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THE
MYSTERIES OF LONDON,

BY
GEORGE W. M. REYNOLDS.

AUTHOR OF "PICKWICK ABROAD," "THE MODERN LITERATURE OF FRANCE," "ESQUIZ MAGAZINE," &c.

WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS.

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CHAPTER I.

THE TRAVELLING-CARRIAGE.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening of the 2nd of November, 1826, that a travelling-carriage stopped, on its way to London, to change horses at the principal hotel in the little town of Staines.

The inmates of the vehicle were two ladies:—an elderly domestic in livery and a female attendant occupied the box.

The night was clear, fine, and frosty: the moon shone brightly; and the carriage lamps threw a strong glare to a considerable distance in front of the vehicle.

The active ostlers speedily unharnessed the four

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wearied steeds, and substituted as many fresh one in their place: the two postboys leapt into their saddles; the landlord cried "All right!"—and the carriage rolled rapidly away from the inn, the horses' shoes striking fire against the stones.

"If there be anything particularly calculated to raise the spirits," said one lady to the other, a few minutes after the chariot had left the peaceful town behind, "it is travelling upon such a boisterous night as this."

"I am delighted to observe that you are in good spirits this evening, my dear Lady Hatfield," was the reply. "After passing four long months at Sir Ralph Walsingham's country seat, London will present fresh attractions for your ladyship."

"My dear Miss Mordaunt," returned Lady Hat-

field, in a serious tone, "you are aware that I am indifferent to those formal parties and ceremonial assemblies which are reckoned amongst the pleasures of the fashionable world; and I can assure you that had not my uncle permitted to return to London in a few days, my own inclinations would have urged me to prolong my stay at Walsingham Manor."

"For my part," said Miss Mordaunt, "I am quite delighted with the idea of hastening back to the great metropolis. A summer in the country is only tolerable because each day brings one nearer to the enjoyments of a winter in town. But really, my dear Lady Hatfield, you are not reasonable. Rich, young, and beautiful as you are—your own mistress—and with the handsomest man in England dying to lay his coronet at your feet—"

"I shall never marry, Julia," hastily interrupted Lady Hatfield. "Pray let us change the conversation. A few minutes ago I was in excellent spirits; and now—"

She paused—and a deep sigh escaped her bosom.

"Did I not say that you were quite unreasonable!" exclaimed her companion. "Here am I—five years older than yourself,—for I do not mind telling you, my dear friend, that I shall never see thirty again;—and yet I have not renounced the idea of changing my condition. I know that I am neither so good-looking nor so wealthy as you;—still I have my little ambition. Sir Christopher Blunt would deem himself honoured were I to smile graciously upon him; but my brother, the lieutenant—who, by the by, expects his captaincy in a few days, thanks to the interest of your kind uncle Sir Ralph—declares that if ever I marry a mere knight, he will never speak to me again."

Lady Hatfield had fallen into a profound reverie, and paid not the slightest regard to the confidential outpourings of her garrulous companion.

Miss Mordaunt, who laboured under the pleasing impression that Lady Hatfield's silence was occasioned by the deep interest which she took in the present topic, continued to rattle away with her tongue as fast as the carriage did with its wheels.

"I am sure it was a very great act of kindness in you to ask me to spend the winter with you in London; for as papa is compelled to reside in Ireland, in consequence of the unsettled state of his tenantry, I should have been under the necessity of returning to the Emerald Isle, after my four months' visit with you to Walsingham Manor, had you not taken that compassion on me. But let us speak of yourself, dear Lady Hatfield. Without a soul in the world to control your actions—with the means of procuring every enjoyment—and with Lord Ellingham going mad on your account—"

"Julia," said Lady Hatfield, with a start,—again I beseech you to drop this subject. And, as you will be my companion for some months to come, let me now, once for all, enjoin you to abstain from such topics. As you cannot read the secrets of my heart, pray bear in mind the fact that many a light word uttered thoughtlessly and with no malicious intent, may reach a chord that will thrill, she added calmly, but bitterly, "to the inmost recesses of my soul."

"Oh! my dear Lady Hatfield," exclaimed Miss Mordaunt, who, in spite of her loquacity, was a very good-natured person. "I am rejoiced that you have given me this warning. And how foolish of me not to have observed—that indeed I now remember—that

the topic of Love never was agreeable to you. To be sure! it was during the sermon upon the felicity of the wedded state, that you fainted and were taken into the vestry!"

Lady Hatfield writhed in mental agony; and bitterly at that moment did she repent the invitation which she had given her thoughtless companion to pass the winter with her in London.

The carriage had now reached the little town of Bedford, which it traversed without stopping; and continued its rapid way towards Hounslow.

But all of a sudden the course of the chariot was checked—as if by an unexpected impediment in the way; and the horses began to plunge frightfully.

At the same time the lady's-maid on the box uttered a dreadful scream.

Lady Hatfield drew down the window nearest to her; the chains that moment came to a full stop; and a stern, but evidently disguised voice exclaimed, "Keep your horses quiet, you damned fools—and don't mind me! If you stir till I give you leave, I'll blow out the brains of both of you."

"Robbers!" shrieked Miss Mordaunt in a despairing tone: "Oh! what will become of us!"

Lady Hatfield looked from the window; and at the same instant a man, mounted on horseback, with a black mask over his countenance, and a pistol in each hand, was by the side of the vehicle.

"Villain!" cried the livery-servant on the box. "But you shall swing for this!"

"Perhaps I may," said the highwayman, coolly, though still speaking in a feigned tone, as is the custom with individuals of his profession upon such occasions as the one we are describing: "and if you attempt to move, old fellow, from where you are, an ounce of lead shall tumble you down from your perch. Beg pardon, ma'am," continued the robber, turning towards Lady Hatfield, who had shrunk back into the corner of the carriage the moment the desperado appeared at the window; "sorry to inconvenience you; but—your purse!"

Lady Hatfield handed the highwayman her reticule.

"Good!" said he, perceiving by its weight and a certain jingling sound which it sent forth, that it contained gold. "But you have a companion, ma'am—her purse!"

Miss Mordaunt complied with this demand, and implored the "good gentleman" not to murder her.

The highwayman gave no reply; but vouchsafed a most satisfactory proof of his intended forbearance in that respect, by putting spurs to his steed, and darting off like an arrow in the direction of Hounslow.

"Cowardly villain! that you are!" ejaculated the livery-servant, hurling this reproach against the postboys.

"And what are you, old fool!" cried the postillion who rode the wheel-horse. "But he'll be nabbed yet."

"Drive on—drive on!" exclaimed Lady Hatfield from the window. "We are all frightened—and not hurt."

"Indeed, my dear," said Miss Mordaunt, as the carriage started off rapidly once more, "I am seriously hurt— grievously wounded!"

"You, Julia!" cried her ladyship, in unfeigned surprise.

"Yes—in pocket," was the answer, implying deep

vacation. "All the remainder of my quarter's allowance—"

"Oh! compose yourself on that head," interrupted Lady Hatfield. "You shall not be compelled to acquaint Mr. Mordaunt with your loss."

This assurance, conveying a promise of pecuniary assistance, materially tended to tranquillize the mind of Miss Mordaunt; but the event which had just occurred—apart from the mere robbery of her reticule—awoke the most painful reflections in the mind of Lady Hatfield.

"By the by," said Miss Mordaunt, after a short pause—for she never remained long silent,—"this audacious outrage reminds me of something your uncle Sir Ralph Walsingham was telling me one day, when you interrupted him in the middle. I think he informed me that about six or seven years ago—when you were only fourteen or fifteen—you were staying at your dear lamented father's country-house, where you were quite alone—for of course one does not call the servants anybody; when the mansion was broken into by robbers during the night—"

"Julia!" exclaimed Lady Hatfield, her whole frame fearfully convulsed by the powerful though useless efforts which she made to subdue her agitation: "never, I implore you, again allude to that dreadful event!"

"Well—I never will," said Miss Mordaunt. "And yet, if one must not speak of Love—nor yet of marriage—nor yet of midnight burglaries—"

"Nay—I was wrong to cut you short thus abruptly," remarked Lady Hatfield, now endeavoring to rob her prayer of the impudence with which her solemn earnestness of manner had invested it: "only do choose some more civilizing topic after the fright which we have just experienced."

"The first thing to-morrow morning," said Miss Mordaunt, who had not noticed the full extent of the impression which her allusion to the burglary of some years back had made upon her companion—for Julia was too flippant, superficial, and volatile to pay much attention to the emotions of others,— "the first thing to-morrow morning we must give information to the Bow Street runners concerning this highway robbery; secondly, we must write to the landlord at Staines to tell him what a couple of cowardly fellows he has got in the shape of those postillions;—and thirdly, you must discharge old Mason, who is evidently incapable of protecting his mistress, much less her friends."

"Discharge old Mason!" exclaimed Lady Hatfield: "impossible! How could he have protected us! He is unarmed—whereas the highwayman furnished two large pistols, doubtless loaded. But here we are safe at Hounslow!"

The carriage drew up at the door of the hotel in this town; and the postillions immediately narrated the particulars of the robbery to the landlord and his attendant tribe of hangers-on.

"Well, this is fortunate!" cried the landlord, when the tale was told: "quite a God-send, as one may say."

"As how, please, sir?" exclaimed the elder post-boy, astonished at the remark.

"Why—it happens that Dykes, the famous Bow Street officer, is in the hotel at this very instant," said the landlord. "John," he added, turning to a waiter who stood near, "beg Mr. Dykes to step this way."

"And what's Dykes doing down here?" asked the post-boy, when the waiter had disappeared to execute the commission he had received.

"He's been investigating a 'vendicary fire,'" replied an ostler; for the landlord, desirous to hold any farther converse with a postillion, had stepped up to the window to inquire whether the ladies chose to alight.

Having received a negative answer, accompanied with an intimation that the sooner the carriage was allowed to proceed the more agreeable it would be to Lady Hatfield and Miss Mordaunt, the landlord returned towards the spot where the postillions, the hangers-on of the hotel, and other loungers were grouped together.

Mr. Dykes almost immediately afterwards made his appearance in the form of a tall, stout, heavy, but powerfully built man, shabby-gentled in his attire, and carrying a strong ash-stick in his hand.

The particulars of the highway robbery were described to him in a very few moments.

"How was the fellow dressed?" asked the officer.

"A black coat," said the first post-boy.

"No—it was n't," cried the second.

"Then what was it?" demanded Mr. Dykes.

"I do n't know—but I'm sure it wasn't a black 'un," was the highly satisfactory answer.

"Describe his horse," said Dykes impatiently.

"Brown—swish tail—standing about fourteen hands—"

"Nonsense!" ejaculated the second postillion, interrupting his companion who had volunteered the explanation. "It was a light bay—the moon fell full upon it—so did the carriage-lights."

"Come, I see we are only losing time," cried the officer. "Which way did he go?"

"He galloped off in this direction," was the reply, which remained uncontradicted.

"Then he'll be in London to-night, whichever road he took," said Mr. Dykes. "If your ladies will give me a cast as far as town, I'll be after the villain. Perhaps he turned off to the left towards Hutton, and so over by Hanwell and then Shepherd's Bush; or else he made straight for Richmond, and so over into Surry. But, one way or another, he's sure to be in London by midnight; and ten to one if I do n't pounce on him. My business is done down here; and I may just as well toddle back to-night as to-morrow morning."

The substance of these remarks was communicated to Lady Hatfield, who could not well do otherwise than accord a seat on the box to Mr. Dykes, Charlotte, the lady's-maid, removing to the interior of the carriage.

These arrangements having been effected, the vehicle pursued its way; and shortly after eleven o'clock it drew up at the door of a mansion on Piccadilly Hill.

Mr. Dykes, having asked the ladies a few questions, promised to communicate the result of his efforts to capture the highwayman; and then took his departure.

Lady Hatfield and Miss Mordaunt shortly retired to their respective bed-chambers: the latter to dream of the delights of London—the former to maintain her pillow with tears; for the recent adventure had awakened in her mind feelings of the most agonising description.

CHAPTER II.

TOM RAIN AND OLD DEATH.

It was about half-past eight on the following morning, when two individuals entered a public-house in White Hart Street, Drury Lane.

One was a man of about thirty years of age, with florid complexion, light hair, and red whiskers,—yet possessing a countenance which, viewed as a whole, was very far from disagreeable. His eyes were of a deep blue, and indicated not only good-humour, but a certain generosity of disposition, which was not impaired by an association with many less amiable qualities—such as a wild recklessness of character, an undaunted bravery, a love of perilous adventure, and a sad deficiency of principle on particular points, the nature of which will hereafter transpire. He was evidently proud of a very fine set of teeth, the brilliancy of which compensated for the somewhat coarse thickness of his lips; and the delicate whiteness of his hands showed that he did not earn his livelihood by any arduous labour. In person, he was about the middle-height—by no means inclined to corpulency—and yet possessing a well-knit frame, with a muscular power indicative of great physical strength. His dress partook of the half-sporting, half-eksh character—consisting of a high chimney-pot kind of hat, with very narrow brims, a checked blue silk neckerchief, fine linen, a buff waistcoat, cut-away Newmarket-style of green coat, drab-breeches, and top-boots. The proper name of this flash gentleman was Thomas Rainford; but his friends had taken the liberty of docking each word of a syllable, and he was invariably known as Tom Rain.

The other individual was an old man, of at least sixty, with white hair, but eyes of fire glaring from beneath a pair of thick, shaggy grey brows. He was upwards of six feet in height, and but little bowed by the weight of years which he bore. Having lost all his teeth, his mouth had fallen in, so as to form a complete angle, the depth of which was rendered more remarkable by the extreme prominence of his hooked nose and his projecting chin. He was as thin as it was possible to be without having the bones actually protruding through the skin, which hung upon them like a tanned leather casing. He was dressed in a long grey stout coat, reaching below his knees; a pair of shabby black trousers, very shabby; and black cloth gaiters fitting loosely over that description of shoes generally denominated high-lows. On his head he wore a greasy cap, with a large front; his linen was by no means of the cleanest; and his appearance altogether was excessively unprepossessing—if not absolutely revolting. What his real name was, very few of even his most intimate acquaintances were aware; for his dreadful omission of form had procured for him the frightful pseudonym of *Old Death*.

