not he wants you to think so, or is really instinctively greedy for the psychologic *bonne bouche*. He is tall, and spare, and interesting in appearance. In short, he lacks no charm but candour; and I am not sure but that the lack is not a fifth grace. He is, finally, "Valentine," and the subject of this "Morality."

It may have been a year ago that, coming silently into my rooms one night, Valentine "jumped" me, to my dignified annoyance. I hate being so taken off my guard. Generally, I hold it that a man's consideration for his fellow-creatures' nerves is the measure of his mental endowment. Valentine, however, does not, to do him justice, make these noiseless entrances to surprise one, so much as to entertain himself with one's preoccupations. Mine, as it happened, was the evening paper.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, breathing the monosyllable suddenly over my shoulder, like an enlightened ghost. The characteristic note was, I supposed, in allusion to the paragraph which engaged my attention at the moment. It was headed "The Brompton Sleeping Girl."

I started, of course; and, in the instant reaction of nerve, flew to an extreme of rudeness.

"Yes," I drawled; "an interesting case, isn't it? Supposing it had been a private letter, how long would you have stood before shouting your presence into my ear like that?"

He laughed as he moved away (he had not shouted

at all, by the bye); then, as he sat down opposite me in the shadow, appeared for the first time to realise my meaning.

"Just long enough to recognise the fact," he said quietly. "What do you mean by the question?"

Thus rebounding, my own rudeness struck me ashamed. I had no real justification for the insult, anyhow that I could call into evidence.

"Oh, nothing!" I mumbled awkwardly; "except that you made me almost jump out of my skin."

It was characteristic of him, and a further puzzle, that in spite of his self-suggested consciousness of superiority he was easily depressed by a snub. We sat for a little in a glowering silence, and perhaps with a mutual sense of injury.

"Yes, an interesting case," he said at length with an effort. "A trance, isn't it?"

"Something of the sort," I replied. "I saw the girl yesterday."

He looked up interested.

"Yes?"

"She is in a private ward of B—— Hospital. I know the house surgeon. He took me to see her."

"Well! How does she look?"

"Seen the St. Amaranthe at Tussaud's—the one whom, as children, we used to call the Sleeping Beauty? Not unlike her: as pretty as wax and as stiff: just breathing, with pale cheeks and her mouth a little open."

"The fit—I seem to remember—was brought on by some shock, wasn't it?"

I growled:

"According to report, concealment of birth. I conclude she was put to shame by some rogue, and couldn't face the music. The child was found, three or four months ago, on a doorstep or somewhere, and traced to her. When the police entered, I suppose she feared the worst, and went off. Odd part is, tha

the infant itself was intact—as sound as a bell. But all that's of little interest. It's the case for me; not the sentiment."

"Ah?" said Valentine.

He leaned forward, resting his long arms on his knees and gently clicking his fingers together. His eyes were full of an eager light.

"Johnny, I wonder if you could get *me* a sight of her?"

"Why not?" I answered. I felt that I owed him some atonement. "I'll ask C—— if you like."

II.

C—— demurred, hummed and hawed, and acquiesced.

"Your friend must keep in the background," he said. "He's not a back-stair reporter, I suppose?"

"He's an independent gentleman, and either a poet or an ass—I don't know which."

"Same thing," said this airy Philistine; "but no matter, so long as he don't talk."

"He won't talk."

"Very well, bring him up. Fact is, we're trying an experiment this afternoon. Aunt's brought the baby—sort of natural magnetism to restore the current, cancel the hiatus—see? I've not much belief in it myself."

I fetched Valentine, and we followed C—— up to the ward. There were only present there—one, a list-footed nurse; two, a little shabby-genteel woman, with a false towlike front over vicious eyes, who carried a flannelled bundle; and three, the patient herself.

She had not so much as stirred, to all appearance, since I last saw her. We, Valentine and I, took up our position apart. Some accidental contact with

him made me turn my head. He was quivering like a high-strung racer for the start. This physical excitability was news to me. "H'mph!" I thought. "Is there really that in you which you must keep such a tight rein on?"

The nurse took the infant, and placed it on the sleeping girl's breast. It mewed and sprawled, but evoked no response whatever.

"She'd never a drop of the milk of kindness in her," muttered the little verjuicy woman.

"Hold your tongue!" said the doctor sharply.

He and the nurse essayed some coaxing. In the midst, I was petrified by the sight of Valentine going softly up to the bed-head.

"May I whisper a word?" he said. "It may fail or not. But I don't think you can object to my trying."

And actually, before his astonished company could move or collect its wits, he had bent and spoken something, inaudible, into the patient's ear.

Now, I ask you to remember that this girl had been in a cataleptic sleep for not less than three months, under observation, and with no chance, so far as I knew, to cozen her attendants; and believe me then as you can when I tell you that, answering, instantly and normally, to Valentine's whisper, she sighed, stretched her arms, though at first with an air of some lassitude and weakness, and, opening her eyes, fixed them with a sort of suspended stare upon the face of her exorcist. Gradually, then, a little pucker deepened between her brows, and instantly, some shadow of fright or uneasiness flickering in her dark pupils, she turned her head aside. Obviously she was distressed by the vision of this strange face coming between the light and her normal, as it seemed to her, awaking.

Valentine immediately stood away, and backed to where she could not see him.

C——, obviously putting great command on himself, since circumstances made it appear that some damned "natural magic" had got the better of his natural science, took the situation in hand professionally, and frowned to the aunt, to whom the baby had been restored, to show herself. The woman, rallying from the common stupefaction, gave an acrid sniff and obeyed.

"*Well*, Nancy!" she said, in a tone between wonder and remonstrance.

The girl looked round again and up, with a little shock. Immediately her dilated pupils accepted with frank astonishment this more familiar apparition.

"Gracious goodness, Aunt Mim!" she whispered; "what have you got there?"

Then she turned her face on the pillow, with a smile of drowsy rapture.

"Anyhow, you've found your way to Skene at last," she murmured, and instantly fell into a natural sleep, from which, it was evident, there must be no awaking her.

C—— wheeled upon my friend.

"I suppose you won't part with your secret?" he asked drily.

It was a habit with Valentine, not his least aggravating, composedly to put by any unwelcome or difficult question addressed to him as if he did not hear it.

"Skene's in Kent, isn't it?" he asked, ostensibly of the aunt, though he looked at me. I could have snapped at him in pure vindictiveness. He wasn't inscrutable, any more than another. What was his confounded right to pose as a sphinx?

"She fancies she's there," he said. "Why?"

I turned dumbly with the question to the little woman creature. I don't know if she supposed I was in some sort of official authority to cross-

examine her. She had powder on her face, and a weak glow mantled through it.

"It was there she met her trouble, sir," she said, hesitating. "She'd gone down to the hop-picking last September, and I was to follow. But circumstances" (she wriggled her shoulders with an indescribable simper) "was against my joining her."

"Well," broke in C——, suddenly and rather sharply, "you must take the consequences, and, for the present anyhow, the burden of them off her shoulders."

"Begging your pardon, sir?" she questioned shrewdly.

"The child," said the doctor, "the child. Everything, it appears, relating to it is for the moment obliterated from her mind. She takes up existence, I think you'll find, last autumn, at this Skene, with expecting you. Well, you have come, and returned to London together. You understand? The time of year is the same. None of all this has for the moment happened."

There was an acrid incredulity in his hearer's face as she listened to him.

"Do I understand, or don't I, sir," she said, "that her shame is to be my care and consideration? And till when, if you'll be so good?"

"That I can't say," he answered. "Probably the interval, the abyss in her mind, will bridge itself by slow degrees. Her reason likely depends upon your not rudely hastening the process. I warn you, that's all."

"And pray," she said, with ineffable sarcasm, "how is I, as a respectable woman, to account to her for this that I hold?"

"Put it out to nurse."

"No, sir, *if* you'll allow me. The hussy have done her best to bring me to ruin already."

"Say you've adopted it."

She gave a shrill titter.

"Nanny will have lost her wits, hindeed, to believe that."

"Well, she has in a measure."

"And the police?" she said. "Aren't you a little forgetting them, sir?"

"The police," said C——, "I will answer for. The case isn't worth their pursuing, and they will drop it."

The baby began to wail, and Aunt Mim, with her lips pursed, to play the vicious rocking-horse to it.

III.

One evening, a week later, Valentine came quietly into my room. I had not seen him in the interval, and was immediately struck, though it was semi-dusk, by the expression on his face. It was white and smiling, and the eyes more brightly inscrutable than ever.

A storm had just crashed across the town, and left everything dripping in a liquid fog. Looking down, one could see the house-fronts, submerged in the running pavements, become the very "baseless fabrics of a vision." The hansom-drivers, bent over their glazed roofs, rode each with a shadowy phantom of himself reversed, like an oilskin Jack of Spades. No pedestrian but, like Hamlet, had his "fellow in the cellarage" keeping pace with him. The solid ground seemed melted, and the unsubstantial workings of the world revealed. To souls hemmed in by bricks, there are more commonplace, less depressing sights than a wet London viewed from a third story.

There was a box in my window, with some marguerites in it, the sickly pledges of a rather jocund spring. Valentine, joining me as I leaned out, handled a half-broken stem very tenderly.

"It has been beaten down, *like poor Nanny*, by the storm," he said. "We must tie it to a stick."

I did not answer for a minute. Then very deliberately I drew in my head and sat down. Again like my shadow, in this city of shadows, Valentine did the same. For some five minutes we must have remained opposite one another without speaking. Then sudden and grim I set my lips, and asked the question he seemed to invite.

"Are you the stick?"

He nodded, with a smile, which I could hardly see now, on his face.

"You speak figuratively, of course," I said, "in talking of *tying* her to you?"

"No," he said. "I talk of the real bond."

"Of matrimony?"

"Certainly."

With a naughty word, I jumped to my feet, strode the round of the room, sat down flop on the table, put my hands in my pockets, tried to whistle, laughed, and burst out: "I suppose you intend this, in a manner, for a confidence? I suppose you are taking straight up the tale of a week ago? Well, *I* haven't lost the impression of that moment, or gone mad in the interval. Do you want me to sympathise with *your* insanity, or to argue you out of it—which?"

He did not answer. Indeed, the offensiveness of my tone was not winning.

"I am perfectly aware," I went on, "that the melodramatic unities demand an espousal with the interesting spirit we have called back to life. They have a way, at the same time, of ignoring Aunt Mim. You will, I am sure, forgive me if I say that it is the figure of that good lady which sticks last in *my* memory."

Still he did not answer.

"I will put my point," I continued, growing a little angry—"I will put my point, as you seem to ask it,

with all the delicacy I can. You drew an analogy between—between some one and that broken cabbage yonder. The sentiment is unexceptionable; only in France they consider those things weeds."

"Do they?" he said coolly. "We don't."

"No; because we must justify ourselves for exalting em out of their proper sphere. They'll not cease to smell rank, though, however you give 'em the middle place in your greenhouse."

I struck my knee viciously with my open palm.

"That was in vile bad taste, Val. I beg your pardon for saying it. But, deuce take it, man! you can't have come to me, a worldling and an older one, for sympathy in this midsummer madness?"

I was off the table again, going to and fro and apostrophising him at odd turns.

"Let's drop parables—and answer plainly, if it's in you. You don't exhale sentiment as a rule. Did or did not that touch about 'poor Nanny' imply a hint of some confidence put in me?"

"I've always considered you my closest friend."

"Flattered, I'm sure; though I didn't guess it. You put such conundrums—excuse me—beyond the time of a plain man to guess. Well, I say, I'm flattered, and I'll take the full privilege. It's natural you should feel an interest in—— By the way, I regret to say I only know her as the Brompton Sleeping Girl."

"She's Nanny Nolan."

"In Miss Nolan, then. Apropos, I've never yet asked, and mustn't know, I suppose, the secret of your 'open sesame'?"

"No, I can't tell you."

"Oh, it doesn't matter! Only, as a question of this confiding friendship——"

"It isn't my secret alone."

"Then I've no more to say. But I presume she's the—the flower in question?"

"Oh, yes! And I'm the stick."

He said it with a quiet laugh.

"I shouldn't have supposed it, on my honour," I assured him. "You can have stuck at very little in a week."

I took a few turns, and faced him, or his motionless shadow, very solemnly.

"Now," I demanded, "for the plain speaking. Will you answer me the truth? I brought away an impression, as I said. It might have been, after all, an impertinent one. A man's a man for a' that—though I confess I can't quite apply the moral to a woman. Still, I'll ask you frankly: How is she socially?"

"Nothing at all. Her father was a colour-sergeant, a red-headed Celt from over the border of dreams. He's gone to join the Duke of Argyll's cloud army at Inverary. Her aunt's an ex-coryphée living on a mysterious pension."

"Of course; only rather worse than I supposed."

"Verender, I must tell you the girl is without reproach. Socially, it is true, they are in a very limited way. They eke out existence in a number of small directions, even, as you know, hop-picking."

"I've nothing but respect for Miss Nolan's virtues. I can even appreciate the appeal of her prettiness to a susceptible nature, which I don't think mine is. Anyhow, I'm no Pharisee to pelt my poor sister of the gutter because she's fallen in it. That's beside the question. But it isn't, to ask what in the name of tragedy induces you, with your wealth, your refinement, your mental and social amiability, to sink all in this investment of a—of a fancy bespoke—there, I can put it no differently."

"Call it my amiability, Verender. She's like the centurion's daughter. There's something awfully strange, awfully fascinating, after all, in getting into

her confidence—in entering behind that broken seal of death."

"You're not an impressionable Johnny—at least, you shouldn't be. You've passed the Rubicon. This child with a child—with Aunt Mim, good Lord! Have you thought of the consequences?"

"Yes; all of them."

"Of the—pardon me. Do you know who *he* was?"

"Yes."

I stared aghast at him—at the deeper blot of gloom from which his voice proceeded.

"And you aren't afraid—for her; for yourself?"

"You mean, of her relapsing?" he said clearly. "Not when she knows the truth—knows what a poor thing he is."

"Are you sure *you* know woman? She is apt to have a curious tenderness for the blackguard who distinguishes her with his most especial brand of villainy. Then she hasn't learned it—the truth—yet?"

"No. Aunt Mim has been loyal."

"Well, well she may be, so long as you offer yourself the prize to such a self-denying ordinance. She sees which side her bread's buttered, no doubt. And how does she account for the little stranger?"

"By adoption. It's an odd thing, Verender—Verender, it's a very odd thing, and very pitiful, to see how *she*—little Nanny—distrusts the child—looks on it sort of askance—almost hates it, I think. I've a very difficult part to play."

I groaned.

"Then why play it? What does it all matter to you? You've opened her eyes. Isn't that enough, without waiting till she's opened yours?"

"Ah!" he said, obviously not attending to me. "But that isn't the whole of my difficulty. The truth is, she appears to shrink from me too."

"You'll forgive me," I said grimly. "That's your first comforting statement."

"I don't know how it is," he continued, in a low voice, self-pondering; "she's frightened—distressed, before a shadow she can't define. Sometimes and somehow it seems as if she wants to love me, but can't—as if she were trying, and vainly, to shape out of a great gloom the obstacle which separates us. And I want to help her; and yet I, too, can't understand. Shall I ever, I wonder?"

I stared at him. "Isn't it plain enough? But you have love's eyes, I suppose." Then I asked, a little softened, "Does she ever lose herself, trying to piece that broken time?"

"I don't know," he answered. "She speaks so little. She is like a little shy ghost—half-materialised—fearful between spirit and matter—very sweet and pathetic."

With the last word he turned abruptly and strode out of the room. I was not so much astonished at his curt conclusion, as at a certain tell-tale cough which accompanied it.

"Oh, hang the fellow!" I muttered. "If he's developed tears in his voice, I give him up."

IV.

One afternoon, accident taking me past the Nolans' house in the Fulham Road, I was disturbed to hear Valentine's voice hailing me from the parlour window. It was a little cheap tenement, and a curiously shabby frame to his rather distinguished figure as he stood up eagerly to stop me.

"Come in," he said. "I want you."

I demurred, in an instant and instinctive panic.

"What for? I'm horribly pressed. Won't it do another time?"

"*It* won't," he answered. "It's its way. But go on, if your need is greater than mine."

"That's shabby," I thought; and yielded with the worst grace possible. He retaliated by meeting me all sweetness at the door, and conducting me into the parlour.

It was an impossible room—I may say it at once—quite the typical tawdry boudoir of an ex-coryphée. She was not there, I was relieved to find, in person; but her multiplied presentment simpered and abashed one from a dozen places on walls and mantelpiece. "Claudine" (she might have been a hair-wash, and enjoyed the same sort of popularity) posed, for all the blind purposes of vanity, in the tights and kid boots of a past generation. Looking from queer old daguerreotypes, in skirts like curtailed crinolines; ogling from wreaths, her calves, crossed to display their strength, in disfiguring proportion with the thin bosom above, she seemed to make an outrage of the dear ungainly sanctities which appeal to us, in peg-tops and voluminous skirts, from the back parts of our albums. There are certain people who, with the best intention in the world to be held sweet, are unsavoury; and Aunt Mim was one of them. All the more wonder that such fruit could be born of her stock.

For she was certainly attractive, was the girl—pure and pretty and unaffected. I had to own it grudgingly to myself, as I bowed to her, and turned interrogatively to my friend.

He had gone to the back of her chair, where she sat away from the open window. There was some discarded work in her lap, and in her eyes some look of a vague sadness and bewilderment.

"Nanny," he said softly, "this, Mr. Verender, is my great friend—my counsel out of Court. Will you just do this for me—make him yours, too? Will you try to explain to him, while I go away, what you find

t so hard to explain to me—your sense of the something that keeps us apart?"

I made an instant but faint demur. Nanny, as faintly, shook her head.

"Oh," he said, "but he will listen to you, I know! Because I am unhappy, and you are unhappy, and I love you so, Nanny, and he is my best friend. Try to explain to him, dear, the difficulty of your case."

This novel enlargement on our relations, his and mine, vaguely annoyed me.

"Why should there be any?" I put in impatiently. "Our friend can give you great social and other advantages, Miss Nolan. If he is decided on this course—you don't dislike him, I think—forgive me, I can see no reason for objection on *your* part."

She rose, as if scared, to her feet. He put a hand on her shoulder. "Hush!" he said. "Be just to me, and try to tell him."

He left the room and the house; and I was in two minds about following him. Was ever man put in a more ridiculous position? Yet the look of the girl gave me pause. She seemed to me to be yet only half awake; and indeed, I think, that is something to understate the case.

"Well," I said stumblingly, as she stood before me. "You heard what he said, Miss Nolan?"

I was not sympathetic. I knew it. Perhaps, having once asserted myself, I might have grown so. But she would not give me the opportunity. In the meantime, I did not feel the less the full force of this mismatch.

She put her hand in a lost way to her forehead.

"I will try," she said, in a low voice, "because he asked me. There—there was a great trouble—oh! it was so far back. I can't remember it—and then everything went."

"He is willing, it appears, to take that interval, that trouble, on trust," I said. "He only asks you,

it seems, to repay his confidence. What you are is what he desires. Cannot you consider yourself newborn into his love?" (I positively sneered the word to myself.)

"There is something stands between us," she only murmured helplessly.

"He doesn't admit it for himself," I insisted irritably. "It might be the ruin of his career, of his position, as foreseen by his friends. I suppose he wishes to assure you that that counts for nothing with him, if by any chance the bar between you lies in your dim consciousness of such a sentiment."

I had been brutal, I admit it. I can only palliate my behaviour by confessing that it was intended to sound the first note of my moral surrender to the appeal of those poor, pain-troubled eyes. Now, at least, I had got my shaft home. She looked up at me with a light of amazed knowledge in her face.

"Thank you," she said. "I knew there was a right reason; and all the time I have been hunting for a fancied one."

I suffered an instant reaction to dismay. I had had no right whatever to make this point. Whatever my private opinion of Valentine's folly, I had allowed myself to be accredited his ambassador.

"Come; it is no reason at all," I said. "There is no such thing as a misalliance in love" (I threw this atrocious sop to my own panic). "If only the practical bar between you could be as easily disposed of."

"The practical bar?"

She turned upon me with a piteous pain in her voice. I had opened a door of release to her, I suppose, and before she could escape shut it again in her face. I was stumbling weakly on an explanation, when suddenly from somewhere above the baby began to wail. Instantly her face assumed the strangest expression—a sort of exalted hardness. She

put up her hand, listened a moment, then, without another word, glided from the room. I am ashamed to say that I seized the opportunity to put an instant period to my visit.

I expected to meet Valentine loitering without; but to my relief he did not appear. So I went on my way fuming. What right had the man to try to inveigle me into seeming to sanction his idiotcy by claiming me its advocate? He wanted to buy justification, I suppose. There are certain natures which cannot properly relish their own grief or happiness unless a witness be by to report upon them. Such was Valentine's, I thought; and the thought did not increase my respect for my friend. I fancied I had already plumbed the shallows of that pretentious reserve, and was angry and half contemptuous that he had so soon revealed himself to me. There was certainly something attractive about the girl; but—well, *he* had not been the first to discover the fact, and, when all was said, his infatuation showed him a fool in my eyes.

That evening, when I was sitting alone writing, she suddenly stood before me. My first shock of amazement was followed by a glow of fury. I felt that I was being persecuted.

"Well, what is it?" I said harshly.

"I only wanted to tell you," she said low, panting as if she had run; "I wanted you to tell *him* that—that I know now what it is. I found out the moment I left you; and I came to say—but you were gone."

"Well?"

"It is the child, sir."

"Yes, you are quite right—it is the child."

No sooner had I said it, than I felt the weight of my self-commitment. Had she discovered—remembered all? Did she conceive the impediment as associated with some scandal attaching to the ineffable Aunt Mim? or was the baby, in her clouded soul, but an

unattachable changeling, which had come to disrupt the kind order of things and brand their household with a curse?

"Yes, it is the child," I said, and leaned my forehead into my hand while I frowned over the problem.

She made no answer. When I looked up at the end of a minute, she was gone.

I started to my feet, and went up and down. I made no attempt to follow. "It is better," I thought angrily, "to let this stuff ferment in its own way. I could have given no other answer."

At the twentieth turn I saw Valentine before me, and stopped abruptly.

"Well," he said; "were you able to get it out of her?"

"What?" I asked defiantly.

"The reason—the impediment, you know?" he answered.

"Sit down, Valentine," I said. "I will tell you the truth. I hinted that the *mésalliance* might be her unconscious consideration."

"She is not so proud," he said quietly; "though I'm unworthy to buckle her little shoe for her."

I positively gasped.

"Oh! if that's your view! But, anyhow, she was seeming to accept mine, when the infant hailed her, and she left me, and I bolted. You put too much upon me—really you do, Val; and here's the sequel. Ten minutes ago she appeared in this room and told me that she had discovered the reason—the real one this time."

"And it was?"

"The baby—no less."

"What! Does she——?"

"I don't know from Adam. I was thinking over my answer; and when I looked up, she was gone."

"And you gave her no reply?"

"Oh, yes! I told her I entirely agreed with her. I had to be honest."

"Verender! You must come with me!"

"Go with you!"

"You've called the tune; you must pay the piper."

"I don't know what you mean. I'll see you—cremated first!"

He stared at me a moment, his teeth showing, his eyes rounding in the dusk, his fists clinching and unclinching; then he, too, was gone. And I went and stood at the window, slinking into the curtains, and feeling myself the most abused cur in all London.

V.

For a fortnight this state continued in me, through alternations of depression, self-accusation, and savage bursts of rebellion. On the sixteenth day a brief note, begging me to call at his rooms, reached me from Valentine.

"I won't go," I swore through my teeth, feeling an inclination to tear the paper in them; and five minutes later was on my way.

"He shall justify me to myself," I had thought. "I'll let my conscience be his footstool no longer."

The fellow lived *en prince* in Piccadilly. I found him in the midst of a litter—boxes and packages and strewed floors—evidently on the eve of a journey. He greeted me, twinkling, in high excitement—not a trace of grievance or embarrassment in his manner.

"Leave those things, Phillips," he said to his staid valet. "We'll finish by and by."

The man left the room; and his master took me by the sleeve, while I held myself in reserve—unconsciously, at the same time, softening to his geniality.

"We're off to Capri—Egypt," he said, "following our late summer with the swallows."

"You and—Phillips?" I asked.

"I and my wife," said he, with a laugh. "Hush! She's seeing the baby to sleep."

He could say it without a blush; and they had been married, as I came to learn, just a week! He led me on tiptoe to a distant room, and bade me look through the opened door. Nanny, crowned, proud as any young queen, with conscious maternity, was bent, singing softly, above a little cot. The sight of her—Val's wife—restored me at once to my self-respect. I had done nothing after all, it seemed, but help to precipitate an event I deplored. My shout had brought down the avalanche. Henceforth my position was to be that of the amused onlooker.

He let me stare; then led me away with all his old affectation of pregnant mystery. We went out together—I don't know why—into the Green Park. It seemed remote and silent, and the better shadows of night were beginning to troop under its trees. Then he spoke to me, as follows:

"Verender, you have a right to know. You remember what you told me that evening? I wasn't just to you, perhaps. I foresaw issues to which you must necessarily be blind. The baby stood between us, you said. It did, but not in the way you meant to imply. I am its father."

I listened perfectly silent, and very grave, as we stepped on together.

"I will say of, not for, myself," he continued, "that I had known nothing of the fruits of a little moonlight idyll out in that Kent village. I was hop-picking, as she was, but for a worser reason. Our encounter in B—— Hospital was my first intimation of the truth. Till that moment I had never considered, at least had been careless of, a sequel; had never, of course, had a shadow of thought to identify the patient with my victim. Then in a moment—Verender, her helplessness found all that wasn't bad in me. She didn't

know me—the curtain was too thick. I determined to woo and win, as a stranger, what was already my own. Was I right?"

I nodded. "Yes, you were right."

"Then came the strange part," he said—"a sort of subconsciousness of an impediment she could not define. It was her dishonour, Verender—my God! Verender, *her* dishonour!—that found some subtle expression in the little life introduced into her home. She always feared and distrusted the child; and I tell you I lived in horror that some day her witlessness would arm her gentle hand to do it a hurt. For she wanted to come to me, Verender, she wanted to come, and it was as if she couldn't, and nobody would tell her why.

"*You* told her, you old rascal! And with what result, do you think? When I followed her, I found her gone—she had taken the baby from its cot, and hurried out. The old harpy was there, raving and gobbling beyond reason. I had her down on her knees to confess. She admitted that the girl had come in, in a fever to proclaim her knowledge of the bar which separated us. Nanny had rounded upon her, it appeared, and accused her, Aunt Mim, of wantonly causing the scandal which had brought this shadow into her life. And then—perhaps it wasn't to be wondered at—Auntie exploded, and gave up all."

"The truth?"

"All of it but what the old hag herself didn't know—the name of the villain. That, circumstances had kept from her, you see. She let loose, did Auntie—we'll allow her a grain of justification; to have her forbearance turned upon herself like that, you know!—and screamed to the girl to pack, and dispose of her rubbish somewhere else. And Nanny understood at last, and went."

"Where?"

"Ah, where? That was the question. I'd only one clue—Skene and the river; but I seized upon it, and my inspiration proved right. She'd gone instinctively to the only place where, it seemed, her trouble could be resolved. You see, she hadn't yet come to identify *me* with it. But I followed, and I caught her in time."

He hung his head, and spoke very low.

"I took the next train possible to Skene. Verender, I'm not going to talk. It was one of those fainting, indescribable experiences, like the voice in the burning bush. Cold dawn it was, with a white bubbling river and the ghost of an old moon. She had intended to commit *it* to the water—the fog wasn't yet out of her brain—and then, all in an instant, the mother came upon her, and the memory of me; and she ran to cast herself in instead, and saw me coming."

There followed a long interval of silence.

"And Aunt Mim?" I asked drily, chiefly to keep up my character.

He laughed.

"Oh! we've added an honourable moiety to a dishonourable pension, and settled her," he said.

Another silence followed.

"Well, I apologise," I said grumpily.

A GHOST-CHILD.

In making this confession public, I am aware that I am giving a butterfly to be broken on a wheel. There is so much of delicacy in its subject, that the mere resolve to handle it at all might seem to imply a lack of the sensitiveness necessary to its understanding; and it is certain that the more reverent the touch, the more irresistible will figure its opportunity to the common scepticism which is bondslave to its five senses. Moreover one cannot, in the reason of things, write to publish for Aristarchus alone; but the gauntlet of Grub Street must be run in any bid for truth and sincerity.

On the other hand, to withhold from evidence, in these days of what one may call a zetetic psychology, anything which may appear elucidatory, however exquisitely and rarely, of our spiritual relationships, must be pronounced, I think, a sin against the Holy Ghost.

All in all, therefore, I decide to give, with every passage to personal identification safeguarded, the story of a possession, or visitation, which is signified in the title to my narrative.

Tryphena was the sole orphaned representative of an obscure but gentle family which had lived for generations in the east of England. The spirit of the fens, of the long gray marshes, whose shores are the neutral ground of two elements, slumbered in her eyes. Looking into them, one seemed to see little beds of tiny green mosses luminous under water, or stirred by the movement of microscopic life in their midst. Secrets, one felt, were shadowed in their depths, too frail and sweet for understanding. The

pretty love-fancy of babies seen in the eyes of maidens, was in hers to be interpreted into the very cosmic dust of sea-urchins, sparkling like chrysoberyls. Her soul looked out through them, as if they were the windows of a water-nursery.

She was always a child among children, in heart and knowledge most innocent, until Jason came and stood in her field of vision. Then, spirit of the neutral ground as she was, inclining to earth or water with the sway of the tides, she came wondering and dripping, as it were, to land, and took up her abode for final choice among the daughters of the earth. She knew her woman's estate, in fact, and the irresistible attraction of all completed perfections to the light that burns to destroy them.

Tryphena was not only an orphan, but an heiress. Her considerable estate was administered by her guardian, Jason's father, a widower, who was possessed of this single adored child. The fruits of parental infatuation had come early to ripen on the seedling. The boy was self-willed and perverse, the more so as he was naturally of a hot-hearted disposition. Violence and remorse would sway him in alternate moods, and be made, each in its turn, a self-indulgence. He took a delight in crossing his father's wishes, and no less in atoning for his gracelessness with moving demonstrations of affection.

Foremost of the old man's most cherished projects was, very naturally, a union between the two young people. He planned, manœuvred, spoke for it with all his heart of love and eloquence. And, indeed, it seemed at last as if his hopes were to be crowned. Jason, returning from a lengthy voyage (for his enterprising spirit had early decided for the sea, and he was a naval officer), saw, and was struck amazed before, the transformed vision of his old child-playfellow. She was an opened flower whom he had left a green bud—a thing so rare and flawless that it

seemed a sacrilege for earthly passions to converse of her. Familiarity, however, and some sense of reciprocal attraction, quickly dethroned that eucharist. Tryphena could blush, could thrill, could solicit, in the sweet ways of innocent womanhood. She loved him dearly, wholly, it was plain — had found the realisation of her old formless dreams in this wondrous birth of a desire for one, in whose new-impassioned eyes she had known herself reflected hitherto only for the most patronised of small gossips. And, for her part, fearless as nature, she made no secret of her love. She was absorbed in, a captive to, Jason from that moment and for ever.

He responded. What man, however perverse, could have resisted, on first appeal, the attraction of such beauty, the flower of a radiant soul? The two were betrothed; the old man's cup of happiness was brimmed.

Then came clouds and a cold wind, chilling the garden of Hesperis. Jason was always one of those who, possessing classic noses, will cut them off, on easy provocation, to spite their faces. He was so proudly independent, to himself, that he resented the least assumption of proprietorship in him on the part of other people—even of those who had the best claim to his love and submission. This pride was an obsession. It stultified the real good in him, which was considerable. Apart from it, he was a good, warm-tempered fellow, hasty but affectionate. Under its dominion, he would have broken his own heart on an imaginary grievance.

He found one, it is to be supposed, in the privileges assumed by love; in its exacting claims upon him; perhaps in its little unreasoning jealousies. He distorted these into an implied conceit of authority over him on the part of an heiress who was condescending to his meaner fortunes. The suggestion was quite base and without warrant; but pride has no balance.

No doubt, moreover, the rather childish self-depreciations of the old man, his father, in his attitude towards a match he had so fondly desired, helped to aggravate this feeling. The upshot was that, when within a few months of the date which was to make his union with Tryphena eternal, Jason broke away from a restraint which his pride pictured to him as intolerable, and went on a yachting expedition with a friend.

Then, at once, and with characteristic violence, came the reaction. He wrote, impetuously, frenziedly, from a distant port, claiming himself Tryphena's, and Tryphena his, for ever and ever and ever. They were man and wife before God. He had behaved like an insensate brute, and he was at that moment starting to speed to her side, to beg her forgiveness and the return of her love.

He had no need to play the suitor afresh. She had never doubted or questioned their mutual bondage, and would have died a maid for his sake. Something of sweet exultation only seemed to quicken and leap in her body, that her faith in her dear love was vindicated.

But the joy came near to upset the reason of the old man, already tottering to its dotage; and what followed destroyed it utterly.

The yacht, flying home, was lost at sea, and Jason was drowned.

I once saw Tryphena about this time. She lived with her near mindless charge, lonely, in an old gray house upon the borders of a salt mere, and had little but the unearthly cries of seabirds to answer to the questions of her widowed heart. She worked, sweet in charity, among the marsh folk, a beautiful unearthly presence; and was especially to be found where infants and the troubles of child-bearing women called for her help and sympathy. She was a wife herself, she would say quaintly; and some day perhaps, by grace of the good spirits of the sea, would be

a mother. None thought to cross her statement, put with so sweet a sanity; and, indeed, I have often noticed that the neighbourhood of great waters breeds in souls a mysticism which is remote from the very understanding of land-dwellers.

How I saw her was thus :—

I was fishing, on a day of chill calm, in a dinghy off the flat coast. The stillness of the morning had tempted me some distance from the village where I was staying. Presently a sense of bad sport and healthy famine "plumped" in me, so to speak, for luncheon, and I looked about for a spot picturesque enough to add a zest to sandwiches, whisky, and tobacco. Close by, a little creek or estuary ran up into a mere, between which and the sea lay a cluster of low sand-hills; and thither I pulled. The spot, when I reached it, was calm, chill desolation manifest — lifeless water and lifeless sand, with no traffic between them but the dead interchange of salt. Low sedges, at first, and behind them low woods were mirrored in the water at a distance, with an interval between me and them of sheeted glass; and right across this shining pool ran a dim, half-drowned causeway—the sea-path, it appeared, to and from a lonely house which I could just distinguish squatting among trees. It was Tryphena's house.

Now, paddling dispiritedly, I turned a cold dune, and saw a mermaid before me. At least, that was my instant impression. The creature sat coiled on the strand, combing her hair—that was certain, for I saw the gold-green tresses of it whisked by her action into rainbow threads. It appeared as certain that her upper half was flesh and her lower fish; and it was only on my nearer approach that this latter resolved itself into a pale green skirt, roped, owing to her posture, about her limbs, and the hem fanned out at her feet into a tail fin. Thus also her bosom, which had appeared naked, became a bodice, as near

to her flesh in colour and texture as a smock is to a lady's-smock, which some call a cuckoo-flower.

It was plain enough now; yet the illusion for the moment had quite startled me.

As I came near, she paused in her strange business to canvass me. It was Tryphena herself, as after-inquiry informed me. I have never seen so lovely a creature. Her eyes, as they regarded me passing, were something to haunt a dream: so great in tragedy—not fathomless, but all in motion near their surfaces, it seemed, with green and rooted sorrows. They were the eyes, I thought, of an Undine late-humanised, late awakened to the rapturous and troubled knowledge of the woman's burden. Her forehead was most fair, and the glistening thatch divided on it like a golden cloud revealing the face of a wondering angel.

I passed, and a sand-heap stole my vision foot by foot. The vision was gone when I returned. I have reason to believe it was vouchsafed me within a few months of the coming of the ghost-child.

On the morning succeeding the night of the day on which Jason and Tryphena were to have been married, the girl came down from her bedroom with an extraordinary expression of still rapture on her face. After breakfast she took the old man into her confidence. She was childish still; her manner quite youthfully thrilling; but now there was a new-born wonder in it that hovered on the pink of shame.

"Father! I have been under the deep waters and found him. He came to me last night in my dreams —so sobbing, so impassioned—to assure me that he had never really ceased to love me, though he had near broken his own heart pretending it. Poor boy! poor ghost! What could I do but take him to my arms? And all night he lay there, blest and forgiven, till in the morning he melted away with a sigh that

woke me; and it seemed to me that I came up dripping from the sea."

"My boy! He has come back!" chuckled the old man. "What have you done with him, Tryphena?"

"I will hold him tighter the next time," she said.

But the spirit of Jason visited her dreams no more.

That was in March. In the Christmas following, when the mere was locked in stillness, and the wan reflection of snow mingled on the ceiling with the red dance of firelight, one morning the old man came hurrying and panting to Tryphena's door.

"Tryphena! Come down quickly! My boy, my Jason, has come back! It was a lie that they told us about his being lost at sea!"

Her heart leapt like a candle-flame! What new delusion of the old man's was this? She hurried over her dressing and descended. A garrulous old voice mingled with a childish treble in the breakfast-room. Hardly breathing, she turned the handle of the door, and saw Jason before her.

But it was Jason, the prattling babe of her first knowledge; Jason, the flaxen-headed, apple-cheeked cherub of the nursery; Jason, the confiding, the merry, the loving, before pride had come to warp his innocence. She fell on her knees to the child, and with a burst of ecstasy caught him to her heart.

She asked no question of the old man as to when or whence this apparition had come, or why he was here. For some reason she dared not. She accepted him as some waif, whom an accidental likeness had made glorious to their hungering hearts. As for the father, he was utterly satisfied and content. He had heard a knock at the door, he said, and had opened it and found this. The child was naked, and his pink, wet body glazed with ice. Yet he seemed insensible to the killing cold. It was Jason—that was enough. There is no date nor time for imbecility.

Its phantoms spring from the clash of ancient memories. This was just as actually his child as—more so, in fact, than—the grown young figure which, for all its manhood, had dissolved into the mist of waters. He was more familiar with, more confident of it, after all. It had come back to be unquestioningly dependent on him; and that was likest the real Jason, flesh of his flesh.

"Who are you, darling?" said Tryphena.

"I am Jason," answered the child.

She wept, and fondled him rapturously.

"And who am I?" she asked. "If you are Jason, you must know what to call me."

"I know," he said; "but I mustn't, unless you ask me."

"I won't," she answered, with a burst of weeping. "It is Christmas Day, dearest, when the miracle of a little child was wrought. I will ask you nothing but to stay and bless our desolate home."

He nodded, laughing.

"I will stay, until you ask me."

They found some little old robes of the baby Jason, put away in lavender, and dressed him in them. All day he laughed and prattled; yet it was strange that, talk as he might, he never once referred to matters familiar to the childhood of the lost sailor.

In the early afternoon he asked to be taken out—seawards, that was his wish. Tryphena clothed him warmly, and, taking his little hand, led him away. They left the old man sleeping peacefully. He was never to wake again.

As they crossed the narrow causeway, snow, thick and silent, began to fall. Tryphena was not afraid, for herself or the child. A rapture upheld her; a sense of some compelling happiness, which she knew before long must take shape on her lips.

They reached the seaward dunes—mere ghosts of foothold in that smoke of flakes. The lap of vast

waters seemed all around them, hollow and mysterious. The sound flooded Tryphena's ears, drowning her senses. She cried out, and stopped.

"Before they go," she screamed—"before they go, tell me what you were to call me!"

The child sprang a little distance, and stood facing her. Already his lower limbs seemed dissolving in the mists.

"I was to call you 'mother'!" he cried, with a smile and toss of his hand.

Even as he spoke, his pretty features wavered and vanished. The snow broke into him, or he became part with it. Where he had been, a gleam of iridescent dust seemed to show one moment before it sank and was extinguished in the falling cloud. Then there was only the snow, heaping an eternal chaos with nothingness.

Tryphena made this confession, on a Christmas Eve night, to one who was a believer in dreams. The next morning she was seen to cross the causeway, and thereafter was never seen again. But she left the sweetest memory behind her, for human charity, and an elf-like gift of loveliness.

HIS CLIENT'S CASE.

THE *Personal Reminiscences* of the late Mr. Justice Ganthony, now in process of being edited, are responsible for the following drollery:—

My first "chambers" were on the top, not to say the attic, floor of a house in (the now defunct) Furnival's Inn. I called *it* "chambers," in the plural, on the strength of a coal-cellar, in the window-seat, and a turn-up bedstead which became a cupboard by day. That accounted for two rooms, and "the usual offices," as the house-agents say, when they refer to a kitchen six feet by eight in the basement. Trousers, after all, are only one garment, although they are called a pair.

There I sat among the cobwebs, like a spider, and waited for my first brief. In the meanwhile, I lived as the spiders do—on hope, flavoured with a little attic salt. It was not a cheering repast; but, such as it was, there was no end to it. By and by I was almost convinced (of what I had been friendlily advised) that it was a forlorn hope—the sort that leads to glory and the grave; probably by starvation. A spider has always, as a last resource, his web to roll up and devour. I ate up my chambers by degrees; that is to say, I dined, figuratively, day in day out, at the sign of the Three Balls. But this was to consume my own hump, like the camel. When that should be all gone, what next? There is a vulgar expression for prog, which is "belly-timber." I only realised its applicability to my own case when my chairs and tables, and other furniture, had gone the primrose way of digestion. It was the brass fender, a "genuine antique," that sat heaviest on my chest.

Furnival's Inn was not a cheerful place to starve in.

There was an atmosphere of gloom and decay about it, which derived, no doubt, from its former dealings in Chancery. In the days of its prosperity it had fed the Inns of Court, as Winchester feeds New College; in my time it could not feed itself. The rats were at it, and the bugs, which are the only things I know of that can thrive on crumbling plaster. I had the distinction of providing some of their rare debauches to the latter; but that was before I began to crumble myself. Some of my blood was certainly incorporated in the ancient walls, and was included in their downfall.

My view, from Furnival's Inn, was dismally introspective. It commanded, in the first place, a quadrangle of emptiness; and included, in the second, an array of lowering and mouldy tenements like my own, at whose stark windows hungry expectant faces would glimmer fitfully, and scan the yard for the clients who never came, and disappear.

There was a decrepit inn, of another and the social type, budded, like a vicious intestinal growth, within Furnival's. I used to speculate, as I looked down at night on its tottering portico, and solemn old frequenters, and the lights blinking behind its blinds like corpse-candles, if it were not a half-way house of call for the dead. For, by day, all business seemed withdrawn from it, and its upper rooms might have been mortuaries for any life they exhibited. No cheery housemaid ever looked from their windows to chaff the amorous Boots below. There was none to chaff. The dead need no boots.

Furnival's Inn had one gullet, by which the roar of the world came in from Holborn. Little else came in but tradesmen, and bailiffs, and an occasional policeman in a thoughtful archæological mood. But the gullet was a vent as much of exit as of entrance; and by it one could escape from the madness of ghostly isolation, and mingle with the world, and look in the

pastry-cooks' windows. Whenever I was moved to one of these chameleonic foraging expeditions, I would pin a ticket on my door, "Called away. Please leave message with housekeeper," and light my pipe with it when I returned. I wonder if any one ever read the fatuous legends? To Hope's eyes, I am sure, they must have been dinted, like phonographic records, with the echoes of all the footsteps that ever sounded on the stairs during my absences.

Those footsteps! How they marked the measure ot my desperation! They were not many, and they were far between; but not one in all the dreary tale ever reached my attic. Why should they, indeed? I am free to acknowledge its moral inaccessibility. Jurisprudence does not, in its convincing phases, inhabit immediately under the roof. The higher one lives, in practice, the lower one's practice is like to be. The law is not an elevating pursuit.

I recognised this in the end; and the moment I recognised it I got my first client.

One November evening, very depressed at last, I was sitting smoking, and ruminating over my doleful fate, and thinking if I had not better shut myself up for good and all in the bed-cupboard, when I heard steps enter the hall below. My ears pricked, of course, from force of habit, and from force of habit I uttered a scornful stage laugh—for the withering of Fortune, if she happened to be by. But, in spite of my scorn, the steps, ignoring the architects' offices on the ground floor (Frost and Driffel, contractors for Castles in Spain), ascended and continued to ascend—past the deed-engrosser's closet on the half-way landing; past the empty chambers immediately below mine (whence, on gusty nights, the tiny creaking of the rope, by which the last tenant had hanged himself from a beam, would speak through the floor under my bed), and higher yet, right up to my door.

