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VOL. I.

LONDON:

THOMAS CAUTLEY NEWBY, PUBLISHER,

30, WELBECK STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE.

1854.

249. v. 550.

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THE NEXT OF KIN.

CHAPTER I.

It had been miserably wet all day. The rain came down in that steady, sullen manner as if determined to have its own way for the next four-and-twenty hours; and didn't care how many out-of-door arrangements it put a stop to.

To be sure, it had once, for a few minutes, ceased—as if the weather, having had a good fit of ill-humour, felt wonderfully relieved, and inclined to be pleasant again—but down came another pelting shower, the clouds gathered over the tiny bit of blue sky that had peeped

out, and all seemed ten times more gloomy after the momentary brightness.

It was one of those days very apt to make an Englishman peevish, idle, unsettled, and splenetic; when he would very likely swear that the rainy season in Abyssinia could not be half so bad to endure as those alternate days of showers and sunshine in his own country.

As the autumn twilight set in, all things looked still more dismal and uninviting; yet, out into those murky, sloppy streets Mr. Maggs must go, for it was long past the usual hour of leaving his office; and he looked oftener, and more impatiently towards the window, wishing the rain would cease for a sufficient time to allow of his walking home without getting wet through.

His occupation appeared to be merely a desultory one for the time being, to wile away the tediousness of waiting.

He was listlessly reading over letters and papers, selected from a confused heap on a side

table—some he laid carefully by, and others he flung on the fire, where, after making a bright flame for a moment, they became spectral mourning chariots, bearing hundreds of parsons, clerks, and congregations up the chimney, where the wind howled in grim delight, as it seized upon them and whirled them away into smoky windings and chinks, smothering them in murky recesses.

Then their perturbed spirits seemed to come again, in another element, and pattered against the glass, calling the genii of the waters to their aid, to wreak vengeance on him who sat within so indifferent; anon, retiring a moment to prepare for a fresh onslaught, rattling with more fury on the windows, as if enraged they could not get at him.

“Not much chance of its being any better to-night,” muttered the gentleman, as he walked across the room, to look out on what prospect the street presented. “If ’tis no

fairer in half-an-hour I *must* set off in spite of it."

There was nothing very alluring out of doors certainly. Dirty men were walking about, with dirty canvas bags, thrown, cloak fashion, over their shoulders. The lank horses, in a passing omnibus, looked more wretchedly dejected than usual. Houseless dogs hung their heads, curled their tails, and slunk for temporary shelter in door-ways—where they probably drew invidious comparisons between their own constitutions and those of a party of ducks, who were gabbling and dipping themselves in the overflowing gutters—enjoying the luxury of swimming, plunge, and shower baths all at the same time.

At last there was a decided promise of improvement; and Mr. Maggs huddled the rest of the papers away, for future examination; and was carefully removing the fire from the grate, preparatory to leaving his office, when

a clerk, who, like himself, was detained by the weather, popped his head in at the door, saying, rather apologetically—

“A lady particularly desires to see you, sir,” and, without waiting for permission, allowed her to enter.

The clerk closed the door and retreated to his own official precincts, not quite sure whether he had done right in acknowledging his master was within at that late hour.

Mr. Maggs had certainly turned round, as if not well pleased at the visit of even a good client, after his day's business was over; but, involuntarily, and with more respect than he at first intended, he bowed as his eyes fell on the lady. She was attired in the dress which betokened her to be a widow; and, on throwing up her long crape veil, she displayed a face both very young and very beautiful.

Whatever were the circumstances that caused her early bereavement, sorrow could not long have preyed on that lovely countenance: her

eyes were not dimmed by weeping, nor could her cheek be thought paled with sadness, for that marble-like hue seemed natural to it. A florid complexion never could have consisted with her style of beauty. There was one peculiar singularity which could not fail to attract attention. The smooth, glossy bands of hair, beneath the quilled border of her cap, were of a rich auburn—while her eyes, that glanced even then, haughtily around, were black and sparkling.

There was a proud curl on the lips too, as she seemed to feel conscious, for the first time, that some erroneous construction might be placed on her singular visit, and the request she came to make ; but this subsided after her momentary observation of Mr. Maggs, whose open, benevolent features expressed the greatest respect and sympathy for his strange visitor.

He drew forward the chair his clients generally occupied, and as the lady, in seating

herself in it, displaced the large black mantle in which she was enveloped, he could not help discovering her appearance very evidently betokened that a child without a living father might, at no distant period, be ushered into the world.

All Mr. Maggs' remarks had only been made within the minute or two following the lady's entrance, during which time she had not spoken, but he saw she held in her hand a small, closely-sealed packet, at which she looked, when he sat down opposite her, and expressed himself ready to hear her communication.

Then she addressed him in a clear, soft voice, but, as she proceeded, something indicated the tones were more used to command than solicit.

"I am come to ask a favour of you, Mr. Maggs. Will you permit me to leave this packet in your care for a few months? I am strangely, sadly situated—no relations, no settled home—and must shortly undergo a

trial may cost me my life. Should I not survive, and should my child die also, which," she added with a sigh, "is what I almost anticipate, these papers will not be redeemed, and *I shall wish you to destroy them unread.*"

The lady paused a moment, for Mr. Maggs had not interrupted her ; he looked exceedingly astonished, and perhaps there was a shade of disapprobation that betokened a refusal ; for, as he made no immediate reply, she continued more earnestly than before—

"This little parcel contains no dangerous secrets, sir ; there are merely a few family letters and papers on which, should I live to come and claim them, I wish to consult you. It is chiefly to prevent their being lost or pried into by strangers, during my illness, and to insure their being destroyed if I die, that I desire to place them with one by whom I know they will be held sacred."

"You are quite a stranger to me madam," began Mr. Maggs. "I do not think I should

like the responsibility, under such circumstances. If I might offer a suggestion, I should say your banker had better take charge of them; or, at least, you must have *some* friend you could trust. I do not like that clause of destroying them, if you do not come to demand them. I might be called on at some future time to produce them, and find myself awkwardly situated for having complied with so strange a request."

"You are making too serious an affair of it altogether," returned the lady. "The papers, at present, concern no one living but myself: they will be of value to no one but myself, or my child, in future. Depend on it, if either I, or it, survive, you shall be relieved from the trust. If not, on this day twelvemonths, I beg you will burn the packet, *unopened* and *unread*. What little mystery it does contain, I wish to die with me."

"And should you not come for it yourself, madam, shall I receive some token to authorise

my giving it up to another on behalf of your child?" asked Mr. Maggs, solemnly.

The young widow paused a few moments, as if undecided whether she would not make some more confidential disclosures to the lawyer; but a disdainful flush spread over her cheeks, and, ere it subsided, she said, hastily—

"I cannot now tell you all my reasons for selecting you, Mr. Maggs, as the only one with whom I wish to leave these papers—although a stranger to me, personally, I know, and have heard sufficient of you, to make me feel assured my present and future confidence will not be misplaced."

There was an earnest persuasiveness in the lady's manner that would have almost induced Mr. Maggs to promise or undertake anything; and in spite of all his caution, as a lawyer, he thought there was some little singularity and romance about the whole affair; and what he would not have dreamed of doing for another, equally a stranger, he began to feel an inclina-

tion to do for the beautiful young widow, under such peculiarly interesting circumstances.

That momentary glance at her figure had at once struck a chord in his breast, which, at that particular period, Mr. Maggs would have thought himself a most insensible brute if he had not listened to. His mind wandered to his own home, and certain cares and solitudes that had lately made it still dearer than it had hitherto been.

And now, as this bereaved young creature sat before him, looking up with those large, dark eyes into his face ; and, with her musical voice, telling him she knew him to be a man of probity and honour—one who would feel for the widow and orphan—he could think of no more reasonable excuses to make for not granting her request.

“I may ask your name and address, madam, may I not?”

The lady's only reply was putting into his hand her little packet.

On the envelope was merely written, in a female hand—"Papers belonging to Mrs. James. To be kept till demanded, or destroyed, unopened, this day twelvemonths." Then followed the date. Three very curious seals secured it.

Mr. Maggs was turning the parcel round and round, as if he could, even from the outside, gain some clue to the contents, when the office door again opened, and the same clerk advanced, respectfully, to make some whispered communication to his master.

The lady retired to the further end of the room, near the door, as if unwilling to intrude on their business.

"Tell him to call here to-morrow morning at eleven. You should have told him I was engaged—and so late too. Stop, perhaps this lady will excuse me one moment."

Mr. Maggs turned round very deferentially towards the spot where he had just before seen

the dark dress of the widow hovering in the dusk.

The mysterious visitor had vanished !

As soon as Mr. Maggs recovered from his astonishment, he went to the front door, and looked out uneasily—no one was visible as far as he could discern, either up or down the murky street, and still holding the packet in his hand, he returned to the office to cogitate on the singular adventure. Mr. Maggs was not in the habit of making confidential communications to his officials ; but he was now thrown off his guard, and briefly related the affair to the head clerk, who had shewn the lady in.

The young man being just ready to leave, was standing before his high desk, looking into his hat, and wishing he had followed the lady. His opinion was decidedly for opening the parcel at once.

“ Who could tell what disclosures might be

made, her giving no reference, no address, was very suspicious."

"Who is she, I wonder?" pondered Mr. Maggs, rather asking himself the question than expecting any solution of the mystery from Mr. Haviland.

Mr. Haviland politely suggested her being no widow at all; but having been austere frowned into silence by his master, again retired to his private reflections behind his hat.

Mr. Maggs had, meantime, formed his own resolution, and deposited the packet in one of his Japan cases, carefully locking it again. Then the rain having at last pretty well ceased, he set off towards his home.

The town of Shuffleborough was then in all its glory and prosperity. Ships from every part of the world poured treasures into it, and took away, in exchange, the superfluous productions of its neighbourhood.

Its streets, which a few years before, were bounded by the river on one side, and a ruinous old castle on the other, now stretched far away beyond either, over what had lately been pleasant meadows. A handsome bridge was thrown over the Queasy, and a railway just opened, crossing its fields and commons, intersecting its turnpike roads, and even running across one or two of its suburban streets, distracting, with discordant screams and whistles, the nerves of all who were not shareholders, or going to travel by it.

Mr. Maggs walked on as rapidly as the slippery muddy pavements would admit of, wondering what could be the use of the shopkeepers displaying all that finery in their windows such a day as that had been, and smiling as he saw the illuminated cards with the printed prices of the articles on them, believing they were only ingenious devices *ad captandum vulgus*.

“Ah, I must not forget to enquire about that cheque to-morrow,” thought Mr. Maggs,

pausing a moment before one of the temples avowedly sacred to Plutus, where that God is supposed to keep especial watch over all money-bags deposited therein, and where people put their cash, under the belief that it will be safer than in their own possession, not awaking from such delusion till they hear the astounding announcement that "the bank has closed till further notice," the partners not finding it convenient to answer any more demands, having, very likely, used the accumulated sums in clothing themselves in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously every day, and driving about in carriages, splashing the mud over the legs of their pedestrian creditors.

Mr. Maggs felt perfectly assured of the security of his deposits, when he saw the strong door and iron defended windows of "The Shuffleborough and Shaminster Bank," as if all the danger to be apprehended was from the outside.

But the rain was beginning again, and the

lawyer quickened his pace, soon coming on the still muddier turnpike road, from which, in a few moments, he saw the lights of his own house. Yet, ever and anon, amidst the gloom, did he fancy a pair of bright eyes flashing on him, or a pale face flickering before him ; and so deep an impression had the young widow's strange visit and disappearance made on him, that he felt nearly tempted to form the resolution of opening her packet the next day.

But she said she trusted him as a man of probity and honour, and a true and upright man Mr. Maggs really was, so he conquered his momentary desire to pry into the poor lady's secrets.

Besides, she had promised to consult him on their contents, when she came to redeem them. Yes—there they should remain, in his strong box, and what he would do with them that day twelvemonths, if she came not, there was plenty of time to consider about.

CHAPTER II.

THE house Mr. Maggs entered was of a truly *composite* order, being something between a pavilion, cottage *ornée*, castilated mansion, and farm-house—partaking equally of the Gothic, Saxon, Elizabethan, and Victorian ages; the architect having, also, strictly adhered to the prevailing style of the day—namely, covering the greatest possible space, with the least possible regard to comfort or uniformity. There was a chimney at each corner, giving it rather the character of a highly-decorated inverted chest of drawers; there were French windows, almost as large as the rooms they lighted; and there was a balcony outside the first-floor, on which, if you were very careful, and not very stout, you might pace up and down without

much risk of falling over and breaking your neck.

The bed-rooms were perfect snuggeries—so snug, indeed, that the chief danger seemed the probability of being suffocated in them. As to the attics appropriated to the servants, the only wonder was, the tiles did not blow away, and leave them exposed in their beds in winter, and become so heated through as to make roast-meat of them in summer.

The centre of the lawn by which the house was approached, was decorated with a pedestal, and a stone-bason, into which three minikin lions were supposed to be spouting water. There was, also, a shrubbery, through a vista of which you caught a glimpse of a miniature pile of pillars, and arches, and urns, dedicated on joint-stock terms to Shakespeare, Milton, and Byron.

Mr. Maggs had no sooner stepped inside the well-lighted dining-room, in which a table was laid for his late dinner, than Martha, the head

domestic of the establishment, hurried in after him, in a state of joyous excitement, shutting the door, lest even her tremulous whisper should be heard beyond, and oblivious of all her master's dignity, clapped both her hands enthusiastically, as she stood before him, repeating over again—

“Only think, sir, Missis have just got a fine boy born;” and Martha looked as much astonishment as if such an event had not been for the best part of the year anticipated, or had never before been known to take place within the experience of her whole life of servitude.

While she was despatched to ascertain whether an interview with his wife would be permitted, under the authority of the nurse and doctor, Mr. Maggs paced the room with a sensation of bounding delight and exultation he had never felt before. They were by no means a young couple, he and his wife, though only a year or two married, and so the happy event in his family was damped by none of the

discouraging thoughts some parents experience, causing them often to regret that English children cannot conveniently follow the fashion of young Egyptian boys and girls, who are little or no expense to their fathers and mothers in the way of clothing; they going for the most part without any, while they can often pick up a respectable maintenance in the streets.

Mr. Maggs gazed up complacently at his likeness hanging over the fire-place, and flattered himself by hoping his son and heir might grow up such a good-looking fellow.

It was the only portrait that embellished the walls, and this being the case, we can only consider Mr. Maggs as a *new man*, judging of him as the Romans would, under such circumstances, who looked on no man as noble, unless he could show the pictures of his ancestors.

We are bound to acknowledge this was the first of the family collection, the worthy lawyer meant to hang round his room.

No dinner was touched that evening by the delighted Mr. Maggs. Perhaps the sip of savoury caudle handed to him with great ceremony, in his wife's bed-room, sufficed, or the sight of that little frilled and flanneled miniature on the pillow, sleeping away its first hour in this world, caused such a choking sensation in his throat, as to render swallowing a matter of utter impossibility.

Who can wonder at the first born being the best beloved? Why should a man be laughed at, when, as he looks at a little red pudgy squalling mass, he believes the nurse's assertion, that "'tis the very finest child in the universe," or smiles complacently when he is told, "'tis the image of himself."

Let him not seek to check that exuberant pride, swelling in his bosom as he hears, for the first time, the feeble cry of his child, when put into his arms. Is it not its first effort to hail him with the precious name of "Father."

Succeeding brothers and sisters never bring half so much pleasure.

Mr. Maggs thought no more about the young widow, except, perhaps, to hope she would have some one to nurse and support her as tenderly as his own dear wife was cared for. No, that she never could, for there would be no kind husband to hang over her, no fond father to bless *her* little boy or girl.

Nothing could exceed the bustling importance of every body in the Maggs' establishment for the next few weeks. Martha appeared to half live in the highway between their house and the town, there seemed to be always something wanted, she did nothing, apparently, all day long, but put on and take off her bonnet and shawl; she was seized with fits of alarm every three or four hours, and was continually discovered by the clerks tumbling breathlessly up and down the office stairs, intending to give the latest intelligence to her master respecting the home department. At

length, having been "as well as could be expected," for several weeks, the bulletins announced Mrs Maggs as "convalescent," and the knocker got rested, and Martha had time to draw breath between the numerous enquiries for her mistress, and Mr. Maggs was allowed to take his seat at his dinner-table without hearing that his wife and son had been at the point of death, during his absence, but were most miraculously preserved by the united efforts of the nurse and doctor.

I have been told the Dutch had a custom whenever any member of the family was ill, of writing the state of the patient every morning on a board, and hanging it outside the door, so that instead of all the knocking and ringing, their friends had only to step over and read the announcement.

It seems rather strange that we English, who are so fond of copying our foreign neighbours, do not adopt this reasonable and time-saving fashion.



Mrs. Maggs had been a Miss Tracy, and was generally supposed to have endured a rather prolonged courtship, from the circumstance of not being satisfactorily able to make up her mind to change her own high sounding appellation for the uneuphonious one of Maggs. She fully believed she could have revived the claims of all the Tracys, who were as likely to have come over with William the Conqueror, as any of the Veres, and Seymours, Harcourts, or Clares, who had so carefully preserved the legend of their family honours, and who considered themselves ennobled by their descent from such lack-landish emigrants. There could be no doubt but her forefathers and foremothers had imprudently permitted their genealogical history to become rather obscured, but Miss Harriet Tracy was exceedingly desirous of standing on good ancestral ground, and supported her authority by now and then bringing forth from a worm-eaten wardrobe, two or three deep-pocketed, padded, embroidered dress

coats, with slashed sleeves and laced collars, which tradition vouched for being the identical garments worn on some long ago memorable occasions by the primogenitive Tracys.

'Tis true, these little historical anecdotes were, now and then, disputed by those matter-of-fact geniuses, who go about the world pulling off the rose-coloured veils of delusion from people's eyes; but Miss Tracy had smilingly defied contradiction, and went on her way, dating her descent from the first Tracys who had set foot in England, asserting her relationship—though too proud to claim it, she said—to many of the high and mighty of the land.

People think there are no somnambulists but those who get out of bed in the night, leap from windows, walk on edges of precipices, climb rocks, and do a thousand other hazardous things, which nobody thoroughly awake would do.

The truth is, one half the world walk in their sleep, and very likely there are no people

happier than those daylight somnambuli, who fearlessly step along, surrounded on all sides with dangers and difficulties, yet cleverly overcoming or avoiding them. No one thinks of waking them up, though the hair-breadth escapes they run are apparent to many; they follow the course adopted towards all sleep-walkers, considering it better to let them remain ignorant of the perilous path they are pursuing.

CHAPTER III.

THE English always celebrate every great event by a feast. If a victory is won, the whole nation dines on sumptuous fare, to commemorate it—or a sovereign is crowned, and the whole island becomes one immense kitchen, and its inhabitants cooks. When a Lord Mayor is chosen, all the business of the city would, beyond doubt, go wrong for the next twelve months, if a certain number of oxen, turkeys, turtles, turbot, etc., were not devoured by a certain number of people. The arrival of a Foreign Ambassador is a signal for the world of fashion to invite him to dinner; and woe be to the welfare of that county or borough, where the newly returned member



does not eat with his constituents. Even in private life, the banqueting mania prevails to all possible extent. A birth-day occurs in a family, and the mother orders something extra for dinner; or a marriage takes place, and a very important part of the ceremony is the wedding feast. In short, a dinner is the necessary celebration of all remarkable events; we can never properly express our feelings, without a goodly array of well-filled dishes. Our love of illuminations and fire-works is second only to our love of feasting. Let John Bull once have a reasonable cause for rejoicing—let him sacrifice to his first god, and pay all possible honours to his gustative idolatry, and immediately he longs, like our old friend, Jack the Giant Killer—

“In each window stick a candle,
Light the crackers, fire the squibs”.

May British hands never light any other

bonfires than those by which they display their admiration for good luck and good cheer.

Mr. and Mrs. Maggs sent out a whole pack of cards of invitation to their friends, bidding them come and celebrate the christening of their son, when he was a year old. A very magnificent entertainment was prepared, and done great justice to by their guests. 'Tis no use to deny that there are many people who seem to have no other business in the world than to devour the inhabitants of the earth, air and water, in order to prevent their getting too numerous, whose only delight in contemplating the changes of the seasons is because they bring fresh delicacies to tempt their never satisfied appetites. To them Nature is only an immense purveyor, bound to supply them with dainties from her store.

Mr. Maggs brought up the best wine from his cellar to drink to the health of the new-made Christian, who having been baptized Fitztracy, in honour of his mother, was con-

sidered entitled to bear the whole weight of her ancestral dignities.

But the dinner was only the first part of the entertainment, and that being over, the ladies hurried away like a troop of Eves, without one Adam to share their banishment, and prepared to receive evening guests.

One after another, these arrived, rapidly, till about nine o'clock, when the galaxy of Shuffelborough beauty might have been seen in all splendour. Jewellery sparkled, lace fluttered, eyes dazzled, rosy lips smiled, mirrors and chandeliers glittered. In short, I should write on mother of pearl, with a diamond pen dipped in dissolved rubies, to properly describe the brilliant scene at baby Fitztracy Magg's christening.

Far be it for me to insinuate that Mrs. Maggs had taken one drop too much wine with her dinner—but she certainly was in a most happy state of intoxication—intoxication caused by the exhilarating ecstasy of seeing

such a fairy-like pageant conjured up in her house—she, the presiding *Déesse*. Every face she looked on was illuminated with smiles—she heard praises or gay laughs wherever she moved.

Happy woman to have bestowed so much happiness on her fellow creatures.

“Light is the dance, and doubly sweet the lays,
When for the dear delight another pays.”

There were several musical young ladies present—and one was now led over to the piano, and requested to favour them with one of her exquisite performances.

Miss Notturmo played in the first rate *terribilissima* style, now so greatly patronised and admired—her fingers, at first, ambled and pranced about over the keys of the piano; but as she got more into the spirit of the composer's design, her hands darted off, one to the treble, the other to the bass, then she crossed

them, and then they rushed together to the middle, and became so entwined, there was no knowing to which the fingers belonged. She evidently thought, and had perhaps been taught, that the great perfection in music was attained by playing the greatest number of notes in the shortest possible space of time, without detriment to the instrument. Something in the railway fashion—the quicker you go the better, so as you arrive safe at the terminus. It was a perfect hurricane of notes—a tornado-like rush of sounds—the eruption of a volcano, followed by the rumbling of an earthquake—and all was over—the whole affair only lasting a few minutes, during which her audience held their breath in amazement, and it was some time before the awful succeeding silence was broken.

Miss Notturmo knew she was the show-off performer of the evening, and determining to give them a full specimen of her powers, vocal and instrumental, dashed off, unsolicited,

into the spirit-stirring song of "The Erl King," desirous, it would seem, of frightening the company out of their wits ; and when she shrieked forth the words—

"Oh, father, dear father, hold me, I pray,
The Erl King comes nearer, he drags me away."

Mr. Maggs, who had volunteered to turn over the leaves of her music-book, was seized with such a spasmodic convulsion as nearly to overset the candles.

Certainly the times are gone by when any one's heart could be won by a young lady playing the Battle of Prague—so, also, is the era passed away, when one who could execute "The Storm" was looked on as a musical prodigy. There had, in those by-gone days, been no difficulty in ascertaining when you had reached the summit of Apollo's Temple—and once there, a lady could sit down and rest her fingers, contemptuous of all who were

still climbing over the mountains of sonatos, and rondos, and heaps of progressive lessons; and should any have dared call into question her title to pre-eminence, she had only to overwhelm them with the crash of the contending elements, or the "charge of cavalry," or "rolling of musketry," and their doubts were for ever silenced. But, at this period, when there is a Miss Notturmo in every house, there is no termination to a musical lady's labours—no season of rest for her fingers. She has no sooner mastered a *Fantasia Brillante*, by five hours a day practising, than Hertz, or Czerny, or Liszt, or somebody else flings a sixteen page *Impromptu Sentimental* at her feet,* and bids her strike chords of five notes each, and flourish over five sharps with incidental flats, and be perfect in it by the end of the week, or something else will have appeared newer and more difficult.

A lady then informed Mrs. Maggs, in musical strains, that she "had wandered in dreams

to her moonlight home ;” and Mrs. Maggs informed the lady, in equally melodious terms, that she, too, had “dreamed of Eden’s blissful bowers and heavenly flowers,” &c.; and then they tried to drown each other’s voices by declaring most energetically, that “in all these entrancing situations they had “only loved one another.”

This was called singing a duet.

Another gentleman, who had been very vehement in his exclamations of “bravo, bravissimo,” was next induced to try his voice. His songs were, it seemed, good, sturdy, spirit-stirring, national, redoubtable airs; generally selected at naval and military bespeaks at the theatres—and always great favourites, as tending to show that Englishmen are most belligerent, knock-about, sort of people; songs encored and enjoyed as much by those who have been expected to do their duty abroad in perilous scenes, as by those who have remained quietly at home.

The gentleman gave them " 'Twas in Trafalgar Bay," as loudly and as energetically as if he were Braham himself, winding up with such an elaborate flourish and shake, in which he ascended so high, and went so far away from the air, that when, at length, he came back to the last note, his friends were inclined to welcome him safe home again, as if he had returned from a long and hazardous journey.

Cards and supper succeeded the music ; and many who were present wished their acquaintances had sons and heirs born more frequently, if they would also, like Mr. Maggs, celebrate the event with such a banquet.

But it is a melancholy certainty, impressed on our minds by the every-day occurrences of every age, that all pleasures, however bewitching, all scenes, however brilliant, must come to an end. Coloured lamps will not burn unceasingly, any more than stars shine by day ; eyes will grow weary even of looking at all that is bright and fair ; feet will tire of

dancing, even to the most inspiring strains ; and day refuses to postpone its breaking, for the gayest nightly revels.

Mrs. Maggs detected more than one pretty mouth squeezing away a yawn ; every-body seemed to have kept up till the last possible moment, and, by one general impulse, all began to depart. In half-an-hour more Mrs. Maggs stood alone amidst the remains of her fleeting glory ; she uttered a very 'deep-drawn sigh, shivered with the morning air in her thin dress, and stalked off to bed—where her husband was already in his first nap, having stolen quietly away after handing the last lady over the stairs.

"Sic transit gloria mundi !"

Notwithstanding those late revels, Mr. Maggs was early at his office next day. It was the anniversary of the young widow's singular visit to him ; and, during all that year, he had neither seen her, nor received the slightest in-

telligence respecting the mysterious packet she had left with him ; and which, if not redeemed by that day, she had so strictly enjoined him to destroy.

Was she dead?—and was her child dead also ? Or might that very anniversary be the time she had intended coming to unfold both the papers and the facts they contained ? Then, again, might they not, as she seemed to indicate, merely contain family letters, of no value or interest to any one but herself. At any rate, if she neither came nor sent, he would obey her orders and burn them.

“ Any one particular been here, Haviland ? ” Mr. Maggs asked, as he entered the office.

“ No one, sir, only Mr. Tutson’s clerk, about that deed of conveyance. There are several letters on your desk, sir.”

Mr. Maggs snatched up one after another. Neither was addressed in a female hand ; nor did either contain any allusion to the widow or her affairs

Every footstep, or knock for admittance at his private room, caused him to start. But the whole day passed and nothing more interesting than the generality of business transacted in a lawyer's office, occurred to render that much expected anniversary remarkable.

"It was quite as late as this when she came," mused Mr. Maggs, when, having dismissed his two high-coloured clerks, with their broad brimmed hats and broad tailed coats, he sat alone at his table, after taking down the Japan case he wanted, and setting it before him.

It was just the autumn of the year, and a nice bright fire was still burning, and to put all temptation as speedily as possible out of his way, Mr. Maggs poked it till the blaze sparkled up the chimney, and sent bright flashes out all over the room. Nothing could long be in that flame without being consumed.

One by one, Mr. Maggs took out the different papers from the case, where, indeed only a few very valuable documents—seldom referred

to—were kept. The one he sought had probably fallen to the bottom. He was not very quick about the task, for he was weighing the matter over in his mind, and debating the propriety of keeping the packet a little longer.