Tom Rain and his hideous companion entered the public-house in White Hart Street, nodded familiarly to the landlord, as they passed by the bar, and ascended the stairs to a private room on the first floor.

Having seated themselves at the table, Tom Rain began the conversation.

"Well, have you considered my proposal?" he asked.

"I have," replied the old man, in a deep sepulchral tone; "but I am cautious—very cautious, my good friend."

"So you told me when I saw you three days ago for the first time," observed Rain, impatiently. "But Tullock, the landlord of this place, is a pal of yours; and he knows me well too. Hasn't he satisfied you about me?"

"Well—well, I can't say that he has'nt," answered Old Death. "Still, a cautious man like me never says yes, in a hurry. Tullock knew you eight or nine years ago down in the country; and there's no doubt that you was then a right sort of blade."

"And so I am now!" cried Tom Rain, striking the table angrily with his clenched fist.

"Softly—softly, my good friend," said Old Death. "We shall agree better afterwards if we have a good understanding at first. I was going to observe that for some years Tullock loses sight of you; he comes up to town, takes this public, and does n't even remember that there's such a fellow in existence as yourself until you make your appearance here a few days back."

"When he received me with open arms, and introduced me to you," added Tom Rain. "But go on: what next?"

"Ah! what next?" replied Old Death, with a horrible chuckle, that issued from his throat as if it came from the depths of a tomb. "Why—you friskily and candidly told me your intentions and views, I admit;—but you can't do without me—you can't do without me, my dear boy—and you know it!"

Again the hideous old man chuckled in his cavern-like tones.

"I never denied what you say," answered Tom Rain. "On the contrary, I am well aware that no one in my line can think of doing business about London, and making London his head-quarters, without your assistance."

"To be sure not," said the old man, evidently pleased by this compliment. "I've had the monopoly of it all for this thirty years, and never once got into trouble. But then I do my business with caution—such caution! I've dealings with all that are worth having dealings with; and not one of them knows even where I live!"

"Only let me find a sure and ready-money market for my goods," exclaimed Tom Rain, "and I'll do more business with you than all the chaps you speak of put together."

"Well, I suppose, we must come to terms," said Old Death, after a short pause. "Tullock assures me that you were straightforward when he knew you in the country, and though time changes men's minds as well as their faces, I'll take it for granted that you're all right. You remember the conditions?"

"Not a word you uttered three days ago has escaped my memory," answered Rain.

"Good. When shall you commence business?"

"I opened my shop last night," replied Tom, with a hearty laugh.

"Nonsense!" cried the old man, fixing a glance of delight upon his new friend. "You don't mean to say that—in a word, is *this* yours?"

As he spoke, Old Death drew from his pocket the morning's newspaper, pointed to a particular advertisement, and held the journal towards his companion.

Tom Rain's countenance was overclouded for a moment; but almost immediately afterwards it expanded into an expression of mingled surprise and satisfaction; and snapping his fingers joyfully, he exclaimed, "Is it possible! could it have been her? Oh! this business is speedily settled!"

And rising from his seat, he rang the bell violently.

A pot-boy answered the summons.

"Pen, ink, and paper, and a messenger to carry a letter," said Tom Rain, with extraordinary rapidity of utterance.

The boy disappeared; and Old Death, recovering partially from the astonishment into which his companion's ejaculations and manner on reading the advertisement had thrown him, exclaimed, "What the devil are you after now!"

"You shall see in a moment," was the reply; "but I don't promise you any explanation of what you will see," he added with another hearty laugh.

The boy returned, bringing writing materials, and intimating that he was willing to be the bearer of the letter.

Tom Rain told him to wait; then, having hastily written a few lines upon a sheet of paper, he tossed the note over to Old Death, who read as follows:—

"Remember the night of the 23th of October, 1819;—and stop the inquiries instituted in respect to the little business referred to by the advertisement in this morning's Times."

"This is past all comprehension," exclaimed the old man, still keeping his eyes fixed upon the paper. "The note has not even a signature."

"It does not require one," coolly observed Tom Rain, as he snatched the letter from his companion, and proceeded to fold it up.

"And do you hope to crush the business by means of that scrap of writing!" asked Old Death, evidently perplexed what to think.

"I do n't merely hope—I am certain of accomplishing my object," was the reply.

"Now mind you ain't deceiving yourself, Tom," said Old Death. "The man who has taken up the affair is persevering as a heaver and crafty as a fox. You may see that he is in earnest by the expedition he must have made to get the advertisement into this morning's paper. I should have hardly thought it possible to be done. However, done it is—and, though it gives no description of the person, yet it offers a good reward for his apprehension. No one knows what trivial circumstance may afford a trace; and—"

"Enough of this, old friend," cried Tom; and handing the letter, now duly folded, wafered, and directed, to the boy, he said, "Take this to the address written upon it; see if there's any answer; and I shall wait here till you come back. Look alive—and you'll earn a crown by the job."

The boy hastened away to execute the commission which he had received.

"And so that was your business, Master Tom!" observed Old Death, as soon as the messenger had disappeared. "Well—you have made a good beginning; it promises bright things."

"What! do you fancy that I have n't had plenty of experience down in the country!" cried Rainford. "Ah! I could tell you a tale or two—but no matter now."

"And the little business, Tom," inquired the old

man,—"*Did it turn out worth the trouble? The advertisement says—*"

"Hark'ee, Master Death," exclaimed Rainford, firmly; "that business does not regard you. Our compact dates from this morning—"

"Oh! very good—very good!" interrupted Old Death, in a surly tone. "Be it as you say; but remember—if you do get into any trouble on account of this, you must n't expect me to help you out of it."

"Neither do I," answered Tom. "However, I am a generous chap in my way, and I do n't mind yielding to you in this instance; for you must suppose that I can see your drift plain enough. The advertisement says '*A purse containing a Bank-note for fifty pounds and eleven sovereigns, and a reticule containing a purse in which there were three ten-pound notes and seven sovereigns.*' This is accurate enough. The reticule I snugg away; the two purses I kept—and here they are."

Thus speaking, Tom Rainford threw upon the table the objects last mentioned.

Old Death's eyes glared with a kind of savage joy as they caught a glimpse of the yellow metal and the flimsy paper through the net-work of the purses.

"Pretty things—pretty things!" he muttered between his toothless gums. "I think you'll do well, Tom."

"And I am sure I shall. But turn the money out on the table; you care more about the handling of it than I do."

Old Death "grinned horribly a ghastly smile," and lost no time in obeying the hint conveyed.

"Twenty-seven golden boys, and eighty pounds in Bank-notes," said the hideous man. "The gold is yours—that's part of our conditions; half the value of the Bank-notes is mine, for the risk and trouble in cashing them—that's also part and parcel of our conditions. So if I give you forty sovereigns—forty golden sovereigns, Tom—we shall be square."

"Just so," earnestly observed Rain.

Old Death produced a greasy leather bag from a pocket in the breast of his grey-coat, and counted thence the forty sovereigns on which he had laid such emphasis.

Tom Rain thrust the coin into his breeches' pocket without reckoning it; while his companion first secured the Bank-notes in the greasy bag, and then threw the two purses into the fray.

"You're a good fellow, Tom—a generous-hearted fellow—and I'm much pleased with you," said the old man. "I shall leave you now, as I have some little trifling matters to attend to in another part of the town. When you want me, you know where to leave a message."

"All right," ejaculated Tom Rainford, who did not appear over anxious to detain his new friend.

They accordingly separated—Old Death taking his departure, and the other remaining behind to await the returns of his messenger.

It is necessary to state that when Old Death quitted the public-house, he was joined a few paces up the street by a sharp-looking, ill-clad youth of about fifteen, whose pale countenance, bright eyes, and restless glances denoted mental activity struggling against bad health.

Approaching the old man, the youth walked by his side without uttering a syllable.

"Jacob," said Death, after a brief pause, and slinking his voice to a whisper, "you saw that swoll-looking chap who went into Tullock's with me just now. Well—I told you to be here this morning at a particular hour, on purpose that you might see him. He will be useful to me—very useful. But I must know more of him—and he is not the man to be pumped. Do you wait here, and watch him. Dog him about—find out where he goes—where he lives—whether he has a mistress or a wife, or neither—"

"Or both," added Jacob, with a low chuckle.

"Yes—any thing that concerns him, in fine," continued Old Death. "I am going to Toby Bunce's in the Dials, where I shall be for the next three or four hours if I'm wanted."

"Very good—I understand," said Jacob; and retracing his steps, he hid himself in a court which commanded a view of Tullock's public-house.

Let us now return to Tom Ralsd, who was waiting for the reappearance of his messenger.

It was shortly before ten when the pot-boy once more stood in his presence.

"Well?" said Rainsford, interrogatively.

"I see the lady herself," was the reply; "and I give her the note. I thought it was something particular—and so I told the flunkey I'd on'y deliver it into her hands."

"And how did she receive it?" asked Tom.

"I was showed into a parlour and told to wait. In a few minutes the door opened and in came a lady—such a splendid creature! I never seed such a fine 'ooman in my life before. Our bar-gal's no think to her! So I give her the note: she looked at the writing on the outside, but did n't seem to know it. Then she opened the letter—and, my eye! did n't she give a start? I thought she'd have fell slap on her face. For a minute or so she could n't recover herself: at last she says, 'Tell the writer of this note that it shall be attended to;—' and she put half-a-crown into my hand. That's all."

"I knew it would be so!" cried Tom Ralsd in a triumphant tone. "Here's the five shillings I promised you, my boy; and I do n't think you've made a bad morning's work of it."

The lad grinned a smile of satisfaction, and withdrew.

Rainsford soon after descended to the bar, conversed for a few minutes with his friend Tullock, the landlord, and then took his departure—duly watched by Jacob.

He had reached the corner of Drury Lane, when he felt himself somewhat rudely tapped on the shoulder.

Turning hastily round, he was confronted by a tall stout man, who, without any ceremonial preface, exclaimed, "You're wanted, my good fellow."

"I know I am," replied Tom coolly, as he measured the stranger from head to foot with a calm but searching glance: "and I'm now on my way to the place where my presence is required."

"Just so," said the stout man: "because you are going to favour me with your company, that I may introduce you to a party who wishes to become better acquainted with you."

"Who's the friend you speak of?" asked Tom in an easy, off-hand kind of manner.

"Sir Walter Ferguson," was the reply. "So come along."

With these words, the stout man took Rainsford's

arm and led him away to the Police Court in Bow Street.

Jacob, who was an unsuspected witness of the whole proceeding, immediately took the shortest way to Seven Dials.

CHAPTER III.

BOW STREET.

THE moment Mr. Dykes had lodged his prisoner in one of the cells attached to the court, he hurried off to Piccadilly Hill, and knocked loudly at the door of Lady Hatfield's residence.

Upon explaining the nature of his business to the domestic who answered the summons, he was admitted into an apartment where Lady Hatfield and Miss Mordaunt almost immediately joined him.

Lady Hatfield was the orphan daughter of the Earl and Countess of Maulverer. She was an only child: the proud title of Maulverer had become extinct with the demise of her father; but the family property had devolved to her. She was in her twenty-fifth year, and surpassingly beautiful—the style of her loveliness was fascinating and intellectual—rendered the more interesting, too, by the tinge of melancholy which characterised her countenance. Her eyes were large and of a deep blue: the soul stole ethereal on her pale and lofty forehead;—her smile, though always plaintively mournful, denoted amiability and kindness. In stature she was of the middle height; and, though in the least degree inclining to eunuchoid, yet the firmness of her form marred not its lightness nor its grace. The bust was rounded in voluptuous luxuriance—and the hips were expanded;—but the waist was naturally small—the limbs tapered gradually downwards—and her step was so elastic, while her gait was easy though dignified, that even the most critical judge of female attractions could not have found it in his heart to cavil at her symmetry.

Miss Mordaunt was a lady who had seen thirty-five summers, although she would have gone into hysterics had any one suggested that such was really the fact. She was short, thin, and not particularly good-looking; for her hair was of so decided a red that it would have been a mockery instead of a compliment to term it auburn: her eyes were grey, and her nose suspiciously inclining to the species called "pig;"—but her complexion was good, her teeth well preserved and white, and her hand very beautifully formed. Thus, when she looked in her glass—which was as often as she passed near it—she mentally summed up the good and the bad points of her personal appearance, invariably striking a balance in favour of the first, and thence arriving at the very logical conclusion that she should yet succeed in escaping from a condition of single blessedness.

It was a little after eleven o'clock when Lady Hatfield and Miss Mordaunt were informed that Mr. Dykes requested an immediate interview with them. Some event of that morning's occurrence had already produced a strange—an almost alarming effect upon Georgiana—such was Lady Hatfield's Christian name: and in order to regain her spirits—to recover indeed from a sudden shock which she had received—her ladyship had proposed an early airing in the carriage. To this Julia, who had some "shopping to do," readily assented. They had accordingly just completed their toilette for

the purpose, and was now waiting in the drawing-room for the arrival of the chariot, when the announcement of Mr. Dykes's name called such an ejaculation of anguish from Lady Hatfield's lips, that Miss Mordant was seriously alarmed.

But Georgiana,—the expression of whose countenance indicated for an instant the agony of a heart wounded to its very core,—subdued her emotions by a violent effort; and then, in answer to her friend's solicitous inquiries, attributed the temporary agitation she had experienced to a sudden pain passing through her head.

It was nevertheless with feelings of mingled terror and repugnance that Georgiana accompanied Julia to the room where the Bow Street officer awaited them.

Her very eye-lids quivered with suspense, when she found herself in the presence of the celebrated thief-taker.

"Well, ladies," exclaimed Mr. Dykes, rising from a chair, and making an awkward bow as they entered, "I've good news for you: the highwayman is—"

"Is—?" repeated Georgiana, with nervous impatience.