Hope, dying on a pallet up three flights of stairs, sprang alert on the instant. It might be a friend, a creditor, the housekeeper: something telepathic, flowing through the panels, assured me that it was none of these things. Tap-tap! so smart on the woodwork that it made me jump. I swept pipes and tobacco into a drawer. "Come in!" I cried. Then, as the visitor entered, "John, throw up the window a little! Oh, bother the boy! he's out."

I don't know if the new-comer was imposed on. He nodded and sniffed.

"Tobacco!" he exclaimed. "What an age since I've tasted it! Mr. Ganthony, I presume?"

I bowed.

"Barrister-at-law?"

I bowed again. My plate was in the hall to inform him.

"Accept my instructions for a brief."

He stated it so abruptly that it took my breath away. If all this was outside procedure, I was not going to quarrel with my bread and butter. I motioned him to a chair, and, taking up pen and paper tentatively, was in a position to scrutinise my visitor.

His appearance was certainly odd — a marked exaggeration, I should have pronounced it, of the legal type. His face was very red; his enormous side-whiskers very white. Large spectacles obscured his eyes, and he wore his silk hat (of an obsolete pattern) cocked rakishly over one of them. Add to this that his voluminous frock-coat looked like a much larger man's misfit; that his black cotton gloves were preposterously long in the fingers; that he carried a "gamp" of the pantomime pattern, and it will be obvious that I had some reason for my astonishment. But I kept that in hand. A lawyer, after all, must come to graduate in the eccentricities of clients.

He looked perkily, with an abrupt action of his head, round about him; then came to me again.

"Large practice?" he asked.

"Large enough for my needs," I answered winningly.

"H'm!" He sniffed. "They don't appear to be many."

"That—excuse me—is my affair," I said with dignity.

"Of course," he said; "of course. Only I looked you up—accident serving intuition—on the supposition that you were green, you know—one of the briefless ones—called to the Bar, but not chosen, eh?"

I plumped instantly for frankness.

"You are my first retainer," I said.

His manner changed at once. He pulled his chair a little nearer me, with an eager motion.

"That's what I wanted," he said. "That's it. The sort that are suffering to win their spurs. None of your egregious old-stagers, who require their briefs to be endorsed to the tune of three figures before they'll move—'monkey'-in-the-slot men, *I* call 'em. Thinks I to myself, Here's the sort that'll be willing to take up a case on spec'."

My enthusiasm shot down to zero.

"Oh!" I said, with a falling face; "on speculation!"

"There's a fortune in it for a clever advocate," he answered eagerly. "A fortune! all Pactolus in a nutshell. I've had my experiences of the other kind. They squeeze you, and throw you away; take the wages of sin, and hand you over to the deuce. What do *you* say?"

"If you will give me the particulars," I answered, without heart, "I shall be able to judge better. Your client——?"

He laughed joyously; frowned; put his hat on the floor; crossed his arms over his umbrella-handle, and

glowered ferociously at me, squinting through his glasses.

"Exactly," he said; "my client, ha-ha! Here, then, young sir, is my client's case.

"His name is Buggins" (I glanced involuntarily at the wall). "He is, or was, until envy combined with detraction to ruin him, a company-promoter. As such, his trend was always towards insurance. It offered the best opportunities to a great creative genius. Buggins, being all that, recognised the still amazing potentialities in a field of commerce, which, though much worked, remains unexhausted—almost, one might say, inexhaustible. In his younger days he showed a pretty invention in devising and engineering what I may call personal essays in this line. His Insurance against Waterspouts, which he worked principally in the Midlands, brought him some handsome returns with a single generation of farmers. It was based on a cloud-burst at Bethesda, in Wales, which ruined quite a number. Other flights of his immature genius were, respectively, Insurance against Death in Diving-bells; against Death of a Broken Heart; against Official Strangulation; against Non-fatal Disfiguration by Lightning; against Death by Starvation (this last was largely patronised by millionaires). On a somewhat higher plane were his *Provident Dipsomaniary*, whose policies matured, or 'burst,' as Buggins phrased it, at the age of eighty-five, an essential condition being that the holders must put in their claims in person; his *Physical Promotion League*, which guaranteed to pay to the parents of any child, insured in it during his teens, a sum of ten pounds on the child's reaching twenty-five years of age and a minimum height of six feet, and a thousand pounds for every additional inch which it grew afterwards; his *Anti-Fiction Mutual*, whose policies were forfeitable on first conviction of having written a novel (this proved one of the most

profitable of all Buggins's enterprises for a time ; but in the end the national malady proved incurable, and subscribers fell off) ; his *Psychical Pocket Research Society*, which offered an Insurance against Ghost-seeing, the policy-holder forfeiting his claim on proof of his first supernatural visitation (but this was so violently assailed by the opposition society, which offered to prove that there were not three people in the United Kingdom who were insusceptible to spooks, that the scheme had to be abandoned) ; finally, in this category, his *Bachelors' Protection Association*, which provided that, if a member reached the age of ninety without having married, he should receive an annuity beginning at fifty pounds, and rising, by yearly increments of ten pounds, to ten thousand pounds—figures which, in a centenarian age, were successful in dazzling a great many.

"But, by then, Buggins was beginning to master the deep ethics of his trade, and to realise that its heaviest emoluments were rooted in the grand principle of profitable self-denial. People *will* be unselfish if they see money in it ; you can't stop 'em.

"One other notable venture marks this period of what I may call his moral transition. That was his inspired scheme for insuring *against* illness, in the sense that any policy-holder admitting him or herself to be seriously indisposed, lost the right to compensation. It would have proved a godsend in a neurotic age ; but the antagonism of the entire medical profession, with the single exception of the officer appointed by the company, killed it.

"We come now to Buggins's final matured achievements. I beg your pardon ?"

I had said nothing ; but I suppose there is such a thing as a "speaking" silence. Certainly, if I had looked as I felt, I was a more drivelling maniac by now than Buggins himself. The visitor seemed to shoot out his eyes like an angry crab.

"Young man, young man!" he said warningly, "I begin to be suspicious that, after all, I may be misplacing my confidence."

He looked banefully into his hat, where it stood rim upwards on the floor; then, suddenly overwrought, kicked it fiercely across the room. The action seemed to restore him to complete urbanity. He smiled.

"So perish all Buggins's enemies!" he said loftily; "and hail the grand climacteric!"

He pinned me, like a live butterfly, to the wall behind me with a fixed and penetrating gaze.

"What would you say," he said quietly, "to an Insurance against Brigandage, available to all travelling in Sicily or the Balkans, and realisable" (his watchfulness was intense) "on the receipt, at the head-offices in the Shetland Islands, of a nose, ear, or other organ, attested, under urgency, by the nearest consul, to be the personal property of the applicant desiring a ransom?"

He paused significantly. "I should say," I responded drivellingly, "that, as a feat of pure inspiration, it—it takes the cake."

"Ah!" He shouted it, and sprang to his feet joyously. "You are the man for me! You justify my confidence, as the returns justified Buggins's daring conception. Would you believe it: within the first few months, bushels of noses were received at the head-offices, every one of which Buggins had no difficulty in proving to be false! But, hush! stay!—there was to be a higher flight!"

He had been pacing riotously up and down. Now he flounced to a stop before me, and held me once more with his glittering eye.

"It took the form," he whispered, "of a *Purgatory Mutual*, on the Tontine principle, the last out to take the pool!"

I rose, trembling, to my feet, as he burst into a violent fit of laughter.

"It was that," he shouted, as he set to racing up and down again, "which let loose the dogs of envy, spite, and slander. They called him mad—*him*, Buggins, *mad*, ha-ha! It was the fools themselves were mad. He ignored their clamour; his vast brain was yet busy with immortal conceptions; he matured a scheme against *Death from Flying-machines*" (here he tore off one whisker and threw it into the fireplace); "he did more—he personally tested the theory of aerostatics" (here he tore off the other whisker, and stamped on it). "Too great, too absorbed, he never noticed that the unstable engine had landed him in the grounds of a private asylum, and, relieved of his weight, had soared away again. The attendants came; they seized and immured him; they would not believe his assurances that he was a perfect stranger. From that day to this, when fortuitous circumstances enabled him to escape, he has appealed to their justice, their humanity, in vain."

Again he stopped before me, and, flinging his spectacles in my face, rent open the breast of his coat.

"Know me at last for what I am!" he yelled. "I am Buggins, and I appoint you my advocate in the action I am about to bring against the Commissioners of Lunacy!"

The door opened softly, and a masculine face peered round the edge. Its scrutiny appearing satisfactory, it was followed by the whole of an official form, which, in its entering, revealed another, large and passionless, standing behind it.

"Now, Mr. Buggins," said the first, "we're a-waitin' for you to take up your cue."

The visitor whipped round, started, chuckled, and, to my relief and surprise, responded rather abjectly.

"All right, Johnson," he said. "I just slipped out between the acts for a whiff of fresh air."

"Well," said the man, "you must be quick and come along, or you'll spile the play."

He went quite tamely, and the second official outside received him stolidly into custody. Mate number one lingered to touch his cap to me and explain.

"Flyborough Asylum, sir. They give him a part in some private theatricals, and he tuk advantage of his disguise as a family lawyer to hook it between the acts. None of us reco'nised him, or guessed what he'd done, till the time come for him to take up his cue; and then, with the prompter howling for him and him not answering, the truth struck us of a heap."

I was down in my chair, flabby and gasping.

"But what brought him to *me*?" I groaned.

"Train, sir," answered the man; "plenty of 'em, and easy to catch from the suburbs. Why he come on here? Why, his offices in the old days was in Furnival's; it were that give us the clue. I suppose, now" (he took off his cap, took a red handkerchief from it, thoughtfully mopped his forehead, and returned the bandana to its nest), "I suppose, now, he's been a-gammoning of you pretty high with his insurances? His fust principle in life was always to play upon fools."

AN ABSENT VICAR.

"EXACTLY," said the Reverend Septimus Prior; "the exchange was the most fortuitous, not to say the most fortunate" (he gave a little giggle and bow) "possible. Your uncle saw my advertisement, answered it, and for a brief period he goes to my cure, and I come to his."

"Well, if you feel certain," said Miss Robin, regretfully resting in her lap the novel she was reading.

Mr. Prior sipped his tea and nibbled his rusk. In the intervals between, he would occasionally glance at the portrait of a scholarly cleric, with a thin grim mouth and glassy eyes, which bantered him from the wall opposite.

"Your uncle—Mr. Fearful?" he had once ventured to ask; and the niece had answered, "Yes. It is very like him."

Now he paused, with his cup half-way to his mouth.

"I beg your pardon?" he exclaimed.

Miss Robin put her book to her lips, and looking over it—really rather charmingly—yawned behind the cover. She was surprisingly *dégagée* for a country vicar's niece—self-collected, and admirably pretty; though her open-work stockings, which she did not hesitate to cross her legs to display, filled him with a weak sense of entanglement in some unrighteous mystery.

"You said?" he invited her.

"I said, If you feel certain," she repeated calmly.

"Ah!" he said. "Yes. You mean?"

"I mean," she said, without a ruffle, "that Uncle Philip *may* have settled to swap livings with you *pro tem.*, and *may* have started off to take yours, and *may* have got there—*if* you feel certain that he has."

"To be sure," he answered. "Why shouldn't I?"

"Had he arrived—when you started—for here?"

"No. Certainly he hadn't arrived. My train was due. I had to leave a message; but——"

She stopped him by dropping her book into her lap; and, clasping one knee in her hands, conned him amiably.

"Did he lead you to expect a niece among the charges he was committing to your care—or cure?" she asked.

"Well, I must confess," said the young man, blushing, "he—ah! mentioned a housekeeper—Mrs. Gaunt, I think—but——"

"No, of course not," she interrupted him. "He had forgotten all about me."

Mr. Prior gasped, and looked down. This was his first holiday exchange of livings—an unsophisticated venture, which he was already half repenting. A suburban cure; a desire for fresh pastures; a daring resolution; an advertisement in the *Church Times*; a prompt answer; as prompt an acceptance (after due reference to the Clergy List); a long railway journey; a tramp, relatively as long, to a remote parsonage on the road to a seaport; an arrival in the dark; an innocence of all expectation of, or preparation for him; an explanation; production of his written voucher, and—here he was, accepted, he could not but think, on sufferance. But there he thought wrong. Miss Robin was not near so upset by his appearance as he was.

"He comes and goes" (she said of Uncle Philip) "without reference to anybody or anything. We never know what he'll do next, or who'll introduce himself into the house as his friend. It may be a burglar or a pirate for all we know. All sorts of strange people come up from the port, and are shown into my uncle's room, and out again by himself at the side door. At least, I suppose so.

We never know what becomes of them, or what's going on, any more than I doubt he does himself. I dare say they fleece him nicely; and—you may laugh—but when he's in his absent moods, you might undress him without his knowing. Only he'd probably strike you to the ground when he found out—he's such an awful temper."

"Dear me!" murmured the young man; "how very curious. One hears of such cases."

"Does one?" said Miss Robin. "I'd rather hear of, than live with them, anyhow; and in a desert, too. It wouldn't so much matter if he didn't always hold others to blame for his mistakes and mislayings. He kept me in bed a week once, because he'd read right through a treatise on explosives in the pulpit, before he discovered that it wasn't his peace-thanksgiving sermon."

"Astonishing!" said Mr. Prior; then added, with a faint smile, "Well, I can promise you, at least, that *I'm* not a pirate."

"No," she said, "I can see you're not. Won't you have some more tea?"

He was shown to his bedroom by Mrs. Gaunt, who was a stony, silent woman, bleak with mystery. All night the wind howled round the lonely building; and the unhappy man, who, in a phase of worldly revolt, egged on by a dare-devil parishioner, had once read *The House on the Marsh*, thought of Sarah and Mr. Rayner, and of a silent weaving of strings across the stairway in the dark to catch him tripping should he venture upon escape.

He arose, feverish, to a sense of hooting draughts in a gray house, and went to matins in the gaunt dull church, which stood as lonely as a shepherd's hut on a slope hard by. There was nothing in sight but wind-torn pastures, and, all around, little graves, which seemed trying vainly to tuck themselves and their shivering epitaphs under the grass. There appeared

nothing in the world to attract a congregation; but, as a matter of fact, there were a few old frosted spinsters present, of that amphibious order, a sort of landcrabs, which forgathers on the neutral wastes between sea and country.

Mr. Prior went back to his dreary breakfast at the Vicarage. His lady hostess, it appeared, was wont to lie late abed, and did not think it worth her while to alter her habits for him. The meal, however, had been served and left to petrify, pending his return from matins. It was with a consciousness of congealed bacon-fat, insufficiently dissolved by lukewarm tea, sticking to the roof of his mouth, that he rose from it, and pondered his next movement. No one came near him. He looked dismally out on a weedy drive. He rather wished Miss Robin would condescend to his company. He was no pirate, certainly; but he believed he would brave, had braved already, much for his cloth. She had beautiful eyes—clear windows, he was sure, to a virginal soul. But then, the other end! the white feet peeping through that devil's lattice! He tried to recall any authority in Holy Writ for open-work stockings. Certainly pilgrims went barefoot, and half a loaf was better than no bread.

"This will not do, Septimus," he said, weakly striking his breast. "I will go and compose my sermon."

He stepped into the hall. It was papered in cold blue and white marble, with a mahogany umbrella-stand, and nothing else, to temper its tomblike austerity. At the farther end was a baize door of a faded strawberry colour.

He was entitled to the run of the house, he concluded. There had been no mention of any Bluebeard chamber. But, then, to be sure, there had been no mention of a niece. The association of ideas tingled him. What if he should turn the handle and alight on Miss Robin?

He flipped his breast again, frowning, and strode to the baize door. Beside it, he now observed, a passage went off to the kitchens. Desperately he pulled the door, found a second, of wood, beyond it, opened that also, and found himself in what was obviously the Vicar's study.

Obviously, that is to say, to his later conceptions of his correspondent. Otherwise he might have taken it for the laboratory of a scientist. It was lined with bookcases, sparsely volumed; but five out of every six shelves were thronged with jars, instruments, and engines of a terrifying nature. In one place was a curtained recess potential with unholiness. Prints of discomposing organs hung on the walls. Immemorial dust blurred everything. There was a pedestalled desk in the middle, and opposite it, hung with a short curtain, a half-glazed door which the intruder, tiptoeing thither and peeping, with his heart at the gallop, found to lead into a dismal narrow lane which communicated with the road. He returned to the desk, which, frankly open, seemed to invite him to its use, and was pondering the moral practicability of composition in the midst of such surroundings, when a voice at his ear almost made him jump out of his skin.

"Pardon me, sir; but have you the master's permission to use this room?"

Mrs. Gaunt had come upon him without a sound.

"Dear me, madam!" he said, wiping his forehead. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, sir," she said, in her stony, colourless way, "that this room is interdict to both great and little, now and always, unless he makes an exception in your favour."

"There was no specific mention of it, certainly," said Mr. Prior, "neither for nor against. I concluded that the use of a study was not debarred me."

"Pardon me," she repeated monotonously. "I believe you concluded wrong, sir."

"The door was not locked."

"There are some prohibitions," she said, "that need no locks."

The inference was fearful.

"Miss June" (ecstatic name!) "and I," she said, "have never dared so much as to put our noses inside, and not a word spoken to forbid it."

Mr. Prior, to his own astonishment, revolted. Smarting, perhaps, under the memory of some suspected covert innuendo in a certain silvery acquiescence in a statement of his made last night, he revolted. He would prove that he could be a pirate if he chose.

"I shall stop here," he said, trembling all over. "There was no embargo laid, and I must have somewhere to write my sermon."

"Of course," said a voice; and Miss Robin stood in the doorway—the most enchanting morning vision, her eyes bright with curiosity.

"I am delighted you support me," he said, kindling and advancing.

She still looked beside and around him.

"Do you know," she said, "it is perfectly true. I have not once dared to venture in here before, though never actually told not to. But that is all one, I think. What an extraordinary litter!"

She had not ventured! and with the inducement of her petrifying surroundings! She was uninquisitive, then—"an excellent thing in woman."

"Since there is no veto," he said, incomparably audacious, "supposing we explore together?"

She looked at him admiringly.

"I should like to." She hesitated.

"June!" cried Mrs. Gaunt

"And I will," said the girl.

But the housekeeper, content, it appeared, with her protest, stood, not uninterested in the subsequent investigation.

"Do you not find all this a little remote, a little

lifeless sometimes, Miss Robin?" said the clergyman, greatly daring.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Eels get used to skinning. It's not life, of course. But I have to make the best of it, and there's no help."

"Ah, yes, there is!" said her companion, intending to imply the spiritual, but half hoping she would construe it into the material consolation.

"What do you mean?" she asked simply.

"Why," he said, stammering and blushing furiously, and giving away his case at once, "with your youth, and—and beauty—oh, forgive me! I am a little confused."

"Where do you live?" she said, fixing him with her large eyes.

"At Clapton," he murmured.

"It sounds most joyous," she said, clasping her hands.

Hardly knowing what he did, he pulled the curtain away from the recess by which they stood, and instantly staggered back. The housekeeper, who, foreseeing his act, had crept up inquisitively behind, gave a mortal gasp, and Miss Robin a faint shriek—for, stretched lifeless and livid on a couch within, lay the stark body of a man.

For a minute they all stood staring, frozen with horror; then Mrs. Gaunt began to wring her hands.

"It is the same," she cried, in awful tones. "I remember him—the dark foreigner. He wandered up here from the port a week ago; and I took him in to the master, and he *never came out again*. I thought he had let him go by the door there into the lane. Oh, woe on this fearful house! Long have I suspected and long dreaded. The sounds, and the awful, awful smells!"

"Perhaps," whispered the girl, gulping, and

clutching at her breast, "he died unexpectedly, and uncle put him away here, and forgot all about him."

Mrs. Gaunt shrieked, and seizing the clergyman's arm, pointed—

"Look! Pickled babies—one, two, three! And bones! And a fish-kettle! It is all plain. He kills them, and boils them down for his experiments, and by an accident he forgot to empty his larder—his larder! hoo-hoo!—before he went!"

She broke into hysteric laughter and gaspings. Miss Robin, whinnying, tottered quite close up to the young man, who stood shivering and speechless.

"What can we do to save him?" she whimpered. "Mr. Prior, say something!"

Thus urged, the unhappy young man strove to press his brain into a focus with his hand, and to rally himself to what, he felt, was the supreme occasion of his life. The appealing eyes and parted lips so close to his would have intoxicated a saint, much more a pirate.

"We must warn him—agony column—from returning," he ejaculated, reeling. "Cryptic address—has he any distinguishing mark?"

"Yes," she said, with frantic eagerness; "he has a large mole at the root of his nose."

"Very well," he said—"something of this sort: 'Nose, with large mole at root of. All discovered. Don't return!'"

"But what is the use of an advertisement? Oh, Mr. Prior! what is the use of an advertisement when we know where he is, or ought to be, and can go——?"

"Do you really think he will be there? It was a blind. Oh, Miss Robin, it is evident now it was a blind to cover his tracks!"

"But why should he have designed to escape at all, leaving this—oh, Mr. Prior!—leaving this horror behind him?"

"We can only conjecture—oh, Miss Robin, we can only conjecture! Perhaps because of his conscience overtaking him; perhaps because, killing in haste, he discovered at leisure that *it* would not go into the kettle; perhaps in a phase of that deadly absence of mind, which, he will have realised by now, the Lord has converted to his confusion."

"Well, if you are right. And in the meantime we must get rid of this—somehow. Oh, pray think of a means! Do! Do!"

Mrs. Gaunt steadied her storming breast as she leaned for support, with hanging head, against the door.

"There's the old well—off the lane," she panted, without looking up. "He there *might* have fallen in—as he went out—and none have guessed it to this day."

It was a fearful inspiration. Mr. Prior, in that moment of supreme sentient exaltation, abandoned himself to the awful rapture of things.

"June!" he whispered, putting shaking hands on the girl's shoulders; "if I do this thing for your sake, will you—will you—I have a mother—this is no longer a place for you—come to Clapton?"

"Yes," she answered, offering to nestle to him. "I had supposed that was understood."

He was a little taken aback.

"We must move this first," he said, wringing his damp forehead. "Who—who will help me?"

It was really heroic of him. In a shuddering group, they approached together the terrible thing—hesitated—plunged, and dragged it out with a sickening flop on the floor.

A greasy turban, which it wore, rolled away, disclosing a near bald head. Its eyes were closed; its teeth grinned through a fluff of dark hair; a lank frock-coat embraced its body, linen puttees its shanks, and at the end were stiff bare feet.

"Look, and see if the coast is clear," gasped the clergyman.

Miss Robin turned to obey, and uttered a startled shriek.

"What are you doing with my Senassee?" cried a terrible voice at the door.

Mr. Prior whipped round, echoing his beloved's squawk. A fierce old man, leaning on a stick, stood glaring in the opening.

"Uncle!" cried the girl.

He advanced, sneering and caustic, pushed them all rudely aside, dropped on his knees beside the corpse, and, thrusting his finger forcibly into its mouth, appeared to hook and roll its tongue forward. Instantly an amazing transformation occurred. A convulsion shook the body; life flowed into its drab cheeks; its eyes opened and rolled; inarticulate sounds came from its jaws.

"Ha!" cried the old man; "I have foreclosed on these busybodies."

Then he rose to his feet, leaving the patient yawning and stretching on the floor.

"Fearful!" gasped the clergyman.

"Do you address me, sir?" asked the old man, scowling.

"Conjurer!" whispered Mr. Prior.

"If you like," snarled the other. "It is a common enough trick with these Yogis, but one I had never seen until he came my way and offered to show it me for a consideration. I had forgot he was still lying there when I agreed to exchange livings with you. (You are Mr. Prior, I presume?) It was the merest oversight, which I remembered on my way, and came back by an early train to rectify—none too soon, it seems, for the staying of meddlesome fingers."

"Forgot he was there!" cried Mr. Prior.

"And what if I did, sir?" snapped the other. "It was a full week he had lain tranced; and let me tell

you, sir, I have more things to think of in a week than your mind could accommodate in a century. Why," he cried, in sudden enlightenment, "I do believe the fools imagined I had murdered the man."

"Look at the babies in the bottles!" cried Mrs. Gaunt hysterically.

"As to you, you old ass," shouted the Vicar, flouncing round, "if you can't distinguish embryo simiadæ from babies, you'd better call yourself Miss, as I believe you are!"

"I give notice on the spot!" cried Mrs. Gaunt.

Miss Robin stepped up bravely to the young clergyman, and linked her arm in his.

"And I," she said. "I think you have behaved very cruelly to me, to us all, Uncle, and—and Mr. Prior has a mother."

"I dare say; he seems fool enough for anything," roared the old gentleman. "Go back to her, sir! Go to——"

June shrieked.

"Clapton!" he shouted, "and take this baggage with you!"

THE BREECHES BISHOP.

In that age of gallantry, the reign of Charles the Second, it was customary when a gentleman drank a lady's health to throw some part of his dress into the flames, in order to do her still greater honour. This was well enough for a lover, but the folly did not stop here, for his companions were obliged to follow him in this proof of his veneration by consuming a similar article, whatever it might be.

About the latter part of the seventeenth century, there was living at Aldersferry, in the Soke of Godsport in Hampshire, a worthy clergyman of the name of Barnabas Winthrop. The little living of St. Ascham's—a perpetual curacy in the Archdeaconry of Winchester—supplied the moral and material needs of this amiable man; his granddaughter, Miss Joan Seabird, kept house for him; and never were cream and ripe fruit happier in contact than were these two playful and reasonable intellects in their relations of child and sage.

A hysteromaniac, however, is Fortune, who, charmed for a while with the simplicity of these her protégés, soon began to construe their contentment into self-sufficiency, and to devise some means to correct their supposed presumption on her favour, by putting it into the head of the artless divine how silence on questions which one felt called loudly for reform might be comfortable, but was shameful and an evasion of one's duty. In short, Dr. Winthrop, entertaining original views of sanitation and the prevention of epidemics, was wickedly persuaded by her to expound them, and so to invite into his harmless Eden the snake which was to demoralise it. In one day he became a pamphleteer.

Now the Plague, in that year of 1682, was not so

remote a memory but that people lived in a constant terror of its recrudescence. Pandects, treatises, expositions, containing diagnoses, palladiums and schemes of quarantine, all based on the most orthodox superstitions, did not cease to pour from the press, to the eternal confusion of an age which was yet far from realising the pious schism of the *aide-toi*. What, then, as might be supposed, was the effect on it, when a clergyman of the Establishment was seen to enter the arena as a declared dissenter from the *fata obstant* of popular bigotry?

For a time Godsport, startled and scandalised, watched aloof the paper warfare; and it was not until after the appearance of the Doctor's tract, *De omni re Scibili* — wherein he sought, boldly and definitely, and withal with a characteristic humour, to lay the responsibility for pestilence, not upon the Almighty's shoulders, but, literally, at the doors of men, at their face-to-face proximity, and at "the Castynge of Noisome filth in their neare neighbourhood"—that it brought down its official hand with a weight and suddenness which shook St. Ascham's to its roots. In brief, there was flung at the delinquent one morning his formal citation to the Sessions Court, there to answer upon certain charges of having "in divers Tracts, Opuscules and Levrets, sought insidiously to ingrafte the minds of his Majesty's liege subjects with such impudent heresies as that it is in the power of man to limit the visitations of God — a very pestilent doctrine, and one arrogating to His servants the Almighty's high and beneficent prerogatives; inasmuch as Plague and Fire and other His scourges, being sacriligeously wrested from His graspe, the world would waxe blown with overlife, till it crawled upon the face of the heavens like a gross putrid cheese."

Under this bolt from the blue the liberal minds of grandsire and child sank amazed for the moment,

only to rally to a consciousness of the necessity for immediate action.

"Up, wench!" cried the Doctor, "and saddle our Pinwire. I will go and lay my case instanter before the Bishop."

"Alas, dearest!" answered the weeping girl, "you forget; he is this long while bedridden."

Her imagination, which had been wont secretly to fondle the idea of her grandfather's enlightened piety rewarded with a bishopric, pictured it in a moment turned to his confusion, and himself, perhaps, through the misrepresentations of a blockhead Corporation, disgraced and beggared in his old age. But, though she knew the Churchman, she had not calculated the rousing effects of criticism on the author.

"Then," roared he, "I will seek the fount itself of reason and justice. It was a good treatise, a well-argued treatise; and the King shall decide upon the practical merits of his own English."

"The King!" she cried, clasping her hands.

"The King," he answered. "Know you not that he moves daily between Southampton, where he lies, and Winchester, where he builds? We will go to Winchester. Nay, *we*, child; blubber not; for who knows but that, the shepherd being withdrawn, the wolves might think to practise on the lamb."

He checked himself, and hung his head.

"The Lord pardon and justify me indignation," he muttered. "I was a priest before an author."

It was fine, but a loaded sky, when they set forth upon their journey of twenty or so miles, Joan riding pillion behind her grandfather on the sober red nag. After much cross work over villainous tracks, they were got at last into the Southampton turnpike, when they were joined by a single horseman, riding a handsome barb, who, with a very favourable face for Joan, pulled alongside of them, as they jogged on, and fell into easy talk.

"Dost ride to overtake a bishopric, master clergyman," says he, "that you carry with you such a sweet bribe for preferment?"

Joan looked up, softly panting. Could he somehow have got wind already of their mission, and have taken them by the way to forestall it? But her eyes fell again before the besieging gaze of the cavalier.

He was a swart man of fifty or so, with a rather sooty expression, and his under-lip stuck out. His eyes, bagging a little in the lower lids, smouldered half shut, between lust and weariness, under the blackest brows; and, for the rest, he was dressed as black as the devil, with a sparkle of diamonds here and there in his bosom. Joan looked down breathless.

"I seek no preferment, sir, but a reasonable justice," said the curate; and, in a little, between this and that, had ingenuously, though with a certain twinkling eye for the humour of it all, confessed his whole case to the stranger. But Joan uttered not a word.

The cavalier laughed, then frowned mightily for a while. "We will indict these petty rogues of office on a *quo warranto*," he growled. "What! does not 'cleanness of body proceed from a due reverence of God'? Go on, sir, and I will promise you the King's consideration."

Then he forgot his indignation, leering at the girl again.

"And what is *your* business with Charles, pretty flower?" said he.

But, before she could answer, whish! went Pinwire's girth out of its buckle, and parson and girl tumbled into the road.

The cavalier laughed out, and, while the Doctor was ruefully readjusting his straps, offered his hand to the girl.

"Come, sweetheart," said he. "Since we go

a common road, shalt mount behind me, and equal the odds between your jade and my greater beast."

Joan appealed in silence to her grandfather.

"Verily, sir," he said nodding and smiling, "it would be a gracious and kindly act."

In a moment she was mounted, with her white arms belted about the stranger's waist; the next, he had put quick spurs to his horse, and was away with a rush and a clatter.

For an instant the Doctor failed to realise the nature of the abduction; and then of a sudden he was dancing and bawling in a sheer frenzy.

"Dog! Ravisher! Halt! Stop him! Detain him!"

He saw the flight disappear round a bend in the road. It was minutes before his shaking hands could negotiate strap and buckle, and enable him to follow in pursuit. But he carried no spurs, and Pinwire, already over-ridden, floundered in his steps. Distraught, dumbfounded, the old man was crying to himself, when he came upon Joan sitting by the roadside. He tumbled off, she jumped up, and they fell upon one another's neck.

"Oh, a fine King, forsooth!" she cried, sobbing and fondling him. "Oh, a fine King!"

"Who? What?" said he.

"Why, it was the King himself!"

"The King!"

"The King."

"How?" he gasped. "You have never seen him?"

"Trust a woman," quoth she.

"A woman!" he cried. "You are but half a one yet."

"It was the King, nevertheless."

"Joan, let us turn back."

"He had a wooing voice, grandfather."

"*Retro Satanas!* How did you give him the slip?"

"We were stayed by a cow, the dear thing, and like an eel I slid off."

"Dear Joan!"

"He commanded me to mount again, laughing all the while, and vowing he'd carry me back to you. But I held away, and he said such things of my beauty."

"That proves him false."

"Does it? But of course it does, since you say so. And while he was a-wheedling in that voice, I just whipt this from my hair on a thought, and gave his beast a vicious peck with it."

She showed a silver pin like a skewer.

"Admirable!" exclaimed her grandfather.

"It was putting fire to powder," she said. "It just gave a bound and was gone. If its rider pulls up this side of Christmas, I'll give him——"

"What, woman?"

"Lud! I've come of age, in a minute. And it's beginning to pour, grandfather; and where are we?"

He looked about him in the dolefullest way.

"If I knew!" he sighed. "We must e'en seek the shelter of an inn till this storm is by, and then return home. Better any bankruptcy than that of honour, Joan."

They remounted and jogged on in the rain, which by now was falling heavily. The tired little horse, feeling the weight of his own soaked head, began to hang it and cough. Presently they dismounted at a wayside byre, and, eating the simple luncheon which their providence had provided, dwelt on a little in hopes of the weather clearing. But it grew steadily worse.

"I have lost my bearings," said the clergyman in a sudden amazement. "We must push on."

About four o'clock, being seven miles or so short of Winchester, they came down upon a little stream which bubbled across the road. The groaning horse splashed into it and stood still. Dr. Winthrop, wakened by the pause from a brown reverie, whipped

his right leg over the beast's withers, landed, slipped on a stone, and sat down in two feet of water. Uttering a startled ejaculation, he scrambled up, a sop to the very waist of his homespun breeches. Their points —old disused laces, fragrant from Joan's bodice— clung weeping to his calves. He waded out, cherishing above water-mark the sodden skirts of his coat, his best, of "Colchester bayze." The horse, sensibly lightened, followed.

"Oh, Oh!" cried Joan. "Wasn't you sopped enough already, but you must fill your pockets with water?"

"Joan!" he cried disconcerted. "I am drowned!"

Luckily, in that pass, looking up the slope of the hill, they espied near the top a tollbooth, and, beyond, the first houses of a village. Making a little glad haste, they were soon at the bar.

The woman who came to take their money looked hard at the tired girl. She was of a sober cast, and her close-fitting coif showed her of the non-conforming order.

"For Winchester, master?" said she.

"Nay," answered the clergyman; "for the first hostelry. We are beat, dame."

"The first and the last is The Five Alls," said she. "But I wouldn't carry the maiden there, by your leave. There be great and wild company in the house, that recks nothing of anything in its cups. Canst hear 'em, if thou wilt." And, indeed, with her words, a muffled roar of merriment reached them from the inn a little beyond.

"One riding for Winchester, and the rest from," she said, "they met here, and here have forgathered roistering this hour. Dare them so you dare. I have spoken."

"*Nunc Deus avertat!*" cried the desperate minister. "The Fates fight against us. At all costs we must go by."

"Nay," said the good woman; "but, an you will, seek you your own shelter there, and leave this poor lamb with me. I have two already by the fire—decent ladies and proper, and no quarry for licence. I know the company; 'twill be moving soon; and then canst come and claim thine own."

He accepted gladly, and, leaving Joan in her charge, rode on to the inn, where, dismounting, he betook himself to the stable, which was full of horses, and, after, to the kitchen.

The landlord, cooking a pan of rashers alone over a great fire, turned his head, focussed the new-comer with one red eye, and asked his business.

"A seat by the hearth, a clothes-rack for my breeches, a rug for my loins while they dry, and a mug of ale with a sop in it," answered the traveller, with a smile for his own waggish epitome. And then he related of his mishap.

The landlord grunted, returned to his task, blew on an ignited rasher, presently took the skillet off the coals, forked the fizzing mess into a dish, and disappeared with it. All the while an ineffable racket thundered on the floor above.

"Peradventure they will respect my cloth," thought the clergyman. "The Lord fend me! I am among the Philistines."

The landlord returned in a moment with a horn of ale in one hand, and a rug in the other, which he threw down.

"Dod, man!" he cried; "peel, peel! This is the country of continence! Hast no reason to fear for thy modesty." And he went out between chuckling and grumbling.

Very decently the curate doffed his small-clothes, hung them over a trestle before the fire, wrapped and knotted the rug about his loins, and sat down vastly content to his sup. In ten minutes, what with weariness, warmth, and stingo—he was asleep.

He woke with a little shriek, and staggered to his feet. Something had pricked him—the point of a rapier. The flushed, grinning face of the man who had wielded it stood away from him. The kitchen was full of rich company, which broke suddenly into a babble of merriment at the sight of his astounded visage. In the midst, a swart gentleman, who had been lolling at a table, advanced, and taking him by the shoulders, swung him gently to and fro till his eyes goggled.

"Well followed, parson!" said he, chuckling, and lurching a little in his speech. "What! is the cuif not to be spoiled of his bishopric because of a saucy baggage?"

He laughed, checked himself suddenly, and, still holding on, assumed a majestic air, with his wig a little on one side, and said with great dignity, "But, before I grant termsir, you shall bring the slut to canvass of herself what termsir. Godsmylife! to hold her King at a bodkin's point! It merits no pardon, I say, unless the merit of the pardon of the termsir—no, the pardon of the merit of the termsir. Therefore I say, whither hast brought her, I say? Out with it, man!"

The clergyman, recognising Joan's abductor, and listening amazed, sprang back at the end with a face of horror, almost upsetting His Majesty, who, barely recovering himself, stood shaking his head with a glassy smile.

"If*hic*akins!" said he: "I woss a'most down!"

"Avaunt, ravisher!" roared the Doctor.

Charles stiffened with a jerk, stared, wheeled cautiously, and tiptoed elaborately from the room. His suite, staggering at the balance, followed with enormous solemnity; and the Doctor, still pointing denunciatory, was left alone.

At the end of a minute, after much whispering outside, a young cavalier re-entered, and approached him

with a threatening visage, as if up the slope of a deck.

"His Maj'ty, sir," said he, "demands to know if you know who the devil you was a-bawling — hic —at?"

"To my sorrow, though late, I do, sir," answered the Doctor in a grievous voice.

"Oh!" said the cavalier, and tacked from the room. He returned again in a second, to poke the clergyman with his finger, and suggest to him confidentially, "Betteric la' than never—hic!" which having uttered, he took himself off, after a vain attempt to open the door from its hinge side. In two minutes he was back again.

"His Maj'ty wan's know where hast hidden Mrs. Seabird. Nowhere in house, says landlord. Ver' well—where then?"

"Tell the King, where he shall reach her only over my body."

The cavalier vanished, and reappeared.

"His Maj'ty doesn't wan' tread on your body. On contrary, wan's raise you up. Wan's hear story all over again from lady's lips."

"I am His Majesty's truthful minister. There is nothing to add to what I have already reported to him."

The cavalier withdrew, smacking his thigh profoundly. Sooner than usual he returned.

"His Maj'ty s'prised at you. Says if you won't tell him where've laid her by, he'll beat up every house within miles-'n'-miles."

"No!" said the simple clergyman, in a sudden emotion.

"Yes," said the gentleman, not too drunk to note his advantage. "For miles-'n'-miles. His Maj'ty ver' s'prised her behaviour to him. Wan's lil word with her. Tell at once where she is, or worse for you."

The clergyman looked about him like one at bay. His glance lighted on the trestle before the fire, fixed itself there, and kindled.

"The Lord justify the ways of His servant!" he muttered; and drew himself up.

"Tell His Majesty," he said in a strong voice, "that, so be he will honour a toast I shall call, the way he seeks shall be made clear to him."

The other gave a great chuckle, which was loudly echoed from the passage.

"Why, thish is the right humour," he said, and retired.

Within a few moments the whole company re-entered, tittering and jogging one another, and spilling wine from the beakers they carried.

The King called a silence.

"Sir," said the clergyman, advancing a little, "I pray your Majesty to convince me, by proof, of a reputed custom with our gallants, which is that, being to drink a lady's health, the one that calleth shall cast into the flames some article of his attire, there to be consumed to her honour, and so shall demand of his company, by toasters' law, that they do likewise."

"Dod!" said the King, chuckling; "woss he speiring at? Drink man! drink and sacrifice, and I give my royal word that all shall follow suit, though it be with the wigs from our heads."

The Doctor lifted his horn of ale and drained it.

"I toast Joan!" he cried.

"Joan!" they all shouted, laughing and hiccupping, and, having drunk, threw down their beakers helter-skelter.

The clergyman took one swift step forward; snatched up his small-clothes from the trestle; displayed them a moment; thrust them deep into the blazing coals, and, facing about, disrugged himself, and stood in his shirt-tails.

"I claim your Majesty's word, and breeches," said he.

A silence of absolute stupefaction befell; and then in an instant the kitchen broke into one howl of laughter.

In the midst, Charles walked stately to the table, sat down, and thrust out his legs.

"Parson," said he, "if you had but claimed my hair. The honours lie with you, sir; take 'em."

He would have none but the Doctor handle him; and, when his ineffable smalls were burning, he rose up in his royal shift, and ruthlessly commandeering every other pair in the room, stood, the speechless captain of as shameful and defenceless a crew of buccaneers as ever lowered its flag to honesty.

Then the Doctor resumed his rug.

"Sir," said he, trembling, "I now fufil my bond. My granddaughter is sheltering, with other modest ladies, in the pike-house hard by."

But the King swore—by divine right—a pretty oath or two, while the chill of his understandings helped to sober him.

"By my cold wit you have won! and there may she remain for me. And now, decent man," he cried, "I do call my company to witness how you have made yourself to be more honoured in the breach than the observance; and since you go wanting a frock, a bishop's you shall have."

And with that he snatched the rug, and, skipping under it, sat on the table, grinning over the quenching of his amazed fire-eaters.

And this, if you will believe deponent, is the true, if unauthorised, version of Dr. Winthrop's election, and of the confounding of Godsport on a writ of *quo warranto*.

THE STRENGTH OF THE ROPE.

Si finis bonus est, totum bonum erit.

THERE were notices, of varying dates, posted in prominent places about the cliffs to warn the public not to go near them—unless, indeed, it were to read the notices themselves, which were printed in a very unobtrusive type. Of late, however, this Dogberrian *caveat* had been supplemented by a statement in the local gazette that the cliffs, owing to the recent rains succeeding prolonged frost, were in so ill a constitution that to approach them at all, even to decipher the warnings not to, was—well, to take your life out of the municipal into your own hands.

Now, had the Regius Professor a bee in his bonnet? Absurd. He knew the risks of foolhardiness as well as any pickpocket could have told him. Yet, neither general nor particular caution availed to abate his determination to examine, as soon as we had lunched, the interior formation of a cave or two, out of those black and innumerable, with which the undercliff was punctured like a warren.

I did not remonstrate, after having once discovered, folded down under his nose on the table, the printed admonition, and heard the little dry, professorial click of tongue on palate which was wont to dismiss, declining discussion of it, any idle or superfluous proposition. I knew my man—or automaton. He inclined to the Providence of the unimaginative; his only fetish was science. He was one of those who, if unfortunately buried alive, would turn what opportunity remained to them to a study of geological deposits. My "nerves," when we were on a jaunt (fond word!) together, were always a subject of sardonic amusement with him.

Now, utterly unmoved by the prospect before him,

he ate an enormous lunch (confiding it, incidentally, to an unerring digestion), rose, brushed some crumbs out of his beard, and said, "Well, shall we be off?"

In twenty minutes we had reached the caves. They lay in a very secluded little bay—just a crescent of sombre sand, littered along all its inner edge with débris from the towering cliffs which contained it.

"Are you coming with me?" said the Regius Professor.

Judged by his anxious eyes, the question might have been an invitation, almost a shamefaced entreaty. But the anxiety, never more than apparent, was delusive product of the preposterous magnifying-glasses which he wore. Did he ever remove those glasses, one was startled to discover, in the seemingly aghast orbs which they misinterpreted, quite mean little attic windows to an unemotional soul.

"Not by any means," I said. "I will sit here, and think out your epitaph."

He stared at me a moment with a puzzled expression, grinned slightly, turned, strode off towards the cliffs, and disappeared, without a moment's hesitation, into the first accessible burrow. I was moved on the instant to observe that it was the most sinister-looking of them all. The tilted stratification, under which it yawned oblique, seemed on the very poise to close down upon it.

Now I set to pacing to and fro, essaying a sort of mechanical preoccupation in default of the philosophy I lacked. I was really in a state of clammy anxiety about the Professor. I poked in stony pools for little crabs, as if his life depended on my success. I made it a point of honour with myself not to leave off until I had found one. I tried, like a very amateur pickpocket, to abstract my mind from the atmosphere which contained it, only to find that I had brought mind and atmosphere away together. I bent down,

with my back to the sea, and looking between my legs sought to regard life from a new point of view. Yet, even in that position, my eyes and ears were conscious, only in less degree, of the spectres which were always moving and rustling in the melancholy little bay.