Presently Mr. Maggs quickened his movements, turning over every paper and package more carefully, and coming, at last, to the shining tin bottom. His heart beat very rapidly and there was a visible tremour of his fingers as he took each paper out separately, and examined all over again.

The parcel he sought was not there !

It had vanished as mysteriously as its owner had. Mr. Maggs began to feel some degree of superstition creeping over him. He never, by any chance, allowed the key of that particular case out of his possession, for very important were the documents he deposited in it ; but every one else was there—not another scrap of writing was missing—and yet the widow's packet was gone.

Mr. Maggs could, moreover, swear before any jury in England that he had put it there, and had also seen it there all safe not more than a month before.

CHAPTER IV.

NOTHING could have equalled the asperity with which Miss Tracy had been wont to descant on the wilful impropriety in some of her matronly acquaintances, in bringing up their boys and girls.

“’Twas the mothers,” she said, “who spoilt half the children in existence.”

She even went so far as to assert that whenever she saw any vice or folly in a man, she felt sure he had inherited it from his mother. She became Mrs. Maggs, and she had a son, and like a great many others, who are very wise in theory, she was very deficient in practice.

No similar event to the one recorded in the

first chapter, having occurred in the Maggs' family, she had bestowed her whole undisputed fondness on her darling Fitz, whom she petted, coaxed, and spoiled, to the utter contempt of all her acquaintances—the elderly unmarried ones being, of course, most shocked.

Mrs. Maggs had resolved on educating her boy herself, at least for the first few years, and was in the habit of taking him, every morning, into the drawing-room, accompanied by his favourite puppy, and “a thing of shreds and patches,” once a respectable yellow-backed “Reading Made Easy,” but now, like Theseus's vessel, it was so patched and repaired as to have puzzled the most learned philosopher to discover whether or not it could ever have been the once prized original.

There was generally a chase between the mother and son before they settled to lessons, then a deal of coquetry about the page required; sometimes Fitz would prefer standing, sometimes sitting, and sometimes kneeling at his

mother's side. Frequently he had left his pocket-handkerchief up stairs, and must go and fetch it, or he came with dirty hands, and had to be sent away to wash them. 'Twas astonishing how often he was afflicted with head-ache, after he discovered it was not considered right to force his brains on such occasions.

"I think you are giving yourself a great deal of unnecessary trouble, my dear, in teaching that boy," said Mr. Maggs, one day, when he happened to be in the room, during the hour of instruction. "Here he is, at six years old, and does not yet properly know his letters. Why not engage a governess who would have some little authority over him?"

"I cannot resign my task of commencing his education to any one," replied Mrs. Maggs. "More than half our great and learned men were first taught to read by their mothers, and I may not be far wrong in believing that a noble ambition to reward those tender in-

structresses, was instilled into their minds at the same time as they helped them to achieve the two greatest mysteries their young minds can conceive, namely, learning their letters and forming them on paper. It was with the hope of rewarding a fond mother that many of our great works were written, and I wish my son to look back on his first lesson with an eager desire to repay me for the trouble they now cost, by gaining for himself the wreath of fame I fully expect him to wear."

It was evident Mrs. Maggs thought she was training an embryo genius, a chrysalis of erudition, which should some day burst forth on the world a more brilliant ephemera than any that had ever yet flown over the fields of literature.

The course of study had commenced on that morning as it usually did with an examination as to how much of the yesterday's lesson the pupil's mind retained.

In silence, Fitz rolled up an additional dog's

ear in his book, accompanied by a vigorous rubbing of his shoes on the white cotton socks, but not one atom of the preceding lecture could he succeed in recalling.

Like Nebuchadnezzar's dream, it had passed from his mind.

Again did his mother inform him that a vowel was an articulate sound, and a consonant an articulate sound, but it was necessary for vowels to help consonants; also, that when Fitz knew all his letters, he would be able to spell every word he used.

An argument refuted on the pupil's side by the declaration that he could talk, without spelling, all he wanted to say—therefore spelling must be great nonsense, and useless trouble.

“But dear Fitz would like to read books; and in order to do so, he must absolutely try to remember those letters he had been so long learning.”

And which his father was beginning to

think would be as difficult of achievement as the labours of Hercules.

Mrs. Maggs traversed the beaten track again ; the peculiarity in the shape and sound of each letter was pointed out—not very clearly, perhaps ; the old story of vowels and consonants, with the addition of diphthongs, was repeated, and the restless young disciple bade to remember it against the next day—as if all this was the easiest thing in the world.

The boy's eyes had, for some time, been fixed on a clump of trees at the end of the lawn, round which the sun was playing at bo-peep—one moment appearing on the grassy slope, then hiding behind it—a bad prospect for an idle scholar—and a remark from his father bade fair to make matters worse.

“I was just thinking, my dear, we can hardly wonder at the minds of those ancient disciples, of great philosophers, expanding, and blossoming, and bringing forth more abundant fruit than the pale-faced, moped-up scholars of

the present day. The masters of old taught in groves and gardens, surrounded by nature. They had but to look round on her beauties, to learn her laws. But now the bodies and minds of youth are cramped up in crowded rooms, and all they know of purling streams, glorious sunsets, wooded knolls, 'cloud-cap'd towers,' or the paths of the heavenly bodies, is from the well-thumbed pages of a book. Depend upon it, the former was the better system."

Mrs. Maggs thought she would try this plan, especially as it would doubtless meet Fitz's entire approbation. He had escaped from his mother's side during the conversation, and was enjoying a roll on the carpet with his puppy, while Mrs. Maggs looked at him, and felt quite confident, that if all the children in Great Britain—little Royalties included—were placed before her, she should still single out her own darling as superior to them all.

Presently he announced the fact of somebody coming up the gravelwalk, and having ascertained that it was one of his father's clerks, darted out of the window, and set off across the garden full speed, when, not seeing where he went, tumbled headlong over a sweetbriar bush, on which he lay sprawling, calling out for quarter to the brambles, which he had, like Demosthenes, magnified, through fear, into a host of pursuing enemies. The excitement of this mishap being over, Mr. Haviland declared the reason of his visit.

A messenger had just arrived at the office in great haste from Mr. Armitage, one of Mr. Maggs's wealthy clients, supposed to be dying, and requesting his lawyer's immediate presence.

Mr. Haviland had brought the message himself, thinking, he said, Mr. Maggs might wish him to accompany him.

"How many times I have tried to get that man to make a will," said Mr. Maggs, while

waiting for his horse to be brought round, after declining his clerk's attendance; "and now, as people generally do, it is left to be done till the last moment; and he too, with so many crotchets in his head, about finding some other next of kin instead of a second cousin, he does not particularly like."

"Riches *do not* always bring happiness in their train," he reflected, as he rode along over the few miles between his own house and Armitage Hall. "I never saw such a lucky man in money matters in my life; every speculation he undertook succeeded! but I suppose it was Fate tried to recompense him for all else she had taken away."

"Oh! that men would think on the certain misery they are entailing on themselves and their offspring," he continued, "by marrying one in whose veins the seeds of consumption are lurking, and in whose family the deadly fruit has unmistakeably shewn itself. Surely the pain of conquering an attachment in early

life cannot be so great as witnessing in after years, the slow, but sure, approach of the destroying angel, coming, too, as he ever does, when all seems bright and safe. Perhaps the sons are spared till manhood, and the daughters, till the hope becomes undoubted, they have lived beyond the season of danger. But the dream is broken—some cause, trifling in itself, has blown the spark into a consuming flame—and the terror-struck mourner sees the partner by whom the treacherous affliction was disseminated, and the children by whom it was inherited, carried out from his home, and laid in the grave. But I fancied Armitage seemed to rise again, even after these terrible blows, when he still saw his youngest son James left to him, untouched by the blight which had swept off all his brothers and sisters. I believe he thought his toil had not, after all, been vain, when he looked on the fine, handsome young man, and hoped he should at least leave *him* behind to enjoy all the wealth he had accu-

mulated. But that son—ah! he caused Mr. Armitage more grief than all the others. It seems as if trouble was to come to him through all he loved, and he be left at last, with no one belonging to him to smooth his path to the grave.”

Mr. Maggs' reflections were brought to a close by his arrival at the gate leading into the grounds of Armitage. He rode up the long, broad carriage-drive, and came to the lawn spread before the house. Here, on a damask and gilded couch, lay the attenuated form of the once proud and hale Mr. Armitage. A man-servant, who stood near, approached to take Mr. Maggs's horse, and in a whisper informed him that though his master was evidently dying, he had insisted on being brought out once more to look round on all he had so much prized.

The old gentleman tried to smile a welcome to his friend and legal adviser, and a chair

having been placed near, he requested the servant to withdraw.

Half-an-hour was passed in a conversation interrupted at intervals by exhaustion on the part of the sick man, and soothing remarks from Mr. Maggs.

"I think, after all, the safest way will be to leave everything to circumstances," said the former, faintly; "you know how strangely I feel on this point, and that I cannot get the idea out of my head that poor James left a child. If he *did*, that child must be my heir. I should rest better in my grave if I could feel some prospect at my death of one of my own descendants inheriting this place."

"My dear sir," said Mr. Maggs, rather impatiently, "you know how often we have gone over this subject before—how that every advertisement has failed, and not the slightest clue obtained as to the certainty even of whether your son was really married or not;

and, if he were, what his wife's maiden name was—or where married. Depend upon it, she would have come forward at his death.”

“He knew my pride was so great, and my anger such, at his announcement of a clandestine marriage with one whom he acknowledged to be low-born and illegitimate, that he, very likely, never let her know decidedly who he really was,” persisted Mr. Armitage; “and then, you know, his awfully sudden death occurred so soon after my quarrel with him, that there was no opportunity for any explanation. I don’t think he *would* have braved my anger, as he did that day, had he not really been married. You know the sequel. He went out of the world without my passionate words having been recalled; and, oh! how was my anger changed for never dying remorse, when told that my son, my only one, the last remaining link between me and my beloved wife, was gone into another world, without the words of love and forgiveness being exchanged.

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How every harsh word I had uttered at that interview burnt before me in letters of fire, as I lay turning on my bed, and reflecting that when I laid down on that bed to die, none but hirelings would be near to close my eyes."

"You know we both set off to London directly, to make every inquiry," resumed Mr. Nudge, willing to divert his friend's thoughts from his own bitter reflections. "You know no one at the hotel, into which the body was carried, could tell us anything about him; and, indeed, would not have known who he was but for one of your letters in his pocket; and the livery stable keeper, to whom the horse he was thrown from belonged, only knew him as one of the gentlemen who occasionally hired horses, and paid well for them. The people he had lodged with, till within the last few months, had heard nothing of any intended marriage, nor of where he went when he left them. And, goodness knows, we made enquires enough all over London, as, it seemed to me, to have brought

forward a hundred wives, if he had left them, backed, as all your offers were, with the promise of great advantage."

"I know he told me she was in the family-way," argued the old gentleman, "he would not have said *that* if not true; and, though she might have died of the shock, the child might have lived."

"And would have been brought forward fast enough, during all these years," interrupted Mr. Maggs.

"Well, well," said the dying man, faintly; "let my cousin Crofton take possession of everything, at my death, as my presumed next of kin. But, if ever a son or daughter, of my dear James's, should be found, and undoubtedly recognised, then, Maggs, I entreat you to use every endeavour to establish its right. Let every consideration be shewn to Crofton—let there be no undue claims made on him when he may be called on to resign—no back rents demanded, or anything of that sort. It will not be his fault

if he, for a time, enjoys what was belonging to another. It is just possible, however, that the publicity of my death may bring forward the very heir you seek ; but be cautious, or, once let it be known a next of kin is wanted for such property, and you may have a dozen."

As Mr. Armitage seemed unwilling to pursue this harassing subject any further, Mr. Maggs made some remarks on the beauties of the prospect and the grounds around.

"Yes, it is very lovely," said the invalid, querrulously ; "but all this makes death very terrible to me. I laid the first stone of the hall myself, and my heart rejoiced as each part rose on the firm foundation ; and when all was finished, and I, with my wife and children, took possession, I was almost wild with joy and exultation. I planted the shrubs and trees—some of them have not yet reached their prime. All is lovely—all is my *own*, no one dare molest me, or dispute an inch of ground. I have built walls, to mark the boundary of what

is mine. And, yet, I must leave it all now. I could still enjoy it, if I might live a little longer. I called the place after myself, for I thought my family would inherit it; but, now, it must go to one not called by my name—but the only one who can claim relationship with me. He will make merry within the walls I raised; he will, perhaps, alter what I thought perfect; he will tread on those lawns, and his children will laugh, and sport, and live where all my fair buds sickened and died.”

Mr. Armitage spoke, and seemed to feel, as if Providence had injured him, and it would be useless to look to that Providence for succour.

“I think,” said he, again raising his head, “I should not so much regret it if it was winter, but ’tis hard to leave it now, when all is so bright and cheerful.”

And everything *was* bright and cheerful. The sun enlivened every spot, and glittered on the windows of the house; bees were busy collecting honey from their favourite

flowers; birds calling and chirping to their companions, or darting off to seek food for a late brood of young ones; plants, with every beautiful blossom, perfumed the air; and Mr. Maggs felt it would, indeed, be hard to die amidst all these life endearing enjoyments.

One object was very conspicuous beyond the grounds, at no great distance, that was the spire of the village church, and as Mr. Maggs glanced at it, the old man's eyes wandered towards it also.

"Turn me away from that," said he, fretfully—"I cannot bear to look where I must so soon be laid—methinks I have only begun to feel the value of life when I have just done living. Let them take me in—and you, Maggs—you will not leave me—something tells me I cannot last much longer—and I feel a dread of death finding me alone when he comes for the last struggle. I often fear my servants may neglect me—and 'tis a consolation to think I shall be sure of some human

creature being with me when the moment of departure arrives. If I live till to-morrow we will talk more of my affairs."

"How I pity near relations when they quarrel," thought Mr. Maggs, when he retired to the room prepared for him, after leaving poor Mr. Armitage to dream over the bright years of his early life, when sorrow was known only by name. "What misery they heap up for themselves—for, sooner or later, Nature will be heard, and reproach each for every injury and insult inflicted, making even the thought of reconciliation painful and humiliating. I never knew any person who did not bitterly repent an estrangement from those in whose veins flowed the same blood, and many and sorrowful have been the tears I have seen shed, at the recollection of unkind words and unjust actions, when the grave has closed over one without the hand of forgiveness being extended.

"Had not Mr. Armitage sent his son

James to London, with the foolish notion of letting the young man see and enjoy life before he settled to business, all the troubles that followed might have been prevented. It is just possible he did marry some obscure girl—but if he did, she never could have had any child—and very probably she was conscious of being one whose character or conduct would not bear investigation, and so never came forward to claim any assistance from his family. The old gentleman's passion, when James came down here from London to make the disclosure, prevented his asking him a single question, which would afterwards have served as a guide to us in finding out something about the affair. Armitage was a happy, enviable man when first I knew him—I little thought to see his old age so desolate."

There is a cup of sorrow filled for all mortals at their birth—but 'tis not drank by each alike. Of some the first sip destroys them, and they willingly resign life rather than quaff

the whole of the bitter draught. Some taste it so gently, and at such long intervals, they are scarcely conscious of it—while to others, Fate administers the whole at once, when they are best able to bear it; and though they may at first be overcome, yet they gradually recover, and enjoy tranquility during their remaining years. But pitiable indeed are those who having shunned the nauseous goblet in youth, have to drain it to the dregs in their old age. And so had it been with Mr. Armitage.

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CHAPTER V.

MR. MAGGS was awoke at an early hour the next morning, by the housekeeper, with a request, he would come immediately to her master. He had passed a bad night, and a servant was sent off, at his desire, for the clergyman of the parish.

Poor Mr. Armitage thinking, like many others, there will be some peculiar sanctity spread over a death-bed when attended by one of God's especial messengers. ●

Whether it was the excitement of the previous day, or whether the hours allotted him on earth had reached their appointed number, cannot be told, but Mr. Armitage felt that the

moment was not far distant, when all his loved treasures must be resigned.

"Stay here till I am carried out," said he, feebly, to Mr. Maggs, as he approached ; "and let *him* not take actual possession till I am gone. He will be here as soon as he knows I am dead ; for I wrote when I was taken worse—he knows it will all come to him. I could not have borne to have him near me—he would, no doubt, have been watching for my departure—for there never was such a thing felt as grief by an heir when he was coming into riches, or lands. Draw up the blinds," he whispered, a few minutes after—"let my eyes rest on those trees while they can—they are waving their leaves over the death-bed of the last of the group that stood near when they were planted."

The clergyman now arrived—and, save the low murmurs of the dying man, and his spiritual supporter, all was still in that chamber.

The sun shone brightly through the windows, and now and then butterflies chased each other by, or fluttered against the glass, and on the table, in a small vase, were two still sweet smelling flowers that would outlive the hand which plucked them.

Presently a gentle tap came to the door, and on Mr. Maggs softly opening it, he saw the housekeeper's little grandchild beckoning him to come out to her.

"I did not like to go in *there*, sir," pointing to the room of death. "There is a gentleman down stairs asking to see master, and will you or grandmother please come and speak to him?"

Children fear death, even before they have witnessed it, or actually known its meaning. There is an instinctive dread that seems to tell them he is the destroyer of all the happy, gay, and familiar objects around.

The gentleman was Mr. Crofton, Mr. Armitage's heir. He had set off immediately he

received his cousin's letter, and, let us suppose he was sincere, or believed himself to be so, when he said he hoped Mr. Armitage would live many years yet to enjoy and keep possession of his estate.

But nature will be nature still; and in human nature there is such a large mixture of selfishness, that Mr. Maggs was not probably far wrong, when he thought he detected a gleam of satisfaction in Mr. Crofton's eyes, when informed that the relative he scarcely knew, but from whom he would derive immense wealth, was, even at that moment, in *articulo mortis*, and so sensitive on the subject of his succession, that it would be best not to announce his arrival.

Mr. Maggs apologised for leaving Mr. Crofton so hastily, and again ascended to his friend's chamber. But the stillness was broken—the maid-servant was pulling down the blinds—the housekeeper walking across the room, without heed to her creaking shoes—and the doctor

emptying the remaining contents of a bottle into a basin, as if no further required—while the clergyman, having risen from his knees, was preparing to leave the inanimate clay, which his presence could no longer cheer or soothe.

Mr. Armitage had gently breathed his last sigh—and down stairs was the new lord and master of his wealth vainly trying to look grieved.

Breakfast was prepared for the gentlemen, and a great deal of conversation carried on between them about the deceased, in those low tones people generally speak of the recently dead, as if they were listening to what those they have just left on earth were saying of them.

“I suppose Mr. Armitage made you acquainted with the chance there is of a nearer heir being discovered, though I cannot say myself you have much ground for apprehension on that head. I believe, we should have long

ago heard, had there been a nearer kin than yourself."

Although Mr. Crofton had only felt himself the owner of his cousin's property about an hour, still, as Mr. Maggs spoke, there was a sensation in his heart, as if he would have been greatly injured had any one deprived him of it.

"Of course," said he, after a pause, "if any one should start up, it will be now, immediately the old gentleman's death becomes known."

"I should say so, certainly," was the lawyer's reply; "but so safe do I consider you and your heirs of this inheritance, that I advise your acting as if no such chance existed. It was a little source of comfort to my old friend, when on his reviving this subject just before his death, he fancied he might atone for his harshness to his son, by enriching his child, if he left one. To tell you the truth, I have often been in terror lest some impostor

should come forward, and give us a good deal of trouble."

After breakfast, Mr. Crofton, Mr. Maggs, and the other two gentlemen went over the house, taking an inventory of all it contained, in case of any future dispute, and then, having sealed up what was most valuable for the present, Mr. Crofton expressed his regret that urgent business would take him back to London that evening—but he should be down in time for the funeral, and hoped Mr. Maggs would remain, according to the deceased's wishes. And after he had shaken hands and seen him depart, Mr. Maggs went back into the house, and indulged in some saddening reflections about its soon echoing the voices of strangers.

Mr. Armitage had what is considered the greatest honour paid to a deceased person—a magnificent funeral.

There was a hearse, with six horses to drag that poor, thin, decaying body along to the grave. Both hearse and horses had waving

plumes, and were covered with I know not how many yards of black velvet and fringe. Mr. Crofton and Mr. Maggs, as chief mourners, had a coach and four to themselves. The clergyman and doctor had another. Several friends of the new lord of Armitage were equally accommodated, and one or two also of those of the deceased : and then came a string of empty carriages, sent as proxy mourners, by families in the neighbourhood—telling too plainly of the empty hearts the poor departed had left behind.

Pages, banners, and plume bearers, swelled the train, and a grand account of the whole appeared next day in the county paper.

A handsome collation was provided at the hall for those who chose to partake of it ; and very much was every one impressed in Mr. Crofton's favour, by his deportment during the whole of that day — everybody except Mr. Maggs ; and he, being a very clear sighted man, fancied there was a little too much dis-

play of grief, for a second cousin he had scarcely known when living. So he left them eating and drinking, and forming new friendships, and strolled out to the spot where he had, a few days before, found poor, dying, Mr. Armitage.

But, here, matters were less soothing than in the dining-room, for the hearse and mourning coaches were just setting off, the horses full gallop, as if in derision of their late creeping pace; and the drivers, in the morning so pale and long-faced, were rosy, jolly, and tipsy, calling to one another, jokingly, as they raced down the avenue.

Mr. Crofton slept that night, for the first time, in his new dwelling; and if he passed some hours in reflection, after he laid down in his damask bed, it can scarcely be wondered at, under the circumstances.

"Here I am," thought he, "immensely rich; all of a sudden in possession of a house I scarcely ever presumed to enter. And, now, my first

step must be to move my family here. Mr. Maggs tells me *that* was what my poor cousin least liked to contemplate ; and I have no doubt it is a melancholy reflection to a dying man, that a new race will enter and dwell where those belonging to him have lived and died. We don't like a successor in any situation. Well, I suppose a day will come to me, too, when that grim bailiff, Death, will turn me out—serve me with a writ I can't evade, as I have many others. When heading a mournful procession, I must pass out of the park gates as my poor cousin did to-day. Be put out to lie in a cold, damp vault ; and another be rejoicing, as I now am, at coming into power and possession. True, he will be my own son, and that makes all the difference. Fortunately my children are young enough to grow accustomed to this great change in their positions. What an uncommonly soft bed this is—rather different to ours at home—home ! pshaw ! is not this my home ? The furniture all looks as good as

new. How many acres did Maggs say? Nice, gentlemanly fellow that Maggs; wife of a high family, he says—great acquisition to Mrs. C.—lucky dog I am! Thankful, young Armitage acted as he did, and got killed. Won't believe in the possibility of any nearer heir—wouldn't give it up; will only wait a month to see if they come forward. Never could go back to business again, after this taste of independence—no fear—here for ever and ever, amen!"

No scene in the "Arabian Nights" equalled Mr. Crofton's dreams that night in Armitage Hall. He saw heaps of diamonds and pearls ready for laying down as gravel on his walks; bars of gold, to be made into gates, and silver wire for his fences; as to garnets, torquoises, and topazes, he turned contemptuously from them, as not exactly knowing how to employ or get rid of such trash. His only anxiety was lest his trees might bear ruby fruit and emerald leaves.

* * * * *

Mr. Maggs was quite right—there was no cause for fear. Mr. Armitage's death was in papers enough ; but no one appeared to dispute Mr. Crofton's right to enter, when he came, in great state, to take possession of Armitage.

CHAPTER VI.

IN an elegant drawing-room, furnished in the prevailing fashion, viz.—crowded with useless and expensive furniture, tables of every size and shape, chairs for every degree of laziness, pier-glasses in all directions, chiffoniers and ottomans in every nook, besides bijouterie of nameless kinds—sat a lady and gentleman in, what is called, the prime of life.

The former was very handsome, though rather too large, perhaps, to be called graceful ; her dress as costly as could, with consistence, be worn in the morning ; and she had light gloves on—either to cover not very delicate hands, or to show there was no necessity for her using them.

It would seem, however, that her present inertia was rather irksome than pleasant, as if the lady had, at no distant period, been accustomed to a more active life than the one she now led. She was seated on an amber damask sofa, the pattern and quality of which she never seemed tired of examining; some of the articles on the marble and marqueterie tables always attracted her attention, whenever she entered that room, and concerning the possible use of which she puzzled herself extremely; but after pacing a moment on the velvet-pile carpet she would return to her sofa, and seat herself in great state, smiling with the luxurious consciousness of having no more laborious tasks to perform than eating and drinking, dressing and sleeping. A life of perfect ease and idleness seems, in some estimations, to be the acme of fine ladyism.

The gentleman was half buried in the silk cushions of a chaise lounge, lolling back with a considerable degree of comfortable luxury,

crossing his feet on a velvet ottoman, and enjoying the gratification of reading his paper, without the expectation of being called from it every ten minutes to attend to business—as might have been the case once.

The lady was Mrs. Crofton—the gentleman Mr. Crofton, and it was in the state drawing-room, at Armitage, they were sitting, expecting some grand morning visitors.

Mr. Crofton had secluded himself for some little time after his cousin's death, for the ostensible purpose of arranging his affairs, and paying respect to his memory—but in reality to calm his exuberant gratification, and to satisfy himself he was perfectly awake, and that no magician was playing tricks with him. He was not long in convincing himself of the tangibility of all his newly acquired wealth, and then the little Croftons were allowed to stretch their limbs in halls and rooms and staircases of magnificent dimensions without fear of being expelled.

A bright shining beetle, with glittering wings, visiting about with all the gay inhabitants of the garden, sipping delicious nectar, or "rocked in a rose while the nightingale sang," could not exhibit a greater contrast to its state, a few months previously—when a grub residing obscurely in a nut, shut up in a mean habitation—than did Mr. Crofton in his new mansion, when compared with his former little nutshell house.

"I really do think we shall find it very dull here after all," said Mrs. Crofton, again changing her position, and spreading out her green brocade, "for though a good many people call, and we are invited out, yet 'tis not somehow like the friendliness of old times."

"Margaret, I did not expect such remarks from you," said Mr. Crofton, pompously, "I thought better of your judgment. This is as bad as your objections to my sending Guy and the two girls to school. It is useless to expect advantageous matches for our children, unless

they are brought up in a way which qualifies them to do honour to the station I expect them to fill. As to your disappointment in not having your old-time humdrum tea-drinkings and gossipings, I thought I explained to you that, among the society you are now admitted into, such social intercourse is neither desired nor countenanced."

Mr. Crofton was making a few similar remarks when the servant announced having shewn a gentleman, who wanted to speak to him on particular business, into the library.

"How many times I have told you, William, to ask people's names," said Mr. Crofton, who during his eight or ten months residence at Armitage, had shewn himself a great disciplinarian.

"I did ask him, sir, but he said he would announce himself," replied William, following his master across the hall, with less deference than his catechism enjoined him to show.

When Mr. Crofton entered the library, he

found a handsome man about five-and-thirty, whose dress and fashionable appearance might claim for their owner, the title of gentleman, but in whose manners there was wanting that grace and gentility never conferred by fine clothes alone.

So the Lord of Armitage bowed very grandly and formally, as he requested to know his visitor's business.

"That I will state very briefly, Mr. Crofton, you can then draw your own conclusion."

Mr. Crofton sank magnificently into a large easy chair, and motioned with his hand to a cane one near the table, signifying the stranger might make use of it; but if he came to ask any favour of the proud man, he must pursue his subject of communication with more respect than he had opened it.

"This estate, and all the late Mr. Armitage's property, was, I believe, left to you only on condition no nearer kin was living!" the man began.

Mr. Crofton bowed as rigidly as if he wore a whalebone cravat.

“He always believed his son left a child; and you were to give up possession if it was ever found and produced.”

Mr. Crofton felt as if a wasp had stung him—a very small, insignificant creature certainly, but capable of causing much irritation.

“May I ask who takes such interest in my affairs, and seems so well acquainted with them?”