"Is in custody, my lady; and all I now want—"

"Who is in custody?" demanded Georgiana, hope for a moment wildly animating her.

"The man that robbed you last night, my lady," answered the officer; "or else I'm damn'd—beg pardon—very much mistaken."

"But how do you know he is the same?" exclaimed Lady Hatfield. "Perhaps you may have erred—your suspicions may have misled you—"

"Ah! my lady," interrupted Dykes, totally mistaking the cause of Georgiana's warmth; "you surely ain't going to plead in favour of a chap that stopp'd you on the King's highway, and did them and there steal from your person and from the person of your friend—"

"Describe the individual whom you have arrested," said Lady Hatfield abruptly.

"To a sixty I will," answered the officer, who was now completely in his element. "About thirty years of age—good complexion—light curly haired whiskers—dark blue eyes—splendid teeth—thick lips—But here's your carriage come round to the door, my lady; and nothing could possibly be more convenient. Please not to waste time—as I think we can get him committed to-day."

The moment Dykes had begun his description, Lady Georgiana's eyes expressed the agonising nature of the suspense which she endured; but as he continued, and his portraiture became the more definite, an aching paleness overspread her countenance.

This agitation on her part was not however perceived by either the Bow Street officer or Miss Mordant; for the former had a habit of fixing his eyes on the knob of his ash stick when he was engaged in a professional topic; and the latter was drinking in with greedy ears the description of the supposed highwayman, whom she was quite astonished to hear represented as so very discrepant from her idea of what a midnight desperado must be.

The arrival of the carriage was, under the circumstances, quite a relief to Georgiana; and, without uttering another objection, she allowed Mr. Dykes to have his own way in the matter.

That experienced officer rang the bell as coolly as if the house was his own, and desired that the man-

servant and lady's-maid, who were in attendance on their mistress the preceding night, would prepare to accompany him to Bow Street.

Mason and Charlotte speedily obeyed this request, and the chariot, instead of taking the ladies up Bond Street, conveyed them, the two servants, and Mr. Dykes, to the police-office.

On their arrival, Mr. Dykes conducted his witnesses into a private room, and, after an absence of about five minutes, returned with the intelligence that the night charges were just disposed of, and that the prisoner was about to be placed in the dock.

A shudder passed through Georgiana's frame; but, with a desperate effort to compose herself, she followed Mr. Dykes into the court, Miss Mordant and the two servants remaining in the private room until they should be summoned individually to give their testimony.

As Georgiana was a lady of rank and fortune she was not treated as a humble witness would have been, but was accommodated with a chair, Mr. Dykes assuring her, in a confidential whisper, that she need not stand up to give her evidence.

The body of the court was crowded with a motley assembly of spectators, the news that a highwayman was about to be examined having spread like wild-fire throughout the neighbourhood.

Scarcely was Georgiana seated, when a sensation on the part of the crowd enabled her to judge that the accused was being brought in; and as Tom Rain leapt nimbly into the dock, she cast a rapid glance towards him—a glance in which terror was combined with indelible disgust and aversion.

The accused affected not to notice her, but lounged in a very easy and familiar fashion over the front of the dock; surveying, first Sir Walter Ferguson, and then the clerk, with a complacency which would have almost induced an uninitiated stranger to imagine that they were the prisoners and he was the magistrate.

Mr. Dykes, being called upon by Sir Walter to explain the nature of the charge against the prisoner, declared that, "in consequence of information which he had received," (the inevitable phraseology of old police-officers,) "he had arrested the accused on suspicion of having stepped Lady Hatfield's carriage on the preceding evening, and robbed her ladyship and her ladyship's friend of certain monies specified in an advertisement which he had caused to be inserted in that morning's paper." Mr. Dykes further stated that, having searched the prisoner, he had found upon him a considerable sum in gold; but none of the Bank-notes stolen.

Lady Hatfield was then sworn, and she corroborated the officer's statement relative to the robbery.

"Has your ladyship any reason to suppose that the prisoner in the dock is the person by whom your carriage was stopped?" inquired the magistrate.

"I feel well convinced, sir," was the reply, delivered, however, in a tremulous tone, "that the prisoner at the bar is not the man by whom I was robbed."

A smile of triumph cur'd the lips of Tom Rain; but Mr. Dykes surveyed Georgiana with stupid astonishment.

"Not the man, my lady!" he ejaculated, at length; "why, last night, your ladyship could give no description of what the robber was or what he was not!"

"Dykes, hold your tongue!" cried the magistrate: "her ladyship is upon her oath."

"Your worship," said Georgiana, in a firmer voice than before, "I was so bewildered last evening—so overcome with terror—"

"Naturally so, Lady Hatfield," observed the magistrate, with a very courteous smile, which seemed to say that he would rather believe the bare word of a member of the aristocracy—especially a lady—than the oaths of all his officers and runners put together. "In fact," continued Sir Walter blandly, "you were too much hurried, to use a common expression, to reply calmly and deliberately to any questions which Dykes may have put to you last evening."

"Such was indeed the case, your worship," answered Georgiana. "This morning, however, I have been enabled to collect my wits, and to recall to mind the smallest details of the robbery. The highwayman had a black mark upon his face; but, by a sudden movement of his horse, as he stood by the carriage window, the mark slipped aside, and I caught a glimpse of his countenance by the moonlight."

"And that countenance!" said the magistrate.

"Was quite different from the prisoner's," replied Lady Hatfield firmly.

"Your ladyship did not make that statement when I gave you the description of the prisoner just now," said Dykes, evidently bewildered by the nature of Georgiana's testimony.

"Because you hurried me away, together with my friend and two of my servants, in a manner so precipitate that I had no time to utter a word," returned Lady Hatfield. "Moreover, as you had taken the prisoner into custody, I believed it to be necessary that his case should be brought beneath the cognizance of his worship."

Georgiana spoke in a tone apparently so decided and calm, that the officer knew not how to reply; although in his heart he suspected her sincerity.

The magistrate consulted the clerk; and, after the interchange of a few whispers, Sir Walter said, "I see no reason for detaining the prisoner: there is evidently some mistake on your part, Dykes."

"Your worship," exclaimed the officer, "I know not what to think. Can the prisoner give a good account of himself? He rides into London from Richmond at six o'clock this morning; puts his horse up at an inn in the Borough; goes to a coffee-house in another street to have his breakfast, and leaves a pair of pistols for the waiter to take care of for him; then walks over to a suspicious public not a hundred miles from this court; meets there a man that me and my partners have long had our eyes on; and, when he is searched, has a large sum in gold about his person."

"Do you hear what the officer says, prisoner!" inquired the magistrate.

"I do, your worship," answered Tom Rain, coolly; "and I can explain it all. I come up to London on business, which requires the sum of money found upon me. I put up my horse where I think fit; and I go elsewhere to get my breakfast, because I can have it cheaper than at the inn. I was armed with pistols because I had to travel a lonely road in the dark; and I left them at the coffee-house because I did not choose to drag them about with me all day long."

Mr. Dykes was about to reply, when two decently-

dressed men, who had entered the court a few minutes previously, stepped forward.

"Please, your worship," said the first, "I have known Mr. Rainford the last four years; and a more respectable man does not exist. He came up to London to buy a couple of horses of me; and he was to pay ready money. My name's Watkins your worship; and I've kept livery and bait stables in Great Queen Street, Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, for the last seventeen years."

"And I, your worship," said the other person, in his turn, "can answer for Mr. Rainford. If you doubt my respectability, your worship, send one of your officers round to Compton Street, and see if the name of Bertinshaw isn't painted up in precious large letters over the best jeweller's shop—"

"And pawnbroker's," interrupted Mr. Dykes significantly.

"Well—and pawnbroker's, too," added Bertinshaw: "I'm not ashamed of the calling."

"Then you are both prepared to guarantee the prisoner's appearance at any future time?" said the magistrate.

"Certainly, your worship," was the joint reply. "To answer any charge that may be brought against him!" continued Sir Walter.

The response was again in the affirmative on the part of Watkins and Bertinshaw.

The magistrate stated the amount of the recognizances which were to be entered into, and Tom Rain was desired to stand down from the dock.

This intimation he obeyed with the same air of calm indifference which had characterized him throughout the proceedings, and which had only been for a moment disturbed by the profound astonishment he had experienced when two men, whom he had never before seen nor even heard of in his life, stepped forward to give him so excellent a character and become his bail. But a moment's reflection convinced him that Old Death was the unseen friend who worked the machinery of this manœuvre.

While the clerk was filling up the bail-bend, Lady Georgiana retired from the office, her bosom a prey to feelings of a strangely conflicting nature,—joy at having passed through an ordeal which she had dreaded—grief at having stained her soul with the fell crime of deliberate perjury—and agony at the sad reminiscences which the presence of Rainford had recalled so forcibly to her mind.

Miss Mordaunt and the two servants were astonished to hear the unexpected turn which the proceedings had taken; but their attention was almost immediately absorbed in the condition of Lady Hatfield, who scarcely had time to communicate to them the result of her examination in the court, when a sudden faintness came over her. She had exhausted all her energies in the endeavour to maintain an air of calmness, and to reply in a tone of sincerity when in the presence of the magistrate; and now a reaction took place—her courage gave way—the weight of fearful reminiscences overpowered her—the glow of excitement which had mantled her cheeks changed to a death-like pallor—and she fainted in the arms of her friend.

Fortunately, Miss Mordaunt had a bottle of volatile salts with her; and by those means Georgiana was speedily recovered. She was then led to her carriage; but she did not appear to



breathe freely until the vehicle was some distance from the police-court.

CHAPTER IV.

ESTHER DE MEDINA.

LET us now return to the interior of the police-office.

The clerk was drawing up the bail-bond; the two securities were conversing in whispers with Tom Rain, whom they had affected to greet, when he descended from the dock, as an old acquaintance; and Mr. Dykes was leaning gloomily against the partition which separated the magistrate's desk from the body of the court,—when the entrance of two persons produced a new sensation amongst the crowd.

One was an officer of the court: the other was a lady, closely veiled, and enveloped in a cloak of rich material.

Her form was tall; and, even though her entire frame was now convulsed with intense anguish as she passed amidst the gaping throng to the

chair which Lady Hatfield had occupied two or three minutes previously, yet that excess of grief and terror did not bow her down, nor impair the graceful dignity of her gait.

The officer motioned her to seat herself, an intimation which she evidently accepted with gratitude.

"What is it, Bingham?" inquired the magistrate of the officer.

"Please, your worship," was the reply, "it's a serious charge; and the prosecutor will be here in a moment."

"Very well," said the magistrate: "I will take it directly."

"Who is she?" whispered Dykes, accosting his brother officer.

"Her name is Esther de Medina, she tells me," returned Bingham.

The question and answer were overheard by Tom Rainford, who was standing close by the officers; and the announcement of the lady's name produced a strange and almost electrical effect upon him.

The devil-me-care recklessness of his manner suddenly disappeared, and a sentiment of profound

consideration and deep interest, in respect to Esther de Medina, seemed to occupy his mind.

He was about to question Mr. Bingham relative to the charge which he had against her, when the clerk called upon him and his securities to sign the bond. This ceremony was speedily performed; and Rain's money was returned to him by Mr. Dykes, who, however, looked at him in a manner which seemed to say—"I know I am not mistaken in you, although you have contrived to get off; but I'll have you another time."

Tom cared nothing for the sinister looks of the Bow Street officer; neither did he pay much attention to the gold which he now poured back into his pocket; for all his thoughts appeared to be absorbed in the presence of the veiled lady.

"Come along with us," whispered Bertinshaw, "and we'll celebrate your escape over a bottle of wine at my place."

"No—not now," replied Tom, hastily: "I mean to stay and hear this case: it interests me."

"Will you join us presently?" asked his new friend, who had just now pretended to be a very old one.

"Yes, yes," answered Tom: "in an hour or so." Bertinshaw and Watkins then took their departure.

"Now, Bingham," cried the clerk: "what is it?"

At that moment a gentleman of handsome appearance and middle age entered the court.

"Here is the prosecutor who will explain the matter," said the officer.

The prisoner, suddenly remembering the respect due to the bench, raised her veil; and, at the same time, she glanced in an eager, inquiring manner towards the individual who now appeared against her.

But we must pause to describe her.

She was not more than eighteen years of age, and surpassingly lovely. Her complexion was a clear, transparent olive, beneath which the delicate tinge of excretion was not entirely chased away from her cheeks by the terror and grief that now oppressed her. Her face was of the aquiline cast—her forehead broad, high, and intelligent; her nose curved, but not too prominent in shape; her mouth small, with thin vermilion lips, revealing teeth of pearly whiteness; her chin sweetly rounded; and her eyes large, black, and brilliant. And never did more splendid orbs of light mirror the whole power of the soul, or flash brighter glances from beneath richly-fringed lids. Then her brows were so delicately pencilled, and so finely arched, that they gave an air of dignity to that lovely—that fascinating countenance. Her hair, too, was of the deepest black—a black so intense, that the raven's wing might not have compared with it. Silken and glossy, the luxuriant mass was parted above the forehead, and, flowing in two shining bands—one on each side of the face, for which they appeared to form an ebony frame,—was gathered behind the ears.

In stature she was tall, sylph-like, and graceful. Her shoulders had that fine slope which the Italian masters so much admired, and with which they were delighted to endow the heroines of their pictures. Her waist was admirably proportioned, and not rendered too thin by the unnatural art of tight-lacing. Her hand was of exceeding beauty; her feet and ankles were in perfect keeping with the exquisite symmetry of her form; and her gestures were full of dignity and grace.

She was a Jewess; and, if the most glorious beauty were honoured with a diadem, then should Esther de Medina have become Queen of the Scattered Race.

The moment she raised her veil, all who could catch a glimpse of her countenance were struck with astonishment at the dazzling loveliness thus revealed; and even the magistrate felt anxious to learn what misadventure could have placed so peerless a being within the grasp of justice. Her crime could scarcely be robbery; for she was well-dressed, and had the appearance of belonging to even a wealthy family. Besides, her face—her eyes seemed to denote a conscious purity of soul, in spite of the painful emotions which her present situation had excited within her bosom.