Tekel upharsin. The hand never left off writing upon the rocks, nor the dust of its scoring to fall and whisper. That came away in flakes, or slid down in tiny avalanches—here, there, in so many places at once, that the whole face of the cliffs seemed to crawl like a maggoty cheese. The sound was like a vast conspiracy of voices—busy, ominous—aloft on the seats of an amphitheatre. They were talking of the Regius Professor, and his consideration in making them a Roman holiday.

Here, on no warrant but that of my senses, I knew the gazette's warning to be something more than justified. It made no difference that my nerves were at the stretch. One could not hear a silence thus sown with grain of horror, and believe it barren of significance. Then, all in a moment, as it seemed to me, the resolution was taken, the voices hushed, and the whole bay poised on tiptoe of a suspense which preluded something terrific.

I stood staring at the black mouth which had engulfed the Regius Professor. I felt that a disaster was imminent; but to rush to warn him would be to embarrass the issues of his Providence—that only. For the instant a fierce resentment of his foolhardiness fired me—and was as immediately gone. I turned sick and half blind. I thought I saw the rock-face shrug and wrinkle; a blot of gall was expelled from it—and the blot was the Professor himself issued forth, and coming composedly towards me.

As he advanced, I turned my back on him. By the time he reached me I had made some small success of a struggle for self-mastery.

"Well," he said. "I left myself none too much of a margin, did I?"

With an effort I faced about again. The base of the cliff was yet scarred with holes, many and irregular; but now some of those which had stared at me like dilated eyes were, I could have sworn it, over-lidded —the eyes of drowsing reptiles. *And the Professor's particular cave was gone.*

I gave quite an absurd little giggle. This man was soulless—a monstrosity.

"Look here," he said, conning my face with a certain concern, "it's no good tormenting yourself with what might have happened. Here I am, you know. Supposing we go and sit down yonder, against that drift, till you're better."

He led the way, and, dropping upon the sand, lolled easily, talking to himself, by way of me, for some minutes. It was the kindest thing he could have done. His confident voice made scorn of the never-ceasing rustling and falling sounds to our rear. The gulls skated before my eyes, drawing wide arcs and figures of freedom in the air. Presently I topped the crisis, and drew a deep breath.

"Tell me," I said—"have you ever in all your life known fear?"

The Regius Professor sat to consider.

"Well," he answered presently, rubbing his chin, "I was certainly once near losing hold of my will, if that's what you mean. Of course, if I *had* let go——"

"But you didn't."

"No," he said thoughtfully. "No—luckily."

"You're not taking credit for it?"

"Credit!" he exclaimed, surprised. "Why should I take credit for my freedom from a constitutional infirmity? In one way, indeed, I am only regretful that I am debarred that side of self-analysis."

I could laugh lovelily, for the first time.

"Well," I said, "will you tell me the story?"

"I never considered it in the light of a story," answered the Regius Professor. "But, if it will amuse and distract you, I will make it one with pleasure. My memory of it, as an only experience in that direction, is quite vivid, I think I may say—" and he settled his spectacles, and began:

"It was during the period of my first appointment as Science Demonstrator to the Park Lane Polytechnic, a post which my little pamphlet on the Reef-building Serpulæ was instrumental in procuring me. I was a young man at the time, with a wide field of interests, but with few friends to help me in exploring it. My holidays I generally devoted to long, lonely tramps, knapsack on back, about the country.

"It was on one of these occasions that you must picture me entered into a solitary valley among the Shropshire hills. The season was winter; it was bitterly cold, and the prospect was of the dreariest. The interesting conformations of the land—the bone-structure, as I might say—were blunted under a thick pelt of snow, which made walking a labour. One never recognises under such conditions the extent of one's efforts, as inequalities of ground are without the contrast of surroundings to emphasise them, and one may be conscious of the strain of a gradient, and not know if it is of one foot in fifty or in five hundred.

"The scene was desolate to a degree; houseless, almost treeless—just white wastes and leaden sky, and the eternal fusing of the two in an indefinite horizon. I was wondering, without feeling actually dispirited, how long it was to last, when, turning the shoulder of a hill which had seemed to hump itself in my path, I came straight upon a tiny hamlet scattered over a widish area. There were some cottages, and a slated school building; and, showing

above a lower hump a quarter of a mile beyond, the roofs and tall chimney of a factory.

"It was a stark little oasis, sure enough—the most grudging of moral respites from depression. Only from one place, it seemed, broke a green shoot. Not a moving figure was abroad; not a face looked from a window. Deathlily exclusive, the little stony buildings stood apart from one another, incurious, sullen, and self-contained.

"There was, however, the green shoot; and the stock from which it proceeded was the school building. That in itself was unlovely enough—a bleak little stone box in an arid enclosure. It looked hunched and gray with cold; and the sooty line of thaw at the foot of its wall only underscored its frostiness. But as if that one green shoot were the earnest of life lingering within, there suddenly broke through its walls the voices of young children singing; and, in the sound, the atmosphere of petrifaction lifted somewhat.

"Yes? What is it? Does anything amuse you? I am glad you are so far recovered, at least. Well——

"I like, I must confess, neither children nor music. At the same time, I am free to admit that those young voices, though they dismissed me promptly on my way, dismissed me pleased, and to a certain degree, as it were, reinvigorated. I passed through that little frigid camp of outer silence, and swung down the road towards the factory. As I advanced towards what I should have thought to be the one busy nucleus of an isolated colony, the aspect of desolation intensified to my surprise, rather than diminished. But I soon saw the reason for this. The great forge in the hills was nothing but a wrecked and abandoned ruin, its fires long quenched, its ribs long laid bare. Seeing which, it only appeared to me a strange thing that any of the human part of its affairs should yet cling

to its neighbourhood; and stranger still I thought it when I came to learn, as I did by and by, that its devastation was at that date an ancient story.

"What a squalid carcass it did look, to be sure; gaunt, and unclean, and ravaged by fire from crown to basement. The great flue of it stood up alone, a blackened monument to its black memory.

"Approaching and entering, I saw some writhed and tortured guts of machinery, relics of its old vital organs, fallen, withered, from its ribs. The floor, clammy to the tread, was littered with tumbled masonry; the sheet iron of the roof was shattered in a hundred places under the merciless bombardment of the weather; and, here and there, a scale of this was corroded so thin that it fluttered and buzzed in the draught like a ventilator. Bats of grimy cobweb hung from the beams; and the dead breath of all the dead place was acrid with cold soot.

"It was all ugly and sordid enough, in truth, and I had no reason to be exacting in my inspection of it. Turning, in a vaulting silence, I was about to make my way out, when my attention was drawn to the black opening of what looked like a shed or annex to the main factory. Something, some shaft or plant, revealing itself from the dim obscurity of this place, attracted my curiosity. I walked thither, and, with all due precaution because of the littered ground, entered. I was some moments in adapting my vision to the gloom, and then I discovered that I was in the mill well-house. It was a little dead-locked chamber, its details only partly decipherable in the reflected light which came in by the doorway. The well itself was sunk in the very middle of the floor, and the projecting wall of it rose scarce higher than my knees. The windlass, pivoted in a massive yoke, crossed the twilight at a height a little above my own: and I could easily understand, by the apparent diameter of its barrel, that the well was of a considerable depth.

"Now, as my eyes grew a little accustomed to the obscurity, I could see how a tooth of fire had cut even into this fastness. For the rope, which was fully reeled up upon the windlass, was scorched to one side, as though some exploded fragment of wood or brickwork had alighted there. It was an insignificant fact in itself, but my chance observation of it has its importance in the context; as has also the fact that the bight of the rope (from which the bucket had been removed) hung down a yard or so below the big drum.

"You have always considered me a sapient, or at least a rational creature, have you not? Well, listen to this. Bending over to plumb with my eyes the depth of the pit (an absurdity, to begin with, in that vortex of gloom), I caught with my left hand (wisdom number two) at the hanging end of rope in order to steady myself. On the instant the barrel made one swift revolution, and stuck. The movement, however, had thrown me forward and down, so that my head and shoulders, hanging over, and actually into, the well, pulled me, without possibility of recovery, from my centre of gravity. With a convulsive wrench of my body, I succeeded in bringing my right hand to the support of my left. I was then secure of the rope; but the violence of the act dragged my feet and knees from their last desperate hold, and my legs came whipping helpless over the well-rim. The weight of them in falling near jerked me from my clutch—a bad shock, to begin with. But a worse was in store for me. For I perceived, in the next instant, that the rusty, long-disused windlass was beginning slowly to revolve, *and was letting me down into the abyss.*

"I broke out in a sweat, I confess—a mere diaphoresis of nature; a sort of lubricant to the jammed mechanism of the nerves. I don't think we are justified in attributing my first sensations to fear.

I was exalted, rather—promoted to the analysis of a very exquisite, scarce mortal, problem. My will, as I hung by a hair over the abysm, was called upon to vindicate itself under an utmost stress of apprehension. I felt, ridiculous as it may appear, as if the surrounding dark were peopled with an invisible auditory, waiting, curious, to test the value of my philosophy.

"Here, then, were the practical problems I had to combat. The windlass, as I have said, revolved slowly, but it revolved persistently. If I would remain with my head above the well-rim—which, I freely admit, I had an unphilosophic desire to do—I must swarm as persistently up the rope. That was an eerie and airy sort of treadmill. To climb, and climb, and always climb, paying out the cord beneath me, that I might remain in one place! It was to repudiate gravitation, which I spurned from beneath my feet into the depths. But when, momentarily exhausted, I ventured to pause, some nightmare revolt against the sense of sinking which seized me, would always send me struggling and wriggling, like a drowning body, up to the surface again. Fortunately, I was slightly built and active; yet I knew that wind and muscle were bound sometime to give out in this swarming competition against death. I measured their chances against the length of the rope. There was a desperate coil yet unwound. Moreover, in proportion as I grew the feebler, grew the need for my greater activity. For there were already signs that the great groaning windlass was casting its rust of ages, and was beginning to turn quicker in its sockets. If it had only stuck, paused one minute in its eternal round, I might have set myself oscillating, gradually and cautiously, until I was able to seize with one hand, then another, upon the brick rim, which was otherwise beyond my reach. But now, did I cease climbing for an instant and attempt a frantic clutch at it, down I sank like a

clock weight, my fingers trailed a yard in cold slime, and there I was at my mad swarming once more—the madder that I must now make up for lost ground.

"At last, faint with fatigue, I was driven to face an alternative resource, very disagreeable from the first in prospect. This was no less than to resign temporarily my possession of the upper, and sink to the under world; in other words, to let myself go with the rope, and, when it was all reeled out, to climb it again. To this course there were two objections: one, that I knew nothing of the depth of the water beneath me, or of how soon I should come to it; the other, that I was grown physically incapable of any further great effort in the way of climbing. My reluctance to forgo the useless solace of the upper twilight I dismiss as sentimental. But to drop into that sooty pit, and then, perhaps, to find myself unable to reascend it! to feel a gradual paralysis of heart and muscle committing me to a lingering and quite unspeakable death—that was an unnerving thought indeed!

"Nevertheless, I had actually resolved upon the venture, and was on the point of ceasing all effort, and permitting myself to sink, when—I thought of the burnt place in the rope.

"Do you grasp what that sudden thought meant to me? Death, sir, in any case; death, if, with benumbed and aching hands and blistered knees, I continued to work my air-mill; death, no earlier and no later, no less and no more certainly, if I ceased of the useless struggle and went down into the depths. So soon as the strain of my hanging should tell direct upon that scorched strand, that strand must part.

"Then, I think, I knew fear—fear as demoralising, perhaps, as it may be, short of the will-surrender. And, indeed, I'm not sure but that the will which survives fear may not be a worse last condition than

fear itself, which, when exquisite, becomes oblivion. Consciousness *in extremis* has never seemed to me the desirable thing which some hold it.

"Still, if I suffered for retaining my will power, there is no doubt that its loss, on the flash of that deadly reflection, would have meant an immediate syncope of nerve and an instant downfall; whereas—well, anyhow, here I am.

"I was fast draining of all capacity for further effort. I climbed painfully, spasmodically; but still I climbed, half hoping I should die of the toil of it before I fell. Ever and again I would glance faintly up at the snarling, slowly-revolving barrel above me, and mark how death, as figured in that scorched strand, was approaching me nearer at every turn. It was only a few coils away, when suddenly I set to doing what, goodness knows, I should have done earlier. I screamed—screamed until the dead marrow must have crawled in the very bones of the place.

"Nothing human answered—not a voice, not the sound of a footfall. Only the echoes laughed and chattered like monkeys up in the broken roof of the factory. For the rest, my too-late outburst had but served to sap what little energy yet remained to me.

"The end was come. Looking up, I saw the burnt strand reeling round, a couple of turns away, to the test; and, with a final gulp of horror, I threw up the sponge, and sank.

"I had not descended a yard or two, when my feet touched something."

The Regius Professor paused dramatically.

"Oh, go on!" I snapped.

"That something," he said, "yielded a little—settled—and there at all once was I, standing as firmly as if I were in a pulpit.

"For the moment, I assure you, I was so benumbed, physically and mentally, that I was conscious of nothing in myself but a small weak impatience at

finding the awful ecstasy of my descent checked. Then reason returned, like blood to the veins of a person half drowned; and I had never before realised that reason could make a man ache so.

"With the cessation of my strain upon it, the windlass had ceased to revolve. Now, with a sudden desperation, I was tugging at the rope once more—pulling it down hand over hand. At the fifth haul there came a little quick report, and I staggered and near fell. The rope had snapped; and the upper slack of it came whipping down upon my shoulders.

"I rose, dimly aware of what had happened. I was standing on the piled-up fathoms of rope which I had paid out beneath me. Above, though still beyond my effective winning, glimmered the moonlike disc of light which was the well mouth. I dared not, uncertain of the nature of my tenure, risk a spring for it. But, very cautiously, I found the end of the rope that had come away, made a bend in it well clear of the injured part, and, after many vain attempts, slung it clean over the yoke above, coaxed down the slack, spliced it to the other, and so made myself a fixed ladder to climb by. Up this, after a short interval for rest, I swarmed, set myself swinging, grasped the brick rim, first with one hand, then with both, and in another instant had flung myself upon the ground prostrate, and for the moment quite prostrated. Then presently I got up, struck some matches, and investigated."

The Regius Professor stopped, laughing a little over the memory.

"*Do* go on!" I said.

"Why," he responded, chuckling, "generations of school children had been pitching litter into that well, until it was filled up to within a couple yards of the top—just that. The rope, heaping up under me, did the rest. It was a testimony to the limited resources of the valley. What the little natives of to-day do

with their odd time, goodness knows. But it was comical, wasn't it?"

"Oh, most!" said I. "And particularly from the point of view of the children's return to you for your dislike of them."

"Well, as to that," said the Regius Professor, rather shamefacedly, "I wasn't beyond acknowledging a certain indebtedness."

"Acknowledging? How?"

"Why, I happened to have in my knapsack one of my pamphlets on the Reef-building Serpulæ; so I went back to the school, and gave it to the mistress to include in her curriculum."

ARCADES AMBO.

MIGUEL and Nicanor were the Damon and Phintias of Lima. Their devotion to one another, in a city of gamblers—who are not, as a rule, very wont to sentimental and disinterested friendships — was a standing pleasantry. The children of rich Peruvian neighbours, they had grown up together, passed their school-days together (at an English Catholic seminary), and were at last, in the dawn of their young manhood, to make the *grand tour* in each other's company, preparatory to their entering upon the serious business of life, which was to pile wealth on wealth in their respective fathers' offices.

In the meanwhile, awaiting a prosaic destiny, they continued inseparable — a proverb for clean though passionate affection.

The strange thing was that, in the matters of temperament and physique, they appeared to have nothing in common. Nicanor, the younger by a few months, was a little dark, curly-haired creature, bright-eyed as a mouse. He was, in fact, almost a dwarf, and with all the wit, excitability, and vivaciousness which one is inclined to associate with elfishness. At the same time he was perfectly formed—a man in miniature, a little sheath crammed with a big dagger.

Miguel, on the other hand, was large and placid, a smooth, slumberous faun of a youth, smiling and good-natured. He never said anything fine; he never did anything noteworthy; he was not so much admirable as lovable.

The two started, well-equipped in every way, on their tour. The flocks of buzzards, which are the scavengers of Lima, flapped them good-bye with

approval. They were too sweetening an element to be popular with the birds.

Miguel and Nicanor travelled overland to Cayenne, in French Guiana, where they took boat for Marseilles, whence they were to proceed to the capital. The circular tour of the world, for all who would make it comprehensively, dates from Paris and ends there. They sailed in a fine vessel, and made many charming acquaintances on board.

Among these was Mademoiselle Suzanne, called also de la Vénerie, which one might interpret into Suzanne of the chase, or Suzanne of the kennel, according to one's point of view. She had nothing in common with Diana, at least, unless it were a very seductive personality. She was a fashionable Parisian actress, travelling for her health, or perhaps for the health of Paris—much in the manner of the London gentleman, who was encountered touring alone on the Continent because his wife had been ordered change of air.

Suzanne, as a matter of course, fell in love with Miguel first, for his white teeth and sleepy comeliness; and then with Nicanor, for his impudent bright spirit. That was the beginning and end of the trouble.

One moonlight night, in mid-Atlantic, Miguel and Nicanor came together on deck. The funnel of the steamer belched an enormous smoke, which seemed to reach all the way back to Cayenne.

"I hate it," said Nicanor; "don't you? It is like a huge cable paid out and paid out, while we drift farther from home. If they would only stop a little, keeping it at the stretch, while we swarmed back by it, and left the ship to go on without us!"

Miguel laughed; then sighed.

"Dear Nicanor," he said; "I will have nothing more to do with her, if it will make you happy."

"I was thinking of *your* happiness, Miguel," said

Nicanor. "If I could only be certain that it would not be affected by what I have to tell you!"

"What have you to tell me, old Nicanor?"

"You must not be mistaken, Miguel. Your having nothing more to do with her would not lay the shadow of our separation, which the prospect of my union with her raises between us—though it would certainly comfort me a little on your behalf."

"I did not mean that at all, Nicanor. I meant that, for your sake, I would even renounce my right to her hand."

"That would be an easy renunciation, dear Miguel. I honour your affection; but I confess I expect more from it than a show of yielding, for its particular sake, what, in fact, is not yours to yield."

Miguel had been leaning over the taffrail, looking at the white wraiths of water which coiled and beckoned from the prow. Now he came upright, and spoke in his soft slow voice, which was always like that of one just stretching awake out of slumber:

"I cannot take quite that view, Nicanor, though I should like to. But I do so hate a misunderstanding, at all times; and when it is with you——!"

His tones grew sweet and full:

"Oh, Nicanor! let this strange new shadow between us be dispelled, at once and for ever. I love Mademoiselle Suzanne, Nicanor."

"I love Mademoiselle Suzanne, Miguel."

"Very well. Then I yield her to you."

"Oh, pardon me, Miguel! but that is just the point. I wanted to save you the pain—the sense of self-renunciation; but your blindness confounds me. More people know Tom Fool than Tom Fool knows. Your infatuation for Mademoiselle Suzanne is very plain to very many. What is plain only to yourself is that Mademoiselle Suzanne returns your devotion. You are not, indeed, justified in that belief."

"Why not?"

"She has confessed her regard, in the first place, for me."

"But she has also confessed to me that I have won the leading place in her affections."

"That is absurd, Miguel. She is the soul of ingenuousness."

"Perhaps, Nicanor—we are only boys, after all—she is a practised coquette."

"You must not say that, Miguel, if you want me to remain your friend. You, perhaps, attach too much importance to your looks as an irresistible asset in matters of the heart."

"Now I shall certainly quarrel with you."

"You are mistaken, I think. Mind, to women of intellect, is the compelling lure."

"It remains to be proved."

"You are determined to put it to the test, then? Good-bye, Miguel."

"This is not a real breach between us? Oh, Nicanor!"

"We must come to a definite understanding. Until we do, further confidence between us is impossible."

He strutted away, perking his angry head, and whistling.

But Suzanne had accomplished the amiable débacle for which she had been intriguing. She had, paradoxically, separated the inseparables. It was a little triumph, perhaps; a very easy game to one of her experience—hardly worth the candle, in fact; but it was the best the boat had to offer. It remained only to solace the tedium of what was left of the voyage by playing on the broken strings of that friendship.

It was Nicanor who suffered most under the torture. He had always been rather accustomed to hear himself applauded for his wit—a funny little acrid possession which was touched with a precocious knowledge of the world. Now, to know himself made the butt of

a maturer social irony lowered his little cockerel crest most dismally. As for good-natured Miguel, it was his way to join, rather than resent, the laugh against himself; and his persistent moral health under the infliction only added to the other's mind-corrosion. In a very little the two were at daggers-drawn.

The "affair" made a laughable distraction for many of the listless and mischievous among the passengers. They contributed their little fans to the flame, and exchanged private bets upon the probable consequences. But Suzanne, indifferent to all interests but her own, worked her oracles serenely, and affected a wide-eyed unconsciousness of the amorous imbroglio which her arts had brought about. First one, then the other of the rivals would she beguile with her pensive kindnesses, and, according to her mood or the accident of circumstances, reassure in hope. And the task grew simpler as it advanced, inasmuch as the silence which came to fall between Miguel and Nicanor precluded the wholesome revelations which an interchange of confidences might have inspired.

At last the decisive moment arrived when Suzanne's more intimate worldlings were to be gratified with her solution of the riddle. It was to end, in fact, in a Palais Royal farce; and they were to be invited to witness the "curtain."

A few hours before reaching port she drew Miguel to a private interview.

"Ah, my friend!" she said, her slender fingers knotted, her large eyes wistful with tears, "I become distracted in the near necessity for decision. Pity me in so momentous a pass. What am I to do?"

"Mademoiselle," said poor Miguel, his chest heaving, "it is resolved already. We are to journey together to Paris, where the bliss of my life is to be piously consummated."

"Yes," she said; "but the publicity—the scandal!

Men are sure to attribute the worst motives to our comradeship, and that I could not endure."

"Then we will make an appointment to meet privately — somewhere whence we can escape without the knowledge of a soul."

"It is what had occurred to me. Hush! There is a little accommodating place—the Café de Paris, on the Boulevard des Dames, near the harbour. Do you know it? No—I forgot the world is all to open for you. But it is quite easy to find. Be there at eight o'clock to-morrow morning. I will await you. In the meantime, not a hint, not a whisper of our intention to any one. Now go, go!"

He left her, rapturous; but, once without her radiance, struck his breast and sighed, "Ah, heart, heart! thou traitor to thy brother!"

And at that moment Suzanne was catching sight of the jealous Nicanor, angrily and ostentatiously ignoring her. She called to him piteously, timidly, and he came, after a struggle with himself, stepping like a bantam.

"Is it not my friend that you meant, mademoiselle? I will summon him back. Your heart melts to him at the last moment."

"Cruel!" she said. "You saw us together? I would not have had a witness to the humiliation of that gentle soul—least of all his brother and happier rival."

"His——! Ah, mademoiselle, I entreat you, do not torture me!"

"Are you so sensitive? Alas! I have much for which to blame myself! Perhaps I have coquetted too long with my happiness; but how many women realise their feelings for the first time in the shock of imminent loss! We do not know our hearts until they ache, Nicanor."

"Poor Miguel—poor fellow!"

"You love him best of all, I think. Well, go! I have no more to say."

"Suzanne!"

"No, do not speak to me. To have so bared my breast to this repulse! Oh, I am shamed beyond words!"

"But do you not understand my heartfelt pity for his loss, when measured by my own ecstatic gain?"

"Well?"

"Suzanne! I cannot believe it true."

"I feel so bewildered also. What are we to do?"

"You spoke once of a journey to Paris together."

"You and I? Think of the jests, the comments on the part of our shipmates! We are not to bear a slurred reputation with us. I should die of shame."

"What if we were to meet somewhere, unknown to anybody, by appointment, and slip away before the world awoke?"

"Yes, that would do; but where?"

"Can't you suggest?"

"I know of a little Café de Paris. It is on the Boulevard des Dames, near the harbour. Say we meet there, at eight o'clock to-morrow morning, in time to catch the early mail?"

"Oh, yes, yes!"

"Hush! We have been long enough together. Do not forget; be silent as the grave."

"Brains triumph!" thought Nicanor, as he went. "Alas, my poor, sweet, simple-minded comrade!"

De la Vénerie carried betimes quite a select little company with her to the rendezvous. They were all choking with fun and expectation.

"The dear *ingénus*!" said Captain Robillard. "It will be exquisite to see the fur fly. But precocity must have its lesson."

They had their rolls and coffee in a closet adjoining the common room. There was a window overlooking the street.

"Hist!" whispered the tiny Comte de Bellenglise. "Here they come!"

Nicanor was the first to arrive. He was very spruce and cock-a-hoop. His big brown eyes were like fever-spots in his little body. He questioned, airily enough, the proprietor, who had been well prompted to answer him.

"No, monsieur; there is no lady at this hour. An appointment? Alas! such is always the least considered of their many engagements."

As he spoke, Miguel came in. The two eyed one another blankly after the first shock. At length Nicanor spoke: the door between the closet and the café opened a little.

"You have discovered, then? Go away, my poor friend. This is, indeed, the worst occasion for our reconciliation."

"I did not come to seek you, Nicanor. I came to meet Mademoiselle Suzanne alone, by appointment."

"And I, too, Miguel. I fear you must have overheard and misconstrued her meaning. It was I she invited to this place."

"No, Nicanor; it was I."

"She has not come, at least. We must decide, at once and for ever, before she comes."

"I know what you mean, Nicanor. This, indeed, is the only end to a madness. Have you your pistol? I have mine."

"And I have mine, Miguel. You will kill me, as you are the good shot. I don't know why I ever carried one, except to entice you to show your skill at breaking the floating bottles. But that was before the trouble."

"Dear Nicanor!"

"But let it be *à l'outrance*. I want either to kill you or to be killed."

"If she were only out of the way, you would love me again."

"Amen to that, dear Miguel!"

"Yet we are to fight?"

"To the death, my brother, my comrade! Such is the madness of passion."

The paralysed landlord found breath for the first time to intervene.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen! for God's sake! consider my reputation!"

Miguel, starting away, and leaving Nicanor with his back to the closet, produced and pointed his weapon at the trembling creature. These South Americans were a strange compound of sweetness and ferocity.

"If you interfere," he said, "I will shoot you instead. Now, Nicanor, we fire at discretion, one shot to each."

The bang of Nicanor's pistol shattered the emptiness. Miguel was down on the floor. Nicanor cast away his reeking weapon, and, running to his friend, raised his body in his arms. The door of the closet opened, and Suzanne, radiant and gloating, stood in the entry. "That was a good shot, Nicanor," said Miguel, smiling weakly. "You are better at men than bottles."

"Miguel! Miguel! you have your pistol undischarged. Faint as you are, you cannot miss me at this range."

"Stand away, then, Nicanor."

Nicanor stood up, tearing his coat apart.

"Here, here! to my heart, dearest!"

Miguel, supporting himself on his left hand, raised his pistol swiftly, and shot Mademoiselle Suzanne through the breast. Then he fell back to the floor.

"That is the short way to it, Nicanor. Confess, after all, I am the better shot. Now we are reunited for ever."

Suzanne had not a word to say to that compact. She lay in a heap, like the sweetest of dressmaker's dummies overturned.

The landlord raised a terrible outcry.

"Messieurs! I am ruined, unless you witness to the truth of this catastrophe!"

"I, for one, will witness," said de Bellenglise, very white. "Mademoiselle, it is plain to the humourist, has only reaped what she sowed. But I do not envy M. Nicanor his survival."

Heaven, however, did, it appeared, from the fact of its claiming him to the most austere of its foundations, La Trappe, in Normandy, where men whom the law exonerates may suffer, voluntarily, a lifelong penal servitude.

And, in the meanwhile, Miguel could await his friend whole-hearted, for he had certainly taken the direct way of sending Mademoiselle Suzanne to a place where her future interference between them was not to be dreaded.

OUR LADY OF REFUGE.

When Luc Caron and his mate, whom, officially, he called Pepino, plodded with their raree-show into the sub-Pyrenean village of San Lorenzo, their hearts grew light with a sense of a haven reached after long stress of weather. Caron sounded his bird-call, made of boxwood, and Pepino drummed on his tabor, which was gay with fluttering ribbons, and merrily they cried together :

"Hullo, gentles and simples ! hullo, children of the lesser and the larger growth—patriots all ! Come, peep into the box of enchantment ! For a quarter-real one may possess the world. See here the anti-Christ in his closet at Fontainebleau, burning brimstone to the powers of evil ! See the brave English ships, *Impérieuse* and *Cambrian*, dogging the coast from Rosas to Barcelona, lest so little as a whiff of sulphur get through ! Crowd not up, my children—there is time for all ; the glasses will not break nor dim ; they have already withstood ten thousand 'eye-blows,' and are but diamonds the keener. Come and see the ships —so realistic, one may hear the sound of guns, the wind in the rigging—and all for a paltry quarter-real !"

Their invitation excited no laughter, and but a qualified interest, among the loafing village ancients and sullen-faced women who appeared to be the sole responsible inhabitants of the place. A few turned their heads ; a dog barked ; that was all. Not though Caron and Pepino had come wearifully all the way from Rousillon, over the passes of the mountains, and down once more towards the plains of Figueras, that they might feel the atmosphere of home, and claim its sympathetic perquisites, was present

depression to be forgotten at the call of a couple of antics. Twelve miles away was not there the fort of San Fernando, and the cursed French garrison, which had possessed it by treachery, beleagured in their ill-gotten holding by a force of two thousand Spaniards, which included all the available manhood of San Lorenzo? There would be warrant for gaiety, indeed, should news come of a bloody holocaust of those defenders; but that it did not, and in the meanwhile, blown from another quarter, flew ugly rumours of a large force of French detached somewhere from the north, and hastening to the relief of their comrades. True, a fool must live by his folly as a wise man by his wisdom; but then there was a quality of selection in all things. As becoming as a jack-pudding at a funeral was Caron in San Lorenzo at this deadly pass. Not so much as a child ventured to approach the peep-show.

The two looked at one another. They were faint and loose-lipped with travel.

"Courage, little Pepa!" said Caron. "There is no wit-sharpener like adversity. The hungry mouse has the keenest scent."

It was odd, in the face of his caressing diminutive, that he held himself ostentatiously the smaller of the pair. He seemed to love to show the other's stature fine and full by comparison. Pepino, in fact, was rather tall, with a faunlike roundness in his thighs and soft olive face. He was dressed, too, the more showily, the yellow handkerchief knotted under his hat being of silk, and his breeches, down the seams of which little bells tinkled, of green velvet. Caron, for his part, shrewd and lean and leather-faced, was content with a high-peaked hat and an old cloak of faded mulberry. His wit and merriment were his bright assets.

Pepino, for all his weariness, chuckled richly.

"Sweet and inexhaustible! I could feed all day on

thy love. Yet, I think, for my stomach's sake, I would rather be less gifted than the mouse. What is the use to be able to smell meat through glass when the window is shut?"

"Wait! There are other ways to the larder than by the door. In the meanwhile, we will go on. There are two ends to San Lorenzo, the upper and lower: we will try the lower. North and south sit with their backs to one another, like peevish sisters. What the one snubs the other may favour."

He swung the box by its strap to his shoulder, closed the tripod, and, using it for a staff, trudged on dustily with his comrade. Half way down the village, a man for the first time accosted them. He was young, vehement, authoritative—the segundo jefe, or sub-prefect of San Lorenzo.

"Wait!" he said, halting the pair. "I know you, Caron. You should be de Charogne — a French carrion-crow. What do you here, spying for your masters?"

"Señor," said the showman, "you are mistaken. I am of your people."

"Since when? I know you, I say."

"Many know me, caballero, in these parts, and nothing against me but my nationality. Now that is changed."

"Since when? I repeat it."

"Since the Emperor tore my brother from his plough in Rousillon to serve his colours, and our father was left to die of starvation. We are but now on our way back from closing the old man's eyes, and at the foot of the hills we recovered our chattels, which we had hid there, on our journey north, for security. I speak of myself and my little comrade, Pepino, who is truly of this province, señor, having been born in Gerona, where he made stockings."

The sub-prefect looked at Pepino attentively, for the first time, and his dark eyes kindled.

"And wore them, by the same token," he murmured.

He swept off his hat, mockingly courteous.

"Buenos dias, señora!" he said.

Caron jumped.

"Ah, mercy, caballero!" he cried. "Can you, indeed, distinguish so easily? Do not give us away."

"Tell me all about it," said the sub-prefect. "Truly this is no time for masquerading in San Lorenzo."

"But it was the most obvious of precautions to begin with," pleaded Caron. "Over the mountains is not safety for a woman; and since——"

"And since, you are in San Lorenzo," said the other.

"It is true, señor. Pepa shall re-sex herself to-night. Yet it is only a few hours since we found our expedient justified."

"How was that?"

"Why, in the hills, on our way back, we came plump upon a French picket, and——"

He leapt, to the sudden start and curse the other gave.

"What have I said, señor?"

"Dolt, traitor!" thundered the sub-prefect. "French! and so near! and this is the first you speak of it! I understand—they come from Perpignan—they are Reille's advance guard, and they march to relieve Figueras. Oh! to hold me here with thy cursed ape's chatter, while——"

He sprang away, shouting as he went, "To arms! to arms! Who'll follow me to strike a blow for Spain The French are in our vineyards!" The whole village turned and followed him as he ran.

Caron, in great depression, led Pepino into a place of shade and privacy.

"I am an ass, little one," he said. You shall ride *me* for the future. And *this* is home!"

She threw her arms about his neck, with a tired spring of tears.

"But I am a woman again, dear praise to Mary!" she cried, "and can love you once more in my own way."

This befell in 1808, when the ferment which Napoleon had started in Spain was already in fine working. The French garrison in Figueras—one of those strongholds which he had occupied at first from the friendliest motives, and afterwards refused to evacuate—being small and hard beset by a numerous body of somatenes from the mountains, had burned the town, and afterwards retired into the neighbouring fort of San Fernando, where they lay awaiting succour with anxious trepidation. And they had reason for their concern, since a little might decide their fate—short shrift, and the knife or gallows, not to speak of the more probable eventuality of torture. For those were the days of savage reprisals; and of the two forces the Spaniards were the less nice in matters of humanity. They killed by the Mass, and had the Juntas and Inquisition to exonerate them.

But Figueras was an important point, strategically; for which reason the Emperor — who generally in questions of political economy held lives cheaper than salt—had despatched an express to General Reille, who commanded the reserves at Perpignan, on the north side of the mountains, ordering him to proceed by forced marches to the relief of the garrison, as a step preliminary to the assault and capture of Gerona. And it was an advance body of this force which Luc and his companion had encountered bivouacking in the hills.

It was not a considerable body as the two gauged it, for Colonel de Regnac's troops — raw Tuscan recruits, and possessed with a panic terror of the enemy—were showing a very laggard spirit in the

venture, and no emulation whatever of their officers' eagerness to encounter. In fact, Colonel de Regnac, with his regimental staff, some twenty all told, and few beside, had run ahead of his column by the measure of a mile or two, and was sitting down to rest and curse, below his breath, in a hollow of the hills, when the two captured vagabonds were brought before him.

There had been no light but the starlight, no voice but the downpouring of a mountain stream until the sentry had leaped upon them. Chatter and fire were alike prohibited things in those rocky anterooms of hate and treachery.

"Who are you?" had demanded the Colonel of Caron.

"A son of France, monsieur."

"Whither do you go?"

"To attend the death-bed of my old father in Rousillon," had answered Luc, lying readily.

The Colonel had risen, and scanned his imperturbable face keenly.

"His name?"

Luc had told him truthfully — also his father's circumstances and misfortunes.

The officer had grunted: "Well, he pays the toll to glory. Whence, then, do you come?"

"From Figueras."

"Ha! They have news of us there?"

"On the contrary, monsieur; your coming will surprise them greatly."

"It is well; let it be well. Go in peace."

A little later the sentry, confiding to one who was relieving him, was overheard to say: "Ventre de biche! I would have made sure first that those two rascals went *up* the hill!"

He was brought before the Colonel.

"My son, what did you say?"

The sentry, scenting promotion for his perspicacity,

repeated his remark, adding that, if he were right in his suspicions of the vagabonds' *descent towards San Lorenzo*, there would be trouble on the morrow.

He was soundly welted with a strap for his foresight, and thereafter degraded—to his intense astonishment, for a private was not supposed to volunteer counsel. But his prediction was so far vindicated that, in the course of the following morning, a well-aimed shot, succeeded by a very fusillade, vicious but harmless, from the encompassing rocks, laid low a member of the staff, and sent the rest scattering for shelter. They were, at the time, going leisurely to enable the main body to come up with them ; but this stroke of treachery acted upon men and officers like a goad. Re-forming, they deployed under cover, and charged the guerrillas' position—only to find it abandoned. Pursuit was useless in that welter of ridges ; they buckled to, and doubled down the last slopes of the mountain into San Lorenzo.

"*If* I could only encounter that Monsieur Caron!" said the Colonel sweetly.

And, lo ! under the wall of a churchyard they came plump upon the very gentleman, sitting down to rest with his comrade Pepino.

It seemed a providence. The village, for all else, appeared deserted, depopulated.

Luc scrambled to his feet, with his face, lean and mobile, twitching under its tan. The Colonel, seated on his horse, eyed him pleasantly, and nodded.

He was hardly good to look at by day, this Colonel. It seemed somehow more deadly to play with him than it had seemed under the starlight. He had all the features of man exaggerated but his eyes, which were small and infamous—great teeth, great brows, great bones, and a moustache like a sea-lion's. He could have taken Faith, Hope, and Charity together in his arms, and crushed them into pulp against his enormous chest. Only the lusts of sex and ambition were in any

ways his masters. But, for a wonder, his voice was soft.

"Son of France," he said, "thou hast mistaken the road to Rousillon."

Luc, startled out of his readiness, had no word of reply. Pepino crouched, whimpering, unnoticed as yet.

"What is that beside him?" asked the Colonel.

A soldier hoisted up the peep-show, set it on its legs, and looked in.

"Blank treason, Colonel," said he. "Here is the Emperor himself spitting fire."

"It is symbolical of Jove," said Caron.

"Foul imps attend him!"

"They are his Mercuries."

"No more words!" said the Colonel. "String the rascal up!"

That was the common emergency exit in the then theatres of wars. It had taken the place of the "little window" through which former traitors to their country had been invited to look.

Pepino leapt to his feet, with a sudden scream.

"No, no! He is Caron, the wit, the showman, dear to all hearts!"

Colonel Regnac's great neck seemed to swell like a ruttish wolf's. His little eyes shot red with laughter. He had as keen a scent as the sub-prefect for a woman.

"Good!" he said; "he shall make us a show."

"Señor, for the love of God! He spoke the truth. His father is dead."

"He will be in a dutiful haste to rejoin him."

"Señor, be merciful! You are of a gallant race."

"That is certain," said de Regnac. "You, for your part, are acquitted, my child. I take you personally under my protection."

"Good-bye, comrade!" cried Caron sadly. "We

have gone the long road together, and I am the first to reach home. Follow me when you will. I shall wait for you."

"Fie!" said the Colonel. "That is no sentiment for a renegade. Heaven is the goal of this innocence, whom I save from your corruption."

They hung him from the branch of a chestnut tree, and lingered out his poor dying spasms. Pepino, after one burst of agony, stood apathetic until the scene was over. Then, with a shudder, correlative with the last of the dangling body's, she seemed to come awake.

"Well," she said, "there goes a good fellow; but it is true he was a renegade."

The Colonel was delighted.

"They have always a spurious attraction," he said, "to the sex that is in sympathy with naughtiness in any form. But consider: false to one is false to all, and this was a bad form of treachery—though," he added gallantly, "he certainly had his extreme temptation."

"The French killed his father," she said indifferently.

"The French," he answered, "kill, of choice, with nothing but kindness. You, though a Spaniard, my pet, shall have ample proof if you will."

"I am to come with you?"

"God's name! There is to be no enforcement."

"Well, you have left me little choice. Already here they had looked upon us with suspicion, and, if I remained alone, would doubtless kill me. I do not want to die—not yet. What must be, must. The king is dead, live the king!"

He was enchanted with her vivacity. He took her up before him on his saddle, and chuckled listening to the feverish chatter with which she seemed to beguile herself from memory.

"These jays have no yesterday," he thought;

and said aloud, "You are not Pepino? Now tell me."

"No, I am Pepa," she said. "I am only a man in seeming. Alack! I think a man would not forget so easily."

"Some men," he answered, and his hand tightened a little upon her. "Trust me, that dead rogue is already forgathering with his succuba."

By and by he asked her: "How far to Figueras?"

"Twelve miles from where we started," she answered.

A thought struck him, and he smiled wickedly.

"You will always bear in mind," he said, "that the moment I become suspicious that you are directing us wide, or, worse, into a guet-apens, I shall snap off your little head at the neck, and roll it back to San Lorenzo."

"Have no fear," she said quietly; "we are in the straight road for the town—or what used to be one."

"And no shelter by the way? I run ahead of my rascals, as you see. We must halt while they overtake us. Besides"—he leered horribly—"there is the question of the night."

"I know of no shelter," she said, "but Our Lady of Refuge."

"An opportune title, at least. What is it?"

"It is a hospital for the fallen—for such as the good Brotherhoods of Madrid send for rest and restoration to the sanctuary of the quiet pastures. The monks of Misericorde are the Brothers' deputies there—sad, holy men, who hide their faces from the world. The house stands solitary on the plain; we shall see it in a little. They will give you shelter, though you are their country's enemies. They make no distinctions."

De Regnac pulled at his moustache, frowning, pondering.

"Where these monks forgather are fat kids and old Malaga—a tempting alternative to the munching of cold biscuit under the stars. But—*sacré chien!* one may always take in more with the gravy than ever fell from the spit. What, then!"

He jerked his feet peevishly in the stirrups, and growled:

"Limping and footsore already come my cursed rabble—there you are, white-livered Tuscan sheep! The bark of a dog will scare them; they would fear a thousand bogies in the dark. It is certain I must wait for them, and bivouac somewhere here in the plains."

Indeed, the first of them came on as he spoke—a weary, stumbling body of laggards, trailing feet and muskets.

"Halte-là!" he thundered; and the men came to a loose-kneed stand, while the corporals went round prodding and cursing them into a form of discipline. De Regnac grumbled:

"Are we to have this cold grace to our loves? God's name! my heart cries out for fire—fire within and without. These monks!"

"Shall I slip before, and sound them? You may trust me, for a Spanish girl, who has learned how to coax her confessor."

"Ha! *You!*" He held her, biting his great lips. "What are you good for but deceit, rogue! No, no; we will go together."

He called his staff about him, and they went forward in a body. Presently, topping a longish slope, they saw, sprung out of the plain before them, a huddled gray building, glooming monstrous in the dusk. Its barred windows stared blindly; twin towers held the portico between them, as it were the lunette of a vast guillotine; a solitary lamp hung motionless in the entrance. Far away across the flats a light or two twinkled over ruined Figueras, like marsh-candles

over a swamp. The place seemed lifeless desolation embodied — Death's own monument in a desert. Gaiety in its atmosphere shivered into silence.

But at length a captain rallied, with a laugh.

"Peste!" he cried; "a churchyard refuge! Let us see if the dead walk!"

He battered with his sword-hilt on the great door. It swung open, in staggering response, and revealed a solitary figure. Cowled, spectral, gigantic—holding, motionless, a torch that wept fire—the shape stood without a word. It was muffled from crown to heel in coarse frieze; the eyelets in its woollen visor were like holes scorched through by the burning gaze behind—the very rims of them appeared to smoulder. Laville, the captain, broke into an agitated laugh.

"Mordieu, my friend, are the dead so lifeless?"

"What do you seek?"

The voice boomed, low and muffled, from the folds.

"Rest and food," answered Laville. "We are weary and famished. For the rest, we ask no question, and invite none."

"So they come in peace," said the figure, "all are welcome here."

The Colonel pushed to the front, carrying his burden.

"We come in peace," he said—"strangers and travellers. We pay our way, and the better where our way is smoothed. Take that message to your Prior."

The figure withdrew, and returned in a little.

"The answer is, Ye are welcome. For those who are officers, a repast will be served within an hour in the refectory; for the rest, what entertainment we can compass shall be provided in the outhouses. A room is placed at the disposal of your commander."