The tone was a very imperious one, and the whalebone did not bend at all.

“I will tell you all that presently, sir; and I will be as concise as possible—for, as I intend to make the subject quite a matter of business, the less circumlocution there is the better. All I intend to do in this present interview is merely to put such facts and proofs into your possession, as shall convince you I am no impostor. What I state will be truth.”

This time Mr. Crofton felt it was an adder stinging him—and he chafed much more, and was apprehensive of more danger.

“To be brief—the child of James Armitage lives—and its parentage can be indisputably proved. There, sir, on that paper you will see the copies of a marriage, and a baptismal register—and below them you may read the address of the parties with whom the child can be found. It is a girl—but that makes no difference in the inheritance of this property.”

A large boa-constrictor, was twining itself round and round Mr. Crofton, waiting, as it seemed, only the opportunity of giving him a mortal squeeze.

“These facts made public and established, as they can easily be, deprive you of Armitage.”

Mr. Crofton sank back in his chair with as venomous serpents gnawing at his vitals as coiled round Laacoon.

"You have, of course, some object in view in telling me this," he said, in a faint voice.

"I have, Mr. Crofton—and to re-assure you, I will add, I am the only living creature possessed of this secret. No one but myself has the clue to its discovery. I give it to you as the person chiefly concerned. That I shall ask a reward for my future silence you will not wonder at—but I shall not ask it till you have taken the two journeys that paper enjoins. When you return, we will talk further about it."

Mr. Crofton, whose notions of right and wrong certainly did not amount to that Brutus-like love of Justice, which would have enabled him to condemn his own son to death—began to breathe more freely when he found his ill-omened visitor was willing to have his lips sealed with gold—and he summoned courage to ask him a few more questions. But the stranger was either very obstinate, or he was a

safe person to be entrusted with a secret, for he could not gain all the information he required. He gained quite enough though to turn his blood cold.

“No one will think anything of your looking over the registers for the dates specified there,” continued the man, after he had made all the disclosures and arrangements for prosecuting the necessary enquiries; “but when you go to the village where the child is, you must proceed with much caution—for though I have ascertained that the mother died without making any actual disclosure, yet there is a mystery about the whole affair, people there would catch at every chance of unravelling.”

“But why, when you knew old Mr. Armitage would have rewarded you for this discovery, did you not make it to him?” asked Mr. Crofton, with a shade of suspicion.

“Because I had, on first becoming acquainted with this secret, committed myself in a manner which forbade my coming forward

openly. At his death, the rightful heir was a mere child, unable to understand and recompense me for a discovery which might involve my ruin. And why I did not *immediately* apply to *you* was, from knowing so much of human nature as to convince me you would be much more likely to agree to my proposals, and keep *my* secret as well as your own, after you had become accustomed to all the luxuries and wealth-bought comforts I had the power to deprive you of. A cool, calculating villain you will say I am," said the man, smiling; "but I show you the dark side of the picture first, both as regards myself and your own situation."

What a pity it was murder involved the unpleasant possibility of being hung for it, and that, however secretly it was done, it generally contrived to let the world know all about it sometime or other.

How thankful Mr. Crofton would have felt to see a thunderbolt fall directly on that cane-

seated chair, and its occupant, provided it did not extend its destructive power to himself. The stranger's last words reminded Mr. Crofton of asking his name and address.

"Oh, you shall know all that in good time; but I am not yet quite sure which path you mean to tread. You can do as you think best. All I advise is, go those journeys, and make those investigations, I have told you of."

Mr. Crofton winced very perceptibly at being thus spoken to by one so evidently his inferior; he had never been treated so irreverentially since he took possession of his cousin's estates.

The man signified their present interview was over; but he should call again shortly; and then seeing Mr. Crofton too bewildered or too proud to do the honours of his house, he rang the bell himself, and bowed very familiarly to him as William appeared.

When alone, Mr. Crofton again perused the sheet of paper left with him; and the more he

remembered the stranger's coolness, the more agitated he became. Had it been a mere threat, he would have demanded money at once, before there was a possibility of the detection of any imposture. And what if these facts *could* be established? Must he quit that abode of luxury and idleness, and go back to his former obscurity and drudgery? Never. The man had calculated well. It would be impossible to give up all the sweet emoluments he had enjoyed for nearly a year. And who was said to be the real heir? A mere child, brought up in ignorance of its inheritance, and therefore unconscious of any sorrow at continued deprivation. If such a child really existed, this person must be bribed to silence, for the present—and who knew what the future might bring. All children did not live, and if this one died, he would still be entitled to the property.

Cogitating thus, and considerably tranquillised, Mr. Crofton returned to the drawing-

room, and welcomed some gay visitors, just arrived. After their departure, he announced to his wife the necessity of his setting off early on Monday morning, for a few days' absence.

Mrs. Crofton, like many other wives, was mightily indignant at any secret being kept from her—especially one involving a journey, the ultimate object of which she was not to know. All her apathy was gone—she had an object in view now to rouse her, but her husband was not to be caught. He turned, and doubled, and ran away into all sorts of subterfuges, but he was neither entrapped nor enticed. So, in spite of inuendoes and black looks, and remarks about the destinies of weak woman, Mr. Crofton held his tongue, and kept his own secret.

When anything disastrous has happened, we are apt to be superstitious, and regard everything as an omen of good or evil. Why did

Nero, the house-dog, patter about so restlessly all that night, and howl so piteously, as if he too dreaded going back to his old gloomy kennel and well-picked bones? And why did that small, bright speck in the sky, so long watched by Mr. Crofton, as he lay waiting for the hour of getting up, slide away at last under that great black cloud, which came rolling on to overtake and overwhelm it."

Suspense was horrible. He longed for the moment of action and investigation to arrive, when all his fears would be removed or confirmed—when he should feel himself more securely established as master of Armitage, or go forth in a worse condition than when he entered. There was also just some doubtful chance of this present business stamping him a villain and impostor for life; so Mr. Crofton stepped into his carriage with rather less than his usual assurance on the Monday morning,

and wondered what he should be thinking about when next he got out of it on his return home again.

The bell was ringing as Mr. Crofton rushed on the Shuffleborough platform. He would not have been behind time for twenty pounds. He hurried into a first-class carriage, which he had all to himself, and, the screeching, and coughing, and puffing, consequent on the long-tailed monster's receiving notice to move on, having subsided, it whirled them away past hills and dales, villages and steeples, towns and woodlands, as if determined they should know as little about the country they travelled through as possible. Over bridges, through tunnels, between stone cuttings, looking down on roofs of houses, passing sheets of water and green meadows, frightening cows and horses, on they rumbled, and rattled, and shook, and jolted, till all the passengers were let loose at the different stations. But rapid as all this had been, it was slow travelling to the rate Mr.

Crofton's ideas had flown during those few hours; and when at last he jumped out, before the noisy concern was quite steady, he presented his ticket, and was out of sight before half the other more cautious folks had descended from the carriages.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. CROFTON fortunately found the little Church at Gapemouth open, for there had been a funeral, and the sexton was putting away the unsightly implements. Mr. Crofton would much rather have heard it had been a wedding.

"Is the clerk here?" he asked very imperiously, as the man brushed by with the trestles.

"He's just stepped home sir," bowing with great reverence to the gentleman's gold chain.

"Fetch him here, will you? I want to look at a register."

A shilling dropped into the earthy hand

of the sexton, and the trestles fell to the ground.

The man was gone longer than Mr. Crofton thought there was any occasion for, but he walked impatiently about the Church, trying to feel interested in examining the monuments.

There were several might have attracted the attention of any less restless than Mr. Crofton. In one corner was a large, plain tablet, sacred to the memory of the man who, nearly three hundred years before, had given the ground on which the sacred edifice was erected, and who was himself the first buried in it. That stone told the tale of his life and death to strangers. It was placed there, so the inscription said, by his sorrowing children and grand-children, all of whose names, with *their* children and grand-children, were added beneath, with different dates—the last nearly a hundred years before Mr. Crofton stood reading it.

On the old worm-eaten pulpit was carved

the name of the minister who had first spoken the word of God in those walls, and on this, as well as on Mr. Crofton's pale face, the patched remains of a coloured window threw a strange glare of light.

His further researches were prevented by the arrival of the clerk, whose friend the sexton had evidently given a favourable account of the gentleman, suggestive of a handsome remuneration ; for, with less hesitation than might have been anticipated, he laid the book before Mr. Crofton opened about the date he named.

A gold-pencil moved rather tremulously over a richly-bound memorandum case, and two very pale lips were tightly compressed together as a piece of paper fluttered, in a very unsteady hand, and was compared with the entry.

The parish book was shut too rapidly for even an inquisitive clerk to properly ascertain which the gentleman had looked at and copied.

The baptismal register was then demanded.

"There you are, sir," said the official,

carrying his finger down slowly over the names of each page in the year named. The stranger standing a little behind, looking over his shoulder.

It was a still more crooked, scrawling memorandum inserted this time, and the clerk had gone over two or three pages before he looked round and asked if the one the gentleman wanted was not there.

The gentleman had evidently seen the one he wanted, or rather that he did not want, for he was looking far away into the Church, through the open vestry door, and he was so pale and shivering—vowing 'twas the coldest church he had ever been in.

“And we don't, generally reckon it so cold on Mondays, as most other days, sir; the people air it you see the Sunday, and we was pretty full yesterday.”

What was Mr. Crofton thinking about as he walked up the aisle, followed by the polite clerk, who was feeling the piece of gold be-

tween his finger and thumb, wishing such people came to look at the parish books every day.

Presently the gentleman started and looked round sternly—

“What time does the next up train pass your station?”

“Now, sir, in about half-an-hour, if you be quick you will get there before it arrives.”

“A first-class ticket for Tattlefield Road,” cried Mr. Crofton, bounding into the office just as the porter was about to close the doors.

In he was again, whirling on. But this time his imagination did not travel so rapidly; his ideas were torpid, stagnant, benumbed, anything that expresses a confirmation of frightful doubts.

From the train he changed to a coach, and from this he was, in about two hours, set down at the door of The Rose and Crown in the little village of Tattlefield.

Mr. Crofton had ever prided himself on being

a man of the world—the unsuspecting villagers, with their ingenuous pastor, were very easily rendered communicative by the wily stranger, who, as we shall show in a future chapter, arrived at a more than usually propitious season, for carrying his schemes into execution. He saw and heard enough to convince even his would-be sceptical mind, that the pretty little half-clad girl he had seen there as Flora James, was no other than the true lawful heiress of Armitage.

His proceedings after this discovery shall be related in another place, but he reached home in safety the third day after his departure, and felt so thoroughly reassured as to parry Mrs. Crofton's enquiries with smart matrimonial jokes about the prevailing sin of womens' curiosity.

He was sitting next morning in his lounge chair, feeling as snug and as comfortable as he did the first time he took possession of it as his own especial seat. Like a person recover-

ing from a severe fit of illness with a renewal of health and life, when all things seem brighter and fresher and dearer than ever before—so did Mr. Crofton look out on his lawns and his trees and meadows with a double appreciation of their value. He had just turned his eyes round for an inward gaze on mirrors and rose-wood, and gilding and Turkey carpets, when William announced, “the same person who called last Saturday,” as being again in the library.

The gilding, the pictures, the mirrors, all became dull and fady, or the cloud that was overshadowing the scene out of doors, had also obscured the former dazzling brilliancy of the drawing-room.

It seemed as if the man had watched his going out and coming in, had perhaps actually followed him, knew of his guilty doings at Tattlefield.

“You have found all my intelligence correct,” he said, rising from Mr. Crofton’s

morocco chair, and offering his hand to that pleasant feeling personage.

Mr. Crofton did not remember to have ever been very partial to handling snakes, but he had often, when a boy, caught frogs, and he thought he felt one in his palm now, as the stranger twined his cold slimy fingers round his warm plump ones.

The master of Armitage was too proud to prevaricate—he merely bowed as he drew over one of the cane bottom chairs and sat down on it. The stranger evidently meant to keep possession of the morocco one, and perhaps Mr. Crofton wished to teach him a lesson of humility by taking the more lowly seat.

“All right, I dare say, marriage, birth, baptism, identity of child—confirmation strong I know—else you would not have acted as you *have*.”

Mr. Crofton winced.

“Well, now then to business. I know as well as you do how many thousands a-year

this property is worth, and I also know that besides your former salary as manager in a merchant's office, you had two hundred pounds per annum, private annuity. Now, when I came here the other day, my intention was to offer an exchange—a compromise—I give you quiet possession of this estate, and *you* make over to me the above annuity. *That* was my intention, and I think you would have felt you had an easy bargain."

Mr. Crofton was certainly looking very easy under the whole affair—very easy indeed.

"But, sir, the case is materially altered since you have taken authority into your own hands without consulting me—this considerably alters the balance of power. *I* know what you have done with the child."

Do all he could, Mr. Crofton could not get his eyes nearer to the man's face than his blue satin neckerchief.

The uninvited guest dragged the chair nearer

to the library table in order to approach his victim.

Mr. Crofton dared not retire further from him.

“As I said before, you must hear my proposals. If you don’t like them, I have only to take my business to another shop. For six years I have led a dissatisfied life—a spell has fallen upon me—and the blight, the curse I may call it, was the possession of this secret, which, as I told you, I dared not make known during old Mr. Armitage’s life. I felt I held power over some one, and I panted to turn it to my own advantage without committing myself.

“This has gnawed at my heart, and, perhaps, in some measure, changed my nature, my inner nature, if I may so call it, for I still possess the good opinion of the world. I still fill the same responsible situation I have held for years. I married for beauty at twenty

two. At twenty four, my only child was born, and in a few years I was a widower. My daughter is now about nine years old, very, very lovely, and you can fully understand me when I assert that the aggrandizement of his children is a worldly man's chief object."

The stranger paused, as if even his assurance failed him in making the daring proposition he intended.

Under any other circumstances the haughty Mr. Crofton would have risen from his seat and demanded to know what that man's affairs were to him. But he felt, from henceforth, his cold damp hand must be taken cordially in his, when offered, or it would send him forth to contempt, ruin and a jail.

"You have a son, Mr. Crofton, now, I believe, about twelve years old. If he lives to the age of twenty-four, he must marry my daughter if she is living. You will thus doubly secure my silence, for if any thing deprived you of the Armitage estates, my child

would also be deprived of a rich husband. On their wedding day the annuity you allow me may cease.”

Mr. Crofton took up a very ponderous ruler in his hand, but whether to lay it on the head of that audacious man, or he had grasped it as the nearest thing on which his eyes fell as he gave that start of surprise and horror at such a revolting scheme, he scarcely knew himself. He arose and paced the room, shaking his head menacingly—then groaned despairingly. For just one second the idea of giving all up flashed across his mind—but any thing—any thing was preferable to that. And twelve years—what might not twelve years effect in the way of escape.

“Come, come, Mr. Crofton, don’t look at this proposed alliance with so much disgust. Let me tell you who and what I am, that you may see there will be less degradation than you deem—and men always raise their wives to their own station. I believe were your

father and mine living, the former would have to allow precedence to the latter, and before you took possession of this property—to which you are convinced now you have no legal right—you and I stood on equal ground. The two-hundred pounds a-year will enable me to educate my daughter, so as to be no unsuitable bride for your son; I shall also be enabled to make arrangements which will place me in a higher station. I shall not often intrude on you, Mr. Crofton, for I know my presence will not be desirable; but I do ask the friendship and countenance of your family for my girl. Nothing will be easier than forming a school acquaintance, and the invitations I expect for her to Armitage will throw her into the society of your son. Should her present promise of beauty be realized, the young man will not be likely to withstand it. I need not say I trust to your honour in using no unfair means to prevent this; one false or treacherous step will lead you forth from this house. Once sign and

agree to my terms, and give me the security I require, and you shall find I am no troublesome, threatening, extortionate villain. There is my card, Mr. Crofton, and in half an hour I will make you acquainted with my whole history, and the means by which I became possessed of these papers, the sight of which has so blanched your cheeks."

Two hours afterwards when William entered to deliver a message, he found *the person* seated very cosily in his master's favourite chair, while that stately gentleman himself had drawn over a similar one that was sometimes filled by an honoured guest. Half buried in luxurious cushions they both of them were—each held a wine glass in his hand, and the decanters filled in the morning were nearly empty. The side of the table nearest them was strewn with papers, over which William saw his master throw his handkerchief as he approached; and when he returned to the kitchen he told his

fellow servants he had never seen Mr. Crofton look so strange before.

“He very likely owed that presuming person a good deal of money, and he was come to demand it now he had grown so rich.”

“People say vice and virtue are two opposite principles,” thought Mr. Crofton, as he crossed the lawn, after seeing his visitor to the first gate, “granted, their efforts may be different on persons we have to deal with, but in my opinion they are nearly allied, though ’tis the fashion to call them antagonists. Now what I mean is this,” continued the new metaphysician, “vice is only a necessary—I mean a preventive—that is a self-defensive warding off—.”

Mr. Crofton had crawled into a large spider’s web in which he was getting more and more entangled, so we will leave him to extricate himself as he best can, while we look back a

few years and see what had been happening in another part of England, and what connexion it was likely to have with the future career of some of the characters in our story.

CHAPTER VIII.

Who does not know some of the beautiful villages with which England abounds.

Cottage covered nooks in green valleys, or on the sides of sunny hills—owing their attraction in the eyes of strangers not more to the pleasant scenery around them, than to the pictures of domestic comfort their neat, snug appearance suggests.

You cannot go many miles without coming on one of those picturesque little settlements; and the miles which, perhaps, separate them are covered with the fruits of industry.

Luxurious crops of hay—wavy heavy laden ears of corn—orchards, turnip and potato fields, meet your sight at every turn of the road, while

here and there you pass sturdy husband-men, bearing their implements of labour on their shoulders as proudly as soldiers do their arms—groups of laughing, plump-cheeked country-girls going or returning from work, joking one another about sweethearts, sometimes flirting with these sweethearts themselves—or old hale women carrying jugs of milk from an adjoining farm, stopping at the corner of a hedge to enjoy a gossip with some long life associate.

Then, on the market days, what a sight is it to see the homeward-bound cart and waggon loads of happy men and women—chiefly the latter, to whom some good-natured driver has given a lift. How they laugh and jostle one another about on their shaking straw seats as the horses rattle over stony places, and what eager, smiling, joyous faces are generally waiting for them as the merry party draw up at the inn door, or at some little garden gate.

Then the unpacking the treasures brought from town in exchange for the fowls, new-laid

eggs, and vegetables, carried away in the morning—and the forgivable delight and vanity with which a new shawl or bonnet is put on to go to church with next day !

A happy people are those rural English, *if they would only believe so*. 'Tis true, there are some whose lot in life is sad and dreary ; but they are only as the few drops of bitterness in the great ocean of happiness ; and alas ! in too many instances is their poverty and wretchedness, and humiliation brought on by their own discontented natures.

It is to one of those pleasant villages we must now transport ourselves in imagination ; and without stopping to admire the white-washed cottages, or the gay gardens, whose claim to neatness was only forfeited by the overrun profusion of the sweetest flowers—nor wonder at the probable age of the great tree in the village “square”—nor smile at the grand sign of the Rose and Crown—but go on, at once, to the Rectory, which, in fact, was little

more than a cottage in size. But such a cottage—such a miniature chateau. What shall we call it? Too fairy-like, perhaps, for what we generally fancy a parsonage must be—so covered with roses, jasmine, and honeysuckle, you would be half tempted to call it an overgrown bower.

Such tiny Gothic windows, such a porch formed out of the trunks of trees, and such a sunny boudoir-looking best parlour! Then the kitchen, built out at the back of the house to leave more room for the best apartments. As to the study, it would give you the idea of somebody having one day put down a table and a chair in an odd corner, and then, in a funny mood, having built a wall round them, leaving just room for a person to slide in and out very carefully.

Never were nooks and crevices made of such use as they were in that little house—under the stairs, up over door-ways, down into angles—every cranny held pigeon holes or cabinets.

Diminutive corner cupboards met you at every turning, while you would never cease wondering how people could get to those high ranges of shelves above their heads in the passages. And most of these clever contrivances had been planned and executed by the worthy, but somewhat eccentric rector himself.

In this Lilliputian snuggerly lived the Rev. Cladis Williams, and Miss Lucy, his sister. His honour's honour, as the humble parishioners called their spiritual master, rather prided himself on various little peculiarities; but so truly was he loved and respected, that the very weaknesses, which in a town might have been ridiculed, were regarded there as some involuntary mental or physical infirmity.

Never could the slightest word be breathed against his moral or religious character; yet, certainly, no one could have told what might be the next strange freak he would perform; and no one in the parish, when such oddity was performed, would feel or express the

slightest disapproval thereat. With this seeming inconsistency, there was a mixture of such high intellect with simplicity of thought and feeling, that made him a favourite with all classes and all ages.

He looked on his parishioners in the light of a large family whom it was inconvenient to lodge and board in one house, but whom he saw and talked to every opportunity—whose joys and sorrows were all known and shared by him—and whose affairs were commented on with as much earnest interest as if concerning himself individually; and if the good-hearted man was now and then imposed on, he grieved so much for the sin of the delinquent, that he more frequently succeeded in reclaiming him than had he used harsh measures and upbraidings.

Mr. Williams was a dear lover of all old customs, believing in the downfall of the Church as soon as a stop was put to Christmas carol singing, holly decorations, and eating

cross buns—or to burning Guy Fawkes on the 5th of November, and carrying oak-apple boughs on the 29th of May.

Few strangers to have looked at Mr. Williams's cheerful countenance would have supposed he had in his home one of those incurable trials to endure, which happily falls on but few. And yet 'tis said no town or hamlet is without, at least, one of those whom God has set apart from its fellow creatures—either a confirmed idiot or a harmless imbecile—a human being, without human reasoning faculties. In that village the dark shadow was in the house of their clergyman.

When Mr. Williams came to take possession of his living, he was accompanied by a sister, some years younger than himself, who, though not so violent as to render restraint necessary, was so far devoid of sense and rationality as to have made her, from her infancy, an object of unceasing anxiety to her family. For her sake, had Mr. Williams remained single, for

her sake, chiefly, had he refused a more valuable living in a populous town, because he considered poor Lucy would not be so safe, or so well attended to, or indeed so free as in their village home, where every inhabitant, from the old tottering man and woman, to the tottering child, knew and respected the "daft Miss Lucy," while her fondness for animals and birds gave many an opportunity of showing kindness to her.

Those presents, though often troublesome to her brother, were never rejected, for the sight of them called forth the only bright beam that ever shone from that darkened mind, and he was not one who would desire to extinguish it.

How many, who are deprived of reason, attach themselves to dumb creatures! Shunning those whom they feel are superior to them, they associate with birds, animals, and even insects, entering into all their peculiarities or sports, familiarizing themselves with

their habits, and even establishing a means of communicating their thoughts and wishes to each other.

Mr. Williams was just wondering how a squirrel, brought to his sister by a little boy, was to be accommodated, and sighing, as he watched the poor woman's childish delight, as she fondled her new plaything, when a messenger arrived, begging he would step up again to Jane Hurnamon's cottage, for the lady, Mrs. James, seemed much worse.

"She will have it, sir, 'tis only the effect of the long journey she came yesterday; but, to my mind, there is death upon her," whispered Jane, as she met him at her own door. "If you recollect, she always had a proud, head-strong spirit when a girl—though, goodness knows, she seems to have known trouble enough to have broken it since then."

They ascended the stairs, and entered a neat, comfortable room. There was a lady re-

clining on the bed, and, by her side, an infant, apparently only a few months old.

A cheerful little fire threw a sparkling light over the room, and cast a glowing hue on the lady's face, which the sanguine imagination of Mr. Williams mistook for health.

"These old women always think people are going to die if they complain of weakness," thought he, as he seated himself by the bedside.

"Well, well, Grace—you see, I cannot help still calling you Grace—forgetting how long it is ago since you were one of our village maidens. What can I do for you? The doctor will be here the first thing in the morning, and soon set you up again, I hope. Your long journey has knocked you up. Where did you say you came from yesterday?"

"I am fatigued, certainly," said the lady, evading his enquiry—a frown had passed over her face, as the minister alluded to her early

life, as passed in that village. "I have much to talk to you about, when I am stronger. You see I must still love this place, as I have brought my child, my little Flora, to live here, and be happier than her mother, I hope."

"Well, all things considered, it might have been better if you had never left us, Grace."

"Perhaps so, sir," she said, quickly; "for then I should not have been reproached for my parents' faults. I should not have been told by a proud husband that I came as a blot into his immaculate family—I should not have had to listen to his unfeeling remarks about his condescension in marrying one so far beneath him, or be told that I was the only barrier to his entering his father's splendid dwelling. And what did he tell me his father said of me?" she exclaimed, with more vehemence. "That neither I nor my offspring should ever be acknowledged by him—that the very fact of my clandestinely marrying his son, showed I was conscious of my unworthiness. Then it

was, Mr. Williams, I made a vow that the child I carried in my bosom should never, while I lived and could help it, know of, or claim consanguinity with that haughty old man. I knew that all his hopes had rested on his only son's marrying and having children, to whom it delighted him to think his honours and wealth, and his name would descend. He had chosen a noble bride for him, and that made his bitterness against me the greater. He had never seen me—knew not even my name, or where I came from, and yet my husband told me he had cursed me. And then, one word after another rose between me and my husband. Ours had been a hasty marriage from passion, fostered, perhaps, by the romance attending the whole affair; so that a violent quarrel, where there had been little principle on either side, cannot be wondered at. He left me, saying, sneeringly, that the rage of a disappointed, ambitious woman must subside before he saw me again."

“In an hour he was a corpse.”

“Dreadful!” said Mr. Williams, greatly excited by this strange recital. “Tell me how it happened.”

“He was in the habit of riding on horseback very frequently, and went out that day as usual. I was standing at the window of the house we lodged in when he passed, but I, still indignant at his insolence, turned suddenly from it in disdain. He pulled the rein with a quick jerk, as if to hurry on, and escape from my scornful look. An instant after there was a crash, a shriek, and men and women ran to see what was the matter down the street. I also rushed again to the window, and threw up the sash with a feeling of apprehension I could not account for.”

There was a moment's pause in the lady's narration, and Mr. Williams fixed his eyes on her face with a searching, reproachful look. The child stirred as if awoke by its mother's excited voice. She caught it in her arms,

and burying her head in its little bosom, murmured—

“My husband had been thrown from his horse, and killed on the spot. Yes,” she added, in a choking voice; “he had gone out of the world with my anger on his head—with his heart steeled by roused pride against me. Then it was that my rage against his father increased tenfold. Then it was I uttered a vow, which I have kept to this day, and will keep while I live. Never shall his heart be made to rejoice with the knowledge that a descendent of his, bearing his name, will inherit the lands and wealth he loves. I had been a wife but six months, and then I was a widow, and had to choose between poverty and asking support from that cold-hearted man. I found a sum of money in my husband’s cash-box, more than enough for all I wanted then, and enough also to lay by some to enable my child to prosecute its claim at any future time.”

“But I cannot understand it all now,” cried

Mr. Williams, while the invalid ceased with a violent fit of coughing." "Of course, this old gentleman heard of his son's death, and how was it he did not see you, and how was it mutual grief did not soften your hearts?"

"I never did see him sir. My husband and I had always passed under a feigned name, for he had friends he thought would betray his marriage to his father, before he wished to do so. And in London, where all I have just related took place, few trouble themselves about their neighbours' affairs, or perhaps know who they are. The corpse was carried to the nearest hotel, where I saw it but once. I then removed immediately to a distance, and all trace of me was lost, as I intended it should, for the old gentleman knew not the name we had assumed. I smiled with revenge when I saw an advertisement in a paper, stating that 'if the widow of his son applied to such and such parties, she would hear of something to her advantage, and the past be forgotten.' It

It was with the hope of advantage to him—it was because my husband had told him I was in a state that promised him an heir. And now, if this heir was not found, all he possessed must go to a stranger; I, the *base born* one, as he had called me, could have made that desolate old man's heart rejoice. But I denied the boon. I chose to believe it was his hand made me a widow, and my hand should keep my child from him."