But the person who was most interested—most astonished by the sudden revelation of that exquisite countenance, was Tom Rain. It was not with lustful desire that he surveyed her; it was not with any unholy passion: on the contrary, it was with a sentiment of deep devotion and profound sympathy. He also manifested extreme curiosity to learn upon what possible charge Esther de Medina could have been brought thither.

On her part, she was evidently altogether unacquainted with the person of Tom Rain; for as she cast a rapid and timid glance around, her eyes lingered not upon him.

The middle-aged, handsome-looking man who had just entered the office, was now desired to state the grounds upon which Esther de Medina was in custody.

This witness deposed that his name was Edward Gordon, and that he was a diamond-merchant, residing in Arundel Street, Strand. On the 31st of October, at about five o'clock in the evening, a female called upon him and requested him to purchase for her a diamond ring, which she produced. He examined it by the light of the lamp burning in the apartment where he received her; and, finding that it was really a jewel of some value, he offered her a price which he considered fair. That sum was thirty guineas. She endeavoured to obtain more; but he did not consider himself justified in acceding to her wish. Finally, she accepted his proposal, received the amount, left the ring, and departed. He went out immediately after, carefully locking the door of the room. Having an engagement to dine with a friend, he returned home late, and did not enter that particular room until the following morning; when he discovered that a set of diamonds, which he remembered to have been lying in an open case upon the table at the time the female called on the preceding evening, was missing. He searched vainly in all parts of the room; and at length came to the fixed conclusion that the jewels in question had stolen the diamonds. He gave immediate information to Bingham, the officer, together with an accurate description of the suspected person; for she was upwards of twenty minutes with him on the evening of the 31st, and he had therefore seen enough of her to know her again.

"Moreover," added the prosecutor "two clear days only have elapsed since the interview which took place between us; and I appeal to your wisdom whether the countenance of the prisoner, when once seen, can be readily forgotten; for painful as it is to accuse so young an interesting a person of such a crime, my duty to society compels me to take this

step; and I have no hesitation in declaring that the prisoner is the female who sold me the ring."

A profound sigh escaped from the bosom of Esther; but she uttered not a word.

Bingham, the officer, then proved that he called about half an hour previously upon Mr. Gordon to inform him that he had vainly endeavoured to discover a clue to the supposed thief. Mr. Gordon was on the point of going out upon particular business, and the officer, in order not to detain him, walked a part of the way in his company, so that they might converse upon the subject of the robbery as they went along. They were passing through Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, when they met the prisoner at the bar, Mr. Gordon instantly recognised her, and the officer took her into custody. She manifested much indignation, and said that there must be some mistake; but when the nature of the charge was stated to her, she turned deadly pale, and burst into tears.

Rainford had listened to these statements with the deepest—the most intense interest; and his countenance underwent various changes, especially while Mr. Gordon was giving his evidence. At one moment Tom exhibited surprise—then indignation,—and, lastly, the most unfeigned sorrow.

But suddenly an idea seemed to strike him; for a minute did he reflect profoundly; and then joy animated his features.

Hastily quitting the court, he hurried to the coffee-house opposite, called for writing materials, and penned the following letter:—

— Nov. 3, 1836.

"MY LOAN.—Esther de Medina is at Bow Street, accused of a crime which is alleged to have been committed at about five o'clock in the evening of the 1st of October. It is for you to prove her innocence. Delay not, then, an instant.

"AN UNKNOWN FRIEND TO ESTHER."

Throwing a shilling upon the table, Tom Rain hurried away, took a hackney-coach at the nearest station, and desired to be driven to the mansion of Lord Edingham, Pall-mall, West.

A half-guinea which he slipped into the coachman's hand as he entered the vehicle, produced the desired effect; for the horses were urged into a pace the rapidity of which seemed to astonish themselves as a proof of what they could do if they chose; and, in a very short time, Rainford lept out at the door of his lordship's abode.

The nobleman was fortunately at home; and Tom Rain delivered the letter to the servant who answered his summons.

Then, having desired the coachman to wait, as he might have "a fare" back to Bow Street, Rainford hurried away at his utmost speed, retracing his steps to the police-office.

In the meantime, the clerk had taken down the depositions of Mr. Edward Gordon and Bingham; while the most extraordinary sensation prevailed in the court. The youth—the loveliness—the modest, yet dignified appearance of Esther de Medina excited all sympathies in her favour; and many a rude heart then present felt a pang at the idea of believing her to be guilty.

She had stood up when the prosecutor was called against her; but when he reached that point in his evidence which mentioned the loss of his diamonds, she clasped her hands convulsively together, and, trembling with agitation, sank into the chair from which she had risen.

When the depositions were taken down, the magistrate said, "Prisoner, you have heard the very serious charge made against you: have you any thing to say in your defence?"

Then she spoke for the first time since she had entered the court; and though her words were delivered with impassioned emphasis, the melodious tones of her voice sounded like a silver bell upon the ears of all present.

"Sir, I am innocent—I am innocent!" she exclaimed. "Oh! God knows that I am innocent!"

The glance she darted from beneath her darkly fringed lids spoke even more eloquently than her words; and every feature of her fine countenance seemed to bear testimony to the truth of her declaration.

"Would you not do well to send for your friends?" asked the magistrate, in a kind tone.

These words seemed to touch her most acutely; they summed up as it were all the painful features of her most distressing position.

"Oh! my father—my dear, dear father!" she exclaimed, her countenance expressing so much bitter—bitter anguish, that there was scarcely an unmoistened eye in the court.

"Your worship, I do not wish to prosecute this case—I am sorry I have gone so far," said the diamond-merchant, wiping away the tears from his cheeks—for he was really a good-natured man.

"It is not in my power to stay the proceedings," replied Sir Walter Ferguson. "The evidence is unfortunately strong against the prisoner. She would do well to send for her friends. Let the case stand over for half an hour."

Esther was accordingly conducted into the magistrate's private room, where she was visited by the female-searcher, who endeavoured to persuade her, with as much gentleness as she could command, to mention the residence of her parents.

"Alas! my mother has long been dead," was the mournful reply; "and my poor father—oh! it would break his heart were he to know—"

She checked herself, and fell into a profound reverie—despair expressed in her countenance. During the remainder of the half hour which intervened ere she was led back to the office, she replied only in vague and unsatisfactory, but not self-inculcating, monosyllables to the questions addressed to her.

At length the female-searcher gave her an indirect intimation, that her punishment on trial would be more lenient if she admitted her guilt and expressed her contrition.

"What!" she exclaimed, with a recovering sob; "do you really deem me culpable of this most heinous charge? My God! have the Christians no mercy—no compassion! Oh! I should not speak thus to you! But I know that our race is looked upon with suspicion: we are prejudiced, because we are Jews! And yet," she added, in a different and prouder tone, "there are as noble sentiments—as generous feelings—as estimable qualities amongst the members of the scattered tribe, as in the hearts of these Christians who have persecuted our nation for centuries and centuries!"

The woman, to whom these words were addressed, was astonished at the enthusiastic manner in which the beautiful Jewess spoke; for there was something at that moment sublimely interesting—eloquently commanding about Esther de Medina, as

the rich colour glowed more deeply upon her cheeks, the blue veins dilated on her proud forehead, and the whole power of her soul seemed thrown into her magnificent eyes.

It was at this moment that the usher of the court entered to conduct the Jewess back into the office.

Once more she stood in the presence of the magistrate,—now no longer subdued and crushed with terror; but nerved, as it were by conscious innocence, to meet the accusation brought against her.

Tom Rain had returned to the court; and, by mingling with the crowd of spectators, anxiously watched the countenance of Esther de Medina.

"Prisoner," said the magistrate, "have you anything now to offer in your defence? Or have you sent to communicate with your friends relative to the position in which you are placed?"

"Sir," answered Esther, her soft and musical tones falling like a delicious harmony upon the ears, "I have but one word to utter in my defence; and if I did not speak it when I first stood before you, it was simply because this terrible accusation, bursting so abruptly upon the head of an innocent person, stupified me—deprived me of the power of collecting my ideas. Neither was it until within a moment of my return into the court that the fact which I am about to state flashed to my memory. Sir—I was not in London from two o'clock in the afternoon until half-past ten o'clock at night, on the 31st of October."

A gentle—a very gentle smile played upon her vermilion lips as she uttered these words.

"And it was during the interval which you name that the prosecutor was visited by the female whom he believes to have robbed him of his diamonds!" observed the magistrate.

"I dare having visited the prosecutor at all," answered Esther, in a firm but respectful tone. "I never sold him a ring—I never sold an article of jewellery to a living being. Placed by the honest industry of my father above want," she continued proudly, "I labour not under the necessity of parting with my jewellery to obtain money."

At this moment, a fine, tall, handsome young man, of about six and twenty years of age, entered the court. He was dressed in an elegant but unassuming manner; his bearing was lofty, without being proud; and his fine blue eyes indicated a frank and generous disposition.

Slightly inclining in acknowledgment of the respect with which the crowd made way for him to pass, he advanced towards the magistrate, who instantly recognised him as an acquaintance.

At the same moment, Esther started with surprise, and murmured the name of Lord Ellingham.

To the astonishment of all present—Tom Rain, perhaps, excepted,—the nobleman shook Esther kindly by the hand, saying, "In the name of heaven, Miss de Medina, what unfortunate—or rather ridiculous mistake has brought you hither?"

Sir Walter Ferguson immediately directed the clerk to read over the depositions.

"What!" ejaculated Lord Ellingham, who had scarcely been able to restrain his indignation during the recital of the previous proceedings: "the daughter of a respectable and wealthy gentleman to be placed in such a position as this! But in a moment I will make her innocence apparent. At the very time when this robbery was alleged to have

taken place—at the hour when the female, for whom this young lady has evidently been mistaken called upon the prosecutor—Miss de Medina was not within six miles of Arandel Street."

These words produced in the court a sensation which was the more lively because they seemed to corroborate the prisoner's own defence—a defence which Lord Ellingham had not heard.

Mr. Gordon, the prosecutor, looked astounded—and yet not altogether grieved at the prospect of the prisoner's discharge.

"Mr. de Medina," continued Lord Ellingham, "has only recently arrived in London, having retired from an extensive commercial business which he long carried on at Liverpool. He has become my tenant for a house and small estate situated at a distance of about seven miles from the metropolis; and on the 31st of October I accompanied him and his daughter—the lady now present—on a visit to the property thus leased. We left London in my own carriage at about two o'clock on the day named; and it was between ten and eleven at night when we returned. During that interval of several hours Miss de Medina never quitted her father and myself."

A murmur of satisfaction arose on the part of the spectators; but it was almost immediately interrupted by the entrance of an elderly and venerable-looking man, whose countenance—of that cast which ever characterises the sons of the scattered tribe—had once been strikingly handsome. Though not deficient in an expression of generosity, it nevertheless exhibited great firmness of disposition; and his keen black eyes denoted a resolute, unswerving, and determined soul. He was upwards of fifty-five years of age, and was plainly, though neatly, dressed.

Advancing into the body of the court, he cast a rapid glance around.

"My father!" exclaimed Esther; and springing forward, she threw herself into her parent's arms.

He held her tenderly for a few moments; then, gently disengaging himself from her embrace, he murmured in her ear, "Oh! Esther—Esther, I can understand it all! You have brought this upon yourself!"

But these words were heard only by Lord Ellingham, who had advanced to shake hands with the Jew.

That reproach appeared for the moment to be singular and altogether misplaced, as it was impossible that Esther could have perpetrated the crime imputed to her; but the nobleman had not leisure to reflect upon it, for Mr. de Medina now perceived him and accepted the outstretched hand.

"I was accidentally passing by the court," said the Jew; "and hearing my own name mentioned by some loungers outside, paused to listen. Their conversation induced me to make inquiries; and I learnt all the particulars of this charge."

"And some unknown friend of Miss de Medina sent me a hasty note conveying the unpleasant intelligence," answered Lord Ellingham. "But I believe that I have fully convinced his worship of your daughter's innocence."

These last words were uttered in a louder tone than the former part of the observation, and were evidently addressed to the magistrate.

"For my part," said Mr. Gordon, "I am perfectly satisfied that there is a grievous misander-

standing in this matter. Miss de Medina is evidently unconnected with it; and yet," he added, as his eyes dwelt upon her countenance, "never was resemblance so striking! However—I am well pleased to think that Miss de Medina is not the person by whom I was plundered; and I most sincerely implore her pardon for the inconvenience—nay, the ignominy to which she has been subjected."

Eather turned an appealing glance towards her father, as if to remind him of some duty which he ought to perform, or to convey some silent prayer which he could well understand; but he affected not to notice that rapid but profoundly significant glance.

The magistrate then declared that the young lady was discharged, without the slightest stain upon her character.

Hastily drawing down her thick black veil, Esther de Medina bowed deferentially to the bench; and passed out of the office, leaning on her father's arm, and accompanied by the Earl of Ellingham.

Tom Rain followed her with his eyes until the door closed behind her.

For a few moments he remained wrapped up in a deep reverie: then, heaving a profound sigh, he also took his departure.

CHAPTER V.

THE APPEAL OF LOVE.

IT WAS about eight o'clock in the evening of the day on which so many strange incidents occurred at Bow Street, that Lady Hatfield was reclining in a melancholy mood upon the sofa in the drawing-room of her splendid mansion.

She was dressed in black satin, which set off the beauty of her complexion to the greatest advantage.

One of her fair hands drooped over the back of the sofa; the other listlessly held a book, the perusal of which she had vainly endeavoured to settle herself.

There was a mysterious air of mournfulness about her that contrasted strangely with the elegance of the apartment, the cheerful blaze of the fire, the brilliant lustre of the lamps, and the general appearance of wealth and luxury by which she was surrounded.

That sorrowful expression, too, was the more unaccountable, inasmuch as the social position of Georgiana Hatfield seemed to be enviable in the extreme. Beautiful in person, possessing rank and wealth, and free to follow her own inclinations, she might have shone the star of fashion—the centre of that human galaxy whose sphere is the West End of London.