"It is well," said de Regnac. "Now say, We invite your Prior to the feast himself provides, and

his hand shall be first in the dish, and his lip to the cup; else, from our gallantry, do we go supperless."

Once more the figure withdrew and returned.

"He accepts. You are to fear no outrage at his hands."

The Colonel exclaimed cynically, "Fie, fie! I protest you wrong our manners!"—and, giving some orders *sub voce* for the precautionary disposal of his men, entered with his staff. They were ushered into a stone-cold hall, set deep in the heart of the building—a great windowless crypt, it seemed, whose glooms no warmth but that of tapers had ever penetrated. It was bare of all furniture save benches and a long trestle-table, and a few sacred pictures on the walls. While the rest waited there, de Regnac was invited to his quarters—a cell quarried still deeper into that hill of brick. No sound in all the place was audible to them as they went. He pushed Pepino before him.

"This is my servant," he said. "He will attend me, by your leave."

The girl made no least demur. She went even jocundly, turning now and again to him with her tongue in her cheek. He, for his part, was in a rapture of slyness; but he kept a reserve of precaution. They were escorted by the giant down a single dim corridor, into a decent habitable cell, fitted with chairs, a little stove, and a prie-Dieu; but the bed was abominably rocky. De Regnac made a wry face at it for his companion's secret delectation.

The ghostly monk, intimating that he would await outside the señor commandante's toilet, that he might re-escort his charge to the refectory, closed the door upon the two. De Regnac cursed his officiousness, groaning; but Pepino reassured his impatience with a hundred drolleries. However, when the Colonel came out presently, he came out alone; and, moreover, turned the key in the door and pocketed it.

"Merely a prudential measure," he explained to

his guide. "These gaillards are not to be trusted in strange houses. I will convey him his supper by and by with my own hands."

The figure neither answered nor seemed to hear. De Regnac, joining a rollicking company, dismissed him from his mind.

And alone in the cell stood mad Pepino.

But not for long. A trap opened in the floor, and from it sprouted, like a monstrous fungus, the head and shoulders of the giant monk. Massively, sombrely he arose, until the whole of his great bulk was emerged and standing in a burning scrutiny of the prisoner. A minute passed. Then, "Whence comest thou, Pepa Manoele? With whom, and for what purpose?" said the voice behind the folds.

His question seemed to snap in an instant the garrotte about her brain. She flung herself on her knees before him with a lamentable cry:

"They have killed my Luc, brother—my Luc, who took me from your wards of mercy, sins and all. They have killed my sweet singing cricket, my merry, merry cricket, that had no guile in all its roguish heart. They put their heel upon him in the path—what are songs to them!—and left my summer desolate. If I weep one moment, I know that blood will scald my cheeks and drain my heart, and I shall die before I act. Oh, brother! keep back my tears a little. Show me what to do!"

She clutched in agony at his robe.

"Come," he said; "the way is clear."

. . . . . .

The feast was served to the tick of the hour by lay brothers, another blank-envisaged form directing them. The tables smoked with cheer, and de Regnac rubbed his hands. There were the joints of fat kid and the flagons of old Malaga—salmis of quail, too; truffled sausages; herrings with mustard sauce, things of strong flavour meet for warriors. The steam itself

was an invitation—the smell, the sparkle. Only one thing lacked—the Prior's grace. De Regnac, bestial always, but most like a tiger in the view of unattainable meats, crowded the interval with maledictions and curses. His courtesy stopped anywhere on the threshold of his appetites. Balked of his banquet, he would be ready to make a holocaust of the whole hospital. Yet he dared not be the first to put his fingers in the dish.

"Where is our host?" he growled. "Doth he fear the test—or death—a coward faint with indecision?"

Even with the word, he found him at his elbow—an old, dry pipe of a man, wheezing thin air. The father's face under its dropping cowl (no doubt his lungs were too crazy for the visor) showed stark with rime; his forehead was streaked with it; his eyes were half-thawed pools. He spoke. Hoarse and feeble, his voice seemed to crow from the attics of a ruined tenement, high up among the winds.

"Fall to, soldiers, fall to! There is no grace like honest appetite. Fall to! And they tell me ye have travelled far to claim our hospitality. Fall to!"

De Regnac smacked his shoulder boisterously, so that he staggered.

"Not till you have blessed our meal for us, old father."

The Prior raised his trembling hands. The other caught at them.

"Not that way. We ask the taster's grace. It was a bargain."

"Be seated, señor," said the old man, with dignity. "I do not forget my obligations."

He went round, bent and stiffly, taking a shred from each dish, a sippet dipped in the gravy.

"Bella premunt hostilia," he expostulated. "Intestine wars invade our breast. What a task for our old digestion!"

His roguery pleased and reassured his company. They attacked the viands with a will. He never ceased to encourage them, going about the board with garrulous cheer.

"And ye come over the hills?" said he. "A hungry journey and a dangerous. It was the mountains, and the spirits of the mountains, that were alone invincible when the Moorish dogs overran all Spain—all but the mountains. The heathen crests were lowered there—rolled back in a bloody foam. Dear God! I'm old."

"Not so ancient, father," cried de Regnac, "but that good liquor will revitalise you. There remains the wine."

"Ah me!" sighed the Prior; "must I?"

They swore him to the toast by every bond of honour. Their throats were ragged with drought.

"Well, well," he said. "I'll first dismiss these witnesses to their father's shame. I'll be no Noah to my children."

He drove the servitors, with feeble playfulness, into the passage; pursued them a pace or two. In a moment he was back alone, his cowl pulled about his face.

"Give me the draught," he said hoarsely, "nor look ye upon the old man's abasement. I am soon to answer for my frailties."

Cheering and bantering, they mixed him a cup from every flagon, and put it into his hand, which gripped it through the cloth. He turned his back on them, and took the liquor down by slow degrees, chuckling and gasping and protesting. Then, still coughing, he handed the cup, backwards, to the nearest.

"Bumpers, all!" roared de Regnac. "We toast old Noah for our king of hosts!"

Even as he drank, as they all drank, thirsty and uproarious, the great door of the refectory clanged to, and the Prior spun with a scream to the floor.

De Regnac's cup fell from his hand; a dead silence succeeded.

Suddenly the Colonel was on his feet, ghastly and terrible.

"Something foul!" he whispered; "something foul!"

Staggering, he swerved out, and drove with all his weight against the door. It had been locked and bolted upon them. Not a massive panel creaked. They were entombed!

Hush!

Solemn, low, mystic, arose without the chaunt of voices in unison—the prayers for one sick unto death: "Receive, O Lord, the sacrifice we offer for Thy servant, who is near the end of her life."

With a scream, de Regnac threw himself towards the body on the floor, and lifted it with huge strength in his arms. As he did so, the cowl fell away, and revealed the face of Pepino. The shadow of death was already fallen on it; but she spoke, and with a smile.

"When he pursued them, I was waiting and took his place. Curse him not. He observed the letter. 'Twas I poisoned the wine. Take back thy wages, dog! Oh, I go to find my Luc—if thou darest follow me!"

He roared out—a spasm took his throat. He tried to crush her in his arms. They relaxed in the effort. Howling, he dropped her, and fell beside in a heap.

Then, from out a mortal paralysis, arose sobbing and wailing at the table. Some seized salt, some the wet mustard from the fish, and swallowed it by handfuls. Others ran hither and thither aimlessly, screeching, blaspheming, beating the walls, the obdurate door. There was a regimental doctor among them; he was the first dead. None found help or hope in that ghastly trap. The venom had

been swift, gripping, ineradicable. Within half an hour it was all a silent company, and the Miserere long had ceased.

Somewhere in a book I read of a tale like this, which was headed "Patriotic Fanaticism." Those were certainly the deadly days of retaliation; but in this case Love, as always, was the principal fanatic.

THE GHOST-LEECH.

KELVIN, not I, is responsible for this story, which he told me sitting smoking by his study window.

It was a squalid night, I remember, wet and fretful —the sort of night which seems to sojourners in the deep country (as we then were) to bring rumours of plashy pavements, and the roar of rain-sodden traffic, and the wailing and blaspheming of women lost and crying out of a great darkness. No knowledge of our rural isolation could allay this haunting impression in my mind that night. I felt ill at ease, and, for some reason, out of suits with life. It mattered nothing that a belt of wild woodland separated us from the country station five miles away. That, after all, by the noises in it, might have been a very causeway, by which innumerable spectres were hurrying home from their business in the distant cities. The dark clouds, as long as we could see them labouring from the south, appeared freighted with the very burden of congregated dreariness. They glided up, like vast electric tramcars, and seemed to pause overhead, as if to discharge into the sanctuary of our quiet pastures their loads of aggressive vulgarity. My nerves were all jangled into disorder, I fear, and inclining me to imaginative hyperbole.

Kelvin, for his part, was very quiet. He was a conundrum, that man. Once the keenest of sportsmen, he was now for years become an almost sentimental humanitarian—and illogical, of necessity. He would not consent to kill under any circumstances—wilfully, that is to say; but he enjoyed his mutton with the best of us. However, I am not quarrelling with his point of view. He, for one—by his own admission, anyhow—owed a life to "the blind Fury

with th' abhorred shears," and he would not, from the date of his debt, cross her prerogatives. The same occasion, it appeared, had opened in him an unstanchable vein of superstition, which was wont to gush—bloodily, I might say—in depressing seasons of the mind. It provoked me, on the evening of the present anecdote, to a sort of peevish protest.

"Why the devil," I said, "are spectral manifestations—at least, according to you fellows—everlastingly morbid and ugly? Are there no gentle disembodied things, who, of their love and pity, would be rather more anxious than the wicked, one would think, to communicate with their survivors?"

"Of course," said Kelvin; "but their brief sweet little reassurances pass unnoticed. Their forms are insignificant, their voices inarticulate; they can only appeal by symbol, desperately clinging to the earth the while. On the other hand, the world tethers its worldlings by the foot so that they cannot take flight when they will. There remains, so to speak, too much earth in their composition, and it keeps 'em subject to the laws of gravitation."

I laughed; then shrugged impatiently.

"What a rasping night it is! The devil take that moth!"

The window was shut, and the persistent whirring and tapping of a big white insect on the glass outside jarred irritably on my nerves.

"Let it in, for goodness' sake," I said, "if it *will* insist on making a holocaust of itself!"

Kelvin had looked up when I first spoke. Now he rose, with shining eyes, and a curious little sigh of the sort that one vents on the receipt of wonderful news coming out of suspense.

"Yes, I'll open the window," he said low; and with the word threw up the casement. The moth whizzed in, whizzed round, and settled on his hand. He lifted it, with an odd set smile, into the intimate

range of his vision, and scrutinised it intently. Suddenly and quickly, then, as if satisfied about something, he held it away from him.

"*Ite missa est!*" he murmured, quoting some words of the Mass (he was a Catholic); and the moth fluttered and rose. Now, you may believe it or not; but there was a fire burning on the hearth, and straight for that fire went the moth, and seemed to go up with the smoke into the chimney. I was so astonished that I gasped; but Kelvin appeared serenely unconcerned as he faced round on me.

"Well," I exploded, "if a man mayn't kill, he may persuade to suicide, it seems."

He answered good-humouredly, "All right; but it wasn't suicide."

Then he resumed his seat by me, and relighted his pipe. I sat stolidly, with an indefinable feeling of grievance, and said nothing. But the silence soon grew unbearable.

"Kelvin," I said, suddenly and viciously; "what the deuce do you mean?"

"You wouldn't believe," he answered, at once and cheerily, "even if I told you."

"Told me what?"

"Well, this. There was the soul of little Patsy that went up in the smoke."

"The village child you are so attached to?"

"Yes; and who has lain dying these weeks past."

"Why should it come to you?"

"It was a compact between us—if she were summoned, in a moment, without time for a good-bye. We were close friends."

"Kelvin—excuse me—you are getting to be impossible."

"All right. Look at your watch. Time was made for unbelievers. There's no convincing a sceptic but by footrule. Look at your watch."

I did, I confess—covertly—in the instant of

distraction caused by Kelvin's little son, who came to bid his father good-night. He was a quiet, winning little fellow, glowing with health and beauty.

'Good-night, Bobo," said Kelvin, kissing the child fondly. "Ask God to make little Patsy's bed comfy, before you get into your own."

I kissed the boy also; but awkwardly, for some reason, under his frank courteousness. After he was gone, I sank back in my chair and said, grudging the concession:

"Very well. It's half-past eight."

Kelvin nodded, and said nothing more for a long time. Then, all of a sudden, he broke out:

"I usen't to believe in such things myself, once upon a time; but Bobo converted me. Would you like to hear the story?"

"Oh, yes!" I said, tolerantly superior. "Fire away!"

He laughed, filling his pipe—the laugh of a man too surely self-convinced to regard criticism of his faith.

"Patsy," he said, "had no Ghost-Leech to touch her well. Poor little Patsy! But she's better among the flowers."

"Of Paradise, I suppose you mean? Well, if she is, she is," I said, as if I were deprecating the inevitably undesirable. "But what is a Ghost-Leech?"

"A Ghost-Leech," he said—"the sort, anyhow, that I've knowledge of—is one who has served seven years goal-keeper in the hurling-matches of the dead."

I stared at him. Was he really going, or gone, off his head? He laughed again, waving his hand to reassure me.

"You may accept my proof or not. Anyhow, Bobo's recovery was proof enough for me. A sense of humour, I admit, is outside our conception of the disembodied. We lay down laughter with life, don't

we? You'd count it heresy to believe otherwise. Yet have you ever considered how man's one great distinctive faculty must be admitted into all evidence of his deeds upon earth, as minuted by the recording angel? It must be admitted, of course, and appreciatively by the final assessor. How could he judge laughter who had never laughed? The cachinnatory nerve is touched off from across the Styx—wireless telegraphy; and man will laugh still, though he be damned."

"Kelvin! my good soul!"

"The dead, I tell you, do not put off their sense of humour with their flesh. They laugh beyond the grave. They are full of a sense of fun, and not necessarily the most transcendent."

"No, indeed, by all the testimony of spiritualism."

"Well; now listen. I was staying once in a village on the west coast of Ireland. The people of my hamlet were at deadly traditional feud with the people of a neighbouring hamlet. Traditional, I say, because the vendetta (it almost amounted to one) derived from the old days of rivalry between them in the ancient game of hurling, which was a sort of primitive violent "rugger" played with a wooden ball. The game itself was long fallen into disuse in the district, and had been supplanted, even in times out of memory, by sports of a gentler, more modern cast. But it, and the feud it had occasioned, were still continued unabated beyond the grave. How do I know this? Why, on the evidence of my Ghost-Leech.

"He was a strange, moody, solitary man, pitied, though secretly dreaded, by his neighbours. They might have credited him with possession—particularly with a bad local form of possession; to suspect it was enough in itself to keep their mouths shut from questioning him, or their ears from inviting confession of his sufferings. For, though their surmise were correct, and he in the grip of the hurlers, a word wrung

from him out of season would have brought the whole village under the curse of its dead."

I broke in here. "Kelvin, for the Lord's sake! you are too cimmerian. Titillate your glooms with a touch of that spiritual laughter."

Agreeably to my banter, he smiled.

"There's fun in it," he said; "only it's rather ghastly fun. What do you say to the rival teams meeting in one or other of the village graveyards, and whacking a skull about with long shank-bones?"

"I should say, It doesn't surprise me in the least. Anything turning upon a more esoteric psychology would. What pitiful imaginations you Christmas-number seers are possessed of!"

"I dare say. But I'm not imagining. It's you practical souls that imagine—that common sense, for instance, is reason; that the top-hat is the divinely-inspired shibboleth of the chosen; and so on. But you don't disappoint me. Shall I go on?"

"Oh, yes! go on."

"The hurlers meet under the full moon, they say, in one or other of the rival graveyards; *but they must have a living bachelor out of each parish to keep goal for them.*"

"I see! 'They say'? I see!"

"The doom of the poor wretch thus chosen is, as you may suppose, an appalling one. He must go, or suffer terrors damning out of reason. There is no power on earth can save him. One night he is sitting, perhaps, in his cabin at any peaceful work. The moor, mystic under the moonlight, stretches from miles away up to his walls, surrounding and isolating them. His little home is an ark, anchored amid a waste and silent sea of flowers. Suddenly the latch clinks up, advances, falls. The night air breathing in passes a presence standing in the opening, and quivers and dies. Stealthily the door gapes, ever so little, ever so softly, and a face, like the gliding rim of the

moon, creeps round its edge. It is the face, he recognises appalled, of one long dead. The eyeplaces are black hollows; but there is a movement in them like the glint of water in a deep well. A hand lifts and beckons. The goal-keeper is chosen, and must go. For seven years, it is said, he must serve the hurling-matches of the dead."

"State it for a fact. Don't hedge on report."

"I don't. This man served his time. If he hadn't, Bobo wouldn't be here."

"Oh? Poor Bobo!"

"This man, I say, survived the ghastly ordeal—one case out of a dozen that succumb. Then he got his fee."

"Oh, a fee! What was that? A Rachel of the bogs?"

"The power to cure by touch any human sickness, even the most humanly baffling."

"Really a royal reward. It's easy to see a fortune in it."

"He would have been welcome to mine; but he would take nothing. He made my little boy whole again."

"Kelvin! I dare say I'm a brute. What had been the matter with him?"

"Ah, what! He simply moaned and wasted—moaned eternally. Atrophy: meningitis; cachexy—they gave it a dozen names, but not a single cure. He was dying under slow torture—a heavy sight for a father.

"One day an old Shaman of the moors called upon me. He was ancient, ancient—as dry as his staff, and so bent that, a little more, and he had tripped over his long beard in walking. I can't reproduce his brogue; but this is the substance of what it conveyed to me:

"Had I ever heard speak of Baruch of the lone shebeen—him that had once kept an illicit still, but

that the ghosts had got hold of for his sins? No? Well, he, the Shaman, was come too near the end of his own living tether to fear ghoulish reprisals if he told me. And he told me.

"Baruch, he said, was suspected in the village of keeping the dead's hurling-goal—had long been suspected—it was an old tale by now. But, och, wirrastrue! if, as he calculated, Baruch was nearing the close of his seven years' service, Baruch was the man for me, and could do for my child what no other living man, barring a ghosts' goal-keeper, could do likewise.

"I humoured him when he was present; laughed at him when he was gone; but—I went to see Baruch. It's all right: you aren't a father."

"You went to see Baruch. Go on."

"He lived remote in such a little cabin as I have described. Lord! what a thing it was!—a living trophy of damnation—a statue inhabiting the human vestment! His face was young enough; but sorrow stricken into stone—unearthly suffering carved out of a block. It is astonishing what expression can be conveyed without a line. There was not a wrinkle in Baruch's face.

"All scepticism withered in me at the sight—all the desperate effrontery with which I had intended to challenge his gift. I asked him simply if he would cure my child.

"He answered, in a voice as hoarse and feeble as an old man's, but with a queer little promise of joy in it, like a sound of unborn rain, 'Asthore! for this I've lived me lone among the peats, and bid me time, and suffered what I know. In a good hour be it spoken! Wance more, and come again when the moon has passed its full.'

"I went, without another question, or the thought of one. That was a bad week for me—a mortal struggle for the child. The dead kept pulling him to

draw him down; but he fought and held on, the little plucked one. On the day following the night of full moon, I carried him in my arms to the cabin—myself, all the way. I wouldn't let on to a soul; I went round about, and I got to Baruch unnoticed. I knew it was kill or cure for Bobo. He couldn't have survived another night.

"I tell you, it was a laughing spirit that greeted me. Have you ever seen Doré's picture of the 'Wandering Jew,' at the end of his journey, having his boots pulled off? There is the same release depicted, the same sweet comedy of redemption—the same figure of fun, if you like, that Baruch presented.

"He put his hands on Bobo's head, and——"

"Well?"

"Bobo walked home with me, that's all."

Kelvin got up from his chair to relight his pipe at the fire. As he moved, the door of the room opened, and a decent woman, his housekeeper, stood, with a grave face, in the entrance.

"Patsy's dead?" said Kelvin.

"Ah, the poor mite!" answered the woman, with a burst of tears. "She passed but now, sir, at half after eight, in her little bed."

POOR LUCY RIVERS.

THE following story was told to a friend—with leave, conditionally, to make it public—by a well-known physician who died last year.

I was in Paul's typewriting exchange (says the professional narrator) seeing about some circulars I required, when a young lady came in bearing a box, the weight of which seemed to tax her strength severely. She was a very personable young woman, though looking ill, I fancied—in short, with those diathetic symptoms which point to a condition of hysteria. The manager, who had been engaged elsewhere, making towards me at the moment, I intimated to him that he should attend to the new-comer first. He turned to her.

"Now, madam?" said he.

"I bought this machine second-hand of you last week," she began, after a little hesitation. He admitted his memory of the fact. "I want to know," she said, "if you'll change it for another."

"Is there anything wrong with it, then?" he asked.

"Yes," she said; "No!" she said; "Everything!" she said, in a crescendo of spasms, looking as if she were about to cry. The manager shrugged his shoulders.

"Very reprehensible of us," said he; "and hardly our way. It is not customary; but, of course—if it doesn't suit—to give satisfaction——" he cleared his throat.

"I don't want to be unfair," said the young woman. "It doesn't suit *me*. It might another person."

He had lifted, while speaking, its case off the typewriter, and now, placing the machine on a desk.

inserted a sheet or two of paper, and ran his fingers deftly over the keys.

"Really, madam," said he, removing and examining the slip, "I can detect nothing wrong."

"I said—perhaps—only as regards myself."

She was hanging her head, and spoke very low.

"But!" said he, and stopped—and could only add the emphasis of another deprecatory shrug.

"Will you do me the favour, madam, to try it in my presence?"

"No," she murmured; "please don't ask me. I'd really rather not." Again the suggestion of strain—of suffering.

"At least," said he, "oblige me by looking at this."

He held before her the few lines he had typed. She had averted her head during the minute he had been at work; and it was now with evident reluctance, and some force put upon herself, that she acquiesced. But the moment she raised her eyes, her face brightened with a distinct expression of relief.

"Yes," she said; "I know there's nothing wrong with it. I'm sure it's all my fault. But—but, if you don't mind. So much depends on it."

Well, the girl was pretty; the manager was human. There were a dozen young women, of a more or less pert type, at work in the front office. I dare say he had qualified in the illogic of feminine moods. At any rate, the visitor walked off in a little with a machine presumably another than that she had brought.

"Professional?" I asked, to the manager's resigned smile addressed to me.

"So to speak," said he. "She's one of the 'augment her income' class. I fancy it's little enough without. She's done an occasional job for us. We've got her card somewhere."

"Can you find it?"

He could find it, though he was evidently surprised at the request—scarce reasonably, I think, seeing how

he himself had just given me an instance of that male inclination to the attractive, which is so calculated to impress woman in general with the injustice of our claims to impartiality.

With the piece of pasteboard in my hand, I walked off then and there to commission "Miss Phillida Gray" with the job I had intended for Paul's. Psychologically, I suppose, the case interested me. Here was a young person who seemed, for no *practical* reason, to have quarrelled with her unexceptionable means to a livelihood.

It raised more than one question; the incompleteness of woman as a wage-earner, so long as she was emancipated from all but her fancifulness; the possibility of the spontaneous generation of soul — the *divina particula auræ*—in man-made mechanisms, in the construction of which their makers had invested their whole of mental capital. Frankenstein loathed the abortion of his genius. Who shall say that the soul of the inventor may not speak antipathetically, through the instrument which records it, to that soul's natural antagonist? Locomotives have moods, as any engine-driver will tell you; and any shaver, that his razor, after maltreating in some fit of perversity one side of his face, will repent, and caress the other as gently as any sucking-dove.

I laughed at this point of my reflections. Had Miss Gray's typewriter, embodying the soul of a blasphemer, taken to swearing at her?

It was a bitterly cold day. Snow, which had fallen heavily in November, was yet lying compact and unthawed in January. One had the novel experience in London of passing between piled ramparts of it. Traffic for some two months had been at a discount; and walking, for one of my years, was still so perilous a business that I was long in getting to Miss Gray's door.

She lived West Kensington way, in a "converted

flat," whose title, like that of a familiar type of Christian exhibited on platforms, did not convince of anything but a sort of paying opportunism. That is to say, at the cost of some internal match-boarding, roughly fitted and stained, an unlettable private residence, of the estimated yearly rental of forty pounds, had been divided into two "sets" at thirty-five apiece —whereby fashion, let us hope, profited as greatly as the landlord.

Miss Gray inhabited the upper section, the door to which was opened by a little Cockney drab, very smutty, and smelling of gas stoves.

"Yes, she was in." (For all her burden, "Phillida," with her young limbs, had outstripped me.) "Would I please to walk up?"

It was the dismallest room I was shown into—really the most unattractive setting for the personable little body I had seen. She was not there at the moment, so that I could take stock without rudeness. The one curtainless window stared, under a lid of fog, at the factory-like rear of houses in the next street. Within was scarce an evidence of dainty feminine occupation. It was all an illustration of the empty larder and the wolf at the door. How long would the bolt withstand him? The very walls, it seemed, had been stripped for sops to his ravening—stripped so nervously, so hurriedly, that ribbons of paper had been flayed here and there from the plaster. The ceiling was falling; the common grate cold; there was a rag of old carpet on the floor—a dreary, deadly place! The typewriter —the new one—laid upon a little table placed ready for its use, was, in its varnished case, the one prominent object, quite healthy by contrast. How would the wolf moan and scratch to hear it desperately busy, with click and clang, building up its paper rampart against his besieging!

I had fallen of a sudden so depressed, into a spirit of such premonitory haunting, that for a moment I

almost thought I could hear the brute of my own fancy snuffling outside. Surely there was something breathing, rustling near me—something——

I grunted, shook myself, and walked to the mantelpiece. There was nothing to remark on it but a copy of some verses on a sheet of notepaper; but the printed address at the top, and the signature at the foot of this, immediately caught my attention. I trust, under the circumstances (there was a coincidence here), that it was not dishonest, but I took out my glasses, and read those verses—or, to be strictly accurate, the gallant opening quartrain—with a laudable coolness. But inasmuch as the matter of the second and third stanzas, which I had an opportunity of perusing later, bears upon one aspect of my story, I may as well quote the whole poem here for what it is worth.

Phyllis, I cannot woo in rhyme,
  As courtlier gallants woo,
With utterances sweet as thyme
  And melting as the dew.

An arm to serve; true eyes to see;
  Honour surpassing love;
These, for all song, my vouchers be,
  Dear love, so thou'lt them prove.

Bid me—and though the rhyming art
  I may not thee contrive—
I'll print upon thy lips, sweetheart,
  A poem that shall live.

It may have been derivative; it seemed to me, when I came to read the complete copy, passable. At the first, even, I was certainly conscious of a thrill of secret gratification. But, as I said, I had mastered no more than the first four lines, when a rustle at the door informed me that I was detected.

She started, I could see, as I turned round. I was not at the trouble of apologising for my inquisitiveness.

"Yes," I said; "I saw you at Paul's Exchange, got your address, and came on here. I want some circulars typed. No doubt you will undertake the job?"

I was conning her narrowly while I spoke. It was obviously a case of neurasthenia—the tendril shooting in the sunless vault. But she had more spirit than I calculated on. She just walked across to the empty fireplace, collared those verses, and put them into her pocket. I rather admired her for it.

"Yes, with pleasure," she said, sweetening the rebuke with a blush, and stultifying it by affecting to look on the mantelpiece for a card, which eventually she produced from another place. "These are my terms."

"Thank you," I replied. "What do you say to a contra account—you to do my work, and I to set my professional attendance against it? I am a doctor."

She looked at me mute and amazed.

"But there is nothing the matter with me," she murmured, and broke into a nervous smile.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" I said. "Then it was only your instrument which was out of sorts?"

Her face fell at once.

"You heard me—of course," she said. "Yes, I—it was out of sorts, as you say. One gets fancies, perhaps, living alone, and typing—typing."

I thought of the discordant clack going on hour by hour—the dead words of others made brassily vociferous, until one's own individuality would become merged in the infernal harmonics.

"And so," I said, "like the dog's master in the fable, you quarrelled with an old servant."

"Oh, no!" she answered. "I had only had it for a week—since I came here."

"You have only been here a week?"

"Little more," she replied. "I had to move from

my old rooms. It is very kind of you to take such an interest in me. Will you tell me what I can do for you?"

My instructions were soon given. The morrow would see them attended to. No, she need not send the copies on. I would myself call for them in the afternoon.

"I hope *this* machine will be more to the purpose," I said.

"*I* hope so, too," she answered.

"Well, she seems a lady," I thought, as I walked home; "a little anæmic flower of gentility." But sentiment was not to the point.

That evening, "over the walnuts and the wine," I tackled Master Jack, my second son. He was a promising youth; was reading for the Bar, and, for all I knew, might have contributed to the *Gownsman*.

"Jack," I said, when we were alone, "I never knew till to-day that you considered yourself a poet."

He looked at me coolly and inquiringly, but said nothing.

"Do you consider yourself a marrying man, too?" I asked.

He shook his head, with a little amazed smile.

"Then what the devil do you mean by addressing a copy of love verses to Miss Phillida Gray?"

He was on his feet in a moment, as pale as death.

"If you were not my father——" he began.

"But I am, my boy," I answered, "and an indulgent one, I think you'll grant."

He turned, and stalked out of the room; returned in a minute, and flung down a duplicate draft of *the* poem on the table before me. I put down the crackers, took up the paper, and finished my reading of it.

"Jack," I said, "I beg your pardon. It does credit to your heart—you understand the emphasis? You are a young gentleman of some prospects. Miss Gray is a young lady of none."

He hesitated a moment; then flung himself on his knees before me. He was only a great boy.

"Dad," he said; "dear old Dad; you've seen them—you've seen her?"

I admitted the facts. "But that is not at all an answer to me," I said.

"Where is she?" he entreated, pawing me.

"You don't know?"

"Not from Adam. I drove her hard, and she ran away from me. She said she would, if I insisted—not to kill those same prospects of mine. My prospects! Good God! What are they without her? She left her old rooms, and no address. How did you get to see her—and my stuff?"

I could satisfy him on these points.

"But it's true," he said; "and—and I'm in love, Dad—Dad, I'm in love."

He leaned his arms on the table, and his head on his arms.

"Well," I said, "how did *you* get to know her?"

"Business," he muttered, "pure business. I just answered her advertisement—took her some of my twaddle. She's an orphan—daughter of a Captain Gray, navy man; and—and she's an angel."

"I hope she is," I answered. "But anyhow, that settles it. There's no marrying and giving in marriage in heaven."

He looked up.

"You don't mean it? No! you dearest and most indulgent of old Dads! Tell me where she is."

I rose.

"I may be all that; but I'm not such a fool. I shall see her to-morrow. Give me till after then."

"Oh, you perfect saint!"

"I promise absolutely nothing."

"I don't want you to. I leave you to her. She could beguile a Saint Anthony."

"Hey!"

"I mean as a Christian woman should."

"Oh! that explains it."

The following afternoon I went to West Kensington. The little drab was snuffling when she opened the door. She had a little hat on her head.

"Missus wasn't well," she said; "and she hadn't liked to leave her, though by rights she was only engaged for an hour or two in the day."

"Well," I said, "I'm a doctor, and will attend to her. You can go."

She gladly shut me in and herself out. The clang of the door echoed up the narrow staircase, and was succeeded, as if it had started it, by the quick toing and froing of a footfall in the room above. There was something inexpressibly ghostly in the sound, in the reeling dusk which transmitted it.

I perceived, the moment I set eyes on the girl, that there was something seriously wrong with her. Her face was white as wax, and quivered with an incessant horror of laughter. She tried to rally, to greet me, but broke down at the first attempt, and stood as mute as stone.

I thank my God I can be a sympathetic without being a fanciful man. I went to her at once, and imprisoned her icy hands in the human strength of my own.

"What is it? Have you the papers ready for me?"

She shook her head, and spoke only after a second effort.

"I am very sorry."

"You haven't done them, then? Never mind. But why not? Didn't the new machine suit either?"

I felt her hands twitch in mine. She made another movement of dissent.

"That's odd," I said. "It looks as if it wasn't the fault of the tools, but of the workwoman."

All in a moment she was clinging to me convulsively, and crying:

"You are a doctor—you'll understand—don't leave me alone—don't let me stop here!"

"Now listen," I said; "listen, and control yourself. Do you hear? I have come *prepared* to take you away. I'll explain why presently."

"I thought at first it was my fault," she wept distressfully, "working, perhaps, until I grew light-headed" (Ah, hunger and loneliness and that grinding labour!); "but when I was sure of myself, still it went on, and I could not do my tasks to earn money. Then I thought—how can God let such things be!—that the instrument itself must be haunted. It took to going at night; and in the morning"—she gripped my hands—"I burnt them. I tried to think I had done it myself in my sleep, and I always burnt them. But it didn't stop, and at last I made up my mind to take it back and ask for another—another—you remember?"

She pressed closer to me, and looked fearfully over her shoulder.

"It does the same," she whispered, gulping. "It wasn't the machine at all. It's the place—itself—that's haunted."

I confess a tremor ran through me. The room was dusking—hugging itself into secrecy over its own sordid details. Out near the window, the typewriter, like a watchful sentient thing, seemed grinning at us with all its ivory teeth. She had carried it there, that it might be as far from herself as possible.

"First let me light the gas," I said, gently but resolutely detaching her hands.

"There is none," she murmured.

None. It was beyond her means. This poor creature kept her deadly vigils with a couple of candles. I lit them—they served but to make the gloom more visible—and went to pull down the blind.

"Oh, take care of it!" she whispered fearfully

meaning the typewriter. "It is awful to shut out the daylight so soon."

God in heaven, what she must have suffered! But I admitted nothing, and took her determinedly in hand.

"Now," I said, returning to her, "tell me plainly and distinctly what it is that the machine does."

She did not answer. I repeated my question.

"It writes things," she muttered—"things that don't come from me. Day and night it's the same. The words on the paper aren't the words that come from my fingers."

"But that is impossible, you know."

"So *I* should have thought once. Perhaps—what is it to be possessed? There was another typewriter—another girl—lived in these rooms before me."

"Indeed! And what became of her?"

"She disappeared mysteriously—no one knows why or where. Maria, my little maid, told me about her. Her name was Lucy Rivers, and—she just disappeared. The landlord advertised her effects, to be claimed, or sold to pay the rent; and that was done, and she made no sign. It was about two months ago."

"Well, will you now practically demonstrate to me this reprehensible eccentricity on the part of your instrument?"

"Don't ask me. I don't dare."

"I would do it myself; but of course you will understand that a more satisfactory conclusion would be come to by my watching your fingers. Make an effort—you needn't even look at the result—and I will take you away immediately after."

"You are very good," she answered pathetically; "but I don't know that I ought to accept. Where to, please? And—and I don't even know your name."

"Well, I have my own reasons for withholding it."

"It is all so horrible," she said; "and I am in your hands."

"They are waiting to transfer you to mamma's," said I.

The name seemed an instant inspiration and solace to her. She looked at me, without a word, full of wonder and gratitude; then asked me to bring the candles, and she would acquit herself of her task. She showed the best pluck over it, though her face was ashy, and her mouth a line, and her little nostrils pulsing the whole time she was at work.

I had got her down to one of my circulars, and, watching her fingers intently, was as sure as observer could be that she had followed the text verbatim.

"Now," I said, when she came to a pause, "give me a hint how to remove this paper, and go you to the other end of the room."

She flicked up a catch. "You have only to pull it off the roller," she said; and rose and obeyed. The moment she was away I followed my instructions, and drew forth the printed sheet and looked at it.

It may have occupied me longer than I intended. But I was folding it very deliberately, and putting it away in my pocket when I walked across to her with a smile. She gazed at me one intent moment, and dropped her eyes.

"Yes," she said; and I knew that she had satisfied herself. "Will you take me away now, at once, please?"

The idea of escape, of liberty once realised, it would have been dangerous to balk her by a moment. I had acquainted mamma that I might possibly bring her a visitor. Well, it simply meant that the suggested visit must be indefinitely prolonged.

Miss Gray accompanied me home, where certain surprises, in addition to the tenderest of ministrations, were awaiting her. All that becomes private history, and outside my story. I am not a man of sentiment; and if people choose to write poems and make general asses of themselves, why—God bless them!

The problem I had set *my*self to unravel was what looked deucedly like a tough psychologic poser. But I was resolute to face it, and had formed my plan. It was no unusual thing for me to be out all night. That night, after dining, I spent in the "converted" flat in West Kensington.

I had brought with me—I confess to so much weakness—one of your portable electric lamps. The moment I was shut in and established, I pulled out the paper Miss Gray had typed for me, spread it under the glow and stared at it. Was it a copy of my circular? Would a sober "First Aid Society" Secretary be likely, do you think, to require circulars containing such expressions as "*William! William! come back to me! Oh, William, in God's name! William! William! William!*"—in monstrous iteration—the one cry, or the gist of it, for lines and lines in succession?

I am at the other end from humour in saying this. It is heaven's truth. Line after line, half down the page, went that monotonous, heart-breaking appeal. It was so piercingly moving, my human terror of its unearthliness was all drowned, absorbed in an overflowing pity.

I am not going to record the experiences of that night. That unchanging mood of mine upheld me through consciousnesses and sub-consciousnesses which shall be sacred. Sometimes, submerged in these, I seemed to hear the clack of the instrument in the window, but at a vast distance. I may have seen—I may have dreamt—I accepted it all. Awaking in the chill gray of morning, I felt no surprise at seeing some loose sheets of paper lying on the floor. "*William! William!*" their text ran down, "*come back to me!*" It was all that same wail of a broken heart. I followed Miss Gray's example. I took out my match-box, and reverently, reverently burned them.

An hour or two later I was at Paul's Exchange, privately interviewing my manager.

"Did you ever employ a Miss Lucy Rivers?"

"Certainly we did. Poor Lucy Rivers! She rented a machine of us. In fact——"

He paused.

"Well?"

"Well—it is a mere matter of business—she 'flitted,' and we had to reclaim our instrument. As it happens, it was the very one purchased by the young lady who so interested you here two days ago."

"The first machine, you mean?"

"The first—*and* the second." He smiled. "As a matter of fact, she took away again what she brought."

"Miss Rivers's?"

He nodded.

"There was absolutely nothing wrong with it—mere fad. Women start these fancies. The click of the thing gets on their nerves, I suppose. We must protect ourselves, you see; and I'll warrant she finds it perfection now."

"Perhaps she does. What was Miss Rivers's address?"

He gave me, with a positive grin this time, the "converted" flat.

"But that was only latterly," he said. "She had moved from——"

He directed me elsewhere.

"Why," said I, taking up my hat, "did you call her 'poor Lucy Rivers'?"

"Oh, I don't know!" he said. "She was rather an attractive young lady. But we had to discontinue our patronage. She developed the most extraordinary—but it's no business of mine. She was one of the submerged tenth; and she's gone under for good, I suppose."

I made my way to the *other* address—a little lodging in a shabby-genteel street. A bitter-faced landlady, one of the "preordained" sort, greeted

me with resignation when she thought I came for rooms, and with acerbity when she heard that my sole mission was to inquire about a Miss Lucy Rivers.

"I won't deceive you, sir," she said. "When it come to receiving gentlemen privately, I told her she must go."

"Gentlemen!"

"I won't do Miss Rivers an injustice," she said. "It was *ha* gentleman."

"Was that latterly?"

"It was not latterly, sir. But it was the effects of its not being latterly which made her take to things."

"What things?"

"Well, sir, she grew strange company, and took to the roof."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Just precisely what I say, sir; through the trap-door by the steps, and up among the chimney-pots. *He'd* been there with her before, and perhaps she thought she'd find him hiding among the stacks. He called himself an astronomer; but it's my belief it was another sort of star-gazing. I couldn't stand it at last, and I had to give her notice."

It was falling near a gloomy midday when I again entered the flat, and shut myself in with its ghosts and echoes. I had a set conviction, a set purpose in my mind. There was that which seemed to scuttle, like a little demon of laughter, in my wake, now urging me on, now slipping round and above to trip me as I mounted, I went steadily on and up, past the sitting-room door, to the floor above. And here, for the first time, a thrill in my blood seemed to shock and hold me for a moment. Before my eyes, rising to a skylight, now dark and choked with snow, went a flight of steps. Pulling myself together, I mounted these, and with a huge effort (*the bolt was not shot*) shouldered the trap open. There was a fall and rustle without; daylight entered; and, levering the

 door over, I emerged upon the roof.

Snow, grim and grimy and knee-deep, was over everything, muffling the contours of the chimneys, the parapets, the irregularities of the leads. The dull thunder of the streets came up to me; a fog of thaw was in the air; a thin drizzle was already falling. I drove my foot forward into a mound, and hitched it on something. In an instant I was down on my knees, scattering the sodden raff right and left, and—my God!—a face!

She lay there as she had been overwhelmed, and frozen, and preserved these two months. She had closed the trap behind her, and nobody had known. Pure as wax—pitiful as hunger—dead! Poor Lucy Rivers!

Who was she, and who the man? We could never learn. She had woven his name, his desertion, her own ruin and despair into the texture of her broken life. Only on the great day of retribution shall he answer to that agonised cry.

THE FAIR WITH GOLDEN HAIR.

Ho! bring me some *lovers*, fat or lean,
That I may crunch 'em my teeth between!
I could eat so many, so many, so many,
That in the wide world there would not be left any.

Ho! Here is Avenant to be seen,
Who comes to draw your teeth so keen;
He's not the greatest man to view,
But he's big enough to conquer you.
PLANCHÉ'S *D'Aulnoy*, slightly misquoted.

SIR RICHARD AVENANT came home from Abyssinia to an interesting notoriety. He had been associated—a sort of explorative free-lance—with the expedition of Mr. Bruce, who was not yet returned from his adventures up the Nile in quest of the sources of that bewildering water; and, upon his arrival in London,

he found himself engaged to a romance which was certainly remote from his deserts.

Now he was a strong, saturnine man, but apt to whimsical decisions, whose consequences, the fruits of whatever odd impulses, he never had a thought but to hold by; and as the self-reserved must suffer the character accorded to their appearance (the only side of them confessed), Sir Richard found himself accredited, by anticipation, with deeds adapted to the countenance he had always addressed to the world.

He was strolling, some days after his return, through the streets, when he was accosted by an acquaintance, a *preux chevalier* of the highest *ton*, curled, be-ruffed, and imperturbably self-assured.

"Why, strike me silly, Dick!" cried this exquisite, "what do you, wandering unsociable in a shag coat, and all London by the ears to lionise ye?"

"Well, I know not, George. What have I done to be lionised?"

"Done! *Done?* asks the man that will not devour a steak but 'tis cut raw from the buttock of the living beast! *Done?* asks Bluebeard (and stap me, Dick, but your chin is as blue as a watchman's!)—*done*, he says, that brings grass-petticoats in his train enough to furnish the Paradise of the Grand Turk! Prithee, Dick, where hast stowed 'em all? Oh, thou hast a great famous reputation, I assure thee, to justify thyself of with the women! Such is the report of thy peris—their teeth, their raven hair, their eyes like stars of the night—there's no virtue in town could resist, if asked, to be thy queen and theirs."

He was chuckling, and taking a delicate pinch of martinique, with his little finger cocked to display a glittering stone, when his eyes lighted on a house over against which they were standing.

"Hist!" said he, pointing with his cane; "pan my honour, the single reservation."

"Single reservation?" repeated the explorer. "To what? To this London of frailties?"

"To be sure," said the other. "The one party, I'll dare swear, that would not put her nose in a ring for thy sake."

"Indeed!" said Avenant. "Then she's the one I must wed."

The elegant cocked his head, squinting derisive.

"I lay you a double pony to a tester you don't, within the decade."

"Done! Tell me about her."

"I'll do more. I'll carry you in to her, here and at once. Tell me about her, quotha! She's the Fair with Golden Hair, and a guinea and a suitor to every thread of it."

"Whence comes she?"

"From Arcadia, man, with a fortune of gold and roses. She cuts out hearts raw, as you do steaks, and devours them by the dozen. Oh, you shall know her!"

"But by what name, George, by what name?"

"Have I not told you? It shall suffice for all your needs. Thou shalt take a pack of Cabriolles, and never hunt her to the death. Come, my friend!"

He led Sir Richard to the house, and had himself announced. They ascended a flight of stairs, going up into a heaven of floating fragrance and melodious sounds. Their feet moved noiseless over silken carpets. They crossed an anteroom ruffling with lackeys, and were ushered into the Fair's boudoir.