"Tchut, tchut, this is all nonsense, Grace; tell me the true name of your husband and his father, that I may see this wrong repaired without more mischief," cried Mr. Williams, eagerly, as if he would snatch up his hat and set off that moment, to find all the parties concerned. "Do you not see you are risking your child's welfare? Suppose this said old gentleman makes a will, leaving all to somebody else, what is to become of you and this little girl?"

"I think I have, indeed, acted rashly all through this affair," said the invalid, in a low

tone, as if ashamed of this confession of weakness; "but I will tell you how matters stand at present, and, in a day or two, I will, perhaps, unfold the whole mystery."

"I hate mysteries; half-revealed mysteries are worse still," interrupted Mr. Williams, bluntly.

"A few months before my baby was born," continued the lady, without heeding him, "I left a bundle of papers with the solicitor of my husband's family; he was a perfect stranger to me, personally, but I had heard the highest character of him, so I went from London purposely to see him. I did not make myself known, for reasons you will readily guess; but I told him if I lived, and my child lived, I should come again and redeem the papers, and probably consult him on their contents. The packet contained, besides my marriage certificate, and my husband's letters, a short sketch of my history, and the reasons which led to our assuming another name, an account of my hus-

band's death, and my own resolution to be revenged on his father, by keeping from him, till the latest moment, the probability of his having a grandchild to inherit what he loved so well. At that time I was impressed with the belief that neither I nor my child would live; but, latterly I have felt an eager desire that my Flora should become this rich man's heiress—if this can be accomplished without his knowing of her existence till a short time before his death. It was chiefly to consult you about this scheme of mine I came here, you being my own, and my poor mother's, best friend."

"And a very ridiculous scheme it seems to me," said Mr. Williams. "Show me these papers, and let me see what I can make out."

"I have them not, yet; but, the day before I left my late residence to come here, I wrote the lawyer a letter of thanks, for the trouble I had given him, and requested he would forward

the parcel here, directed, under cover, to you. It must arrive to-morrow or next day."

"My mind will not be relieved till I see and read all this packet contains," said Mr. Williams, seriously. "Your poor mother was deceived and led astray by that false villian Lieutenant Carlyon; she pretended *she* was married, till we all found out he had a wife already, and then he imposed on her some mysterious tale, and in a little while left her and you, his child, to be maintained as you best could. You lived here very contentedly, till her death, and those friends of hers sent for you to go to London—and, as I told you then, Grace—on the morning you left the village, in all your beauty, with hope and joy in your heart—I trembled for what might be your future lot. That you were uncertain about the rectitude of the path you were pursuing, was fully shown by your never writing to me, or your old friends here, to tell us of your marriage, or whereabouts you were living. I hope, Grace, you really *were* married;

you are telling me the truth on that point, I trust," added Mr. Williams; who recalled to mind the girl's fondness for what is called romancing, and remembered the somewhat ridiculous boastings he had heard of "her father having been a gentleman;" and her exciting the curiosity and jealousy of some of the country girls, by her half-joking, half-seriously expressed belief, that "she should one day turn out to be a tip-top heroine, such as they read of sometimes."

The lady had made no other reply to his hinted suspicions, but placing her left hand proudly in his, and, certainly, on one of the little white fingers glistened a wedding-ring.

"To-morrow I will tell you more," said she, haughtily; "I see the time is indeed come when I must take some steps to secure and prove the fact of my child's legitimacy, as *you* even doubt it; fortunately, I can place that beyond all dispute. She was christened, also,

in the same church, and by the same clergyman, who married her father and me."

"Well, well, Grace, I wont call you Mrs. James, since you tell me that is not really your name—as to-morrow is to clear up all mysteries, we will leave it till then. Good-bye, and may God bless and support you."

CHAPTER IX.

MR. WILLIAMS was a very early riser, and the next morning was busy tying up some chrysanthemums round a row of little poles on each side of his garden walk, when Mrs. Hurmamon ran up breathlessly, shouting, even before she opened the gate—

“Quick, quick, sir, poor Mrs. James is dead, she must have broken a blood vessel in the night, for when I went into her room just now, the baby was crying, and covered with its mother’s blood. ‘Handy to death how fast they go,” she repeated, believing more firmly than ever in the truth of one of her old superstitions. “Ah, sir, she would not have travelled so quick, and been in such haste as

she says she was to get here if death had not been overtaking her."

Her tale was true. When the clergyman again entered the cottage, the beautiful young widow lay stretched on her bed, with the blood even then congealing on her lips. A hasty message summoned the surgeon from the next town, but it was too late. Then came the coroner, and after many necessary and many unnecessary questions being asked, the usual verdict was given of "Died by the visitation of God," as if all deaths were not caused by God's visitation—and the poor lady was buried, and Mr. Williams placed the child in Jane Hurmamon's care.

All this had happened, and been duly talked over, but no packet of papers had arrived for Mrs. James, under cover, to the Rector; and now his belief in Grace's statements wavered again. They were evidently not true in this particular, and were not likely to be in others, and all this account of the wealth and grandeur

of her husband's family might only be what she wished, rather than what she knew to be the case. Mr. Williams had not the slightest clue to guide him in making any investigations; and nothing was found in her two trunks to afford any assistance. She had not even said *where* she came from, nor the town in which the lawyer she talked of lived. They were only people quite in humble life, with whom she had gone to London, to stay three or four years before, and on his trying some enquiries about them, he found one was dead and the other gone no one knew where. So in a little time it became pretty generally understood in the village, that his honour had adopted the little orphan, who though still living under Jane's roof, spent much of her time at the Rectory.

Perhaps some of this resolution owed its origin to the singular interest poor silly Miss Lucy took in the child—it was a new plaything for her, prettier and gentler than any she had

before. She discarded her birds, her dog, and even her squirrel, to fondle the little Flora, and would seat herself, with all her eager awkwardness, on the floor, to have the child laid on her lap, when with glee, little less childish, she would play, or talk to it, hugging it, sometimes, till it cried, but never growing weary or impatient, and pushing it from her as she would her other pets. Could it be that helpless baby had touched some chord in the witless woman's heart, which awakened in her an instinctive feeling of woman's love?

But as time passed on it was strange to see how these two seemed to change places; little Flora was no longer the helpless child, trusting even to the uncertain guidance of such a flighty creature as Lucy Williams. She, by some intuitive wisdom, discovered that the larger form was the greater infant, and in a few years usurped all Lucy's former authority; the poor silly woman, apparently delighting in obeying her imperative little playmate. Some

doubted Mr. William's prudence in exposing the child to the society of one from whom it might copy, and perhaps imbibe many eccentric habits, but there seemed no real fear from this. Flora would lecture her gawky friend about her stupidity, and then point like a fairy despot to some article she wanted, shaking back her curls and commanding Lucy to bring it properly, and the submissive Lucy would shake her head too, and laugh and hurry off, and return with what she was sent for, laying it down respectfully, and looking in the child's lovely face for an approving smile or nod.

But the orphan, left so strangely on the protection of the village, was a favorite with others besides Miss Lucy. The schoolmistress also had taken her under her especial favour and guidance, training her, perhaps, for one of those little angels who are considered to pass to and fro from heaven to earth, by a sort of Jacob's ladder, chiefly for the purpose of giving

Mrs. Higgs and others of her genera, an opportunity of writing histories of religious children. Such people being always on the watch for any delicate boy or girl who is picked out from its contemporary reprobates, and questioned and prompted till the frightened little creature fancies itself truly converted, and hears heavenly voices and sees white shining forms. Then when disease, which such excitement engenders, comes with rapid strides, those infant saint-makers hover over and round the dying child, interpreting every word into inspired emanations from a regenerate being.

Mrs. Higgs had contributed accounts of several of these "interesting ripenings for glory," to the Tract Societies, and had now fixed on Flora James as her next victim, choosing to believe that the child's large, dark, lustrous eyes, and pale, singularly expressive countenance, betokened an early death, and promising herself great popularity if she suc-

ceeded in making a juvenile convert of the pattern child of the school, the Rector's *protégée*, the companion of his half-witted sister.

"All good children here to-day, I hope," said Mr. Williams, looking into the school-house, as he passed, "no one naughty to-day, I hope."

Mrs. Higgs held up her finger as a signal that the parrot-like chorus of small voices just then shouting, vigorously, "twice two is four—twice three is six," might cease for the time being. Every little girl immediately improving the short holiday by slyly pinching the arms or stepping on the toes of her neighbour, or poking her fingers through a luckily discovered hole in a pinafore.

"Taken in a body, sir, I have not much to complain of," answered Mrs. Higgs, in a tone and precision as if a short-hand writer were taking notes of her conversation, "individually there are some straying ones, I find it difficult

to draw within the fold—while, as a counter-balance, I am thankful to say some other few are becoming shining lights in the path, to guide the erring ones back into the right road.”

Mr. Williams never thoroughly understood Mrs. Higgs, when talking rhapsodically—perhaps he overlooked her little peculiarities, and thought only of her good intentions.

“ Well, then, as it seems we are all pretty good, we may proclaim the usual whole holiday to-morrow. I don’t like any to be prisoners on Whit-Tuesday.”

There was a general clapping of hands, partly in honour of Mr. William’s good-nature, partly in honour of the glories of Club Day, but Flora was the only one of the children who ventured to speak.

“ I have promised Miss Lucy to take her to see it all,” said she, putting her little hand into her benefactor’s. I let her look at the outsides of the shows as I came along.”

A child of six or seven years chaperoning a woman of thirty !

"Then I must send some one to take care of you both," said Mr. Williams, laughing at Flora's important look.

"She is safe enough when with me, sir, she shall not get into mischief."

That evening there was a larger party than usual at the Rose and Crown, and amongst them two or three strangers. The room they sat in was one of those large, cosy kitchens, still to be sometimes met with in old fashioned country inns, though never in the later built, smart, showy ones springing up here and there by a road-side bearing such imposing signs as Railway Hotel, Victoria Tavern, Commercial Arms, &c. The Rose and Crown had been built purposely for an inn sixty years before, and been an inn ever since. It had a porch, with stone benches ; deep, long windows in all the front rooms ; huge fire-places, and a settle in the kitchen so large that it must have been put into its place before the walls were

raised round it. The parlour, seldom occupied except by state guests, was furnished in a high style of decorative art, under the superintendence of the landlord's daughter. In the centre of the chimney-piece was a china shepherd, ditto shepherdess—the former tastefully arrayed in green tights, blue vest, and a careless head-dress, rather between a Turkish turban and an old lady's toque of the former century—speckled stockings, and red shoes, wonderfully well adapted for climbing rocky steeps in search of straying flocks.

The lady reclined in an easy attitude on a sea-green hillock, nursing a lamb, with a curly wig, parrot nose, and bright blue eyes, and a pouting mouth, into which his mistress was tenderly cramming a small sized tree. This graceful group was supported on each side by three of those seemingly imperishable India cups and saucers, which must owe their preservation to the purpose of being set before the eyes of modern tea-drinkers, to show them

what diminutive sips their fore-mothers were obliged to be satisfied with. There was, also, a small-necked bottle, with a shilling in it, which had set the brains of at least two generations of the villagers puzzling to account for the mystery of its getting there; and near this was a once upon a time correct barometer in which the landlord was still a sincere believer, though the lady in her sky-blue spencer persisted in always standing out of doors, no matter what the weather was, and keeping the gentleman inside the house comfortably protected by a great coat and umbrella.

On a table behind the door was a pyramid formed of the family collection of desks, work-boxes, &c., whereof the base was a large pistol-case of the master's, and the apex an infantine tea-caddy, a present in his wife's girlhood. Several pictures—on which the artists certainly had not spared paint—hung round the walls; and the chairs, which were as stiff backed as Inn chairs always are, were ranged in prim

order beneath. There was the usual piece of square carpet in the middle of the room, few houses of the calibre of the Rose and Crown ever having one which entirely covers the floor.

This apartment was in the early part of that evening occupied by a gentleman who had given more magnificent orders than the landlord with all his best intentions had been able satisfactorily to comply with; but the gentleman had evidently tired either of his own reflections, or the contemplation of the parlour furniture, for he seemed to have put his dignity in his pocket, and sought companionship with the party in the kitchen. He sat rather apart from them, however, and apparently had more desire to derive amusement or information from their discourse than take any part in it himself.

After he had taken a survey of the other guests, he hesitated a moment whether or not to retire again, but a sudden thought, perhaps, struck him, for his face flushed for a moment,

and then he compressed his lips tightly, and looked as if he were debating some matter secretly.

He was watching another stranger, who sat with the less exclusive visitors at a long oak-table, displaying his magniloquence even before an audience that had not paid for the treat; but in whose wondering, credulous looks he evidently read promises of future payment. There was not one who did not place implicit faith in the disinterested assurance of Herr Cesarotti when he told them that owing to the accident to one of his caravans, he would next day exhibit to them and their friends in that peculiarly favoured locality, for three-pence, what all the rest of England were charged six-pence for. Who was there in that kitchen did not unfeignedly believe in the goodness of heart of the man who promised to shew them free, gratis, the largest lion in the world, whose den should be so placed as to be seen by all around. As to the extraordinary spectacles



prepared to entrance the sight of those who paid to go inside, he neither could nor would say anything. He could not do himself or his partner justice.

All this was uttered by Herr Cesarotti with an expression of countenance which seemed to entreat you to believe him an honest man, and doubt any proofs you might hereafter have of his being a rogue.

The gentleman we first spoke of was smoking a cigar, and sipping brandy-and-water at a little round table, in a retired, exclusive corner ; he had taken a newspaper from his pocket, and read with great attention probably, for though every one else greeted a fresh arrival, he never raised his eyes from the paper.

“ Why am I so late ? ” said the new comer, “ why, there was no getting away from home, and there was no getting my little Tom to bed, so I walked up and down with him for more than an hour after his mother undressed him, and I was obliged to tell him the whole story

of John Gilpin, went half-through Watts' Hymns—related Sinbad the Sailor, and finished off with the bells of St. Clement's, before the young rogue went to sleep. Then I had to go over to the Rectory with a message and fetched home little Flora James, and she would not let me start till I promised to take her into the show to-morrow. I only agreed on condition she leaves off speaking in scripture texts, as that cant Mrs. Higgs teaches her to. 'Tisn't natural, though I shouldn't say it."

"No more is it, Mr. Blenkinsop, though I don't say it out of disrespect to the profession you belong to."

Mr. Blenkinsop being the parish clerk, was considered as part of the Established Church, and always ranked next to the Rector himself; indeed, he was a much more imposing personage in the desk than Mr. Williams in the pulpit, inasmuch as he was a tall, powerful looking man, with a sonorous voice, while the latter was diminutive in person, and unassuming in

manner. Blenkinsop's great ambition was to be considered a model clerk, to accomplish which he had made several journies to the neighbouring towns and villages, to observe the peculiarities or take hints from the different clerks. His impression when he returned from each trip was, that in nine cases out of ten, any old nasal-toned, charity-school-educated candidate who could mumble over the responses had been deemed capable of these situations; but he determined there should be no such reproach in his parish. It was generally considered no one could equal him in the style of reading his part of the service, and nothing could exceed the complaisance with which he listened to the praises of his friends, or the *sang froid* with which he discussed the merits or demerits of his brothers of the lower desk—as if he himself had attained to the very tip-top of his profession, and could afford to frown on his inferiors, reject, with indifference, the advances of those who thought themselves his

equal, and smile at every offer of raising him any higher.

The gentleman in the corner spread open his paper to turn it just as Mr. Blenkinsop alluded to Flora James—in doing so, he became more visible to the other guests, and received a polite bow from the clerk with whom it seemed he had strolled through the village in the afternoon, and been escorted to the Rectory, as Mr. Williams was considered to be an old college friend of his. It had proved to be another Mr. Williams he professed to know; but the mistake appeared by no means an unpleasing one, for the worthy, friendly-feeling Rector had received the stranger politely, and was so prepossessed in his favour that he whiled away more than an hour with him, and even gratified the desire he had expressed of being permitted to walk round his Edeny garden. The little girl they found there throwing daisies at a large, silly-looking woman, the gentleman was sure must be Mr. Williams's child

and could not be persuaded to the contrary, till told of her singular history and doubtful origin.

He was quite affected at the account of the lady's death, and the non-arrival of the proofs she spoke of; but he seemed to know more of the world than his reverend acquaintance, for he shook his head when he hinted a possibility of all being a fabrication, on the part of some faulty one, to deceive a too trusting friend. The gentleman then inquired as to the respectability of his host at the Rose and Crown, expressing much satisfaction at the character given of his house, for owing, he said, to a most foolish blunder, he had got into a coach going to the wrong place, and being too tired to return, had resolved to sleep there that night.

The recognition between the stranger and old Blenkinsop, at the inn, was followed by one with another person present, though not so public, and therefore unobserved by any one else. The former had, for some time been

watching Herr Cesarotti, though that personage had, perhaps, been unconscious of this scrutiny, till, at length, his eyes wandered over to the secluded corner, and rested on the then exposed face of the gentleman.

There was at first a puzzled endeavour to rub up his memory on the part of the showman—then a quick glance returned by a slight signal, neither of which was observed by others present. But the signal and the glance, being interpreted by Herr Cesarotti, gave him to understand he was not to acknowledge, or seem to know, the very exclusive person at the small table, at the present time ; but that the said person would be glad to have a little private and confidential chat as soon as convenient.

Having unbent considerably from his high bearing, the gentleman joined occasionally in the conversation, particularly addressing his remarks to old Blenkinsop, who, he saw, considered himself chief authority in parish matters. Amongst other things, he alluded to

the singular tale the worthy clergyman had related in the afternoon, and having flattered the assembly with the assurance that they were verifying the truth of a remark he had often made, that the most interesting facts were sometimes collected by great authors from casual remarks heard at a village inn, he allowed them to suppose he was himself travelling to collect such incidental anecdotes. It was astonishing what memories all present possessed in a moment, though none were observant of the tact which drew them back every now and then to the only subject which he chiefly desired to listen to. And having, as it would seem, collected materials enough to fill three volumes, the strange guest bade all good night, and retired to his parlour.

Many minutes had not elapsed when he again opened the door, and admitted Herr Cesarotti, with whom he spent half-an-hour in earnest conversation; and then, hearing the repeated farewells in the passage, their con-

ference was brought to a close, at the same time that a bank-note was being carefully deposited in Cesarotti's canvas bag.

"I always used to suspect you was rather a larkish chap in old times, Mr. Sam ; and though we have lost sight of one another all these years, yet it seems you are just the same ; but I can't see why you mayn't let this little un be ; from what they say, no one suspects her to be yourn ; and if we take to her, and she gets moved about from stablishment to stablishment in our line, all trace of her may be lost, and if in future time you want to claim her, you mayn't know where to find her."

"I tell you I want to lose all trace of her ; I don't want to claim her ; and if you don't like the job I have proposed, you have only to say so, and I can do as I at first intended."

"Oh ! if so be you don't want to reclaim her in future, and there is no more harm in it than what you say, I'm your man, and glad to have

her. Lion queens is got common now, but a little lion princess, or a fairy tiger tamer, would be a novelty, and draw well : so we will stand to the agreement we made just now. She is not likely, at her age, to recollect much about old associations, and when she sees what a respectable profession she is got into, she won't desire to exchange leading about lions for leading about idiots."

"Mind your promise, that she is not to be seen anywhere in this neighbourhood, and you cannot do the trick better than as I told you."

"Do you think I am not more up to trap than that, my fine fellow-clerk that was once upon a time. It won't suit me to be taken up for child-stealing, even to serve such a patron as you can now be to me."

The man said this with a mixture of arch humility and mook gravity ; and then, after a few more words, he went away, leaving the gentleman very easy—very easy indeed, if one

might judge from certain self-congratulations, that "all was safe now, and he was a clever fellow and Cesarotti, as he called himself, was a great fool," which the gentleman wondered at, considering how much he must have seen of life since their early acquaintance till now when he had so opportunely met with him.

"That was a bright idea of mine saying she was my illegitimate child; at any rate, I have put it out of the power of that scamp at Shuffleborough to play me false, and bring the girl forward in future. If cleverly done, Cesarotti's trick will never be detected, nor he incur any suspicion."

CHAPTER X.

THE sun rose on Whit-Tuesday as splendidly as the most sanguine heart in Tattlefield believed it would. It was indeed one of those mornings on which we can almost persuade ourselves that all God's creatures, animal and vegetable are rejoicing; that every bird is singing His praise; and every shrub and tree bowing its head in token of gratitude, while the pure fresh air bears towards heaven the incense offered by every flower.

Long before daylight, the Church bells had rung out a merry peel—to awaken folks by time it would seem—as if any overslept themselves in Tattlefield on Club-Day. The tower displayed a great tree, which was not there

the day before, giving you the idea of its having sprung up through belfry, bells, stones and all, in one night.

Blenkinsop, the clerk, was very busy indeed ; and if one might suspect anything from the frequent glances of exultation he cast, every now and then towards the tower, it might lead to a conjecture, as to whether he had not had some hand in that Jack's-beanstalk-like production.

And there he was in the Rectory garden, cropping boughs of laburnum and lilac, throwing all sorts of flowers and evergreens into a wheelbarrow, which little Flora had induced Lucy Williams to drag along—Lucy being so proud of her seemingly useful employment, that she resigned it very reluctantly at the gate to the gardener's boy, to trundle off to the great barn in the village, which had been cleaned and whitewashed, and was now garlanded and draperied with all due taste. Two large arm-chairs, one at the head of each

table, had been converted into bowers of early roses and lilies. Seats of honour these for the clergyman and the club surgeon.

About ten o'clock, the approaching sound of a band of music came gradually on the ear, in which, however, the big drum only was conspicuous, for some minutes; and then everybody having, by this time, put on their best clothes, and every bit of looking-glass in the parish having been in requisition, either to reflect the pretty face of some rustic belle, or the three times soaped, three times polished cheeks of a hero of the plough and spade, or even the creased skin and neat cap of some old dame—all turned out to join or watch the grand procession.

And now the band was heard more distinctly, coming nearer, and approaching the Rectory, where a superannuated gardener marched up the walk, and threw open the gate. This public functionary was always armed on that day with a tall white wand, which he

shook menacingly at any little urchin daring enough to intrude beyond the prescribed limits, or presuming to climb the wall for a better view.

A splendid blue and gold flag waved above the shrubs and crowd, and on it was a figure of Britannia, looking marvellously like an old woman spinning, with some convulsive letters, which nobody had time to read, surrounding her.

After the flag, came about a hundred as fine, stalwart fellows as can be imagined, walking two and two, dressed in their best clothes, and adorned with blue rosettes and scarfs, holding long, white rods, from which hung ribbon and silver streamers glittering in the sun.

Now one of the principal farmers stepped up and begged to have the honour of escorting the Rector to Church. Although this ceremony had been repeated every Club-Day from time immemorial, both Mr. Williams and the principal farmer looked as nervously diffident,

as if it was the first time the honour had been requested or granted. The Rector shook hands with three or four of the nearest, and then headed the procession. All the members falling in again in regular order, and all the non-members following in very irregular order.

A short but appropriate sermon was preached by Mr. Williams, after which, the band and the flag became energetic as before, the Rector and the principal farmer took top couple places, the second couple now being the surgeon, who could not join till then, and number two farmer—all halted again at the Rectory, where the two gentlemen filed off, and away fluttered the flag, the band burst out into an inspiring tune, which some professed to know the name of—the drum performed never-before-heard rolls, and the imposing cortege halted at some of the chief farms, where, in the courtyard, or garden, or orchard, as might be most convenient, it formed something in the shape of a circle.

Then followed such a rattling of cups and mugs, such dipping of cider out of enormous tubs and cans—such drinking of healths—such speeches—and such shy leers cast on smiling girls, who were peeping out of windows, or from behind trees, or over low walls and railings—such hip, hip, hurrahing, that the club surgeon bade fair to have a number of extra cases before long of sore throats or impaired lungs.

The dinner, at three o'clock, in the great barn, was a very splendid affair indeed; and after Mr. Williams had drank the health of all present, followed by a hope that they would spend the remainder of the day in such a manner as not to cause either himself or them to regret their holiday—he and the surgeon withdrew, and the two principal farmers slid into the bower chairs.

Sometimes there was a dance on the green, or rustic diversions, and great tea drinkings—but it had seldom chanced to have such an at-

traction as on this particular Club Day, when, as we before hinted, an accident to a caravan had induced Herr Cesarotti to halt for a day in the village. And it was in front of the show greater part of the holiday folks were to be seen assembled.

Herr Cesarotti had faithfully kept his promise of exhibiting his pet Leo for nothing, the den being so placed as to be seen by as many of the half fearful, half venturesome villagers as approached near enough—and when the second exhibitor in command came forward, dressed in a real tiger-skin waistcoat, a hat of platted porcupine's quills, surmounted with a bunch of eagles' feathers, and a hussar jacket of buffalo's hide, and began to carry on a sort of flirtation with the king of beasts, sustained on one side by growls and shaking of the mane and paw—more than half the audience felt in their pockets for the requisite “three-pence,” and resolved to see the greater wonders inside.

"I always pity a lion in a state of captivity," said Mr. Williams, who, with the surgeon, was strolling through the village green, "there is such a subdued melancholy expression in his eyes, as he rests his head on his folded paws, looking submissively at those who would quail, if he met them in his native forests. His roar in a den is one of indignation at the insults he is exposed to—little boys poking him with sticks through the bars—women who would faint at the sight of a rat in a state of liberty criticising the length of his mane and tail—shaking their heads undauntedly at him. 'Tis truly degraded, imprisoned royalty."

"Well," rejoined Mr. Wilson, "I only hope we shall not repent of our fondness for naturalizing wild beasts, planting gardens, and building houses for them. Why, in case of a revolution, the mob would very likely turn them loose, and in a few years England would be overrun, and an elephant or a tiger hunt be

as common a diversion as in the countries they bring them from."

"I hope Lucy and little Flora are not in this crowd," said Mr. Williams, not attending much to his friend's forebodings.

"Not very likely," replied Mr. Wilson; "or, if they are, depend on it, old Blenkinsop is their escort—so let us go back to the Rectory for a cup of tea before I start. The sight of those creatures make me think, that of all deaths, the most horrible must be being devoured alive. How revolting it is to think of being shaken and clawed by a lion or a tiger, like a mouse by a cat, or gobbled up by a crocodile or shark, like some hapless frog by a hungry duck."

Their fears about Lucy and her little friend were dispelled by the intelligence that Jane Hurnamon had taken them to the village, and would, no doubt, bring them back safely. Truth, to tell the old housekeeper had been glad to get rid of her poor silly mistress, for

these two had been close prisoners all the morning. Lucy's entreaties to be allowed to go to Church not being deemed desirable of compliance with, though Flora was, of course, there with all the school children, marshalled in form by Mrs. Higgs.

After wandering about the house listless and mischievous as those demented ones are when thwarted, Miss Lucy at last solaced herself with making confidential communications to the cat, telling him all her secrets, and cautioning him not to divulge any of the important disclosures she had made; but like a child, she started up when Flora's laughing voice was heard, and it was as much as the little girl could do to prevent her decorating herself in the most ridiculous fashion, which Miss Lucy considered essential, for doing honour to the gay scene she was to join.

"Have I not often told you I wont have that feather worn," said the tiny mistress of the robes as she surveyed Lucy's fantastic

costume, "and those flowers in your bosom, I tell you I have only seen just a few carried in the hand, by any one to-day."

Miss Lucy drew out the great nosegay of tulips and double stocks she had contrived to stick in her dress, but petitioned hard to retain the feather; which request being at last graciously conceded, the ill matched pair stepped out into the garden to await the arrival of Mrs. Hurnamon. Lucy employing the delay in gathering fresh flowers of the gaudiest kind, till she carried a bouquet the size of a cabbage.