Oh! bright—gloriously bright are the planets which move in that heaven of their own;—and yet how useless is their brilliancy! The planets of God's own sky are made to bestow their light upon the orbs which without them would revolve in darkness; but the planets of the sphere of aristocracy and fashion throw not a single ray upon the millions of inferior stars which are compelled to circle around them!

To Lady Hatfield the pleasures and dissipation of the West End were unwelcome; and she seldom

entered into society, save when a refusal would prove an offence. Up to the age of seventeen or eighteen she had been remarkable for a happy, joyous, and gay disposition; but a sudden change came over her at that period of her life; and since then her habits had grown retired—her disposition mournful.

But let us return to her, as she lay reclining on the sofa in the drawing-room.

The robbery of the preceding night and the events of the morning had evidently produced a powerful impression upon her mind. At times an expression of acute anguish distorted her fair countenance for a moment; and once or twice she compressed her lips forcibly, as if to restrain a burst of mental agony.

The time-piece upon the mantel had just proclaimed the hour of eight, when a domestic entered the room and announced the Earl of Ellingham.

Georgiana started up—assumed a placid expression of countenance—and advanced to receive the young nobleman, who, as he took her hand, respectfully pressed it to his lips.

"Your ladyship will, I hope, pardon me for intruding at this hour," he said, as he conducted her back to the sofa, and then took a chair at a short distance; "but I was not aware of your return to town until an hour ago, when I perused in the evening paper an account of the outrage of last night and the investigation at Bow Street this morning. How annoying it must have been to you, my dear Lady Hatfield, to have gone through the ordeal of a visit to a police-court!"

"There is something gloomy and dispiriting in the aspect of these tribunals which the crimes of the human race have rendered necessary," observed Georgiana. "The countenances of those persons whom I beheld at the police-office this morning, had all a certain sinister expression which I cannot define, but which seemed to proclaim that they never contemplated aught save the dark side of society."

"The same idea struck me this day," said Lord Ellingham: "for I also paid a visit to Bow Street—and scarcely an hour, I should conceive, after you must have left the office. But enough of this subject: the words *Bow Street—Police*—and *Tribunal* grate painfully upon the ear even of the innocent—that is, if they possess hearts capable of sorrowing for the woes and crimes of their fellow-creatures. Lady Hatfield," continued the Earl, drawing his chair a little closer, "it was to converse upon another topic—yes, another and a more tender topic—that I have hastened to your presence this evening."

Georgiana was about to reply;—but the words died upon her quivering lips—and an oppressive feeling kept her silent.

"Yes, my dear Lady Hatfield," continued the Earl, drawing his chair still more nigh,—"I can no longer exist in this state of suspense. During the whole of last winter I was often in your society; you were kind enough to permit my visits—and it was impossible to be much with you, and not learn to love you. You departed suddenly for the country last July; but I dared not follow—for you had not even informed me of your intended retirement from London at so early a period. Pardon me if I say I felt hurt,—yes, hurt, Lady Hatfield,—because I loved you! And yet never—during that interval

of four months—has your image been absent from my mind: and now I am again attracted towards you by a spell stronger than my powers of resistance. Oh! you must long ago have read my heart, Georgiana—say, then—can you, do you love me in return?"

There was something so sincere—so earnest—and yet so manly in the fluent language of the Earl of Ellingham,—his fine countenance was lighted up with so animated an expression of hope and love,—and his eyes bore such complete testimony to the candour of his speech,—that Georgiana must have been ungenerous indeed had she heard that appeal with coldness.

Nor was it so; and the Earl read in the depths of her melting blue orbs a sentiment reciprocal with his own.

"My lord—Arthur," she murmured, "you ask me if I can love—if I do love you:—and, oh! you know not the pang which that question excites in my heart! Yes," she added hastily, seeing that the Earl was astonished at her words, "I do love you, Arthur—for you are all that is good, generous, and handsome! But—my God!—how can I force my lips to utter the sad avowal—"

"Speak, Georgiana—speak, I conjure you!" exclaimed Lord Ellingham: "you alarm me! Oh! keep me not in suspense! You say that you love me—"

"I never loved until I knew you—I shall never love another," answered Georgiana, fixing her deep, silently expressive, and intellectual eyes upon the countenance of the Earl.

"A thousand thanks for that declaration, my heart's sole joy!" he cried in an impassioned tone; and, falling on his knees by the side of the sofa, he threw his arms around her—he clasped her to his breast—his lips pressed hers for the first time.

But that joy lasted only for a moment.

With rebounding heart—and with almost a scream of anguish—Georgiana drew herself back, and abruptly repulsed her ardent lover: then, covering her face with her hands, she burst into a flood of tears.

"My God! what signifies this strange conduct?" ejaculated the Earl, as, with wounded pride, he retreated a few paces from the weeping lady.

"Forgive me—forgive me, Arthur!" she wildly cried, turning her streaming eyes towards him in a beseeching manner. "I am unhappy—very unhappy—and you should pity me!"

"Pity you?" exclaimed the Earl, again approaching the sofa, and taking her hand, which she did not attempt to withdraw: "how can you be an object of pity! Beautiful—beloved by one whose life shall be devoted to ensure the felicity of yours—"

"Oh! your generous affection, Arthur, gives me more pain than all the rest!" cried Georgiana, in a rapid—half-hysterical tone. "As a weak woman, I have dared to love you—as an independent one, I have confessed that love;—but now," she added, in a slower and firmer tone, while her vermilion lips quivered with a bitter smile,—now, as a strong woman—as a woman restored to a sense of duty—do I make the avowal—and my heart is ready to break as I thus speak—"

"Good heavens! relieve me from this cruel—this agonising suspense!" passionately exclaimed the Earl.

"I will—I will," returned Lady Hatfield. "Arthur—dearly, fondly, devotedly as I love you,—proud as I should be to call you my husband,—happy, happy as I should feel to link my fate with yours,—alas! it cannot be!—never—never!" she added with a frantic vehemence that caused every chord to thrill in the heart of her admirer.

"Georgiana, is this possible?" he asked, in a faint tone, while a deadly pallor overspread his countenance.

"Would that it were not!" she murmured, clasping her hands together in visible anguish of soul.

"And yet it is incomprehensible!" cried the Earl, starting back, and even manifesting somewhat of impatience. "You are not a foolish girl who takes delight in trifling with the sincere attachment of an honest man who adores her:—you are not a heartless coquette, looking upon her admirer as a slave whom she is justified to torture. No—no: you yourself possess a generous soul—you have no sympathy with the frivolous portion of your sex—you are as strong-minded, as sincere as you are beautiful. Tell me, then, Georgiana—what signifies this strange contradiction! You love me—you would be happy and proud to become mine;—and yet—my God!—and yet you the next moment annihilate every hope in my breast!"

"Alas! how unpardonable must my conduct seem—how inexplicable my behaviour!" exclaimed Lady Hatfield, in a tone of despair. "I am not indeed a heartless coquette—nor a weak frivolous girl:—in the sincerity of my heart do I speak, Arthur:—and if you be generous you will forgive me—but I never can be true!"

"Then you love another!" cried the Earl, impatiently.

"Have I not solemnly assured you that I never loved till I knew you—and shall never, never love again!" she added, with a convulsive sob, as if her heart were breaking.

"But perhaps you were betrothed to another in your youth:—peradventure that other has some sacred pledge—some irrevocable bond—"

"No—no: I am my own mistress—none can control me!" interrupted Georgiana, her nervous state of excitement growing each moment more painful.

"And your uncle—your friends—your advisers?" said the Earl,—"it is possible that they have become acquainted with your attachment towards you—that they have some motive to counsel you against my suit!"

"On the contrary—But, my God! do not question me thus!" almost shrieked the unhappy lady. "I shall go mad—I shall go mad!"

"Oh! there is some dreadful mystery in all this!" cried the Earl: "and I too shall go mad if it be not explained! Merciful heavens! a terrible suspicion flashes across my mind. And yet—no—no, it cannot be,—for you declare that you never loved another! Still—still, what motive, save that, can render you thus resolute not to become mine? Georgiana," he said, sinking his voice to a low tone, and speaking with a solemn seriousness which had something even awful in its effect,—Georgiana, I conjure you to answer me,—one, who am your devoted lover and your sincerest friend,—as you would reply to your God! Say—if in your giddy and inexperienced girlhood—ignorant through extreme in-

noence of the snare spread for you—and in a moment of weakness—you—”

“Just heavens! that you should suppose me criminal—guilty!” shrieked Georgiana, covering her face with her hands.

“Pardon—pardon!” cried the Earl, again falling on his knees at the feet of her whom he adored; and, forcibly possessing himself of one of her hands, he conveyed it to his lips. “Pardon me for the outrageous idea that I dared to express—forgive the insulting suspicion which for a moment occupied my mind! Alas! alas! that I should have provoked the look of indignation which you are now cast upon me, when I withdrew your hand from before your eyes! But, ah—now you smile—and I am forgiven!”

Georgiana did smile—but in a manner so plaintively melancholy, that, although it implied forgiveness for the injurious suspicion, it still conveyed no hope!

There was a long and mournful pause.

The Earl of Ellingham burned to penetrate the deep mystery in which the conduct of Lady Hatfield was shrouded; and yet he knew not what other hypothesis to suggest.

He had no rival in her affections—her friends offered no objection to his suit—she was under no pledge to bestow her hand upon any particular individual—and the evanescent suspicion that she might have once been frail and was too honourable to bring a polluted person to the marriage-bed, had been banished beyond the possibility of return:—what, then, could influence her conduct?

He knew not how to elicit the truth; and yet his happiness was too deeply interested to permit him to depart in uncertainty and suspense.

“Georgiana,” he said, at length, and speaking in a tone which showed how profoundly his feelings were excited,—“I appeal to your sense of justice whether you have acted candidly and generously in respect to me! Throughout the whole of last winter you permitted my visits—I will not say encouraged them, because you have too much delicacy to have done that. But you were never denied to me; and you gave me not to understand that my calls were unwelcome, when they began to exceed the usual limits of mere friendly visits. At length my attentions became marked towards you,—and you must have read my feelings in my manner—my language—and my attentions. Alas! why did you permit me to encourage the blossoming of hopes which are now so cruelly blighted by the unaccountable decision that you have uttered to-day?”

“Oh! do not reproach me, Arthur!” exclaimed Georgiana: “and yet I know that I have acted imprudently. But it was so sweet to be beloved by you, that I had not courage to destroy the charming vision! At length I took a decided step—or at least what seemed to me to be so: I departed suddenly to my uncle’s country-seat, without previously intimating my resolution to you. And remember—no avowal of affection on your part had then met my ears; and it was impossible that I could have acquainted you with my proposed departure, even if I had wished so to do—because I did not see you on the day when I determined to quit London; and had I written to you then, would you not have thought that my note conveyed a hint for you to follow me?”

“Fool—idiot that I was not to have declared my

passion months and months ago!” ejaculated the Earl. “But say, Georgiana—had I solicited your hand last summer, ere you left London, would those reasons which influence you now—”

“Yes—they were in existence then,” was the hasty reply.

“And am I to remain in ignorance of the motives which compel you to refuse my suit?” asked Lord Ellingham bitterly. “Is there no chance of their influence ceasing? Oh! give me but a glimpse of hope, and so powerful is my attachment—so devoted my love—”

“Merciful heavens!” exclaimed Georgiana wildly,—“am I then to lose such a man as this?”

And again she clasped her hands convulsively together.

“Oh! you love me—you do love me, my angel,” cried the Earl; “and yet you refuse me! What stern fate—what terrible destiny can possibly separate us? This mystery is appalling!”

“And a mystery it must remain,” said Georgiana, suddenly assuming that quiet and passive manner which indicated despair.

“Then farewell, Lady Hatfield,” exclaimed the Earl; “and be not surprised if I must attribute the disappointment—the anguish—the deep humiliation which I now experience, to some inexplicable caprice of the female mind. But, madam,” he added, drawing himself up haughtily, and speaking in a tone of offended pride, “the Earl of Ellingham, whose wealth and rank may enable him to vie with the mightiest peers of England, will not be even the sport of the whims and wavering fancies of the beautiful Lady Hatfield.”

Thus speaking, the nobleman bowed coldly, and advanced towards the door.

“Oh! this is cruel—this is cruel!” cried Georgiana, throwing herself hysterically back upon the sofa.

“No, madam—it is you who are cruel to reject the honourable suit of one like me without deigning to vouchsafe an explanation,” said the Earl, persisting in his severity of tone and manner against the promptings of his generous nature, but with the hope of eliciting a satisfactory reply.

“Then go, my lord—depart—leave me!” cried Georgiana; “for I never can be yours!”

The Earl lingered for a moment; convulsive sobs broke from the lips of the unhappy Lady Hatfield—but not a word to invite him to remain!

His pride would not permit him to offer farther entreaty;—and, suffering cruelly at heart, he rushed from the room.

In less than a minute Georgiana heard the steeple door close; and then, burying her face in the cushion of the sofa, she gave way unrestrainedly to all the violence of her grief.

CHAPTER VI.

DR. LASCELLES.

THE interview between Lady Hatfield and the Earl of Ellingham was as long as it was painful; and ten o’clock struck by the thousand churches of London, as the nobleman quitted the mansion.

There was such a fierce struggle in his breast between wounded pride and fervent affection, that

his sorrow for the blighted hope of the latter was rendered less acute by being united with the indignation inspired by the former.

In spite of his generous nature, he could not help thinking that he had been trifled with to some extent; for it naturally seemed preposterous that Georgiana should refuse him without a candid explanation of the motives, and when every earthly circumstance appeared favourable to their union.

Then, again, he pondered upon the wildness of her grief—the delirious anguish which she had shown at several stages of their interview—her solemn avowal of love for him alone—and her voluntary assurance that she should be happy and proud to call him her husband. He moreover reflected upon the steadiness of her character—her aversion to the frivolities of the fashionable world—her apparent candour of disposition—and her total want of any thing approaching to coquetry;—and he endeavoured to persuade himself that he had acted harshly by leaving her in anger.