She sat at her mirror, in the hands of her perruquier. She was the most beautiful insolent creature Sir Richard had ever seen. There was not an inch of her which Nature could have altered to its improvement. The very patch on her cheek was a theft from perfection. But to so much loveliness her hair was the glory, a nimbus which, condensing in the heavy atmosphere of adoration, dropped in a melting

flood of gold, which, short of the ground only, shrank and curled back from its gross contact.

All round and about her hummed her court—poets, lords, ministrels—suitors straining their wits and their talents for her delectation, while they bled internally. Many of them greeted Sir Richard's chaperon, many Sir Richard himself—good-humouredly, jealously, satirically, as the case might be—as the two pushed by. A stir went round, however, when the rough newcomer's name was put about; and some rose in their seats, and all dwelt inquisitively on the explorer's reception.

It was condescending enough; as was that of his friend, who loved himself too well, and too wittily, to show a heart worth the beauty's discussing.

"Have you got back your appetite, sir," said the Fair to Avenant, "for dressed meats?"

"And ladies?" whispered Sir Richard's friend.

"Oh, fie!" said madam.

"I will return the question on you," said Sir Richard, in a low voice.

The Fair lifted her brows.

"Why, I am told, madam," said Avenant, "that you feed on raw hearts; but I am willing to believe that the one lie is as certain as the other."

The imperious beauty bit her underlip, and laughed.

"I perceive, Sir Richard," she said, "that you do not court by flattery."

"I do not court at all, madam," he answered.

"Ah, true!" she replied. "You buy in the open market. It must be simpler; though, in the plain lodging where I hear you lie at present, the disposal of so responsible an establishment must exercise your diplomacy."

She spoke aloud, evoking a general titter; and so aloud Avenant answered her.

"By no means, madam. I have in my sleeping-room a closet with three shelves. On one of these lies Beauty, unspoiled by adulation: on another lies Virtue,

that respects her sex too well to traduce it; on the third lies feminine Truth, loveliest of her sisters. These are my whole establishment; and as they are shadows all, existing only in the imagination, they exercise nothing but my fondness for unattainable ideals."

The company broke into much laughter over this Jeremiad; and the girl joined her young voice to theirs. But a little glow of colour was showing in her cheek, verily as if Sir Richard had flicked that fair surface with his glove.

"Oh!" she said, "this is a sad regale! Sure, sir, does the climate of Abyssinia breed no hotter than Leicestershire Quakers? Why, I have heard a lion roar fiercer in a caravan. Now, pray, Sir Richard, put off your civilities, and give us news instead of lessons. They say there is a form of lawless possession in the women of the country you visited."

"It is very true there is, madam. It is called the *Tigrétier*—a seizure of uncontrollable vanity, during which the victim is so self-centred that she is unable to attend to the interests, or even to distinguish the sexes of those about her. She will, for instance, surround herself with a circle of male admirers, assuming all the time, apparently, that they are the gossips of her own sex, with whom, like a decent woman, she would wont ordinarily, of course, to consort in private."

The Fair cried out, "Enough! Your stories are the most intolerable stuff, sir. I wish Mr. Bruce joy of your return, as I hear you are not to remain in England."

Then she turned her shoulder to him, her flush deepening to fire; and Sir Richard, bowing and moving away, fell into conversation with one or two of his acquaintances. Presently, looking up, he was surprised to see the room near empty. Goldenlocks had, in fact, issued her wilful mandate, and her court was dismissing itself.

The explorer was pressing out after the rest, when a maidservant touched his sleeve, and begged him to return to her lady, who desired a word with him. Sir Richard acquiesced immediately. He found the Fair standing solitary by her dressing-table, frowning, her head bent, her fingers plucking at a wisp of lace. Her hair, still undressed, hung down deep over her shoulders, mantling them with heavy gold, like a priest's chasuble.

"Did you seek my acquaintance, sir," she said imperatively, "with the sole purpose to insult me?"

"Nay, madam," he answered, as cool as tempered steel; "but because you was described to me as the one woman in London that I might not marry, if I had the will to."

"Why not?" was on the tip of her tongue; he saw it there. But she caught at herself, and answered, "So, sir, like sour reynard, I suppose, you would spite what you found it useless to covet."

"*I* covet, madam!" he said, in a tone of astonishment. "*I* aspire to wrest this wealth and beauty from a hundred worthier candidates! Believe me, my ambition halted far short of such attainment."

Her lips smiled, despite herself. What were the value, she suddenly thought, in a world of suitors that did not include this shagg'd and rugged Jeremiah? Her speech fell as caressing as the sound of water in a wood.

"Yet you confess to some ambition?" she murmured.

"True," he answered; "the virtuoso's."

She lifted her beautiful brows.

"I will be candid, madam," he said. "I have the collector's itch. Whithersoever I visit, I lay my toll on the most characteristic productions of the tribes—robes, carvings, implements of war—even scalps. Madam, madam, you must surely be of the sun children! Your hair is the most lovely thing! I

would give my soul—more, I would give a thousand pounds to possess it."

"I see, sir," she said; "to carry your conquest at your belt."

"Nay," he answered, with feigned eagerness. "Not a soul need know. The thing is done constantly. You have but to subscribe to the fashion of powder, and you gain a novel beauty, and I a secret I swear to hold inviolate."

"Oh!" she said softly. "This is Samson come with the shears to turn the tables on poor Delilah!"

And on the instant she flashed out, breaking upon him in a storm of passion. That he dared, that he dared, on no warrant but his reputation for inhumanity, so to outrage and insult her.

"Go, sir!" she cried. "Return to your Nubians and Dacoits—to countries where head-hunting is considered an honourable proof of manliness!"

He stood, as outwardly insensate as a bull.

"Then you decline to deal?"

Her only answer was to throw herself into a chair, and to abandon herself to incomprehensible weeping. But even her sobs seemed to make no soft impression on him. He took a step nearer to her, and spoke in the same civil and measured tone he had maintained throughout.

"Take care, madam. I never yet set my will upon a capture that in the long run escaped me."

She checked her tears, to look up at him with a little furious laugh.

"Poor boaster!" she said. "I think, perhaps, that recounting of your Tigrétier hath infected you with it."

"By my beard, madam," said he, "I will make that hair my own!"

"See," she cried jeeringly, "how a boaster swears by what he has not!"

Sir Richard felt to his chin.

"That is soon remedied," said he. "And so, till my oath is redeemed, to consign my razors to rust!" And with these words, bowing profoundly, he turned and left the room.

Shortly after this he sailed to rejoin his expedition, and was not again in England during a period of eighteen months.

At the end of that time, being once more in London, he devoted himself—his affairs having now been ordered with the view to his permanent residence in the country—to some guarded inquiries about the Fair with Golden Hair. For some days, the season of the town being inauspicious, he was unable to discover anything definite about her. And then, suddenly, the news which he sought and desired came in a clap.

He was walking, one day, down a street of poor and genteel houses, when he saw her before him. He stood transfixed. There was no doubting his own eyesight. It was she: tall, slender, crowned with her accustomed glory, the flower of her beauty a little wan, as if seen by moonlight. But what confounded him was her condition. Her dress was mean, her gloves mended; every tag of cheap ribbon which hung upon her seemed the label to a separate tragedy. Thus he saw her again, the Fair with Golden Hair; but how deposed and fallen from her insolent estate!

She mounted a step to a shabby door. While she stood there, waiting to be admitted, an old jaunty cavalier came ruffling it down the street, accosted her, and accompanied her within. She might have glanced at Avenant without recognising him. The rough dark beard he wore was his sufficient disguise.

Sir Richard made up his mind on the spot, and acted promptly. Having no intention to procure himself a notoriety in this business, he rigidly eschewed personal inquiry, and employed an official informer, at a safe figure, to ferret out the truth for him. This, epitomised, discovered itself as follows:—

Cytherea—Venus Calva—Madonna of the magic girdle, who had once reigned supreme between wealth and loveliness, who had once eaten hearts raw for breakfast, feeding her roses as vampires do, was desolate and impoverished—and even, perhaps, hungry. A scoundrelly guardian had eloped with trust funds: the crash had followed at a blow. Robbed of her recommendation to respect; deposed, at once, from the world's idolatry to its vicious solicitation, she had fled, with her hair and her poor derided virtue, into squalid oblivion; that, at least, she hoped. But, alas for the fateful recoils on Vanity! She drives with a tight rein; and woe to her if the rein snap! A certain libidinous and crafty nobleman, of threescore or so years, had secured, in the days of the Fair's prosperity, some little bills of paper bearing that beauty's signature. These he had politicly withheld himself from negotiating, on the mere chance that they might serve him some day for a means to humiliate one who, in the arrogance of her power, had scoffed at his amatory, and perfectly honourable, addresses. That precaution had justified itself. The peer was now come to woo again, and less scrupulously, with his hand on a paper weapon, one stroke from which alone was needed to give the Fair's poor drabbled fortune its quietus. She was at bay, between ruin and dishonour.

Sir Richard came immediately to a resolve, and lost no time in giving it effect. He wrote a formal note to the Fair, recalling himself courteously to her remembrance, reminding her of his original offer, and renewing it in so many words. He would do himself the honour, he said, to wait upon her for her answer on such and such a day.

To this he received no reply; nor, perhaps, expected one. He went, nevertheless, to his self-made appointment with the imperturbable confidence of a strong man.

Passing, on his way, by a perruquier's, he checked himself, and stood for some moments at gaze in a

motionless reverie. Then he entered the shop, made a purchase, and, going to a barber's, caused himself to be shorn, shaved, and restored to the conventional aspect. Thus conditioned, he knocked at the Fair's door, and was ushered up—bawled up, rather, by a slattern landlady—into her presence.

She rose to face him as he entered. She had his letter in her hand. Her beautiful hair, jealous, it seemed, to withdraw itself from the curioso's very appraisement, was gathered into and concealed under a cap. Her features, thus robbed of their dazzling frame, looked curiously, sadly childish and forlorn. There were dark marks round her eyes—the scarce dissipated clouds of recent tears. Who can tell what emotions, at sight of this piteous, hard-driven loveliness, stirred the heart of the man opposite, and were repressed by his iron will?

"This letter, sir," said the Fair, holding out the paper in a hand which shook a little. "I have tacitly permitted you to presume a right to a personal answer to that which it proposes, because such a course appeared to me the least compromising. I cannot write my name, sir, nowadays—as scandal doubtless hath informed you—but Fortune will be using it to my discredit."

Sir Richard bowed.

"There is this difference only, madam: *my* word is the bond of a gentleman. I vowed you secrecy."

"That is to assume, on your part," she said quietly, "a confidentialness which, in its insult to misfortune, is at least not the *act* of a gentleman. Moreover, a gentleman, surely, had not taken advantage of circumstances to propose to destitution what affluence had once refused him."

"Beware, madam!" said Avenant. "Pride must make some sacrifices to virtue. If, in renewing a pure business offer, I, a simple instrument in the hands of Providence, give you an opportunity to maintain that priceless possession unimpaired, would

it not be the truer self-respect to secure your honour at whatever cost to your sentiments?"

"I thank you, sir," she said. "I have not forgotten, nor forgotten to resent, my self-constituted Mentor. I will assure him that, for the matter of my virtue, it is safe in my hands, though I have to arm those against myself."

"Good heavens, madam!" cried Avenant. "You are not at that resource?"

"Give yourself no concern, sir," she answered coldly. "The moral I learned of your insult, was to save myself in its despite."

His deep eyes glowed upon her.

"You have sold your hair?" he said.

"Yes," she answered; "to pay my debts. 'Twas your letter decided me."

"At a thousand pounds?"

"At a hundred."

Then she added, as if irresistibly, because she was still little more than a child, "And now, sir, how is the boaster vindicated? But your oath, I perceive, still goes beardless."

"Within the hour only," said he; and, thrusting his hand into his breast, he drew out the long tresses of the Fair With Golden Hair.

She stared, amazed a moment; then threw herself upon her knees by a chair, weeping and crying out:

"Oh, I hate you, I hate you!"

He strode, and stood over her.

"I saw them through a window as I came. How could I mistake them? There is not their like in the world. But now, my oath redeemed, it is for you to say if I am to destroy them."

"Oh, my hair!" she wept; "my one beauty!"

"I have staked all on this," he cried. "If your hair was your one beauty, my beard alone redeemed me from appalling ugliness by so much as it hid of me. Well, I have lost on both counts, if the net result is your hatred."

She looked up, with drowned bewildered eyes, and held out her hand blindly.

"Give me back my hair," she said, "and you shall have the hundred pounds."

"Nay, sweet Delilah," quoth he; "for that would be to return you your strength, and I want you weak."

Her arm dropped to her side.

"That you may insult me with impunity!" she said bitterly.

"Ah, Delilah!" he cried; "is it so bad, that the offer of my hand and heart is an insult to a woman?"

She sank back, sitting on her heels. From under her cap, fallen awry, curled shavings of gold hung out—the residue of a squandered wealth. Her eyes were wide with amazement.

"So bad?" she whispered. "Are you asking me to marry you?"

He was not a conformable wooer. The love-wise sex shall say if he was a diplomatic one. He threw himself on his knees beside the Fair, seized her in his bearlike grip, and kissed her lips.

"Now," he said, "it is neck or nothing. None but a parson can wipe out the stain. Hate me now, and put Love to bed for by and by."

She smiled suddenly—like the rainbow; like an angel.

"Yes," she said, "if you insist. But the poor thing has slept so long in my heart, that it would fain wake up at last, and confess itself."

The peer took his settlement with a very bad grace; but he had to take it, and there was an end of him.

"Avenant," whispered the Fair, on the evening of their wedding day, "I have been vain, spoiled, perhaps untruthful. But I wished to tell you—you can put me to sleep on the middle shelf of your cupboard."

"It has been converted into a closet for skeletons," he said. "I was a bachelor then."

THE LOST NOTES.

THE faculty of music is generally, I believe, inimical to the development of all the other faculties. Sufficient to itself is the composing gift. There was scarcely ever yet a born musician, I do declare, who, outside his birthright, was not a born ass. I say it with the less irreverence, because my uncle was patently one of the rare exceptions which prove the rule. He knew his Shakespeare as well as his musical-glasses—better than, in fact; for he was a staunch Baconian. This was all the odder because—as was both early and late impressed upon me—he had a strong sense of humour. Perhaps an eternal study of the hieroglyphics of the leger lines was responsible for his craze; for craze I still insist it was, in spite of the way he took to convince me of the value of cryptograms. I was an obstinate pupil, I confess, and withstood to the end the fire of all the big guns which he—together with my friend, Chaunt, who was in the same line—brought to bear upon me.

Well, I was honest, at least; for I was my uncle's sole provisional legatee, and heir presumptive to whatever small fortune he had amassed during his career. And day by day, as the breach between us widened, I saw my prospect of the succession attenuating, and would not budge from my position. No, Shakespeare was Shakespeare, I said, and Bacon, Bacon; and not all the cyphers in the world should convince me that any profit was to be gained by either imagining or unravelling a single one of them.

"What, no profit!" roared my uncle. "But I will persuade you, young man, of your mistake before I'm done with you. Hum-ti-diddledidee! No profit, hey? H'm—well!"

Then I saw that the end was come. And, indeed, it was an open quarrel between us, and I was forbidden to call upon him again.

I was sorry for this, because, in his more frolicsome and uncontroversial moments, he was a genial companion, unless or until one inadvertently touched on *the* theme, when at once he exploded. Professionally, he *could* be quite a rollicking blade, and his settings of plantation songs were owned to be nothing less than lyric inspirations. Pantomime, too, in the light of his incidental music, had acquired something more than a classical complexion; and, in the domain of knock-about extravaganza, not only did the score of "The Girl who Knew a Thing or Two" owe to him its most refined numbers, but also the libretto, it was whispered, its best Attic *bonnes-bouches*.

However, all that good company I must now forgo —though Chaunt tried vainly to heal the breach between us—and in the end the old man died, without any visible relenting towards me.

I felt his loss pretty keenly, though it is no callousness in me to admit that our long separation had somewhat dulled the edge of my attachment. I expected, of course, no testamentary consideration from him, and was only more surprised than uplifted to receive one morning a request from his lawyers to visit them at my convenience. So I went, soberly enough, and introduced myself.

"No," said the partner to whom I was admitted, in answer to a question of mine: "I am not in a position to inform you who is the principal beneficiary under our friend's will. I can only tell you—what a few days before his death he confided to us, and what, I think, under the circumstances, you are entitled to learn — that he had quite recently, feeling his end approaching, realised on the bulk of his capital, converted the net result into a certain number—five, I think he mentioned—of Bank of England notes,

and . . . burned 'em, for all we know to the contrary."

"Burned them!" I murmured aghast.

"I don't say so," corrected the lawyer dryly. "I only say, you know, that we are not instructed to the contrary. Your uncle" (he coughed slightly) "had his eccentricities. Perhaps he swallowed 'em; perhaps gave 'em away at the gate. Our dealings are, beyond yourself, solely with the residuary legatee, who is, or was, his housekeeper. For her benefit, moreover, the furniture and effects of our late client are to be sold, always excepting a few more personal articles, which, together with a sealed enclosure, we are desired to hand over to you."

He signified, indeed, my bequest as he spoke. It lay on a table behind him: A bound volume of minutes of the Baconian Society; a volume of Ignatius Donnelly's Great Cryptogram; a Chippendale tea-caddy (which, I was softened to think, the old man had often known me to admire); a large piece of foolscap paper twisted into a cone, and a penny with which to furnish myself with a mourning ring out of a cracker.

I blushed to my ears, regarding the show; and then, to convince this person of my good-humoured sanity, giggled like an idiot. He did not even smile in reply, the self-important ass, but, with a manner of starchy condescension, as to a wastrel who was getting all his deserts, rose from his chair, unlocked a safe, took an ordinary sealed envelope from it, handed it to me, and informed me that, upon giving him a receipt, I was at liberty to remove the lot.

"Thanks," I said, grinding my astral teeth. "Am I to open this in your presence?"

"Quite inessential," he answered; and, upon ascertaining that I should like a cab called, sent for one.

"Good-morning," he said, when at last it was

announced (he had not spoken a word in the interval): "I wish you good-morning," in the morally patronising tone of a governor discharging a prisoner.

I responded coldly; tried, for no reason at all, to look threatening; failed utterly, and went out giggling again. Quite savagely I threw my goods upon the seat, snapped out my address, closed the apron upon my abasement, and sat slunk into the cavity behind, like a salted and malignant snail.

Presently I thumped the book malevolently. The dear old man was grotesque beyond reason. Really he needn't have left life cutting a somersault, as it were.

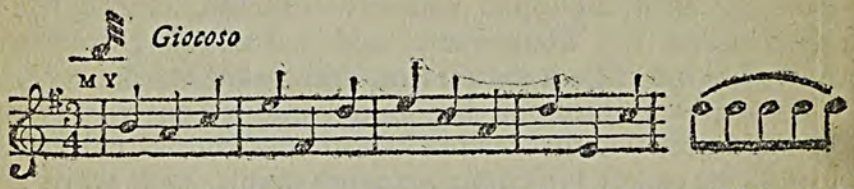
But, as I cooled outwardly, a warmer thought would intrude. It drew, somehow, from the heart of that little enclosure lying at the moment in my pocket. It was ridiculous, of course, to expect anything of it but some further development of a rather unkind jest. My uncle's professional connection with burlesque had rather warped, it would appear, his sense of humour. Still, I could not but recall that story of the conversion of his capital into notes: and an envelope——!

Bah! (I wriggled savagely). It was idiotic beyond measure so to flatter myself. Our recent relations had precluded for ever any such possibility. The holocaust, rather! The gift to a chance passer-by, as suggested by that fool of a lawyer! I stared out of the window, humming viciously, and telling myself it was only what I ought to expect; that such a vagary was distinctly in accordance with the traditions of low comedy. It will be observed that I was very contemptuous of buffoonery as a profession. Paradoxically, a joke is never played so low as when it is played on our lofty selves.

Nevertheless, I was justified, it appeared. It may be asked, Why did I not at once settle the matter by opening the envelope in the cab? Well, I just temporised with my gluttony, till, like the greedy boy, I could examine my box in private—only to find that

the rats had devoured all my cake. It was not till I was shut into my sitting-room that I dared at length to break the seal, and to withdraw——

Even as it came out, with no suggestion of a reassuring crackle, I realised my fate. And this was it: please to examine it carefully—



Now, what do you make of it? "*Ex nihilo nihil fit*," I think you will say with me. It was literally thus, carefully penned in the middle of a single sheet of music-paper—a phrase, or *motif*, I suppose it would be called—an undeveloped memorandum, in fact—nothing else whatever. I let the thing drop from my hand.

No doubt there was some capping jest here, some sneer, some vindictive sarcasm. I was not musician enough to tell, even had I had spirit for the endeavour. It was unworthy, at least, of the old man—much more, or less, than I deserved. I had been his favourite once. Strange how the *idée fixe* could corrode an otherwise tractable reason. In justice to myself I must insist that quite half my disappointment was in the realisation that such dislike, due to such a trifle, could have come to usurp the old affection.

By and by I rose dismally, and carried the jest to the piano. (Half a crown a day my lady exacted from me, if I so much as thumped on the old wreck with one finger, which was the extent of my talent.) Well, I was reckless, and the theme appeared ridiculously simple. But I could make nothing of it—not though Mrs. Dexter came up in the midst, and congratulated me on my performance.

When she was gone I took the thing to my chair again, and resumed its study despondently. And presently Chaunt came in.

"Hallo!" he said: "how's the blooming legatee?"

"Pretty blooming, thanks," I said. "Would you like to speculate in my reversion? Half a crown down to Mrs. Dexter, and the use of the tin kettle for the day."

"Done," he said, "so far as the piano's concerned. Let's see what you've got there."

He had known of my prospective visit to the lawyers, and had dropped in to congratulate me on *that* performance. I acquainted him with the result; showed him the books, and the tea-caddy, and the penny, and the remnants of foolscap—finally, handed him the crowning jest for inspection.

"Pretty thin joke, isn't it?" I growled dolefully. "Curse the money, anyhow! But I didn't think it of the old man. I suppose you can make no more of that than I can?"

He was squinting at the paper as he held it up, and rubbing his jaw, stuck out at an angle, grittily.

"H'm!" he said, quite suddenly, "I'd go out for a walk and revive myself, if I were you. I intend to hold you to that piano, for my part; and you wouldn't be edified."

"No," I said: "I've had enough of music for a lifetime or so! I fancy I'll go, if you won't think me rude."

"On the contrary," he murmured, in an absorbed way: and I left him.

I took a longish spin, and returned, on the whole refreshed, in a couple of hours. He was still there; but he had finished, it appeared, with the piano.

"Well," he said, rising and yawning, "you've been a deuce of a time gone; but here you are"—and he held out to me indifferently a little crackling bundle.

Without a word I took it from his hand—parted, stretched, and explored it.

"Good God!" I gasped: "five notes of a thousand apiece!"

He was rolling a cigarette.

"Yes," he drawled, "that's the figure, I believe."

"For me?"

"For you—from your uncle."

"But—how?"

He lighted, took a serene puff or two, drew the *jest* from his pocket, and, throwing it on a chair, "You'll have to allow some value to cryptograms at last," he said, and sat down to enjoy himself.

"Chaunt!"

"Oh," he said, "it was a bagatelle. An ass might have brayed it out at sight."

"Please, I am something less than an ass. Please will you interpret for me?" I said humbly.

He neighed out—I beg *his* pardon—a great laugh at last.

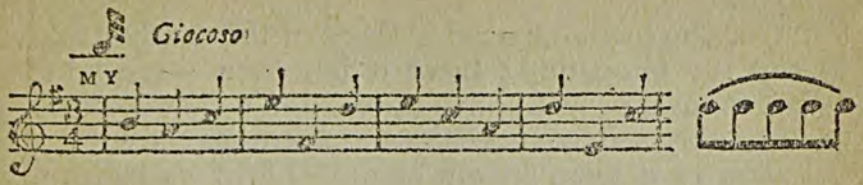
"Oh," he cried: "your uncle was true blue; he stuck to his guns; but I never really supposed he meant to disinherit you, Johnny. You always had the first place in his heart, for all your obstinacy. He took his own way to convince you, that was all. Pretty poor stuff it is, I'm bound to confess; but enough to run *your* capacities to extinction. Here, hand it over."

"Don't be hard on me," I protested, giving him the paper. "If I'm all that you say, it was as good as cutting me off with a penny."

"No," he answered: "because he knew very well that you'd apply to me to help you out of the difficulty."

"Well, help me," I said, "and, in the matter of Bacon, I'll promise to be a fool convinced against my will."

"No doubt," he answered dryly, and came and sat beside me. "Look here," he said; and I looked:—



"You know your notes, anyhow," said he. "Well, you've only got to read off these into their alphabetical equivalents, and cut the result into perfectly obvious lengths. It's child's play so far; and, indeed, in everything, unless this rum-looking metronome beat, or whatever it may be, bothers you for a moment."

He put his finger on the crazy device perched up independently in the left-hand corner; and then came down to the lines again.

"Let that be for the moment," said he. "It don't much signify, after all. How do these notes go? that's the main question. Read 'em off."

I spelt them out, following his finger: "b a c e f d e c a d e c."

"That's a good boy," he said. "And now, what are these things beyond, that have run off the lines, so to speak?"

"What are they? Why, I don't see what they can be but notes."

"Exactly. Five notes."

I stared at the bundle in my hand, and then up at Chaunt.

"O-o-o-o!" I exclaimed.

He uttered a loud ironic laugh. "Well," he said: "what does 'b a c e f d e c a d e c' spell?"

I scratched my nose. "You tell me, please."

"Oh, Jerusalem!" he cried, and took his pencil to the line, thus: b a c | e f | d e | c a d e | c—

"Well?" he said again.

I shook my head.

He positively stamped. "Listen here," he cried: "'bac ef de cad-e c'—*don't* you see?"

"No."

"Oh, you ineffable ass! 'Back of the caddy' (that's to say the tea-caddy; there it is), 'see'—see what? What follows? Why, five notes, don't they? 'Back of the caddy see five notes'—and there *they* are."

I sank in a heap in my chair. Light had dawned on me. "And you found 'em there, I suppose?" I murmured—"behind a false back or something?"

He nodded. "You're getting on."

"And, please, what's the thing at the top?" I continued faintly. "Let me get it all over at once."

"Ah!" he said: "there's a trifle more ingenuity in that, perhaps. What is it, to begin with? A demisemiquaver balanced on the top of an M Y, eh?"

"So it appears to me."

"To any one. Don't be frightened. Try it every way round, and conclude with this: 'On the top of M Y'—that is to say, '*on* M Y,' which is *my*, 'a demisemiquaver': or, shorn of all superfluities (he pencilled it down), thus: 'on my demisemiquaver.' Now apply the same process."

I looked; pondered; felt myself instantly and brilliantly inspired; seized the pencil from him, and ticked off the measurements:—

"On my demise | mi | q | u | av | er."

"Exactly," said Chaunt, rising with the air of an at-length-released martyr, and proceeding to roll another cigarette: "'On my demise, my cue you have here.' 'Pon my word, without irreverence, it's worthier of the composer of 'Say, den, Julius, whar yo' walkin' roun'?' than of the author of *Some Unnoticed Sides of Bacon.* But all one can say is that he adapted himself to the intellectual measure of his legatee. Have you got a match?"

I must end, I am really ashamed to say, with this. Anyhow, in one way my uncle was triumphant: I was convinced, at last and at least, of *a* value in cryptograms.

THE UNLUCKIEST MAN IN THE WORLD.

He was nicknamed, ironically, Carabas—a sort of French equivalent for Fortunatus—the only title by which I ever knew him. Perhaps the underlying sympathy which impelled the jest reconciled him to its mockery; for there is, after all, an acute distinction in being the unluckiest man in the world. Somebody says somewhere that it is better to "lead" in hell than be a super in heaven. There came a time, I think, when Carabas would have resented good fortune as an outrage. It would have broken his record, and made him commonplace at a blow. As with Hawthorne's young woman who was bred and throve on poisons, a normal dietary would have been fatal to him. Carabas was nurtured on ill-luck.

I made his acquaintance at Verey's in Montreux. It was for ever Carabas here and Carabas there, and, sometimes, in badinage, M. le Marquis; for the fellow was always in huge request for his capability and good-humour. There was a great deal of commiseration being shown for him when I first arrived. Latterly he had drawn a prize ticket—for thirty thousand francs, I think it was—in some State lottery. But, alas! a few days before the declaration of the winning numbers, he had parted with his voucher for a trifle over cost price. We got up a consolation subscription for him in the hotel—relatively, quite a respectable little sum—which, with effusive thanks, he deposited in the Bureau de Secours Mutuels. The bank stopped payment almost at once, and Carabas lost his nest-egg, with a prospect of future "calls" from the parent cuckoo.

After that, we abandoned him to his Nemesis. We had recognised finally, I suppose, that vails to him

meant nothing but tips to his evil destiny, to whom, as to a rapacious head-waiter, they all accrued. And so he himself was convinced with us. He showed himself neither surprised nor aggrieved ; but remained the sunniest fatalist, with just a touch of wistfulness, which Nature had ever produced out of a union between Candour and Philosophy.

I don't know what his official position was. I don't think he knew himself. He wore a plain peaked cap, and a sleeved waistcoat with brass buttons, and was, loosely, jackal to the tremendous concierge whose bullion took the costly glass tabernacle in the hall with splendour. Carabas himself was not at all a figure of splendour. He was small, and placable in expression, with smiling cheeks, mobile lips, pencilled over by a tiny black moustache, and strength visible in nothing but his eyes. They were his vouchers of distinction above the common brand.

One thing certain about him was that he was an accomplished linguist ; a second, that, for all his unspoiledness, he had a large experience of man, and (notably) womankind ; a third, that his courage was equal to his good temper ; a fourth, that, with every natural claim to consideration, his pride halted at no service, whether of skill or complaisance, which an unscrupulous management could exact of him ; a fifth and last, that he permitted his employers so to presume upon his reputation for successlessness, as to accept from them, in reward for his many accomplishments, wages which would have been cheap to inefficiency. His own material welfare, indeed, seemed always the thing remotest from his interests. To be helpful to others was the sum of his morality.

I never could satisfy myself as to his nationality. Once—as one might ask him anything without offence —I put the question to him. To my secret surprise, he seemed to hesitate a perceptible moment before he answered, with a smiling shrug of his shoulders :

"Cosmopolitan, monsieur; a foundling of Fortune."

"We should do very well, then," I answered, "to claim you for England."

Was it fancy on my part that his pleasant face paled a little? "As to that," he said, "I know nothing."

"You have never been in England?"

He made no reply, but began bustling over some incoming luggage, calling to the porters at the lift; and in a moment he left me.

The next day he was taken ill. The reversion of a service of raw oysters, supplied to the guests at table d'hôte, had found its way to the supper-table of the staff. Carabas detested oysters, but his gallantry to the fair sex was proverbial, and Ninette, the prettiest of *filles de cuisine*, sat next to him. She extracted a single "bivalve" from her half-dozen, and put it on his plate, moueing at him ravishingly.

"Love conquers everything, M. Carabas," she said; "even the antipathies of the stomach. I will not believe in your protestations unless you eat this for my sake."

He swallowed it at a gulp, and—it was a bad oyster, the only doubtful one in the whole consignment. Later, he was very sick; and afterwards ill for four days. Ninette cried, and then laughed, and congratulated herself on her escape. But as for the hotel, it was disconsolate in the temporary loss of its Carabas.

For my part, I was even particularly conscious of a vague discomfort in his absence. Somehow a certain personal responsibility which I had undertaken seemed to weigh upon me the more heavily for it. It was not that Carabas could have lightened, by any conceivable means, my burden. It was just a sense of moral support withdrawn at a critical moment. It was as if the knees of my conscience were weak,

owing to something having gone wrong with my backbone. But I will explain.

Mr. G——, a very famous lawyer in our own country, had brought his family, a son and daughter, to holiday in Lucerne. The boy was a conceited and susceptible youth; to the lady I was—engaged.

There seems no reason why impressionability should spell obstinacy; yet very often it does. Young Miller (so I will call him) having invited himself, at the Schweitzerhof, into the toils of a siren—a patently showy and dubious one—resisted all the efforts of his family to help him out. Baffled, but resolute, the father thereupon shifted the scene to Montreux, where they were no sooner arrived than he was summoned home on business at a moment's notice. In the meanwhile, to me (hastily called from Paris, where it had been arranged I was to join the party on its homeward journey), was assigned the unenviable and impossible task of safeguarding the family interests. Miller had positively refused to accompany his father home, then or thereafter, until his absurd "honour," as he called his fatuity, was vindicated. It would never do to abandon the wretched infant in the wilderness. He had his independence, and was a desirable *parti*. Hence my promotion to an utterly fictitious authority.

I knew, naturally, how it would be; and so it turned out. The head was no sooner withdrawn, than Mademoiselle Celestine—privately advised, of course, of the fact—arrived at Verey's. Here, then, was defiance unequivocal—naked and unashamed, I might have said, and been nearer the truth of the case. For mademoiselle's charms were opulent, and she made no secret of them. One would have thought a schoolboy might have seen through that rouge and enamel, through the crude pencilling on those eyelashes, through all that self-advertising display. I will not dwell upon its details, because their possessor made,

after all, only a summer nightmare for us, and was early discomfited. She served, at best, for foil to a brighter soul; and such is her present use in the context.

From the outset there was no finesse, no pretence of propitiation in her tactics. She understood that it was a matter of now or never with her quarry, and aimed to bring him down sitting. A woman, even the best of her sex, never gives "law" in these matters. She goes out to kill.

The two together formed an opposition camp—quite flagrantly, out in the sunlight. I thought sometimes the boy looked unhappy; but the witch would never let me have *him* to myself, and I could not manœuvre *her* from under his guns. I would never have scrupled to roll her in the mud, could I once have got her alone. But she has too cunning for that; and, as for her companion, his warfare was, after all, an honourable warfare. And all the time I had my own particular Campaspe to safeguard, to console, to squire through the odious notoriety which her brother's infatuation had conferred upon us all.

It was Carabas, of course, who in the end procured us a way, his own, out of the difficulty. The scandal being common property, there was no need for him to affect an ignorance of it. Yet we never knew, until the moment of his decision, how it had been occupying his mind from the beginning, or how, quietly and unobtrusively, he had been studying to qualify himself as our advocate. "*Our* advocate," I say; but I knew his brief was for the bright eyes of Campaspe. *He* struck for the credit of the hotel, he declared; and mam'selle was associated with the best of that. Anyhow he struck, and daringly.

He had risen from his bed on the fourth day, as smiling, as complaisant as ever. His presence, like a genial thaw, ameliorated the little winter of our discontent. We greeted his reappearance with effusion,

and dated, from the moment of it, our restoration to the social sanities.

It was a dusk, warm evening. The peaks of the Dent du Midi, thrust into a dewy sky, had been slowly cooling from pink to pearl-ash, like ingots of white-hot steel. Everything seemed one harmony of colour, except our thoughts, Campaspe's and mine, as we strolled in the deserted garden. The Celestine and her victim had been out boating on the lake. We met them, unexpectedly returning. Mademoiselle was eating cherries out of a bag, and daintily spitting the stones right and left as she advanced. I don't know how we should have faced the contretemps; I had no time, indeed, at the moment, to form a decision, before Carabas came softly and swiftly from a leafy ambush, and took command of the occasion.

We all, I believe, instinctively recognised it for a critical one. Mademoiselle's bosom, though she laughed musically (she had managed to preserve, it must be owned, the unspoiled voice of a *séductrice*) began to rise and fall in spasms. The portier addressed her without a moment's hesitation.

"I take the liberty to inform madame that she is in danger."

She gave a little gasp.

"But is this comedy or melodrama?" she cried vehemently.

"That is," said Carabas, "as madame shall decide. I have the plot up my sleeve."

"The plot!" she echoed, and fell staring at him; and then furiously from him to us.

"Go on," she said. "I know very well who has instigated you to this."

She checked herself, and, smiling, put out a hand towards her companion, as if to ask, or give, reassurance. But I noticed, already to my satisfaction, that the boy did not respond. As for us, we were in complete darkness.

"I obey, madame," said Carabas. "This plot is told in a word. There was once in Paris a certain notorious *courtisane et joueuse*. Will madame desire her name?—*à bon entendeur demi-mot*. One night this lady's husband, a Corsican, from whom she was separated on an honourable allowance, visited, purely by accident, her establishment. There was a fine scene, and he wounded her severely. She was forced by the police to prosecute him, and the jury, amidst the plaudits of the public, gave their verdict—against madame. But, triumphant there, the husband's vengeance was whetted rather than assuaged. He would throw himself upon the suffrages of his countrymen in a more drastic vindication of his honour. She had disguised herself — her name — had fled. He devoted himself to the business of pursuit. At length he believed he had traced her to an hotel in Territet."

Carabas shrugged his shoulders and his lips, stuck out his arms at right angles with his body, stiff from the elbow, and came to a significant stop. I declare I pitied the adventuress. Every expression but that of panic seemed eliminated from her face at a touch. She looked old and haggard; and then, as if conscious of her self-betrayal, collapsed in a moment, dropping her bag of cherries.

"I am not very well," she stammered; "the night air tries me." She turned lividly upon the portier: "Par pitié, monsieur! C'est pour me prévenir que vous êtes venu, non pour me trahir?"

Without waiting for his answer, she gathered herself together, literally, folding her train about her arm; made a desperate effort at self-command; wrenched out a smile, and went off, quavering a little airy chansonette. But, after a few steps, despite her royal amplitude she was running. Carabas, very pale but self-possessed, picked up the bag, found one cherry in it, put it in his mouth abstractedly, and—

"My God!" cried Miller hoarsely.

Carabas jumped, and gulped.

"A thousand devils!" he cried. "You made me swallow the stone, monsieur."

The boy was in a fever of agitation.

"Is she really that—that sort?" he said.

My Campaspe fell upon his neck.

Oh, my dear, Oh, my dear, I am so sorry!" she sobbed.

He put her roughly, but not unkindly, away.

"I'm — I'm going back to England — to the governor," he said.

"Carabas," I demanded privately, as we returned to the hotel, "is it a fact that——?"

"The husband is here? No, monsieur; it is not a fact."

"But——"

"It was a *cause célèbre*. I was confident I recognised madame from the published prints. For the rest, it was just a chance shot; but it hit the mark."

"Carabas, you are wonderful; and we shall not forget."

Miller was as good as his word. With characteristic disregard for any but his own interests, he was gone the next morning, without sign or message, leaving us to wobble in his backwash of scandal, and to get out of it as best we could. His flight, of course, threw open all the doors of gossip. My business in Paris being unfinished, I had to go; but first I did my best to provide against unpleasantnesses by confiding Campaspe to the care of the least slanderous *dame de campagnie* I could find. I am afraid, nevertheless, she had but a poor time of it.

A week later I received a letter from Mr. G——, who in the interval had returned to Montreux.

"All is happily over with all," he wrote: "with the exception, that is to say, of poor Carabas, who is to undergo an operation for appendicitis. It

appears that a cherry-stone, which he swallowed unwittingly, did the business. The management (OWLS!) demur to the expense. I have insisted (FOOLS!) upon undertaking it upon my own account. We owe much to him; and so do they (IDIOTS!). But they don't understand how to pay your debts is very often the best foresight."

It was a case of pitch and toss. For days, it appeared, Carabas's life hung in the balance. In the meanwhile, I was enabled to rejoin Mr. G—— and his daughter at Montreux, and to take my share in the nursing. Between gratitude and indignation, we rather claimed Carabas among us. Campaspe the poor fellow simply adored. Once, when he fancied himself losing hold, he confided to her, while we stood by, some main incidents in his life. I retail them here, in an abbreviated form.

CARABAS'S STORY.

"There is no doubt," he said, "that as truly as some men are born without a palate, so some men are born without luck. It is no use trying to remedy the deficiency; it is well, rather, to study to reconcile oneself to it.

"I was born in an English village, of naturalised Huguenot parents. When I was nineteen, I fell passionately in love. I had for a rival a youth very strong and unscrupulous. One day he persuaded me to bathe with him in the river, then swollen with floods. In mid-stream he pounced upon me, and strove to bear me under. I struggled desperately—it was of no avail. Death thundered in my ears; the water enwrapped and proceeded to swallow me. The last thing I saw was a figure gesticulating and shouting on the bridge a little way above; then consciousness fled, and I sank. I came to myself,

stranded somewhere in a dark channel. A mad face was bending over me. I knew it—it was that of the miller. I had been carried into his race, and, just short of the wheel, he had caught and dragged me to shore. He was a drunkard, of that I was aware; and he was now quite demented.

"'*Mordieu!*' he said,' I see what you've come for, and the devil shan't call twice for his own.'

"I understood instantly. He meant himself to go with me into the water—to join issues with the devil who had called for him, and have a fine frolic into eternity with his visitor. Terror lent me strength. I caught at a post, and, as he leaned down, shot my whole body at him like a spring. He went over with a splash, and I heard the wheel hitch, then begin to turn again, chewing its prey. Oh, my friends, what a situation! I lay like one damned, a thousand dreadful reflections mastering me. I should be accused, if caught, of murdering this man. That terror quite devoured the other, and increased with every moment that I lay. Darkness came upon me, and then I rose and fled. I thought of nothing but to escape; and so, stealing always by night, I reached London.

"Now, I will tell you the irony of this destiny. Many weeks later I read, by chance, in a newspaper, how my rival had been granted your Royal Humane Society's testimonial, on the evidence of a casual spectator, for a brave but unsuccessful attempt to *save me* from drowning; and how the little pretty romance had terminated with his marriage to the admiring object of our two regards. So I was dead; and, as long as I lay in my nameless grave—for my body, it appeared, had never been recovered—the ghost of my fear was laid. I do not complain, therefore. Yet—ah, mademoiselle, most condescending of sympathisers!—*she* had been very dear to me."

Here Carabas found it necessary to console my Campaspe before he could go on.

"I obtained work—under an assumed name, of course—and for many years found at least a living in that immense capital. I had an aptitude for languages, which was my great good fortune; yet prosperity never more than looked at me through the window. What then? I could keep body and soul together. Ill-luck is too mean a spirit for Death to patronise. Many a time has the great Angel turned his back disdainfully on the other's spiteful hints. He will not claim me, I believe, until he sees him asleep, or tired of persecuting me.

"One day I was travelling on your underground railway. I had for companion in my compartment a single individual. He jumped out at the Blackfriars station, leaving a handbag on the seat. At the moment the train moved off I noticed this, seized it, and leaned with it out of the window, with a purpose to shout to its owner. I saw him in the distance, hurriedly returning. The train gathered speed; I saw he could never reach me in time, and I flung the bag upon the platform. Instantly I perceived him leap, and jerk his arm across his eyes; and on the same moment a terrible explosion occurred.

"Stunned, but unhurt, I had fallen back, when, in a flash, the full horror of my situation burst upon me. It was the time of the dynamite scares, and—ah, mon Dieu, mam'selle! your quick wit has already perceived my misfortune.

"The train had stopped; the place was full of smoke; the hubbub of a great tumult sounded in my ears. The owner of the infernal machine was certainly destroyed in his own trap; I, at the same time, had as certainly thrown the bag. No evidence to exonerate me was now possible. Without an instant's consideration, I opened the door upon the line, slipped out, closed it, and raced for my life through the smoke to the next station. I was successful in gaining its

 platform without exciting observation. News of the

catastrophe had already been passed on, so that I was able, mingling with a frenzied crowd, to make my way to the streets. But panic was in my feet, and all reason had fled from my brain. I felt only that to remain in London would be to find myself, sooner or later, the most execrated of human monstrosities, on the scaffold. There and then I effaced myself for the second time, hurried to the docks, and procured a post as steward on an outgoing steamer. I have never been in England since. I now give monsieur the explanation he once asked for, secure in the thought that, as ill-luck has at last conceded to me the ministrations of this dear angel of a mademoiselle, his persecution must be nearing its end before the approach of the only foe he dreads. I leave it to monsieur, if he likes, to vindicate my name."

As he finished, Mr. G——, whose face had been wonderfully kindling towards the end, bent over the bed.

"This must not be, Carabas," he said. "The man, the dynamiter, confessed the whole truth before he died."

Carabas sprang up.

"Monsieur!" he cried.

"I am a lawyer," said Mr. G——; "I was connected with the case. The man confessed, I say. If I had only known that—Carabas! Carabas! you were the one witness we wanted, and could not find!"

Campaspe knelt down, and put a pitiful young arm round the shoulders of the unluckiest man in the world.

