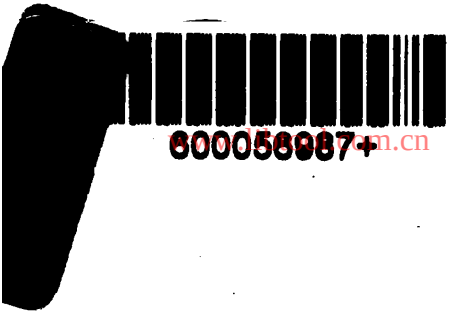
PAUL KNOX PITMAN



PAUL KNOX, PITMAN.

BY

JOHN BERWICK HARWOOD,

AUTHOR OF

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CHAPTER I.

MOTHER AND SON.

"MOTHER," said Percy Shafto, as he entered the morning-room, so called, at Brockspear House, "I have something to say to you."

Lady Elizabeth, who was seated before her writing-table, busy among her letters—she was a punctual and a fluent, if didactic, correspondent—laid down her

pen, and smiled graciously. Smiles did not suit so well with the strongly-moulded features of her ladyship as frowns did, nevertheless she almost always had a smile for a greeting to her son.

"I hope," she said, almost archly, "that it is not about money?"

Now, Lady Elizabeth did think that it was about money that Percy had come to speak. Grown-up sons, as many mothers know to their cost, are expensive members of a family, and often prefer to solicit the maternal intercession as to having old debts paid or procuring a supply of new cash. Percy was not extravagant above the average of young men of his age and class, but he did sometimes exceed his allowance, and on these occasions usually came to his mother to help

him. Lady Elizabeth was helpful enough in such a case, being both fond of her boy, and a notable manager, without whose imperious advice feeble Sir Thomas would never have contrived to keep a balance at his banker's.

"Well, no, mother; I don't want any money just now, thanks," answered Percy with some embarrassment, and then Lady Elizabeth raised her expressive eyebrows a very little, and looked at the young man more attentively than before, divining that the difficulty was a more serious one than could be bridged over by the familiar panacea of a moderate cheque. Percy, on his side, began to feel the task he had undertaken to be not quite so easy as, at a distance, it had seemed. It was the morning of the day succeeding that on which he had saved May from the

waters of the flooded Sprent, and he had fully made up his mind, while his head was yet upon its pillow, that he would lose no time in asking the sanction of his parents for his engagement, or quasi-engagement, to May Gwynn.

With Sir Thomas, Percy felt instinctively, it would be of little use to speak on the subject.

"What does your mother say to it?" would have been the baronet's nervously uttered inquiry, nor would the titular master of Brockspear have presumed to form an independent opinion concerning his son's matrimonial projects. To go direct to head-quarters, and to obtain, if possible, the consent of the real, if not nominal, head of the family, was the only practicable course to pursue.

Percy's nature was to be open as the

day, but he was not blind to the strength of the prejudices with which he had to deal, and he began to think it well to exercise a little diplomacy as to the manner of his statement of facts. There was not much to encourage him. The smile had quite vanished from Lady Elizabeth's face, like a transient gleam of sunshine from the surface of a steel-blue sea, and she sat in her high-backed chair, very upright, grim, and attentive. Even the aspect of the Tudor apartment, with its quaint oaken furniture, and the tapestry wrought by deft fingers that had been dust for centuries, seemed calculated to chill his ardour.

"Well," said the young heir of Brockspear, contriving to assume a tone of easy carelessness, "I remember to have heard you say, mother, that early marriages

were the best, and I am much of the same mind. A young fellow can't go on always mooning life away, out with the hounds at one time of the year, tramping the stubbles at another, dancing at balls, or rambling over the Continent, or even up in London"—he made haste to add, knowing that Lady Elizabeth, whose brother the earl had sown and garnered many a harvest of costly wild oats there, had a horror of our island Babylon—"but ought to settle down somehow."

It would have been worth a portrait-painter's while to have watched the face of the mistress of Brockspear during the enunciation by her son of the artful remarks above chronicled. It darkened and lightened, changing swiftly from storm to calm, and at length settled at fair-weather point.

"The fact is, my child," said Lady Elizabeth, quite playfully, "you have seen somebody you care for, and who seems to care for you, and hence all this sagacious sermonising as to the expediency of marrying early. Have I guessed right?"

Percy flushed up to the eyes—he was young and honest—and then laughed, rather dubiously.

"You are a witch, I think, mother. At any rate, you *have* guessed right," he said.

Now, in truth, Lady Elizabeth had guessed wrong. Percy had been visiting of late at various country mansions, at a ducal castle in especial, the noble inmates of which counted kin with his mother's own stock. And she had taken it into her head that it was Lady Florence or

Lady Alice that Percy wanted to marry. Such a match would be more than welcome. There would be no money, in the conventional sense of the word, only the traditional "child's portion" which falls to the lot of those born in the purple of British dukedom; but even twenty thousand pounds would do something with the Brockspear mortgages, and Percy, in any case, would be richer than his father; and then the blood! and the influence, courtly, social, political!

"Have you spoken to—to *her*, Percy?" asked the Lady of Brockspear Park. She did rather wish to know which of the Duke's girls was to be her own daughter-in-law. Lady Florence was the prettiest and the most taking, but she was petulant, lavish, and ambitious; with her it would be hard to steer clear of debt and

Parliamentary contests. Lady Alice was pensive, and of delicate health, and was, besides, her father's favourite. The duke would do his very best with the Ministry to get the husband of Lady Alice something good out of the national loaves and fishes. Percy might, after a probation of a year or two, find himself Secretary of Legation, Governor of an island, or in some other snug post, the avenues to which are as yet barred by no impertinently new-fangled rules as to competitive examination.

Percy had got into his head some dim idea as to Lady Elizabeth's mistake. He steadied his voice and spoke his mind.

"Mother," he said, "I fear, I greatly fear, that the choice which I have made is not one of which you will approve—not at once, I mean—but still my choice is

made, and my heart is given. I told you, last night, how, through Heaven's mercy, I was lucky enough, at Black Mill, to save the life of Miss Gwynn — May Gwynn."

"Well!" said Lady Elizabeth, with a terrible, half-incredulous look of rage.

"I have asked May Gwynn to be my wife," said Percy, frankly.

Lady Elizabeth rose up majestic. Her anger lent her a dignity which even her son, who was used to see her stirred to wrath by petty contradiction, could not but acknowledge. "You mean the girl from the school-house?" She almost hissed the words, rather than spoke them, and seemed to wait, with an eagerness that was almost touching, for a denial or softening down of what she had heard.

"I do mean the girl from the school-

house, mother," replied Percy, reddening. "I have loved her a long time."

Then Lady Elizabeth, quite contrary to everything that Percy had expected, broke down utterly, and began to weep. Percy had never seen tears in those haughty, passionless eyes before. He was very much touched. We can few of us behold without emotion the weeping of very proud people, from whom tears seem to be wrung painfully, as though they were drops of blood. But when he tried to console her she turned on him with all the fury of a hurt tigress.

"I never thought," she said, "wretched boy, that a son of mine—mine! would be the first to bring disgrace to Brockspear."

"Disgrace!"—Percy's flush had given place now to the paleness of an indignant anger that equalled Lady Elizabeth's own

—"that word is unjust—unjust and unreasonable—applied to the girl whom I have asked to marry me."

Then ensued a very stormy scene. Lady Elizabeth may be excused if her irritation led her to express strong feelings in strong language. She was mortified, hurt, disappointed. And she felt the shock the more cruelly because, Alnaschar-like, she had just begun to rear a glittering fabric of imagined success for her son's future, all built on his supposed success as a wooer in the ducal castle aforesaid, and now the basket of glass had been kicked over, and the scattered fragments bestrewed the earth. But a little while ago, and she had been projecting her mind into bureaucratic intrigues for Percy's advancement, and now——

No wonder that she was wroth with him, no wonder that she was furious against May. Percy tried argument, but he might as well have argued with the north-east wind; he tried entreaty, but a stone sphinx in the Nile valley could not have been more ruthless than was Lady Elizabeth Shafto in the earliest sting of this dire and bitter calamity. The one soft spot in her heart was her maternal love. And now she felt herself defied, humiliated, insulted, by this misguided boy's resolve to marry a foundling, a nobody, a penniless girl like May Gwynn.

Percy at last grew tired of the unseemly debate. He had borne himself from first to last in it as became him, not allowing himself to be drawn into a single undutiful retort, but firm as a rock upon the main point, that he would never give

up May, or be false to his plighted word to her. May was young and so was he. They could wait. Perhaps his mother would see the affair in a different light by-and-by. In the mean while he should certainly not go counter to her wishes and his father's, by marrying without their consent. But none the less should he hold himself as betrothed to May. And so saying, he went.

Lady Elizabeth, when alone, knitted her solemn brows and thought very earnestly, perceptibly indeed, had any one been there to watch her, for she was one of those few women, the muscles of whose foreheads expand and contract in frowning unison to the subtle thought-play of the brain. Then she rose and, after composing her ruffled features before the glass, rang the bell.

"I want the carriage directly," she said, in a voice that she vainly tried to render calm and steady; "tell them to make haste, James."

"The bay horses, my lady?" said the butler. Lady Elizabeth was methodical, and rarely drove out so early.

"The grays!" answered his mistress, and the butler—who, by the way, was the under-butler; Mr. Diprose, his superior, being yet in undress, and reading the newspaper in his pantry—retired with a conviction that something was amiss, and that Mr. Percy had a finger in the pie.

CHAPTER II.

AN EARLY VISIT.

"WHAT would you have had me do, father? or what answer, but the true one, could I give him when he pressed me so?" said May, sobbing; "I, whose life he had just saved —not for the first time."

"Do not distress yourself, my dear," said the kind old schoolmaster; "you are not to blame, nor, to do him justice, is young Mr. Percy, for what has occurred. For all that, however, I cannot but regret that he—and you——"

Here Reuben Gwynn ceased to speak, and seemed to fall into a reverie. "I wish," he said, after a while, "that you had liked Mr. Digby, the curate."

"Mr. Digby is a good man, and a true, large-hearted gentleman," replied May; "I hope we may be friends always, I am sure, but with Percy it is so different."

"I suppose so," said the schoolmaster, with a gentle sigh; "I know very little of such matters myself, but still it would have made me very happy if I could have known your safety in this world to be assured, humanly speaking, as the wife of Mr. Digby. This young Mr. Shafto has more, I grant you, to please the eye——"

"It is not that, father," interrupted May, smiling and blushing; "I have—this is a little secret between you and

me—" and as she said it she nestled prettily up to the old man, and hid her crimsoned face on his shoulder; "I have loved the other—Percy, I mean—oh, so long! all my life, I think. And he loves me with his whole heart, and he told me so again and again, and I was so glad and proud, and yet half sorry and ashamed, because he was so far above me, and I knew that all would be vexed that he should stoop to May Gwynn, who has not even a right to the name you gave her, father dear!"

And then May flung her arms round the old schoolmaster's neck, and began to cry, and Reuben's own eyes grew dim, and he did his best to comfort her.

"Mr. Percy is a fine young fellow, that I own," he said; "he really does seem good, as well as bold and pleasant-spoken,

and—I do think he is in earnest, my dear, I really do."

"In earnest?" May opened her large blue eyes, and looked wonderingly at Reuben Gwynn, as a child taking stock of the world might have done. She was not a child, nor was Capel a saintly spot whence all knowledge of evil was excluded. But it had never come into her imagination that a young gentleman such as Percy was could be otherwise than in earnest. She had been startled and annoyed, under the beeches at Brockspear, when he had taken her in his arms and kissed her, but now she would have staked her very soul upon the young man's truthfulness.

"He is in earnest, never doubt," she said, half reproachfully. Reuben, with his larger experience, nodded his head,

somewhat ruefully; love-making and love had been things foreign to the walk through life of that lonely, studious man, but he was aware that the masculine conscience is elastic, and that hot pursuit to-day is quite compatible with lukewarm indifference or cold aversion to-morrow. And yet he did believe the young heir of Brockspear to be faithful and true, and it was with some reluctance that he forced himself to say—

"It is because I prize my little May so much, that I am sorry to see her jeopardise her happiness on the shoals and quicksands that beset an unequal marriage."

"Mr. Digby, too, is in station above me," said May hastily.

"Yes, but not so patently so as to set

every gossip's tongue astir, and provoke opposition and envy," returned Reuben. "These Shaftos, you remember, are great people in a pedigree point of view, one of those historical families the number of which lessens so rapidly as to give an artificial lustre to the handful that survive. It is very unfortunate——"

"Unfortunate, perhaps, that he cared enough about me to risk his life for mine," said May softly; and then old Reuben Gwynn shuddered, and clasped his darling to his breast, as the remembrance of how near he had been to losing her forced itself upon him. Was it unfortunate, after all, he wondered, or ought he rather to trace the work of destiny in bringing together these two young people, of different degrees on the social ladder, it is true, but otherwise to all appearance

fitting mates one for the other? If only Percy had not been heir to a baronetcy, and his mother a less exacting dame than Lady Elizabeth!

So the old schoolmaster was very gentle with May, taking her part as it were against herself, and soothing her when she began, with a sweet inconsistency, to impute it as a fault of her own that Percy loved her. And in this Reuben Gwynn, too, was acting nobly, in that he set aside or crushed down, as unworthy, certain private selfishness of his own. For there is this difference between a father's fondness and a mother's, that the former is jealous of the lover who comes to bear off the treasure of his home and hearth, and the latter is not. And Reuben felt a slight grudge against Percy for wanting

to deprive him of the prop and stay of his old days.

Both agreed that no marriage was possible as yet. May was young. Percy was not his own master. There could be no hurry. But Reuben saw no objection to the engagement, which was likely to be a long one, being considered as binding.

"Did you give him a distinct promise, my darling?" asked Reuben.

"I told him that I never would marry unless I married him," answered May, again hiding her face; and the schoolmaster stroked her golden hair, and bade her be of good cheer, for all would yet be well. Percy, he said again, was a fine young fellow, gallant, frank, and chivalrous. And May, flushing crimson at the praise of him who was so dear to her, took Reuben's old hand and kissed it.

"I am so glad, father, to hear you speak thus of him," she said.

"And I wish, my child," said the schoolmaster tenderly, "that there were a sort of fairyland where you two young folks could marry and dwell, and never know care or sorrow—lead, I mean, such a life as I suspect would suit both of you, boy and girl as you are, and as reckless of the rough, stony paths of ordinary life as if you were absolute children. These unequal marriages——"

Reuben Gwynn came awkwardly to a stop here. His book-lore—for of personal experience he had but a scanty supply—told him how hard it is to overpass the barriers which caste and circumstances set up between those of widely differing degree. Percy might change his mind. The tedium of a long engagement might

damp Cupid's crisp wings. May's youthful beauty might fade before her betrothed could afford to take her to his home. Or she and Percy might marry, and the girl might live to rue the day when she became as the Apple of Discord in an estranged family.

"My only wish, dear May, is to see you happy," said the schoolmaster. The poor man, sincerely fond of his adopted child, proud of her rare beauty, proud too of her charm of manner, experienced some of the sensations of a hen that has hatched a duckling, and stands flapping her wings upon the banks of a pond, and clucking out unregarded warnings, while the downy nurseling takes the water with hereditary delight. His aim had been from the first to bring up May as a lady; and now a brilliant proposal of marriage

had been made to her, and Reuben was all but frightened at the idea of her accepting it.

"You do not think, father, that I have acted wrongly in any way—do not think that I should not try my best to make him happy, if I did marry him?" asked May. But before the schoolmaster could reply, there came a heavy sound of a carriage approaching at a swift pace, and both May and Reuben paused to listen, as if some instinct had warned them both that the approaching sound of rapid wheels had reference to themselves. The sound drew nearer and nearer yet, and in a minute or two the carriage from Brockspear Park rolled by the window and stopped in front of the garden gate, the fine gray horses in a lather of heat and foam, champing their bits and rattling

their silver-mounted harness, while the gold-laced liveries and emblazoned panels seemed to shine more brightly by contrast with the mean and grimy main street of the colliery village. Now, the Brockspear equipage was not one which made itself cheap by frequent exhibition in Capel. Lady Elizabeth was able to call on her friends at the rectory without positively traversing any portion of the straggling place whereof the Reverend Robert Churton had the cure of souls. And on ordinary occasions she was content to sit behind a sober pair of bays, whereas upon this particular morning the mettled gray carriage-horses, the finest in the Brockspear stable, were stamping their iron-shod feet before the door of the school-house.

"Lady Elizabeth it is," said Reuben,

somewhat aghast, "and I protest that she is coming here."

May said nothing, but grew red and white by turns, and rallied her spirit for the trial that she felt, rather than knew, to be at hand.

CHAPTER III.

A STORMY VISIT.

LADY Elizabeth Shafto stepped from her carriage and traversed the narrow garden-path that led to Reuben Gwynn's front door, with the stately tread and dignified bearing of one who takes the lead in a procession. Her ladyship's marked features, resolute demeanour, and firmness of purpose, were perfectly well known within a considerable radius around Brockspear Park; but never had she

looked more distinctly like Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth than when she rustled into the schoolmaster's tiny parlour, and brought the terrors of her strong gaze and beetling brows to bear upon May Gwynn.

"It is with this young—lady that I have to speak," she said in brief, harsh tones, ignoring the schoolmaster's timid proffer of a chair. Lady Elizabeth was strong, and of a commanding stature, and she chose to stand, overtopping May, and frowningly surveying her.

"So, Miss Gwynn, or whatever you call yourself, it appears that I have to thank you for entangling my son in a low love-affair that I almost blush to mention," said the Lady of Brockspear.

May winced as if she had received a

blow. The blood rushed to her face, and then she grew pale again, and made answer, slowly—

"You have been very much misinformed, madam, if you think that I—I—Oh, father, tell her!"

And here May broke down in a burst of passionate weeping, and Reuben Gwynn did his best to explain how matters really stood. But Lady Elizabeth scarcely hearkened to a word from Reuben Gwynn, but remained grimly contemplating her real adversary, her true rival, the girl that had fascinated her son. Now, all students of human nature know that women are, as a rule, melted by women's tears; but when some master-passion makes them dead to that sympathetic emotion, then indeed they are very callous, and flint-hearted upon

this occasion Lady Elizabeth proved herself to be.

"I have not come here," she said, drumming impatiently with her foot upon the floor, "to hear the mawkish praises of a suffering innocent. I have come to say that, whatever arts may have been used to trepan my son into a rash avowal, no impudent adventuress shall ever be allowed again to set foot within the threshold of Brockspear. It has not hitherto been customary with the Shaftos to pick up a bride from the gutter, as my son, I grieve to say, threatens to do."

There was something in this outburst of aristocratic insolence which stunned and humiliated Reuben Gwynn, much as it jarred against his fine intellect and cultured taste. Such personages as Lady Elizabeth are rare, fortunately for their

order. But the woman, hard, haughty, cruel, was not so much to blame as an impartial bystander would have deemed her. In any station of life she would have been proud, keen, and self-assertive. Do we not know meek mistresses and maids who domineer, and are there not salaried subordinates whose changeable tempers are a matter of interest to their paymasters! As it was, she had been born in the purple, and honestly believed that in crushing May Gwynn she was exercising a manifest right.

"Lady Elizabeth, my adopted daughter in no way deserves——" put in the schoolmaster, but he was cut short.

"Your opinion, Mr. Gwynn, goes for nothing with me in such a case," said the wife of Sir Thomas, fixing her menacing eyes on May; "it is from this girl's lips

that I wish to hear, if shame does not render her mute, how she excuses herself."

But May Gwynn, to Lady Elizabeth's surprise, met those fierce black eyes with her own blue ones, very steadily, and said, with a sweet dignity that her enemy felt to be natural—

"You startled me at first, madam, and —and frightened me a little, too. It was the first time that I had heard an unkind word, or been unfairly suspected, Lady Elizabeth, in my life, and that must excuse me if I was silent at first. As regards your son, I have no excuses to make."