"Yet what alternative had I?" he asked himself; "and would not any other man have in the same way cut short an interview of so mysterious and unsatisfactory—so perplexing and humiliating a nature?"

Alas! the Earl of Ellingham found himself the very next minute dwelling with an aching and compassionate heart upon the agonised state in which he had left the being whom he so tenderly loved;—he thought of her fascinating beauty—her bewitching manners—her well-cultivated mind—her amiable disposition;—and then he said within himself, "Oh! if I have indeed lost her, I have lost an angel!"

He had reached the immediate vicinity of Hatfield's Hotel, when he turned back with the resolution of seeking another interview with Georgiana.

But scarcely had he retraced ten steps of the way, ere he stopped short, and asked himself what advantage could be gained by such a proceeding?

"The decision is given," he reasoned: "she can never—never be mine! Wherefore should I renew her grief and my humiliation—evoke fresh tears from her eyes, and add sharpness to the sting of my disappointment? No: it may not be! Some terrible mystery shrouds her conduct from my penetration;—but shall I, who am devoted in love, give way to a base sentiment of curiosity? It would be unmanly—ignoble—cowardly to attempt to extort her secret from her,—for a profound secret she doubtless cherishes—a secret which has this evening influenced her conduct! And perhaps," he thought, following the natural channel of his meditations, "that secret is of a nature which a modest woman could not reveal to one of the opposite sex?"

This idea, suddenly flashing across his brain, suggested a proceeding which, after a few minutes of profound reflection, he determined to adopt.

Passing rapidly up Dover Street, Lord Ellingham entered Grafton Street, where he knocked at a door on which was a brass-plate engraved with the name of DR. LASCHELLES.

The physician was at home; and the tobeleman was immediately ushered into a parlour, where he was shortly joined by the individual whom he sought.

Dr. Lascelles was a short, thin, sallow-faced man

of about fifty. He had small, restless, sparkling eyes, a prim mouth, and an intelligent though by no means prepossessing countenance. He was devoted to the art which he practised, and was reputed the most scientific man of the whole faculty. His anatomical researches had been prosecuted with an energy and a perseverance which afforded occupation to half the resurrection-men in London, and more than once to the doctor's own personal danger in respect to the law. It was whispered in well-informed circles that he never hesitated to encounter any peril in order to possess himself of the corpse of a person who died of an unusual malady. His devotion to anatomy had materially blasted his feelings and deadened the kinder sympathies of his nature; but his immense talents, added to a reputation acquired by several wonderful cures, rendered him the most fashionable physician of the day.

Such was the medical gentleman whom Lord Ellingham called to consult.

"Excuse this late visit, doctor," said the Earl; "but I knew that I might take the liberty of intruding upon you."

"The words early and late are not in my vocabulary, so far as they regard myself," said the reply. "My hours are at the disposal of my patrons, amongst whom I have the honour to include your lordship."

"Then, without farther apology, I shall proceed to state the object of my visit," said the nobleman.

"Give me your hand—your look dejected—you are very pale—your pulse—"

"It is not concerning myself altogether that I have to speak," interrupted the Earl, withdrawing the hand which the doctor had seized: "I wish to consult you upon a subject intimately affecting my happiness."

The physician looked surprised, and drew his chair closer to that in which the Earl was seated.

"To tell you the truth," continued Arthur, "I am deeply enamoured of a lady whose social position, beauty, fortune, and intellect render her in every way worthy to become my wife."

"Well—why do n't you propose to her?" demanded the physician drily.

"I have—and am rejected," was the answer, accompanied by a profound sigh.

"The devil!" said the physician. "But what can I do for you in the matter? Surely your lordship does not believe in philtres and love-draughts?"

"Ridiculous!" cried the Earl impatiently. "If you will grant me a few moments, I will explain myself."

Dr. Lascelles folded his arms, threw himself back in the chair, and prepared to listen to his young friend's narrative.

"The lady to whom I am attached," continued the Earl, "is, as I ere now informed you, in every way worthy of an alliance with me; and she is moreover deeply attached to me. She has never loved another, and declares that she never can. No apparent circumstances interfere with our union; and she has done me the honour to assure me that she should be alike proud and happy to own me as her husband. She is entirely her own mistress; and, even if she were not, her friends would present no barrier to our marriage. Yet she refuses me—and for some mysterious cause which she will not explain. I have just left her,—left her in a state



of anguish such as I never before witnessed—such as I hope never to behold again!"

"Perhaps she has been guilty of some weakness which she is afraid you would discover!" suggested Dr. Lascelles.

"Oh! no—no," exclaimed Arthur, enthusiastically: "in an unguarded moment—carried away by a hasty suspicion of the kind—I hinted at that possibility,—and I soon repented of my rashness! The lady's countenance flushed with a glow of honest indignation; and, instantly veiling her blushes with her hand, she burst into tears. I could pledge my existence, doctor, that she is purity itself."

"But wherefore do you consult me in the matter?" asked Lascelles.

"You must admit, doctor," answered Ellingham, "that my position is a singular one in reference to the lady of whom I speak. What am I to conjecture? Suspense is terrible; and yet, not for worlds would I again attempt to extort her secret from her."

"The motive may be a physical one," said the doctor.

"That was the idea which ere now struck me, and which has brought me hither to consult you!" exclaimed the Earl.

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"She may be the prey to some insidious disease which impairs not her exterior aspect at present," continued Doctor Lascelles; "say, for instance, a cancer in the breast. Or again, her motive may be a moral one; inasmuch as she may be aware, from some secret warnings, that she is in danger of suffering an aberration of reason."

"And if the lady were a patient of your own, doctor," asked the Earl, "should you be enabled to judge whether she were menaced by that dreadful mental malady to which you have alluded?"

"Decidedly so," replied the physician.

The Earl rose from his seat, and walked two or three times up and down the apartment.

Dr. Lascelles followed him with his eyes; and as he surveyed the strong, well-knit, but slender and graceful form of the young nobleman, the votary of science could not help thinking what a splendid skeleton he would make.

At length the Earl stopped abruptly opposite the doctor, and said in an impressive tone, "You will never reveal the particulars of this interview!"

"It is scarcely probable," returned Lascelles, with a smile.

"But you promise me—you pledge your word

never to breathe a syllable which may betray the motive of my present visit, or the topic of our conversation?" persisted the Earl.

"Never," exclaimed the physician.

"Then listen," said the Earl, sinking his voice almost to a whisper;—"the lady of whom I have spoken is—"

"Lady Hatfield," observed Lascelles.

"What! you have guessed—"

"Simply because every one said last winter that you were dying for her," interrupted the doctor coolly; "and therefore I presume you have availed yourself of her ladyship's return to town, to place your coronet at her feet."

"Yes—I do allude to Georgiana, whose professional attendant you are," cried the Earl. "And believe me, when I solemnly declare that no sentiment of impertinent curiosity—"

"Never said the motives," said the doctor; "let us keep to the facts. I have known Lady Hatfield for upwards of five years; and I can positively assure your lordship that there is not the slightest cause, physical or moral, with which I am acquainted, that can influence her conduct towards you."

"Then, what can this mystery be?" exclaimed Arthur, more perplexed than ever. "My God! must I again fall back upon the hypothesis of a woman's idle caprice—the theory of her unaccountable whims? Is she the victim of an idiosyncrasy which she cannot control? and must I be made its sport?"

"Throughout the sphere of my extensive practice," observed Dr. Lascelles, "I know not a woman less likely to be swayed by idle caprice or unaccountable whims than Lady Hatfield. Her mind is strong—her intellect bright and uncharacterised by the slightest eccentricity. I have, however, frequently observed that her ladyship is the prey to a secret melancholy—that she has her dark moments, as one may denominate them; but at those times the vigour of her soul is not subdued to a degree that would produce so strange a result as a decision affecting her own happiness. You say she loves you—"

"I have not a doubt of the sincerity of her attachment!" cried the Earl emphatically.

"And yet she will not marry you?" said the doctor. "I cannot comprehend it."

"Nor I," observed Arthur, with exceeding bitterness of tone. "My happiness is at stake. What can I do? Had she explained the motive of her refusal, and were that motive a strong one,—did it reveal some cause which would render our union infelicitous,—I might have born up against this cruel—cruel disappointment. My love for her would then have been converted, by admiration of her generous candour, into a permanent friendship; and we might henceforth have met as brother and sister. But how can I ever visit her again? how can I meet her? Beautiful and amiable as she is, I adore her;—and yet I dare not in future trust myself in her presence! No—I must crush this love in my heart—stifle it—subdue it altogether! Oh! fool that I am to talk thus;—as if it were practicable to forget her—as if it were possible to cease to worship her! Ere now, as I walked through the streets, I endeavoured to blunt the keenness of my affection by placing it in contact with the amount of wrong which I deemed myself to have experi-

enced at her hands. But, unjustly perhaps as she has treated me—humiliated as I felt and still feel myself to be—chagrined—disappointed—rejected without explanation,—oh! all these injuries are absorbed in the immensity of the love which I bear her!"

And in a state of extraordinary excitement, Arthur paced the room with agitated steps.

The doctor sat musing upon his chair. He had ever been too much devoted to scientific pursuits to afford leisure for the delights of love; and though he was married, he had entered the conjugal state only through motives of self-interest. Well aware that ladies prefer a medical attendant whose propriety of conduct is—or at least appears to be—guaranteed by marriage, he had one day cast his mental eyes around the circle of his acquaintance; and his glances were at length fixed upon a wealthy widow who was one of his patients. Jumping into his cab, he called upon her, and, in order not to waste time, proposed while he felt her pulse: she smothered an assent—and, as she could not name the day, he did it for her while he wrote out a prescription. Then he pocketed her guinea all the same—not through meanness, but from the regularity of professional habit; and had she offered him a fee as an acknowledgment for his loss of time on the morning when they issued from the church, he would also have taken it. This union was sterile; but the doctor found that he had obtained an excellent wife, who kept his house in good order—did the honours of his table to admiration—and never interrupted him when he was engaged in his study.

We have only introduced this little episode in the life of Dr. Lascelles, just to convince our readers that he was not at all the man to comprehend the vehemence of Lord Ellingham's love. Thus, while the nobleman was pacing the apartment in the manner described above, and declaiming in reference to his passion, the physician was meditating profoundly upon the conduct of Lady Hatfield, in refusing so excellent a match. His mind, habituated to connect every thing as much as possible with the special sphere of science wherein he moved, soon lost itself in a field of conjecture, as to whether there might not be some physical cause, carefully concealed even from himself, which would elucidate the mystery. The result of his meditations was not at all satisfactory to himself; but he resolved that he would not allow the matter to remain just where it was.

This determination he did not, however, communicate to Lord Ellingham, who took his leave more bewildered than ever, as to the motive which could have possibly induced Lady Hatfield to assure him of her love, and yet refuse him her hand.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BEAUTIFUL PATIENT.

TWO minutes had scarcely elapsed since Lord Ellingham took his departure from the doctor's abode, and the learned gentleman himself was still pondering on the strange communication which had been made to him, when a loud and hasty knock at the front-door echoed through the house.

A servant answered the summons, and in a few

moment she ushered Tom Rain into the presence of Dr. Lascelles.

"Sir," said the visitor, who was painfully excited, "a female—a young woman in whom I am deeply interested—has taken poison. Come with me this instant, I implore you."

Dr. Lascelles snatched up his hat, and followed Rainford without pausing to ask a single question. A hackney-coach was waiting at the door: the two individuals leapt in; and the vehicle drove rapidly away.

The doctor now thought it expedient to make a few inquiries relative to the case which was about to engage his attention.

"What poison has the young woman taken?" he asked.

"Arsenic," was the reply: "for I found the paper which had contained it."

"And how long ago?"

"Ten minutes before I knocked at your door."

"Has there been any vomiting?"

"I did not delay a single moment in hastening to fetch you, after the unhappy creature took the poison; and therefore I am unable to answer that question."

The physician remained silent; and in a few minutes the coach stopped at a house in South Moulton Street.

The door was opened by a servant girl; and Rainford led the physician to a bed-room on the second floor, whither the servant girl followed them.

By the light of a candle placed upon a chest of drawers, Dr. Lascelles beheld a young female of great beauty, and with no other garment on than her night-dress, writhing in excruciating agonies upon the bed. From the reply given by the servant-girl to a question put by the doctor, it appeared that the young lady had been seized with violent vomiting the moment after Tom Rain had left to procure medical aid; and Lascelles accordingly proceeded to adopt the usual treatment which is pursued in such cases.*

In the course of half an hour the patient was pronounced to be out of danger; and Tom Rain, who had in the meantime manifested the utmost anxiety and vacillancy, now exhibited a proportionate liveliness of joy.

* The first great object which we must keep in view, is to promote the speedy evacuation of the stomach; if the poison itself has not produced vomiting, from ten to twenty grains of sulphate of zinc must be given if it can be readily procured; this generally acts as a powerful emetic. If this, however, cannot be obtained, a mustard emulsion should be administered, and the vomiting promoted by drinking large quantities of barley water, linseed tea, milk or tepid water; the two first being of a mucilaginous nature are to be preferred; tickling the back of the throat with a feather will often cause the stomach to reject its contents. It frequently happens that this treatment alone is sufficient for relief in accidents of this nature. After the stomach has been cleansed by the emetic, &c., as described above, lime-water, or chalk dissolved in water, if it can be procured, may be given in large quantities. Hahnemann has recommended soap to be dissolved in water, in the proportion of a pound to four pints, and a teaspoonful to be given every five or six minutes; this undoubtedly is the best treatment if lime water is not at hand. Powdered charcoal may also be administered with advantage if the other remedies are not immediately attainable. The above remedies may be used with some degree of confidence, although their good effects are not sufficiently certain to establish them as "antidotes."—*Ready Remedies in Cases of Poisoning, &c.* By James Johnson M.D.C.S.