"Not only we now," she said softly, "but others also, it seems, owe you a great debt, dear Carabas. We shall all be unable to pay it if you die. If—if I give you a kiss, will you live to return it to me on my wedding day?"

"Mademoiselle!" cried Carabas, radiant. "You shame ill-luck; you shame even Death. See how they turn and go out by the door! Vouchsafe me that dear mascot, and I swear I will live for ever."

He is now, and has been for long, our most loved and trusted servant, with an iron constitution, and, what is best, an unshakable conviction that the circumstances which led him on to his present position were, after all, the kindest of luck in disguise.

JACK THE SKIPPER.

"Will you favour me by looking at it, young gentleman?" said the petitioner.

It was a most curious little model, which the petitioner had taken reverently out of a handbag. He was a hungry, eager-looking man, in a battered bowler, shabby frock-coat, and a primordial "comforter" which might have been made for Job.

Mr. Edward Cantle, busy at his desk, paid no attention.

"It turns, sir, literally, on a question of fresh butter," said the petitioner. "Who gets it nowadays, or realises how, between churn and table, every pat becomes a dumping-ground for bacilli? Here, you will observe, the whole difficulty is resolved. We lead the cow into the cart itself, milk her into a separator, turn her out, drive off, and the revolution of the wheels completes the process. See? No chance for any freebooting germ! The result is simplicity itself—the customer's butter made actually on the way to his door."

Mr. Cantle put his pen in his mouth, blotted what he had been at work on, examined it cursorily but surely, rose, walked to the counter, and presented a

form to the petitioner, all something with the air of a passionless police-inspector. He was a tall young man, loose-limbed, and with all his hardness, like a melancholy Punch's show character, in his head. Much converse with cranks had engendered in him an air of perpetual unspoken protest, of exasperated resignation. For he was a trusted clerk in the office of the Commissioners of Patents for Inventions.

"Exactly," he mumbled over the goose-quill. "That's a matter for your provisional specification. Good-morning."

"It's the most wonderful——"

"Of course—they all are. Good-morning."

"It will revolutionise——"

"Naturally. You will make your petition and declaration in the proper forms. Good-morning."

The inventor essayed another effort or two, met with no response, quavered out a sigh, packed up his treasure and vanished. The sound of his exit neither relaxed nor deepened a wrinkle on the brow of the neatly groomed Government official. He simply went on with his work.

At half-past one o'clock, it being Saturday, he—we were going to say "knocked off," but the expression would be a libel on his methodical refinement. He took a hansom—selecting a personably horsed one—to his chambers in Adelphi Terrace; lunched off four *pâté de foie gras* sandwiches, already awaiting him under a silver cover, and a glass of chablis; changed his dress for a river suit of sober-tinted flannel and a Panama hat; charged himself with a morocco hand-bag, also ready prepared; drove to Waterloo, and took a first-class ticket, and the train—he favoured the South-Western because it was the quieter line of two in this connection—to Windsor. Arrived there, he was hailed and joined by a friend on the platform.

"Glad you're come, Ned. I'm off colour a bit. You never are."

It was hardly an attractive reception. Mr. Cantle glanced interrogatively at his companion, the Honourable Ivo Monk, son of Lord Prior.

"No?" he said. "What's disturbing you, Monk?"

"Oh, the devil, I think!" said the young man peevishly. "Come along, do, out of this."

Together they walked down to the river in almost absolute silence. Mr. Cantle had agreed to join his friend for an agreeable week-end on the water. It looked promising. He thought a little, and came to a characteristically uncompromising decision.

"Is it anything to do with Miss Varley?"

"Yes, it is."

"She—they have a houseboat here, haven't they?"

"Yes."

"Close by?"

"More or less. Just above Datchet."

"Then, I think, perhaps I'd better——"

"Then, I think, perhaps you'd not. You don't know anything about it. It's not what you suppose."

"Oh!"

A punt, in luxurious keeping with the tastes of its owner, awaited them at the steps. It was equipped with a number of little lockers for wine and food, a wealth of the downiest cushions, and an adjustable tilt with brass hoops for "roughing it" at nights on the water. For the Honourable Ivo was at the moment an aquatic gipsy, wandering at large and at whim, and scorning the effeminate pillow.

They loitered through Romney lock, talking commonplaces, and below relinquished their poles and sat and drifted until the reeds held them up. It was a fair, sweet afternoon, full of life and merriment, and, in view of the crowding craft, the remotest from ghostliness.

"Would you like to see her?" said Mr. Monk suddenly and unexpectedly.

Cantle was never to be taken off his guard.

"If it will please you, it will please me," he said.

They resumed the poles and made forward. To their left a little sludgy creek went up among the osiers; and, anchored at its mouth, rocked the vulgarest little apology for a houseboat. It seemed just one cuddy, mounted on a craft like a bomb-ketch, which it filled from stem to stern; and what with its implied restrictedness, and dingy appearance, and stump of a chimney, one could not have imagined a less inviting prison in which to make out a holiday. Yet there was a lord to this squalid baby galliot, and to all appearance a very contented one, as he sat smoking a pipe, with his legs dangling over the side. Monk nodded to him, and the man nodded back with a grin.

"Who's that?" asked Mr. Cantle, when out of earshot.

"Oh, a crank! You should recognise the breed better than I do."

Mr. Cantle, thoughtfully nursing his jaw, with a frown on his face, had left off punting.

"Don't you know him?" he said suddenly.

"We exchange civilities," answered the other; "the freemasonry of the river, you understand. *There's* the Varleys' boat."

Forging under the Victoria Bridge, they had come in view of a long line of houseboats moored under the left bank against a withy bed, opposite the Home Park. At one of these, hight the *Mermaid*, very large and handsome, they came to, and fastening on, stepped aboard. A sound of murmuring ceased with their arrival, and Cantle had hardly become aware of two figures seated in the saloon, before he was being introduced to one of them.

Miss Varley was certainly "interesting"—tall and "English," but with an exhausted air, and her eyes superhumanly large. She greeted the stranger

sweetly, and her fiancé with a rather full, pathetic look.

"Mamma's resting a little," she said, in a bodiless voice, "and Nanna's been reading to me. Papa comes down by the seven o'clock train."

"And what's Nanna been reading?" asked the young man.

The old nurse held up the volume. It was the Holy Book. Monk ground his teeth.

"Hush, Master Ivo!" whispered the woman. "You only distress her."

"I'd rather see her reading a yellow-back on a July day on the river."

The girl put a hand on his arm. "When the call has come? When my days are numbered, Ivo?" she said.

He almost burst out in an oath.

"I'd rather, if I were you, be recognised and called by my own name and nature," he said bitterly. "But it's all nonsense, Netta. Do, for God's sake, believe it!"

He was so obviously overwrought, the situation was so painful, that his friend persuaded him, on personal grounds, to leave. They punted across, dropped down a distance, and brought up under the bank in a quiet spot.

"Very well," said Cantle. "You'll tell me, perhaps, what's the matter?"

"Can't you see? She's dying."

He dropped his face into his hands, with a groan of impotent suffering.

"There's some mystery here," said his friend quietly.

Monk looked up, and burst out in a sudden lost fury:

"There is, by God! Jack the Skipper!"

Cantle was rolling a cigarette imperturbably.

"Who's —Jack the Skipper?" he drawled.

"I wish you could tell me," cried the other. "I wish you could show these the way to his throat!" He held out his hands. "They'd fasten!" he whispered.

He came all of a sudden, quite quietly, and sat by his friend. "It's been going on for three weeks now," he said rapidly. "They call him that about here—a sort of skit on the other—the other beast, you know. He appears at night—a sort of ghoulish, indescribable monster, black and huge and dripping, and utters one beastly sound and disappears. Nobody's been able to trace him, or see where he comes from or goes to. He just appears in the night, in all sorts of unexpected places—houseboats, and bungalows, and shanties by the water—and terrifies some lonely child or woman, and is gone. The devil!—oh, the devil! We've made parties and hunted him, to no good. It's a regular reign of terror hereabouts. People don't dare being left alone after dark. He frightened the little Cunningham child into a fit, and it's not expected to recover. Mrs. Bancock died of an apoplexy after seeing it. And the worst of it is, a deadly superstition's seized the place. Its visit's got to be supposed to presage death, and——" He seized Cantle's hand convulsively.

"Damn it! It's unnatural, Ned! The river's haunted—here, in Cockney Datchet—in the twentieth century! You don't believe in such things—tell me you don't! But Netta——"

His head sank on his breast. Cantle blew out a placid whiff of smoke.

"But—Miss Varley?" he said.

"You know—you've heard, at least," said the other, "what she was. The *thing* suddenly stood before her, when she was alone, one night. Well—you see what she is now."

"I don't see, nevertheless, why she don't——"

"Pack and run? No more do I. Put it to her

if you like. I've said *my* say. But she's in the grip —thinks she's had her call—and there's no moving her. Cantle, she's just dying where she stands."

Cantle's cigarette made a tiny arc of light, and hissed in the river. He had heard of epidemic hysteria. The world was full of cranks.

"Now," he said, "drop the subject, please. Shall I tell you of some fools I've come across in my time?"

He related some of his experiences in the Patent Office. The most impudent invention ever proposed, he said, was a burglar's tool for snipping out and holding by suction in one movement a disk of window glass. His dry self-confidence had a curiously re-assuring effect on the other. While they ate and drank and smoked and talked, the life of the river had become gradually attenuated and delivered to silence; a mist rose and hung above the water; sounds died down and ceased, concentrating themselves into the persistent dismal yelp of a dog somewhere on the bank above; the lights in the houseboats thinned to isolated sparks—twelve o'clock clanged from a distant tower.

Then, all at once, he was alert and quietly active.

"Monk, listen to me: I'm going to cure Miss Varley."

"Ned!"

"Take the paddle and work up—up the river, do you hear? I'll sit forward."

The ghost of a red moon was rising in the east. They slipped on with scarce a sound. A sort of lurid glaze enamelled the water. All of a sudden a sleek bulk rose ahead right in their path, wallowed a moment like a porpoise, and disappeared.

"Good God!" cried Monk, in a choking voice, half rising from his seat.

"Keep down!" whispered his friend.

"Cantle! Did you see it? Cantle! It was he!"

"Keep down!"

They paddled on, past the last of the boats, through the bridge, on as far as the squat little bomb-ketch bulking black and menacing at the mouth of the creek.

"Hold on!" whispered Cantle. "Run her out of sight into the reeds. We must wade on board there."

"There? That fellow Spindler's boat?"

"Of course, now. That was his name."

"What do you mean?"

"You'll soon know."

They accomplished the feat, though near mud-foundered by the way, and scrambled, dripping, on board. The door of the cuddy yielded to their touch. Monk was beginning to gather dim light.

"Don't let me," he whispered, almost sobbing, "keep my hands off him."

"Leave him to me," said Cantle gravely.

Not a sound of life greeted them. They stole into the cabin and closed the door, almost, upon themselves.

"We must yield him to-night for the sake of to-morrow," murmured Cantle.

"Ned! If he goes again——"

"Hush! It's not probable he'd risk a second visit, knowing her watched."

The crack brightened as the moon rose: glowed into a ribbon of light. Suddenly Cantle gripped the other's wrist.

A stealthy puddling, sucking sound close by reached their ears. Over the side came swarming a great shapeless fishy creature, which settled with a sludgy wallop on the little triangle of foredeck almost at their feet. Monk gave a soft, awful gasp, and, with the sound, Cantle had dashed open the door and flung himself upon the monster.

"Quick!" he cried; "you've got matches! Light a candle—lamp—anything! Lie still, Mr. Spindler. It's all up. I know you and your Marine Secret Service suit! A knife now, Monk! Out he comes."

He was merciless with the blade when he got it, slashing and cutting at the oilskin suit, splitting it from top to toe. Mr. Spindler's red beard and extravagant face came out of it like a death's-head out of its chrysalis.

"There goes the proud monument of a lifetime," said the madman. He had made no effort to resist. The first blow at this darling of his invention had seemed to hamstring him, morally and materially.

For he was just one of Mr. Cantle's cranks—had once invented a submarine travelling suit, with which he had hoped to inaugurate a new system of Secret Service for the Admiralty. It was an ingenious enough device, with some scheme of floating valves through which to breathe; but the authorities, after holding him on and off, would have none of it. Then the fate of many inventors had befallen him. Between practical ruin and a moral sense of wrong, he had gone crazy, and vowed warfare on the mankind which had discarded him. It should comprehend, too late, the uses of instant appearance and disappearance to which his invention could be put. He went mad, and ended his days in an asylum.

On the Monday morning Mr. Cantle posted back to the Patent Office; on the Tuesday Miss Varley was reading de Maupassant's *Mademoiselle Fifi* under the awning of the *Mermaid's* roof; and on the Wednesday Mr. Ivo Monk got her to name the day.

A BUBBLE REPUTATION.

One crowded hour of glorious life
Is worth an age without a name.

I HAD never suspected Sweeting of a desire to be "somebody." Indeed, the *jeunesse dorée*, in whose ranks Nature had seemed unquestioningly to bestow him, is not subject to diffidence, or prone to the wisdom which justifies itself in a knowledge of its own limitations. I was familiar with his placid, cherubic face at a minor club or two, in the Park, in Strand restaurants and Gaiety stalls; and it had never once occurred to me to classify him as apart from his fellows of the exquisite guild. If, like Keats, he could appreciate the hell of conscious failure, its most poignant anguish, I could have sworn, would borrow from some too-late realisation of the correctest "form" in a hat-brim or shirt-collar. I could have sworn it, I say, and I should have been, of course, mistaken. Keats may have claimed it as his poetical prerogative to go ill-dressed, and to object, though John, to be dubbed "Johnny." It remained to Sweeting to prove that a man might be a very typical "Johnny" and a poet to boot. But I will explain.

One day I entered the reading-room of the Junior Winston and nodded to Sweeting, who was seated solitary at the newspaper-table. While I was hunting for the *Saturday Review* — which was conducting, I had been told, the vivisection of a friend of mine — my attention was attracted by something actually ostentatious in Sweeting's perusal of *his* sheet, and I glanced across. Judge my astonishment when I saw in his hands, not *Baily's* or the *Pink 'Un*, but the very periodical I sought. I gasped; then grinned.

"Hallo!" I said. "Since when have you taken to that?"

He attempted to reply with a face of wondering hauteur, but gave up at the first twitch.

"Oh," he said rather defiantly, "you lit'ary professionals think no one's in it but yourselves."

"In what?"

"Why, this sort of thing," he said, tapping the *Saturday*; "the real stuff, you know."

"Indeed," I said, "we don't. You're always welcome to the reversion of my place in it for one."

"Oh, me!" he said airily. "It don't positively apply there, you see, being a sort of a kind of a professional myself."

"My Sweet!" I exclaimed. "A professional—you?"

"Oh, yes," he said. "Didn't you know? Write for the *Argonaut*. Little thing of mine in it last number."

I felt faint.

"May I see it?" I murmured. "If I don't mistake, it's under your elbow at this moment."

"Is it?" he answered, blushing flagrantly. "Lor' bless me, so it is!"

I took it from his hand, opened it, and read, over his undoubted signature—Marmaduke Sweeting—the title, "The Fool of the Family."

"Ah!" I thought, "of course. Like title like author."

But I was wrong. The tale, a veritable *conte drolatique*, was as keen and strong as a Maupassant. I had no choice but to take it at a draught, smacking my lips after. Then I put the paper softly down and looked across at him. His harmless features were set in a sort of hypnotic smile, his hat was tilted over his eyes, and he was making constant mouthfuls of the large silver knob of his stick. My eyes travelled to and fro between this figure and the figures of print *that were he*. What possible connection could there

be between the two? I thought of Buffon writing in lace ruffles, and all at once recognised a virtue in immaculate shirt-cuffs, and decided to consult some fashionable hosier about raising my price per thousand words. In the meantime my respect for Sweeting was born.

"So," I said, "you are somebody after all?"

"Am I?" he answered, grinning bucolic. "Glad you've found it out."

"Why," I said, "honestly there's genius in this story; but nothing to what you've shown in concealing that you had any. There must be much more to come out of the same bin."

He flushed and laughed and wriggled, as I walked over and sat beside him.

"Oh, I dare say!" he said. "Hope so, anyhow."

"Not a doubt. What made you think of it, now?"

"Oh! I thought of it," he said; and, after all, there was no better reply to an idiotic question. I was beginning humbly to appraise intellectual self-sufficiency at its value, and to appreciate the hundred disguises of reason.

I saw a good deal of Sweeting, on his own initiative, after this. He would visit me in my rooms, and discuss—none too sapiently, I may have thought in other circumstances, and with the most ingenuous admiration for his own abilities—the values of certain characters as portrayed by him in a brilliant series, "The Love-Letters of a Nonconformist," which had immediately followed in the *Argonaut* "The Fool of the Family," and was taking the town by storm. Thus, "What d'ee think of that old Lupin, last number," he would chuckle, "with his calling virtue an 'emu,' don't-cher-know?"

"Ha, yes!" I would correct him, with a nervous laugh. "'Anæmia' was the word. You meant it, of course."

"Why, didn't I say it?" he would answer. "It's

got a big swallow anyhow;" and then he would check himself suddenly, and, without further explanation, eye me, and begin to whistle.

Now I might recall the passage to which he referred (to wit, that every red blood corpuscle, being a seed peccancy, so to speak, made virtue an anæmia) and try to puzzle out a quite new significance in it. Suspecting that its author's apparent naïveté was only assumed, I was respectfully guarded in my answers, and, when he was gone, would curiously ponder the perspicacious uses to which he would put them. He did not consult me, I felt, as an oracle; but rather drew upon me for the vulgar currency of thought, to which his exclusiveness was a stranger. He was very secret about his own affairs; though I understood that he was becoming quite an important "name" in the literary world. Ostensibly he was not, after that first essay, to be identified with the *Argonaut*, though any one, having an ounce of the proper appreciation, could scarcely fail to mark in the "Love-Letters" the right succession of qualities which had made the earlier story notable. Indeed, he suffered more than any man I knew from the penalties attaching to the popular author. The number of communications, both signed and anonymous, which he received from admirers was astonishing. Scarce a day passed but he brought me specimens of them to discuss and laugh over. I did not, I must admit, think his comments always in good taste; but then I was not personally subject to the flattering pursuit, and so may have been no more constituted to judge than a monk is of a worldling.

These testimonies to his fame were from every sort of individual—the soldier, the divine, the poet, the painter, the actor (and more especially the actress), the young person with views, the social butterfly, the gushling late or the schoolroom, the woman of sensibility late of the latest lifelong passion for art or

religion, and finding, as usual, the taste of life sour on her lips after a recent debauch of sentiment. They all found something in the "Love-Letters" to meet their particular cases—some note of subtle sympathy, some first intimation to their misunderstood spirits of a kindred emotion which had *felt*, and could lay its finger with divine solace on the spot. No longer would they suffer a barren grievance—that hair-shirt which not a soul suspected but to giggle over. To take, for example, from the series a typical sentence which served so many for a text—

"*To whom does the materialist cry his defiance—to whom but to God? He cannot rest from baiting a Deity whose existence he denies. He forgets that irony can wring no response from a vacuum.*" Apropos of which wrote the following :—

A Half-pay General.—Don't tell me, Sir, but you've served, like me, a confounded ungrateful country, and learned your lesson! Memorialise the devil rather than the War Office. You've hit it off in your last sentence to a T.

A Chorus Girl.—Dear Sir,—You mean me to understand, I know, and you're quite right. The British public has no more ears than a ass, or they'd reconise who ought to be playing Lotta in *The Belle of Battersea*. It's such a comfort you can't tell. Please forgive this presumptious letter from a stranger.—Yours very affectionately,

Dolly.

An Apostolic Fisherman.—I like your metaphor. I would suggest only "ground-baiting a Deity" as more subtly applicable to the tactics of a worldling. Note: "And Simon Peter said, 'I go a-fishing.'"

Take, again, this excerpt: "*Doctors' advice to certain patients to occupy their minds recalls the Irishman's receipt for making a cannon, 'Take a hole and*

pour brass round it.'" Of which a "True Hibernian" wrote:

> SIR,—I've always maintained that the genuine "bull," fathered on my suffering country, came from the loins of the English lion. Murder, now! How could a patient occupy his doctor's mind as well as his own, unless he was beside himself? And then he'd have no mind at all.

Or take, once more and to end, the sentence: "*The Past is that paradoxical possession, a Shadow which we would not drop for the Substance;*" which evoked the following from "One who has felt the Weariness, the Fever, and the Fret":

> How strangely and exquisitely phrased! It brings, I know not how, the memory of the Channel before me. I have only crossed it once; but, oh! the recollection! the solemn moving waters to which my soul went out!

These are specimens, but a few, of the responses wrung by Sweeting from the human chords he touched. There were, in addition, prayers innumerable for autographs, requests for the reading of manuscripts, petitions for gratis copies of his works, to be sold for any and every charity but the betterment of impecunious authors. He fairly basked in the sunshine of a great reputation. There was only one flaw in his enormous self-satisfaction. By a singular perversity and most inexplicable coincidence, every one of these signed documents was without an address. But, after all, coincidence, which is only another name for the favouritism of Fate, must occasionally glut itself on an approved subject. Sweeting was in favour with the gods, and enjoyed "a high old time of it," principally, perhaps, because he did not appear to be ambitious of impressing any "set" but that with

which he was wont to forgather, and above which he made no affectation now of rising superior.

I had an example one evening of this intellectual modesty, when casually visiting the Earl's Court grounds. There I encountered my friend, the centre and protagonist of a select company in the enclosure. All exquisitely wore exquisite evening dress (for myself I always scornfully eschewed the livery), and all gravitated about Sweeting with the unconscious homage which imbecility pays to brains—"the desire of the moth for the star." I could see at once that he was become their Sirius, their bright particular glory, reflecting credit upon their order. And he, who might have commanded the suffrages of the erudite, seemed content with his little conquest—to have reached, indeed, the apogee of his ambition—a one-eyed king among the blind. These suffered my introduction with some condescension, as a mere larva of Grub Street. They knew themselves now as the stock from which was generated this real genius. As for me, I was Gil Blas's playwright at the supper of comedians. And then, at somebody's initiative, we were all swaggering off together along the walks.

Now, I had always had a sort of envy of the *esprit de ton* which unites the guild of amiable gadflies; and, finding myself here, for all my self-conscious intellectual superiority, of the smallest account, I grew quickly sardonic. If I knew who wrote the *Heptameron*, I didn't know, even by sight, the Toddy Tomes who was setting all the town roaring and droning with his song, "Papa's Perpendicular Pants." It is a peevish experience to be "out of it," even if the *it* is no more intelligible than a Toddy Tomes's topical; and gradually I waxed quite savage. Reputation is only relative after all. There is no popular road to fame. As an abstract acquisition, it may be said to pertain at its highest to the man who combines quick perceptions with adaptive sympathies.

I was not that man. In all, save exclusively my own company, I felt "out of it," awkward because resentful, and resentful because awkward. I despised these asses, however franked by Sweeting, yet coveted, vainly, the temporary grace of seeming at home with them. I got very cross. And then we alighted on Slater.

I knew it for his name by Sweeting's greeting him in response to his hail. He was seated at a little table all by himself, drinking champagne, and alternately turning up and biting the ends of a red tag of beard, and luridly pulling at a ponderous cigar. He was a small, dingy person, so obviously inebriated, that the little human clearing in which he sat solitary was nothing more than the formal recognition of his state. He also, it was evident, to my disgust, despised the conventions of dress, but without any of those qualms of self-consciousness with which I was troubled. He lolled back, his hat crushed over his eyes, a hump of dicky and knotted tie escaping from his waistcoat-front, his disengaged thumb hooked into an arm-hole—as filthy a little vagabond, confident and maudlin and truculent in one, as you could wish. And he hailed Sweeting as a familiar.

My friend stopped, with a rather sheepish grin.

"Hullo, Slater!" said he. "A wet night, ain't it?"

Our little group came chuckling all about the baboon. Even then, I noticed, I was the one looked upon with most obvious disfavour by the surrounding company.

"Look here," said Sweeting, suddenly gripping me to the front. "Here's one of your cloth, Slate'. Let me introjuce you," and he whispered in my ear, "Awfully clever chap. You'll like him when you know."

I suppose my instant and instinctive repulsion was patent even to the sot. He lurched to his feet, and

swept off his crumpled hat with an extravaganza bow. Sweeting's pack went into a howl of laughter. It was evident they were not unacquainted with the creature, and looked to him for some fun.

"My cloth, sir?" vociferated the beast. "Honoured, sir, 'm sure, sir. Will you allow me to cut my coat according to it, sir? Has any gentleman a pair of scissors? Just the tails, sir, no more—quite large enough for me; and you'd look very elegant in an Eton jacket."

I tried to laugh at this idiotic badinage, and couldn't.

"Oh, crikey, wouldn't he!" said a vulgar onlooker. "Like a sugar-barrel in a weskit."

Then, as everybody roared, I lost my temper.

"Don't be a fool," whispered Sweeting. "It's the way he'll get his change out of you."

"Change!" I snapped furious. "No change could be for the worse with him, I should think. Let me pass, please!"

The odious wretch was pursuing me all the time I spoke, while the others hemmed me in, edging me towards him and roaring with laughter. Sweeting himself made no effort to assist me, but stood to one side, irresistibly giggling, though with a certain anxiety in his note.

"Call off your puppies!" I cried ragingly, and with the word was sent flying into the very arms of Slater. I felt something rip, and at a blow my hat sink over my eyes; and then a chill friendly voice entered into the mêlée.

"Oh, look here, Slater, that'll do, you know!"

I wrenched my eyes free. My champion was not Sweeting, but Voules, Sir Francis Voules, of whom more hereafter. He was cool and vicious, and as faultlessly dressed as the others, but in a manner somehow superior to the foppery of their extreme youth. He carried a light overcoat on his arm.

"Oh! *will* it?" said Slater.

"Yes, I said so," said Voules, pausing a moment from addressing me to scan him. Slater slouched back to his table. Nobody laughed again.

In the meantime, Sir Francis was helping me to restore my hat to shape, and to don *his* overcoat.

"Yours is split to the neck," he said. "Now, let's go."

He took my arm, and we strolled off together. The crowd, quite respectful, parted, and we were engulfed in it.

I was grateful to Voules, of course, but inexplicably resentful of his cool masterfulness. Truth to tell, we were souls quite antipathetic; and now he had put me right—with everybody but myself. In a helpless attempt to restore that balance, I snarled fiercely, smacking fist into palm:

"I'll have the law of that beast! You know him, it seems? I can't congratulate you on your friends."

"Sweeting was most to blame," said Voules quietly.

I grunted, and strode on fuming.

"But, after all," said Voules, "the poor ass had to back up his confederate."

I glanced at him as we walked.

"His confederate?"

"Of course. Didn't you know? Slater really writes the things for which Sweeting gets the credit."

"Oh, come, Voules! Here's one of your foolhardy calumnies. You really should be careful. Some day you'll get into trouble."

"Oh, very well!"

"You talk of it as if it were an open secret."

"You know Sweeting as well as I. Do you recognise his style in the Nonconformist lucubrations? Possibly you've had letters from him?"

"I've some specimens of letters *to* him now—letters from admirers. If anything were needed to

refute your absurd statement, there they are in evidence."

He gave a little dry laugh ; then touched my sleeve eagerly.

"You wouldn't think it abusing a confidence to show me those letters?"

"I don't know why. Sweeting's laid no embargo on me."

"Very well. If you'll let me, I'll come home with you now."

I stumbled on in a sort of haze.

I did not believe this to be any more than a mad shot in the dark. Sir Francis was one of those men who made mischief as Pygmalion made Galatea. He fell in love with his own conceptions—would go any lengths to gratify his passion for detraction. Do not suppose, from his prefix, that he was a bold, bad baronet. He was just an actor of the new creation—belonged to what was known by doyens of the old Crummles school as the be-knighted profession. The stage was an important incident in his social life, and he seldom missed a rehearsal of any piece to which he was engaged.

"You know this Slater?" I said, as I drove in my latchkey. "As what?"

"As a clever, disreputable, and perfectly unscrupulous journalist."

"It's preposterous! What could induce him to part with such a notoriety?"

"The highest bidder, of course."

"What! Sweeting? If he's still the simple Johnny you'd have him to be?"

"I'm yet to learn that the simple Johnny lacks vanity."

"But, for him, such an unheard-of way to gratify it!"

"Opportunism, sir. There are more things in the Johnny's philosophy than we dream of."

"Well, I simply don't believe it."

Voules read, with an immobile face, the letters which Sweeting had left with me. At the end he looked up.

"Are you open to a bet?"

"Can't afford it."

"Never mind then." He rose. "Truth for its own sake will do. Anyhow, I presume you don't object to countering on Slater?"

"Oh, do what you like!"

"Thanks. Would you wish to be in at the death?"

"Just as you please."

"You see," said he, with a pleasant affectation of righteousness, "if my surmise is correct—and you're the first one I've ventured to confide in—it's my plain duty to prick a very preposterous bubble. Thank you for lending yourself to the cause of decency. Don't say anything until you hear from me. Good-bye!"—and he was gone, followed by my inclination, only my inclination, to hurl a book after him.

I sat tight—always the more as I swelled over the delay—till, on the third day following, Sweeting called on me. He came in very shamefaced, but with a sort of suppressed triumph to support his abjectness.

"I couldn't help it, you know," he said; "and I gave him a bit of my mind after you'd gone."

"Indeed," I answered good-humouredly; "that was what you couldn't well afford, and it was generous of you."

He was blankly impervious to the sarcasm. Had it been otherwise, my new-fledged doubts had perhaps fluttered to the ground. After a moment I saw him pull a paper from his pocket.

"Look here," he said, vainly trying to suppress some emotion, which was compound, in suggestion, of elation and terror. "You've made your little joke, haven't you, over all those other people forgettin' to put their addresses? Well, what do you think of *that* for the Prime Minister?"

I took from his hand a sheet of large official-looking paper, and read:

"DEAR SIR,—You may have heard of my book, *The Foundations of Assent.* If so, you will perhaps be interested to learn that I am contemplating a complete revision of its text in the light of your 'Love-Letters.' They are plainly illuminating. From being a man of no assured opinions, I have become converted, through their medium, to a firm belief in the importance of the Nonconformist suffrage. Permit me the honour, waiving the Premier, to shake by the hand as fellow-scribe the author of that incomparable series. I shall do myself the pleasure to call upon you at your rooms at nine o'clock this evening, when I have a little communication to make which I hope will not be unpleasing to you. Permit me to subscribe myself, with the profoundest admiration, your obedient servant,

"J. A. BURLEIGH."

"Well," I murmured, feeling suffocated, "there's no address here either."

"No," he answered; "but, I say, it's rather crushing. Won't you come and help me out with it?"

"What do you want *me* for?" I protested. "I've no wish to be annihilated in the impact between two great minds. You aren't afraid?"

"Oh, no!" he said, perspiring. "It'll be just a shake, and 'So glad,' and 'Thanks, awfully,' I suppose, and nothing more to speak of. But you might just as well come, on the chance of helping me out of a tight place. It's *viva voce*, don'tcherknow—not like writin', with all your wits about you. And I shall get some other fellows there, too, so's we aren't allowed to grow too intimate; and you might as well."

"I wonder what the 'communication' is?" I mused.

"Oh, nothin' much, I don't suppose," said Sweeting, with a blushing nonchalance. But it was evident that he had pondered the delirious enigma and emerged from it Sir Marmaduke.

"Well," I concluded rather sourly, "I'll come."

He went away much relieved, and I fell into a fit of stupor. In the afternoon a telegram from Voules reached me, "Be at Sweeting's 8.45 to-night."

At a quarter to nine I kept my appointment. Sweeting was insufferably well-to-do, and his rooms were luxurious. They were inhabited at the moment by an irreproachable and almost silent company. Among them I encountered many of the young gentlemen who had been witnesses of, and abettors in, my discomfiture the other night. But they were all too nervous now to presume upon the recognition—too oppressed with the stupendous nature of the honour about to be conferred upon their host — too self-weighted with their responsibility as his kindred and associates. They could only ogle him with large eyes over immensely stiff collars, as he moved about from one to another, panic-struck but radiant. It was the crowning moment of his life; yet its sweeter aftermath, I could feel, reposed for him in the sleek necks of champagne-bottles just visible on a supper-table in the next room. He longed to pass from the test to the toast, and the intoxicating memory of a triumph happily accomplished. And then suddenly Slater came in.

He was not expected, I saw in a moment. Indeed, how could such a death's-head claim place at such a feast? He was no whit improved upon my single memory of him, unless, to give the little beast his due, a shade less inebriated. But he was as grinning, cocksure, and truculent a little Bohemian as ever. Sweeting stared at him aghast.

"Good Lord, Slate'," said he, "what brings you here, now?"

"Why, your wire, old chap," said the animal.

"I never sent one, I swear."

"Oho!" cries Slater, glaring. "D' you want to go back on your word? Ain't I fine enough for this fine company?" and he pulled a dirty scrap of paper out of his pocket, and screeched, "Read what you said yourself, then!"

The telegram went round from hand to hand. I read, when it came to my turn: "Come supper my rooms 8.45 to-night. M. Sweeting."

"I never sent it," protested our host. "It must be a hoax. Look here, Slate'. The truth is, the Prime Minister wrote he wanted to make my acquaintance, because—because of the 'Letters,' you know; and—and he's due here in a few minutes."

The creature grinned like a jackal.

"My eyes, what fun!" he said. "I shall love to see you two meet."

"There's—there's fizz in the next room, Slate'," said the miserable Sweeting.

"You needn't tell me," said Slater. "I'd spotted it already."

And then, before another word could be said, the door was opened, and the guest of the evening announced.

He came in smiling, ingratiatory, the familiar willowy figure in pince-nez. We all rose, and the stricken Sweeting advanced to meet him. The great man, looking, it is true, a little surprised over his reception, held out his hand cordially.

"And is this——" he purred—and paused.

Sweeting did not answer; he was beyond it; but he nodded, and opened his mouth, as if to beg that the "communication" might be posted into it, and the matter settled off-hand.

"I did not, I confess," said the Premier, glancing smilingly round, "expect my little visit of duty—yes, of duty, sir—to provoke this signal welcome on the

part of a company in which I recognise, if I mistake not, a very constellation of the intellectual aristocracy."

Here a youth, with a solitaire in his eye, and a vague sense of parliamentary fitness, ejaculated "Hear, hear!" and immediately becoming aware of the enormity, quenched himself for ever.

"It makes," went on the right hon. gentleman, "the strict limit to my call, which less momentous but more exacting engagements have obliged me to prescribe, appear the more ungracious. In view of this enforced restriction, I have equipped myself with a single question and a message. Your answer to the first will, I hope—nay, I am convinced—justify the tenor of the second."

He released, with a smile, the hand which all this time he had retained, much to Sweeting's embarassment, in his own. Finding it restored to him, Sweeting promptly put it in his pocket, like a tip.

"I ask," said the Premier, "the author of 'The Love-Letters of a Nonconformist' to listen to the following excerpt" (he produced a marked number of the *Argonaut* from his pocket) "from his own immortal series, as preliminary to some inquiry naturally evoked thereby"—and he read out, with the intonation of a confident orator: "'We have (shall I not declare it, my sweet?) the most beautiful women and the most beautiful poets in the world—two very good things, but the latter unaccountable. Passion, in perpetuating, idyllically refines upon the features of its desire; hence the succession of assured physical loveliness in a race which, however insensible to the appeals of emotional and intellectual beauty, can understand and worship the beauty that is plain to see.'"

Here the reader paused, and looking over his glasses with a smile, very slightly shook his head, and murmuring, "The *beauty* that is *plain* to see! H'm! a fence that I will recommend to Rosebery,"

continued, "'Passion endows passion, far-reaching, to bribe the gods with a compound interest of beauty. It touches heaven in imagination through its unborn generations. It tops the bunker of the world, and, soaring, drops, heedless of Time the putter, straight into the eighteenth hole of the empyrean.'"

The Premier stopped again, and, looking gravely at Sweeting, asked, "What is the eighteenth hole of the empyrean?"

Now I expected my friend to reveal himself, to sally brilliantly, referring his questioner, perhaps, to some satire in the making, some latter-day Apocalypse of which here was a sample extracted for bait to the curious. Well, he did reveal himself, but not in the way I hoped. He just strained and strained, and then dropped his jaw with the most idiotic little hee-haw of a laugh I ever heard, and—that was all.

The other, looking immensely surprised, repeated his question: "What, sir, I ask you, is the eighteenth hole of the empyrean?"

"Why, the one the Irishman poured brass round."

I started. It was not Sweeting who spoke, but Slater. The little demon stood grinning in the background, his tongue in his cheek, and his hands in his trousers pockets.

"H'mph!" said the Prime Minister. "Very apt, sir. I recall the witticism. It is singularly applicable at the moment to the reorganisation of the Liberal party. 'Take a hole and pour brass round it.' Exactly."

His manner, there was no denying it, was extremely severe as he again addressed the perspiring Sweeting:

"Once more, sir," he said, "I resume our discussion of a passage, the intellectual rights in which you would seem to have made over to your friends." And, with a positive scowl, he continued his reading.

"'So well' (writes the impassioned Nonconformist), 'for the national appreciation of beauty that is physical.

On the other hand (tell me, dear. It would come so reassuringly from your lips), what can account for the spasmodic recurrence in our midst of the inspired singer? What makes his reproduction possible among a people endowed with tunelessness, innocent of a metrical ear?'"

Quite abruptly the Prime Minister ended, and, deliberately folding his paper, hypnotised with a searching stare his unhappy examinee.

"The question, Mr. Sweeting," said he, "is before the House. You will recognise it as ending—with some psychologic subtlety, to be continued in our next—number 10—the last published of the *Argonaut*. To me, I confess, the answer can be, like the Catholic Church, only one and indivisible. Upon the question of your conformity with my view depends the nature of the communication which I am to have the pleasure, conditionally, of making to you. Plainly, then, sir, what makes possible the spasmodic recurrence of the inspired singer in the midst of a people endowed with tunelessness and innocent of a metrical ear? I feel convinced you can return no answer but one."

A dead silence fell upon the room. Sweeting scratched his right calf with his left foot, and giggled. Then in a moment, yielding the last of his wits to the unendurable strain, he gave all up, and, wheeling upon Slater:

"Oh, look here, Slate'!" he said. "What does?" and without waiting for the answer, drove himself a passage through his satellites, and collapsed half dead upon a sofa.

The Premier, with an amazing calm, returned the *Argonaut* to his pocket.

"Surely, sir," said he, "this is inexplicable; but" (he made a denunciatory gesture with his hands) "it remains to me only to inform you that, conditional on your right reply to your own postulate, it was to have been my privilege to acquaint you of his Majesty's

intention to bestow upon you a Civil List pension of £250 a year; which now, of course——"

He was interrupted by Slater:

"Oh, that's all one, sir! Fit the cap on the right head. The answer's 'Protection,' isn't it? I ought to know, as I wrote, and am writing, the stuff."

"*You*, sir!"

All eyes were turned upon the beastly little genius, as he stood ruffling with greed and arrogance, and thence to the sofa.

"Oh, shut up!" said Sweeting feebly. "It was only a joke. I paid him handsome, I did, to let me have the kudos and letters and things. He'd the best of the bargain by a long chalk."

"He-he!" screeched Slater. "Why, you fool, did you think merit earned such recognition in this suffering world? Hope you enjoyed reading 'em, Sweet, as I did writing 'em." He turned, half cringing, half defiant, upon the guest. "I'm the author of the 'Love-Letters,' sir—honour bright, I am; and I wrote every one of the testimonials, too, that that ass sets such store by. You'll take those into consideration, I hope."

"I shall, sir," thundered the other—"in my estimate of a fool and his decoy."

He blazed round and snatched up his hat.

"Make way, gentlemen!" he roared, and strode for the door.

A slip of pasteboard fluttered from his hand to the carpet; he flung wide the portal, banged it to behind him, and was gone.

Some one, in a sort of spasmodic torpor, picked up the card, and immediately uttered a gasping exclamation. We all crowded round him, and, reading the superscription at which he was pointing, "Mr. Hannibal Withers, Momus Theatre," exchanged dumbfounded glances.

"Why, of course," stuttered a pallid youth; "it

was Withers, Voules's pal; I reco'nise him now. He's the Prime Minister's double, you know, and—and he's been and goosed us."

"What!" screamed Slater.

But I was off in a fit of hysterical laughter.

It was actually a fact. It is a mistake to suppose that your profession scandal-monger is prepared to build except on a substratum of truth. Voules had pricked the bubble as he had promised. The bargain, it was admitted, had been struck—on Slater's side for such a consideration as would submerge him in champagne had he desired it. He had written and sent the manuscripts to Sweeting, who had had them typed, and passed them on to the *Argonaut* as his own. But the real author knew that his tenure was insecure so long as the other's colossal vanity was not ministered to. Hence the correspondence, in which the little monster burlesqued his own lucubrations. It might all have ended in a case of perpetual blackmail (Sweeting never could see beyond the end of his own nose) had not the bait answered so instantly to Voules's calculations.

There was a bitter attack on the immorality of the stage in the next number of the *Argonaut*, which subsequently had to compound with Voules under threat of an action for libel. But Sweeting had his wish. He was "somebody," as never yet. Until he took his notoriety for a long sea-voyage, he was more crushingly than any gentleman in the *Dunciad* "damn'd to fame."

A POINT OF LAW.

BY A CAPTIOUS LITIGANT.

GIVEN a wet night on circuit, a bar parlour with a chattering fire, a box of tobacco, a china bowl of punch, and a mixed forensic company to discuss the lot, and what odds would you lay for or against the chances of a good story or so?

Grope in your memory (before you answer) among legal collectanea and the newspaper reports of famous, or infamous, trials. What then? "Lord!" you admit, "these bones unearthed seem wretched remains indeed! I find your grooms of the horse-hair, young and old, cracking their ineffable chest-nuts for the benefit of an obsequious tipstavery; I find a bench so conservative that, though it be pitched in the very markets of chicanery, it is never to be won from its affected ignorance of those topical affairs which are matters, else apart, of common knowledge; I find the profession for ever given to whet its wits on a thousand examples of resourcefulness and impudence, and most often failing in the retort piquant." Give me a cheeky witness to cap the best drollery ever uttered by counsel. Legal facetiæ, forsooth! The wit that tells is the wit that can cheat the gallows, not send to it. Any dullard can hang a dog.

Look at the autobiographies of your retired legal luminaries: what scurvy bald reading they make as a rule. Look at—but no: he rests in Abraham's bosom; he is studying the Mosaic law; we may be in need of him again some day.

There is an odd family likeness between the personalia of lawyers and of actors. The fellows, out of

court, stripped of their melodramatic trappings, can't raise a laugh which would tickle any one less than a bishop. They are obsessed with the idea of their own importance. Much self-inflation has killed in them all sense of proportion. They prove themselves, the truth is, dull dogs on revision.

The law is not so exhausting a study as it appears on first sight to a layman. Given an understanding of its main principle, which is syllogism, and there you are already in its Holy of Holies. As, for instance, I call a man a beast: a cheetah is a beast: I have called the man a cheater—*ergo*, he can proceed against me for defamation. There is its rubric in a nutshell—perfectly simple..

However, *exceptis excipiendis*, there were Curran, and Erskine, and some others. There was also Brindley, the great Crown Prosecutor, whose eloquence was of such persuasiveness that it was said the very Bench *hung upon his word*. I had the chance to meet him once, in such a place and on such a night as I began by describing. It was in the Maid's Head at Norwich, and my experience is at your service.

It had, I knew, been a full list and a varied; yet the great man, it seemed, had found nothing in it all to stimulate his humorous faculties. The liveliness was all supplied by a pert Deputy Clerk of the Peace, whose bump of reverence was as insignificant as his effrontery was tremendous. The Bar began by tolerating him; went on to humour his sallies; chilled presently over his presumption; grew patronising, impatient, and at last rude. He didn't care; nor I, certainly. His readiness was the only relief from a congested boredom.

The talk drifted, in the course of the evening, upon legal *posers*—circumstantial evidence, ex-statutory cases, and so forth. There were some dull examples proffered, and I observed, incidentally, that the Law,

 when it couldn't hark back to precedent, was wont

to grow a little hazy and befogged. Many solemn conundrums were propounded; but the Deputy Clerk, as usual, pushed himself to the front with an impertinence—

"If I slink out of the company of a bore, am I guilty of stealing from his person?"

"Pooh, pooh!" said Brindley, with contempt. "Don't be flippant, sir."

The Deputy Clerk was not a whit abashed.