"You entangle him in a wretched intrigue. You throw yourself in his way, and bewitch him with your mock-modesty and pretty looks," cried Lady

Elizabeth, who was by this time in a towering passion; "you, a hired girl who came to my house to sing at——"

Here Percy's mother came to a dead stop, and bit her lip, as she remembered with annoyance that she had not, at Mrs. Churton's intercession, offered to May the five-pound note which she had prepared as a guerdon for the "young person" from the school-house who had sung the birth-day ode at Brockspear, and knew that she had no right to describe May as having been in any sense a hireling.

"I have not deserved this," said May, struggling with her sobs; "I have not deserved to be told that—I—threw—that I ever sought to meet with Mr. Percy Shafto, that I ever tried to win his liking or his love. It is hard of you, Lady

Elizabeth, and wrong, and cruel, to tax me with what I have never dreamed of doing."

Lady Elizabeth's anger burned the fiercer for this protest. Percy's infatuation, in her eyes, could only be condoned by the remembrance of the fact that most young men were hot-headed and foolish, and would pay a high price for a beautiful toy. That the enchantress should have lured him on to a proposal of marriage was sufficiently provoking in itself. But that the enchantress should have the effrontery to deny that she had practised her arts for the bewilderment of her victim was an affront to the worldly knowledge of the Lady of Brockspear which it was hard to endure.

"Come!" she said sharply, "these ingenuous airs and graces may captivate

young gentlemen, but they are quite thrown away, I assure you, upon me. You have played your cards very well, Miss Gwynn, but I choose that you shall understand that this romantic affair must end. My son, I beg you to believe, is entirely dependent on his father, and I need not tell you that neither Sir Thomas nor myself will sanction a step which would entail a bitter insult to an ancient and honourable name like our own. I, for one, would sooner see Brockspear brought to the auctioneer's hammer than see you, Miss Gwynn, enter it as its mistress."

The trenchant ferocity with which Lady Elizabeth spoke, her almost painful earnestness and evident sincerity, were not thrown away upon May. She pressed her hands, through the slender

fingers of which the tears trickled slowly, upon her burning eyes. "Poor Percy!" she murmured, in a voice too low for mortal ear to catch the words, "and poor me!"

Lady Elizabeth quite mistook the nature of her emotion. Imperious as she was by temperament, and by habit thrifty, she could on occasion be large-handed and open-hearted. Looking upon May as conquered, she almost began to pity her. Now, to her mind, was the moment, in the language of the old Byzantine historians, to build a bridge of gold for a flying foe.

"I never meant," she said, more cordially, "that your disappointment should be without its compensation. Only let me know—perhaps with Mr. Gwynn's assistance—the sum of money which will suffice to——"

"A thousand pardons, Lady Elizabeth, if I venture to interrupt you. There are speeches best left unfinished, and I think that one day you will be glad to remember that this one, which seemed to offer money to my darling for—Good heavens, madam!" added the schoolmaster, trembling in every limb, "I trust you spoke in haste, and unadvisedly!"

Lady Elizabeth stood for a moment half rebuked. Such an outburst of indignant remonstrance from old Reuben Gwynn, that humble, gentle scholar, whom an unusual store of learning and reflection had not rendered a leveller or a grumbler even against such minor dignitaries as baronets and justices of the peace, was in itself striking. But what impressed Percy's mother the most was the look of wonder, pain, and sweet scorn

in May's blue eyes, as she gradually realized the nature of the proposition that had been made to her.

There was some good in Lady Elizabeth after all. Stirred by some quick womanly impulse, she made a step or two forward. "I—I didn't mean to insult you, my dear," she said hastily; "forgive me that. I did not intend to hurt your feelings—about money, I mean. But all this nonsense between you and my son Percy must come to an end. He will have to travel—should go abroad, I think, for a year or so—and you—well, if Mr. Gwynn, here, could spare you to me, to be my companion while Percy is away, or if I could get you well placed as a governess, I should be glad, and we might be—friends, we two."

Now, Lady Elizabeth deserved some

credit for this speech. Her aristocratic haughtiness was a part of herself. In softening towards May, in suggesting terms of compromise, she was doing violence to her own cherished traditions. That Percy should marry the girl was of course impossible. But she did wish the girl to make herself happy in some other way, and began, when face to face with May, to regret that she had tried to trample upon her. Never in her life before had Lady Elizabeth asked a person of inferior grade to be her friend. And when she said it, she felt her condescension to be such as a Brahmin might have used when proffering friendship to a Sudra, on whose unhallowed brows the sacred streak had never been drawn, in whose hair the mystic thread had never been knotted.

"You speak very generously, Lady Elizabeth," said May, lifting up her clear, steady eyes to meet those of Percy's mother, "and most gladly would I try to win your liking. But I am very much afraid that I shall not earn it. If Mr. Percy changes his mind——"

"Then?" cried Lady Elizabeth eagerly.

"Then I give him back his word," answered May, with a sweet simplicity that almost disarmed the anger sparkling in her opponent's eyes; "never shall he be troubled by the memory of May Gwynn."

"But if he be obstinate?" demanded Lady Elizabeth, hardening again.

"If he ask me, I will say to him," rejoined May, with gentle firmness, "what I said yesternight, I shall love no

other, I shall wed with no other. But I will not be the cause of home strife and family disunion, and I will never marry him so long as his parents oppose the match. Now, Lady Elizabeth, I have told you the very truth. I hope, if you are angry with him and with me, that your anger will fall on me alone."

"You shall not be my son's wife," said Lady Elizabeth, briefly and sternly; "of that, Miss Gwynn, you may be sure. Such a marriage would crush the hopes that I have nursed for years. But you are, both of you, very young, and will not be the first who have outlived a silly project such as this. My dear friend, Mrs. Churton, who was so kind to you as a child, would be shocked to hear of this!"

It vaguely occurred to May that the

Hon. Albinia Churton was the very lady of all others to accept the love-affair with gushing enthusiasm, and to forward it to the languid best of her ability; and perhaps somewhat of the same idea may have entered the mind of Lady Elizabeth, for she said hastily—

"In fact, *all* your well-wishers, Miss Gwynn, if sufficiently well informed, would counsel you to forget this absurd sentimentality. The sooner you do so, the better, I assure you, for your prospects and your peace of mind!"

Having discharged which Parthian arrow of feminine displeasure, Lady Elizabeth took her stately presence out of the school-house, and presently the gray horses, the silver-mounted harness, the hammercloth, and the emblazoned panels vanished from the Capel street.

"You spoke nobly, my darling," said Reuben, as he folded sobbing May in his old arms.

"I spoke honestly, father," the girl replied amidst her tears. "Whilst he is true to me I will be true to him. Nay, when he gives me up, I will love him still, to the last. But we shall never marry, never be happy, I foresee, for pride bars the way."

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT THE BARONET SAID.

"YOU feel well enough, to-day, I hope, to give me your advice on a subject that has pained and vexed me more than I can explain to you?"

So said Lady Elizabeth, as she entered what was known at Brockspear as the "study" of the nominal master of the house. Sir Thomas had never been much of a student at any time, a Guide to Whist being supposed to be the volume

over which he had pored the longest; but a county magistrate is presumed to have public responsibilities, and accordingly the baronet's book-shelves were as fairly furnished with legal works of reference as those of a justice of the peace have need to be. There were maps also, of the county, and of the hundred, and again of the Shafto property, both as it had been and in its present shrunken condition. And there were piles of leases, releases, covenants, and other documents relating to land, neatly arranged on side-tables, and carefully tied with red tape or green ribbon, the contents of which would probably have been as Hebrew or Assyrian to the enfeebled brains of the actual life-tenant of the estate.

Sir Thomas, since his late severe attack,

had been reduced to that painful state of intellectual and bodily weakness in which a man is at the mercy of others, and lives as it were on sufferance. He was not imbecile or childish, but a very little would have sufficed to make him appear so in the eyes of duly qualified medical practitioners, or of Commissioners of Lunacy. He could not have passed creditably through the ordeal of any average examination into his mental faculties, and might at any moment, had it pleased those about him, have been declared incapable of managing his own affairs.

Some hazy perception that he was tolerated rather than respected, that he was a mere King Log, whom a push would upset, and an inert incumbrance upon the family estate, added to Sir

Thomas's habitual deference to his haughty wife. From a very early period in their married life he had been thankful to shift the burthen of business to her stronger shoulders, and since his illness any assertion of authority on his part had been but the shadow of a shade. There are men born to be governed—sent into the world, it may be said, bitted and bridled and saddled, and meekly waiting for the guiding rein and goading spur. Sir Thomas was one of these. He was not a fool, in the common acceptation of the term. His old London associates had not despised him. He went through the usual grind of social life reasonably well, a goodly gentleman, not wise, but neither vicious nor silly. But as to moral backbone he was a mollusc. Had he never married, he would have gradually suc-

cumbed to the double tyranny of his servants and his solicitor.

At that time the existence of Sir Thomas was not an actively disagreeable one. His easy chair, his cushions, and his footstool were judiciously placed at the proper angle by a very careful, middle-aged valet who had learned the art of making old masters comfortable. There were the newspapers, London and local, aired and folded, lying ready to his hand, and there too were the reviews and magazines, their leaves ready cut, arranged in tempting order. The small hot fire gave out the ruddy glow most welcome to the dull circulation of a languid invalid. The window-curtains were down just enough; the screen and heavy damask *portière* kept out the very suspicion of a draught. The baronet's

appetite was not neglected. His favourite dishes were remembered. He had seldom dined so well as since his recent convalescence. Yet he was not happy.

No man, and perhaps no woman, quite likes the covert feeling of being humoured and soothed like a child, of meeting with obsequious attention, not sympathy, everywhere. Sir Thomas knew that things were not with him as they had been. Matters were made too smooth for him. He regretted the days when grumbling gardeners, growling grooms, and farm bailiffs of an angular habit of mind, had been as thorns in his soft flesh. Nobody, now, growled or grumbled because of stable affairs, or garden administration, and Sir Thomas felt the less of a man and a landowner because of the removal of an old annoyance.

It was with somewhat of a thrill of pleasurable excitement tingling through his drowsy veins that the Lord of Brockspear braced himself up to hear what his lady had to say. Ask his advice, forsooth! Why, the very notion of such a seeking for counsel was a compliment to the rickety old man. He knew "my lady" to possess better brains than his. How clear-headed, and how firm of nerve, had she been in all those dealings as to the old mortgages that were as a cancer eating into the noble Shafto estate! But for her he should have been a poorer man by two or three thousand pounds a year, and Percy's future would have been by no means a bright one.

"Quite well, mons'ous well!" he said, shuffling with his feet, and straightening his back, and elevating his chin with a

smile; "and very ready, I'm sure, to do my best for you, Elizabeth."

Sir Thomas had been handsome, a comely, well-grown man. He passed muster still, physically, having a little pink yet in his cheek, being well shaven, well brushed, well dressed, neat, trim, and perfectly cared for, but his lower lip drooped, and his vacant eye could with difficulty be made to fix itself steadily upon an object.

"Sorry, though, if something has gone wrong," he said waveringly.

"Something has gone wrong, shamefully, distressingly wrong!" said Lady Elizabeth, in her deep, Siddons-like voice, and then, seeing the invalid's nervous start and the tremulous action of his white, gnarled fingers, she added, "nothing in a business point of view, nothing about money, dear!"

Sir Thomas breathed again, and his beringed fingers left off shaking. He was, like some other country gentlemen, conscious that he owed a great deal more than he could conveniently pay, and dreaded foreclosure as an Irish cottier tenant dreads eviction. There were the acres and there were the rents, and the mortgages got their half-yearly payments pretty punctually; but if ever there were a sudden demand for a lump sum, it might puzzle even "my lady" to be ready with the cash required. But now he was assured, on the best authority, that no such crisis had come. A new thought occurred to him. "Not Percy —hurt himself, hunting?" he asked eagerly.

"It is about Percy that I have to speak," answered Lady Elizabeth, "but

he has not met with any accident of that sort. He has fallen in love, fallen in love with a low, designing girl," added the Lady of Brockspear, "and he has the audacity to tell me, to my very face, that he means to marry her, a creature without a shilling!"

"Who is it?" asked Sir Thomas, quite briskly, and gently rubbing his soft white hands together; "what's her name, then?"

We must be very old and frail before we outlive our greediness for gossip. Sir Thomas, in his innocent inquisitiveness, quite forgot that it was his duty to be horrified at what he had just heard, until recalled to a sense of the proprieties by the rebuke of his wife.

"Really, Thomas!" said Lady Elizabeth sternly; "I had expected you to

receive this—this disgraceful news, in a more becoming manner."

The baronet looked as contrite as some well-disciplined dog might do when chidden for whimpering for food before the biped portion of the household had leisure to attend to his wants.

"Mons'ous disgraceful, on my word!" he exclaimed, "if the boy really means it. Perhaps, however, it is a fancy of which he will grow tired before long."

"You do not inquire," said his wife austerely, "who is this young person that your son proposes to bring home to Brockspear."

Now, this was slightly inconsistent on the part of Lady Elizabeth, and even Sir Thomas felt it to be so. However, with meek hypocrisy, he replied, "Do I know her? I thought, from your way of speak-

ing of it, it might be some strolling actress, or—that kind of thing—that had turned the boy's head. There was young Lord Ogle—— "

"It is that young girl at Capel—the foundling, you remember, that was adopted by the silly old schoolmaster, Gwynn, who gave her his name, since she has none of her own—she it is whom Percy proposes to convert into the future Lady Shafto," said Lady Elizabeth impatiently.

Sir Thomas winced a little. That Percy would one day reign in his stead, and that the day was probably not far distant, was a fact that he could cheerfully admit. But he was not very much pleased at Lady Elizabeth's thoughtless speech, as an old king regnant is rarely delighted by a hint as to the great things expected from his successor. However,

he recovered his equanimity, and said, rattling his weighty watch-guard to and fro, in a meditative manner, "Little May Gwynn—well, well!" in a tone that did not imply very stringent condemnation of his son's selection.

"Of course you understand that it can never be," said Lady Elizabeth peremptorily.

"No, no, of course not, my love!" answered the feeble baronet apprehensively.

"You must speak to him, since my warnings and wishes are set at nought," pursued the Lady of Brockspear, with bitter emphasis. "A father's authority should yet, I imagine, even in these times, count for something."

"Yes, certainly I will speak to him, at your request, Elizabeth," said Sir

Thomas as his restless fingers disturbed the faultless tie of his cravat; "I'll point out to him the folly, yes, and the absurdity, of that sort of match, as a man of the world, before I—but between ourselves, my dear, I had rather, in my weak state, be spared the fatigue of an exciting interview like that. You could tell him, plainly, my opinion of his conduct."

The peevish contraction of Lady Elizabeth's mouth, as she listened to this speech, changed to a softer expression as she remembered who was the speaker. She knew her husband to be but as a puppet of which she pulled the wires, but her puppet was dancing well in his wooden way, and she had no desire to find fault with the ungracefulness of his performance. She had no real wish that the baronet should lecture Percy on the

sin of marrying beneath him. If her own eloquence was thrown away on the obstinate young man, what hope that the truant would be reclaimed by the pompous platitudes of his father! She had sought Sir Thomas less as a counsellor than as a sympathetic hearer, and, now that he had been duly impressed with a sense of the enormity of Percy's behaviour, his sentiments were such as his wife desired.

"The young giddy-pate!" said Sir Thomas, with a mild indignation; "good-looking youngster, too, that had only to ask and to have, among heiresses! It's money that Percy ought to marry — money — money — money!" and Sir Thomas raised his voice, and assumed an air of extra importance at the very mention of that valuable social commodity.

"I quite agree with you there," re-

marked Lady Elizabeth cordially. She did not say that her hopes had so recently been raised on high, and then cruelly dashed down, as to a ducal match for her son. But she agreed with her husband's dictum. Money, if rank and money could not be had in conjunction, was in itself a talisman for earthly ills, and had Percy told her that he loved a rich man's daughter, had that rich man earned his wealth as a rag-picker in the Paris streets, or by the slave trade, or in any grimy channels, she would have been ready with her motherly congratulations. But little May Gwynn! The thing was an insult not to be borne!

Sir Thomas was pleased to be hearkened to, and encouraged to talk.

"You see, Elizabeth," he said, in his senile way, "rich men of our station can

afford to please themselves. There was Lord Ogle that I talked of just now. He married—ah, well!—but then the Ogle property brings in sixty thousand a year, unencumbered. Percy's case is different, but he is a Shafto of Brockspear, and our baronetcy is of Charles the First's giving, and those old baronetcies of 1639 or so are getting scarce, very. I could reckon on my fingers——"

But Lady Elizabeth did not care for her husband's digital enumeration of ancient existing baronetcies. "I wish you could advise me," she said.

Sir Thomas looked up, flattered.

"You can't make anything of Percy?" he said slowly; "young dog! I know he can be resolute when he likes."

"I call such resolution wilful obstinacy," answered his wife, "but I admit that he is deaf to reason."

"Try the girl, ma'am," said Sir Thomas, with a leer of simple cunning; "she has a heart, depend upon it, and can be talked over. Give her a dose of the pathetics, set before her the ruin of the boy's prospects, lay on the colours thick and black, and I'd bet anything in moderation, if I were a betting man, that she cries, and sobs, and gives him up. I used to know women well," feebly chuckled Sir Thomas, "and they were generally like that."

Lady Elizabeth said nothing, but sat for awhile, deep in thought, frowning at the fire, as if she saw May's face imaged in the glowing caverns between the coals. Then she rose.

"Thank you, my dear," she said softly; "I hope I have not tired you very much. You know how glad I always am of your

advice in any matter of real difficulty. It is time, or nearly so, for your drops. I will send Simmons. Good-bye for the present." And she went.

CHAPTER V.

LADY ELIZABETH SEEKS AID.

"YOU, and you alone, dear Mrs. Churton, can help me at this pass," said Lady Elizabeth Shafto, with great earnestness.

"I should be glad, I am sure, to render you any service in my power, Lady Elizabeth," replied Mrs. Churton, in a tone of polished kindness, but without enthusiasm, from among her sofa-pillows. It was one of Mrs. Churton's bad days. Her head really did ache. Her frail frame

could scarcely rest even on the soft couch on which she lay stretched, among shawls and cushions, perfumes and essences within reach, the room darkened, and every sound without hushed in deference to the nerves of the invalid. To any less notable visitor than Lady Elizabeth, or to Lady Elizabeth herself upon ordinary occasions, Mrs. Churton would have been "not at home." But Lady Elizabeth had been urgent, and had gained admittance.

"I knew I could rely on you, knew that you would be on my side in this matter," pursued the Lady of Brockspear, drawing her chair a little nearer to the sofa; "how, indeed, could there be two opinions on the subject!"

"How indeed!" echoed Mrs. Churton, whose temples throbbed considerably, and

who conceived the wisest policy to be one of acquiescence.

"But the emergency is a real one," resumed Lady Elizabeth, with native energy; "Percy will marry this girl, if not prevented."

"Dear me!" responded the Honourable Albinia, stirring languidly among her cushions; "what a very headstrong young man!"

In her secret heart Mrs. Churton admired the courage that could afford to please itself in matters matrimonial, regardless of the very vigorous opposition of so important a personage as her strong-willed neighbour. She had never had a son of her own, and therefore had none of that fellow-feeling with Lady Elizabeth's embarrassments which serves as a link between the mothers of young

gentlemen prone to kick over the traces as they trot through their early stages along life's highway.

"And the girl," went on Lady Elizabeth, "will marry him unless something be done, and done quickly. The law ought to secure us against such things."