"Shall I recover it, sir! Oh! tell me—shall I recover?" asked the young woman in a strange, thrilling, piteous tone, as she fixed her large dark eyes upon the countenance of the physician.

"You are in a fair way to survive this mad—this wicked attempt upon your life," answered Lascelles, in a compassionately reproachful rather than a severe tone. "But you must be kept quiet—and all sources of mental irritation must be removed or forgotten as much as possible," he added, glancing towards Rainford.

"Oh! sir—do not imagine for a moment that I will upbraid or ill-treat me!" exclaimed the young woman, darting a fond look towards Tom Rain; then, drawing a long and heavy respiration, she said, in a different and more subdued tone, "In justice to him, doctor, I must assure you that no harshness on his part urged me to this shocking deed: but—"

"Yes, my dearest girl," interrupted Rain, rushing to the bed, and taking one of her hands which he pressed fondly to his lips, "I did upbraid you—I did speak severely to you—"

"No—no—not more than I deserved!" cried the young woman: "for I was very wrong—oh! I was very wrong! But say, Tom, can you forgive me?"

"He does forgive you—he has forgiven you," exclaimed the physician. "And now abandon that subject, which is naturally a painful one. Tomorrow morning I shall call and see you early."

Dr. Lascelles took up his hat to depart, and Rainford followed him into the passage, where he said in a low but earnest tone, "One word, sir, in private, please to step into this room."

And he conducted the physician into a front apartment, the door of which he carefully closed.

"In the first place, sir," began Rainford, when they were thus alone together, "allow me to thank you for your prompt and effectual aid in this most painful affair!"—and he slipped five guineas into the doctor's hand. "Secondly, let me implore of you to grant the favour which I am about to ask."

"Speak sir," said Lascelles; "and if your request be not inconsistent with my honour as a physician and as a gentleman—"

"Far from it," exclaimed Rainford. "It is this:—Promise me, on your solemn word of honour as a physician and as a gentleman, that, when once your professional visits here have ceased, you will forget that you ever beheld that young woman who is lying in the next room. Promise me, I say, in the most binding manner, that should you ever henceforth meet her, alone or in company, you will not even appear to recognise her, much less attempt to speak to her, unless you be formally introduced to her, when you will consider your acquaintance with her to begin only from the moment of such introduction. Promise me all this, sir, I implore you—for you know not what vitally important interests may be compromised by your conduct in this matter."

"I have not the slightest objection to tranquillise your mind by giving the pledge which you demand," returned Dr. Lascelles, without a moment's hesitation.

"A thousand thanks, sir!" cried Rainford joyfully. "You fully understand the precise nature of the reserve and silence which I require?"

"Never to allude in any way to the incident of this night, nor to appear to recognise elsewhere nor

henceforth the young lady whom I have just seen," said the doctor. "You may rely upon me; the secret shall never transpire from my lips."

"Again I express my gratitude," cried Rainford, with undisguised satisfaction.

Dr. Lascelles then took his leave; and, as he retraced his way to Grafton Street, he never once ceased to think of the strange promise which he had been required to give, in respect to the beautiful creature who had made so resolute an attempt upon her own existence.

On the following morning, shortly after eight o'clock, the physician's cab stopped at the door of the house in South Moulton Street; but, to his surprise, he learnt from the landlady that Mr. and Mrs. Jameson (by which names Rainford and the young woman had been known at their lodgings) had taken their departure at seven o'clock, before it was even light.

"Had they resided long with you?" inquired the doctor.

"Only a week, sir," was the answer. "The lady kept herself very quiet, and seldom went out. When she did, she always had a thick black veil over her face; and, you may think it strange, sir—but it's true for all that—what is, sir, that I never once caught a glimpse of her countenance all the time she was in this house. But the servant-girl says she was very beautiful—very beautiful indeed! You must, however, be able to judge whether that report is true or not, sir!"

"I know little, and think less of those matters, my good woman," said the doctor hastily; and, returning to his cab, he drove off, to visit another patient.

CHAPTER VIII.

SEVEN DIALS

THERE is not in all London a more extraordinary locality than that which bears the denomination of Seven Dials.

Situate in the midst of one of the lowest and worst neighbourhoods throughout the metropolis, and forming a focus where seven streets, converging towards that point, meet like as many streams flowing into a common reservoir, the open spot of ground called Seven Dials is a lounge for all the idle vagabonds and ill-looking persons, men and women, who occupy the cellars and garrets in the vicinity.

From the centre of the open space alluded to, the eyes may plunge their glances down into the circumference—the thoroughfares—narrow, dark, filthy, and formed by dwellings of an appearance so miserable or so repulsive that they equally pain the heart and shock the sight.

If the wanderer amidst the mazes of this vast city were desired to point out the chosen abode of poverty and crime, taking as his guide the physical aspect of all the worst neighbourhoods, he would probably indicate Seven Dials and its branching streets.

The shops are all of the lowest and dirtiest description; nauseous odours impregnate the atmosphere. In winter the streets are knee-deep in mud, save when hardened by the frost; and in summer they are strewn with the putrefying remnants of vegetables, offal, and filth of every description.

Half-naked children paddle about in the mire or wallow on the heaps of decomposing substances just alluded to,—greedily devouring the parings of turnips and carrots, sucking the marrow out of the rotting bones, and rejoicing when they happen to find a mouldy crust, a morsel of putrid meat, or the maggot-eaten head of a fish. Neglected beings, too, are they—knowing nothing save blows, curses, and hunger at home, and learning nought save every corrupt habit and ruinous vice abroad.

How can we be surprised if such an infancy becomes imbued with those evil principles which goals and treadmills only tend afterwards to confirm, and which give ample promise of occupation for turnkeys, penal-settlements, and the hangman?

The Established Church is maintained at an annual expense of several millions sterling; the clergy belonging to that Church claim the right of educating and instructing the people;—and yet in no country in the civilised world is there such an appalling amount of juvenile depravity as in England!

For ourselves, we declare—we repeat, that our Government, our Legislature, our Clergy, and our Great Landowners are all guilty of the blackest turpitude, in permitting hundreds of thousands—aye, millions of children to be neglected in so horrible a manner. If a child be seized with a malignant, infectious, and dangerous disease, what would be said of a father who looked on indifferently—who omitted to call in medical advice—and who beheld, with equal calmness, the ferocious malady spreading amongst the rest of his offspring! Should we not denounce—should we not execrate such a man, as a monster deserving of any penalty which our statutes could inflict?

Yes—a thousand times *yes!*

By a parity of reasoning, then, do we hold up to abhorrence those men who seize upon the reins of power merely to gratify their own selfish ambition; also those men who accept seats in the legislative assemblies, and fritter away the time of a great nation in their own party squabbles,—those men, too, who put on black gowns, preach sermons as a duty rendered in return for the enjoyment of enormous revenues, and then declaim against the wickedness of those millions whom they do not attempt to reform,—and, lastly, those men who wring the sweat from the poor man's brow, to distil pearls for themselves, but who care not for the welfare of that poor man's offspring!

Hundreds of thousands of pounds are annually subscribed to further the objects of foreign missions, the scene of whose labours is in far-off lands, scarcely known to us by name, and amongst a race with whom our sympathies cannot exist,—but beneath our very eyes—crossing our paths—constantly displaying their bathosome rage to our view, are small children innumerable, whose only training is for the prison, the hulks, and the gallows!

Talk not to us of christianizing Barbarians in the remote islands of the South Sea, when the children of so many of our own fellow-countrymen and country-women are but barbarous Christians at home!

Let the reader who imagines that we exaggerate the amount of the evil we denounce,—let him take his stand, any evening, in the midst of Seven Dials, and well consider the scenes around him.

It is said that there are Seven Cardinal Sins; at

the point where we would wish our sceptical reader to post himself, he may command a view of seven streets, each one presenting to his contemplation some new phase in the common sphere of hideous poverty and terrible demoralisation.

Mark the population of that neighbourhood, consisting of seven principal streets, with all their connecting lanes and alleys—with their dark, filthy courts, and their murderous-looking nooks and passages!

Of what does this population consist?

Men brutalised by drink, or rendered desperate by poverty, and in either state ready to commit a crime,—women of squalid, wasted, and miserable appearance, who, being beaten by their husbands and fathers, revenge themselves upon their children or their little brothers and sisters,—poor shopkeepers, who endeavour to make up for the poverty of their petty dealings by cheating their furnished customers,—wretched boys and girls, whose growth is stunted by suffering, whose forms are attenuated through want, and whose minds are poisoned by the scenes of vice, dissipation, and immorality which open upon them at their very birth!

What hope—what promise for the future do such beings as these hold out?

In consternation and sorrow, mingled with the most awful misgivings, do we survey the picture which we are now compelled to draw;—and our feelings are thus painful, because we know this picture to be correct!

And yet we call our country "MERRY ENGLAND!"

Merciful Heavens! what a mockery is this name! Can England be merry while the most hideous poverty is the lot of half her population; while her workhouses are crowded with miserable beings who must for ever resign all hope or idea of again enjoying the comforts of "home;" while the streets are filled with loathsome wretches, clad in filthy rags, which barely cover them,—shivering with the cold, or fainting beneath the intolerable heat—and spured from the doors not only of the rich, but also of the very officers appointed to relieve distress; while the poor mother, maddened with the idea of her own destitution and houseless condition, presses her famishing child to her breast which yields no milk, and then rushes in desperation, to consign the innocent being to the waters of the nearest stream; while the wretched father stifles his children, that he may hush for ever in their throats the cry of "Bread! bread!"—that vain and useless cry to which he cannot respond; while innocent babes and prattling infants bear upon their countenances and exhibit in their attenuated frames all the traces of the dread and agonising pangs of a constant gnawing—craving—never satisfied hunger; and while hundreds annually die around us of starvation and absolute want?

Merry England, indeed! What? is England joyous when the shop of the pawnbroker thrives royally upon the immense interest wrong from the very vitals of the poor; when the goals, the hospitals, and the workhouses are more numerous than the churches; when the hulks are swarming with convicts pent up in frightful floating dungeons, amidst the fetid atmosphere; when the streets throng with unfortunate girls, who ask to be redeemed from so appalling traffic, but who see no avenue of escape from their loathsome calling; when the voice

of starvation, the voice of crime, the voice of discontent, and the voice of barbarian ignorance, echo up to Heaven, and form such a chorus as could scarcely be expected to meet the ears beyond the precincts of hell; and when seven-teenths of the entire population are wretched—oppressed—enlaved—trampled on—miserable—degraded—demoralised!

Merry England!!!

But let us continue the thread of our narrative.

Two of the thoroughfares which converge to Seven Dials, bear each the name of Earl Street.

Passing from High Street, St. Giles's, towards St. Martin's Lane, we must request the reader to turn with us to the right, into that Earl Street which lies between the Dials and one extremity of Mozzmouth Street.

Half way up Earl Street stood a house of even a darker and more gloomy appearance than its companions. Its door-way was lower than the level of the street, and was reached by descending three steps. The windows were small; and, as many of the panes were broken, the holes were mended with pieces of dirty paper, or stopped up with old rags. Altogether, there was something so poverty-stricken, and yet so sinister, about the appearance of that tettering, dingy, repulsive-looking dwelling, that no one possessing an article of jewellery about his person, or having gold in his pocket, would have chosen to venture amongst its inmates.

And who were these inmates? The neighbours scarcely knew. Certain it was, however, that over the rickety door of the house were painted the words—**TOMAS BUNCE, TAILOR**; but few were the jobs which Mr. Bunce ever obtained from the inhabitants in the vicinity; for by his manners were too reserved—too repulsive, to gain favour with the class of persons who might have patronised him. And yet there appeared to be no signs of absolute poverty in that dwelling. Mrs. Bunce was one of the adjacent butcher's best customers; a public-house in the Dials was known to be regularly visited by her for the beer at dinner and supper times; and pints of gin were occasionally purchased by the same mysterious customer at the same establishment. She was as averse to gossiping as her husband; and her neighbours declared that they could not make her out at all. She always paid ready money for every thing she had; and therefore the tradespeople were the staunch defenders of the Bunces, whenever a word of suspicion was uttered against them.

Who, then, were these Bunces?

Let us step inside their dwelling, and see if we can ascertain.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening, a few days after the incidents related in the preceding chapters, that Toby Bunce, his wife, Old Death, and the lad Jacob sat down to tea in the ground-floor back room of the house which we have been describing.

Toby Bunce was a short, thin, pale-faced, sneaking-looking man of about forty. He was dressed in a suit of very shabby black; and his linen was not remarkable for cleanliness. His coarse brown hair was suffered to grow to a considerable length; and, as he seldom treated it to an acquaintance with the comb, it hung in matted curls over his shoulders. His nails were equally neglected, and resembled claws terminating with blackened points.

His better-half—as Mrs. Bunce indeed was, not

only figuratively, but also literally—was a tall, thin, scraggy, lantern-faced woman, with a sharp green eye, a vixenish pug-nose, and a querulous voice; for although she was excessively reserved when she went out “to do her marketing,” she made up for that silence abroad by an extra amount of garrulity at home. Her age exceeded by a year or two that of her husband, and, as she was totally devoid of that sentiment which is so generally ascribed to the sex—we mean vanity—she did not scruple to acknowledge the above fact. Indeed, she often advanced it as an argument to prove that she must know better than he, and as a reason for her assertion and maintenance of petticoat government. But if vanity were not her failing, avarice was her ruling vice; and to gratify her love for gold she never hesitated at a crime.

In this latter respect Mr. Bunce was no better than his spouse—save that his anxiety to obtain money was not always equalled by his readiness to face the danger occasionally involved in procuring it. Any act of turpitude that might be accomplished safely and quietly, would find no moral opponent in the person of Toby Bunce; but when some little daring or display of firmness was required, he was forced to supply himself with an artificial energy through the medium of the gin-bottle.

The room to which we have introduced our readers was furnished with bare necessities, and nothing more. A rickety, greasy deal table; four or five of the commonest description of rush-bottomed chairs; a long form, to accommodate extra company; an old portable cupboard, fitting into one of the angles of the apartment; and a shelf to serve as a larder,—these were the principal articles of the domestic economy. The table was spread with a varied assortment of crockery, none of the cups matching with the saucers, and no two cups or no two saucers alike.