"Sir, to you," he said. "If that isn't liked, I'll propose another. If a woman is divorced from her husband, and a child is born to her before the decree is made absolute, is that child, lawfully begot, legitimate or illegitimate?"

They were glad to take this seriously. I forget what the decision was—that, given the necessary interval between the decree and its confirmation, I think, the situation was virtually impossible.

"Very well," said the Deputy Clerk. "But perhaps one can conceive such a question rising. Let it pass, however; and answer me this, gentlemen: If one is imprisoned unjustly—that is to say, for a crime one has not committed—and, breaking out of prison, gives proof of one's innocence, can one be indicted for prison-breaking?"

This, at least, was a fair poser, and discussion on it grew actually warm.

"Bosh!" said a fierce gentleman. "You ain't going to justify your defiance of the law by arguing that the law is liable to make an occasional mistake—don't tell me!"

Here a very young barrister dared the revolutionary sentiment that the law, being responsible in the first instance to itself, might be treated, if caught stumbling *in flagranti delicto*, as drastically as any burglar with a pistol in his hand. He was called, almost shouted, down. The suggestion cut at the very root of jurisprudence. The law, like the king who typified it,

could do no wrong; witness its time-honoured right to *pardon* the innocent victims of its own errors.

"It may detain and incarcerate one for being only a suspected person," said Brindley. "That its suspicions may prove unfounded, is nothing. It must be *cum privilegio*, or the constitution goes. A nice thing if the Crown could be put on its defence for an error in judgment."

"A very nice thing," said the Deputy Clerk.

Brindley snorted at him. "Perhaps," said he sarcastically, "the gentleman will state a case."

The gentleman desired nothing better. I would have backed him to hold his own, anyhow; but, in this instance, I was gratified to gather from his manner that he had a real story to tell. And he had.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it occurred within my father's memory; but my own is good enough to reproduce it literally. It made a rare stir in the Norwich of his day, and quite fluttered, I assure you, the dovecots of the profession.

"The parties chiefly concerned in it were three: old Nicholas Browbody, his ward Ellen, and Mr. George Hussey, who was put on his trial for burglary and murder. Mr. George was quite a notable cracksman in his day, which was one pretty remote from ours in everything but the conservatism of the law. He was 'housebreaker' in the indictment; he was arrested by the Tombland patrol; and he was carried to court in a 'chair,' attended by a party of the City Guard.

"George, says the story, was an elegant figure of a man, and not at all regardless of the modes. Dark blue coat with brass buttons, fancy vest, black satin breeches, white silk stockings, hair full dressed, and a brooch in his bosom—that was how he appeared before his judges.

"The facts were simple enough. On a night of November, a shot and a screech had been heard in

Mr. Browbody's house in Unthank, a ward of the city; an entrance had been made through a window, opportunely open, by the Watch as opportunely handy, and the housebreaker had been discovered, a warm pistol in his hand, standing over the body of old Nicholas, who lay dead on the floor with his head blown in.

"The burglar was found standing, I say, like as in a stupor; the room was old Browbody's study; the door from it into the passage was open, and outside was discovered the body of a girl, Miss Ellen, lying, as it were, in a dead faint. There you have the situation dashed in broad; and pretty complete, you'll agree, for circumstantial evidence."

"Wait, my friend," began Brindley, putting up a fat pompous hand. "Circumstantial, I think you said?"

"Yes, I said it," answered the Deputy Clerk coolly; "and if you'll listen, you'll understand—perhaps. I said the girl was in a faint, *as it were*, for, as a matter of fact, *she never came out of it for seven months.*"

He leant back, thumbing the ashes into his pipe, and took no heed while the murmurs of incredulity buzzed and died down.

"Not for seven months," he repeated then. "They called it a cataleptic trance, induced by fright and shock upon witnessing the deed; and they postponed the trial, waiting for this material witness to recover. But when at last the doctors certified that they could put no period to a condition which might, after all, end fatally without real consciousness ever returning, they decided to try Mr. Hussey; and he was tried and condemned to be hanged."

"What! he made no defence?" said a junior contemptuously.

"Well, sir, can you suggest one?" asked the other civilly.

"Suicide, of course."

"With the pistol there in the burglar's own hand?"

"Well, he made none, you say."

"No, I don't say it. He declared it was ridiculous attempting a defence, while he lacked his one essential witness to confirm it. He protested only that the lady would vindicate him if she could speak."

"Oh, of course!"

"Yes, of course; and of course you say it. But he spoke the truth, sir, for all that, as you'll see.

"He was lodged in Norwich Jail, biding the finish. But, before the hangman could get him—that time, at least—he managed to break out, damaging a warder by the way. The dogs of the law were let loose, naturally; but, while they were in full cry, Mr. Hussey, if you'll believe me, walks into a local attorney's office with Miss Ellen on his arm."

Brindley turned in his chair, and gave a little condescending laugh.

"Incredible, ain't it?" said the Deputy Clerk. "But listen, now, to the affidavits of the pair, and judge for yourselves. We'll take Miss Ellen's first, plain as I can make it:—

"'I confess,' says she, 'to a romantic attachment to this same picturesque magsman, Mr. Hussey. He came my way—never mind how—and I fell in love with him. He made an assignation to visit me in my guardian's house, and I saw that a window was left open for him to enter by. My guardian had latterly been in a very odd, depressed state. I think he was troubled about business matters. On the night of the assignation, by the irony of fate, his madness came to a head. He was of such methodical habits by nature, and so unerringly punctual in his hour for going to bed, that I had not hesitated to appoint my beau to meet me in his study, which was both remotest from his bedroom, and very accessible from without. But, to my confusion and

terror, I heard him on this night, instead of retiring as usual, start pacing to and fro in the parlour underneath. I listened, helpless and aghast, expecting every moment to hear him enter his study and discover my lover, who must surely by now be awaiting me there. And at length I *did* hear him actually cross the passage to it with hurried steps. Half demented, dreading anything and everything, I rushed down the stairs, and reached his room door just in time to see him put a pistol to his head and fire. With the flash and report, I fell as if dead, and remember nothing more till the voice of my beloved seemed to call upon me to rise from the tomb—when I opened my eyes, and saw Hussey standing above me.'

"Now for Mr. Hussey's statement:—

"'I had an assignation with a young lady,' says he, 'on the night of so-and-so. A window was to be left open for me in Unthank. I had no intent whatever to commit a felony. I came to appointment, and had only one moment entered when I heard rapid footsteps outside, and a man, with a desperate look on him, hurried into the room, snatched a pistol from a drawer, put it to his head, and, before I could stop him, fired. I swear that, so far from killing him, I tried to prevent him killing himself. I jumped, even as he fell, and tore the pistol from his hand. Simultaneous with his deed, I heard a scream outside. Still holding the weapon, I went to the door, and saw the form of her I had come to visit lying in that trance from which she has but now recovered. As I stood stupefied, the Watch entered and took me. From that time I knew that, lacking her evidence, it was hopeless to attempt to clear myself. After sentence I broke prison, rushed straight to her house, found her lying there, and called out upon her to wake and help me. She answered at once, stirring and coming out of her trance. I know no more than that she did; and there is the whole truth.'"

The Deputy Clerk stopped. No one spoke.

"Now, gentlemen," said he, "I don't ask you to pronounce upon those affidavits. In the upshot the law accepted them, admitting a miscarriage of justice. What I ask your verdict on is this: Could the law, after quashing its own conviction, hold the man responsible for any act committed by him during, and as the direct result of, that wrongful imprisonment?"

This started the ball, and for minutes it was tossed back and forth. Presently the tumult subsided, and Brindley spoke authoritatively for the rest—

"Certainly it could, and for any violence committed in the act. Provocation may extenuate, but it don't justify. Prison-breaking, *per se*, is an offence against the law; so's being found without any visible means of subsistence, though your pocket may just have been picked of its last penny. Any concessions in these respects would benefit the rogue without helping the community. I won't say that if he hadn't, by assaulting the warder, put himself out of court——"

"That was where he wanted to put himself," interrupted the Deputy Clerk. It was certain that he was deplorably flippant.

Brindley waved the impertinence by.

"The offence was an offence in outlawry," he said.

"But how could it be," protested the Clerk, "since, by the law's own admission, he was wrongfully convicted? If he hadn't been, he couldn't have hurt the warder. If you strike me first, mayn't I hit you back? I tell you, the law acknowledged that it was in the wrong."

"Not at all. It acknowledged that the man was in the right."

"Isn't that the same thing?"

"Oh, my friend! I see you haven't got the rudiments. Hussey was a prisoner; a criminal is a prisoner; *ergo*, Hussey was a criminal."

"But he was a prisoner in error!"

"And the law might very properly pardon him that; but not his violence in asserting it."

The Deputy Clerk shrugged his shoulders hopelessly.

"Well, it was all the same in the end," said he; "for it hanged him for pointing out its error to it, and so spoiled a very pretty romance. The lady accompanied him to the scaffold, and afterwards died mad. *Sic ita ad astra.* I will cap your syllogism, sir. An ass has long ears; the law has long ears; *ergo*, the law is an ass."

"Young man," said Brindley, with more good humour than I expected, "you have missed your vocation. Take my advice, and go to writing for the comic papers."

"What!" cried the Deputy Clerk. "Haven't I been a law reporter all my life!"

THE FIVE INSIDES.

I'll example you with thievery.—*Timon of Athens.*

The dear old lady was ninety, and it was always Christmas in the sweet winter of her face. With the pink in her cheeks and the white of her hair, she came straight from the eighteenth century in which she was born. They were not more at odds with nature than are the hips and the traveller's joy in a withered hedge; and if at one time they paid to art, why it was a charitable gift to a poor dependent—nothing more, I'll swear.

People are fond of testing links with the past. This sound old chatelaine had played trick-track, and dined at four o'clock. She had eaten battalia pie with "Lear" sauce, and had drunk orgeat in Bond Street. She had seen Blücher, the tough old "Vorwärts," brought to bay in Hyde Park by a flying column of

Amazons, and surrendering himself to an onslaught of kisses. She had seen Mr. Consul Brummell arrested by bailiffs in the streets of Caen, on a debt of so many hundreds of francs for so many bottles of *vernis de Guiton*, which was nothing less than an adorable boot-polish. She had heard the demon horns of newspaper boys shrill out the Little Corporal's escape from Elba. She had sipped Roman punch, maybe ;—I trust she had never taken snuff. She had—but why multiply instances? Born in 1790, she had taken just her little share in, and drawn her full interest of, the history, social and political, of all those years, fourscore and ten, which filled the interval between then and now.

Once upon a time she had entered a hackney-coach ; and, lo ! before her journey was done, it was a rail-way coach, moving ever swifter and swifter, and its passengers succeeding one another with an ever more furious energy of hurry-scurry. Among the rest I got in, and straight fell into talk, and in love, with this traveller who had come from so far and from scenes so foreign to my knowledge. She was as sweet and instructive as an old diary brought from a bureau, smelling of rose-leaves and cedar-wood. She was merry, too, and wont to laugh at my wholly illusory attachment to an age which was already as dead as the moon when I was born. But she humoured me ; though she complained that her feminine reminiscences were sweetmeats to a man.

"You should talk with William keeper," she said. "*He* holds on to the past by a very practical link indeed."

It was snowy weather up at the Hall—the very moral of another winter (so I was told) when His Majesty's frigate *Caledonia* came into Portsmouth to be paid off, and Commander Playfair sent express to his young wife up in the Hampshire hills that she might expect him early on the following morning. He did not come in the morning, nor in the afternoon,

nor indeed, until late in the evening, when—as Fortune was generous—he arrived just at the turn of the supper, when the snow outside the kitchen windows below was thawing itself, in delirious emulation of the melting processes going on within, into a rusty gravy.

"You see," said Madam, "it was not the etiquette, when a ship was paid off, for any officer to quit the port until the pennant was struck, which the cook, as the last officer, had to see done. And the cook had gone ashore and got tipsy; and there the poor souls must bide till he could be found. Poor Henry—and poor little me! But it came right. *Tout vient à qui sait attendre.* We had woodcocks for supper. It was just such a winter as this—the snow, the sky, the very day. Will you take your gun, and get me a woodcock, sir? and we will keep the anniversary, and you shall toast, in a bottle of *the* Madeira, the old French rhyme."

I had this rhyme in my ears as I went off for my woodcock—

> Le bécasseau est de fort bon manger,
> Duquel la chair resueille l'appetit.
> Il est oyseau passager et petit:
> Est par son goust fait des vins bien juger.

I had it in my ears, and more and more despairingly, as I sought the coverts and dead ferns and icy reed-wrecked pools, and flushed not the little *oyseau passager* of my gallantry's desires. But at last, in a silent coomb, when my feet were frozen, and my fingers like bundles of newly-pulled red radishes, William keeper came upon me, and I confided my abortive wishes and sorrows to his velveteen bosom.

He smiled, warm soul, like a grate.

"Will'ee go up to feyther's yonder, sir," said he; "and sit by the fire, and leave the woodcock to me? The old man'll be proud to entertain ye."

"I will go," I said meanly. "But tell me first, William, what is your very practical link with the past?"

He thought the frost had got into my blood; but when I had explained, he grinned again knowingly.

"'Tain't me my lady meant, sir," he said. "'Tis old feyther, and his story of how the mail-coach was robbed."

The cottage hung up on the side of the coomb, leaning its back to an ash wood, and digging its toes well into the slope to keep itself from pitching into the brook below. There were kennels under the faggot stacks, a horse-shoe on the door, red light behind the windows. It looked a very cosy corner after the white austerity of the woods. William led me to it, and introducing me and my errand to his father, left the two of us together by the fire.

It was a strange old shell of a man, russet and smooth yet in the face; but his breath would sometimes rattle in him to show how dried was the kernel within. Still his brown eye was glossy, and his voice full and shrewd; and in that voice, speaking straight and clear out of the past, and in an accent yet more of the roads than of the woods, he told me presently the story of the great mail robbery.

"It ruined and it made me, sir," said he; "for the Captain, hearing as how the company had sacked me for neglect of duty, and knowing something of my character, swore I'd been used damnably, and that he'd back his opinion by making me his gamekeeper. And he did that; and here I be, waiting confident for him to check my accounts when I jine him across the river."

He pointed to a dusky corner. There hung on the wall an ancient key-bugle, and an old, old napless beaver hat, with a faded gold band about it.

"I was twenty-five when I put *they* up there, and that was in the year '14; and not me nor no one else

has fingered them since. Because why? Because it was like as if my past laid in a tomb underneath, and they was the sign that I held by it without shame or desire of concealment.

"In those days I was guard to the 'Globe' coach, that run between London and Brighton. We made the journey in eight hours, from the Bull and Mouth in Aldersgate to the New Inn in North Street—or t'other way about; and we never stopped but for changes, or to put down and take up. Sich was our orders, and nothing in reason to find fault with 'em, until they come to hold us responsible to something besides time. Then the trouble began.

"Now, sir, as you may know, the coachman's seat was over the fore-boot, and, being holler underneath, was often used as a box for special parcels. So it happened that this box was hired of the owners by Messrs. Black, South, and Co., the big Brighthelmstone bankers, in order to ship their notes and cash, whenever they'd the mind to, between London and the seaside, and so escape the risks and expense of a private mail. The valiables would be slid and locked in—coachman being in his place—with a private key; and George he'd nothing to do but keep his fat calves snug to the door, till someun at the other end came with a duplicate key to unlock it and claim the property. Very well—and very well it worked till the fifteenth of December in the year eighteen hundred and thirteen, on which day our responsibility touched the handsome figure—so I was to learn—of £4000 in Brighton Union bank notes, besides cash and securities.

"It was rare cold weather, much as it is now, save that the snow was shallower by a matter of two inches, and no more bind in it than dry sand. We was advertised to start from the Bull at nine; and there was booked six insides and five out. At ten minutes to the hour up walks a couple of Messrs.

Pinnick and Waghorn's clerks from the borough, with the cash-box in whity-brown paper, looking as innocent as a babby in a Holland pinifore. George he comes out of the shades, like a jolly Corsican ghost, a viping of his mouth ; the box is slung up and fastened in ; coachman climbs to his perch, and the five outsides follow-my-leader arter him to theirs, where they swaddle 'emselves into their wraps strait-veskit-vise, and settin' as miserable as if they was waitin' to have a tooth drawed. Not much harm there, you'll say—one box-seat, two behind, two with me in the dickey—all packed tight, and none too close for observation. Well, sir, we'll hear about it.

"Out of the six insides, all taken, there was three already in place : a gentleman, very short and fierce, and snarling at everything ; gentleman's lady, pretty as paint, but a white timidious body ; gentleman's young-gentleman, in ducks and spencer and a cap like a concertina with the spring gone. So far so good, you'll say again, and no connection with any other party, and leastways of all with the insides as was yet wanting, and which the fierce gentleman was blowin' the lights out of for bein' late.

"'Guard,' says he, goin' on outrageous, while the lady and the young gentleman cuddled together scared-like in a corner, 'who are these people who stop the whole service while they look in the shop-vinders? If you're for starting a minute after the stroke,' says he, 'dash my buttons,' he says, 'but I'll raise all hell to have you cashiered!'

"'All right, sir,' I says. 'I knows my business better'n you can tell it me—' and just as I spoke, a hackney-kerridge come rumbling into the yard, and drew up anigh us.

"'Globe?' says a jolly, fat-faced man, sticking his head out of it. 'All right, Cato,' and down jumps a black servant, in livery, that was on the box, and opens the door.

"The fat man he tumbled out—for all the world like a sheetful of washing a-wallopin' downstairs—Cato he got in, and between them they helped from the hackney and across to the coach as rickety a old figure as ever I see. He were all shawls and wrap-rascal. He'd blue spectacles to his eyes, a travellin' cap pulled down on 'em, his mouth covered in; and the only evidence of flesh to be seen in the whole of his carcass, was a nose the colour of a hyster. He shuffled painful, too, as they held him up under the arms, and he groaned and muttered to himself all the time he were changing.

"Now, sir, you may suppose the snarling gentleman didn't make the best of what he see; and he broke out just as they was a-hauling the invalid in, wanting to know very sarcastic if they hadn't mistook the Globe for a hearse. But the fat man he accepted him as good-humoured as could be.

"'It's nothing affectionate, sir,' says he. 'Only paralysis, which ain't catching. The gentleman won't trouble you.'

"'Not for my place,' says the fierce gentleman, bristling up like a dog. 'Damme, sir, not for my place. Oh, I can see very well what his nose is a-pinting to, and damme if it isn't as monstrous a piece of coolness as ever I expeerunced. *These* seats, sir, are the nat'ral perkisite of a considerate punctiality, and if your friend objects to travelling with his back to the 'orses——'

"'Now, now,' says the fat man—'nothing of the sort. You don't mind sitting with your back to the 'orses, do you, nunky?'

"'Eh,' says the old man, 'uskylike, and starting a bit forward—'no, no, no, no, no, no, no—' and he sunk into the front cushions, while Cato and the fat 'un dispodged him to his comfort.

"'Time, gentlemen!' says I.

"'Wait a bit,' says snarler. 'It can't never be—

why, surely, it can't never be that the sixth inside is took for a blackamoor?'

"'Alfred,' says the lady, half veeping: 'pray let things be. It's only as far as Cuckfield we're goin', arter all.'

"'A poor argiment, my dear,' says he, 'in favour of suffering forty miles of a sulphurious devil.'

"'Pray control yourself, sir,' says the fat man, still very ekable. 'We've booked three places, for two, just to be comfortable. Our servant rides outside.'

"Well, that settled it; and in another minute we was off. I laughed a bit to myself as I swung up; but I hadn't a thought of suspicion. What do *you* say, sir? Would you have? Why, no, of course not—no more than if you was a Lyons Mail. There was the five o' them packed in there, and one on the roof behind the coachman—three divisions of a party as couldn't have seemed more unconnected with one another, or more cat and dog at that. Yet, would you believe it, every one of them six had his place in the robbery that follered as carefully set for him as a figure in a sum.

"As for me, sir, I done my duty; and what more could be expected of me? At every stage I tuk a general look round, to see as things were snug and nat'ral; and at Croydon, fust out, I observed as how the invalid were a'ready nodding in a corner, and the other two gents settled to their *Mornin' Postses*.

"Beyond Croydon the cold begun to take the outsides bitter; and the nigger got into a vay of drummin' with his feet so aggerawacious, that at last George he lost his temper with him and told him to shut up. Well, he shut up that, and started scrapin' instead; and he went on scrapin' till the fierce gentleman exploded out of the vinder below fit to bust the springs.

"'Who's that?' roars he—'the blackamoor? Damme!' he roars, 'if you aren't wus nor a badger in more ways than one,' he roars.

"'All right, boss,' says the nigger, grinning and lookin' down. 'Feet warm at last, boss,' and he stopped his shufflin' and begun to sing.

"Now, sir, a sudden thought—I won't go so far as to call it a suspicion—sent me, next stop, to examine unostentatious-like the neighbourhood of them great boots. But all were sound there, and the man sittin' well tucked into his wraps. It wasn't like, of course, that he could a' kicked the panels of the box in without George knowin' somethin' about it. And he didn't want to neither; *for he'd finished his part of the business a'ready.* So he just sat and smiled at me as amiable as Billy Vaters.

"Well, we went on without a hitch; and at Cuckfield the three back insides turned out into the snow, and went for a bespoke po'-chaise that was waitin' for 'em there. But, afore he got in, the fierce gentleman swung round and come blazin' back to the vinder.

"'My compliments, sir,' says he, 'at parting; and, if it *should* come to the vorst,' he says, 'I'd advise you to lay your friend pretty far under to his last sleep,' he says, 'or his snores'll wake the dead.'

"'Hush,' says the fat 'un. 'It's the drowndin' spirit in him comin' up to blow like a vale.'

"'Is it?' says the fierce gentleman. 'Then it's my opinion that the outsides ought to be warned afore he gives his last heave,' and he went off snortin' like a tornader.

"The fat man shook his head when he were gone. His mildness, having sich a figger, was amazing. He sat with his arm and shoulder for a bolster to old paralysis, who was certainly going on in style.

"'Now, sir,' says I, 'the whole blessed inside is yourn till the end of the journey.'

"'Thank you, guard,' says he; 'but I won't disturb my friend, and we'll stay as we are, thank you.'

"I got up then, and on we went—last stage, sir,

through Clayton, over the downs, whipping through Pyecombe and Patcham, swish through Preston turnpike, and so into East Street, where we'd scarce entered, when there come sich a hullabaloo from underneath as if the devil, riding on the springs, had got his tail jammed in the brake. Up I jumps, and up jumps the blackamoor, screeching and clawing at George, so as he a'most dropped the ribbins.

"'Eh, boss!' he yelled. 'De old man—down dere!—damn bad!'

"George he pulled up; and I thought he'd a bust, till I climbed over and loosened his neckercher, and let it all out. Then down we got—nigger and I, and one or two of the passengers—and looked in. 'What the thunder's up?' says I. The fat man were goin' on awful, sobbin', and hiccuppin', and holding on to old paralysis, as were sunk back in the corner.

"'I'm afraid he's dyin',' he said. 'I'm afraid he's dyin'! Oh, why did I ever give way to him, and let him come!'

"Well, we all stood pretty foolish, not knowing what to say or do, when his great tricklin' face come round like a leg o' mutton on a spit, and, seein' the nigger, bust into hystrikes.

"'O Cato!' he roars; 'O Cato, O Cato! Sich a loss if he goes!' he roars. 'Run on by a short cut, Cato,' he says, 'and see if you can find a doctor agen our drawin' up at the New Inn.'

"That seemed to us all a good idea, though, to be sure, there was no cut shorter than the straight road we was in. But anyhow, before we could re'lise it, the nigger was off like a arrer; and one of the gentlemen offered to keep the fat man company. But that he wouldn't listen to.

"'If he *should* come round,' he said, 'the shock of a stranger might send him off agen. No, no,' he said: 'leave me alone with my dying friend, and drive on as quick as ever you can.'

"It were only a matter of minutes; but afore we'd been drawed up half of one afore the inn, a crowd was gathered round the coach door.

"'Is he back?' says the fat man—'Is Cato come back with a doctor? No, I won't have him touched or moved till a doctor's seen him.'

"Then all at once he was up and out, rampageous.

"'Where is he?' he shrieks. 'I can't vait no longer—I'm goin' mad—I'll find one myself'—and, afore you could say Jack Robinson, he was off. I never see sich a figger run so. He fair melted away. But the crowd was too interested in the corpse to follow him.

"Well, sir, he didn't come back with a doctor, and no more did Cato. And the corpse may have sat there ten minutes, and none daring to go into it, when a sawbones, a-comin' down the street on his own account, was appealed to by the landlord for a verdict, seein' as how by this time the whole traffic was blocked. He got in, and so did I; and he bent over the body spread back with its wraps agen the corner.

"'My God!' I whispers—'there's no breath comin' from him. Is he dead, sir?'

"The sawbones he rose up very dry and cool.

"'No,' he says, 'there ain't no breath comin' from him, nor there never will. It ain't in natur' to expect it from a waxworks.'

"Sir, I tell you I looked at him and just felt my heart as it might be a snail that some 'un had dropped a pinch of salt on.

"'Waxworks!' I says, gaspin'. 'Why, the man spoke and groaned!'

"'Or was it the gentleman you was tellin' me of as did it for him?' says the sawbones, still as dry as cracknels.

"Then I took one jump and pounced on the thing, and caught it up;—and I no sooner 'ad it in my 'ands, than I knew it were a dummy—nothing more nor less.

But what I felt at that was nothin' to the shock my pullin' it away give me—for there, behind where it had set, was a 'ole, big enough for a boy to pass, cut right through the cushions and panels into the foreboot; and the instant I see it, 'Oh,' I says, 'the mail's been robbed!'"

The old man, who had worked himself up to a state of practised excitement, paused a dramatic moment at this point, until I put the question he expected.

"And it had been?"

"And it had been," he said, pursing his lips, and nodding darkly. "In the vinter of '13, sir—the cleverest thing ever planned. It made a rare stir; but the 'ole truth was never known till years afterwards, when one o' the gang (it was the boy as had been, now growed up) were took on another charge, and confessed to this one. The fat man were a ventriloquist, you see. That, and to secure the 'ole six insides to themselves while seemin' strangers was the cream of the job. They cut into the boot soon arter we was clear of London, and passed the boy through with a saw and centre-bit t'other side o' Croydon. He set to—the young limb, with his pretty innocent ducks!—tuk a piece clean out of the roof just under the driver's seat, and brought down the cash-box; while Mr. Blackamoor Cato kep' up his dance overhead to drown the noise of the saw. The box was opened and emptied, and put back in the boot where it was found; and the swag, for fear of accidents, was all tuk away at Cuckfield."

He came to an end. I was aware of William gamekeeper, the younger, standing silent at the door, with a couple of speckled auburn trophies in his hand. The fire leapt and fluttered. I rose with a sigh—then with a smile.

"Thank you, William," I said gratefully, as I took the woodcock. "How plump they are; and how I love these links with the past."

THE JADE BUTTON.

THE little story I am about to tell will meet, I have no doubt, with a good deal of incredulity, not to say derision. Very well; there is the subject of it himself to testify. If you can put an end to him by any lethal process known to man, I will acknowledge myself misinformed, and attend your last moments on the scaffold.

Miss Belmont disapproved of Mrs. John Belmont; and Mrs. John Belmont hated Miss Belmont. And the visible token of this antagonism was a button.

It was of jade stone, and it was a talisman. For three generations it had been the mascot of the Belmont family, an heirloom, and symbolising in its shining disc a little local sun, as it were, of prosperity. The last three head Belmonts had all been men of an ample presence. The first of them, the original owner of the stone, having assigned it a place in perpetuity at the bottom hole of his waistcoat (as representing the centre of his system), his heirs were careful to substantiate a tradition which meant so much to them in a double sense.

Indeed, the button was as good as a blister. It seemed to draw its wearer to a head in the prosperous part of him. It was set in gold, artfully furnished at its back with a loop and hank, and made transferable from waistcoat to waistcoat, that its possessor for the time being might enjoy at all seasons its beneficent influence. In broad or long cloth, in twill or flannel, by day and by night, the button attended him, regulating indiscriminately his business and his digestion. In such circumstances, it is plain that Death must have been hard put to it to find a vulnerable place;

and such was the fact. It has often been said that a man's soul is in his stomach; how, then, could it get behind the button? Only by one of those unworthy subterfuges, which, nevertheless, it does not disdain. The first Belmont lived to ninety, and with such increasing portliness that, at the last, a half-moon had to be cut, and perpetually enlarged, out of the dining-room table to accommodate his presence. Practically, he was eating his way through the board, with the prospect of emerging at the other end, when, in rising from a particularly substantial repast one night, he caught the button in the crack between the first slab (almost devoured) and the second, wrenched it away, and was immediately seized with apoplexy. He died; and the Destroyer, after pursuing his heir to threescore years and ten, looking for the heel of Achilles, as unworthily "got home" into him. He was lumbering down Fleet Street one dog-day when, oppressed beyond endurance by the heat, he wrenched open—in defiance of all canons of taste and prudence—his waistcoat. The button—*the* button—was burst from its bonds in the act, though, fortunately—for the next-of-kin—to be caught by its hank in the owner's watch-chain. But to the owner himself the impulse was fatal. A prowling cutpurse, quick to the chance, "let out" full on the old gentleman's bow-window, quenching its lights, so to speak, for ever; and then, having snatched the chain, incontinently doubled into the arms of a constable. The property was recovered—but for the heir; the second Belmont's bellows having been broken beyond mending.

The third met with as inglorious an end, and at a comparatively early age; for the button—as a saving clause to whatever god had thrown it down, for the fun of the thing, among men—was possessed with a very devil of touchiness, and always instant to resent the least fancied slight to its self-importance. Else had Tithonus been its wearer to this day, as—but

I won't anticipate. The third Belmont, then, in a fit of colossal forgetfulness, sent the button, *in* a white waistcoat, to the wash. The calamity was detected forthwith, *but not in time to avert itself.* After death the doctor. Before the outraged article could be restored to its owner and victim, he had died of a rapid dropsy, and the button became the property of Mrs. John Belmont, his relict and residuary legatee, who——

But, for the history of the button itself? Why, in brief, as it affected the Belmont family, it was this. Mr. Adolphus Belmont had been Consul at one of the five treaty ports of China about the troublous years of 1840-42. During the short time that he held office, a certain local mandarin, Elephoo Ting by name, was reported to Peking for high treason, and honoured with an imperial ukase, or invitation to forestall the headsman. There was no doubt, indeed, that Elephoo Ting had been very strenuous, in public, in combating the intrusion of the foreign devil, while inviting him, in private, to come on and hold tight. There is no doubt, too, that in the result Elephoo and Adolphus had made a profitable partnership of it in the matter of opium, and that the mandarin had formed a very high, and even sentimental, opinion of the business capacities of his young friend. Young, that is to say, relatively, for Adolphus was already sixty-three when appointed to his post. But, then, of the immemorial Ting's age no record actually existed. The oldest inhabitant of Ningpo knew him as one knows the historic beech of one's district. He had always been there—bland, prosperous, enormous, a smooth bole of a man radiating benevolence. And now at last he was to die. It seemed impossible.

It *was* impossible, save on a condition. That he confided to his odd partner and confidant, the English Consul, during a last interview. He held a carving-knife in his hand.

"Shall I accept this signal favour of the imperial sun?" he said.

"Have you any choice?" asked the Consul gloomily. "The decree is out; the soldiers surround your dwelling."

Elephoo Ting laughed softly.

"Vain, vain all, unless I discard my talisman." He produced the jade button from his cap. "This," he said, "I had from my father, when the old man sickened at last of life, desiring to be an ancestor. It renders who wears it, while he wears it, immortal; only it is jealous, jealous, and stands upon its dignity. Shall I, too, part with it, and at a stroke let in the light of ages?"

He saw the incredulity in his visitor's face, and handed him the carving-knife.

"Strike," he said. "I bid thee."

"You take the consequences?"

"All."

With infinite cynicism, Mr. Belmont essayed to tickle, just to tickle, the creature's infatuation with the steel point. It bent, where it touched, like paper. He thrust hard and ever harder, until at last he was thrashing and slicing with the implement in a sort of frenzy of horror. The mandarin stood apathetic, while the innocuous blade swept and rustled about his huge bulk like a harmless feather. Then said he, as the other desisted at length, unnerved and trembling, "Art thou convinced?"

"I am convinced," said the Consul.

Elephoo Ting handed him the button in exchange for the knife.

"Take and wear it," he said, "for my sake, whom you have pleased by outwitting, on the score of benefiting, two Governments. You have the makings of a great mandarin in you; the button will do the rest. Would you ever escape the too-soon satiety of this stodgy life, pass it on, with these instructions which

I shall give you, to your next-of-kin. Be ever deferential to the button and considerate of its vanity, for it is the fetish of a sensitive but undiscriminating spirit. So long as you cherish it, you will prosper. But the least apparent slight to itself, it will revenge, and promptly. As for me, I have an indigestion of the world that I would cure."

And with the words he too became an ancestor.

Then riches and bodily amplitude came to Adolphus Belmont, until the earth groaned under his importance. He was a spanker, and after him Richard Belmont was a spanker, and after him John Belmont was a very spanker of spanks, even at thirty-two, when he committed the last enormous indiscretion which brought him death and his fortunes almost ruin. For the outrage to the button had been so immeasurable that, not content with his obliteration, it must manœuvre likewise to scatter the accumulations of fortune, which it had brought him, by involving in a common ruin most of the concerns in which that fortune was invested, so that his widow found herself left, all in a moment, a comparatively poor woman.

And here Mrs. John Belmont comes in.

She was a little woman, of piquancy and resource, and a very accomplished angler of men. She could count on her pink finger-tips the ten most killing baits for vanity. And, having once recovered the button, she set herself to conciliating it with a thousand pretty kisses and attentions. It lived between the bosom of her frock and the ruff of her dainty nightgown. Yet for a long time it sulked, refusing to be coaxed into better than a tacit staying of its devastating hand. And so matters stood when the Assembly ball was held.

Miss Emma Belmont and Mrs. John Belmont lived in the same town, connections, but apart. Their visits were visits of ceremony—and dislike. Miss Emma was Mr. John's sister, and had always highly disapproved of his marriage with the "adventuress."

Her very name, she thought, bordered on an impropriety! How could any "Inez" dissociate herself from the tradition of cigarette-stained lips and white eyeballs travelling behind a fan like little moons of coquetry? This one, in fact, took no trouble to. Her reputation involved them in a common scandal; and it was solely on this account, I think, that she so resented her sister-in-law's appropriation of the button. She herself was devoted to good works, and utterly content in her mission. She did not want the button; but, inasmuch as it was a Belmont heirloom, and Mrs. John childless, she chose to symbolise in it the bone of contention, and to use it as a convenient bar to amenities which would, otherwise, have seemed to argue in her a sympathy with a mode of life with which she could not too emphatically wish to disconnect herself.

They met at the Assembly ball. Miss Belmont, though herself involved in the financial ebb, had considered it her duty to respect so respectable an occasion, and even to adorn it with a silk of such inflexibility that (I tremble as I write it) one could imagine her slipping out of it through a trap, like the vanishing lady, and leaving all standing. Presently Mrs. John Belmont, with a wicked look, floated up to her.

"*You* here, Inez!" exclaimed Miss Emma, affecting an amazement which, unhappily, she could not feel.

The other flirted and simpered. When she smiled, one could detect little threads drawn in the fine powder near the corners of her mouth. There was no ensign of widowhood about her. She ruffled with little gaudy downs and feathers, like a new-fledged bird-of-paradise.

"Yes, indeed," she said. "And I've brought Captain Naylor, who's been dining with me. Shall I introduce him to you?"

Miss Belmont's sense of decorum left her speechless.

Inez, on the contrary, rippled out the most china-tinkling laugh.

"You dear old thing," she tittered. "Don't look so shocked. I knew you'd be here to chaperon me, and——" She came a step closer. "Yes, the button's there, Emma. You may stare; but make up your mind, I'm not going to part with it."

Miss Belmont found herself, and responded quietly:

"I hope not indeed, Inez. I don't ask or expect you. You might multiply it to-night by a dozen, and only offend me less."

Mrs. John laughed again, rather shrilly.

"Oh, fie!" she said. "Why, even you haven't a high-necked dress, you know."

And then a very black and red man, in a jam-pot collar and with a voice like a rook, came and claimed her.

"Haw, Mrs. Belmont! Aw—er, dance, I think."

Miss Belmont, to save appearances, rigidly sat out the evening. When at last she could endure no more, she had her fly called and prepared to go home. She was about to get into it, when she observed a familiar figure standing among the few midnight loafers who had gathered without the shadow of the porch.

"Hurley!" she exclaimed.

The man, after a moment, slouched reluctantly forward, touching his hat. He had once been her most favoured protégé—a rogue and irreclaimable, whom she had persuaded, temporarily, from the devil's service to her own. He had returned to his master, but with a reservation of respect for the practical Christian. Miss Belmont was orthodox, but she had a way with sinners. She pitied and fed and *trusted* them. She was a member of the Prisoners' First Aid Society, with a reverence for the law and a weakness for the lawless. Her aim was to reconcile the two, to interpret, in a yearning charity, between the policeman and the criminal, who at least, in the

result, made a common cause of honouring *her*. Inez asserted that, living, as she did, very nervously alone on the outskirts of the town, she had adopted this double method of propitiation for the sake of her own security. But, then, Inez had a forked tongue, which you would never have guessed from seeing the little scarlet tip of it caressing her lips.

Well, Miss Belmont had once coaxed Jim Hurley into being her handy man, foreseeing his redemption in an innocent association with flowers and the cult of the artless cabbage. He proved loyal to her, gained her confidence, knew all about the button and other matters of family moment. But the contiguity of the kitchen-garden with Squire Thorneycroft's pheasant-coops was too much for hereditary proclivities. He stole eggs, sold them, was detected, prosecuted, sentenced to a short term of imprisonment, and disappeared. Miss Belmont herself met him on his discharge from the jail gates, but he was not to be induced to return. The wild man was in his brain, and off he had gone, with Parthian shots of affection, in quest of fun. And for two years she had not seen him again until to-night, when his scratch of red hair and beard—which always looked as if he had just pulled his head out of a quickset—suddenly blew into flame before her. And then there followed a shock of distress.

"Jim! Why, what's happened? What's the matter with you?"

There was no need to specify. The man was obviously going off his tramp—nearing the turn of the dark road. He was ghastly, and constantly gave little spasmodic wrenching coughs during the minute he stood beside her.

"Well," he gasped, "I dunno. The rot has got into my stummick. I be all touchwood inside like an old ellum."

"Will you come and see me?"

"'Es. By'm-by."

"Why not now? Where are you going to sleep?"

He grinned, and coughed, half-suffocated, as he backed.

"I've got my plans, Missis. You—leave me alone."

It did not sound gracious. One would not have guessed by it his design, which was nothing less than a jolly throw against the devil in the teeth of death. Miss Belmont, a little hurt, but more sad, got into her fly and was driven home. Arrived there, she sat up an hour contemplative. She was just preparing to go to bed in the gray dawn, when she heard the garden-gate click and footsteps rapidly traverse the path to the front door. Her heart seemed to stop. She stole trembling into the hall. "*Who's there?*" she demanded in a quavering voice. The answer came, with a clearness which made her start, through the letter-box.

"Me, Missis—Jim Hurley."

Amazed, and a little embarrassed, she opened. The man burst, almost fell in, and, staggering, recovered himself.

"'Ere!" he said, with eager manipulation trying to force something upon her. "I've done 'er! I've got it for yer! Take it—make 'aste—they're arter me. It's yourn as by rights, and she's got to crow on the wrong side of 'er woundy little mouth."

But Miss Belmont, with instinctive repulsion, had put her hands behind her back and retreated before him.

"Jim!" she said sickly. "*What* have you got? What do you mean? I'll take nothing from you."

"Oh, go along!" he insisted. His cough was gone. He seemed animated with a new masterfulness. "Ain't I in the know? It's yourn, anyhow, and"—his eye closed in an ineffable rapture—"I done the devil out of his own when I heard I be booked to go to him. He'll pay me, I reckon; but I don't care. You take it. It's your dooty as a good woman."

"No, no," cried Miss Belmont, beating him away with her hands. "Don't let me even see it to know. How could you suppose such a thing? Take it back while you've time."

B's 33 and 90 wore their list-footed boots; but Jim's ear was a practised one. Swiftly summoned, they had raced on his tracks from the Assembly Rooms. He had known it, and had laboured merely to keep his start of them by three minutes—two—one. Now, while their sole was yet on the threshold, he darted into the dining-room and was under the table at a dive. They had him out and handcuffed, of course, in a jiffy; and then they stood to explain and expostulate.

"Well, you ain't a cheeked one neither, Hurley! To run up here of all places for cover! Don't you mind him, Miss." (She stood pale and shivering. "The shock!" she had murmured confusedly.) "Why," said 33, "the man was heard by plenty proposing of hisself to visit you; and looked to your hold kindness to him to take and shelter, is supposed."

She found voice to ask, "What's he done?"

"Done!" said 33. "Why, bless you, Miss! Treating of you as if you was in collusion, ain't I?" (She shivered.) "Why, he grabbed a jewel—a gold button, as I understand—out o' the buzzim o' your own late brother's good lady as she was a-stepping into her broom, and bolted with it. It'll be on 'im now if we're lucky."

"You ain't then, old cock," said Jim, with a little hoarse laugh and choke.

"Chuck it!" said 90, a saturnine man.

"That's what I done, Kroojer," said Jim. "You go and 'unt in the bloomin' 'edges if you don't believe me."

"It's my duty to tell you," said 33, "that whatever you says will be took down in evidence agen you."

"Not by you," said Jim. "Why, you can't spell."

They carried him off dispassionately, with some rough kindly apologies to Miss Belmont for the trouble to which they had put her. She locked and bolted the door when they were gone; mechanically saw to the lamps, and went upstairs to bed in a sort of stunned dream. So she committed herself to the sheets, and so, in a sort of waking delirium, passed the remaining hours of slumber. She felt as if the even tenor of her way, her stream of placid days, had been suddenly dammed by a dead body, the self-destroyed corpse of her own character. Sometimes she would start from a suffering negation to feel B 90's hand upon her shoulder. "What have I done—oh! what have I done?" she would moan in anguish; and B 90 would glower from under his helmet like a passionless Rhadamanthus—

"What have you done? What but, like our second Henry, meanly, by inference and innuendo, imposed upon your wretched tool the responsibility for a deed which you dared not seek to compass by the open processes of the law. Did you dispute the right ownership of the button? Then why choose for your confidant an ex-thief and poacher? No use to say you designed no harm. By the flower be known the seed. Come along o' me!"

She rose late, ate no breakfast, and sat awaiting, pinched and gray, the inevitable ordeal. It opened, early enough, with the advent of Mrs. John. The little widow came sailing in, with a face of floured steel. When she saw, the edge of her tongue seemed to whet itself on her lips. Miss Emma broke out at once in an unendurable cry:

"Inez! You can't think I was a party to this!"

"Who said so, dear? Though the man was a protégé of yours, and was known to have remained where he encountered me by your instructions."

"It is not true."

"Isn't it? Well, at least, the plan miscarried.

Now, give me the button, and I promise, to the best of my power, to hush the matter up."

"I haven't got it, indeed; oh, you must believe me! He told the policeman himself that he had thrown it away while escaping."

"Yes, yes. I give him credit for his loyalty to you. But, Emma—you know I never put much faith in your sanctimoniousness. Don't be a fool, and drive me to extremities."

"You can't mean it. I blame my covetous heart. I envied you—I admit it—this dear fetish of our family. But to think me capable of such a wickedness! oh, Inez!"

Then Mrs. John Belmont exploded. I muffle the report. It left Miss Belmont flaccid and invertebrate, weakly sobbing that she would see Hurley; would try to get him to identify the exact spot where he had parted with the bauble; would move heaven and earth to make her guiltless restitution. Yet all the time, remembering the scene of last night, she must have known her promise vain. Jim had sought to thrust no shadow of a fact upon her. He had not thrown the button away. He alone knew where it now was; but would he so far play into the hands of her enemy as to tell? She felt faint in the horror of this doubt; and Mrs. John perceived the horror.

As for her, she was utterly hateful and incredulous. She had friends, she screamed—one in particular—who would act, and unmercifully, to see her righted. She hardly refrained from striking her sister-in-law, as she rushed out in a storm of hysterics.

And at this point I was called in—by Miss Belmont, that is to say.

I found her utterly prostrated—within step of the brink of the final collapse.