Herr Cesarotti was still haranguing the crowd, still delighting them with his antics and witty speeches, displaying, at the same time, the pliability of his body and the volubility of his tongue; the whole diversified with an exhilarating and vigorous accompaniment of the show band, consisting of a clarionet, a great drum, and two Saxe Horns, with triangles

ad liberatum, by a little boy in a Highland dress.

"Now, Miss Lucy, you are not to push yourself in amongst the mob," cried the authoritative voice of Jane Hurnamon, as she found more difficulty than she anticipated in keeping the mad delight of Miss Williams within bounds, "we can see very well where we are."

"I cannot see at all," muttered little Flora, looking round for some horse-step, or low wall to mount on.

"She is not looking now," whispered Lucy, as Jane having recognized some old friends, became too engaged to notice her charges. "I'll push in here and you follow."

The way seemed made easy to them by some invisible assistance, and in a few minutes they stood close to the steps of one of the caravans.

"Should you not like to see the inside," whispered a voice in Flora's ear.

"That I should right well," cried the child, 'but then Miss Lucy and Jane —."

The words were hardly uttered when there was a rush, a swaying to and fro of the crowd, Lucy was pushed about till she became quite furious; twenty or thirty hot looking men and women appeared for a moment on the stage, then bustled down the steps to report marvellous accounts of what they had witnessed; a fresh reinforcement hurried forward, but not one amongst either party had observed the canvas opening drawn aside and a woman and a little girl go into the caravan, more especially devoted to domestic use.

Poor frightened Miss Lucy had gladly accepted the escort of a labourer who knew her and drew her from the crowd, and one of the cottagers, whose windows overlooked the gaieties, having invited the parson's sister in, she sat there safe enough, nodding, smiling, and clapping her hands in great dignity, very unwillingly retiring even after the lamps had

been lit on the stage, and public curiosity so far quenched that only a few stragglers could be enticed.

"I shall complain of that Flora James to Mrs. Higgs," said Jane Hurnamon, when Lucy had explained their having lost one another in the crowd, "she is gone off with some rude girls I'll be bound."

Jane left Miss Williams at the rectory gate, with the housekeeper; and then meeting so many acquaintances on her way, and stepping in at so many neighbours', it got quite late when she approached her own cottage at last.

When she passed the caravans, the lamps were put out, the gaudy pictures rolled up, and the whole concern presenting the appearance of a speedy removal — even during the night, perhaps. The strange gentleman, who had once or twice during the day strolled through the village with a rather supercilious air, was smoking a cigar at the door of the "Rose and Crown;" and, as Jane always felt great venera-

tion for people in, what she considered, high rank, she dropped a curtesy to him ; hoping, in her heart, he would take away a favourable impression of the grand sights he had witnessed that day—to see which he had, with great condescension, informed the landlord he should defer his departure till the next morning.

Jane was rather surprised at not finding Flora at home, and gone quietly to bed, as she expected ; but she had, no doubt, coaxed an invitation to sleep at the Rectory, as she very frequently did ; so, comforting herself with the resolution that the first exercise she took in the morning should be to give the naughty girl a good whipping, Mrs. Hurnamon folded up her holiday clothes carefully, and soon forgot her pleasures and her vexations in a sound sleep.

* * * * *

Mr. Crofton, when he returned to Armitage,

little knew who had been on his track the whole of that journey ; and was, with a very sardonic smile, following on foot, while he was riding in the coach that conveyed passengers from Tatlefield to the railway-station, a few miles distant.

The guilty, or those who are meditating guilt, seldom trust one another.

But no one in the village thought of connecting the disappearance of little Flora James—as the news flew from cottage to cottage—with the visit of the strange gentleman at the “Rose and Crown.” Neither did suspicion hint at the possibility of her being with the show-people, who had departed before day-break that morning.

CHAPTER XI.

“Now, if you please, I want to go home, or they will be looking for me.”

“Yes, my dear, you shall presently ; but you must first taste my gooseberry wine,”

One sentence was from a child, who had become tired of the limited display of curiosities in her little cabin-like chamber. The other from a tall, showily-dressed woman — whose laced-up boots, beaver bonnet, and grease bedizened flounces, did not seem quite in character with her title of “Baroness,” by which she was frequently addressed through the curtained window by some one outside.

At one end of the little room there was a long chintz drapery, behind which was a high

cushioned bench—once the retiring throne of a departed giantess, where she had sat in state before parading up and down the caravan, the flooring of which she was always supposed to shake with her enormous weight; and whose roof she brushed the cobwebs off with her upright plume of feathers. There were, also, two corner cupboards, into one or other of which the Baroness seemed to be always putting her head and tasting something out of black bottles; now and then carrying some of their contents over to the curtained window, where there always appeared to be a hand waiting to receive it. One or two stools, a fixed leaf-table, and a saucepan and tea-kettle were the only other conspicuous articles of furniture—accommodations altogether that denoted very simple tastes in the illustrious highly-named individual they belonged to.

“Your gooseberry wine is not so nice as the Rector’s,” said the little girl; as she shook her head and made wry faces at the mixture

handed to her in a broken wine-glass, which, being deficient of a stem and stand, she was requested to empty at once.

"They don't make theirs so strong, perhaps," remarked the Baroness, turning the glass upside down.

"Oh! how I wish I was home, I am so sleepy. Please call Thomas Webb, ma'am, I am sure that's his voice outside, he will take me to Jane."

The Baroness made no other sign of complying with the child's request, than lifting her up gently enough, and laying her on the ex-giantess's couch.

For a few minutes the continued noise and din outside bewildered Flora still more than before; but soon even the drum and cymbals ceased to disturb her, and she slept for some hours.

Once or twice she stirred, and fancied she was jolting in a cart; but she soon dreamed again of Miss Lucy and the pet lion.

It was daylight when she thoroughly awoke, and lay for some minutes in all the confusion of thought suggested by strange objects.

Then a loud terrific roar, at no great distance, made her spring from her bed ; and, screaming with terror, she rushed through the opening in the curtains and into the cabin.

“Come, now none of them noises here, we’ve enough without any new ones ; and, unless you wants to become acquainted with them as makes them, you had better be quiet and come to breakfast.”

This speech was delivered by the man she had seen on the stage the previous day ; but who was now divested of all superfluous politeness and finery, indeed of all superfluous clothes, having neither coat nor waistcoat on. He sat by the fire-place, smoking a pipe as he watched the Baroness’s preparations for breakfast.

With one spring Flora bounded to the open window, but how her terror increased when she saw, instead of the old familiar scenes of

the village, strange fields and hedges, by which they were slowly passing.

"The Princess does not take to her new dominions kindly," said the man; "but she will by-and-bye, when she sees how much better off she is, than learning lessons at school; and it shows she wer'nt wanted, else they would not have been so glad to get rid of her."

That was a bold chance stroke of Herr Cesarotti's; and he saw it was a lucky one, for the proud spirit of the child rose directly.

"Did they send me away?"

"Why how else would you have got here? You know you've no father nor mother, and 'tisn't convenient to maintain unknown children."

"Who told you I was an unknown child?" asked Flora, angrily.

"Aye, there it is. Who else could I get all the information about you from, but those as

know you ? and when I offered to take you to ride about everywhere, with me and the Baroness, I assure you they thought it was a good riddance, and a great thing for you to be made a princess, and wear spangles."

"I will never go back to them again," exclaimed Flora, indignantly; "and when I *am* a princess, see if I own *them* !"

Both Herr Cesarotti and the Baroness took a great liking to the child; she had just the spirit they desired, and had given much less trouble in her subjugation than they expected. The former, especially, patronised her, and liked to have her sitting by when he told tales of some of his exploits. At these times he seemed to forget, or lay aside, his usual professional slang; and even such a child as Flora could detect somewhat more of refinement, or of the remains of a former more respectable line life, than could be discovered in the Baroness.

For some weeks they travelled about from town to town, stopping only a day or two at

either ; and, at these resting places, Flora was, at first, kept very secluded. No fear, though, was there now of any attempt to escape, or make herself known. The tales of her early orphanhood, and the mystery of her birth, had made a great impression on the child ; and, now the belief was instilled into her mind that all her former friends had conspired to give her to Cesarotti, it cannot be wondered at if she connected one circumstance with the other, and came to the conclusion that these illiberal people had really been glad to get rid of her.

No further task had yet been assigned the Princess Ponowsky, as she began to be called, than allowing herself to be dressed in a smart muslin frock, starred with spangles ; a crimson velvet short Polish jacket, also laced and spangled ; a hat with drooping white feathers, and hollow silk stockings, with satin shoes—such being considered the every-day costume of a princess.

Few children are there, or ever were, but could be conquered with fine clothes, and praises of their beauty. Flora's only regret was Miss Lucy could not see her, as she paraded up and down the stage, with as stately a step as she could practise ; condescending, now and then, to exchange a word, or accept a fairing from some plebeian plainly-dressed child, who ventured near enough to have the honour.

The only part of the exhibition allotted the Baroness, was her entering a den, where three young leopards, a lion just weaned, and an infant panther was kept. The "happy family," so named, passing their time in mutual terror and disgust of each other, and a perpetual longing to try their respective strength in a general *melee*, from which they were only deterred by the unceasing pokes of a steel wand administered by the proprietor, or one of his supernumeraries.

The Baroness always elicited great applause when she knelt on one knee nursing the

juvenile lion, surrounded by the leopards as lap-dogs, a surfeited Boa hanging round her neck, and a red-eyed vulture perched sulkily over her head. But Flora was now given to understand that she, as "The Fairy Wild Beast Tamer," was to take this part as soon as it had been properly rehearsed in private.

More than once had she been held sufficiently near to have tempted the omniverous propensities of beasts less disciplined than Herr Cesarotti's, but she had, hitherto, resolutely refused to enter the den; and, in consequence, the least amiable side of the Baroness's temper had been displayed, causing Flora to think the private life of a princess was not so agreeable as the public.

They were at last halting in a large village, by the sea, where, though not a very fashionable resort, some few came to lodge during the summer and autumn months; and here it was that Herr Cesarotti determined Flora should

make her first appearance with the young cubs.

The Baroness took her in with her for a few minutes, during which the child had scarcely drawn breath ; but when commanded to enter alone, and practise the intimidating arts she had been taught, she firmly refused.

“ You may throw me in, if you will !” said she, standing before the iron bars, her face flushed and her hands clenched tightly, and held down by her side ; “ you may throw me in, but I won’t go in, now, there !” and she stamped her foot in a most royal manner.

Whether Herr Cesarotti really meant to force her or not no one can tell, for a confused noise was heard from the stage, and the Baroness and a policeman tried which should first tumble down the steps leading to the arena. It was not yet the usual hour for exhibition, so Herr Cesarotti turned angrily to see who was daring to force an entrance, but all his intended dignity

vanished when he recognised the man who walked towards him.

“Ah! my dear Tapley, you did not think to see me here, so far south; why you are a cleverer fellow than ever I thought you were, to take so well to this kind of life. But I am sorry to tell you that little affair about the horse you rode away in mistake, has not been settled or forgotten yet—the reward is still unclaimed, because no one has had the pleasure of seeing you in that neighbourhood since; and but for my being here on a sort of double duty, that is invigorating my health by the sea breezes, and forming a party of rustic constabulary, I should not have had the satisfaction of winning it, as I now hope to. I have no charge against this good lady, or any of her establishment; so, perhaps, she will like to continue in the same line, but, I am very much afraid, your complaint will involve change of air for a considerable period.”

Herr Cesarotti had released Flora the moment

he heard the man's voice, and she, terrified still more by the altercation, and firmly believing the savage man meant some day, when they were short of food for his beasts, to throw her in to them; and, was even now, perhaps, accused by the policeman of having done so to some other child, she darted by them, and up the steps to the stage, without being noticed by any one.

Down the outer steps again she rushed, and across the road, ran as fast as her legs would carry her. She went a mile or two before she ventured to stop to rest; then, creeping into a barn, coiled herself up in the loose hay, hid by cider casks and husbandry implements; here she fell fast asleep.

It was dark when she awoke, and then new terrors took possession of her heart. Some one might come quietly, noiselessly, and murder her, or evil spirits be in that strange place.

At that moment she even longed for the sheltering protection of the caravan, and would

willingly have consented to play with leopards, little Leo and all.

Morning at last broke, but it was wet, and cheerless. Flora could see no house near, and though cold and hungry, she crept into the heap of hay again.

Had it been a fine day, she had fully resolved to find her way back to the Baroness, so helpless did she now feel. But the rain dispirited and deterred her.

What slight causes alter our whole course through life.

It was near midday when a man entered the barn and began rummaging in one of the corners; and with an instinctive feeling that it would be against her to be discovered lurking there, Flora got up, and going towards him, begged he would give her a piece of bread to eat. There is something in the tone and look of an habitual beggar soon betrays itself—particularly in a beggar child—the downcast look—the whine—the glibly told tale; but the girl

who stood so erectly as she shook the hay from her curls, was either a very bold beggar indeed, or this was the first time she had asked charity ; for she looked up with her large dark eyes fixed on the man's face, and repeated her request—

“ Why who are you, where do you live, and what brought you here in this way ? ”

“ I don't know who I am, I don't live any where now, and though I used to play with Miss Lucy, and Mrs. Higgs had promised me a pair of wings to go to Heaven with ; yet they would not maintain me any longer, and it was because I would not be put, like Daniel, into the lion's den, yesterday, that I ran away,” repeated the child, with a confused notion that the man desired to know the chief events in her history before he would relieve her.

With half a smile, and half a shake of the head, he led her out, and across a field to a cottage, where a short introduction took place, with a very pleasant-looking old woman, who

supplied her with a basin of bread and milk. When she had ate it, and answered some of the many questions put to her—Flora spied a little stool in one corner, and fetching it, she came and seated herself near the fire by the woman's side as she had often done at Jane's.

Apparently the old couple were amused at the little creature's coolness, for nothing more was said, as at first, about taking her back to the caravan; perhaps honest John Fowkes and his wife looked on all showmen as the link between savage and civilized society, and thought it but a sorry way of bringing up a child.

"But I don't belong to them," said Flora, in answer to some remark, "I only staid with them because I will never go back to the village again. I should like to stay with you now," she added artlessly.

"Well, you shall till to-morrow," replied the woman, "'tis too wet to go anywhere to-day; but in the morning John shall go and

see the Baroness, as you call her, and tell her not to be angry with you."

The next day, at dinner-time, he went down to the sea-side village, but the caravans and show people were gone; and there he heard that the proprietor had been taken up on a charge of horse-stealing, and carried off to the county jail. Some inquiries had been made by one of the women about a missing child; but the unconcern she had showed in going away without it, fully proved its not being her own; so on his return to the cottage, a council of state having been held, it was decreed, that as John and Mary had no children, they were to look on this little one, so singularly thrown on their protection, as a peculiar blessing from Heaven sent to comfort and cheer them in their old age, and may be to become a support to them, if their years were prolonged till hers were sufficiently advanced to enable her to work for them.

CHAPTER XII.

WE English appear to have some rather peculiar tastes, the gratification of which seems, in a great measure, to be essential, not only to our happiness, but in many respects, as we firmly believe, to our existence.

One of these is the necessity of going for a certain portion of every year to the sea-side, where we enjoy ourselves in a listless sort of way, sitting on rocks and beaches, listening to the shrill, screeching sound of the waves, before they approach the shore, and break into their own peculiar roaring murmurs.

We take great delight in dipping ourselves into the salt water—called so, sometimes,

merely through courtesy—though going to the sea-side does not always involve the possibility of bathing—many of our favourite resorts—some of those on the Bristol Channel, for instance—only affording opportunities for this recreation at certain times and seasons—rendering also a telescope an indispensable article amongst our luggage, in order to distinguish with satisfactory accuracy the line of demarkation between water and mud. But then, to be sure it is not always neap tide, and it is not to be denied that there are particular hours of the day when there is a rush of would-be plungers into those, sometimes, ill-ruled waves—though they not unfrequently resemble a large party of Tantaluses, vainly trying to get into water deep enough to wet their heads.

Certainly there are other watering places, where there is no mistake about the salt sea, and pure green billows, and deep enough all day

long to enable us to drown ourselves with very little personal exertion, if we feel so inclined.

What, to be sure, is rather amusing, is the capriciousness with which these sea-side temporary sojourners go on patronizing and condemning every locality in turn. Some small villages or groups of fishing huts suddenly find themselves famous—and though only once known as places where fish could be got cheap, become pointed out as spots where a superabundant quantity of pure air can be inhaled with great benefit by those who, for the greater portion of the year, must only breathe a denser atmosphere.

Immediately esplanades, terraces, detached villas, and bungaloes, in all the miscellaneous styles of watering-place architecture spring up. In many instances, with such charmingly , eccentric irregularity that one might be tempted to believe some athletic seraph must have flown up into the air with a dozen or

two ready-made houses on his back, and dropped them one after another, when he found the burden too heavy—without any particular regard to uniformity or convenience of situation.

As soon as the character of the new resort is properly established, some clever person is sure to discover a Spa in the immediate neighbourhood, and everybody feels a desire to drink nauseous water for the cure or prevention of every known disease.

Nota bene—If the spring discovered is pure, clear, wholesome tasting water, it is no Spa.

A lady and gentleman had, for nearly an hour, been sauntering on a beach, which extended some miles, occasionally amusing themselves by throwing pebbles into the sea, or watching some amusing donkey lay down in the sand and roll his rider off his back, kicking up his heels afterwards in self-satisfaction, as it seemed, at his daring achievement.

“Why don't they teach these Mosaic Arabs

to carry their riders properly?" said the gentleman, testily. "If I lived here, I would have a society formed for that purpose—kicking should soon be abolished both by four-legged and two-legged creatures; and I would see if some other means could not be found for making the former move on, instead of a stick with a pin in it.

"Thank goodness, however, I *don't* live here—and what is more, I don't intend to stay here much longer—'twas only to satisfy one of your whims, Mary, that I came all this way from home. How many more of these sea-bathing places you intend to visit every summer, I don't want to know, but I do want you to know that I will register a vow never to be tempted to another."

"Then write your vow in this sand, my dear, and it will not be sooner effaced than your vexation," replied the lady, who leaned on his arm; "but we will leave here and go home as soon as you like."

"There it is—I do wish you would not be such a fool as to tell me I may have my own way in everything. One half the women in the world ruin a man's temper by being viragos, and the other half by being milksops. Any one to hear you speak would think I was the most domineering old bashaw that ever breathed—or that I was a cantankerous, irritable, rampageous dog in the manger, that snapped and snarled at every one."

"Well, there, don't be angry, or I will make you as cross as you wish," said the soothing voice of his companion.

"Why, I tell you, I am *not* angry, I am *not* cross, I am *not* dissatisfied," cried the gentleman, raising his voice higher at each sentence; "but I do say it is very aggravating when a man asserts an opinion in direct opposition to what he knows to be the opinion of his wife, if she wont take the trouble to contradict him."

"Now, I am sure you would not like me to

be always thwarting you ; we should not have lived together so happily as we have for ten years if I had," whispered the lady, good-humouredly, leading away her irascible husband from the sight of the offending donkeys, and the rapidly receding water. Then turning towards a pretty shady lane that led into the country, she tried to pacify and amuse him.

"Mary, you are a fool. I do *wish* so many women had not been born fools, then I should have had better chance of finding a wise one. No one can say I ever was so unreasonable as to expect to find all the cardinal virtues united in one woman ; but I certainly did not think I should have been so unlucky as to chose the one tantalizing she-plague born in every age to show men what fools they are to always paint the devil in male form.

"Now I know very well that if I spoke of your faults, Mary, as plainly before others as I feel I am called on to do when we are alone, everybody would think I had met with a very

worrying wife ; but you know I don't do thi
I always let them suppose I am the only or
to blame."

" Well, and what is the use of a husband
'tis not to fight his wife's battles, and bear th
blame of all her faults on his shoulders ;
asked the lady, looking up, laughingly, in th
old gentleman's face.

" There you go again. Talk—talk—yo
never give your tongue a holiday. 'Tis th
way with all women—their heads will ach
with too much pleasure, and their hearts fro
too much pain—but there never lived th
woman yet whose tongue ached from too muc
talking."

There was a pause of a few minutes, durin
which any one to have looked into the lady
pale, smiling face would have seen no indic
tion of ill-humour, such as it might be su
posed her aggravating husband's remarks wou
call forth. She seemed about six or eight an
thirty, certainly not remarkable for beaut

but with a true expression of one of the sweetest tempers in the world. Her companion was many years older, a fine, hale man, but with such a rapid succession of the oddest lights and shadows falling over his face, as would have puzzled the cleverest of physiognomists. A witty old lawyer friend of his once declared, he firmly believed Mr. Vallack held a perpetual Nisi Prius Court in his pericranium, and that he was always engaged hearing council on both sides of the important investigation as to whether his fellow creatures were actually disposed to act a friendly part towards him, or whether the whole world was populated with his own personal private and public enemies, and whether he could not sustain actions against them each individually for conspiracy, and malice *prepense*.

Certainly, when we first make his acquaintance on the sea beach, there had been no verdict given by the jury—Mr. Vallack, sometimes, perhaps, entertaining the thought of

allowing himself to be non-suited, and at others, of applying for a rule absolute to call a new trial.

He had stood still a few minutes in the lane they were walking through, during which pause he had decapitated a dozen nettles with his stick; then turning round, he said, in a voice that would hardly be recognized as the same which spoke before.

“Mary, I shall be obliged, after we get home, to request, as a particular favour, that the parish authorities will allow me now and then to take a day’s turn at the tread-mill. An idle gentleman’s life does not suit me, I have been getting rustier and rustier ever since I gave up business.”

“And yet, Edward, why should you have slaved any longer when we have no children to leave our money to.”

“There you are, off again, on that donkey of a theme,” cried Mr. Vallack, in his old tone. “Children — what good are children — but

that's another whimmy absurdity of women, they are sure to cry themselves, if they have not half-a-dozen brats crying round them. And as to saving money for them, what's the good of that, they spend as much in a month as took their parents a year to save. And ten chances to one but the young dogs sneer at their father if he made his wealth by trade; jump over the counter and swear their souls revolt at the notion of keeping shop. I tell you, in a few years, there will be no tradespeople in England, and then let those who come after us see what will be the result. Every body crowding into first-class carriages will never do for travelling through the world. And then if I had a daughter, I suppose some jackanapes would tell me he would like to marry her, but there was a stumbling-block he feared his family would not leap over. *I had been a shopkeeper!* And so she would not be highly connected enough for some half-pay officer perhaps, who could hardly have bought

bread and cheese for her—or for a clerk—I beg pardon, I forget, there are no *clerks* now-a-days, they are all agents. Or one who called himself a merchant, by virtue of twenty feet of yard, a couple of barges, and a sloop, and an office as big as a watch-box—or a doctor with two patients and a stock of pill-boxes and bottles—or—.”

The lady's little white hand came before his mouth, and in the bright dark eyes that looked at his, there was a glistening that made him silent in a moment.

Perhaps the lady was wishing she had a daughter whom she might always keep with her, without chance of her marrying any one.

Mr. and Mrs. Vallack were now interrupted by a troop of children running from the village their long walk had led them near. They were shouting, laughing, and jumping, in chase of a gandy butterfly, whose beauty and finery, as in many another cases, was likely to prove its destruction. The insect at last sought

refuge near the bank on which the lady and gentleman seated themselves to rest, but it was followed without hesitation, or respect by its little eager pursuers.

Mr. Vallack, now all good humour, clapped his hands to encourage two of the competitors who came rolling on the ground over one another—up again they were in an instant, regardless of knocks or bruises, screaming with joy.

“’Tis astonishing how much sooner these little ragged ruffians learn to use their limbs than their more pampered contemporaries,” said Mr. Vallack, who, in spite of his seeming misanthropy, was a lover of the whole world; “here have these brats got strength and spirits enough to take care of themselves at an age when children of richer parents are carefully wrapped up and sheltered from the air under the watchful charge of a nurse.”

At last the butterfly settled itself on a tall shrub, high above the heads of its little tor-

mentors; caps were flung up, boughs shaken, all to no purpose—the pretty wings fluttered and swung about on the nodding flower—even Mr. Vallack laughed heartily, and perhaps remembered some such sport when he was a boy—then after sipping a few drops of nectar, and feeling rested and refreshed, it flew off into a meadow, and at that instant a little girl, who had watched all from a cottage door, darted off alone after it, and returned in a few minutes, holding her closed hand above her head, panting and struggling through the crowd of children surrounding her.

“Come here my dear,” said Mrs. Vallack, beckoning to the conqueror, who was refusing a peep at the captive, “you would not hurt the poor thing?”

In an instant the hand was tossed up in the air, and the butterfly at liberty, while the child danced before the stile to prevent her companions following it again.

Mrs. Vallack sighed and thought how happy

her now desolate home would be if blessed with any such rosy, sturdy little creatures as formed that group.

"Have all these scamps got fathers and mothers, or are they orphans like young butterflies," asked Mr. Vallack, of an old man who stood near.

"I think they have, sir," after a little consideration as they passed in some new sport, "all except the princess, you know, sir."

Mr. Vallack informed him he knew nothing of the private history of the village, but was curious to know how one with so grand a title came to have such lowly associates.

The princess, on being pointed out, proved to be the fortunate butterfly catcher, who was habited in a dress of patchwork fashion, and shoes like many a human couple, destined to run thir course, paired, but not matched.

"Rather a slatternly attire for such a high-born damsel," said Mrs. Vallack, smiling.

"Why, you see, ma'am, we don't know

whether she is high-born or low-born. She came to the town beyond, with some show-people, but she was very likely stolen by them, for she says she used to live in a village, and the parson was very fond of her, as she had no father or mother as she knew off—but either she does not know the name of the place, or she wont tell, and all we could pick out was, “his honour,” was sometimes called Mr. Williams, but that is such a common name, we might have gone all through England and Wales before we came to the right. And, indeed the little creature made herself so happy with us here, no one thought of sending her away; but there is sad times coming now for her, I’m afraid, for poor old Mary Fowkes died last week, and as John can’t take care of her, we talk of applying to the parish to know what to do.”

Mrs. Vallack had sat looking up into her husband’s face during this recital, and as the old man turned to go away, she clasped her

fingers over the hand, which rested on her knee.

“May we not have been led here to-day, Edward, to do a good action?” she said, in a low sweet voice, “this poor little thing seems quite destitute. You know how often I have wished to adopt a child; but you have said it would break its natural ties. This girl seems to have no ties, no one owns or claims her, and I do indeed think the hand of God is pointing out to us a means of doing good to a fellow creature, and earning a source of much pleasure to ourselves. I am sure there must be something very endearing in the love of a child, even if not our own.”

“Now I see you want to draw me into all sorts of trouble and disputes, and to take charge of some beggar’s brat, who will be sure to turn out bad. Now don’t say another word about it. Here, you old gentleman, just show me where your friend Fowkes lives; I want to talk to him.”

Mrs. Vallack called the little girl to her as soon as her husband entered the cottage : something told her he was gone to see if her plan was practicable or advisable, and if so, there was a louder hope whispering to her that he meant to comply, at last, with her long-cherished, though, perhaps, romantic, wish.

The child's answers to her questions, and the ingenious account she gave of the little she remembered of her former history, convinced the lady she was neither a beggar nor a showman's child ; but the more mystery there was, the more eager she became to snatch the beautiful little creature, both from a parish bringing up, and the future ills she might be exposed to. There seemed to be a secret understanding between these two, as they sat there during that half hour, that the one had found a protector, and the other a comforter.

"That child can't go with us in that state," said Mr. Vallack, in his old, testy way, as he at length issued from the cottage, followed by

the grateful old Fowkes. "She can't go with us in that guise," he repeated, as if angry she had not been washed and dressed during his absence. "And now, I've to call on the clergyman here, which I know is what you want me to do, in order to hear what he says, and to tell him he shall write down all the people know about her, in case of some one coming to accuse me of child-stealing; and I must tell him where I live, and all that nonsense, that he may know where to find her when she may be wanted. And yet, there you sit, though you see what a hurry I am in, for I know you never take a scheme into your head, but it must be settled directly: and our month's lodging is up on Thursday, and go then I shall, and what time will you have between this and then to rummage all the two-penny shops here for the ginghams and calicos, I know your head is running on at this minute; and there are stockings, and shoes, and a bonnet to be got for her, and you will forget

one-half, if it was not for me to remind you. And listen, Mary, you must promise to take all the trouble and annoyance that I know we shall bring upon ourselves in future. 'Tis no scheme of mine—for you see how reluctantly I agree to it."