Percy's mother may have had some vague knowledge of the condition of old France, before the Bastile fell, dragging down with it the throne that it had bolstered, and when *lettres de cachet* were to be had for the asking, when solicited by dames of high degree like herself. It would have been very convenient to have consigned Percy, *de par le roi*, to lonely meditations in the tower of the Bertaudière, and to have sent May to herd with other female prisoners in the plebeian Fort L'Evêque, there to learn humility.

But a British Secretary of State has never been so accommodating as a French Minister under the Bourbons was apt to be.

"Can he—that is—will he, marry if Sir Thomas and yourself positively forbid it?" asked Mrs. Churton slowly; "I should have thought no clergyman in the diocese——"

"Ah, my dear friend," interrupted Lady Elizabeth with a gloomy air, "a registrar's office, I am told, makes young people independent of checks of that kind; besides, a special licence is to be had from a suffragan, or whatever the word is, for money, and then there are Scotch marriages. My only hope, as I said before, is in you, and in your influence over the girl."

"I hardly know that I can do any-

thing," rejoined Mrs. Churton peevishly; "I have no authority over her; never in my life scolded or lectured her in any way."

"That is just the reason, Mrs. Churton, if you will but see it," persisted Lady Elizabeth, "why she will hearken to you now, when you, her old patroness, her kind friend, tell her what you think of her conduct."

Mrs. Churton was very far from being sure what she really did think of May's conduct. She had, like most good women, a spice of romance in her disposition, and for a moment, when she first heard of the mutual attachment of Percy Shafto and May Gwynn, she had been rather pleased, if a little fearful of the result. It was with a stifled sigh, and somewhat of regret, such as a child might evince on

hearing that a charming fairy tale was quite untrue, that she made answer—

"Poor thing, I suppose she ought to be taught that no such union is possible."

"Mrs. Churton," said Lady Elizabeth decisively, "you know how I love my son, the only child I ever had to weave hopes for. You may believe how earnest I am on this subject when I tell you that I would rather see my boy on his death-bed than hear of such a match as this. I am not one to use exaggerated phrases, or to say more than I mean. I do hope you will do your best for me —for us—to keep an ancient family free from——"

Lady Elizabeth was about to round off the sentence with the word "disgrace," but she left it unspoken, remembering her hearer's partiality for May.

"It *would* be a terrible thing!" said Mrs. Churton, perhaps reflecting on the stormy future that might await her favourite, if brought into juxtaposition with such a mother-in-law as the mistress of Brockspear Park.

"It would be very sad," returned Lady Elizabeth, with a touch of feeling in her voice, "sad in every way. I have never known Sir Thomas so determined on any point as he is in opposing what he, and I too, cannot but regard as Percy's social suicide. If the wretched boy marries this—this Miss Gwynn, he will not have a shilling while his father lives, except what he can raise among the Jews. And Sir Thomas has quite rallied lately, and Dr. Trotman takes a very hopeful view of the case. Then, afterwards, there is my jointure of nearly two thousand a year,

as you are aware, I think, and Percy will have but a cramped income until the long leases fall in, and ought not to marry, unless he had had the sense to choose some one who would be a help, instead of a clog to the family. It is not money alone. Just think of the way the news will be received at my cousin the Duke's, and at Staincourt, and Harley, and at every house at which a Shafto has always been welcome. All Percy's old friends will look coldly upon him. It is hard to bear!" And the speaker pressed her coroneted handkerchief to her eyes.

Mrs. Churton's undecided sympathies began to sidle and edge themselves towards the visitor. Personally, she very much preferred sweet May to the beetle-browed Lady Elizabeth. The families at Brockspear Park and Capel

Rectory had been on intimate terms for years and years. But it is astonishing how very long our acquaintance may endure with those whom the world calls our friends, without our ever getting beyond the cold outer crust of conventionality, where natures are uncongenial. The Honourable Albinia Churton was a disappointed woman. She had loved her Robert, and attributed to him qualities which he lacked as a beast lacks wings, and married him under the blundering belief that he had such qualities, and found him an honest, rough, commonplace man, and suffered for her mistake.

Lady Elizabeth Shafto had knowingly married a fool, or, if not a fool, at any rate a dull, pompous man, with an impaired constitution and a feeble intellect. Her own hard head had supple-

mented her spouse's deficiency of brain-power. Her own iron will had forced respect and duty and good offices from those around her. She had despised the rector's wife as an affected, self-indulgent person, and had not been careful enough to keep her opinion to herself, for some echo of it not to have reached Mrs. Churton's ears; yet Mrs. Churton began to sympathise with Lady Elizabeth.

Class feeling, caste feeling, *esprit de corps*, call it by what name you will, is a sentiment singularly strong and binding. The bullied school-boy swears by the public school at which his experiences are of birch, fagging, and the prefectorial use of the ground-ash. The cavalry soldier would die for the colours of the regiment in which he is a butt for cruel horse-play and the belt-strokes inflicted by illegal

sentence of a troopers' "district court-martial." So did Mrs. Churton make up her mind that Percy and May ought not to marry, because Lady Elizabeth, whom she rather disliked, was of her own order, and was violently opposed to the match.

"If I really could be of use in this!" said the invalid more resolutely, as she raised herself from among her pillows; "if I thought expostulation from me would be of any real service, I would not hesitate to promise."

Years had elapsed since Albinia Churton had spoken so much to the purpose. But nerves are strange harp-strings, on which chance and design play tunes more or less in harmony. Those of the rector's wife were decidedly the better, braced as it were by Lady Elizabeth's visit. Her headache was all but cured. Even her

usual languor had diminished, and there was almost a briskness in her tone as she uttered the last words.

"You can be of great, of inestimable use," urged Lady Elizabeth, whose hopes rose high as she saw the effect which her pertinacity had produced. "Miss Gwynn will believe you, because she knows you have her interest really at heart. I do assure you," added the visitor quickly, "that I believe the truest kindness to the girl would be to prevent her from ever seeing Percy again. She will forget this youthful folly, will meet with some one else, some one in her own class——"

"But you forget, dear Lady Elizabeth," interjected Mrs. Churton, "that we are quite in ignorance as to what her own class, poor darling, may be. For anything we know, she may be our equal in

the accident of birth, as she is, excuse me, in all else."

"I do not believe in romantic histories of lost heiresses," said Lady Elizabeth, knitting her portentous brows, and speaking in her deepest contralto; "we have to take the world as it is, and to see Miss Gwynn as the Capel schoolmaster's adopted daughter. As such, she is no match for a Shafto of Brockspear. Come, my dear friend, do not let your liking for this girl blind you to the cruel injury which such a marriage would inflict upon us all. You and I, I may say in confidence, stooped a little from our own degree when we consented to marry commoners, and I think you can appreciate my feelings in the present case."

Mrs. Churton was not strong-minded enough to be quite unaffected by this

appeal to the subtle freemasonry of superior rank. That either she or Lady Elizabeth had condescended very much in marrying as they had done she did not exactly believe. The Churtons were, in a pedigree point of view, perhaps a shade less illustrious than the stock from which she sprang. But then the Shaftos were a race by far more ancient than that of the Earl, Lady Elizabeth's father, and had fought in Border wars, and broken lances in royal tournaments, when the forefathers of the proud wife of weak Sir Thomas were attired in the flat caps, and buckled shoes, and grey jerkins of plain York burgesses and industrious wool-carders.

"I cannot tell whether my poor influence can avail for much, but I will try my best," said Mrs. Churton. "People

are happiest, I am sure, when they keep to the grooves in which nature has placed them."

Lady Elizabeth nodded a gracious approval of this opinion. She had scented social heresy in her friend's late allusion to the accident of birth. Indeed, to Lady Elizabeth's way of thinking, there was no accident at all in the matter. Sheep there were, and sheep-dogs, and shepherds, and it would have been presumptuous on the part of the woolly flock, or of the dogs that drove them, to cavil at the commands of their common master.

Now, however, Mrs. Churton was talking in a nice, sensible way, and the further conduct of the affair might safely be left in her hands. Throughout the interview Lady Elizabeth had exhibited

praiseworthy self-restraint. We have seen her, on a previous occasion, soften a little towards the young person from the school-house. But that was a mere fugitive impulse, and now she was as adamant and the nether millstone. Still, she would not talk ill of May, lest she should arouse in Mrs. Churton a spirit of championship. "I know I can leave it all to you," said Lady Elizabeth, as she pressed the hand of the rector's wife with affectionate emphasis, at parting; "pray do your very best for us all, dear Mrs. Churton."

By this time the Honourable Albinia's headache had been conjured away by the excitement of the interview, and Lady Elizabeth had scarcely driven forth from the rectory gate before she took her pen and, in her delicate small handwriting,

indited a note to May, begging her young friend kindly to come at once to speak with, most sincerely hers, Albinia Churton.

"You will go, Matthew, to the school-house first, but if Miss Gwynn is away, follow her, and give the note into her own hand; I wish very much to see her before dark," said Mrs. Churton to the servant to whom her letter was entrusted.

CHAPTER VI.

BROUGHT TO BAY.

THERE are few positions less enviable than that of the envoy, statesman, or advocate, who finds it incumbent upon him to plead a cause or to support a policy which in his heart of hearts he believes to be wrongful, hollow, and utterly unjust. Yet the thing must be done, is done, every day and hour. Counsellor Silver-tongue calls on all the powers to protect the poisoner, of whose deserved doom he

of my own daughters that I were compelled to speak thus, I could not have a more entire and absolute confidence than I now repose in your word. It was not your fault, dear. I never dreamed that it could be."

May took Mrs. Churton's weak white hand, glittering with rings, and pressed it twice to her lips.

"I—I never sought him, never tried to win a look even," she said, still weeping.

"No," answered the rector's wife, in her soft, soothing voice, "it was not my pet's fault that she was a pretty girl, a very pretty girl, or that a bold, impulsive young man, at a very susceptible time of life, should have fallen in love with my little friend. Not the only one, May, either. I don't think I betray a con-

fidence when I say that the curate, Mr. Digby, was talking to me about you, very lately."

May hung down her head, and her colour deepened. It was painful, not pleasant, to her to think of the pain which she had involuntarily given to the warm-hearted honest man whom she had rejected. There are girls who exult in their conquests, as a Sioux warrior boasts of the scalps that decorate his wigwam; but May was not of these. Mrs. Churton mistook the nature of her emotion.

"Need Mr. Digby be quite without hope, my dear?" she said. "A better man, or a truer, I never knew. He would make you a good husband, May."

"Mrs. Churton!" exclaimed May, looking up with a quick, reproachful glance, the tears yet clinging to her eye-

lids; "have you known me so long, and yet so little, as to think that I could change like that?"

"I meant no harm, my dear," expostulated the Hon. Albinia; and then she sighed. It would have been so charming and in every way satisfactory a solution of the imbroglio if May could but have been converted into Mrs. Charles Digby. The curate was long descended, too, and had titled relatives whom he rarely saw, but who might conceivably deign, from their Olympian height of cloudy grandeur, to "do something" for their kinsman on the occasion of his marriage. With him, May's future might have been assured as one of modest comfort.

"And you don't like him—can't like him?" said Mrs. Churton.

"I like him, and respect him, and wish

him well," answered May unfalteringly. "I never saw any one, except Paul Knox, whom I should so gladly have had for a brother. But I could never have cared for him in any other way."

"Ah! then we will think no more of that," said Mrs. Churton, whose temples were already throbbing, and who knew that the heaviest part of her task remained to be done. "But, my dear, this affair between you and Percy Shafto can never, never come to any good ending."

"I suppose not," said May piteously; and the corners of her poor little mouth began to droop, and the big tears welled up to her blue eyes, so that Mrs. Churton had to steel her own heart very much to enable her to discharge herself creditably of her mission.

"I think so well of him, and I know so

much good of you," pursued the rector's wife, "that I do hope the mischief which I otherwise foresee may be averted, and that you may both of you live to be thankful for the thwarting of this—this youthful fancy"—Mrs. Churton could think of no more unhackneyed expression —"of yours. I am afraid we should have but a sad world of it if people always married their first loves."

May was silent. To a young, loving heart, any suggestion of change or fickleness has a cold-blooded, cruel sound. She was not philosophical enough to find comfort in the idea that time might bring with it the Lethe draught of indifference. Mrs. Churton continued: "A gentleman of Percy Shafto's degree has duties, you must remember, my dear, as well as rights. There is a dilapidated estate to

be built up again, a grand old name to be maintained with credit in this country-side, dependants to provide for, relatives to conciliate. Percy, whom I have known since his infancy, is precisely one of those young men whom the world will welcome with its kindest smile, on condition that he does nothing to derogate from the test of its good opinion. But—forgive me, May—he must not marry—beneath him!"

"Must not marry—me?" said May slowly, as she fixed her sorrowful eyes on the face of her early friend. "Ah! why, why, then, did he come to me at all?"

"He did it because he was a generous boy," answered Mrs. Churton promptly—she had entered cordially into her task by this—"and you, because you are a good and noble girl, will not let him have cause to rue the day that you two ever

met. You must be the wiser of the two, May—must have prudence for both—must save him, dear, dear May, from himself, be the cost to you howsoever heavy and sore."

Mrs. Churton had touched the right chord now. Self-sacrifice is an idea so glorious and so pure to the imagination of a good girl or a good woman—so hallowed, and so lifted above the common grovelling greed of earthly passions—that it exercises a strange fascination of its own. And to a girl who loves, as May did, from the very depths of her innocent heart, the fascination is resistless.

"I will—do what is right—dear Mrs. Churton—I will——"

May broke down here, weeping so bitterly that her grief frightened the rector's wife, who began to doubt whether

what she did was justifiable. But May did not remain to listen to the feeble sympathy of her patroness. She rose up, bent over Mrs. Churton as she lay among her sofa-pillows, and without a word more, kissed her, and was gone. The Hon. Albinia remembered that parting, and the cold, hasty touch of May's blanched lips, till her dying day.

It was nearly dark—for autumn evenings close in fast—when May left the rectory. Through the gathering shadows of night she went, slowly and with uncertain steps, weeping wildly now that she was well away from the rectory and the risk of prying eyes—weeping as though she were one cast out from all hope of happiness. Suddenly from the dusk some one emerged and caught her by the hand.

"Why, May, May! don't you know me?" exclaimed a voice that thrilled through every fibre of her frame. "They told me I should find you at the rectory," went on Percy Shafto, "and so I was only too glad; but what is this, my love?" added the young man, alarmed at the girl's silence, only broken by the smothered sobs that seemed to be wrung forth from a bursting heart. "Has any one been hard or unjust to you, because of—me?"

"Not unjust—no—no!" answered May, in a low, broken voice, and struggling to release her hand. "You must not hold me thus, Mr. Shafto."

"Call me Percy, May," pleaded the young man; "and let me have your promise, once for all, to be my wife. I can't live without you. Better for me

never to have seen you; better for me to have been brought dead up the shaft at the Old Romans, like those poor fellows in the fiery seam, than to have any answer from you now, except 'yes,' May darling."

"Do not press me for an answer now. I cannot give it," said May feverishly. Her own voice, as she said the words, sounded strangely to her ear.

"I must press for an answer," returned Percy, still holding her hand in his. "And, May, let no highflown scruples be allowed to come between us two, or to mar the happiness of both our lives. Even my mother must in time be brought to hear reason. She is fond of me, after all; and when she comes to be convinced that to separate us two would be to turn me into a broken man, reckless what became of him, she must—— "

"You try me too much!" exclaimed May, again striving, and this time with success, to free her hand from Percy's grasp. "To-morrow—yes, to-morrow, at latest, I will—that is, you will learn. But pray, pray, do not follow me now!"

She broke away from him as she spoke, and it was but a brief glimpse of her tear-stained, lovely face which he could catch, before she was hurrying away down the lane. Percy stood perplexed, watching her slight figure until it was lost in the shadowy twilight that was deepening fast.

"They have been lecturing her among them"—thus it was that Percy muttered between his teeth—"lecturing and hectoring until they have almost persuaded her that nature is wrong, that truth is wrong, and that love is a sin and marriage a

crime, without the jingle of money-bags. I am my own master, though, within certain limits, and—— "

And then it occurred to Percy that to win over Mrs. Churton to his side would be a serviceable stroke of social diplomacy. His old friend, May's early patroness, a weak, romantic lady—young folks are sharp critics of their seniors—ought to help, instead of hindering, a love affair. Yes, he would drop in to-morrow morning at the rectory, detach Mrs. Churton from her alliance with Lady Elizabeth, and perhaps persuade her to order out her pony-carriage and accompany him on the solemn visit which he proposed to pay at the school-house. Chewing the cud of this design, Percy went home.

May, too, went home. On reaching the school-house she shut herself up in

her room—the tiny, pretty room, with the fragrant creeper peeping coquettishly in, and the garden lying peacefully beneath the window, which had been hers as a child—and, with her a most unusual precaution, locked the door. Presently, the preparation of the old schoolmaster's frugal supper claimed her care, and she went down to the little parlour, where the servant-girl—a raw-boned, slipshod lass of fifteen, fresh from Brankspeth Workhouse—was clumsily laying the cloth for the evening meal.

There was not much conversation that night between Reuben Gwynn and his adopted daughter. May, sad and silent, tried to put a brave face on the matter of her misery, and read a little, and worked a good deal, plying her needle, as women will ply some instrument of the kind

when the very guillotine is waiting for them, and affecting unconcern in a manner that might have imposed upon Reuben, had not his affection for May sharpened his perceptions.

"I'll speak to her in the morning." Reuben Gwynn revolved these words in his mind a score of times before he went to bed. The opinion was gradually forcing itself upon the old schoolmaster that there was risk of a broken heart or a crushed spirit to his darling from the obstinate opposition which Percy's relatives, as represented by Percy's mother, had offered to the match. And, sooner than that, Reuben—meek, placable man as he was—would have bidden defiance to all the fine ladies chronicled by Debrett.

"I'll speak to her to-morrow," thought the schoolmaster. Alas! to-morrow!

CHAPTER VII.

A LONG FAREWELL.

"MY dearest, dearest father—for such you are to me—you will never know what it has cost me to take such a step as this, to which sorrow has driven me at last: to leave you—to leave the dear home into which you took me, a poor little castaway, all those years ago. I have been so happy here, father dear, that I could not have torn myself away, even now that I am so very, very wretched, were it not

that it has been borne in upon my mind, for months and years, what a burden I am upon your slender means, dear, and how many little luxuries and comforts you have denied yourself, uncomplaining, that May might still find food and shelter beneath your roof. I have thought, again and again, that it was my duty to go forth into the world and earn my own livelihood, even before Mr. Shafto began to press me so urgently to be his wife.

"I must go. I have thought long over my position, and I must go. My stay could but cause unhappiness and dissension here, and make you poorer and poorer, father, who have so little to spare, and whose bread I have eaten since I was a child. You need not fear, for I shall be among good and worthy people, who will take me in, and help me to earn a

maintenance by honest industry. Nor is our parting for ever, father. I shall see your kind face again—when will it be absent from my memory?—and shall come back to the dear old school-house, and be again to you as a daughter, able, as I hope and pray, to be a help rather than a burthen to my kind, good protector in his old days. But this must not be until all this sad, sad business as regards Mr. Shafto's wish to marry me is forgotten.

"Forgive me if I keep secret the place whither I have gone. I dare not tell you, father, lest you should follow me there, and I could not return: so it would be but needless pain to both that this should be. Pray, say farewell for me to Mrs. Churton, a very kind farewell, with many thanks for all she did for me in old times.

Ask Mrs. Churton why I have gone away from Capel. I did not tell her of my purpose, but she talked much to me to-day, and can guess the reason. And I promised Mr. Shafto an answer to-day. Tell him—no, better tell him nothing, but that I shall never come back until he has forgotten me. And now, forgive me, dear father, forgive little May, when she bids you good-bye. Say good-bye, too, to brave, noble Paul Knox, from

"MAY GWYNN."