I coaxed her back, foot by foot; won the whole truth from her; laughed her terrors to scorn, and staked her my professional credit to have the matter

put right, or on the way to right, by our next meeting.

And I meant it, and was confident. For that very day—though of this she did not know—I had officially ordered Jim Hurley's removal from the cell in which he had been lodged to the County Hospital. The man was dying, that was the fact; and a fact which he had known perfectly when he staked at one throw for an easy bed for himself, and a repayment of his debt to his old benefactress.

He was ensconced in a little ward by himself, when I visited him and sat down to my task. He cocked an eye at me from a red tangle, and grinned.

"Now, Hurley," I said, "I come straight from Miss Emma, by her authority, to acquaint you with the results of your deed."

"Oh!" he answered. "Hev the peelers been a-dirtyin' of their pore knees lookin' for it in the 'edgerows? I 'opes as they found it."

"You know they couldn't. You've got it yourself."

"S'elp me, I haven't!"

Then I informed him, carefully and in detail, of the awful miscarriage of his intentions. He was patently dumfounded.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he whispered, quite amazed. "Well, I *am* blowed!"

"You must undo this," I said. "There's only one way. Where *is* the button?"

He gauged me profoundly a moment.

"On a ledge under the table," he said. Then he thrust out a claw. "Don't you go lettin' '*er* 'ave it back," he said, "or I'll 'aunt you!"

I considered.

"You must undo what you've done," I repeated. "Don't you see? Unless you can prove that it's been in your possession all the time, *ana is now*, her character's gone for ever. Mrs. John will see to that."

He did not, professionally, lack wits. He understood perfectly. "You're 'er friend?" he asked.

I nodded.

"All right," he said, "you get 'old of it private, and smuggle of it 'ere, and I'll manage the rest."

"But, my good fellow! You've been overhauled, I suppose, and pretty thoroughly. How can you convince—*convince*, you understand—that you've kept the thing snug through it all?"

"You go and smuggle of it 'ere," he repeated doggedly.

It needed only a very little manœuvring. I hurried back to Miss Belmont's, heard the lady was still confined to her room, forbade the servant to report me, and claimed the privacy of the dining-room for the purpose of writing a prescription. The moment I was alone, I made an excited and perfectly undignified plunge under the table, found the ledge (the thing, in auctioneer's parlance, was a "capital set," in four leaves), and the button, which in a feverish ecstasy I pocketed. Then, very well satisfied, I hurried back to Mr. Hurley.

I found him, even in that short interval, changed for the worse; so much changed, that, in face of his condition, a certain sense of novel vigour, an overweening confidence in my own importance which had grown up, and lusty, in me during my return journey, seemed nothing less than an indecency. However, curiously enough, this mood began to ebb and sober from the very moment of my handing over the *pièce de conviction* to its purloiner. He "palmed" it professionally, cleared his throat, and took instant command of the occasion. "Now," he said, "tell 'em I've confessed to you, and let 'em all come."

His confidence mastered the depression which had overtaken me. I returned, with fair assurance, to
1 Miss Belmont, who received my news with a perfect

rapture of relief. What she had suffered, poor good woman, none but herself might know.

"Did he own to you where he had hidden it?" she asked. And "Yes," I could answer, perfectly truthfully.

By my advice, she prepared to go at once and fetch her sister-in-law to the hospital—with a friend, if she desired it—that all might witness to the details of the restitution.

In the meanwhile I myself paid a visit to the police station, and thence returned to my post to await the arrival of my company.

It came in about an hour: Miss Belmont, tearfully expectant; Mrs. John Belmont, shrill and incredulous; an immaculate tall gentleman, Captain Naylor by name, whose chin was propped on a very high collar, that he might perpetually sniff the incense of his own superiority; and, lastly, and officially to the occasion, B 90.

I lost no time in conducting them to the bedside of the patient. He had rallied wonderfully since our ast encounter. He was sitting up against his pillow, his red hair fluffed out like the aureole of a dissipated angel, an expression on his face of a quite sanctimonious relish. I fancy he even winked at me.

"Now, Hurley," I said gravely, "as one on the threshold of the grave" (which, nevertheless, I had my doubts about), "speak out and tell the truth."

He cleared his throat, and started at once in a loud voice, as if repeating a lesson he had set himself:

"'Earing as 'ow my rash hact 'ave brought suspicion on a innercent lady, I 'ereby makes affirmation of the fac's. I stole the button, and 'id it in my boot, where it is now."

"No, it ain't," said B 90 suddenly. "Stow that."

Mr. Hurley smiled pityingly.

"Oh, ain't it, sir?" he said. "'Ow do you know?"

"Because I searched you myself," said B 90 shortly.

The patient, infinitely tolerant, waved his hand.

"'E searched me, ladies and gentlemen! Ho, lor! Look at 'im; I only arsks that—look at 'im! Why, he doesn't even know as there's a smut on his nose at this moment." (B 90 hastily rubbed that organ, and remembering himself, lapsed into stolidity once more.) Mr. Hurley addressed him with exaggerated politeness—"*Would* you be so good, sir, as to go and fetch my boots?"

B 90 thought profoundly, and officially, a minute; wheeled suddenly, withdrew, and returned shortly with the articles, very massive and muddy, which he laid on the counterpane before the prisoner. The latter, cherishing the ineffable *dénouement*, deliberately took and examined the left one, paused a moment, smilingly canvassing his company, and then quickly, with an almost imperceptible wrench and twirl, had unscrewed the heel bodily from its place and held it out.

"'Ere!" he said; and, with his arm extended, sank back in an invertebrate ecstasy upon his pillow.

The heel was pierced with a tiny compartment on its inner side, and within the aperture lay the button.

They all saw it, but not as I, who, standing as I did at the bed-head, and being something of an amateur conjurer myself, was conscious in a flash of the rascal "passing" the trinket into its receptacle even as he exposed it.

There followed an exclamation or two, and silence. Then Captain Naylor said "Haw!" and Miss Belmont, with a gasp, turned a mild reproachful gaze upon her sister-in-law. But Mrs. John had not the grace to accept it. She gave a little vexed, covetous laugh, and stepped forward. "Well," she

said to Miss Emma, "you must go without it still, dear, it seems." Then, coldly, to Hurley, "Give it me, please."

Now, so far so good; and, though I was enraged with, I could not combat the decision. But truly I was not prepared for the upshot.

Jim, at Mrs. John's first movement, had recovered possession of the button.

"No, you don't!" he said quite savagely. "I know all about it, and 'tain't yourn by rights."

"Jim, Jim," cried Miss Belmont in great agitation; "it is hers, indeed; please give it up. You don't think what you make me suffer!"

But the man was black with a lowering determination.

"'Tain't," he said. "Keep off, you! I've not thrown agen the devil for nothing. It's goin' to be Miss Emma's or nobody's."

"Not mine," cried the poor lady again. "I don't want it. Not for worlds. I wouldn't take it now!"

And then Mrs. John Belmont, in one discordant explosion of fury, gave away her case for ever.

"Insolent! Beyond endurance!" she shrieked, and whirled, with a flaming face, upon her cavalier.

"Archibald! why do you stand grinning there? Why don't you take it from him?"

Thus prompted, Archibald, in great confusion, uttered an inarticulate "Haw!" explained himself in a second and clearer one, and strode threateningly towards the bed. Watching, with glittering eyes, the advance, Jim, at the last moment, *whipped the button into his mouth and swallowed it!* . . .

The case, as a pathological no less than as a criminological curiosity, was unique. I will state a few particulars. The button lodged in the pancreas, in which it was presently detected, comfortably ensconced, by means of the Röntgen rays. And it is a fact that, from the moment it settled there—*never* apparently

(I use the emphasis with a full sense of my responsibility) to be evicted—Mr. Hurley began to recover, and from recovering to thrive—on anything. Croton-oil—I give only one instance—was a very cream of nourishment to him. Galvanic batteries but shook him into the laughter which makes fat, but without stirring the button. It was ridiculous to suggest an operation, though the point was long considered. But in the meanwhile the button had continued piling up over itself such impenetrable defences of adipose tissue that its very locality had become conjectural. The question was dropped, only to give rise to another. How could one any longer detain this luxuriant man in hospital as an invalid? He was removed, therefore, beaming, to the police court; received, for some inexplicable reason, a nominal sentence, dating from the time of his arrest (everything, in fact, was henceforward to prosper with him), and trundled himself out into the world, where he disappeared. I have seen him occasionally since at years-long intervals. He grows ever more sleek and portly, till the shadows of the three dead Belmonts together would not suffice to make him a pair of breeches. He has a colossal fortune; he is respectable, and, of course, respected—a genial monster of benevolence: and he never fails to remind me, when we meet, of the time when I could pronounce his life not worth a button.

I have, can only have, one theory. The button, after many cross adventures, "got home" at last—fatally for Mrs. John Belmont, who fell into a vicious decline upon its loss, and, tenderly nursed by her sister-in-law, departed this sphere in an uncertain year of her life. And, unless the button itself comes to dissolve, Jim, I fear, is immortal.

DOG TRUST.

THERE was no reason why Richard Le Shore should not have made a straightforward appeal for the hand of Miss Molly Tregarthen to her papa. His credentials —of fortune, condition, and character—were unexceptionable; the girl's kind inclinations were confessed; the father himself was an unexacting, indulgent, and ease-loving Democritus. It was but a question of those two and of Mr. Dicky, their favoured, their intimately favoured, guest.

There was no reason, and for the reason that the spirit of Romance abhors reason; and that was why, without any reason, Richard persuaded Mollinda to a clandestine engagement, to stolen interviews, to a belief that love franked by authority was only the skim-milk of human kindness. At least he chose to persuade himself that he persuaded her, at all times, when he could coax a certain bewildered honesty in her eyes from dumbly questioning the necessity of such tactics. In reality he loved that look, as the sweetest earnest of a sweet quality. It was not her he studied to deceive, but himself. Incurably eligible, he could never taste but through make-believe, like the "Marchioness," the sweet stimulant of paternal interdiction.

At the end of the season he accompanied father and child to "Tregarthen." Here, you may be sure, he had not been twenty-four hours without making choice for his love's rendezvous of a little wood which, approached through a tangled shrubbery, covered the slopes which ran up from the back of the house to the high beeches above.

Now Dicky would himself have allowed that everything (desirable) had shone upon his suit save moon-

light. That only, of all poetic glamours, was yet lacking. And so he prevailed with Molly Tregarthen to consent to a post-prandial trysting among the trees, on the very evening subsequent to that of his arrival.

He had no difficulty in escaping from papa, the imperturbable sybarite. Seated in an open window over against shrouded lawns, and a moon which rose like a bubble in liquid darkness; dreaming betwixt decanter and cigar-case, papa would not have had his luminous coma disturbed for anything less than a serious fire. So Dicky left him, and going up alone to the woods, leaned his back against a tree and smoked placidly.

It was very quiet, and fragrant, and beautiful there; and presently the young gentleman lost himself somewhat in reflections. The moonlight, penetrating the leaves, made of the sward a ghostly Tom Tiddler's Ground, which was all mottled with discs of faint gold. What a soft, fine shower to fall upon the head of his Danae, as she should come stealing up the alleys of light! Stealing—stealing! There was a little thrill of ecstasy in the word. How wide her eyes would be, and how would her bosom rise and fall in the breathlessness of some phantom guilt!

Quite a nice little debauch of expectation, only—she did not come. He waited on, desirous, impatient, hungry; and at last, it must be said, cross. The touch of her hand, her lips, had never seemed so indispensable to him; but he would not cheapen the virtues of his own by carrying them back to market to a coquette. If she wanted them, she knew where to find them. As for him, he was quite placid and content; in proof of which he threw away his cigar-butt, and began pacing with a noisy recklessness up and down.

That did not conjure her to him, but it seemed to evoke occasional responsive rustlings, or the fancy of them, which would bring his heart into his throat.

They were only the stirring of woodland things, it seemed. He got very angry, resentful, cruel in his thoughts. The moon, the bubble of light, rose higher and higher—to the very surface of night, where it floated a little, and then burst. At least, so it seemed; for, all of a sudden, where it had been was a black cloud, and drops began to patter on the leaves. Then Richard realised all in a moment that his tryst had failed, that the moonlight was quenched, and that it was beginning to rain. With a naughty word or two, he braced up his loins, left the wood, and descended towards the house.

As he went down, he heard the stable clock strike twelve. He startled, and strode faster, faster, until he was fairly scuttling. It was in vain. The Tregarthens were early people, and, even before he reached the house, he knew that its every window was blind and black. The whole family was abed, and he was shut out into the night.

Twice, and vainly, he made the entire round of the building, seeking for any loophole to enter by. The rain by then was pelting, yet he did not dare raise a clatter on the front door, for fear he should be pistolled from a window. The inmates knew nothing of his absence, and the Squire held, for a Democritus, strong views on the subject of undisturbed repose.

Coming to the porch again from his second circuit, and putting a hand to rest upon one of its columns, he jumped, as if he had touched a charged battery, to see a figure standing motionless in the shadow.

"Hallo!" he gasped, in a sudden shock; then rallying, muttered out in a fury at his own weakness, "Who the devil are you?"

Some faint gleam of moonshine, weltering through the flood, enlightened him even as he spoke.

"Why, if it ain't the butler!" he said.

It was the butler. The figure admitted it in a curt word. Le Shore had already, on the occasions of his two dinners at "Tregarthen," noticed this man, and

had taken a quite violent exception in his own conscience to his manner and appearance. He thought he had never known a leading trust bestowed upon one whose face so expressed the very moral of acquisitiveness, whose conduct was marked by such an uncouth inurbanity. Here, if there was any value in biology, was Bill Sikes in broadcloth.

The tone of the fellow's answer grated confoundedly on him—he hardly knew why.

"Are you locked out, like me?" he said, putting violence on himself to speak civilly.

"Yes, sir," answered the man; "but for a better reason."

"What do you mean by that?"

The creature was as thick-set as a bull. He could have broken this elegant like a stick across his knee. He commanded the situation, massive and impassive, from his own standpoint.

"Look'ee here, sir," he said, speaking through a grip of little strong teeth in a square jaw, "I'm going to tell you what I mean. I'm going to make no bones about it. You meet Miss Molly fair and open, or you don't meet her at all. Do I know what I'm saying? Yes, I do know. She didn't come to you to-night—because why? Because *I* interdicted of her. That's it. She might have thought better—or worse—of it, bein' a woman, and soft; and that's why I laid by, watchin' that no harm should come of it if she did. But she was wise, and didn't. I seen you all the time in the wood, and I tell you this. A word's got to be enough. You meet her by fair means, or not at all. Never mind the Squire there. It's me that says it. If she admires you, nine stun ten—which there's no accounting for tastes—I'm not the one to make difficulties. But you go like a honest man and ask her straight of her father. That's the ticket, and don't you make no error. Don't you flatter your fancy no more with randyvoos in the moonshine. Why,

if ever there's a light calc'lated to lead a gentleman astray, it's that. I say it, and I know. You go to the girl's father; and, after, we'll see what we'll see."

He cleared his throat with a quarrelling sound, and came out of the shadow.

"Now," said he, "here's a house you've been locked out of, and you want to get in without disturbin' of the family—is that it? Very well, sir; now we understand everything, and step this way, if *you* please."

Almost with the words, he had clawed himself up to a window-sill of the ground-floor, and was very softly manipulating the sash. Mr. Le Shore, voiceless, hardly gasping, stood, just conscious of himself, in an absolute rigour of fury and astonishment. He was "stound," as Spenser would have put it. Presently he snapped his eyelids, and woke aware that Mr. Hissey, standing on the grass, was loweringly inviting him to enter by way of an opened window. With a shock, he recovered his nerves of motion, and, stalking to the place, vaulted stiffly to the sill, and sat thereon like a cavalryman.

"I've just a word or two for you, before I—I avail myself of this," he said. "You've been gadding, and got drunk, I suppose; and this is your way of trying to make capital of a belated guest. Perhaps the means you've adopted 'll appear less excellent to you in the sober morning. As to your method of entry, there's nothing in it incompatible with the character I'd already formed of you. But that, and your quite outrageous insolence, will be made matters for your master's consideration to-morrow. I mention this in honour, before I——" He waved his hand towards the room.

"I could twist your neck with two fingers, here and now," said the man.

"Exactly," said Dicky. "And that's why I decline to make use of this window except on the plain understanding."

The butler cleared his throat again, even with a strange note of approval in the unseemly sound.

"Mayhap you'll do," he said. "Now go to bed, and don't forgit your prayers in your disappyntment."

Mr. Le Shore hissed-in a breath, as though the rain had suddenly become boiling spray, then tiptoed rigidly to his room.

The opening of the window, framed with creepers, whose shadows shrank or dilated softly in the muslin curtains, gave on to a soothful picture of lawn and herbaceous border which, withdrawing to cool caverns of leafiness under a remote cedar tree, seemed to gather themselves to a head of prettiest expression in the person of little Miss Mollinda swinging there in a hammock. Within, at the luncheon-table, Tregarthen poured himself out a glass of Madeira with a hand so limp and white in appearance that one would have thought it incapable of the task of poising the heavy decanter. Here was delicate seeming only, however. The perpetual sybarite reads an incorruptible constitution. The white hand held the bottle horizontal, as steady as a rock, during the minute the indolent, good-humoured eyes of its owner were directed to those of his visitor.

"My dear good Richard, the man *is* a burglar."

He laughed at the other's expression, filled his glass, sipped at it, and, hooking his thumbs in his arm-holes, lolled back in his chair.

"I am not justified in the confidence, perhaps. I don't know. Anyhow, it is the short way out of a fatiguing explanation. The man *is* a burglar—not figuratively, but actually, by breeding, education, profession—*appelez-le comme vous voudrez*. He has the stamp of it so distinctly on him that one need not ask him to produce his skeleton key."

"Then I have nothing more to say."

"Ah! the devil take the honest thief! Your

obvious grievance forces me to the explanation, after all. My dear boy, I imply nothing, argue from no premises but such as a long experience of this capital, troublesome fellow suggest to me. Speaking from these (I may be wrong), I should conclude that he is somehow in process of safeguarding, as he thinks, the interests of my girl, to whom he is quite romantically attached. Honestly, I don't know to whom I would rather commit them. Poor motherless child!"

He had, it seemed, no thought of himself as pledged to the task. "Himself" should be a fair one-man's burden

"He is very right to be attached to Miss Tregarthen," muttered Le Shore dryly, and a little sullenly.

"He is very right indeed," answered his host; "righter (pardon the solecism) than you might think. In this excellent rogue is provided such an illustration of the 'harmony not understood' of discords, as circumstance has ever given to an *ennuyé* world. The dear creature has decided to stultify his every instinct for a sentiment. It is the most interesting psychological phenomenon you can imagine. He has conceded nothing of his nature but the means to its practical achievement. Conceive a wolf of his own determination forgoing blood. Such is this dear, admirable brute. *Perfossor parietum nascitur.* He cannot change his spots. To this day, I think, he will always of choice enter by a window rather than a door; to this day he regards plate with a most *melting* look. But for all that, I think I may swear that at the present moment the tally of my spoons is to an ounce what it was when he took service with me eighteen years ago."

"Your servant for eighteen years!"

"My servant—titularly: in reality, my mentor, my vizier. Dog Trust is a rather sweetly demoralising acquisition. He takes the burden of conscience from one—steals it, in this case, I may say. But then, after all, he may use his vicegerency to ends so far

beyond the moral grasp of the master he represents, as more than to vindicate that master in his withdrawal from the vexatious problems of duty. Through sheer force of affection this admirable George has mastered himself, and bettered his master in the parental ethics."

"Indeed, sir?" (Mr. Dicky spoke very dryly.) "And how does Miss Tregarthen approve the viziership?"

"As she loves and respects the vizier, Richard, I do not think she would willingly run counter to his dictates, which, by the way, he never imposes in a manner to alarm one's pride. Ah! did you catch that whiff of scabious? There is a bush of it under the window there. It always seems to me to embody in itself the whole warmth and fragrance of summer. My dear fellow, your eyes are relentless inquisitors. No more wine? Well, I suppose I shall have to tell you how it came about."

He sighed, drained his glass, laughed slightly, and smoothed a stray wisp of hair from his forehead.

"Once," he said—"it was particularly disagreeable to a person of my temperament—I was called upon by Fate to suffer the ugly and sordid experience of a conflagration in my house. You, who are also a little inclined, I believe, to create for yourself an atmosphere of romance, to regard the great world only as a quarry, from which to gather materials most exquisite and most apt to the enrichment of the hermitage, which it is your design and your delight to build apart for your soul, will appreciate what were my feelings upon seeing my fairy fabric doomed to destruction, to positive annihilation, by the flames. I have never spoken to you of the disaster before. You will know that I do so now under the mere stress of fitness, as a means to your proper understanding of George Hissey's conduct. The recollection is painful and horrible to a degree.

"The alarm, the escape, the catastrophe were all accomplished in the dark hours of a winter's morning. My dear wife (she sleeps, awaiting my coming, in Elysium) followed me down the stairs and out of the house at a short interval. She found me devoted to a frantic endeavour to secure from destruction such of my poor treasures as were accessible—few enough, alas! though the tears I shed should have quenched the hate of a Hecla. What had I done with her child? she cried to me—with our sweet Molly, our little three-year-old babe? Richard, I felt as stunned as if she, the pretty, gentle mother, had struck me across the mouth. I could only stare and gasp. She uttered a heart-shaking scream, and turned to where the servants stood huddled together in the garden. They were all there, and the two nurses were crying and moaning and accusing one another. My God! mad with terror, they had deserted their charge to perish by itself in the burning house!"

He paused. "Don't go on, sir, if it distresses you," said Le Shore quietly.

"No," answered Tregarthen. "Like the Ancient Mariner, I must be quit of it now I have begun. But I will have a glass of wine."

He poured himself out one, daintily as to the drop on the decanter lip.

"There followed a fearful scene," he said. "It was all I could do to prevent my angel from precipitating herself through the blazing doorway. The whole building seemed by now a furnace—no possibility of further salvage from those priceless accumulations—not, of course, that at such a pass it was to be thought of. I mingled my tears with my wife's. I offered half my fortune to any one of the crowd who would save, and a large reward to any one who would venture to save, our darling. But it was in vain; and in my heart I knew it.

"Now, in this extremity of despair, a sudden roar went up from a hundred throats, and passed on the instant. Richard, a man, shedding flakes of fire as Venus cast her birth-slough of spray, had emerged overheard from the sea of flame, and in his arms was our child. Who was he? Whence did he come? No one knew. Our house was isolated. The engine from the neighbouring town had not arrived. He was not a friend, nor a neighbour, nor an employé. It was only evident that innocence had somehow evolved its champion.

"We watched, stricken, as castaways watch the glimmer of a remote sail. The figure had broken its way through the skylight in the roof, only, it might be, to symbolise in the burden it bore the leaping of a little flame heavenward. The situation was the very sublimity of tragedy. Beneath those two the roof, sown with a very garden of fire, dropped at a sickening angle.

"Suddenly, shutting, as it seemed, upon his charge, the man rolled himself up like a hedgehog, and came bowling down the slope. It was a terrible and gasping moment. His body, as it whirled, reeled out a hiss of sparks. The next instant it had bounded over the edge, and plunged among the smoking bushes beneath.

"They broke his fall; but it was the verandah awning which in the first instance saved his life—his, and our dear devoted cherub's. But he had never once, through all the stunning vertigo of his descent, failed to shield the little body which his own enwrapped.

"Now, my dear Richard, comes the strange part. When I was sufficiently recovered to seek our preserver, I found him sitting handcuffed, in charge of the local policeman. He was very white, with two or three ribs broken; but he took it all unconcerned, as being in the day's, or the night's, business. Who was he? Well, here is the explanation. He was a renowned cracksman, as I think they call it, who had

been operating in the neighbourhood for some weeks past — the hero of many a shuddering midnight adventure. Without doubt he had taken his toll of *my* 'crib,' had not circumstance dropped him ripe into the gaping mouth of the law. He had entered, and was actually at work, when fire cut the ground, as it were, from under his feet. Almost before, intensely occupied, he realised his position, escape by the lower rooms was debarred him. Was ever situation so dramatic? It was to be compared only with that of a huntsman who, entering some cave to steal bear cubs, turns to find the dam blocking his outlet. Still, Mr. Hissey *might* have escaped, and without detection, by dropping to the lawn from a back window, had his burglarious ears not pricked suddenly to the wailing of a child.

"My dear fellow, need I explain further? The child he risked his own life to rescue was our—I may almost say, at this day, was *his* Molly. It was the strangest thing. I did not, as a consequence, quite see my way to holding him altogether absolved; but my dear, emotional partner was of a different opinion. We had quite a little scene about it. In the end she prevailed—with the whole boiling of the law, too; and the man was sentenced to come up for judgment if called upon. Then straightway, and by his own desire, she took the disinfected burglar into her service. It was one of those daring psychologic essays which may once and again be carried to a successful issue through the white-hot faith of the experimenter; but which must not be given authority as a precedent. My wife fairly redeemed this burglar, by committing, without hesitation, to his loyal trust the little waif of fire whose destinies he had earned the right to a voice in. From that day to this, I will say, he has never abused the faith we reposed in him. On her deathbed, my dear girl (pardon me a moment, Le Shore), my dear wife most solemnly

recommitted her child to his care. I did not complain, I do not complain now. I, who make no pretence of competence in the paternal rôle, thank the gods only for my vizier, who is quite willing to accord me the ritual of authority, while taking its practical business on his own shoulders. With a man of my temperament it works; and I am satisfied, if Molly gives me her respect, that she should give Hissey her duty."

He ceased, with a little smiling sigh, and lifted a cigarette from a silver case which lay on the table. Le Shore regarded him steadily.

"Mr. Tregarthen," said he, "Molly and I are engaged. I should have told you before."

The older man did not pause in the act of lighting his cigarette; but enjoyed an inhalation of smoke before he answered:

"I plead guilty to a suspicion, Richard. I am confident our vizier has been safeguarding the proprieties. You remember what I said to you in his excuse just now?"

"I have your sanction, sir?"

"Certainly, as a form. But I am afraid, from the practical side, you will have to satisfy that same inquisitor."

"Mr. George Hissey," said Dicky, "I have papa's authority to marry Miss Molly. Now, with your permission, I will relieve you of your trust."

"Dicky!" cried the girl reproachfully; and she put her kind young arms round the ex-burglar's neck.

"Unless," said Le Shore, "you care to transfer that to my 'crib,' Mr. Hissey."

The butler cleared his throat.

"Well, I do care, sir," he said hoarsely, nevertheless, "since you seen fit to cut that moonshinin' lay. And as to cribs——"

"Molly," said Richard, "there's papa calling."

A MARTYR TO CONSCIENCE.

"I HAVE nothing to do with your scruples," said the magistrate; "the law is the law, and I am here to administer it."

Mr. Plumley licked his hand, and stolidly smoothing down his black hair with it, answered, as if at a distance, being a well-fed, unctuous man, "too full for sound and foam," "I'm a conscientious objector."

"Passive resister!" corrected a friend, a little eager man, among the audience near him.

"Eh?" said Mr. Plumley immovably, and without a glance in the direction of the voice, "I said passive resister, didn't I?"

"Whether you said it or not," answered the magistrate sharply, "you look it. I make an order against you for the amount."

"As man to man——" began Mr. Plumley.

"Not in the least," said the magistrate; "as debtor to creditor. Stand down."

"I shan't pay it," said Mr. Plumley, preparing to obey.

"If you say another word, I'll commit you for contempt," said the magistrate. "Stand down, sir!"

Mr. Plumley stood down, with an unspeakable expression—it might have been of satisfaction—on his huge, stolid face. Arrived at the floor, he beckoned his little friend to follow him, and heavily left the court.

He steered—the other acting as his rudder, as it were, and keeping his position behind—straight for his own domestic shrine, hight Primrose Villa, semi-detached. It was a beautiful little home for a widower unencumbered, calculated, like an india-rubber collar, to afford the maximum of display at

a minimum of cost in washing. The doorsteps were laid with a flaming pattern in tiles; red-aspinalled flower-pots, embellished with little dull glazed shrubs, stood on the lowest window-sill; the bell-knob was of handsome porcelain, painted with the gaudiest flowers in miniature. Within, too, it was all furnished on a like hard principle of lustre—red and yellow oilcloth in the hall, with marbled paper to match; earthenware-panned mahogany hat-rack and umbrella-stand combined, as red as rhubarb, and as acrid in suggestion to one's feelings; more oilcloth in the parlour; more mahogany, also, with a pert disposition in its doors and drawers to resent being shut up; glass bead mats and charity bazaar photograph frames on the whatnots, all so clean and pungent with sharp furniture stain that the rudder—Gardener by name—felt, as usual, the necessity of a humble apology for bringing his five feet four of shabbiness into the midst of so much splendour and selectness.

Mr. Plumley rumbled condescendingly in reply:

"You'd get used to it, Robert, you'd get used to it, if you'd lived familiar with it all your life, as I have."

"Ah!" said Gardener, "but I wasn't born like you, sir, to shine."

If he meant that the other was a light in his way—a little tallowy, perhaps—his own dry, hungry cheeks certainly justified him in the self-depreciation. They justified him, moreover—or he fancied they did, which was all the same as to the moral—in continuing to act jackal to this social lion, who had once been his employer in the cheap furniture-removal line. He lived—hung, it would seem more apposite to say—on his traditions of the great man's business capacities, capacities whose fruits were here to witness, for evidence of the competence upon which his principal had retired. He got, in fact, little else than his traditions out of his former master at this date; yet

it was strange how they served to delude him into a belief in his continued profit at the hands of the old patronage. The moral benefit he acquired from stealing into the local chapel to hear Mr. Plumley take a Sunday-school class, was at least worth as much to him as the occasional pipe of tobacco, or glass of whisky-and-water, which his idol vouchsafed him. For Mr. Gardener, as a true "poor relation" of the gods, was humbly thankful for their cheapest condescensions.

"You stuck to your principles, sir," he said, standing on one leg and the toe of the other, in humble deprecation of his right to any but the smallest possible allowance of oilcloth. Perhaps he would have brought his foot down, even he, could he have guessed the true significance of his own remark.

"I did, Robert," said Mr. Plumley, placidly sleeking his hair. "I always do. Have a pipe, Robert?"

"Thank you kindly, sir," said the man. "That was a mistake you made, sir."

"Mistakes," said Mr. Plumley, "will occur. Have some whisky, Robert?"

"You're very good, sir."

"You don't like it too strong, I think, Robert? And how's the world treating you, my friend?"

"Much as usual, sir. From hand to mouth's my motto."

"Sad, sad to be sure. They'll distrain upon me, I suppose."

"I'm afraid so, sir."

"The inhumanity of the world, Robert! You do pretty reg'lar porter's work for Bull and Hacker, the auctioneers, don't you, Robert?"

"That's so, Mr. Plumley," said the man, wondering. "But the work's heavier than the wages."

"They'll be commissioned to seize the necessary goods. I wish you'd manage to give 'em a hint, Robert—over the left, you know, without any reference

to me—that there's a picture I prize (and that I've reason to believe a dealer is after), what would more than pay the two pun odd of the distraint if put up first. O' course, I can't appear to favour the matter myself, being a con——"

"Passive resister, sir."

"Thank you, Robert; being the one most concerned in disputin' the justice of the law. But a hint from you might settle the question at once. We aren't very good friends, Bull and me; and, if he thought I prized the article, he'd be moral sure to seize it, slap away, to spite me."

"The picter?"

"The picture, Robert. There it is."

It hung in an obscure corner, a dingy enough article, in an old damaged frame.

"It don't look the price," said Gardener doubtfully.

"It cost me more in a bad debt," said the ex-remover, busying himself with the whisky in his heavy, observant way.

"Very like, sir," answered the other, and coughed behind his hand.

"I know what you mean," said his patron; "that I was took in. Well, I've reason to think not, my man. I've reason to think that picture's worth a deal—say, fifty pun. Anyhow, I mean to try."

"A dealer's after it, you say?"

"Yes, I do say."

"Then why—with deference, sir—don't you sell direct to him?"

"Why don't I? Am I a man of business, Robert? Look about you. Have I learned, do you think, to take a hexpert's word as to the precise vally of a article that I see his heye's on, or to argy by induction that a good private offer means a better public one? When it comes to overreaching—hem!—a connoyser's a man like myself; so we'll just, by your leave, put the picture up to auction."

He carried the decanter back to its place in one of the shiny cupboards.

"Besides, my friend," said he, talking over his shoulder, "don't you see as how my conscience demands this seizure?"

"Not quite, sir, *with* humility, if so be as——"

"You're dense, Robert. Look here, I'm a conscientious resister, ain't I? Law ain't necessarily equity because the devil and Mr. Chamberlain frames it. There's some lawgivers that are Vicars of Jehovah, and some of——but perhaps you've never heard of Abaddon?"

"*Haven't* I?" said Mr. Gardener ruefully. "I was near run in once for tendering one as had been passed on me."

"He was king of the bottomless pit," said Mr. Plumley patiently. "*He* framed this here law what's made a passive objector of me. Well, if, in resigning myself to his unjust processes, I force the picture-dealer's hand, thereby making a profit elsewise denied me, don't you see how I round on the law—triumph over it—kill two birds with one stone, as it might be?"

"Yes, sir; I see that," said Mr. Gardener, though still doubtfully.

"You do, do you?" responded the other. "Well, then, the only thing is to make the law pay as heavy as possible by getting the picture run up to the dealer's figure."

"But the law wouldn't go for more'n its two pun odd," protested the jackal.

"Oh, you fool!" snarled the lion. "It's the moral profit's the game, don't you see? *I* gain by the very hact what starts of itself to ruin me. It's as plain as two pins."

Mr. Gardener scratched his head, and broke into a short laugh.

"Bless you, sir," said he, "it's clear enough; if

on'y you'll tell me who in all this here place is a-going to run up the dealer, since you can't yourself."

Mr. Plumley, bending at the cupboard, did not answer for a moment. When at last he did, rising and facing round, there was a curious pallor on his lips, and he had to clear his throat before he could articulate:

"You, Robert."

"Me, sir! You're joking."

"Never less so, Robert."

"I ain't worth a sixpence in the world, sir."

The ex-remover walked shakily across, and put a flabby, insinuative hand on the other's shoulder.

"I think I may say I've been a good friend to you, Robert?"

Gardener muttered an uneasy affirmative.

"To justify a great principle, Robert? It's a mere matter of form; it's—— Humph! A moment, if you please. Think of it while I'm gone."

A rap at the front door had obtruded itself. Mr. Plumley tiptoed elephantinely out, was heard murmuring a few minutes in the hall, and returned shortly in a state of suavely perspiring mystery.

"It's the dealer himself, Robert," he whispered, his little eyes twinkling. "He's come to make another attempt. I'll humour him—humour him, never fear. Now, you must be quick. Will you do this little thing to oblige me?"

"Supposing I were let in, sir?"

Mr. Plumley coughed.

"I guarantee you, of course. It's just a confidence between us. Go to fifty pound—not a penny less nor more—and let him take it at any figure he likes, beyond. He won't fail you. You'll do it, Robert?"

"I don't favour the job, sir."

"But you'll do it?"

"Well, yes, then."

Mr. Plumley showed him out, returned to the

parlour, finished his whisky-and-water, and called in the dealer from some hidden corner of the hall where he had lain concealed. He had braced his nerves in the interval. His attitude all at once was scowling and truculent—meet for the reception of the shabby loafer who now presented himself.

"What are you grinning at, sir?" he roared. "This ain't the face to bring to business."

"Oh! isn't it?" said the man. "Then I'll change it——" which he did, so suddenly and terrifically that the other cowered. The stranger snorted, and relaxed.

"What now, minion?" said he.

"Bah!" snarled Mr. Plumley: "it comes easy to a barn-stormer."

"Roscius, ye fat old Philistine," cried the actor, striking his breast with a ragged-gloved hand: "Roscius, thou 'villainous, obscene, greasy tallow-ketch!'"

"Well," said Mr. Plumley, wiping his brow, "I meant no offence, anyhow. Have a drink?"

The stranger breathed heavily, and assumed a Napoleonic pose.

"I will have a drink," he said; and, in fact, before he would condescend to utter another word, he had two.

"Ha!" he said then, ejaculating a little spirituous cloud, and his lean, pantomimic face was all at once benign. "Richard's himself again, and eager for the fray! To the charge, my passive resister, my heavy lead! Ye need Theophilus Bolton! Ye must pay!"

"As to that there," began Mr. Plumley, stuttering and glowering; but the other took him up coolly:

"As to that, dear boy, there's no question. You've withheld me from a profitable engagement——"

"Oh, blow profitable!" interposed Mr. Plumley. "And you didn't jump at the chanst neither!"

"To play a part for you," went on the actor

unruffled. "Well, am I to be Agnew, or Christie, or Sotheby, or who? My commission's five per cent."

"Well, I don't object to that," said Plumley, relieved. "On the vally of the picture to Gardener, that's to say. Call it done, and call yourself what you like."

"One man in his time plays many parts," murmured Mr. Bolton. "Put it on paper, dear boy. I have a weakness for testaments."

Mr. Plumley protested; the actor whistled. In the end, the latter pocketed a document to the effect that Joshua Plumley agreed to pay Theophilus Bolton a sum to be calculated at the rate of five per cent. on the ultimate selling price at auction (on a date hereafter to be filled in) of a picture known as "The Wood Shop."

"You'll be close?" said Mr. Plumley uneasily. "It might—it might injure me, you know, if it got about. Short o' fifty pound's the figger—you understand? Let Gardener secure it at that. I've my reasons. You come to me quick and quiet after the sale, and you shall have your two pound ten on the nail, and slip off with it as private as you wish."

Now, what was Plumley's little game? And wasn't he anyhow a good man of business?

He was at least such a sure student of human nature as to have made no miscalculation in the matter of Bull and Hacker's predilections. They seized, on the strength of Mr. Gardener's artful insinuations, the very picture on which the defaulter was supposed to set a value, and put it up to sale one afternoon on the tail of a general auction. Mr. Gardener bid for it (the practice was common enough amongst the firm's employés, acting for private clients, and Bull rather admired the man's astuteness in having suggested a seizure so prospectively profitable to himself), and a strange dealer opposed him. They ran one another up

merrily, and the room gaped and sniggered and whispered. It was an afternoon of surprises.

"Forty-six," cried the auctioneer—"any advance on forty-six?"

A local lawyer, Bittern by name, was observed pushing his way through the crowd.

"Good Lord!" he was muttering; "is the man daft!"

"Forty-seven," said the dealer.

"Forty-eight," bawled Gardener.

"Forty-nine," said the dealer monotonously.

"Fifty!" cried Gardener stoutly; and hung on the bid which was to quit and relieve him.

It did not come.

The auctioneer raised his stereotyped wail: It was giving the lot away; a chance like that might never occur again; let him say fifty-one. "Come, gentlemen! Shall I say fifty-one? No?" He would sell at fifty, then—sell this unique work at the low figure of fifty pounds. "Any advance on fifty pounds?" He raised his hammer.

"Not for me," said the dealer, turning away. "Let him have it."

Down came the hammer. "Gardener: fifty pounds," murmured Mr. Bull, with a very satisfied face. The purchaser stood stupefied.

Two flurried gentlemen at this moment entered the room. They seemed more rivals than friends, and each shouldered the other rather rudely.

"Too late, by gosh!" growled one.

"Not a bit," said the second, pushing past. We'll get the vendee to put it up again. I dare say he'll do it."

"Here!" cried the first, grasping at the other's receding figure.

Jibbing together, they made their way towards Gardener, who was standing in rueful and dumbfoundered altercation with the lawyer. A brief but

very earnest discussion took place among the four. At the end, the rostrum was invoked, the picture was replaced on the table, the two new-comers took up position. Gardener, mute and dazed, fell back, in custody of the lawyer, who stood with a hard, shrewd glitter in his eyes, and the auctioneer, blandly elated, raised his voice, justifying his own judgment.

The picture, he said—as he had already informed the company, in fact—was a desirable one, a rare example of that peerless master Adrian Ostade; and the recent purchaser—whose property it was now become—had been persuaded generously to put it up to auction again on his own account, in answer to the representations of certain would-be bidders, whom an unforeseen delay on the railway had prevented from attending earlier.

"We will start at fifty pounds, gentlemen, if you please," said he.

Mr. Bolton, in the background, pulled his hat over his eyes, and settled himself to listen.

That great financial strategist, Mr. Plumley, sat drinking whisky-and-water by lamplight. His pipe lay at his side. He had tried to smoke it; but tobacco flurried him.

"It should be about settled by now," he muttered. "Where's that Bolton?"

"Rap!" came the answer, upon such an acute nervous centre, that he started as if he had been stung.

He rose, made an effort to compose himself, and went to the door.

A spare tall figure detached itself from the dark, and entered.

"What the devil's been keeping you?" growled the ex-remover.

"Ah! you're short-sighted, my friend," said Mr. Bittern, and walked coolly into the parlour.

Mr. Plumley stared, felt suddenly wet, shook himself, and followed. When it came to creeping flesh, he felt the full aggravation of his size. The slow march of apprehensions, taking time from a sluggish but persistent brain, seemed minutes encompassing him.

"So," said the lawyer, dry and wintry, the moment he was in, "you coveted your neighbour's one ewe lamb?"

Mr. Plumley took up his pipe, blew through it, put it down again, and said nothing.

"You'd heard of Gardener's aunt's little bequest to him of fifty pounds, duty free, eh?" asked the lawyer.

"No," said Mr. Plumley.

"Oh!" said the lawyer. "He bid fifty pounds for that picture of yours this afternoon, and got it. On whose instructions?"

"Ask him, sir. He acts for many."

"It wasn't on yours, then?"

"Is that reasonable, Mr. Bittern, when to my knowledge the man wasn't worth a brass farden?"

"What do you say about holding him to his bargain?"

"I say, if he's bought the picture, he must pay for it."

"And who bid against him? You don't know that either, I suppose?"

"Nat'rally. Was I there?"

"Well, I've settled for him with Bull and Hacker, and brought you their cheque, less commission and distraint. Give me a receipt for it."

The great creature, elated with his own strategy as he was, could hardly draw it out, his hands shook so. But he managed the business somehow. The lawyer examined the paper, and buttoning it into his pocket, took up his hat.

"Oh, by the way!" he said, as if on an afterthought, "I was forgetting to mention that Gardener,

after securing the picture, put it up to auction again, at the particular request of some late arrivals, and was bid a thousand pounds for it. It turned out to be a very good work."

Mr. Plumley took up his pipe again quite softly, looked at it a moment, and suddenly dashed it to smithereens on the floor.

"It was a plant!" he cried in a fat, hoarse scream. "I'll be even with him—I'll have the money—the picture was mine—I'll—by God, I say, it was a conspiracy!"

The lawyer at the door lashed round on him like whip-cord.

"And that's what I think," he shouted. "The meanest, dirtiest trick that was ever played by a canting scoundrel on a poor brother. But I may get to the bottom of it yet, from the opening scheme to enlist Gardener's sympathies for a poor martyr to conscience, to the last wicked design upon him in the saleroom. I may get to the bottom of it, cunning as it was planned; and, when I do, let some look-out!"

As he flung away, he let in a newcomer, Mr. Bolton, by the opened door. Mr. Plumley, choking in the back-water of his own fury, had sunk into a chair, gasping betwixt bitterness and panic. He could not, for the moment, remember how far he had committed himself. He looked up to meet the insolent, ironic smile of his confederate. "Come along, dear boy," said Mr. Bolton. "Curtain's down. Cash up!"

He presented a claim for fifty pounds, and stood, his hat cocked on his head, picking his teeth.

"What's this curst gammon?" sneered Mr. Plumley, rousing himself.

"Commission," said the actor airily. "Five per cent. on the ultimate selling price of a picture."

"It went at fifty."

"Pardon *me*, sir. *Ultimate—ultimate*, see agreement" (he smacked his chest). "One thou' was the figure, and dirt cheap. Fine example. I'll trouble you for a cheque."

"Two pound ten. I'll give it you in cash."

Mr. Bolton whistled a stave, and turned round, his hands deep in his breeches' pockets.

"I can sell to the other party. Good-day to you, and lookout."

"Stop! Here's Bull and Hacker's cheque."

"I'd rather have yours."

Mr. Plumley, in his present frenzy of scare, with his brain refusing to work, would have given more to re-secure the document. The cheque passed.

"Now," he roared, staggering to his feet, "you can go to——"

"So-long," minced the actor; "meet you there, old chummy. Party in the parlour, you know. Talk over old times. Ta-ta!"

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