The child still held one of the lady's hands in both hers, and was smoothing it over her face, perhaps remembering poor Miss Lucy's used to be as soft and white; but Mrs. Vallack had put the other into her husband's warm palm, and the loc. of love and gratitude she gave him was a full payment in advance for any vexation her scheme might cost him.

Depend upon it, love becomes a purer, holier feeling, when mixed with gratitude.

CHAPTER XIII.

THERE was an old-fashioned, rambling looking house in Cornwall, called Trelighthen, which, having for some years been shut up with a haunted reputation, was bought—a great bargain—by Mr. Vallack, when he retired from business, and wished to settle in his native county. Trelighthen had doors and windows of every possible size and shape, set up in every imaginable place, consistent with the probability of ingress and egress, light and air being desired. A new wing had been added by Mr. Vallack, between which coquet-tish-looking projection and the grim, grey, old mansion, there seemed to be as much conformity and assimilation as in many of the ill-assorted

human unions often seen. A very fantastical affair altogether was that new wing, with its great bow window on the ground floor, and its two little oval ones at the top, peeping out from a sort of *chevaux de frise* work, like eyes from beneath a pair of very bristling eyebrows—and its door more decorated than any other door within twenty miles of it, set off too with a coloured glass fan-light and gothic arch over, nestling, as it seemed, within a jaunty porch, where two people could just sit down, and hide themselves behind the clustering, dangling boughs of clematis and honeysuckle. But Mr. Vallack prided himself amazingly on his improvements, and often declared that, if it was true about Augustus finding Rome brick, and leaving it marble, he might surely claim the credit of having found Trelighthen a comfortable, ruinous farm-house, and converting it into a miniature palace. But ten times more comfortable than many a palace—at least, any of those Aladinish sort of things one is so apt to

fancy by that name—was that snug, pleasant Trelighthen—and ten times happier were its inmates than many of those who ever looked out through ruby and amber windows, with golden frames: and there was, at least, one within, who thought her view of life a complete kaleidoscope; peep at it which way she would, gay, bright colours, and graceful forms met her eyes. The present to her was a panorama spread around, lit up with sunshine, and she never liked to contemplate the possibility of any cloud falling on it.

And when we again meet Flora as we now do, ten sunny years had passed o'er her head, but few would have failed to recognise the large black eyes, and the bright brown glossy hair, which fell in thick, clustering curls over her arms, as she crossed them on the knee of an old gentleman, by whose side she sat on a very low stool—as she had been accustomed to sit, it would seem, from her childhood—by the

fondling simplicity with which the little seat was still appropriated. Mrs. Vallack, looking as amiable and as delicate as ever, was in her easy chair, on the opposite side of the fire-place ; and to judge from the fond looks exchanged by these two, it might be inferred Flora had, indeed, been as a daughter to her.

On the hearth-rug sat a fine, sleek tabby cat, purring and closing her eyes every now and then, in all the luxury of indolence, dreaming for a moment, perhaps, of the long-whiskered, yellow friend, who occasionally paid her a visit. Her daughter, a frolicsome young puss, was catching flies occasionally at the window, now and then flirting with a Blenheim puppy outside, and as indifferent to her mother's admonitory looks as any other youthful coquette, who thinks she is as capable of taking care of herself as *she* had been at the same age. So, the old lady dozed on, probably flattering herself with the hope, that, though

such an idle young kitten, she might, in time, like many others, become a sedate, prudent old cat.

A rather irregular sort of education had Flora received, Mr. Vallack declaring she was naturally so clever and so quick she could learn everything taught at one school in twelve-months. Then would follow a long interregnum at home, that the old gentlemen might perfectly satisfy himself she was not being overtaught too many accomplishments which he set his face against, saying he wanted to know how much of what was useful a girl could learn, whose music-master declared it to be indispensable she should practise six hours a-day, her drawing-master three, and a jumbling together of every European language during the rest. He said he neither wanted her to talk German, nor to sing Italian to him, nor to stand on her toes as long as an opera dancer could; but he wished her to be a cheerful home companion for himself and his wife, and,

perhaps, for some worthy, sensible husband, at some future time, and though she could neither play fantasias brillantes on the second-hand piano he had bought for her—nor execute scenas nor bravuras, yet the old man delighted to listen to her half self-taught songs, and sweet old-fashioned airs, which he declared to have been his favourites when a boy, and none of which, he thought, were equalled by any modern music.

During the first few years of her adoption, Flora had chiefly been known by pet names—"Minnie, Poppet," "Tiny Flo," or "Tormentilla;" but when sent to school, she became "Miss Vallack" at once. Her protectors had been "Lady Mamma," and "Papa Vallack;" but as gradually "your mamma," or "your papa," began to be used by servants and strangers, the child had penetration enough to see that these epithets were received with greater fondness than any others. In short, she had felt like some little step-son or

daughter often has, when first given to a new parent. It seems as if one side has no right, and the other no courage, to adopt the endearing applications unsolicited, and yet the loving heart and lips of the child seem to shrink from the more formal ones usually adopted.

In later years there seemed to be an understanding between the few who knew the real facts, that Flora was to be considered as the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Vallack, whose name she bore, and a veil drawn over whatever mystery or misfortune had cast her amongst strangers in a low or equivocal rank of life.

But it was in this mystery that Flora's only perplexity or anxiety lay. There is a feeling implanted in all hearts, a yearning, if you will, that prompts the desire to know from whence we sprang—from whom we had our being. Tell us who were our parents, and though they be dead, we are, in a manner, satisfied. But let us have no history, no recollection, no tradition, even of who they were, no link to

unite us with human kind, and the stoutest heart must, at times, feel its desolation. With this impression, let us pity those poor offsprings of sin who have been deserted and disowned in infancy by their parents, whose shame, too, often falls on the innocent. Nameless, and unclaimed, they are left in all the mystery of guilt with strangers, to be cast forth in a little time upon the wide world, and may be to pass unknowingly and unknown the authors of their being. And Flora knew not but this mark was set on her; for as she grew up, she recalled many of Jane's strange hints, and the angry indignation with which she had once told her she had no right to the name of "James," for her mother had said it was not her real one. When older still, Flora dreaded to think of the reasons which might have induced her mother to assume a false name, and felt almost glad she remembered so little about her childhood impressions, lest some of them might darken her now happy lot.

And who can wonder, when she contrasted her present home, where every wish was gratified, with her former state—as the alternate drudge or pet of her nurse, and no other enjoyment than the hope of a summons to the Rectory to eat bread and jam, and teach poor, stupid Miss Lucy new games—she should think that both Cesarotti and old John Fowkes were deserving her everlasting gratitude; for had they not been the means by which she had stepped into her fortunate position?

When Flora's education had, according to her dear papa's notions, been quite finished, she was installed into all the honours and duties of housekeeper. She became "the mistress of the house," "the domestic economist," as he liked to call her, and many a delicious pudding or plate of dainty cakes that appeared at table had been prepared by those fair hands, or invented by that prettiest of busy bodies; and great faith Flora had in many of those said inventions.

Then how matronally she would look of a morning with her large, white apron on, locking and unlocking cupboards and closets, peeping into pots of preserves and pickles, filling tea-cannisters, and sugar-basins, or smiling at the ruby colour of her raspberry vinegar. And how seriously and importantly she would decant Mr. Vallack's wine, or fill his spirit bottles—for he had appointed her chief butler also.

Then she would, perhaps, stand and consider a moment, and consult with Sally on the best method of dressing a joint, or using up cold meat, and all Miss Flora's suggestions were oracles in Sally's estimation.

Yes, a pretty Englishwoman can never be seen to better advantage than in her home—seen, too, in her neat morning costume, when, as our Flora, she is busied with the little important duties, which, when perfected, make the home of an Englishman a true elysium.

Whether Mrs. Vallack had ever taken on

herself these little domestic arrangements nobody seemed able to remember; but she did not give you the idea of having done so. To be sure some women never have a *wifeish* look, let them be married ever so many years—while on the other hand, there are girls of seventeen and eighteen who make you think they must soon have homes of their own to manage, for men would be blind indeed not to chose such thrifty housewives.

So there our charming housekeeper of Trelighthen sat on her low ottoman at Mr. Val-lack's feet, and let him be as cross as he would, when he took his seat, she never failed in a few minutes to coax or banter him into a good humour.

“Now confess I am very thoughtful to have ordered this cheerful fire on such a dull, chilly, autumn evening—see how it blazes, and crackles, and glitters, as if to welcome us round the hearth again. I don't think a fire ever is so pleasant as when lit for the first

time after the summer has passed away. No, I don't value it half so much in winter, because I have got use to it, I suppose."

"Ah, yes, like an old friend, whose services we are got used to, and don't care for."

"You morose, growling old man, do you dare insinuate there is such ingratitude in the world," said Flora, placing Mr. Vallack's hands on her shoulders, where she held them, as she looked up into his face, archly; "I should not be one bit surprised now if you called *me* ungrateful."

"There, that's the way with all women—you can't make a remark, but they are sure to take it as meant for themselves. Just as they blame men for imaginary faults, in order to hide their own real ones."

"He means, my love, he is not half grateful enough for all the happy hours he owes to you," said Mrs. Vallack, with her old, sweet smile.

The girl's eyes were cast down, for a mo-

ment, and she passed the back of one of the hands she held over them.

"Well, I declare, you always manage to say something to make Tiny Flo unhappy," grumbled the old gentleman.

"No, always reminding her of her happiness," exclaimed Flora, uncovering her face, now all radiant with pleasant reflections. "But see how idle you are making me—here have the tea things been waiting half an hour, and directly you will be scolding me because the tea has not been wetted long enough to be well drawn out."

Then pushing back the little stool, this pet of the Vallacks rose, and a lovelier creature could not stand before you. She seemed little more than seventeen, rather plumper than some are at that age—but then she was taller too, so the effect of both was only to make her look rather more womanly.

We wont call her pretty—that is a term more applicable to blue eyes, fair hair, and

rosy cheeks. All who looked at Flora Vallack's dark sparkling eyes, her high and noble forehead, her mouth so small and pouting, with that peculiar wax-like complexion, declared her to be very beautiful. Those who had seen her picking her way through the muddy lanes to Church, bore testimony to her having an exquisite little foot. ("A little foot," or, "a large foot," seems to be the usual expression used, as if people stand only on one leg, or have but one foot to stand on.) As to her hands, they were so small, so white, and so soft, that Mr. Vallack vowed they had smoothed away his wrinkles. And yet, as we have shown, these pretty hands were not idle ones.

Flora had just commenced the duties of the tea-table, putting the proper number of spoonfuls of Souchong and Pekoe into the tea-pot, watching the curling steam from the urn, locking the caddy, and depositing the bunch of keys in her dress pocket, recommending, with

demure importance, the hot, heavy cake, that delicious compound of flour, currants, and clotted cream, made to perfection only in Cornwall—when a loud ring at the hall-door startled the trio ; and Flora, who felt her character as chatelaine was at stake, immediately turned her thoughts on the required additions, and the extra infusion indispensable, for the hospitable welcome to be given to a visitor, whoever it might be.

“Herbert—nephew Herbert,” she cried, joyfully starting up to open the parlour door, as a cheerful, hearty voice was heard, and, with the eager, unblushing freedom of a sister, she held up her face for the kiss she received.

“I do love taking people by surprise,” cried a fine handsome young man advancing to salute his uncle and aunt, still holding Flora in one arm. “Now don’t quarrel which shall devour one—or rather, let me first devour some of Tormentilla’s rich cakes, and swallow a cup of her inimitable tea. By the bye,

Flo," in a whisper, "you must give Fanny some lessons in these arts—'tis all settled, and you shall be bridesmaid."

"What is all that treason plotting?" asked Mr. Vallack, drawing his chair to the table, where Herbert Trevennon was already seated by Flora's side, busily helping about sugar and cream distributions.

"Oh, I am come down to make a full confession," he cried, laughing so heartily, as to show both rows of the whitest, evenest teeth that could be seen in the handsomest mouth. "Fanny Harwood has been graciously pleased to accept your inestimable nephew, and we are to be married next month—(such a love of a house we have taken, Flo)—in parenthesis—and I want you all to come up—and then I and my wife—what a sweet loving name *wife* is, Flo—we'll come back and spend our first married Christmas with you here."

"Mr. Herbert Trevennon has some obsolete notions about a wife owing everything to her

husband, and fancies women presume too much when they bring any capital into the partnership matrimonial," said Mr. Vallack, glancing alternately at Flora and his wife, as if this was some new intelligence they had not heard discussed every day during the last month or two.

"Well, you know, I always said I never would marry a rich woman," retorted Herbert, slapping the old gentleman on the shoulder, as if he did not care one bit for the gravity he had assumed. "I always declared there must be something very degrading to the feelings of a father being obliged to give a man a fortune to induce him to marry his daughter, bribing him, as it were, to take her off his hands."

"And so he has been lucky enough to meet with a gentleman, whose opinions entirely coincide with his own—indeed, I should not wonder if Mr. Harwood goes still further, and praises the Chinese fashion of the lover, giving his future father-in-law a handsome *douceur*

in exchange for a wife ; for I believe the young lady is not in expectation of having two six-pences to jingle in her pocket on her wedding-day," said Mr. Vallack, still addressing Flora.

" Well, you may say what you like, uncle—the wife is the fortune, good or bad, after all. And, let me tell you, 'tis not every man I should like for a father-in-law—there is a vast difference in them—young men who are courting will tell you all about that. I know there are some whose daughters I would not marry unless they faithfully promised to die, or banish themselves out of my sight, as soon as the ceremony was over. There are others who absolutely recommend their girls, by their own hearty, happy dispositions—men whose hands you could clasp, and request them to appropriate any chair in your new home to their own use, and occupy it as often as they like."

" Has Mr. Harwood selected his yet," asked Mr. Vallack, slyly.

Herbert made no reply, but turning to his aunt, said—

“I am always puzzled to discover where Tormentilla gets her pretty dresses down in this outlandish place ; now this velvet jacket, how admirably it fits her, and the petticoat train, whatever you call it, I never saw a handsomer one. And your style of dressing your hair, Flo, is peculiarly your own. I am so glad you have not adopted that frightful fashion of black velvet pigtails, hanging half a yard down your back.”

“Any woman can dress fashionably,” said Mrs. Vallack, “but ’tis not every one can dress becomingly. Our Flora seems certainly to have discovered the grand secret of uniting both these desideratums in her toilet, and yet few would believe she is her own dress-maker and milliner.”

“Why, Flo, what a treasure of a wife you will be one of these days, such a girl as you can afford to marry a poor man for love,

whereas, too many a woman must sacrifice her affections for the sake of indulging the extravagance she has been brought up in. What a pity you and I did not chose one another."

"I have done many foolish things in my life, but never one so thoroughly foolish as falling in love with cousin Herbert Trevennon," said Flora folding her pretty hands on the edge of the tea-tray, and looking down on them with a saucy smile.

"What a blessed thing it would be," cried Mr. Vallack, "if we could only restore the Saxon habits, when ladies contentedly went three hundred years without changing the fashion of dress."

"Why, the men would be the very first to complain, now," said Flora, laughing, "they would grow weary of the very uniformity they pretend to desire. 'Tis all very well, pappamine, for husbands to preach economy to their wives, but depend upon it, they like to see them well dressed for all that. And as to not

liking *variety* ! why, nature herself sets us an example, she does not dream of wearing the same dress all the year round, but at one time arrays herself in rich green, then in robes of pure white, glittering with diamonds, then comes decked out with wreaths of every hue, and lest you should too long be dazzled with these splendours, she strips off her gay attire, and appears in sombre brown and olive, that you may admire the contrast more when she again comes forth in a garb of airy lightness."

"Oh, we know of old, there is no criticism to be ventured on Tormentilla's rhapsodies," said Herbert, with mock gravity, "so now let me tell you all my future plans, for I shall not have long to be with you. My patients will want me."

Flora then touched his hand, and pointed to the bell, indicating that though she seldom had a cavalier to wait on her, she meant to demand a proper degree of service from him, when she had. And then the tea things being

cleared away, they seated themselves round the bright fire to listen to and consult about the young man's matrimonial and professional prospects.

"So you see I must start for Falmouth very early to-morrow morning," said Herbert, in conclusion, referring to one part of their discourse.

"I shall be off at five, and will breakfast somewhere on the road, without troubling any one here so early. I shall be with you again on the second day. Mind you look out for me."

"That we will do with all impatience, Sir, Knight," said Flora, "but, touching this scheme of starting without breakfast, I issue my never-to-be-disputed orders against it. I shall get up and see you take the proper quantity of toast, ham, and eggs, together with as many cups as you please of my incomparable coffee. Moreover, I offer you a word of advice to last through life. Don't ever set out on an

important errand with an empty stomach, however excited you may feel, however eager in the pursuit, always eat first. Before I go to bed, therefore, I shall give Sally the requisite instruction about bread and butter, &c."

"Bread and butter," exclaimed Mr. Vallack, catching only the last words of Flora's parting address to Herbert. "I verily believe women imagine the whole world would go wrong if it was not for the bread and butter that is cut in it."

"Well, and confess that all the troubles and all the quarrels and half the heart-aches in the world, *are* caused by bread-and-butter," said Flora, putting in her head again at the door, as she stood with her lighted candle ready to retire. "I am sure I do not know what your Lords and Commons can have to dispute and consult about if 'tis not for the most effective method of providing bread-and-butter for her Majesty's numerous subjects. And don't we always call those very shrewd and clever people

who find out which side their bread is buttered ? And when we are indifferent about any thing, don't we sometimes say, ' 'tis none of our bread and butter.' And is it not the fear of the uncertainty of being able to provide bread-and-butter that keeps hundreds of warmly attached couples single who would otherwise be united. I grant this last is a very unromantic view to take of things affectionate, but depend upon it, they are all very reasonable folks who do think of bread-and-butter matters."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE next evening the Vallacks were sitting by their parlour fire, talking over all the news Mr. Trevennon had brought them, when again a loud ring was heard from the front door.

"Herbert cannot have returned already," said Mrs. Vallack, listening.

It was certainly not Herbert, for Zephaniah the old man-servant was holding a parley with some one. It could not be a visitor either, or he would have been admitted directly.

"What can that fellow mean by standing there letting the cold air into the house," cried Mr. Vallack, just as Zephaniah presented himself and announced that Mr. Clemow, the landlord of the village inn, wished to see him.

"Tell him to rub his shoes and come in."

After a deal of scraping of shoes and rubbing them on several successive mats, Clemow was ushered in, and stood about a foot from the door, holding his round polled hat in both hands. He was a fine specimen of a broad-shouldered athletic Cornishman, who looked as if he could throw or hug half-a-dozen champions of England or elsewhere, without any great inconvenience to himself.

"Well, Clemow, what is it?"

"Why, sir, we have three rather strange sort of lodgers down with we, rather mysterious in their goings on, or at any rate comical. They are all dressed in grey suits of clothes, coats, waistcoats and trousers all the same, even little grey caps—reminding me wonderfully of the convicts I once saw in Plymouth Dock Yard. They carry about every where with them, three square books, in which one or other of them is always writing or drawing. They have asked hundreds of questions re-

specting every body in the neighbourhood, your honour especially, and laughed for an hour when I told them our fair maids were made by pressing pilchards under heavy weights. Now, so far, no harm, you will say ; but, sir, I glanced over the shoulder of one of them just now, and saw he was drawing the picture of a man holding up a hare before an old gentleman. You may guess who *I* think they are now, Mr. Vallack."

Mr. Vallack seemed to have guessed certainly, for he turned very pale, and had somewhat the air of a doomed man.

The truth was, he had, as a magistrate, committed three men for poaching, about a year before, who, after enduring a few days' incarceration, were liberated on its being proved they were not the actual culprits. It seems they were strangers in the parish, and though perhaps just as great rogues as the poachers, had vowed vengeance on Mr. Vallack for the blunder he had made, and almost incessantly

tortured him with threatening letters bearing post marks of almost every town in England, and signed by the not very pleasant names of Hatchet, Bodkin and Firebrand.

Now, although it was strongly suspected these scamps were only revenging themselves on him in jokes, yet the old gentleman was always thrown into a state of considerable excitement, whenever the existence of these ill-omened men was in any way brought to his recollection. That the wretches had, at last, arrived to put their threats of conflagrations, private assassination, or midnight attacks, into execution he would not now listen to a doubt of; and seriously considered whether his prerogatives, as a magistrate, did not extend to taking up unknown, suspicious people, lodging at a little, obscure, village ale-house. It mattered not that neither he, nor the few who had seen them on their former visit, could, perhaps, identify them.

Unfortunately it was too late to do anything

that night, except ordering the landlord to lie awake and keep a sharp watch, and to come to Trelighthen early in the morning, and report his further observations.

The orders about nocturnal vigils were repeated to the whole household—as to himself, Mr. Vallack did not contemplate closing his eyes.

Pistols, and the rope communicating with the alarm-bell, having been duly examined and reported as fit to use on the slightest notice; the whole party crowded up stairs together, feeling a little comfort in knowing that all precautions had been taken to prevent their being murdered or burnt in their beds, without any body knowing what was doing. Danger always loses some of its horrors when we know we have the means of defending ourselves, or of giving an alarm for help.

“Poor Flora looks as pale as a ghost!” said Mrs. Vallack, kissing her on the staircase.

"I do wish you would tell us the precise degree of pallor in such a case, Mrs. Vallack ; I presume you speak from actual observation ?" said the old gentleman, in one of his most snappish tones ; glad, it would seem, to divert his mind from more disagreeable contingents than the appearance of a ghost or two would have been. "Don't you be at all alarmed, Flo, I am a host in myself. In case of an attack you have only to call Sally, and tell her to go and wake Zeph, and send him to me."

After a very restless night, Mr. Vallack fell into a deep slumber towards morning ; when he dreamed of three men with pitchforks, three Guy Fawkes's in his wine cellar, and his house bursting into flames in three different places ; three separate wounds in his body—three constables — three confessions—and three figures hanging dangling by their necks in the air ; in which secure position he was contemplating them, when, lo ! three loud knocks were actually thumped at his bed-room door.

After nudging Mrs. Vallack, to the great danger of her ribs, he opened his eyes, and found it was already early day-light, so, jumping out of bed, he made a rather tremulous demand to know who was there.

It was perhaps the preservation of Mr. Vallack's intellects that he received but one reply, and that in the well-known voice of Zeph.

"Quick, sir, dress as quick as you can, I have caught them on the premises. I have locked them in the back-yard; and there is no way out but over the spikes of the wall. They are in a pretty passion, and say they are not *what I take them for.*"

"But how do you think they got in, Zeph?" asked Mr. Vallack, who had decided on first going to a high window to reconnoitre the yard.

"Why, sir, when the boy went home last night, he must have left the wicket-gate open. These rogues, prowling about as soon as day-light, must have found out this, and could get

easily into the yard. I don't think they can have been there long ; but their coolness, when I discovered them, was most amazing. There they were, all perched up on the top of the hay-rick, one of them seemed to be drawing a plan of the house, while the others looked on. Knowing they would not come down in a hurry, I slipped out, locked the great gates upon them, and there they are like mice caught in a trap."

Having now finished dressing—which had been a flurried affair, performed partly on the landing—Mr. Vallack and Zeph peeped down and saw, sure enough, three men, habited as Clemow had described. They had no weapons that the spies could perceive, nor could they very distinctly see their features ; nevertheless, Mr. Vallack felt certain they must be three as diabolical-faced ruffians as he could have looked at. At one moment he heard great shouts of laughter, and another terrible swearing.

Several times they shook the large gates—went into the barn—and came out again—and,

at last, after a brief consultation, knocked at the back door of the house.

By this time all the inmates of Trelighthen were assembled; and Clemow, being espied coming up the lawn, he was admitted; when, his deposition shewing a surreptitious escape of his three lodgers, it was determined that the dining-room should be converted into a hall of justice, and the men brought forward to give an account of themselves.

It is very comfortable in all battles, foreign and domestic, to know you are at least equal in number to the enemy. Three to three was no bad match, even if violence was attempted, especially with a reinforcement of females in the rear.

Flora was ordered to sit at the head of the dining-table, by Mr. Vallack's right hand, and make any notes of the case he might deem requisite.

"Now then, where are these fellows?" said the magistrate; "you have not let them escape I hope; they are not gone away, I presume?"

No, sir, they are only gone mad, I believe," replied Zephania; "they are bullying the maids through the back door, and have hunted the pig about till he is as mad as they are; they have turned all the sitting hens out, and are trying to make the two cocks fight; and yet, every now and then, off they go into fits of laughter."

"They will find it no laughing matter I expect," said Mr. Vallack, with increasing dignity.

Much noise, of unbarring and unlocking, was then heard, mingled with angry remonstrances and enforced commands, then a tramping of feet along passages, and the dining-room door being flung open with as much force as by a Newgate turnkey, in walked three young men, whose appearance and manners certainly did not indicate the degree of criminality the master of Trelighthen was determined to suspect them of.

"Really, Mr. Vallack, there seems some

strange mistake entertained about us ; though, I acknowledge, we owe you an apology for intruding on your premises."

This was from the elder of them, as they hurriedly advanced towards the bottom of the dining-table—a position indicated to them by a wave of Zephania's hand.

Of the other two, one seemed to forget the ridiculous predicament in which he was placed, in the contemplation of the now blushing Flora—and the other was telegraphing a series of winks and smiles with the landlord of The Cat and Rolling Pin, the only part of whose face visible over the broad-brim of his hat, which he held before it, being a pair of very roguish black eyes.

Before the rather perplexed Mr. Vallack could make any observation in words, the hall door, which, amid the bustle, had been left open, admitted another, on this exciting scene, who, after a moment's colloquy with Sally, rushed in with alarmed looks. But in an in-

stant these gave place to surprise and laughter. He strode over to the criminals, shook them heartily by the hand, and, amidst explanations and greetings, he was, at last, heard to exclaim—

“You sly, unconscionable dogs, to steal this march upon me—why, if I had known of your coming, I would have announced you, or been here to welcome you—and now you have been rightly punished.”

“No sentence has been passed on them yet, Herbert—so had we not better proceed with the trial and examination of the prisoners?” asked Flora, with comical gravity, as she saw the confusion of the young men, whom, with a woman’s quick penetration, she had, in a moment, seen, were no tramping vagabonds, as Mr. Vallack had called them.

“Mr. Trevennon will perhaps make the best he can of our case, and tell who we are, without further criminating us,” suggested one.

“Oh yes, I will give evidence as to the

previous respectability of your characters—how far you have crimated yourselves since we parted, a week ago, in Shuffleborough, I can't answer for. But first let me present Messrs. Magrath, Eastcourt, and Crofton, to my dear uncle, and aunt, and cousin Flora. These fellows are never dangerous unless they have a pen or pencil in their hands," he added, trying to look very serious at Mr. Vallack. "But I believe something of the truth is, that they have been pedestrianizing through most of the English counties—and when, a little while ago, they named Cornwall as their probable next excursion, I blush—or, at least, I see Flora is blushing—when I acknowledge I promised, if here, at the same time, to point out to them some rich grist for their mill."

"In odd, unpolished characters, as well as rough, unpolished granite, and other natural curiosities, I suppose," said Flora, rising; "but as these gentlemen are friends of yours, they will, perhaps, respect *us*, and let *us* re-

main in our inglorious seclusion—though I believe few are safe now, when book-making people wish for a caricature.”

Flora assumed all her little dignity as she said this.

“It must be a caricature indeed, if we could succeed in rendering Miss Vallack ridiculous,” said the youngest of the three, venturing to leave his place at the end of the room and approach her.