Such were the contents of the letter, tear-marked and hastily penned, but carefully folded and heedfully addressed, which Kitty Lob, the youthful domestic of whom previous mention has been made, put into Reuben's hands on his descending, at his usual hour, to breakfast. There

was no breakfast eaten in the school-house parlour on that sad morning. Kitty, blubbering excitably, and applying the corner of her coarse apron to her red eyes, told, in answer to Reuben's scared questionings, the little she had to tell.

"Miss May be goan away—goan, I'm thinking, sir, for good and a'. She coomed to my bedside, afore the light, and says she, 'Kitty, there's something I want 'ee to do for me, an' thet's to gie this letter to Mr. Gwynn directly he cooms down i' the morn; but,' says she, 'promise me, there's a good girl, not to disturb un afore, nor yet break his sleep, but keep quiet.' An' she gave me a shillin'—here it be," continued Kitty, displaying the coin between her finger and thumb; "an' she wished me good-bye, quite kind and civil like, but in a

sort of way that makes me cry when I think o't, though then I did but gape at her. An' she's goan! Her door be shut, but I did peep into her room, and saw the bed hedn't been slep' in, and all the drawers were pu'ed out, an' the window open, and she goan!" And here the small servant's voice broke down, and she broke out into a wild outburst of vehement, untutored grief. Fresh from the ways of the grim, hateful Union at Brankspeth, Kitty Lob had softened, for the first time in her raw young life, to the gentle influence of May Gwynn, the first "leddy," as she said, that she had ever "spakken till," and to her as thoroughly a lady as if May, in pearls and white satin, had been newly presented at Court.

Reuben Gwynn staggered rather than

walked up the narrow stairs. May's door was closed. Twice he knocked at it, calling aloud by name upon its absent inmate. Then he opened the door of May's tiny bed-chamber. It was empty, the casement open, the drawers open; the cage void, the bird gone—just as the schoolmaster had known that it would be. But Reuben, sick and dizzy, sat down on the little white bed that had lain undisturbed all night, and gazed around him like one who awakens from the delirium of a fevered dream.

May was gone. The bright, sweet child, that he had harboured from the far-past time of the Capel railway accident, had left him.

There was nothing to be gleaned from Kitty Lob. She had told all that she knew, and Reuben vainly tried

threats and bribes, for no further crumb could be extracted from the young serving-lass. Then Mr. Gwynn, thrusting aside his untasted breakfast, bethought him of Mrs. Churton. May had spoken in her letter of Mrs. Churton as one who could throw light on dark places in her hastily-written letter, and to Mrs. Churton he must go. But the hours of gentlefolks, so Reuben ruefully thought, are later than those of even certificated schoolmasters, and May's father by adoption had to chafe and fret away the time before he could present himself at the rectory.

At the rectory, Reuben Gwynn, on asking for Mrs. Churton, was shown direct into the drawing-room. He had been in the house once and again, but always had been ushered into the study,

into the study, where the Reverend Robert wrote his sermons and stacked his old hunting-whips and new fishing-rods. There he found the mistress of the house, and with her Percy Shafto.

At the first glimpse of Reuben Gwynn's face and the sorrow that was stamped there, Percy grew white to the very lips. Twice he tried to speak, but a strange huskiness clogged his voice. Mrs. Churton it was who spoke first.

"Mr. Gwynn," she said, in a tone of unfeigned concern, "I hope May is not ill?"

The Hon. Albinia had heard of love-lorn damsels whose cares had culminated in brain-fever, and it was almost a relief to her when the schoolmaster said curtly—

"No, madam; but she has left me."

"Left you, Mr. Gwynn!" The evident astonishment of the Rector's wife to some extent disarmed Reuben's rising anger. The schoolmaster was, as we know, humble by temperament and by conviction, and entertained a simple reverence for the higher powers, not universal among trained teachers such as he was. But he had come up to the rectory with the notion that he had the right to demand an account of the treatment which May had received there, and he did so, but in milder accents than he had meant to use.

"She refers me, Mrs. Churton, in this" —and with tremulous hand he held out the letter of which Kitty Lob had been the keeper—"to you, for an explanation of the manner in which she was driven from her home. That she was with you

so late as yesterday evening, I know. She came back sad and silent. This morning she was gone at daybreak, and left this letter—read it, if you please, madam—for me."

"She is not—that you know of—ill?" asked Percy hoarsely, as Mrs. Churton stretched out her blue-veined white hand, and took the letter that Reuben held out to her.

"No, Mr. Percy, she is not," answered the schoolmaster. He did not look on the heir of Brockspear with any great favour, thinking—as fathers by blood as well as by adoption are sometimes in moments of irritation prone to think—that, but for the meddlesome conduct of the young man, his girl would still be fancy-free, and his home a peaceful one."

"And she gives you no clue—nothing

to guide you—as to her intentions?" inquired Percy eagerly.

Reuben shook his head. Mrs. Churton's hand, as it held the letter, quivered like an aspen's leaf, and the tears rose to her eyes and blurred the writing.

"You read it, Percy!" she said, and the young man almost snatched it from her, and ran his eyes hurriedly over the lines.

"She must have been cruelly, wickedly used," he said, stamping his foot, in utter forgetfulness of the polite habits of society, upon the floor. "Why, I met her but last evening, coming away from this house, and she could hardly answer me but with sobs. She promised me, though, a reply to-day. Is it in this bitter way that it should reach me? You have been very unlike yourself, Mrs.

Churton, if you have helped my mother to hound May from her home."

The speech was a rough one. Percy, to the backbone a gentleman, stammered out some broken words of apology for what he had said. But Mrs. Churton was not offended, only contrite and half frightened.

"May Heaven forgive me," she said, with trembling lips, "if I have given any cause for such a charge as that. I did speak to May, long and seriously, on the subject of your mutual liking, Percy, and the mischief that I feared would result from it, the family strife, the ——. But believe me, Mr. Gwynn, that I said no harsh or unkind word, and that May and I parted as friends."

Percy took Mrs. Churton's ring-adorned hand and put it to his lips.

"You are my kind friend of a lifetime," he said, in a voice that he could not render steady, "and will excuse my rudeness, since it half maddened me to think that May had been lectured and worried until Capel became odious to her. But where, where is she gone? and what will become of a young, innocent girl, flung so suddenly upon the world? Surely we can track her out, surely we can discover her hiding-place, unless, indeed——"

And here Percy grew pale, as a lover's fears suggested that May might have found a refuge in the yet swollen waters of the Sprent, or beneath the black ooze of the Tyne Canal. But this ghastly fancy vanished like a ghost at cockcrow, as Reuben Gwynn made answer—

"I have no immediate apprehensions

as to my darling child's safety, much as her going from me cuts me to the heart. She is so good and so helpful and sensible, that I make no doubt of her telling the exact truth when she says that she shall be with friendly and respectable people. May would not trust any who were not worthy of her trust. But it is the loss of her that grieves me. All the sunshine will be taken out of my life now, and——" But here the schoolmaster, who was not much given to murmur against his lot in life, dashed away the unaccustomed moisture from his old eyes, and said more firmly, "Would to God that I might find her, not for my sake, but for hers! She might grow tired, who knows, of the shelter she has sought, or become unwelcome there, and wander away, and be ill and poor among

strangers. Was nothing said last evening, that you can remember, Mrs. Churton, that might give us even a glimmer of hope?"

No. Mrs. Churton could remember nothing of the sort. May had not breathed a word that could be construed into a declaration of her wish to quit Capel. She had spoken but on one subject, had expressed her desire to do what was right, and had gone away in sore distress.

"We would grudge no expense if inquiries and advertising would be of use," said Mrs. Churton, in conclusion, with a comfortable matron's reliance on the power of the purse.

Reuben shook his grey head.

"Advertisements failed to find those belonging to her when she was a wee

thing, saved out of the great railway accident that made all England ring with the horror of it, and they'll scarcely avail now to find her, or to call her back, once she has made up her mind to seek a home elsewhere. But somebody of the neighbours may have met her, or, perhaps, by asking for tidings of her in the country-side, we may chance on intelligence that would prove useful."

"Of course! I was a dolt not to think of it!" cried Percy, snatching up his hat and riding-whip. It would, in his excited state, have been a relief to the young man to gallop over every mile of road east, west, north, and south of Capel, and to knock at every door for leagues around. But neither Reuben nor Mrs. Churton felt at all sanguine as to the result of so promiscuous a quest, and Percy, chafing

at the delay, was forced to own that his elders took the more rational view of the case. On one point all were agreed. May was to be sought out, at any cost of money or toil, were such seeking possible. And then they separated.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALONE IN THE WORLD.

IN the chill, quiet hours of the grey dawn, when the sleep of the healthy is soundest, and watchers by sick-beds dread the worst that can happen here on earth to the frail wasted form beneath the crumpled bed-clothes, May stole, mouse-like, from her little room. Pale, with large anxious eyes, that had been but rarely closed in slumber night after night, fair May Gwynn addressed herself to the bitter task of

leaving, perhaps for ever, the shelter of the roof beneath which she had grown and thriven since first she came beneath it as a tiny child.

How often had the girl kissed, with her warm red lips, the cold insensible walls of the dear, dear room that she loved so well, and that she almost fancied must love her, and know her, and reproach her insomuch as she was leaving it! At Reuben's door she lingered long, and then, noiselessly mounting a narrow stair not much less steep than a ladder, broke the sleep of Kitty Lob, to entrust to that juvenile handmaiden the letter, blistered with hot tears, that was addressed to the old schoolmaster. Then came a brief, sad farewell to the old garden, dimly seen through autumn fog, and then the sallying forth into the bleak bare world.

No runaway schoolboy, no fugitive defaulter, not the most innocent truant that ever slipped away under cloud of night from home, ever failed to feel the shame, the hesitation, or the remorse inseparable from a stealthy departure of this sort. May was not to be envied as she closed the little wicket, traversed the silent village street, and, after a twist or two in the devious way, found herself in Nut Lane, the very place where Percy Shafto had pressed on her his tale of love. Yet, with a beating heart and drooping eyelids, on she pressed, too intent upon her purpose to be turned from it now.

She had chosen this early hour for her flight because she should thus elude observation, and escape the prying eyes of those to whom she was known. She was well through Nut Lane, and out upon

the moor that lay brown and barren beyond, before there was more than a faint crimson to flush and dapple the pale pearl-grey of the eastern sky. Sunrises are more often described than witnessed, at least by those who know how to limn them in word-painting, for sailors, waggoners, and policemen care little for the cold coming of Aurora. Such as it was, this sunrise came tardily.

Some streaks of pink, faintly mingling with the sickly gray to eastward, the fading out of stars, a pallor and confused medley of colours in the heavens, then an undecided gleam of yellow light that seemed to struggle for existence, then a crimson reddening, then a lilac reflex, and next a steady increase of the yellow, modest light, and the dawn was a fact. This was no tropic or sub-tropic morning,

to break out glorious and golden, insolent with beauty and rich array of tints, but a pale, undecided English autumnal day creeping into being. Yet it came.

Very much alone in the world did May feel, as she walked on across the moor, keeping to the road that led to Thrumby. For the first part of her route she encountered no one. Then she met, here and there, a farming man or two, strangers all, but no miner bound for Capel, who would probably have recognized her. On she went upon the Thrumby road. There was not much communication between mining Capel and agricultural, or indeed manufacturing Thrumby, where handloom weavers, and other devotees of an isolated industry, yet kept up the whirr and click of their spindles and shuttles, in defiance of the

white gaunt factory, with its thousand windows and heart of throbbing steam.

At Thrumby dwelt a certain Mrs. or Miss Pringle, mistress by brevet rank—a wiry, kindly old maiden dressmaker, deft with her needle, and well thought of in her neighbourhood. Mrs. Pringle was a niece of Dame Thwaites, who had been Reuben Gwynn's housekeeper, and Mrs. Pringle had taken a fancy—most people did so, but hers was a strong one, and the more notable because Mrs. Pringle was the reverse of imaginative — to May Gwynn. May's simple plan had been to take refuge with this dressmaker, to pay with her work for her board, being able to use needle and scissors, as she knew, skilfully, and there to lie hid until she could shape out some scheme for the future.

But Mrs. Pringle was gone from Thrumby—gone away to Liverpool, so said her successor in the business, a tidy, smiling widow, who had never heard of May before, but asked no questions, accepting her as Mrs. Pringle's friend.

"She be doin' main well, so she writes me word," said the widow, seeking in her cupboard for the letter of her predecessor, "and be gettin' quite a connection, and more orders than she can take. But how pale you look, my dear!—sit ye down, lass, and take a bit o' breakfast wi' us, if ye will, and then I'll gie ye Mrs. Pringle's address, gin ye want to write to her."

"I want to go to her," said May, making up her mind as promptly as we all of us do when pushed out of the grooves of habit; "if you will kindly give me her address, I will go at once."

"What, a' the way to Liverpool!" demanded the brisk widow, looking up in wonder from the rashers frizzling on her gridiron; "well, lass, thou'st a brave spirit for thy years, but `thet's nouther here nor there. Sit ye down, and tak' thy tea, an' thy bread, and thy bacon, like the rest of us. I winna gie the address till after breakfast."

But the newly-established dressmaker, if thus peremptory on the chapter of refreshment, showed in other matters a delicacy for which May was very grateful. She asked no questions, and though by nature as curious as any other daughter of Mother Eve, did not so much as hint an inquiry as to whence May had come, or what was her business with Mrs. Pringle. Breakfast over, she extracted the letter from the recesses of her cup-

board, and by its re-perusal it was ascertained that Mrs. Pringle's residence was at No. 18, Stanley Street—or Stangate Street—or again, Stansfield Street—for the word would admit of all three readings almost equally well. As to No. 18 there could be no dispute.

"An'. if thou likest to take train at Barmsbro'," added the hospitable widow, "'tis but a three-mile walk, an' Capel's six, every inch on't, and Ned here, he'll show ye the short way to station."

Ned, who was a white-haired, brown-visaged urchin of some eleven years, did in effect prove himself a competent guide by rugged moorland tracks and winding lanes, until Barmsbro' was reached, and then, with a grin of delight at the gift of a shilling from May's slender purse, "to buy sweeties," trotted homewards. May

found herself the solitary occupant of the bare little waiting-room, and had to amuse herself with her own thoughts as best she might during the hour and a half for which it was necessary to await an available train.

For the first time, perhaps, during the ninety minutes of her enforced occupancy of the Barmsbro' railway station, did May learn to realize the change that had come over her fortunes. Hitherto she had had a recognized position in the world, now she was as a dead leaf blown before the wintry gale. No one knew her. The ways of the place in which she found herself were strange to her. How slowly the white-faced railway clock ticked away the seconds, as the tardy hands crept from one segment of the dial towards another! Would the time to start never come?

Other trains went rushing and clattering past, and still May waited. At last there was a little bustle in the little station, and a few parcels, and a few passengers, were in readiness, as May was.

How the girl's heart throbbed as she shyly approached the unshuttered window in the booking-office, and asked for her second-class ticket to Liverpool!

"Can't give you a ticket to Liverpool by this train—only to Doddridge," said the clerk, and then, softening as he saw the dismay in the pretty face on the outside of the window, added, "You'll have plenty of time at Doddridge, miss, to book afresh for Liverpool. Wait there you must, for above an hour. I'll speak to the guard of the train," he added, as he saw May's bewilderment, "and he'll tell you where to go, and put you right."

May paid for her ticket, and with trembling fingers took up the loose silver and the oblong slip of pasteboard. She had never travelled since that disastrous journey in early infancy which had led to her being flung on the world's mercy. She was timid, and had a guilty feeling, moreover, as to her recent flight, which made her try to shun notice.

"Luggage, miss?" said the porter, as he wheeled what little there was on the platform, and the slow train—none but the lumbering variety stopped at Bramsbro'—came rumbling up.

No; May had no luggage beyond the light basket on her arm, in which she carried a few needful things chosen from her modest wardrobe. She took her seat, and with a whistle and a jarring clang the train creaked away from

beside the brick platform. On it went, traversing an utterly unfamiliar district, where the sight of a pit-mouth and coal-bank was rare, and brown stretches of arable land, and meadows where the kine grazed, met the eye on every side.

A long and tedious journey, with frequent stoppages, brought May at length to Doddridge Junction, where she had to wait for an hour before she was allowed to purchase her new ticket. This time it was for Liverpool itself.

May had, as her whole worldly wealth, some five sovereigns, a present made her months before by Mrs. Churton. One of these she had changed at Barmsbro', and it proved sufficient to take her to her destination. Should she find Mrs. Pringle, and be received as she hoped to be, she would have no further need of ready money.

From Doddridge she travelled part of the way with quiet, decent companions enough—a farmer and his wife, a maid-servant bound for her new place, a small tradesman taking his little boy to school. But all these presently got out, and, shortly after the tall brick chimneys and barrack-like factories announced a manufacturing district, May found herself quite alone.

Travelling quite alone is a thing which to different people bears different significations. The well-to-do gentleman, who draws his soft rug around his knees and unfolds his newspaper as his train slides away from the terminus, very much prefers to be quite alone, and has often bribed some porter to procure for him the seclusion that he relishes. But a timid young girl, as she sees the shadows

of evening falling on an unaccustomed landscape, and is hurried past villages populous enough to pass for towns, and towns resounding, beneath their canopy of smoke, with the din of industry, feels her solitude very much. May felt it.

"You'll have friends to meet you, I dare say, miss?" said the grizzled old guard, as he inspected her ticket and added it to the heap of tickets he had collected as he hurried up the narrow platform, but he was too busy to wait for a reply.

Then came the glare of lights, the noise, bustle, and scramble of a large station, and next, May was out in Liverpool streets, in the darkness of a foggy evening. She was very timid, scared, and ill at ease, for she had never been in a town before; and the lighted shops,

the street-lamps, and the numbers of people hurrying to and fro, or lounging on the pavement, made her feel as if she had been suddenly plunged into some huge noisy wilderness, in which she was more alone than on the bleakest moorland.

Shrinking, now and again, from the rude stare of admiration of some would-be dandy or jaunty apprentice who caught a glimpse of her pale lovely face under the gas-light, and having more than once to turn aside so as to avoid passing some group of brawling sailors or half-drunken Irish dock-labourers gathered around a low-browed tavern or flaring gin-palace, May wandered for some time almost aimlessly to and fro. Wisely enough, she asked her way from no chance passenger, but it was often not until after

long hesitation that she could bring herself to enter a shop and make her shy inquiry concerning Mrs. Pringle's abode.

There seemed to be no Stansfield or Stangate Street in Liverpool; but then, again, there were two Stanley Streets, one in a bustling quarter, near the docks, the other in a quieter neighbourhood. Instinctively, May chose the latter, but it cost her a long and devious walk to reach it, and her strength was almost spent when at last she saw the words, "Stanley Street," in white letters on a corner house, and on the neat door of No. 18, a brass plate inscribed "Pringle." Her ring brought the proprietress in person to the door.

"Why, Miss May!" cried that lady, starting as though she had seen a ghost.

"Will you take me in, please, Mrs.

Pringle?" said May faintly, as she leaned for support against the wall. And Mrs. Pringle drew May into her house, and welcomed her warmly and wonderingly.

CHAPTER IX.

SETTING OUT IN SEARCH.

WORK was not over—would not be over so far as the day-shift of undergrounders was concerned, for hours and hours — in the great Silverseam pit. And yet here was the man of all others employed in that mine might be considered as the truest representative of constant industry, had knocked off work thus early, and gone up the shaft. For the giant striding so swiftly towards Capel was Paul Knox.

Half-way to the village he encountered a well-mounted horseman, and, with a start, recognized the rider. As he did so, a flush of angry red rose to his face, and was visible even through the coaly dust and grime that blackened it.

"Your servant, young gentleman!" said Paul, in his grave, weighty voice, which sounded, in his rare moments of displeasure, like the menacing growl of far-off thunder; "you are, of all in the world, the man I most want to see."

And, as he spoke, he eyed Percy Shafto very grimly indeed. He had just heard of May's flight. The news of it had brought him in hot haste to upper air and daylight, and now the sight of Percy had suggested to him that his successful rival was responsible for May's flight. At another time Percy's high spirit would

have led him, like a knight-errant of romance, to accept the challenge conveyed in Paul's hostile tone and looks.

But now the young heir of Brockspear sprang from his saddle. "You, too," he said earnestly, "are the very man *I* am most glad to meet, from here to London. You knew her—you cared for her—and all who ever did know or care for her should band together now to trace her out, and guard and save her from the world's rough touch."

Paul Knox looked again at Percy's eager, handsome face and haggard eyes, and his own wrath was lulled to rest.

"I have but whiles heard it," he said slowly; "I main hoped, but not believed, the story was a lie. It seemed so unlike —her!"

Up to this moment neither of these

two men, so like in some respects, so unlike in others, had named the subject of their discourse. A grammarian could not have inferred that it was of May that they spoke.

"Miss Gwynn is gone," said Percy hurriedly; "nor has our good friend the schoolmaster any clue to her hiding-place. Here is her letter to Mr. Gwynn —I begged the loan of it. Read it, and see if you can guess whither she has gone!"

As Percy Shafto drew the letter from the breast-pocket of his coat, Paul Knox gazed on him intently, and almost bitterly, as men do gaze on those who are preferred to them, as though questioning the grounds for such preference. To ordinary eyes such justification was not far to seek. Percy was young, gallant,

fair to look upon, a gentleman, in all respects brighter and comelier than the towering figure confronting him, all smeared with the black dust that is to a collier as war-paint to an Indian. Some such reflection must have occurred to Paul himself, for he sighed, and took the letter which Percy held out to him.

Very slowly, as though poising and testing every syllable, Paul read through the tear-blistered letter that May had left behind her; but when at length he came to the brief farewell message to himself, his broad chest heaved like a rising wave, and with a deep gasping sob he turned away, and pressed his swart, strong hand to his brow.

"I mind it," he said, as though unconsciously — "mind it, as 'twere but yestreen, that black night when Bloody

Field earned its name, and the dead and wounded were snatched out of the burning wreck o' the broken train, and she, a wee innocent mite, was smiling on us all, and then crying on the dead mother that she ne'er should see more. 'Twas then they gave her, poor lamb, the name o' the Mayblossom. And this is how she's left us!"

"Do not blame her——" Percy was beginning, but he was interrupted.

"Blame her! No more than I blame one o' the angels yonder, that are no purer than she," said Paul almost fiercely. "No, if I blame any"—and here the veins on his broad brow swelled like knotted cordage, and he drew himself up to his full height—"if I blame any——" And then came a pause. "You are right, Mr. Percy," he said

gently, but with an evident effort, "May Gwynn's friends should bestir themselves to be useful to her now. And I, for one, will not rest until she has been found and placed in safety."

"Let us start, then, at once!" said Percy in the eager manner that suited well with his warm blood and falcon-eye; "I shall take the mail train and hunt up London at once."

Paul Knox, after a minute's pause in frowning thought, expressed his dissent.

"No, Mr. Percy, no. 'Tis not London. London tempts poor shallow young girls, just as the flare o' the candle tempts young moths, but 'tisn't a lass like May Gwynn to be drawn till't. She'll keep to the scent o' the Northern heather, and the burr o' the Northern tongue, yet awhile. Try thy London plan, Mr.

Percy, but I reckon, wi' help from where help comes, I'll find her we seek within a long day's foot-journey of Capel."

Such was Paul's fixed idea. But Percy thought differently. He would go to London, would get skilled help, would multiply himself in indefatigable research. But he was as bent on exploring London as ever was a compânion of Columbus on the discovery of El Dorado.

"Depend upon it," he said confidently, "town is the likeliest place. Quiet people, as well as gay folks, go there; and to one who wishes to be hidden, there is nothing to equal the great City, where nobody knows or cares what happens a hundred yards away. Still," he added, with marvellous modesty for one of his age and training, "you may be right, Paul, and I may be wrong.

And if you're to search, even near home, you'll want money."

"And Percy's right hand moved towards his pocket, but coyly, for somehow, to offer coin of the realm to Paul Knox, even to be expended in May's service, seemed an awkward bit of diplomacy.

Paul laughed grimly. "Keep thy sovereigns, Mr. Percy," he said. "There be they in London whose palms will hunger for them. For me, I'll spend little, losing but the few days' wage, which I am thankful to say I well can spare. Now we must part, I to speak a word to Kate my sister, and put off my working gear, and you, sir, to ride up to Brockspear and busk ye for your longer journey. Tell me only, Mr. Percy, where in London I can send you a line, if there's a blessing on my seeking."

"Paul, you're a fine fellow, if ever there was one," exclaimed Percy impulsively. "Here's my address," and he pencilled some words on a leaf of his pocket-book, and tore out the leaf—"Short's Hotel, Bond Street; you won't forget?"

"I will write to you there, sir, if I have news," said Paul, as he received the scrap of paper. Nor did he linger, but with a grave, respectful touch of the hat, and either not perceiving, or ignoring, the hand that Percy half extended towards him at parting, he strode off towards the village.

The heir of Brockspear, of an ancient baronetcy, of a name by far more ancient, stood for a while, with his horse's bridle over his arm, eying, half compassionately, half enviously, it might have been

deemed, the tall miner at whose receding figure he gazed.

"A good fellow, and a brave fellow, but that isn't all!" such was Percy's soliloquy; "there's something about Paul Knox that sets one thinking. If that man, collier or not, is not a gentleman at heart—but there! I'm sorry for him, and I hope he'll get over it, and learn to be happy, somehow."

And then Percy mounted and rode off.

CHAPTER X.

A TALLYMAN AT FAULT.

OUR readers may remember possibly a certain Andrew Glibbs, of Berwick-on-Tweed, by trade a tallyman, or, as he styled himself, credit-draper. This restless person, who was presumed to be always on his rounds through some half-dozen of the border counties, suddenly reappeared in Capel, producing amongst the feminine inhabitants of the huge straggling village somewhat of the effect which the apparition of

a hawk would do amidst the cackling tenants of a hen-roost. Customers behindhand with the world are apt to become flustered at catching sight of the sharp man of business in whose books their defaulting names are inscribed. And Mr. Glibbs was reported to know by a nice instinct when, as the French say, the pear was ripe, and when policy dictated that he should leave off the foisting of unwelcome goods, and apply, through the medium of the County Court, the salutary thumbscrew of the Law.

On this occasion, however, Mr. Glibbs bore no pack, and was followed by no boy trundling a wheelbarrow laden with his bulkier wares, nor did he carry in his hand the well-worn yard measure which was familiar to his grasp, and which sundry of his debtors dreaded as though

it had been the wand of a magician. Nor did he conduct, with his habitual air of being a sort of dandified tax-gatherer, his usual house-to-house visitation among those who had the advantage of being bound to him by business ties.

Mr. Glibbs, whose neat boots were coated with the mud of the road, and whose entry into Capel did not coincide with the arrival of any train, trudged direct to the cottage of Mrs. Martha Gubbins, mother of Joe the pointsman, and beneath whose humble roof occurred the first incidents here chronicled. With a quick step Mr. Glibbs approached the Gubbins' dwelling, but as he drew near to it he slackened his pace. On the occasions of his previous visits he had found Dame Martha, howsoever crabbed in personal demeanour, at any rate easy

of access. Now two dragons guarded the squalid doorway—two she-dragons—besmirched, wrinkled, able-bodied colliery matrons, with short black pipes in their mouths, and with much of the trooper-like, independent air which is sometimes to be found among unbullied females in the mining districts.

Andrew Glibbs, used, both south and north of Tweed, to the ways of an especially sturdy and stiff-backed peasantry, at once made up his mind that something was amiss. He heard, too, the hum of two or three voices from within the cottage, and caught an indistinct vision of female forms flitting to and fro.

"My business was with Mrs. Gubbins. She's not dead, I hope?" he said, touching his hat, and speaking in his blandest tones.

"Not dead, young chap!" austerely answered one of the Amazons, still puffing at her discoloured pipe, and speaking half resentfully, as might a showman whose show was disparaged. "What d'ye want wi' the poor soul?"

Mr. Glibbs smiled in a deprecatory manner, and looked at the other guardian of the threshold.

"She be sure to go," said Amazon number two, rather eagerly; "tough as she be, we'll have the lykewaking of her before the Sabbath dawns."

An odd psychological study did these women present. It was a kindly impulse, largely dashed with dull curiosity, that had drawn them to the bedside of old Martha Gubbins. They had brought her tea, and they had brought her gin, and broth, and candles, and tobacco, and

anything they had to give, and "fettled her up" with the rough good-nature of such nurses. But they thought she owed them a death, and waited, as in a match between two resolute bull-dogs, to see when the King of Terrors should prove too mighty a wrestler for Martha to strive with. They had, as it were, patted her on the back and bidden her do her best, and then formed a ring to watch the tussle between the wiry widow and Azrael himself.

Andrew Glibbs cared as little for these manifestations of that odd love of excitement which the north-country working classes display on such occasions as Gallio cared for the squabbles of Hellenised Jews. But he knew the keen scent which village gossips have for the snuffing out of a life, and a shade of anxiety came over his pale face.

"I've very important business, ladies, with Mrs. Gubbins," he said; "if I could have five minutes' chat with her, I——"

"Bain't ye Glibbs, i' the tally trade?" roughly asked one of the dragons.

"That's my name, ma'am, at your service," replied glib Andrew.

"Then bain't ye ashamed, ye greedy gled," broke out the scornful matron, removing the pipe-stem from between her lips, the better to express her contempt, "to coom here, an' harry and worret a poor dyin' old creature for the beggarly shillin's ye've cleeked down against her for rotten gown-pieces an' twopenny shawls i' thet book o' yourn? Out o' this, or I'll find them as 'll wet thy fine cleethes i' the horsepond, and roll 'ee i' the coal-dust till thy skin be as black as thy heart, my man jack!

A base scrapegroat, to set upon the dyin' ! "

Mr. Glibbs winced and reddened under the shower-bath of this philippic. His moral cuticle was of an enduring texture, and he was used to hard words, as well as smooth ones, in the way of business, but he was well aware that he was not too popular in Capel, and that a cry of "haro, and out upon him" might probably prove a pretext for some act of Lynch law, impossible of prevention, and difficult of redress. Even Quarter Sessions cannot un-duck a man who has been dragged through a miry pool, or ward off fists that buffet and boot-heels that bruise. Again the tallyman tried the smile conciliatory.

"Ladies, ladies ! " he said, "you mistake me very much. I want to see Mrs. Gubbins, but not to bother the poor old

lady about any bit of money she may or mayn't owe me. It's quite the other way, I assure you. It's into her pocket, not out of it, I want the shiners to go. When last I saw her we had some talk, and now I want to have a word with her again, for her benefit, I do assure you."

By this time two or three other female faces were peering over the shoulders of the original occupants of the doorway, and among them was the half-frightened face of a certain Mrs. Shaw, whose pledge to pay to the tallyman, monthly, one pound eleven shillings and threepence was not often punctually redeemed.

"Mrs. Shaw, there, knows me, and will say a word!" cried Andrew confidently.

Mrs. Shaw, all alive to the cogency of this appeal, did say as many words, of an

apologetic and soothing sort, as a foolish, youngish married woman, dreading her husband's vigorous displeasure in the event of an open breach with the detested credit-draper, could be expected to say. Her intercession produced some effect. There was no longer any question of maltreating the tallyman, nor did the guardians of the threshold absolutely refuse him admission. But a very general opinion seemed to prevail as to the propriety of Mr. Glibbs' unbosoming himself before the jury of matrons there present, of the nature of the business with which he proposed to trouble Mrs. Gubbins. To this, however, Andrew very reasonably demurred, pleading that there were profitable concerns whereof the virtue evaporated when too much daylight was let in upon them, and urgent

private affairs that could but suffer from publicity. Mrs. Shaw, in the ensuing debate, again advocated her creditor's cause, and the end of it was that Mr. Glibbs was somewhat grudgingly inducted into the sick-room where old Martha, beneath a many-coloured quilt, lay on the bed whereon she was to die.

Mrs. Martha Gubbins, a mere bundle now, of almost as many hues as those of her patchwork counterpane, purple as to the jacket of knitted wool that clung to her shrunken shoulders, red as concerned the comforter twisted about her skinny neck, yellow of skin, "Isabella-coloured" as regarded her dubious linen, had been roused and shaken by her volunteer nurses into a high state of wakefulness. She knew the tallyman at once.

"I remembers 'ee, Mr. Glibbs, I re-

members 'ee!" she said peevishly, as two of the gossips propped up the wasted form of the invalid with cushion, bolster, and rug, and then slowly withdrew.

"And I remember our former talks together, dame, and have good news to tell," said Mr. Glibbs smoothly, as he whipped out his big pocket-book—"news that will bring you in many a gold guinea, Mrs. G."

"What's the use o't now?" querulously demanded the pointsman's mother; "we don't hunger, nor yet thirst, where I'm a-goin', mister. Gowd guineas! If I'd ha' had 'em to gi'e un, maybe that doctor would ha' took the pains to cure me, he would, but 'tis ower late now."

In this, it may be said, Mrs. Gubbins maligned the parish surgeon, who could have done no more to save her, by art of

healing, than he had done, had she been a duchess dowager whose fees rustled as they were pocketed.

"You'll be cured yet, dame," said Mr. Glibbs encouragingly; "why, there was an aunt of my own, mortal bad, worse—to look at—than you, ma'am, and she's a hale old party, able to see to her poultry and her grandchildren. Come, come, dame! you've something to live for now. It rests with you to be a lady, and make a gentleman of Joe, and be 'madamed' by every cummer you've got, once we've gone a step or two farther in this job of ours."

"I'll ne'er go no steps, except to the cold kirkyard, snappishly replied the invalid; "an' whawt be t' use o' your plots an' your plans, when I be dyin', and the girl's rin off, no one knows where

to? I heard thet but now. I didn't care muckle. Before I took sick, I'd ha' cared. 'Tis all one now."

The last words were uttered in a low, crooning cry.

"Gone—gone for good?" exclaimed Mr. Glibbs in extreme discomposure.

"Ay, gone for good, or for ill, who kens?" crooned out the old woman. "There be nae Mayblossom in Capel any more."

Mr. Glibbs pricked up his ears. "Indeed, dame?" he said.

"'Tis nowt to me now!" reiterated Mrs. Gubbins, with unconsciously transparent selfishness; "but May Gwynn, thet war took into t' owd schoolmaster's house when she was left a lorn thing, after thet railway accident thet cost my Joe sae dear, has rin off. All along o'

they young men thet must coom a-courtin' an' a-sweetheartin', an' can't let a girl be," added the pointsman's mother, with an evident sense of injury.

"That was how it was, was it, dame?" returned Mr. Glibbs, whose keen features twitched not a little as he listened greedily for fresh intelligence.

"Yes, 'twas," rejoined the invalid, stirring uneasily. "Young Master Percy Shafto, the son of Sir Thomas yonder at Brockspear, ups and offers for to wed May Gwynn, an' she without the price of a silk gown to be married in, so his mother, thet's as proud as a peacock, comes atween the young folks, an' Miss May, being but a soft-spoken, dainty bit lass, instead of holding to the grip, makes a moonlight flitting o't, and leaves a letter behind to gi'e the reason for't.

'Twas Kate Knox told me, when she looked in whiles, wi' a drop broth, and she said the tidings ccomed after her brother Paul had gone down pit. He'll feel it more than most, Paul Knox will, for I believe he was in love wi' Miss Gwynn himself, for all he's a matter o' fifteen or sixteen years older than she can be."

This long speech proved fatiguing to Mrs. Gubbins, who now lay back, with half-closed eyes, gasping and groaning, and paid but slight attention to the tally-man, who now, edging his chair a little nearer to the bed, employed all the resources of his eloquence to re-awaken the expiring embers of self-interest in the old woman's dulled mind. He had, he said, in the course of his circuit made certain inquiries, founded on the modicum of information which Mrs. Gubbins had

doled him out, and the result had been most satisfactory. Heaps and heaps of money were be made of the secret, if properly manipulated. It was a sin and a shame to leave such a gold mine unworked. If Mrs. Gubbins would but tell all she knew, or entrust the letters to Andrew's care, or even allow him to copy them in her presence, riches, positive riches, would accrue.

To all this reasoning Mrs. Gubbins had but one reply. "'Tis too late!" she would mutter sullenly; "nowt cares I, since nowt'll come o't."

From this position Mrs. Gubbins could not be driven. It was too late for her to enjoy the fruits of victory, and so the campaign might come to an inglorious end, for aught old Martha cared. Once she growled out something about "Joe,

poor weakly chap," and Mr. Glibbs caught with avidity at the idea, and pressed home with fervid oratory the duty of providing for Joe.

But the maternal instinct—strongest and most deeply rooted of all the passions that go to the making up of our complex natures—is very unevenly distributed, not only amongst human beings, but the brute creation as well. We see hens that serenely abandon their eggs to be hatched by any one or anything that will take the necessary trouble, and mothers whose sympathy with their offspring is as languid as decorum permits. In the case of Mrs. Gubbins, cynicism quite overpowered natural affection. On the frontiers of another world, she turned resentfully round and snarled, as a dog would do at the notion that his bone

was to be snatched from his jaws and gnawed at by another dog.

"No, Mr. Glibbs, no; I winna hae't," she said decisively, at last; "I winna be cheated out o' my reets thet way, by a smooth-tongued impocrite [she meant hypocrite] like you, my buck. Ye've made me talk till I'm drouthy an' faint, an' if ye prated till Doomsday ye'd never get no more out o' me, man. 'Tis too late now."

At this moment there opportunely appeared a couple of the guardian gossips, who probably considered that Mr. Glibbs' period of audience had exceeded reasonable limits, and these, seeing how pale was the old woman, and how sharp was the sound of her hacking cough, proceeded to administer sundry small drams, by the help of a broken wine-

glass and two black bottles smelling horribly of whiskey and peppermint.

Andrew Glibbs, rage and disappointment sparkling in his eyes, rose from his rickety chair, and took his leave with as good a grace as he might.

"I'll come and have another chat with you, Mrs. G., ma'am," he said, "when you're better and stronger."

"Then, my chap," returned the old woman, just then enlivened by the newly-swallowed elixir of Glenlivat, "ye'll wait for your crack till——"

She did not finish the sentence, otherwise than by a weak but scornfully-intended effort at snapping her lean brown fingers in the tallyman's face. Mr. Glibbs got himself out of the miserable room, and down the broken stair, and through the houseplace, and past

the knot of lounging women, and out into the street, and even round the corner, deftly enough. Then he paused, and ground his teeth, and cursed his evil fortune and the selfishness of Joe's mother.

The tallyman had in him this much in common with Napoleon, that a long course of success had made him intolerant of failure. He was one of those few who are quite sure as to the goal in view through life, and who press towards it unfalteringly. His goal, it need scarcely be said, was a handsome competence for Andrew Glibbs. Here was a golden chance, which would do as much for him as four or five extra years of the tally-trade, and save the wear and tear of bargaining and brow-beating, the wheedling requisite to establish a con-

nection, the bullying by which it was carried on, and the final crushing of the recalcitrant or over-goaded customer. And this chance was to be wrested from him because a love-sick girl chose to run away, and a close-fisted crone to sicken mortally.

Andrew Glibbs rallied his spirits and refused to be beaten. There was no trouble that he would not take, no act not illegal of which he did not feel himself capable, to redeem the day. He had learned from the brief garrulity of Mrs. Gubbins much that he had not known before, and piecing together scraps of information that had till then floated vaguely through his memory, he was able to form a pretty good estimate of May's actual position, and of the cause of her quitting Capel. She was gone, and the

old schoolmaster was ignorant of the retreat which she had chosen. Andrew hesitated for a few moments, then tapped his forehead and smiled. A little questioning, and ten minutes' walk, brought him in front of the dwelling of Paul Knox.