“Why, you see, Flo, Magrath is clever at hitting off characters—Eastcourt collects and turns them into funny stories—and Guy Crofton adds sketches and embellishments *ad libitum*. But I don’t believe either of them are publishing fellows, so don’t be afraid of them.”

Mr. Trevannon then explained to his three friends, as delicately as possible, the intelligence which he had briefly gleaned from Sally, of their having been taken for poachers or incendiaries, or, at the best, three very suspicious

characters. And then long and loud was the laughter which rung through the old dining-room of Trelighthen.

At last, Mr. Vallack was induced to look at the affair in a new light, and enjoy it as a capital joke, and declare he was for ever after cured of his fears of Firebrand, Bodkin, and Hatchet; and when he had come to this conclusion, he joined in their merriment. But, as you may conclude, from his character, when Mr. Vallack laughed, it was none of those boisterous, sudden peals of haw-haws, like a roar of thunder, and over in a minute. It more resembled a gently dawning lumination coming upon you gradually, like the sun rising in the morning, and Aurora taking off her nightcap.

The first indication of mirth was betrayed by a slight twitch at the tip of his nose, then a little spasmodic ecstasy was visible at the corners of his mouth, his forehead seemed to have a sunbeam flickering over it, his eyes

sparkled, his cheeks flushed, and you could almost persuade yourself a hundred mimic, roguish devils were scampering over his whole face, every one of them, at last, joining in a chorus of convulsive cachinations.

"Gentlemen," said he, as soon as the fit was over—"gentlemen, your being friends of my nephew is a sufficient guarantee for your respectability; and though it seems I am spared the task of locking up three housebreakers, yet I still hope you will remain at Trelighthen for the day. The adventures of the morning have made me very hungry, and you too, no doubt. You shall find, with all our roughness, we know what right true hospitality is in the 'Granite State.' So now, Flo, be off, and order breakfast directly."

And then, amidst a great many apologies and explanations, together with mutual hopes, that their acquaintance, though begun in an odd way, might long continue, Mr. Vallack led the way into the drawing-room, where the

breakfast was laid that morning, and the sun shining in brightly through the great bow-window, lighting up the face of the loveliest dispenser of tea and coffee the tourists had ever had the good luck to meet with.

And there was beef, and ham, and eggs, and hot rolls, and, above all, the delicious bowl of thick cream ; enough to tempt the appetites of the most fastidious, or satisfy the hungriest hunter after the picturesque—and how much pleasanter it all was than a rough breakfast of bacon and fried potatoes at The Cat and Rolling Pin !

CHAPTER XV.

"Yea, people can do pretty much as they like in Cornwall—'tis the only true land of liberty left now; as to that sneering Dr. Johnson's impudence about the wise men coming from the East—we know what he meant—but don't care for such hints one straw," said Mr. Val-lack, in answer to a remark from Mr. Magrath.

"He could not surely have meant to insinuate that the Cornish were behind the rest of England in either intellect or education," returned Mr. Crofton, looking at Flora, as he handed her his cup to be refilled.

"In education, perhaps yes," said Mr. Val-lack; "but in good common sense, decidedly no. If being ignorant of half the follies and

vices met with in more polished counties, if keeping up all good old customs, and erring on the side of profuse hospitality, are proofs of lack of wisdom, long let them remain so with us ; and if railroads or other innovations are likely to do away with these simple tastes—long may they keep off, say I. Why, I believe, that twenty years ago, one half the Cornish people considered they had seen quite as much of the world as was necessary, if they had been to Bodmin at Assize time, or to Helstone on Flora Day.”

“ Well, I have not been many days in Cornwall,” returned Mr. Eastcourt ; “ but I will bear testimony in favour of all I have observed. I never saw a healthier, cleaner set of poor, than those I have had the opportunity of witnessing in our walking excursion. We scarcely met a bare-footed or ragged man or woman, and were rather amused at its seeming to be washing-day one place or another every day in the week, for there was scarcely a garden or

a hedge in any little hamlet but had decent, well-mended clothes spread to dry. I have been told, there is less pauperism and less crime than in most other parts, and that your lower orders are better conducted and more contented. I wish you could tell us how this is."

"You have explained one very powerful reason," rejoined Mr. Vallack. "You say you saw most of even the very poor decently clad. Now, the back must be covered, as well as the belly filled. Feed a destitute creature ever so well, and still let him retain his ragged coat, and let him see his toes out of his slipshod shoes, and he remains only a mere sensually satisfied brute. But assist his endeavours to appear respectable, and he will soon feel that he is so. There is a decent pride in the hearts of the true Cornish that makes them recoil from filth and rags; the better orders see it is to their interest to encourage this, and with us there is more communication between the

higher and lower ranks, than in many other places. We have more Sisters of Charity amongst us than can be found in your most Romanised counties—not ones who go about robed in black, and with thick veils over their faces, but honest, warm-hearted, fellow-creature-loving, useful women, who unostentatiously perform every good action they can. Strangers call ours a barren land; but let them show me another such land turned to such good account—or another such hard-working, cheerful race to inhabit it. I beg pardon, gentlemen,” cried Mr. Vallack, seizing the carving-knife and fork in great confusion, “your plates are empty.”

“And I will tell you another reason why our cottagers look so healthy and happy,” said Mrs. Vallack. “There are not such cooks in first-rate kitchens, as are to be found in many hovels—not one who could dress fish and potatoes in such a variety of ways. Your smarter, tawdry, fine lady labourers’ wives,

will throw a piece of bacon into a saucepan, and boil out all its nourishment, because 'tis the easiest way of dressing it; but one of our thrifty, Cornish-bred dames will, with half the quantity of meat, some potatoes, onions, and turnips, concoct a savoury dish, the very smell of which brings a smile on her husband's face, as he enters his tidy dwelling."

"You talk about there being more intercourse between rich and poor," said Mr. Trevennon, smiling. "Why, my firm belief is, that one-half the people are related to the other half, for you know they are said to have kept so much formerly among themselves, that there was little intermarrying with other counties! so that it was inevitable, if the Tredwins wanted a wife, they must look for her amongst the Trelawneys, and if the Trelawneys were in search of a husband, he was chosen out of the Borlaces—the Borlaces looked for partners from the Vivians or the Pendarvises—and so on, *ad infinitum*. Now, you know all could not do in



the world as well as others, and while some went up, up, up, others went down, down, down, as the nursery song goes, and, for aught I know, a descendent of a Trevennon or a Treleven, may, at this moment, be working in a mine—digging his own potatoes—or catching his own pilchards: for my own part, I shake hands with all who claim acquaintance with me, and never think of turning away my head from the humblest salutation, for how do I know but I might be cutting one of my forty-ninth cousins.”

“You alluded just now to Flora Day,” said Mr. Guy Crofton; “I wish you would describe what it really is; for, from some accounts I have heard, it must be rather like a respectable carnival.”

“Ah! come down here on the eighth of May,” said Herbert, “and if you don’t get some notes worth writing in your sketch books, I’ll never read them again. I don’t think I have ever missed a Flora Day yet, since that

eventful period of my life when I kicked off the effeminate disguisements of frocks and pinafores, and jumped into the privileged dignifications of coats and trowsers; and though I have settled so far off as Shuffleborough, I still hope to take many another trip down here to have my heart gladdened with the Furry Tune. We have lost poor Billy Tubbs' drum though, I am sorry to say, and with it, I am afraid, a good deal of the spirit of our band. I know the time when all the rank and beauty of the county was to be seen assembled outside The Angel; and even now, I can tell you, we have a pretty good muster, enough to tempt many a novelty-seeker from distant parts. Here the stewards and lady patronesses introduce partners to each other, or make the usual preliminary arrangements. The first couple are generally the head man in the town and the newest bride, or some other admired married lady: then follow, perhaps, forty or fifty couples, all elegantly dressed—the gentlemen

with sprigs of flowers in their coats and on the fronts of their hats, in honour of the goddess, whose marvellously kind interference, in saving their town from a dragon, they thus perpetuate the memory of."

"Stop a moment," interrupted Mr. Magrath. "Am I to understand that those in the rank of *ladies* and *gentlemen* join in such revels?"

"You are to understand what I assert as a fact," reverted Trevennon; "and if you admit my cousin Flora to be a lady,, she will acknowledge to having more than once danced out a pair of kid shoes, or perhaps got a pretty dress splashed, when it has not happened to be *quite* such a fine day as people could desire for dancing through the streets. But I'll be bound, neither she nor any of the others present ever thought of a spoilt gown, in comparison to the enjoyment of their 'ance."

"We will admit Miss Vallack to be a veritable Flora," said young Crofton, bowing, as

he watched her eyes sparkling at the recollection of her only initiation into gay life.

"Away then they go," continued Mr. Trevennon, "in one of the most unique *gallopes* you can imagine, through each street, and in through most of the large houses, round the gardens and out again, laughing at any little awkwardness they may have been guilty of."

"Once more, excuse me, Trevennon. Are you not, hyperbolising? Dancing through people's houses!"

"Yes, quite correct; and what you may think stranger, nobody objects, nor did I ever hear of any complaint made against the *fadders*. Well, the aristocracy are not the only ones to enjoy themselves; there are other parties of dancers as well: at one time a long string of the tradespeople, or a very lively, jigging procession of the lower orders, amongst whom I have seen some buxom old dames in their best, foot it through Coinage-hall-street, like Terpsichores and Coryphees. Now, just fancy flags

flying, garlands fluttering, all the inhabitants out of doors or at their windows, bells ringing, bands playing, merry voices and shouts of laughter, and you have some idea of Helstone Flora Day. In the evening there is a ball at The Angel, and dances or parties everywhere, and at last people go home to dream over all those happy hours again, and wake, next morning, to hear every man, woman, or child in the streets, humming or whistling the Flora Tune. I dare say, if you inquired into the courtship of every eight out of ten couples within twenty miles of Helstone, you would discover, that either the parties fell in love with each other—wishing, perhaps, the partners for that long dance, might be partners for life—or long pending affairs matrimonial, were brought to happy terminations on a Flora Day. But our Flora can, perhaps, tell you more about these matters than I can.”

“ Well, gentlemen, having listened so patiently to my nephew’s long description of what some

are good-natured enough to call a "modern Saturnalia," may I propose taking you to see something of our neighbourhood? I presume you are good walkers; and I will show you scenery many counties cannot boast of. Nay, no excuses or apologies, you are our guests for the day. I see 'Tiny Flo' is already on hospitable thoughts intent, and has her wits in the larder, so we will excuse her."

"But Miss Vallack will join us in our walk, I hope?" urged Mr. Crofton, in a very persuasive tone; "we can saunter in this pretty garden till she is ready."

"Oh yes, Tormentilla must come with us," cried Herbert; "and, as I know 'tis useless to ask you, aunt, to take such a long walk, you will, I am sure, see that all her culinary orders are duly executed."

Flora had paused a moment as she opened the door, then, catching Mr. Vallack's consenting glance, she said, very artlessly—

"I should *so very much* like to go; I can

arrange everything and be with you in half-an-hour."

Herbert then showed his friends all over the small, but beautifully laid out, grounds belonging to Trelighthen; coming round, at last, rather slyly, to the yard, and the hay-ricks, and the barn—the scene of their late embarrassing adventure—when Guy Crofton, to avoid the laugh against him, sauntered towards an arched window, half hid with ivy. Perhaps, he still felt some remains of his morning's curiosity, for he very unceremoniously advanced and peeped in.

But what a vision!—or, rather, unromantic reality did he gaze on!

There was Miss Flora Vallack—that beautiful, intellectual Flora, that personification of the goddess whose name she bore—standing before a deal table, making pies. Three or four open and covered tarts were placed near; and there was she, with her pretty hands well

daubed with flour, and her well-formed figure disguised in an enormous white apron, with a bib pinned over the body of her dress. Every thought seemed absorbed in the trimming and crimping of paste.

Near her was Sally, sharing her admiration between her young mistress and her handy work.

Away flew Mr. Guy Crofton's incipient admiration for the divine Flora. Charlotte might have captivated Werter cutting bread and butter, but Flora disenchanted Guy Crofton making pies.

'Twas true he had heard something about housekeeping and preparations she had to attend to, before she could join them for their walk, but that she was actually going to help cook, or prepare any part of the dinner he had been invited to partake of, was an absurdity he never dreamed of. Nay, he thought, had he been *told* such was the case, its enormous vulgarity

would not have been so very shocking, as thus witnessing it.

How clever, how refined, how very lovely, he had thought her at breakfast. How he had believed he had discovered one of those brilliant gems—those lovely flowers which have hitherto shone and bloomed unseen. How much romance he had thought there was in their first meeting. How well acquainted their laughable introduction had made them; so that, instead of only a few hours, he could have fancied he had known her for years. And yet he, Guy Crofton—who was brought up to despise *dames domestiques*—who had always heard sneering, contemptuous remarks on women who went into kitchens, or knew how a dish on their own tables had been cooked—had looked, and thought, with admiration of a girl who was now too intent on her common-place occupation to notice his very much admired eyes peeping in at the window.

"Oh ! here is Tormentilla !" cried Herbert, running up and looking over his shoulder ; "now we shall know when she will be ready."

Mr. Crofton no longer felt so much eager desire for her company.

"Not many minutes," said Flora, looking up and nodding her head to them, while she put the finishing strokes to a tart, tapping it with a paste-cutter rapidly.

No confusion, no horrified vanity, at being caught employed in the domestic duties many women, in those days, think it so genteel to disown all knowledge of. She did not even blush when she was told Mr. Crofton had been looking at her some minutes through the clustering ivy. As to making excuses, or trying to disclaim her usual task, such a thought never entered her head. Even while Herbert was speaking, she was watching Sally place the pies and tarts on a shelf, ready to be put into the oven at the time directed ; then, after

a few last words to her hand-maiden, about a prime turkey hanging above her head, Flora vanished, and Mr. Crofton moved sulkily away from the little arched window.

CHAPTER XVI.

“ARE we for the dell, or the heights over the sea? Oh! papa leads the way, then I know *his* favourite spot.”

Guy Crofton turned round, as he was strolling on with Mr. Trevennon, and saw the loveliest face it had been his lot to meet, beaming with the happiest smiles, shaded by the most witching straw bonnet, whose blue flowers seemed brighter still as they rested on her shining hair.

When Mr. Crofton looked at her, she was drawing a very neat fitting kid glove over the tiniest and whitest hands ever woman owned.

Could that be the same hand he had seen disfigured with dough? Could that round bust,

over which she was wrapping her shawl—finishing her unstudied toilette, which her haste to join them had, perhaps, prevented her doing before a glass—the same so lately shrouded in that ugly bibbed apron?

No doubt about it, and what was more singular, Miss Vallack did not seem to want him to doubt it.

“She can have no really refined tastes,” thought Guy, glancing though with surprised admiration, at the prettiest *chaussied* foot in England.

So off they set at last, Mr. Vallack carrying in his hand a huge cabbage, a present to be left at a poor cotter’s—with as much nonchalance as if it was an immense bouquet.

“What a beautiful beetle,” said Flora, pausing a moment to examine it.

“I am no entomologist, Miss Vallack,” replied Crofton, who seemed to fancy the remark was addressed to him. “I confess I

never, in my life, took any pleasure in rearing dragon flies or tiger moths—or walking three or four miles in quest of a particular kind of grub or chrysalis. I never could see any thing worthy of much study in beetles, gnats, or caterpillars.”

“Then I fear you will laugh at my folly in owning I delight to watch even a swarm of flies in the sun-shine. With what mad gaiety they chase one another, darting backwards and forwards, never extending beyond a certain circle, while their sport lasts. Oh, I have often thought they were enjoying a brief whirl of happiness many a mortal might envy.”

“Miss Vallack is a lover of the insect tribe, I presume,” rather sneeringly said this, by Mr. Guy.

“I am, indeed. How can I help it when I look at them displaying their natural gems, which they wear always, while poor human beings must purchase theirs, and only put them on, on state occasions.”

"Miss Vallack would hardly kill a wasp that stung her, I suppose."

"I would not kill it for stinging me," she said, laughingly. "I confess I never like to kill even the most insignificant creature. I picture to myself the pleasure its tiny heart feels in the glow of sunshine or fresh air, or creeping along as that beetle is, in quest of food, or to join his companions ; and why should I, in an instant, destroy the life and form God has given to it, merely because I have the strength to do so."

Mr. Crofton looked a little less contemptuously on Flora, condescended even to ask the name of a flower he gathered.

She told him both the common and botanical names, pointing out also a beauty and property peculiar to it.

"Are you fond of flowers ?" she asked.

"More than of insects," he returned, smiling as he looked in her animated face, and feeling his admiration returning very rapidly.

"Now I dare say you had a garden of your own, when you were a boy," she said, earnestly, "and perhaps kept pigeons or rabbits. Herbert did, and I always think that is one reason why he is so humane and kindhearted now. I never could fancy a wicked or unfeeling person ever having been fond of flowers or birds or a dog."

Mr. Crofton chose to think Flora was paying him a compliment through the disguise of praising Herbert, and he returned it by declaring he always thought it a proof of a contented mind when he saw any one so fond of the country as Miss Vallack evidently was.

"I think," she said, "if I were to exchange my present life for a gay, listless one in a town, I should feel something like an old acquaintance of papa's, only from an opposite cause. The old gentleman was a city clerk, and had lived all his life in London, but being told of the pleasures of the country, and the beauty of green fields and hedge-rows, he re-

quested a month's holiday to go and taste these rural delights. He prowled about, listlessly, far away from his better prized streets, and returned at the end of three weeks, taking his seat at the desk, with the only smile that had illumined his face since he left it."

They now entered the village, and in front of the Cat and Rolling Pin, found an itinerant dancing party, probably from some neighbouring fair. Flora always glanced with somewhat of apprehension at such exhibitions; lest amongst any of the troop, she might recognise her old owners, the Baroness or Herr Cesarotti; but here, as in many similar instances, all were strangers.

The gentlemen paused a minute as they passed, jokingly remarking on the profound ignorance of steps and figures evinced by the performers, and their happy unconsciousness of these deficiencies, which gave an air of freedom and originality to the exhibition, that old Mr. Val-

lack declared was far preferable, in his estimation, to the formal toe-pointed, lounging movement he had sometimes seen at a party. As they continued their walk, Mr. Crofton heard, with infinite astonishment, that Miss Vallack had never taken lessons from any of the celebrated professors in the Terpsichorean art, had never even heard their names. He was amazed, and yet what could he have expected from an unambitious Cornish Girl—a maker of pies and puddings.

“How I hate to see a man a good dancer,” cried Mr. Vallack, “*chassezing* and springing about like a monkey. Talking gravely about top couples, and side couples, waltzing and polking. It always makes me suspect dancing must have been the only thing he excelled in, when at school.”

“I shall enter the lists with you, sir, if you speak against dancing,” said Mr. Magrath. “In my estimation there is not a more exhilarating amusement, though I know many who,

like yourself, consider it only adapted for children, or people of weak intellect."

"Papa forgets that many great philosophers did not think it beneath their dignity to dance," said Flora, archly, "even Socrates was not only an admirer of dancing, but learnt it in his old and sober days. And if my memory does not play me tricks, I think I have read that some very eminent ancient compared valour with dancing, and said the Gods had bestowed a disposition for it on some men, as they had other good qualities on others."

"Oh, I don't condemn dancing *in toto*," cried Mr. Vallack, "indeed I would encourage it by all means, if you could show me that, as among warlike nations, it could be made useful to the state by rendering men agile and vigorous, but in the mean time I must be permitted to indulge in the belief, that light heads and light heels are generally synonymous."

“ Well, none of you ask my opinion ?” said Herbert, laughing, “ but I will give you the result of my researches on the subject. Hundreds of years ago a dreadful epidemic spread all over the known world, called The Dancing Plague. People were seized, on hearing any kind of music, with the most horrid convulsions, they capered in wild delirium; threw themselves into all sorts of contortions, and at last sank exhausted, and many died. Various were the remedies resorted to, and at length this frightful malady subsided, and was nearly extirpated. Now in my endeavours to discover the reason for the love of dancing, felt by many moderns, I could come at no more satisfactory conclusion than this—when dancing became less feared as the symptoms of a dangerous disease, it was adopted as a fashionable amusement.”

“ And we may still laugh at that unpolished, ignoramus Mustapha Rub-a-Dub, for imagining

we were expiating some sins by a severe punishment," said Guy Crofton, who, be it, added, was rather proud of his dancing.

Our party, who had proceeded some distance, now wound their way through a narrow path, on the side of a wooded-hill, where the bushes and brushwood were so high and close, as to prevent their catching more than an occasional peep of the sea beyond.

At last, they came out on a bold promontory, where numberless huge blocks of granite were deeply embedded in the heathy soil, making you fancy some enraged giants had been throwing stones at one another, or that Neptune, in a passion, with one of the terrestrial gods, had torn up great fragments of rock, and flung at him—this being the only conjecture Herbert, said, by which he could account for their singular and elevated situation.

On some of the smaller pieces, the pedestrians seated themselves to rest.

"There are the waves of the mighty Atlantic

dashing beneath your feet," exclaimed Mr. Vallack, "as to this breeze you may fancy it comes to you from any distance you chose to imagine."

"If I had any friend across the waters, I should try to persuade myself that some drop in the ocean as it rolls nearer and nearer to me, might have washed the shore where they stood," cried Flora joyously.

How very beautiful Guy Crofton thought she looked, and how very bewitching. The wind seemed to delight in blowing right in her face, puffing off her bonnet, scattering her long curls over her eyes every now and then, and giving her cheeks such an enchanting glow. It certainly had no business to do so, for Guy Crofton was falling in love quite fast enough, even if the same bold wind did not occasionally afford him a peep at ankles that could not be rivalled before any foot lights in Europe. So happy she looked, too, so unconscious of her charms.

"I think I never saw a wilder, more grandly desolate spot than this in my life," exclaimed Mr. Eastcourt, after standing some minutes in silent contemplation. "Do, Crofton, take out your sketch-book, and try to carry away some slight resemblance of those foaming billows, and frowning heights."

The beauties of Nature seemed to have lost most of their charms for Mr. Crofton. What were those wave-washed, rugged rocks to him, compared with the blooming spray-sprinkled face of Miss Vallack, who stood by his side jerking her head, in vain attempts to keep her bonnet on.

"I have, as many Englishmen do, travelled over foreign countries before I had seen the wonders of my own," said Mr. Eastcourt.

"Has Miss Vallack been abroad?" asked Mr. Magrath, looking at her with considerably more admiration than as a married man, Guy thought, he had any right to.

"I never was out of England in my life, and

yet I have been all over the world—in imagination—for I never hear or read of any remarkable place, but I step into one of my ariel cars and set off to see it, returning after I have compared every part with the description, very satisfactorily gratified and charmed, without having had any of the disagreeables of real travelling, such as paying for my journey, or being fatigued after it.”

“Flora has long been puzzling herself and us with a query whether there is not as much delight to be found in imaginative delusion as in actual reality,” said Mr. Vallack, looking down very proudly on the animated countenance of his adopted child, as she now sat at his feet leaning against him, “and I verily believe when she indulges in one of the peeps from the windows of any of her *Chateaux en Espagne* every ten feet high water-fall becomes a Niagara, and the mountains of white clouds are firmly believed to be any snow-covered range she chooses to imagine.”

"Yes," resumed Flora artlessly, "and I have stood sometimes looking down into deep water, and seen caverns and grottos, and magnificent buildings, and have sighed when a cloud, passing over the sun, obscured the whole of my fairy world. Then, perhaps, comes some one whispering in my ear, that it had only been the reflection of the reality, I might look at, if I turned my eyes to the land."

"I agree with you, Miss Vallack," said Mr. Crofton,, "that it is much pleasanter to look at things through the rose-coloured tissue of fancy, than to stare at them with the naked eye of actuality. We don't thank any one for roughly pulling the veil from before us. Just as philosophers destroy half the romances in life by hunting out dull, stupid causes and effects."

Mr. Vallack told the strangers several interesting particulars of noted spots, visible to them from their elevated position. And then they all went down carefully over the the ridges

of rock to the smooth belt of sand beneath, pausing every moment to listen to the waves dashing against the scattered islets at a little distance from the shore, over which the sea-gulls, and now and then a cormorant, soared and screamed, as if indignant any should intrude on their dominions.

"I always think Armitage would be greatly improved if it had a sea view," said Guy Crofton, turning to Herbert, who had often been there.

"Is Armitage the name of the place you live at?" asked Flora.

"It is the name of our family seat," replied Guy, with considerable importance, "and if Mr. and Miss Vallack ever honour our neighbourhood I hope they will pay us a visit. My father and mother would, I am sure, be happy to return the hospitality you have shewn me."

Flora bowed. She little dreamed that this Armitage to which she was rather pompously invited, was by right her own, and that he who

now thought he condescended extremely in promising her a welcome there, was considered the heir presumptive of the rich domain, she should now be mistress of.

Flora's day dreams in her air-built castles never showed her the substantial residence she ought to have been living in.

"Indeed, we must think of returning," cried Flora, at last, "we have a long walk, and dinner will be spoilt, if we don't make haste."

Those pies again—What a vision of them came to destroy all the romance of the present moment. Perhaps, by that time though, Guy would not have objected to them in reality, so hungry was he beginning to feel.

"You have only ten minutes to spare," said Mrs. Vallack, as she met them at the porch-door. "Herbert you will show the gentlemen to your room."

Mr. Guy Crofton said something about the absolute necessity of a visit to the inn, and his desire of dressing for dinner; very indignant

was he therefore at seeing how indifferent his two friends were about their toilets—Eastcourt merely muttering something about the ladies excusing their travelling costume. Guy remembered the fashionable, well-fitting coat lying in his portmanteau at the Cat and Rolling Pin; but only conscious of its being a vain wish to appear before Miss Vallack in any but his grey suit, he followed Trevennon who was rapidly striding up stairs.

What a substantial, well-ordered feast was waiting when they entered the dining-room. Totally unlike some of the glass and china, and electro-plate entertainments, too often seen in these days, when display is so much thought of, that though the dishes on a table might be most costly, it seemed that putting much into them has been rather overlooked.

“I hope you each have as good an appetite as I have,” said Flora, taking her place at the head of the table, long since resigned to her by

the ease loving Mrs. Vallack. "Indeed I am very, very hungry."

What an admission to be made by a pretty girl, who ought to have led you to suppose such vulgar requirements as eating and drinking were almost unnecessary to support her angelic nature—a few canaries, tongues, or larks' wings being the utmost that could tempt her delicate appetite!

But there was no affectation about Flora Vallack, so she honestly owned to being "very hungry."

It was not a silent, solemn dinner either, there was plenty of talking and laughing, and the worthy Amphitryton himself seemed delighted with his new acquaintances.

As to Guy Crofton, he might have wished to hear no other voice than Flora's, and was tempted once or twice to feel rather savagely inclined towards Magrath and Eastcourt, for usurping so much of her conversation. Could he have summoned some geni to his aid who

would have spirited away these two presuming fellows he would have felt eternally obliged to him—he would have felt happy to know that one of them was snugly seated on the highest peak of Chimborazo, with a mackintosh on, and a comforter round his neck—and the other gently singing his toes in the crater of Mount Vesuvius. For himself he was getting quite reconciled to the possibility of a clever woman, finding time to prepare a dinner for her friends, and when the veal pie, with its delicate, shelly paste, was cut open by Miss Vallack, he chose it in preference to the turkey. He firmly believed there never could have been another such delicious veal pie in the world. The damson-tart, too, was inimitable, and he began to wish his mother and sister were more in the habit of attending to such things instead of leaving them to servants. Mr. Guy Crofton rather prided himself on being a man of refined, fastidious tastes, and he must, therefore, have meant it as a great compliment to Flora, when

he thought during the dessert that day at Trelighthen, that she was, above all women he had seen, the one he could have bestowed his heart on, *but for* certain obstacles which he knew would prove about as difficult of removal as the rocks they had seen on the sea-shore that morning.

CHAPTER XVII.