"My brother is at work—will be till evening," said Kate Knox, a gentle-mannered young woman, with a curved spine and a sweet, patient face, as she answered the visitor's knock.

But as she spoke the words, the lofty figure of Paul himself threw its shadow on the doorway.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE TRACK.

"NAME of Glibbs," and as the tallyman uttered these words, by way of a self-introduction, he touched his glossy hat; "name of Glibbs. Perhaps you've heard of me?"

"Yes, Mr. Glibbs, I have," answered Paul Knox, in his weighty way, and fixing his dark steady eyes upon the keen, cold, shifty eyes of the visitor; "I mean nothing uncivil when I say that

I prefer not to deal wi' you, and just now I am pressed for time."

The credit-draper stood his ground. "We might deal, Mr. Knox," he said insinuatingly, "for other matters than shirts and broadcloth and trinkets. I know a thing or two as to a certain young lady which——"

Thus far Andrew had proceeded smoothly enough, but he faltered and broke down as a grasp of iron was suddenly laid on his shoulder, and he felt himself shaken to and fro, under the pressure of Paul Knox's mighty right hand, like a reed swaying in the wind.

"Be careful, mate, how you speak of *her* in my hearing!" said the miner in a deep low voice like the growl of coming thunder. For a moment Mr. Glibbs' customary assurance deserted

him, and he could only redden and stammer, when to his great relief he heard Kate say gently—

"Paul, I doubt the man means no harm."

"Indeed, I do not, miss," gasped out the credit-draper, re-arranging his ruffled coat and shirt-front, as those iron fingers relaxed their hold ("I felt," said Mr. Glibbs, afterwards, "as if I were under the paw of a lion"); "I would not, if it were ever so, say a disrespectful word of Miss May Gwynn; and, indeed, all I propose is for her benefit, if only we could find her."

He had struck the right key-note now.

"Ay, if only we could find her?" responded Paul dreamily, and then rallied his wandering thoughts.

"If you have something to say to me,

Mr. Glibbs, which regards May Gwynn, I will hear you patiently. I was hasty with you just now. If your meaning was good, I ask pardon," so rolled out the massive words, and there was something in Paul's tone and manner which so impressed the credit-draper that he touched his glossy hat for the second time.

"You see," explained Mr. Glibbs, sidling a little towards the big miner as he spoke, and watching Paul's face as a careful captain, in the hurricane latitudes, watches his barometer, "you see, we credit-drapers get to talk with a many, and to come across, sometimes, odd bits of news. Now, in the course of business, it came to my ears, months and months ago, how a certain party——"

"I am not fond of riddles. Please to speak plain truth," interjected Paul Knox.

"That Miss May Gwynn," meekly went on the tallyman, "*might* turn out—mind, I'm not positive, only I'd bet a thousand pounds on it, if I had it, and were a betting man—might, I say, turn out to belong to those who could and would claim her, and—and make a grand lady of her—I meant no more," he added hurriedly, for the expression of Paul's changing face puzzled him.

"My dear! the wee, bright lassie that seemed to me, many a mirk day down shaft, like a morsel of the blessed sunshine when I thought of her, she a lady, of herself!" murmured the tall miner, and in a voice so low and soft that only his sister's ear caught the words. She laid her hand upon his strong arm.

"Paul, poor dear old Paul!" she whispered fondly, with all a woman's

divining instinct of sympathy. Paul had never given his confidence on this point to even the being on earth who loved him the best, the poor crooked sister whose path through life had been made smooth by his unfailing kindness. But still she was aware that Paul loved May Gwynn, and knew too that these tidings of May's speedy promotion to a high station were certain to make his hopeless passion yet more hopeless, as bringing her he loved nearer to Percy Shafto.

Paul Knox seemed, as a strong man might cast off a load, to shake from him the emotions that for a brief space had disturbed him, and he again took a steady survey of the tallyman's face. "You'd hardly have come to me, Mr. Glibbs," he said, "if you had not wanted something from me, and you have not

yet told me what that is. Before I talk wi' you as to May Gwynn, I'd like some proof you're in earnest. If you're the man to do good to anybody, and not turn a penny by it, you are sorely slandered here in Capel."

"Does anybody in Capel," coolly rejoined the smiling tallyman, "set me down for a regular, right-down natural, that ought to be shaved, and shower-bathed, and locked up in an idiot asylum, I wonder? Of course, I want to turn a penny by it—an honest penny, if ever I finger one, mind you—and to turn such pennies is a part of my trade, as to ply a pick is yours. Now have patience with me for one moment."

And then the credit-draper, with real caution and apparent sincerity, told as much as it suited him to tell. He had

learned certain facts as to May's parentage—quite enough for his own satisfaction, though he admitted that the chain of proof was not perfect—and would have gone direct to the young lady herself, but that by an unlucky coincidence her departure from Capel had preceded his return to it.

"You see," said Mr. Glibbs, "I have got a few trifles—extracts from letters, an ornament or so of small value, and so forth—in my room at my sister's over at Thrumby yonder. I have a sister, or step-sister—a good deal older than myself—who's settled at Thrumby in the dress-making line, and I've put up at her house for a few days' rest, before I go on with my rounds again. If you'd not mind the trouble of a six-mile walk——"

No. Paul was ready to walk six miles,

terested in the fortunes of a young lady respecting whom I have chanced, in the way of business, on some information, and there are papers and things here among my traps which he is welcome to inspect."

"Ah, a young lady!" returned Mrs. Barnes, knitting her brows as if in doubt.

"Yes, you may say so," answered the tallyman cheerily, "since, so far as I can make out, it rests with her to ride in her carriage, and take her place with the best of them, once we can find her."

"Find her!" exclaimed the widow in accents of shrill wonder, but her brother, who was in the act of ushering Paul into the tidy cottage, did not heed what she said.

"Sit down, sit down, Mr. Knox," he said, setting a chair for the visitor; "I'll

go and get the things I spoke of." And as he spoke he bustled his way up the creaking staircase, and his tread was soon heard on the flooring of the chamber above.

Mrs. Barnes, being left alone with the guest, seemed as though she were about to speak, but at this juncture her progeny, two boys and a girl, with dog's-eared books and bescrawled slates, carried in satchels, came trooping in, and the condition of their rough hair and mud-bespattered garments afforded their vigilant parent a little exercise, including a motherly shake and slap, for her quick tongue and fingers. And then Mr. Glibbs came down the complaining stairs again, bringing with him a little bundle of papers, and a small wooden box. From the latter he extracted two or three

glistening objects, and held them out to Paul.

"Old-fashioned ornaments, and not worth much in the market," said the tallyman critically, "but I think you'll agree with me that they are such as a lady might have worn at that time."

"At what time?" asked the pitman.

"Ah! well, we'll say at the time of the Capel Accident," returned the other drily. "And now read these—remembering that they are only extracts, taken almost at hazard, from old letters and things."

Paul took the papers, and read their contents slowly.

"Tis as Greek to me, master, because o' the names," he said at length; "but those, I reckon, you have altered."

"Excuse me for that trifling precaution," said Mr. Glibbs, smiling; "I didn't

want, as you may guess, to spoil my own market. A secret is only a secret so long as one brain keeps it snug. So I have substituted fictitious names of places and persons for the real ones, but otherwise the story's true.

"And—it's of *her* that you speak?" said Paul, regarding the tallyman with impatient scrutiny, "and to the best of your belief, she comes of a good stock, and will be rich, and have a grand gentleman for a father, and yet you've never said a word to help her to her rights afore to-day?"

"Now, now, my dear friend!" expostulated Mr. Glibbs, holding up his outspread hands with a deprecatory gesture, "you must take a business-like view of these transactions, indeed you must. A man of business has his hands a deal

too full, I can tell you, to give up his whole time, even to so interesting a young lady as Miss Gwynn, gratis. And I didn't see my way——"

"To making money by it, ye mean?" demanded Paul, with a look of scorn that, tough as was his moral epidermis, the credit-draper flinched from.

"To making money by it," said Mr. Glibbs, instantly rallying from his discomfiture; "private inquiries are worth paying for, just as Manchester prints and Leeds woollens are. Now there's a party in Capel who retains possession of documents enough to prove identity. If we had but a clue to Miss Gwynn's present address——"

When here his sister unexpectedly intervened.

"I'd wad a sovereign," she said, with

an emphasis worthy of the offer of such a bet, "that Miss Gwynn's the very lass that coomed ben to us here, an' broke bread wi' us, an' thet my lad yonder guided by short cut over moor to Barmsbro' Station, this blessed morn. An' if so, I ken where she be this night."

"You're a white witch then, dame, if you help us at this pinch," answered Paul Knox; and Mrs. Barnes took the rough north-country compliment as it was meant, and proceeded to justify it by unearthing, after some search in her well-stocked cupboard, the crumpled letter in which her late predecessor in the dressmaking business at Thrumby gave her address.

"Number Eighteen, Stanley Street, or Stansfield, or else Stangate, Liverpool," read out Mrs. Barnes; "at one

or ither ye'll find the lassie, as sure as ye'll find Liverpool itself."

There was a good deal of quick, excited play of question and answer, of descriptive talk on the part of honest Mrs. Barnes, glorying as she did in the accident that had made her unravel the tortuous knot, of open-mouthed wonder on that of the children, who left their bread-and-butter half consumed, in their eagerness to hear more concerning the "bonnie leddy" who had shared their morning meal.

"'Tis news that will lighten the schoolmaster's heart," exclaimed Paul characteristically, taking thought for others while his own heart was full to bursting; "and there's one, too, who must learn the truth before he starts for London, by this night's mail, on a bootless errand."

On learning that the person who was to be prevented from setting off on a wild goose chase was Percy Shafto, Mr. Glibbs elevated his eyebrows and screwed up his mouth as if whistling inaudibly. He knew enough to be aware in what relations Paul and Percy stood towards May Gwynn, and that the former should be considerate of the peace of mind of his luckier rival struck the credit-draper as something beyond measure comical. But then the whole character of the big miner was anomalous and perplexing to him. Mr. Glibbs offered no opposition, however, to Paul's proposal of a speedy return to Capel, which was reached in due course, but too late to anticipate Percy Shafto's departure for the metropolis. Before the wayfarers had emerged from between the

lofty banks of Nut Lane, the mail train, with Percy as a passenger, had rushed arrow-swift off on its journey to the south.

"I'll send Mr. Percy a word over the wires," said Paul, and the brief telegram which he despatched to Short's Hotel, and which simply intimated that May's abiding-place had been discovered, was put into the young man's hand as he alighted at the door of his chosen house of entertainment. Then came a word to the old schoolmaster, a word to Kate Knox, and then Paul was hurried by the tallyman back to the station, and the two took their tickets for a northern town, by a train which was on the point of starting.

"We are going," said Mr. Glibbs, rubbing his hands, "to find the person

who has the best right to bring the young lady home. A different guess sort of home from your Capel school-house, I expect it will prove."

CHAPTER XII.

A STROKE OF BUSINESS.

"GUESS you've never been here before, Mr. Knox?" said the credit-draper in his airy way, as he and his stalwart companion alighted at the gaslit, busy, stirring station of Norchester.

Paul Knox was a stranger in Norchester. He said so. "I am a stranger nowhere," responded the tallyman, with a little laugh of triumph, suppressed, but there. The potent passion of human

vanity is so greedy for its pabulum that, like the starving, it will feed on odd viands ere it ceases to cater for its craving appetite. A dwarf, especially if a hunchbacked dwarf, is proud of his hunch and of his starveling stature. There is a vanity in the blind; even the deferential deaf hug to their bosoms a quaint gratification in the fact that their infirmity marks them out as something different from the herd.

Now, Andrew Glibbs felt himself morally shortened by some inches in Paul Knox's presence. The two men, so very unlike to one another, had been together but a few hours, and had exchanged in those few hours few ideas. But Andrew felt as though he had passed the time, somehow, in weighing himself, by the aid of invisible scales, against Paul Knox, and

had kicked the beam, and been approved of light weight, in comparison with the big miner. It was not only that in thew and sinew Paul was the better man. The credit-draper had an uneasy suspicion that in heart, and nerve, and brain as well, he was no match for this big man of the mine, whom he had sought out under the impression that he should have to deal with a fool or a fanatic.

Mr. Glibbs, at any rate, was used to travel, and had every town from Clyde to Trent or Severn at his fingers' ends, and he was glad to feel that in some respects he was Paul's master. "We can't do better than the 'King's Arms,'" he said condescendingly; "a cheap house," he hastened to explain, "but a clean and decent commercial inn. They know me there, and we can get bed and

supper without bleeding our purses too smartly, Mr. Knox. Generally, at Norchester, I put up at a private house, but now it is different."

It was indeed Mr. Glibbs' amiable practice to live, in Norchester and other places of equal population, at free quarters in the dwelling of some well-selected customer who owed him a heavy bill, and tried to win forgetfulness of it by delicate attentions such as the hissing hot sausage, the freshly-opened oyster, the frothing stout, or the steaming toddy. In these tributary abodes the tallyman was wont to make up, by seasons of brief indulgence, for a long course of asceticism prescribed by the simple wish to save money, and to revel as it were in a sort of eleemosynary Capua, in the midst of his obsequious entertainers. But in the present

instance it suited him to go to the "King's Arms," and to the "King's Arms" he and his tall companion went.

The tallyman was up and stirring at an early hour, but early as it was, he was told, on asking for his big fellow-traveller, that the gentleman had strolled out—"to the Walls."

Now, the Walls of Norchester are notable examples of the rare old ramparts which some half-score, at most, of our English cities yet can boast, once a bulwark against the foe, then a peaceful promenade, now a tolerated relic of the past. Those of Norchester overlook the Scottish border; the low blue hills to be seen from them were once in an enemy's country; serious watch was once kept from them for a glimpse of skirring moss-troopers or the warnings of a more serious

warden-raid, and thus a sort of antiquarian interest clings to them even now. Paul was leaning on the gray stone parapet, looking dreamily into the dim distance to the northward. Collier as he was, he had read books, and thought of book-lore, so that his meditations may not impossibly have been such as never would have entered into the hard, practical head of Mr. Glibbs.

"I'm going to-day to tap the rock!" said the credit-draper, half-playfully; "I mean, Mr. Knox," he added as he saw Paul's glance of inquiring wonder, "I am going to see the party who has, as I believe, the best right to take an interest in Miss Gwynn. Then, if all goes well, the party will probably be glad to see yourself, as Miss Gwynn's friend, and then—why, the rest of it will be in better hands than mine."

Paul Knox demurred a little to the tallyman's way of doing business. If what Mr. Glibbs wanted was fair and honest, why was he not more open as to his intentions and objects? He had, of course, the right to please himself, but then why had Paul been brought to Norchester, and why was he to stay there? To this the diplomatic Glibbs made answer that Paul's condition of ignorance should not long endure, that the moment had almost arrived for telling all that could be told, and that, for May's sake, May's early friend would do well to be patient.

Breakfast over at the "King's Arms," Mr. Glibbs departed in a hired gig, pledging himself to return, if possible, by the early dinner-hour to which both men were accustomed, and emerging from

what is still called the Scotch Gate, journeyed at a trot of reasonable briskness over some miles of road, until at length the gig came to a halt in front of some tall park gates, the stone piers of which were surmounted by greyhounds couchant in heraldic repose. The tall park-gates were thrown open, and on went the gig along a cream-coloured road as smooth as polished stone, under the shade of great trees that seemed reluctant to part with the gold and russet of their withered leaves, and where to left and right were caught delicious glimpses of ferny dells, and swelling eminences crested with broom and heather, and upland lawns where fed the dappled deer, and of the distant flash of ornamental waters specked with silvery swans—all the adjuncts and surroundings in which wealth takes pleasure.

Mr. Glibbs eyed all these things, albeit no lover of landscapes, with unconcealed satisfaction; and when at length the gig drew up before the imposing front of a stately house, and two or three liveried servants, with the greyhound couchant emblazoned on their gleaming buttons, came with leisurely calm to answer to the clang of the door-bell, he looked very pleased indeed. Long experience had taught the tallyman that the finer the mansion the more difficult it is to get speech of the owner of it; but he was ready for the emergency.

"Would you have the kindness," he said politely, to the oldest and portliest of the men-servants, "to take in this card for me, and to say that I have travelled many miles for the favour of a few words."

The man in livery gave a supercilious inspection to the piece of pasteboard, which he held, as if it had been a natural curiosity, between his finger and thumb.

"Couldn't think of such a thing," he said decisively; "you'll sell nothing here, my man, unless indeed," he added as an after-thought, "you like to go round to the back entrance and see if any of our ladies want to buy."

But Mr. Glibbs had not come so far to sell prints or gewgaws to housemaids. He called the janitor's attention to the fact that there were written words—a mere request for an interview—and a date—the date of the year of the Capel Accident—on the card; and he was so very earnest and pertinacious that at last a grave man in black, bearing some authority in the household, came forward

and consented to take in the card. Almost immediately he returned. "Please step this way," he said; "Mr. Hastings will see you in the library."

The library, with its Romanesque pillars, its panelled walls of shining oak, the Flemish stained glass shimmering in its windows, and its array of splendidly-furnished book-shelves, was on a scale of splendour unusual even in the largest of private mansions. There were costly marbles, pictures of great price, works of art such as only the rich can collect, and only they when wealth and taste go together. The master of all these things, a handsome man of middle age, with hair prematurely dashed with gray, turned his proud and somewhat stern face towards the credit-draper.

"You wished to speak to me, Mr.—

Mr. Glibbs, I think?" he said half listlessly, and yet with a sort of suppressed eagerness in his voice.

"I have come here, from a distance, for nothing else, Mr. Hastings," replied the tallyman; and the servant, in obedience to a motion of his master's head, placed a chair for the odd visitor, and retired.

"Concerning the year ——" Mr. Hastings said these words in a tone of inquiry, and then paused.

"Concerning that very year, the date of which I have marked down on that card," said the tallyman cautiously. "May I ask, sir, if I am mistaken in thinking that the date is one which you have particular reason to remember."

Mr. Hastings was, as has been said, a comely gentleman of middle age, who

must have been in his youth strikingly handsome. He had a pale, bronzed face, that told of long years beneath a sultry sun, and there were lines on the broad brow and about the firm mouth, and a languor in the melancholy eyes. But those eyes could flash yet, and they flashed indignant anger now.

"If you dare, without good grounds for what you hint, if you dare, I say, to awaken painful memories, or to trifle——" He paused here, gasping for breath, but the swelling of the veins on his sun-burned forehead proved that he was terribly in earnest. The credit-draper made haste to avert the coming storm.

"Indeed, sir," he said, firmly but respectfully, "the last thing that would come into my head would be to trifle with such a gentleman as yourself; nor have I

taken the liberty to come here without sufficient reasons for a step which involves loss of time, which, in my walk of life, is money. It does so happen that I have picked up information which ——"

"Which you are willing to sell to me at a fair price?" impatiently broke in Mr. Hastings. "Is it not so?"

"At a fair price, as your honour puts it," glibly returned the tallyman. "I am a poor tradesman, and can't afford, much as I should like it, to do good gratis. And I am sure that your honour will consider——"

"Would a thousand pounds content you?" asked Mr. Hastings briefly. A thousand pounds! The intoxicating music rang, like the jingle of fairy bells, through the entranced ears of Andrew Glibbs. But after one brief thrill of

rapture the old bargaining instinct revived, and he coughed deferentially behind his shining hat.

"A liberal offer, sir, very much so," he replied with provoking slowness; "but —but mine is but a small way of business, which extra capital would enable me to——"

"I increase my offer to fifteen hundred pounds," interrupted Mr. Hastings haughtily; "but this time remember, Mr. Glibbs, it is a final one. I am not the sort of person, in temper or by habit, for vulgar chaffering and higgling over terms. Speak out, then, and to the point, or the interview is at an end." And as the master of the house spoke, he glanced towards the bell-handle hard by.

Experience of the constant friction

betwixt different wills had taught Mr. Glibbs the arts of an accomplished angler. He saw that to tighten the line was to snap it.

"Very gratefully," he said, "I accept your handsome offer, Mr. Hastings, and I won't insult you by asking for written promises, or anything of that sort; your word is your bond, I know that. And fifteen hundred, which is heaven to me, is easy parted with by you. Now here goes to earn it. In that year of which I speak, a lady, as I gather, and a child, disappeared."

"Disappeared!" Mr. Hastings seemed to breathe the word rather than to speak it.

"That lady was——" Mr. Glibbs began slowly.

"Was my dear wife, my bride

almost!" exclaimed Mr. Hastings hoarsely. "What have you to tell me of her?" and here hope brightened in his face, and then faded away again. He made an impatient gesture. "She is dead, sir," he said, "or we had not been sundered so long."

"She is dead!" answered the credit-draper, with grave respect not wholly feigned; "the poor lady was, no doubt, the stranger who perished in the Capel Railway Accident, years ago. But her child is living," Andrew made haste to say.

Across the stern, proud, sun-bronzed face of Mr. Hastings there passed the shadow of a great grief, and then the gleam of a great joy, that came to him, rainbow-like, through the storm of tears and agony. For he did weep, covering his

face with his strong white hands, with all the bitterness of a brave man's grief.

"Marian, my Marian!" he murmured; "but she is not all dead, for May lives!"

"Yes, sir, it is of Miss May," put in the tallyman, whose quick ear had caught the name—"Miss May Gwynn, as they call her, after the worthy old party who took her home—that I came to speak to you to-day."

Andrew Glibbs was a hard man. His bosom was quite steeled against the distress of those who were black-listed in his awful ledger of defaulting customers. To the widow and the orphan, to the sick and to the spendthrift, he had but one grim formula, the "Pay me that thou owest" of Scripture. But he felt a little for so rich a man as Mr. Hastings, and he insinuated consolation dexterously enough.

"My daughter! my daughter!" exclaimed Mr. Hastings, "the dainty, delicate little child for whose sake that fatal voyage was undertaken—what of her? How has the world, on whose mercy she was flung, dealt with her?"

"Not badly," responded the tallyman, "as a true friend of hers, whom I left in Norchester, will tell you, sir. I never set eyes on her, so it happens, myself; but a nobler girl, or a prettier young lady, if all tales be true, never lived." And then Mr. Glibbs produced his evidence. There were the trinkets. There were the extracts from the letters. There was an old newspaper describing the Capel Accident. And then he went on to give a brief sketch of what had occurred, as far as he understood it, of Percy's courtship, of Lady Elizabeth's opposition, of May's

flight, and of the fact that Paul Knox was at Norchester, ready to corroborate the credit-draper's words.

Mr. Hastings, once roused, was a man of action, and on this occasion he took care that no time should be lost. His orders were executed by his servants with such promptitude, that before the valet had completed the hurried packing of his master's portmanteau, the carriage was at the door, and the fine horses seemed almost to devour the way to Norchester, so swiftly did they speed along. Then, the "King's Arms" once attained, there followed an interview with Paul Knox, and within a few hours of the time when Mr. Glibbs had stood parleying at the rich man's door, the tallyman, with sparkling eyes and a red spot on each of his high cheek-bones, was on his way back

to his sister's abode at Thrumby, a cheque for fifteen hundred pounds lurking in the safest pocket of his tightly-buttoned coat, while Mr. Hastings and Paul Knox were flying towards Liverpool as fast as steam could convey them.

"You had better go in the first," said Mr. Hastings, in a husky voice that he could not keep from trembling, as, in the dusk and shadow of the early evening, he stood, with Paul at his side, in front of the door of No. 18, Stanley Street, with the gleam of the gas-lamp full on the brass plate, which bore the name of Pringle; "yes, she had better see you first. I am a stranger in her eyes," he added sadly. Paul rang the bell. Mrs. Pringle herself it was who opened the door. She knew the tall miner, and started back as though she

had seen a ghost. "Our business, if you please, is with May Gwynn. She is here, I know," said Paul, with his grave, sweet smile.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. HASTINGS TELLS HIS STORY.

IN an upper room of Mrs. Pringle's house the newly-arrived travellers—being ushered upstairs by the dressmaker herself—found her whom they sought. May, who was dexterous with her needle, had been helping her good-natured hostess to complete some young lady's ball-dress, so that the gas was burning brightly; and as May rose hurriedly from her chair, the loose folds of sheeny silk, and snowy gauze, and artificial flowers, fell athwart

her form like an Eastern scarf of blended colours. She started up, like a frightened fawn, and fixed her eyes almost implor-ingly on Paul's face.

"You are not angry with me?" she said, in just the tone, and with just the look, that the tall pitman could remember when she had been a little child.

"I could not be angry wi' thee, my dear, had I the right to chide," was Paul's reply; "nor am I here to-day on my own errand. It is good news, May, that I bring."

And as he spoke, he stepped aside, so that Mr. Hastings, who had hitherto kept in the background, might be seen. May looked at him, at the handsome, well-cut features, the eager glance in the eyes, the dark hair dashed with gray, and she trembled, without knowing why.

"This gentleman?" she whispered inquiringly to Paul.

"Thou hast seen him before, lassie," answered Paul Knox, with somewhat of a sob in his own deep voice. "'Tis God's goodness that gives thy father back to protect thee."

Then, somehow, May found herself clasped in the stranger's arms, and felt his kisses on her forehead, and his tears upon her cheek; and felt as though she were in a dream, not awake.

"Yes; I am your father, May dear, and my name is Lionel Hastings," said the bronzed stranger; and in your sweet face, my darling, I trace the features of the wife I loved so very dearly, and who was so early lost to me. When last I saw you, my child, it was beneath a hotter sun and sky, and on the deck of the ship

that—Are you glad or sorry, May, that the long missing father has come at last?"

May was glad—glad, that is, with a timid joy. She was a little afraid of this strange gentleman, grander in bearing, and of a nobler presence, than any man of station whom she had ever yet met with; but she could appreciate the tenderness with which he looked upon her, and the softening of those haughty eyes that had so long looked listlessly upon the world.

"Mine is a simple story," said Mr. Hastings, as he sat beside May, with his eyes riveted on her face, and with Paul Knox in front, an attentive auditor. "I was a cadet of old family, a baronet's younger son, and on cold terms, through no fault of mine I can truly say, with my elder brother, who inherited the title

much about the time when I first knew your mother, dear May. Ours was a run-away match; and her stern, iron-willed father never forgave his only child. He was a rich, a very rich man, who had begun from small beginnings, and by shrewdness, industry, and luck, had become one of the wealthiest ironmasters in Scotland. He was a widower, and his name was Laird.

"I have known," continued Mr. Hastings, with a slight smile, "proud men in plenty, and am myself reputed to be not quite free from the sin by which Lucifer fell; but never have I met with one so imperious or so exacting as my wife's father. He never forgave the stolen marriage, but nursed to the best of my belief, his resentment to the last. I confess that he was thwarted on a point

on which he had set his heart. His daughter would be a great heiress, of land as well as of money, for had he not bought Glenfern and Glenochar, picturesque Highland properties, with two estates in the Scottish lowlands, and one on the English side of the Border, on which I now reside? He meant that his daughter should marry a lord—a poor one, of course—who would consent to assume the surname of Laird, and so, in a manner, to ennoble the honest patronymic which had suddenly been so doubly and triply gilded.

"A lord, after some diplomatic negotiations, was found, able and willing to gratify the rich man's whim. Viscount Kil——, I forget the rest of his title, would exchange his Celtic surname for the sturdy one of Laird, or, indeed, for any

other, to be freed from debts and duns. I saw him often at that time—a vacuous, half-vicious, but not ill-natured young man, always with a gold-rimmed glass stuck into that unmeaning right eye of his.

"Mr. Laird, as I have said, was bitterly mortified at his daughter's preference of a poor gentleman like myself to the foolish young Irish lord, and he never deigned an answer to any one of the letters—poor little tear-blotted letters! A pile of them were found after his death, unopened, in his desk, which his daughter wrote to him both in England and from abroad, craving the forgiveness that he was resolved not to grant. Many thought that he would marry again, in hopes of male heirs; but he merely grew more morose, hard, and greedy of gain,

adding to his store as though he were a kind of slave to the habit of money-making. As for us, we went abroad.

"I had a little money, very, very little, and the sale of my lieutenant's commission in the army eked it out somewhat. It was to the New World, ever the El Dorado of the desperate, that I determined to go; and so I did, first to Mexico, to South America next, and then to Mexico again; my loving wife accompanying me everywhere in that deadly climate, among perils and hardships ill-adapted to one so delicate.

"In Mexico, May dear, you were born, and the first years of your young life were spent among the palmettoes and agave orchards, and white-walled haciendas, and mud-huts that stood on a lofty table-land of Anahuac. At that time I was the

manager of a silver mine, earning a small salary by irksome toil and some danger; for raiding Indians and white robbers were no infrequent visitors to that wild district, and we never knew when our sleep would be broken by a volley of musketry or by the more dreaded war-cry of the savage. My little capital had been sunk in futile speculations, for there are smooth-tongued knaves in a colony as well as on the Stock Exchange, and we were poorer by far than on the day we had landed on that foreign shore.

"Then Marian sickened. It made my heart bleed to see the hue of health fade from her dainty cheek, though, brave wife, she never complained; but strove to rally her spirits and to feign a blitheness she did not feel, lest her 'poor boy,' as she called me—and, indeed, I was

young then—should have a fresh anxiety to harass him. It was your illness, May, my love, that broke down her resolve not to speak. The climate, so a wandering doctor, who stayed a day or two with us on his way to the Rio Grande, told Mrs. Hastings, was a perilous one for European children. You were drooping already like some English flower in that thin, dry air, beneath that tropic sun. Then I resolved, with much reluctance, to do what is forced on many a husband and father in those countries, to send away those I loved to England, and to stay there alone beside my desolate hearth."

Here May's hand stole as it were into her father's, and its light touch recalled his thoughts from the past to the present, and assured him of her sympathy. He looked down at her, and smiled mournfully but fondly.

"With some difficulty I scraped together the sum needed for the passage home, and then at Vera Cruz, on the deck of the ship that was to bear them to Europe, I bade farewell to all that I cared for in the world, to the wife that I was never to see more on this side of the grave, to the child that laughed and prattled in gay unconsciousness of what parting meant, amused as her infant eyes were by the bustle and stir on board. And then I stood alone on the mouldering rampart of the grim old Spanish fortress, watching the last faint wreaths of smoke that the disappearing steamer left behind to mingle with the sultry blueness of the Southern sky.

"I waited and waited in my solitary dwelling beside the silver mine, far off in Durango, for tidings from my wife, but

mail after mail came in, and there was no letter for me. I have since then divined that Marian's heart had failed her when it came to the point, on arriving in her native country, of writing to the offended parent whose forgiveness and protection for herself and little May necessity at that time compelled her to solicit. And then, no doubt, she conceived the romantic idea of presenting herself, without notice, at Glenfern, in hopes that the sudden sight of herself and her innocent child would soften her father's heart.

"What was I to do? I wrote repeatedly, addressing my letters to Marian at her father's house in Scotland, and then, when they remained unanswered, to Mr. Laird himself, but still no reply reached me. That the steam-packet had come safely into port I had learned by

inquiry made through the shipping agents, and that was all. Then, anxiety combining with the subtle influence of that treacherous climate, I fell ill, and when I shook off the fever, was a mere wreck of myself—wan, and worn, and frail—poor too—for the rich Don who owned the mine had given me up for dead, and a smart Yankee had stepped into my shoes while I was still living. I dragged myself to Vera Cruz, and then made such inquiries as a destitute man could make across all those weary miles of sea.

"The lagging answers merely told me one or two plain facts. The West India mail steamer had arrived safely at Southampton. Among the passengers landed at that port were Mrs. Hastings and her child. That was all — absolutely all. From the moment of my poor Marian's

touching English ground all trace of her was lost. How could it be otherwise? I wrote to agents, to bankers, to the police, to Mr. Laird, even to Sir Gervase, my brother, and got no comfort. I did not hear from Gervase for many months, and when he wrote it was from Egypt, at the Second Cataracts, whither my letter had followed him. Mr. Laird kept silence. No one knew anything of my loved and lost.

"How could I guess that the wealthy ironmaster had died, stricken down by aneurism, the bosom snake of many a rich man, but two days before the homeward-bound packet had sailed from Vera Cruz? How could I know that Marian and her little one had been passengers in that train which rushed to its destruction in the hideous Capel Accident, of which I,

an exile from England for half a lifetime, never heard until to-day? I could not long indulge the luxury of grief, or even of anxiety, on the coast. Sheer hunger and penury drove me to work, and, as tutor to a Mexican boy, as a surveyor in Honduras, mate of a coasting vessel, and engineer of a Peruvian mine, I had labour enough to occupy me. Never did I slacken in my eagerness to learn what had caused my wife's silence, but never could I collect the money needed for my journey to Europe, and the costly inquiries that were requisite.

"That Marian was dead, and that her child was dead too, seemed, after a time, certain. Yet I lived and toiled, to drown care, I think, as others fly to the bottle. I was known in both the Americas as a joyless, melancholy man, on whom, oddly

enough, Fortune seemed to smile, for my later speculations brought in golden fruit. I came back, three years ago, almost a rich man, and found a fortune awaiting my acceptance. Mr. Laird's great wealth had lapsed—since he had never disinherited his daughter by making a will—first to Marian, then to May, and then, I being alive and the heir of my missing wife and child, to me.

"To me! It was a mockery, to my fancy, when first the lawyers came to greet me as owner of Glenfern and Glenochar, of Rowanbrae and of Carstone Hall, whence I came to-day; owner, too, of stocks and shares and consols, and miscellaneous property, from Glasgow houses to Russian *rentes*. To all this I succeeded without dispute, and since then, scanty indeed is the pleasure that

it has brought to me. In the midst of all that wealth could buy, I have felt myself as sadly alone, and my life as devoid of zest and savour, as the loneliest anchorite could have done. Very gladly now shall I resign my riches to their true possessor! and that, May, is yourself."

"I—to me!" murmured May, half frightened, while even Paul Knox could not repress an exclamation of surprise.

"To yourself, May Gwynn of yesterday, May Hastings of to-day," answered her father, smiling; "you are the real heiress of your grandfather's large fortune, and will find occupation enough, I can assure you, in its management—unless, indeed, you devolve some of the cares of ownership upon your husband."

May felt a burning flush suffuse her face, as for the first time the thought,

presumptuous as it seemed to her, that this sudden accession of fortune might bridge over the social gulf that severed her from Percy Shafto, crossed her mind.

The gaps in the narrative of Mr. Hastings were soon filled up in the course of the conversation, a conversation interrupted by May's sobs more than once, as the image of the dead mother whose lineaments her fancy had often pictured was called up before her by her newly-recovered father's words. There could be no reasonable doubt that Mrs. Hastings had been the unknown and unclaimed stranger lady who had perished in the Capel Accident. The coincidence of her father, Mr. Laird's death, just before she sailed for Europe, and the fact that a number of greedy kinsfolk had put in

their claim for a share of the great property of the intestate ironmaster, had combined with other causes to prevent recognition, while May's father, far away, and in distressed circumstances in a foreign land, could but conduct by proxy inquiries which proved fruitless.

"To-morrow, then, my darling, we will go to Capel," said Mr. Hastings, as he bade his daughter good-night. "I shall be impatient until I have knelt by my lost wife's early grave, and thanked, as he deserves to be thanked, the generous old man—father, as you call him, and justly so—whose care preserved my child to be a blessing to the evening of my life. I find I owe heavier debts of gratitude on your account, May, my dear, than I can ever pay in this world;" and as he spoke he held out his hand, not for the

first time that evening, to Paul Knox. May had found time to tell her father, briefly, how Paul had saved her on the brink of Old Deeps Pit, when she was a child.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONFESSION.

"KEEP back, now, keep back, cummers and lasses all!" said the sturdy, gray-haired parish surgeon, as by rough coaxing and gentle pushing he thrust back the throng of women that choked the porch, and filled the house-place, and overflowed into the brick-floored back yard, of Mrs. Gubbins' humble dwelling; "give the poor soul time to breathe, I say. When the gentlemen come down——"

"Ay, but when they do coom down, who kens but they'll leave her i' the death-swarf!" grumbled an experienced matron in a man's nightcap of striped wool. "I've seen too many dee, not to know what's meant when the white of the eye gets yellowed, and turns up, slow and heavy, and yet anxious, thet away! Gentles, forsooth! What ha' they to do i' sick-rooms, a fashious, mealy-mouthed lot! If, indeed, 'twere only the parson!"

And a sympathizing chorus of female voices took up the complaint. It was felt to be a grievance that, when Mrs. Gubbins was certaily *in extremis*, those of her own sex and class were shut out, and gentlemen were let in. One of those gentlemen, the curate, might be tolerated in virtue of his sacred calling. The

other could allege no such excuse. He was simply the proud-eyed, middle-aged stranger from foreign parts, known to be the father of the Mayblossom, and rumoured to have brought back fabulous wealth from "the Injees," who was staying, in default of any inn or hotel fit to harbour such a guest, as Brockspear Park.

No authority less despotic than the doctor's could have cleared the room where Dame Gubbins lay dying, and yet the mixed motives that had brought together this mob of collier wives and wenches, eager as crows around carrion, had in them a large leaven of kindliness to temper the taste for excitement that was at the root of it. One woman had brought with her a "singing hinnie" as the Durham mining folk call the rich,

well-buttered tea-cakes they love so well, and kept her griddle over the glowing fire that she might carry the toothsome morsel, hissing hot, to tempt the invalid's appetite. Another was provided with a cramp-bone, of rare medical virtue; while a third had in a bottle some strong stuff, traditional in her family, which smelt of nutmeg, peppermint, and proof-spirit, and which she regarded as an heroic remedy, and called "St. George."

In the sick-room, gathered round the bed, were Mr. Digby the curate, Mr. Hastings, Paul Knox, and the old woman's son Joe, that ill-starred Joe, ex-pointsman, scapegoat of the Capel Accident, and present engine-tenter, as he had been for many a year, at Black Dog pit.

"If 'twould profit Joe!" muttered Mrs. Gubbins, irresolutely, from between

the patchwork counterpane. The old she-heathen seemed minded to make a bad ending to a shifty life. The Reverend Charles Digby had done his best, and had got a polite hearing for his pious exhortations, being indeed a popular clergyman, but no more. Then Mr. Hastings had tried ethics, and Joe had appealed to family affection, but without much effect. Paul Knox had been the last speaker, and few they were in Capel, by this time, who could quite disregard Paul's words, backed as they were by the weight of Paul's life, of which the very wildest of the miners were secretly proud somehow.

"If 'twould make a man o' Joe!" the old woman said again.

"I don't want nought, mother," returned Joseph stoutly, straightening his bent back, and lifting up his eyes that

generally sought the earth, "if 'tis i' the way o' money ye mean. But I do want if so be I follow my mother's coffin to kirkyard, to know she died honest, as my feyther and his forbears died, wi'out a wrongful sixpence on their souls."

"Ye're a fule, Joe! ye're a fule!" retorted the crone peevishly, turning her wrinkled face to the wall. Presently she began to mutter and sob, and then broke into a wailing cry.

"I winna be a thief; no, I winna. An' suppose I were to coom back fra' death's door, an' ye haled me to prison for what I was gaby enow to tell ye—na! I'se keep what I ken to mysel'!"