"I SAY, have either of you fellows got any pomade or Macassar, or anything of that sort," bawled a gentleman over the banisters of the stairs.

The gentleman was in his shirt-sleeves, and had been engaged in the operation of shaving.

"What the deuce do you want with pomade, Crofton," cried one of the unshaved, who was sitting cosily resting his legs on the window-seat of the parlour at the Cat and Rolling Pin. "You'll be asking if we have any any *Eau-de-Cologne* next, I suppose."

"How very thoughtless of me not to have put up any of those things," sighed the young man, going back again into his bed-room, and

performing the hundredth flourish over his hair with the brush, to a whistling accompaniment.

Tis never fair to look at a man when he is either shaving, or brushing his hair, or tying his neckerchief. The smilings, the drawing up of eyes and mouth, the wrinklins of the nose, the side views, the front views, the near peeps, the distant peeps, together with the self-gratulatory glance when all is finished, should be sacred to his own contemplation.

Apparently Mr. Guy Crofton was pleased with his achievements so far, and he proceeded in his toilet by putting on a very elegant waistcoat, the pattern of which rather resembled a large party of gold-coloured spiders crawling about on blue-satin.

The love of dress shown by some women has often been a subject of ridicule, but some men don't seem to be one whit behind us. Have they not the novelties in cachmeres and velvets, and kerseymeres, and don't they religi-

ously believe in the doctrine of their tailors, and think a well-fitting coat, a resplendent vest, and a resistless tie, convert a block at once into a gentleman ?

Not all who walk in pelished, patent leather boots, choose the cleanest side of life's path—and many a glossy silk hat covers brains as light as itself.

After further adorning himself with a gold chain, which was confined by one button of the waistcoat, allowed to meander over a small portion of the front, caught in again by another button, and becoming finally lost in the pocket, where it was attached to a watch rather larger than half-a-crown, Mr. Guy Crofton considered himself in an enviable state of attraction.

He went down stairs, and announced to the untidy, grey-coated loungers his intention of calling at Trelighthen, to inquire whether Trevennon thought of leaving with them next day.

He also wished to pay his respects to Mr. and Mrs. Vallack. A duty the lazy ones did not see much necessity for, at least at such an early hour.

Of course, they did not—that was why Crofton had not thought it worth while to say anything to them of his intention.

What a large amount of politeness and interest in the welfare of all her friends, is suggested by an admiration for any female member of a family.

As Mr. Guy Crofton drew near the end of his short walk, he felt conscious of a degree of embarrassment and awkwardness he never before experienced on paying a morning visit. Indeed, he became rather reluctant than otherwise to meet Miss Vallack, and even persuaded himself he must have a sort of antipathy for her. But very often the first symptoms of love are mistaken for indications of an opposite sentiment.

One thing is very certain—nothing can make people do such foolish things as that early sickening for a love fever does.

Some contend there is an insane period in every person's life. If this is the case, those are fortunate to whom the attack comes in the shape of an amorous fit; if they escape it then, 'tis sure to break out afterwards in a more dangerous form. This theorem makes us terribly afraid that, after all, love has more to do with the head than the heart.

Mr. Crofton's approach had been observed by no one, and he was about to ring at the hall door, when he caught the sound of a very musical voice, reading aloud, near a window just by.

Cautiously he stepped out again, and, peep-out from behind a large laurel, saw Flora Vallack seated by her father, rocking herself very gently in a low chair, and looking up now and then to make some remark on the book, which both seemed to enjoy. Guy thought

the mere sound of her voice would have been enough for *him*, even if the pages were the dullest ever printed. She held an ivory paper-knife in her hand, with which she tapped the old gentleman's knee whenever he betrayed any sign of inattention; and more than once she pointed to some particular lines, which she went back and read over again, holding up her finger in the meantime reprovingly.

Such very fluttering feelings came over Mr. Crofton's heart, which, in a little time, extended themselves to his whole body, that, in some agitation, he shook the boughs of the laurel, and betrayed himself; but he had *savoir faire* enough to pretend to be advancing in great haste at that identical moment, and Mr. Vallack extended his hand for a hearty shake through the open window, Flora coming round to the porch door also, with such a welcome sparkling in her eyes, that Guy thought to himself, as some old songster did, that if peace

was to be found in the world, the heart that was humble might meet with it in such a spot.

There looked love enough from those dark eyes of hers to bestow on half the world; yet, so selfish was Mr. Crofton becoming, that he wanted to appropriate every atom of it to himself.

"I was just coming down to your place to see if you would like to try and have a shot this fine September morning," cried Herbert Trevennon, in a great bustle, hurrying into the room with a couple of guns in his hand; "so, if you think Magrath and Eastcourt would like it, we will get along at once."

Guy thought Magrath and Eastcourt would like it uncommonly, but he himself manifested no inclination to "get along." He felt perfectly satisfied where he was, and as Mr. Val-lack was just then giving him an account of some old Cornish legend, mentioned the day

before, he saw no reason why he should be so rude as to run away at once, before he had asked all the questions he intended.

"Perhaps Mr. Crofton is not fond of shooting," suggested Flora, seeing that gentleman's insensibility to Herbert's impatient tappings on his shoulder, as he stood apparently listening to Mr. Vallack's tale.

In her innocence, Flora thought the young man's reluctance rather resulted from a disinclination to damage his very elegant dress by a shooting excursion, or that he felt too lazy to change it. But if Trevennon had offered him a tiger hunt, with unlimited security to himself and certain victory over the royal game, Guy would not have started after that little winning suggestion of hers, which, of course, his manly vanity had interpreted into a wish he should stay where he was.

"You go and take care of yourselves," said Mr. Vallack, following Herbert to the door; "we will take care of Mr. Crofton."

And away went the sportsman at last, after three or four forgets in his bustling hurry to collect shot-bags and powder-flasks, &c.

"I hope that fellow does not contemplate falling in love with our Flo," thought Mr. Trevennon, as he walked to the village. "Guy is very well himself, but I don't like any one belonging to him, and I happen to know their views too in another quarter. Much old Crofton would thank me for introducing him to the daughter of a retired tradesman, as he would think her to be, and as to exposing her to their mortifying remarks, when they found out she had not even *that* claim to respectability, I would see all the friendship for every fellow in the world in the Dead Sea, or trickling away in the Lethean spring, before I will permit it. Flora's secret shall ever be safe with me. I am too proud of considering her my cousin ever to breathe a word to any one that might lead to a discovery she was not so."

"I don't know what sort of a husband that

harum scarum fellow will make," said Mr. Vallack, laughing, as they went back to the house, "I have not yet seen his future wife—you know the lady, I dare say."

It was Guy's policy to create a favourable impression of Miss Harwood, else how could he be sure they would agree to Herbert's invitation, and allow Flora to visit her; and if this request was not acceded to, how was he ever to see her again? He could hardly have the face to make another excursion into the far west—and the next day they were to set off. How very much he desired to squeeze Mrs. Vallack's hand, when she said she should trust Flora to go to Shuffleborough in the spring.

The shooting party not having returned by dinner-time, very little persuasion was required to induce Mr. Crofton to remain, instead of returning *a la solitaire* to his inn.

Again was there the hospitable welcome, and the well-spread board. And, above all,

there were some of those delicious pies left from the batch made the day before. What an enjoyable dinner that was to Guy Crofton. After the cloth was removed, Mr. Vallack wheeled two pretty lounge chairs towards the fire-place, after Flora had in vain tried to catch his eye. At last, she said—

“You see, Mr. Crofton, papa does not like being left to sip his wine in gentlemanly exclusiveness; and as I suppose he intends to make no stranger of you to-day, mamma and I will take our usual places, unless your decree is, banishment for ladies when they have eaten their dinners.”

“When will English women break through such an absurd observance?” asked Mr. Crofton, drawing his own chair nearer to Flora’s so as to make quite a snug little circle round the bright fire, which, according to her orders, had been lit in the dining-room every day since that first chilly evening on which we renewed our acquaintance with her. “I am sure

the charms of female society ought to have more attraction than the enjoyment of unrestrained drinking."

"You forget the penalty *we* should have to pay in the forfeiture of the hour's scandal in the drawing-room," said Miss Vallack, rather archly.

"That is a privilege, I think, would never be claimed by Miss Vallack—at any rate, I am glad she does not exact it to-day."

And very great reason Mr. Guy Crofton thought he had for congratulating himself as he sat there in that cosy, friendly way by the dining-room fire at old Trelighthen. His glass, as he turned from it in the morning, had more than ever afforded him the assurance of his being a very handsome fellow, and he felt more than usually comfortable under such conviction.

We are bound to acknowledge the fact that Guy Crofton *was* a very good-looking young man. He had large, dark, sometimes sleepy-

looking eyes, which no woman could help admiring; and when he spoke, he had a habit of raising them slowly, as if it was an exertion to lift those long, black lashes. He had very white and even teeth, which might be the reason why he displayed them so much. Amongst strangers, he was often spoken of as "that gentleman with the very handsome nose;" and very fond was he of exciting your attention to this feature—for he either allowed you a good profile view—or he had a trick of closing one eye, and looking at it in a funny way, which naturally made you look at it too.

Lavater says, "a handsome nose is worth a kingdom;" and really when one remembers or notices the pugs, the flats, or sharps, every day seen, we can hardly wonder at the value set on a handsome nose by the great physiognomist. Eyes and mouths may be voluntarily improved by languishing or pouting—but as Nature has formed a nose, so it must remain. The former may be active—but the latter must

be passive. Mr. Guy Crofton being little more than three-and-twenty, we may presume his whiskers had not yet attained the perfection he looked for—but the little he had was exactly the colour, shape, and character he desired. In general, when talking to a lady, he kept his whole attention fixed on her, leading her to suppose she was the only person in the world whom, just at that moment, he thought worthy of listening to his sentiments : also, he affected a sort of Lydian mood—and there was now and then a touch of pathos extremely fascinating. But whether he did not consider Miss Vallack worthy of taking so much trouble about, or he had found out she was one to whom unadorned common sense would be more acceptable is uncertain—but it may be remarked, he practised very few of his usual bewitcheries in her presence.

“Now these square books Clemow laid so much stress on, can you honestly tell me, they are not some day to be printed and published ?”

said Mr. Vallack, when literature had become a subject of conversation.

"As far as my share of the production extends, I believe I can honestly say nay," replied Mr. Crofton. "I have seen and heard of too many of the souring disappointments literary people meet with, to allow me to feel any desire of enlightening an ungrateful public at the expense of time, sleep and peace of mind. I have no ambition to seek the bubble reputation blown from the mouths of those who read in a few hours, and for three-pence a volume, what it may have taken me months to write. Poetry, I have abjured for similar reasons—so, in future, let the Nymphs of Parnassus beckon and entice me as they will, they shall find I am able to fly from and resist their allurements, though many a wiser man than I, has been enticed by them to his ruin."

"But you know we have the character of being a nation of scribblers—ergo, all can

write who choose," said Flora, laughing; "and though all cannot expect to take first class places, or write epic poems, yet there may be many pages written which obtain all the honour and praise they deserve, and afford infinite amusement and instruction to second and third rate comprehensions which would otherwise remain unenlightened. We cannot all expect to produce wonders of the world—for instance, he who could not design a pyramid for dead kings to lie in, might yet be able to build a very comfortable house for living mechanics to dwell in."

"I am rather inclined to suspect Miss Val-lack herself is a Genius of the Lamp," said Crofton, insinuatingly.

"No," replied Flora, "I have never yet felt any inclination to 'quit my sphere and rush into the skies.' I never desire to step beyond the limits of my present narrow orbit. I am of opinion that there is a certain space allotted each human being, a certain sphere to which he

belongs. In that we may revolve with safety, and this system is so nicely ordered, that in it we need not fear of coming in contact with any other body. But let us wander out of this prescribed circle, and we are in constant danger of being eclipsed by some star whose place we try to usurp, or jostled by some satellite whom we, perhaps, endeavour to rival in its attendance on a superior planet."

Mr. Vallack, who had, while Flora spoke, been searching amongst sundry books and pamphlets, on a side table, now brought over a magazine, and putting it into Mr. Crofton's hand, begged him to read, aloud, the two-page-long poem he pointed out, and say what was his opinion of a man who could ostentatiously sign his name to such trash.

Guy Crofton, obeyed him by reading with ludicrous emphasis the "Vision of the Tempest Meteor."

"Depend upon it, sir, the gentleman went to sleep in a state of intoxication, dreamed it

all, and woke up next morning without being cured of his fit of inebriety, and sat down and wrote himself into a deeper state of stupefaction."

"Oh, my dear papa, he is only one of those I spoke of just now, who want to ride, lounging on plush covered cushions instead of taking their places in a second or third class carriage."

"Flora talks as if there was a railroad to the top of Mount Parnassus," said Mr. Val-lack, smiling.

"And is there not," she asked, with a very comical expression of countenance, then clasping her hands on her knees, she looked down demurely as a school girl might on having made some dreadful blunder.

The two gentlemen then entered on that generally introduced topic of conversation—politics.

Never was there any other nation so fond of arguing on this subject; every body seems to

feel it their business to take part in the never to be settled contest, as to whether those who are out or those who are in, best know how to take care of the country.

What a blessing, we cannot help thinking it would be, if some of the English would take lessons from the Turks, buy a cushion or a carpet, a chibouque and some Salonica powder, and squat down all day long, cross-legged, and smoke themselves into a cloud of supreme indifference as to what is doing beyond the carved bowls of their cherry stick tubes, never opening their mouths except to emit enrapturing fumes. Something might be said against this, perhaps, on the score of indolence and waste of time, but those restless agitators, those revolutionary advocates, to whom the squatting system is recommended, have seldom any business of their own to attend to, for it is generally those people who have nothing to lose—neither as regards property nor character, who are the most violent politicians, and

call the loudest for an amendment in the government.

"Oh, pray, Mr. Crofton beware how you say too much against protection," cried Flora, at last tired of their dry discussion, "for I verily believe if papa only suspected his cat or dog of entertaining free trade principles, he would turn them both out of doors."

"They look fat and sleek enough for any ultras in the world," rejoined Guy, laughing as he rubbed the back of Duke, whose nose nestled snugly in Mrs. Kitty's soft fur."

Mr. Vallack made no other remark at Flora's interruption than shaking his head at his guest, as much as to say, "you see what a saucy arbitrary creature she is ; but I always find it advisable to let her have her own way."

Talk of moonlights and twilights, and gas-lights, and blue lights—what light equals the fire-light, at that idle laughing time, when, as it flickered over the snug dining-room at Trelighthen, it throws its bright flashes on

happy faces. Then came the loud ring at the hall door, and the sound of laughing voices announcing the return of the sportsmen, and as Flora passed Guy Crofton, to busy herself in tea preparations, she heard a deep drawn sigh which she attributed to weariness.

"Not so, Miss Vallack," said he, in a low tone, not heard by any other amidst the bustle of the new arrivals, in reply to Flora's hinted suspicions, "I sigh with regret that those few very happy hours are gone, I may live them over again in imagination, and perhaps look back at them through after years of trouble and disappointment, but I fear I shall never enjoy such again in reality."

"Then you are not one of those who believe there is no such thing as *an hour* of pure unalloyed happiness. I have heard some say that what we call happiness is nothing but a momentary transient beam of enjoyment or pleasure, and that it vanishes directly we begin to analyze our sensations. They say it cannot be

perfect happiness, for even if no passing shadow of the present mars it, either a recollection of the past, or a foreboding of the future is sure to intrude, and thus blight and destroy it. I do not thus understand happiness myself."

"The fact is, happiness depends as much on others as ourselves," said Guy, looking into Flora's eyes, as she turned from him to take her place at the table.

As the three visitors and Mr. Trevannon were to start early the following morning, adieux and hopes of future meetings were all said that evening, and then it was, Flora thought, their departure would leave a blank, she had never been conscious of before.

"Well, I am not sure that the pleasure of seeing dear friends only a short time, compensates for the pain of parting," said Herbert, putting his arm round Flora's waist and kissing her, looking at the same time very maliciously at Guy Crofton, as if he would say, "Don't you envy me?"

They were all standing in the porch ready to start, but Mr. Crofton's gloves were not in his hat, at least so he said, as he drew back into the hall, and stood again near Flora's side. Once more he took her hand, and pressed it warmly in his ; and she not being one of those *noli me tangere* young ladies who affect to be extremely shocked at any indication of a gentleman's regard, did not snatch it prudishly away. If asked, she would very honestly have acknowledged she had felt great pleasure in Mr. Crofton's society, and was very sorry he was going so soon.

Guy seemed meditating some insane declaration, when Mr. Trevennon appeared with a light. Half a minute afterwards the missing gloves were found "all right" in Mr. Crofton's hat.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THERE can be very little doubt entertained that some of the good-natured angels in heaven busy themselves in planning marriages for a few favoured mortals on earth ; and the only reason these so arranged alliances do not always take place is, that time and space being of little moment to those empyreal match-makers, they sometimes overlook the awkward contingent of one party being in one hemisphere, and the other in another. A great many of the terrestrial preliminaries are left to a bustling, busybody, to whom people give the name of Fate—and she often marries up some ill-assorted couples, just to get rid of the uninteresting rubbish she meets with in her peram-

bulations, and finds in her way when she is searching for her favourites. Souls destined to be united on earth, sometimes pass the whole of their existence without meeting, and so wander about, disdaining to be satisfied with uncongenial partners. Amongst those are very frequently found many of the old maids and bachelors, for whose single state, we, in our short-sighted wisdom, are unable more satisfactorily to account.

Love at first sight then is nothing more than the joyous unrestrainable attraction of two bodies whose destinies have all been arranged long ago in celestial circles.

But there is one great difference between these heavenly arbitrators and earthly ones.

Riches and honours to *them* are of little note, while, with *us*, they are the alpha and omega of all contracts. A *suitable* match in this world being generally comprehended by rank on one side, and money on the other. The latter desideratum is sometimes met with on both sides

—the former, alone, rarely. As to those imprudent creatures who think only of a union of hearts, and set out in life with the resolution of sharing each other's troubles and joys, with a sufficiency for only the necessities, without any of the luxuries of existence, we say nothing about them.

Perhaps there never was any period which afforded less favourable opportunities for a wife-seeking man than the one in which we now live. Girls too often lay themselves out to receive the flattery and flirtation of those they never mean to marry. A man sometimes sees, loves, and proposes; and, in return, is stared at, laughed at, and rejected. On the other hand, it not unfrequently happens, that before he has had an opportunity of forming an opinion of a lady, some one of her relatives, so prematurely asks his intentions, that it pretty effectually puts a stop to his entertaining any.

It is rather a curious fact that there are more old maids in the middle class of society, than in either the very high or very low.

We will set aside our above-mentioned theory of super-celestial betrothments, and ask whether something of this might not be owing to girls being allowed to go into society before they are old enough to attract serious attentions; hence they become too well-known in their own circle, and, perhaps, gain the name of coquette, because they do not like to own how often they have been trifled with? And, again, whether they are not too frequently educated with notions very unsuitable for the sphere to which they belong, and thus frighten men who don't want exhibition wives.

It is all quite different with noble *debutantes*, who are kept very secluded, till they come forth with the support and chaperonage of distinguished friends, amidst brilliant scenes, with the advantages of dress and a blaze of artificial

light. Their appearance, moreover, having been long announced in the fashionable papers, where their beauty, accomplishments, and probable fortune were duly advertised. They sit for their pictures, which are exhibited to all who may, or may not, aspire to the originals. And, then, the public are informed that on such a night the lovely Lady Sophia Jasper, daughter of that distinguished statesman the Earl of Shamrogue, will make her debut; that her great-uncle, Lord Hokkanobaro, will also give a princely ball, &c.; and that her grandfather, the venerable and esteemed Sir Ewan Muddlepool, will throw open his magnificent mansion during the season.

Or else, that the Marchioness of Bulgaria contemplates a series of *soirees*, to introduce her youthful and wealthy niece, the beautiful Valentina Castelli, to her friends. Or, that a Lady Blanch, or a Lady Mary, is to be presented to Her Majesty, at the ensuing drawing-room, &c., &c.

Mammas and papas, poets and painters, and matchmaking relatives, take all the trouble of establishing an aristocratic belle ; and, after a brief season, all the anxiety the Lady Sophia, or the Lady Blanch, has, is in selecting the best of the numerous proposals made for her.

How the Johns and Betsys of low life became acquainted with each other, and are wooed and won, we have not now time to inquire.

Freedom of election is all very well in some ways, but we know that disinterested people always think they can tell who would be best suited as husbands and wives than the parties themselves can ; and, perhaps, after all, there are few happier matches than where you are told you must have that or none.

This is our opinion, but it did not seem to be Mr. Guy Crofton's opinion, when he was informed a matrimonial alliance between himself and Miss Haviland had long been planned by their respective fathers. He rather chose to flatter himself that he was one of tho

favoured mortals whose *affaires de cœur* had been kindly superintended by an angelic committee, and that he had found his kindred soul, down in a little out-of-the-way nook in Cornwall. He had returned to Armitage with the firm conviction on his mind that by some extraordinary blunder in the computation of time he should find the next six or eight months elongated into as many centuries; and yet when at last June and Flora Vallack arrived, he began to doubt the probability of their having slipped away so soon, when they had seemed like eternity to him in anticipation.

But 'tis ever thus with us all. Time comes towards us, showing only his haggard face, pale, and withered with age; we believe him too feeble and decrepid to move fast, and even murmur at his dull, lingering pace.

He meets us—and passes by. Then we look back and discover his wings, those proofs of his speed, which, in his advance, were hid from our sight, and it is only then we can believe

how rapid, how unperceived his flight has been.

But Guy Crofton had lately began to feel rather nervous as to the introduction he had promised Miss Vallack to his family. How would that home-educated girl stand the test of criticism from his fashionable sisters who had spent years in the attainment of accomplishments and elegant deportment—and now prided themselves on knowing nothing that could render them valuable as wives or domestic economists, for Mr. Crofton had brought up his two daughters in the way which he considered the most available for their forming advantageous matches.

He could give them good fortunes; but he had no family honours—therefore, into one or other of the great houses in the neighbourhood, he contemplated transplanting them as soon as possible. Very handsome, dashing girls Elise and Rosana were—and putting great faith in their papa's superior wisdom and kind efforts,

were not likely to throw any obstacles in the way of his arranging for them the best settlements.

The Misses Crofton thought manners and morals were subject to the changes of the times and fashions, as much as bonnets and dresses were.

The ladies of the day are not required to case themselves in an armour of whalebone and buckram—neither are they expected to sit stiffly upright, with folded arms, firmly closed lips, and downcast eyes—blushing like startled nuns at every word a gentleman addressed to them. Elise and Rosana Crofton did not wear hoops, nor high-heeled shoes, nor powdered hair—neither did they adopt the *chevaux de frise* manners of their grandmothers and great aunts.

Elise, the eldest, was certainly very beautiful; and with her irresistible looks of languid fascination, and drowsy softness, had drawn so many lovers around her, that Mr. Crofton was as perplexed as was the father of the Grecian

Helen, on which, of his daughter's numerous suitors, he should bestow her without offending all the rest.

"Miss Vallack is arrived at the Trevennon's; I wish you and Rosana would call on her—you know, I have told you how kind they all were to me when I was in Cornwall last year—I think you would find her an acquisition," was Guy Crofton's speech to his sisters, one morning, when he found them, as usual, employed in one of the Penelopean pieces of work which occupy so extensive a portion of English-women's time.

"Guy, you do make such strange requests; you are well aware mamma only wishes our acquaintance with the Trevennons to be professional, as she calls it. Mr. Trevennon is our medical man, and we notice him and his wife accordingly—but it does not follow we are to patronise all his relations."

"You will not be called on to *patronise* Miss Vallack," said Guy, crossly, "unless she is

greatly altered, you will find her a girl you may be proud to add to your list of acquaintances."

"I thought you said Trevennen told you Mr. Vallack had once been in business, or something of that sort," retorted Elise, sneeringly.

"So he might once; but he has long since retired to a good estate of his own."

"Ah one of those pa says he hears of very often now-a-days, who are wise enough to retire from business before their business retires from them," replied Rosana, with a very haughty bearing; "but we will call—I confess to a curiosity to see this Cornish paragon you and Magrath have talked so much of. We will call, Elise, some leisure day."

It was a leisure day to Mr. Guy Crofton, that same morning, it would seem; for, two hours after he left his sisters, he presented himself in Mrs. Trevennen's drawing-room.

Merry voices and merry laughter saluted

his ears, as the door opened, and a gentleman was saying, very affectedly—

“Oh, Miss Vallack, you give us no credit then for constancy, and all that sort of thing.”

Many handsome faces were turned towards the fresh visitor; but neither bore the slightest resemblance to the Cornish beauty. In a moment, however, two gentlemen were pushed rather unceremoniously aside, and one of those houri-like creatures Guy had read a great deal about in poetry, appeared before him in reality.

“Mr. Crofton, how glad I am to see you—my wicked cousin Herbert would insist on my believing you were digging gold in Australia,” cried a very joyous voice, the sound of which brought to his remembrance certain thrills he had experienced on hearing it some months ago.

If Guy Crofton had been called on solemnly to confess the truth as to his feelings, at that moment, he would very likely have owned

to something like a shock of astonishment that Miss Vallack, whom he had at Trelighthen thought the very perfection of loveliness, had really been capable of improvement; and yet here he stood holding the hand of just such a woman, as he felt sure, Raphael or Rubens must have had floating before them in imagination when they depicted their most gloriously enrapturing beauties.

“She has evidently forgotten all about that pressure of her hand,” thought Guy, as he saw how unaffectedly Flora expressed her pleasure at again meeting him. And soon Herbert Trevennon came in and announced his intention of giving a grand pic-nic the following week, in honour of his cousin, and invited Crofton and all present to join; and then old scenes and friends in Cornwall were enquired and talked about, and Guy thought Trevennon was very uncivil when he exclaimed—

“Why Crofton, one would imagine you and

Tormentilla had known one another a dozen years or so, instead of only two days."

"I told papa it was utterly impossible I should remember half his messages to you, Mr. Crofton, said Flora, turning to him again, in her old artless way after Herbert's interruption, "but I know one was, that he shall be very happy to renew his acquaintance with you, when he comes next month to fetch me."

How greatly Guy enjoyed the evidences of envy and jealousy displayed by the other gentlemen.

Mrs. Crofton and her daughters found time to call on Mrs. Trevennon and Miss Vallack, and so agreeably were they surprised by the beauty and ladylike manners of the latter, that Mrs. Crofton was graciously pleased to invite them to dine at Armitage the following day.

"You will excuse the short notice, Mrs. Trevennon, said the great lady, "but we must

lose no time in becoming acquainted with your charming relative. You will only meet one or two friends besides our family circle, so I must hear no denial. We dine at seven, if that will suit Mr. Trevennon's professional engagements."

Considering the doctor's wife had only once before been honoured with an invitation to Armitage, she accepted the present very friendly one, with less embarrassment than perhaps her grand visitors anticipated. Flora being, fortunately, quite ignorant of the magnitude of the honor conferred, acquiesced somewhat as she would have done, at Trelighthen, on being asked out to tea by her nearest neighbour.

But so startled was she by Mrs. Trevennon's account of all the splendour by which she had been surrounded on her former visit; a full description of which she gave her after the ladies had taken leave, that she felt half tempted to

wake next morning with such a violent headache as should oblige her to stay at home.

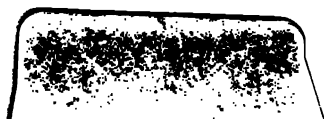
Herbert's jokes pretty well re-assured her however ; though he did say that, "when people were invited to a dinner party, only the day previous, it looked rather as if they were merely wanted to make up the number, rendered deficient, perhaps, by the tardy refusal of some more honoured guests." She must not flatter herself the Croftons intended to give her any great pleasure ; their motive, no doubt, being chiefly to overawe her by a magnificent display of their wealth, and he advised her and Fanny to be in good time, for he said he always observed that every one felt privileged to say all the ill-natured things they could of the unlucky guest for whom the dinner was spoiling.

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