"Dame!" said Paul in his grave, sweet voice, "dame!" And the sick old woman trembled as at the accents of the accusing angel, and made feeble answer

—"Ye needna bait me, Paul, as they baited a brock for sport at t' fair when I were young."

"Dame," pursued the tall miner, "it's the sin, not the telling of it, makes our faces black at the Great Day. For them that repent there's mercy. Do what's right now, Mother Martha, and e'en undo the evil ye did, very like thoughtlessly, all those years ago! Earn a blessing, woman, the last day's darg ye do on this earth, and never fear but that ye'll be thankful one day to have helped that each should have his own, and justice be done. I don't say do it for my sake, if ever I did ye a good turn; nor for sister Kate's, nor even for Joe's that stands crying there, but do it, dame, for the sake of the God ye'll see so soon."

"Ye won't find nought i' the cup-

board," answered Mrs. Gubbins with an odd sort of half-hysterical, half-triumphant chuckle.

Mr. Hastings and the curate exchanged looks. To them it seemed as if the old pagan had resolved to die with a lie upon her lips. And it was very provoking, for courts of law are incredulous, and additional proofs of May's identity, which the obstinacy of this old crone kept back, were required before May could be legally established in the position of her grandfather's heiress. And to both of them it seemed as though such an answer to so forcible an appeal as that of Paul Knox implied a dogged silence and an impenitent death.

Paul Knox, better acquainted with the sullen, but not wholly unreasonable, character of the dying woman, kept his

steady eyes fixed upon her half-hidden face.

"We're awaiting for thee to tell us, dame," he said at length, with the massive gentleness of voice and manner which matched well with his fearless, blameless life.

Mrs. Gubbins, moaning in her bed, a mere creaking, gasping, bony bundle of moribund humanity, hearkened to Paul's remonstrance as an ill-conditioned dog hearkens to his master's whistle, and turned round whimpering—

"A great strong chap like thee, Master Paul, can't be gainsaid by a poor, frail old body thet's nigh to the death-thraw. Thet tallyman!" added old Martha with a singular perversity, "'tis along o' his crooked doings ye iver coomed to harry me."

"Andrew Glibbs," responded Paul in his deep voice, "is a pelf-worshipper, wise no doubt in his generation, as they that serve Mammon are, so the Writ says."

"Ay," crooned out Mrs. Gubbins grudgingly, "an' see, ye that live long enow, ef he don't die on a good soft feather-bed, not a wore-out old flock like this, that has barely a soft spot in 't. A hard, bad chap, thet Glibbs! I wish some on ye would do something for my Joe."

"I will," answered Mr. Hastings. "Do but tell the truth, and your son shall have a hundred a year for life."

Joe, ex-pointsman, pale enough before, reddened now. "I won't take it, sir; thank'ee kindly," he said, and the Reverend Charles Digby patted him on the shoulder with his broad hand, and said—

"Don't be foolish, Joe?"

"Thank'ee, I'd raythor not," replied Joe, sheepfaced, but determined. "Let mother do what's right, but I'd not care to finger money for what she's done or hevn't done, parson, I thank'ee. My work is sufficient for me."

Yet Joe was bowed and gnarled with toil, and his hollow cheek, and hacking cough, and lean limbs did not indicate the robust self-reliance that his brave words implied. Mr. Hastings looked at him, and for the first time understood him. Up to that moment he had regarded the ex-pointsman, the helpless cause of the Capel Accident, with horror and disgust. But now he said kindly enough—

"You shall be no loser, my poor fellow, by the manliness that prompts you to speak thus. If your mother——"

"Hush!" exclaimed Paul Knox.

"You look," exclaimed Mrs. Gubbins, with startling suddenness, but in a thin, reedy voice, "you look in the outhouse in the back yaard, wheer the fagots be, an', nearest to the end wall wheer the black cobwebs be hanging, you'll find seven or eight bricks loose i' the floor. An' underneath there lays a little red leather trunk, wi' papers, and letters, an' deeds, that be yellowed now wi' age and long keepin'; but all be there, 'cept a ring or so I sold to tallyman—all be there. That was the box I found chucked clear o' a heap o' blazing kists and coffers, when the carriages were burning out yon in Bloody Field at t' gran' Capel Accident. I snatched un up, I did. First bit o' goods not mine ever I laid a finger on."

"Ye art not the only poor sinner, dame," said Paul kindly; "not the first Satan has tempted unawares. Ye brought it home, then, and hid it, and made thyself acquainted with the contents by degrees?"

"Ay, I taught myself to read," panted out Mrs. Gubbins; "taught myself wi' what scraps o' schooling I'd kept i' a corner o' my addled old brain, to get a fortune out o' they letters, an' I hevn't," she added querulously, "hevn't got the price of a week's collier wage out 'nt. It 'ill be a shame ef ye doan't some o' ye do something for Joe, weakling as he be."

These were the last coherent words that she said, for soon a kind of spasm came on, and it was necessary to call up the doctor, while at his heels streamed

in a throng of female visitors, clamorous, eager, but not ill-intentioned; and if hot cake, the strong medicine called "St. George," or undisguised ardent spirits brought in black bottles, Wedgwood tea-pots, and pickle-jars could have revived Mrs. Gubbins, her lease of life need not have expired so quickly as it did.

"Died without much pain," was the surgeon's whispered verdict as he came downstairs. "She belongs to our good friends aloft there—at least, the mortal part of her does, and they are making preparations to 'wake' her in the bad old fashion of such mortuary ceremonies. Once the breath is out of the body, the doctor, you know, is listened to no more."

The little red leather trunk, sorely faded, mildewed, and discoloured, was found beneath lose bricks and rubbish

in the neglected corner of the outhouse indicated in the confession of the late Dame Gubbins. It was not without emotion that Mr. Hastings recognized it. It proved to be of Mexican make, and contained letters, papers, and miscellaneous objects enough to have convinced, in open court, the most sceptical jury ever yet impanelled of May's identity with the lost daughter of Lionel Hastings. Every link in the chain of evidence was now complete, and May, the penniless foundling, was now established virtually in the position of one of the richest heiresses of the day. No one could be more eager to possess himself of an inheritance than was Mr. Hastings to cede his large fortune to its true owner.

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

LADY Elizabeth Shafto, when first the discovery of May's parentage was noised abroad, felt sorely puzzled as to the course which it behoved her, with regard to her own dignity, and to the family interest and honour, to pursue. Happily, of the diverging paths before her, she chose the best—was ready with congratulations, not at all insincere, on "dear Miss Gwynn's" good luck, and encouraged

Percy, in his father's name, to invite May's new-found father to stay at Brockspear Park. That young gentleman had come back in hot haste on receipt of Paul's telegram addressed to Short's Hotel, and felt as though he had been an unconscious Aladdin, for whom the beneficent geni had laboured while he slept.

May was back again for a while in the little dear old bed-room at the schoolhouse, under the care of worthy Reuben Gwynn, while the documentary evidence obtained from Mrs. Gubbins was being duly sifted and sorted by a shrewd lawyer summoned from Lincoln's Inn for that purpose. But she was only to occupy her old bed-chamber for a very little space before quitting Capel for her father's home; and Lady Elizabeth's new

apprehension was lest the heiress should be lost to the Shafto family.

It was, then, with very great relief that the managing wife of feeble Sir Thomas met her son one morning flushed and radiant.

"Mother," said Percy, in his downright style, "I have spoken to May again, and she loves me, and I love her, just as if that confounded money had never come showering down upon her. *I* knew from the first it would make no difference to either of us. And I have spoken to Mr. Hastings, and he says——"

Percy hesitated.

"What does he say?" asked Lady Elizabeth, trying to seem unconcerned.

"He said, that, well as he liked me, he should prefer to give his answer when he was certain that it was made with the

consent of—with your consent, mother, and that he should wish to talk it over with you, if the governor were not in a state of health to be troubled. And here he comes." And so saying, Percy made his escape.

Most men and many women will admit that the task which lay before Lady Elizabeth, in her interview with Mr. Hastings, was an awkward one. She had, in a manner, to solicit, on her son's behalf, the hand of the "hired girl," whom she had flouted, and brow-beaten, and chased out of Capel, for her presumption in being loved by Percy. But, beyond a few incidental prickings of conscience, she did not feel this very keenly, having persuaded herself that her conduct had been, and was, based on the strictest sense of duty and the

proprieties. A fortunate hazard had converted the schoolmaster's adopted daughter into a great heiress, and, by another happy chance, the blood of the Shaftos would run no risk of mingling with a meaner stream, for was not her father the younger brother of Sir Gervase Hastings, and did he not count cousinship with some of the most ancient lines in England?

"I do hope and trust they will be happy together," said Lady Elizabeth, clasping her hands with all a mother's fervour. And Mr. Hastings, who knew women of the world too well to blame them for acting according to their lights, eyed her with some furtive sense of amusement, and said in his most courteous manner that he shared her ladyship's anxiety on the subject, but felt

confident of the future felicity of the young people.

There was the usual interval—too long for the impatience of a lover like Percy Shafto—during which lawyers, milliners, and all the useful persons who are called into requisition on such interesting occasions, seemed to reign supreme, and then the daughters of the duke, Lady Elizabeth's relative, one of whom that lady had secretly marked out as an eligible consort for her son, consenting to figure amidst the bevy of highborn bridesmaids, whom the bride's blushing loveliness outshone, Percy and May were married.

Reuben Gwynn taught no more. The old schoolmaster, with some reluctance, turned his back on the school-house where he had so long laboured, and took up his residence in a pretty cottage at

May's park-gates, where May daily visits him, and still persists in the supervision of Kitty Lob, grown to womanhood now (who acts as Reuben's housekeeper), and in addressing him affectionately as "father." His house and garden, no less than the ample annuity which he was coaxed into accepting, were a gift from May, whose own hands planted the rose-creeper, a cutting from the old tree that crept up the school-house wall, which now spreads its blossomed tendrils over the cottage-front. "Nothing which the world can give should sunder us, father," May says sometimes in answer to Reuben's remonstrances as to the care she lavishes on his old age; "I was naughty once, you know, but you have long forgiven your little May for that."

A broken pillar of white marble, in a

setting at all seasons of bright, fair flowers, marks the grave, nameless no longer, of May's mother, that unforgotten Marian, who was the one love of her father's life. A humbler headstone in another part of the Capel cemetery is inscribed with the name of Joseph Gubbins. The poor fellow did not long enjoy the hundred a year which, in compliance with the pledge given by Mr. Hastings, was duly paid to him while he lived.

A year after the wedding, Sir Thomas Shafto very quietly died in his arm-chair, and Sir Percy reigned in his stead, Lady Elizabeth retiring to the Dower House, with her lawful jointure liberally supplemented, for the new Lady Shafto bore no grudges for past unkindness, and was ever the May Gwynn that the neighbourhood had known in the days of her

poverty, the same that the afflicted had welcomed as a gleam of sunshine in their dark homes, the same that children had ever loved and clung to, the Mayblossom of Capel-le-Moors. And those who had known her were pleased to hear that Brockspear was glad with the patter of tiny feet and the sound of young voices, and that May was happy in the love of her husband and her children, as well as of the father who never would be parted from her more in this world.

The Reverend Charles Digby resigned his curacy and went away, but came back, years afterwards, as a guest, to the rectory, and married Laura Churton, frank, honest Laura, who had been shut up with him and with May in the Old Romans pit. A less unworldly personage in this history, Mr. Andrew Glibbs, up-

borne on the golden-feathered wings of the capital furnished by Mr. Hastings, has long soared above the humble sphere of credit-drapery, and is occasionally mentioned in the newspapers as contractor for this or that, which always turns out to be a paying concern. His health, however, has declined, and the Nemesis of dyspepsia sits beside his pillow.

One other old friend of May's quitted Capel only a month before her marriage, but not without an adieu. Paul Knox, before going to Australia, had journeyed to the Border mansion, near Norchester, where May and her father were living, to bid farewell to Percy Shafto's betrothed bride. All there had been very tender with him—Mr. Hastings, who had learned to understand him; Percy, whose gallant heart had chivalry enough in it

to dispose him to pity the toil-worn miner who had presumed to fall in love with his affianced wife; May, who read Paul's secret now, to which she had before been blind. But Paul bore himself proudly and worthily, and never a word was said as to compassion or repining.

"And Kate, your sister?" It was May who asked the question.

"Nay, lassie, she goes wi' me, of course," returned Paul simply.

"But you'll come back to England one day, Paul—back to England, to Capel, to the old place, and your old friends—ourselves, I hope, among the foremost of them?" pleaded May.

"Never, my dear, never on this side o' death, if it be His will," answered Paul, with a slight, painful twitching of the muscles of his firm mouth. "Good-bye,

gentlemen; and to you too, May, good-bye."

Brave Paul! Lady Elizabeth and her like might view May through a golden halo, as the rich Miss Hastings, but to him she remained the little lady that had laughed at his bungling efforts to pronounce French or German, the child that he had snatched from the verge of Old Deeps coal-pit.

Percy and Mr. Hastings shook hands with him very heartily and regretfully, but May did more. She took the rough, strong hand of the man who had saved her life, and put it to her lips; and had she kissed Paul's sallow cheek at parting, Percy would not have been jealous, nor her father offended. But, as it was, she did kiss his hand; and Paul, with a sob, and a muttered word of blessing, turned

away and walked from the room and from the house, nor is it probable that May's eyes will ever rest on him more.

A great crowd had gathered around Capel Junction Station, when the day came for the actual start, to see the last of Paul Knox. There were idlers enough, no doubt, who would have lounged out, with pipes in their mouths and hands in their pockets, to see any sight, howsoever trivial or debasing. But there were steady workers, too, cheerfully renouncing the day's wages, the loss of which they would feel, because of the greater loss that Capel was to undergo, and because they liked to pay a tribute of respect to one to whom Capel owed more than, as yet, it could gauge by any known standard. That the chapel folks, the flower-fanciers, the bookworms, so called,

the miners who amused their leisure with scraps of learning, or snatches of art, should be there, was of course but natural.

Strange to say, however, the majority of the men present were not regular frequenters of church or chapel, not students, not amateurs of science. Most of the male spectators were strong-limbed working men of the jovial pagan brotherhood, practical materialists who liked to get their pennyworth of solid comfort or of wild excitement for every penny they earned, and who knew no restraint but that of the police. There they were, however, to "see Paul off," as they said, and some of them had even taken the trouble to attire themselves in their Sunday clothes, as if the occasion were one which demanded extra splendour of

raiment. There were women in plenty, too, far more talkative, but with perhaps rather less of sorrow in their eyes than there was in those of their husbands. A few lads, viciously inclined, leered and chuckled to one another in mutual congratulation that the great enemy of dog-fights and ratting, of drinking-bouts and kicking-matches, was removed, but they were only a meagre minority. Paul's well-wishers made up the bulk of the crowd.

Paul came at last, his sister at his side, and passed very slowly through the throng that encumbered the approaches to the railway-station, exchanging, Kate a smile, Paul a handshake, right and left, as they went. At the station-door itself stood the rector, having just alighted from the mail phaeton that he drove now,

for the Reverend Robert Churton, though still hale and hearty, was heavier and less active than of old, and less fond of the saddle.

"I've come," said the Reverend Robert, in his bluff way, "to shake hands, and to wish luck, Paul Knox, to the manliest man that ever lived in my parish—not that you ever listened to many sermons of my preaching, Master Paul—but I'd have been glad if we had understood each other better years and years ago."

"I hope I understood thee, Mr. Churton," answered Paul, as he took the rector's proffered hand; "my respect and my good word have been fairly earned and openly given this many a day."

Some few of the bystanders heard the rector's words, and Paul's reply; and

there were others who heard nothing, and grew impatient as they saw a social superior monopolise, though but for a moment, the hero of the hour.

"Ye're niver a-goin' to leave us, Paul, thet a-way, wi'out a word!" said a grizzled veteran of Silverseam pit.

"Na, na, thet would not be our Paul!" put in another, and then some of the younger fellows set up a cry of, "A speech, a speech!"

Paul, with his deformed sister clinging to his mighty right arm, her trustful face turned towards the strong, wise brother, for whose sake she was willing to exchange the Old for the Newest World, looked with steady eyes at the surging crowds. Seldom, perhaps, had the tall, gaunt, dark-eyed miner presented a nobler aspect than he did then, as he drew up

his almost gigantic stature to its full height, and swept the air with a gesture impressive in its easy unconsciousness, with his powerful arm and outstretched hands.

"Dear friends, dear neighbours," thus rolled out the deep, rich notes of Paul's strong voice, "a speech from me, worth the hearing, ye will not get this day, for I am taken by surprise. Many a kind face I've seen, many a kind word I've heard as I passed by on my way to station, of those I'll ne'er, perhaps, see more in this world; and I take it very well of ye, neighbours, that ye've come to say farewell and to bid us God speed. And in my own name and my sister's—she be cryin', poor thing, an' cannot speak—I thank ye one and all."

A strange, confused sound, like a sob

wrung from the heart of a giant, rose up from the throng. All seemed instinctively to feel that the common expression of Englishmen's emotion, in the form of a cheer, was out of place now. Mingling with the regret for the loss of one who might in some sense be called the type of a miner at his best, mingling too with the personal esteem for the most popular member of the community, never so popular as when they were losing him, the people felt a vague but sincere sympathy for the grief that their favourite kept so bravely to himself. It was somehow known to nearly all there that it was his hopeless love for May, and his unwillingness to see her as the wife of another, that drove Paul forth into exile; and in some odd, inarticulate way the crowd contrived to express its sorrow and

its goodwill. The women, more excitable than their male partners, began to weep aloud.

"Oh, Paul, Paul, but we'll miss ye sairly!"

"Dear lad, we'll wait lang to see another like thee!"

"A blessing won't hurt 'ee, though 'tis fra such as we!"

Such were a few of the shrill cries that rose above the low deep murmur of the crowd. Just then the train came rolling heavily into the station.

"Just a word more, Paul, old chap!"

This from a chorus of men's voices, the loudest among which, strange to say, were those of wild young fellows of the Pinks and Blues, as their club ribbons and cravats showed them to be, no habitual hearers of Paul's, but with faces

softened now by the remembrance that they should have no further chance of listening to him. It was noteworthy that no one had made mention of May's name, or of the rumoured fact of Paul's attachment to her. Some innate delicacy, which educated people could not have surpassed in this case, warned the rough colliers to respect the secret that their former comrade chose to keep to himself.

"Mates, friends—dear old neighbours," said Paul, again facing the crowd, "I be going, for the last thing I say among ye in Capel, and to my fellow-workers, to ask a grace of ye, that ye may give me an ye like?"

"What is it, Paul? Ef ye could eat and drink gold, we'd gi'e it 'ee," answered a spokesman, amidst applause from the rest.

"I do believe, mates," responded Paul, "that you would, free-handed and free-hearted as ye be. But the grace I crave will cost ye nowt. List, friends, to the last sermon ye'll hear from Paul. Would ye pleasure me? Why, then, if ye be in doubt, and don't know whether to do what's wrong, and seems pleasant, or not, think of me, and do what's right. And, when ye see a man ye dinna braid to, or a woman, or a wean, in distress, or see a dumb thing put to pain for nothing useful, just remember Paul Knox, and do what would make Paul Knox glad, t'other side of the world, if he did but know it. And now, the Lord bless you, old and young—good-bye!"

And then broke forth the thunder of cheering, of cheering such as never election knew, when the most triumphant

candidate went up to Parliament on the strength of bribes and beer, for now every hurrah came, unbought, from the heart of the cheerer. And so, amidst a mighty roar of British applause, the train rolled out of Capel Station; and the crowd, rushing to embankment and railing, watched it, and watched the waving of Paul's hand and hat in acknowledgment of their parting huzzas, until all faded away in the dim distance. And thus finishes the story of Paul Knox, Pitman.

THE END.

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