Toby Bunce, having succeeded in inducing the kettle to boil, by means of sundry bits of wood sparingly applied, his wife Betsy made the tea, while Jacob cut the bread-and-butter.

“I wonder whether Tom will keep his appointment?” said Old Death, as he sipped his tea. “It’s a full hour past the time that I told him to be here.”

“And we’ve been a waiting for him till the fire got so low that it took a power of wood to make it burn up again,” observed Toby Bunce.

“Spuse it did?” cried his wife. “You know very well that we do ‘at care about any expense when our best friend Mr. Bones is with us,” she added, glancing towards Old Death; for the Bunces were amongst the very few of that individual’s acquaintances who knew his real name.

“And yet I should think he would not fail,” continued Old Death in a musing strain. “His conduct seemed straight-forward and right enough the very first day we agreed to terms; and he even gave me my regulars in a matter that I ‘d nothing to do with. But it was well for him that he did so; or else he ‘d have been laid up in lavender for want of bail.”

“Bertinslaw and Watkins did it pretty tidy,” said Jacob, who was making prodigious lacozds upon the bread-and-butter.

“Keep your observations to yourself,” growled Old Death in a surly tone. “Remember, I have n’t

forgot your negligence in losing sight of Tom Ham the other day, when he left the police-office.”

“It was n’t my fault,” returned the lad, his dark eyes flashed angrily, “I kept lurking about the court after I had been up here to tell you that Dykes had nabbed Mr. Hamford: I saw him go over to the coffee-house soon after he was discharged—I followed him when he went in a coach to Pall Mall—I dogged him back again to Bow Street—and then—”

“And then when the Jewess’s case was over, you saw him come out, and you lost sight of him,” interrupted Old Death angrily. “But never mind,” he added, softening a little; “I will set you to watch him another day when you’ve nothing better to do, and we will find out all I want to know about him.”

“When did you see him last?” inquired Toby Bunce.

“This morning, at Tallock’s; and—”

Old Death was interrupted by a knock at the street door, to which summons Jacob hastened to respond.

In a few moments, he returned, accompanied by Tom Rain, who sauntered into the room, with a complaisant air and the chimney-pot hat stuck on the right side of his head.

“So you are come at last, Tom,” said Bones, alias Old Death, his toothless jaws grinning a gastly satisfaction. “Well, better late than never. But let me introduce you to my very particular friends Mr. and Mrs. Bunce; and as they are good friends of mine, they will be good friends to you. This crib of theirs is convenient in more ways than one,” added the old man significantly; “and you will find it so if you ever want to lay up for a time until the storm, which must menace one sometimes, blows over.”

“The hint may not prove useless at a pinch,” said Tom carelessly, as he seated himself on the form. “But there’s some one present whose name you’ve not yet mentioned, old chap!”

And he glanced towards the sickly lad, who was still occupied with the edible portion of the repast.

“Oh! that’s my Mercury—my messenger—my confidant—or any thing else you like to call him,” said Bones. “His name is Jacob Smith, for want of a better—and he’s a perfect treasure in his way. He can scent an officer two streets off, and would prove the best scout that ever a general commanding an army could possibly employ. Now you know his qualifications; and if you ever want to make use of him, he is at your service.”

“Well, my lad,” exclaimed Tom Rain, “your master gives a good character of you; and mind you continue to deserve it,” he added, with an ironical smile. “But what is to be done now, old fellow?”

This question was addressed to Bones, who accordingly prepared himself to answer it.

“There’s something to be done to-morrow night, my dear boy,” began the old villain, his dark eyes gleaming from beneath their shaggy, overhanging brows; “and there’s money—much money—to be got. But the thing is a difficult one, and requires great tact as well as courage.”

“You must suppose beforehand that I am the person to manage it properly,” said Rain; “or I should think you would not have applied to me.”

“Very true, Tom,” returned Old Death, with a sepulchral chuckle: “very true! The fact is,

you are a dashing, genteel-looking, and well-spoken fellow when you choose; and you can inlaid yourself into the good graces of the best-born gentleman in the land. I am sure you can do this—don't you think you can, Tom?"

"I should rather fancy I can," replied Rainford, by no means displeased with the compliment just paid him. "But go on—explain yourself—and we shall then see what can be done."

"Listen attentively," said Old Death. "Between Streatham and Norwood there stands a pretty but lonely house, occupied by a gentleman named Torrens. He is a widower, and has two daughters. The eldest of these girls is to be married the day after to-morrow to a certain Mr. Frank Curtis, the nephew of the wealthy Sir Christopher Blunt. It appears that Mr. Torrens has fallen into some difficulty through over-speculation in building houses at Norwood; and Sir Christopher has consented to advance him five thousand pounds, on condition that this match takes place. For the girl, it seems, is totally opposed to it: she has another lover whom she loves—and she hates Mr. Frank Curtis. But the father insists on sacrificing his daughter, to whom Curtis is greatly attached; and Curtis possesses influence enough over his uncle Sir Christopher to persuade him to advance the money."

"All this is clear enough," said Rain; "and nothing would give me greater pleasure than to haul Sir Christopher, Frank Curtis, and the selfish old father. But I do not see how the business can in any way benefit us."

"I will tell you, my dear boy," replied Old Death, with another chuckle expressive of deep satisfaction. "To-morrow evening Sir Christopher, the nephew, and Sir Christopher's lawyer will set out for Torrens Cottage, as the place is called. They will settle all the preliminary business with the father to-morrow night, so that the marriage may take place the first thing on the ensuing morning."

"Well?" said Tom inquiringly, seeing that Old Death paused.

"And two thousand pounds out of the five will be conveyed from London to Torrens Cottage to-morrow night," continued Bones; "and," he added significantly, "something happens to stop the money on its way."

"But who will have the money about him—Sir Christopher, the nephew, or the lawyer?" demanded Tom.

"Ah! that's the point to ascertain," cried Old Death. "You must exercise your tact in solving this doubt; and your courage will afterwards effect the rest. Did I not say that the business required alike tact and courage?"

"You did indeed," answered Rain; "and I can scarcely see how the deuce the thing is to be managed. Still two thousand pounds would prove very welcome. But how came you to learn all this?"

"The knight's servant, my dear boy, is in my pay," returned Old Death, with a triumphant grin. "Ah! I have many gentlemen's and noblemen's domestics devoted to my interests in the same manner; and by their means I learn a great deal. But to return to our present business. Two thousand pounds are to be paid down as an earnest of the bargain to-morrow night; and those two thousand

pounds will be much better appropriated to our uses."

"I perfectly agree with you, old fellow," said Rain. "Could not the knight's servant inform you who is likely to take charge of the money?"

"Impossible!" cried Bones. "He will most probably accompany the party; and—"

"How will they go?" demanded Rain, a thought striking him.

"On horseback," answered Old Death. "Sir Christopher and his nephew have a great opinion of themselves as riders; and the lawyer, Mr. Howard, is a sporting character. It is, therefore, sure that they will all go on horseback."

"Then leave the rest to me," cried Tom Rain, snapping his fingers. "What time do they set out?"

"At six o'clock," was the answer.

"Good again," observed Tom. "It's as dark then as at midnight, this time of the year. Say no more upon the subject; the thing is just the same as if it was done—provided your information is correct, and no change takes place in the plan as at present laid down by these gentlemen. One word, however—describe Sir Christopher's servant to me."

"A short—thin—dapper-made fellow—dark curly hair—face marked with the small-pox," replied Old Death. "Drap livery, turned up with red. His name is John Jeffreys."

"Enough," said Tom. "I shall call at Tallock's to-morrow between two and three in the afternoon; and if you have anything fresh to communicate, you can either leave a note or meet me there. If I neither see nor hear from you at that time and place, I shall consider that all remains as you have now represented. You have nothing more to say at present?"

"Nothing," returned Bones, after a moment's reflection.

"Won't you take a drop of brandy-and-water, Mr. Rainford—just a *leetle* drop?" inquired Toby Bunce, with a deferential glance towards his better half.

"A leetle drop, stupid!—a good big drop, you mean!" cried the shrew. "Is n't Mr. Rainford a friend of Mr. Bones'—and sin't all Mr. Bones's friends our friends? I am sure if Mr. Rainford would drink a—*a*—*quar*—*a* *gint* of brandy," she added, emphatically defining the quantity she felt disposed to place at the service of the new acquaintance, "he is quite welcome."

"No, thank 'ee," said Rainford. "I must be off. The business of to-morrow night requires consideration; and—"

He was interrupted by a knock at the street-door; and Toby Bunce hastened to answer the summons.

CHAPTER IX.

A DEATH-SCENE—LOCK'S FIELDS.

THE room-door was left open; and the inmates could therefore hear every thing that took place in the passage.

Toby Bunce opened the street-door cautiously, and said, "Who's there?"

"In the name of heaven, grant me a night's lodging," exclaimed the appealing voice of a female: "if not for myself—at least for this poor dear child!"

"Toby, shut the door!" screamed the querulous tones of Mrs. Bunce from the back-room. "We do n't want beggars and poor children here."

"Stay!" cried Tom Rain: "never be hard-hearted!"

And, hastening to the street-door, he saw, by the light of a shop-window opposite, the form of a miserable-looking female crouching upon the steps, and with one arm round the neck of a little boy who was crying bitterly.

"Come in, my good woman," said Rainford. "I will pay any expenses that your presence may entail on the people of the house—come in, I say."

But the poor creature fell back insensible.

"Toby, take care of the child," cried Tom Rain in an authoritative tone; "while I lift the woman off the steps."

And, suiting the action to the word, he raised the senseless being in his arms, and conveyed her into the passage, Toby following with the little boy, who seemed to be about five or six years old.

"Surely you're mad, Tom," exclaimed Old Death, advancing from the back-room, "to bring strangers into this house."

"I should be a brute to see a dying woman turned away from the door of this or any other house," said Rainford firmly. "Stand back, and let me have my way. My purse shall satisfy the Bunces for any trouble this business may give them."

"Well, well—be it as you will," growled Old Death; then, in a hasty whisper to Betsy Bunce, he added, "You had better let him do as he likes. He is a queer fellow, but very useful—and must not be offended."

Thus advised, and cheered moreover by Rain's liberal promise of payment, Mrs. Bunce suddenly exhibited a vast amount of sympathy on behalf of the poor creature; and, having fetched a candle from the back-room, she lighted Rainford, who carried the still senseless woman in his arms, up stairs to a chamber where there was a sordid kind of bed.

Rainford placed his barthen on the miserable pallet, and Betsy Bunce applied such restoratives as the circumscribed economy of her household furnished.

"In the mean time Toby had brought the little boy into the chamber; and the child, hastening towards the bed, exclaimed, "Mamma—dear mamma—speak to me—why do n't you speak to me?"

The woman opened her eyes languidly; but the moment they encountered the face of the child, they were lighted up with joy; and snatched the boy to her breast, she murmured in a faint tone, "I thought I had lost you, Charles—I dreamt that we were separated! Oh! my head—it seems to split!"

And she pressed her open palm to her forehead with all the appearance of intense suffering.

We must pause a moment to observe, that this woman seemed to be about five-and-thirty years of age; that she was dressed in widow's weeds of the coarsest materials; and that her entire aspect denoted dreadful privations and great sufferings, mental as well as physical. The boy was also attired in mourning garments; and though his little cheeks were wan, and his form emaciated, still was he a very interesting child.

"My good woman," said Tom Rain, approaching the bed, "banish all misgivings relative to the present; for you shall be taken care of."

Then, turning towards Mrs. Bunce, he directed her to procure food, and to send Jacob for a surgeon.

"No—no, it's useless," cried the poor woman, alluding to the latter order. "I feel that I am dying—my last hour is come!"

The child threw his little arms about her neck, and wept piteously.

"Oh! my God!" cried the wretched stranger, "who will now take care of you, my poor dear—dear little Charles! I who have been to you as a mother—"

"Yes—you are my mamma—my own mamma," exclaimed the child, his heart ready to burst, although he scarcely understood the real nature of the misgivings which oppressed him.

"Sir," said the woman, after a few moments of profound silence, during which the sobbings of the boy and the uneasy palpitations of his own breast were alone heard in the chamber,—"sir," she said, addressing herself abruptly to Rainford, "you spoke to me kindly—you look kindly upon me,—and, if I may judge by your countenance, you possess a kind heart—"

"Speak, poor woman," cried Rain, softened almost to tears. "If there is any thing I can do for you, confide in me—and I swear—"

"The gratitude of a dying being is all that I can offer you in return for what I am about to ask," interrupted the woman in a faint, yet hurried tone,—for she seemed to feel that she had not long to live. "Draw near, sir—there—and now listen attentively. Dreadful privation—exposure to the cold—sleeping in the fields—and painful wanderings have reduced me to this state. But I shall die contented—nay, even happy, if I thought—"

"I understand you," cried Rain. "You are anxious for the welfare of this boy? Compose your mind—banish those painful reflections—I swear to protect him!"

There was something so earnest and sincere in the manner, the voice, and the countenance of Rainford, who was a creature of the most generous impulses, that the dying woman believed him; and her heart bounded with fervent gratitude.

Then, making a sign for Rainford to draw nearer to her still, she collected all her remaining force, to utter a few last words; but physical exhaustion almost completely choked her utterance.

"This boy," she murmured in a faint and dying voice, "is not mine. Do not weep, Charles, love—I am not your mamma—although I love you—as if you was my own child. But the moment you were born—in secret—and mystery—was arranged—and—from that moment I—but, my God! I am dying!—oh! give me strength to declare that—your mother—is—"

"Speak, speak," cried Tom Rain: "breathe but the name of his mother—I shall catch it—and I declare most solemnly—O, God! she is dead!"

And it was so! Vain were her last efforts to give utterance to the name which trembled upon her tongue; the death-rattle stifled the words in her throat—her eyes glazed—her countenance settled in insensibility—and she was no more!

The little Charles would not believe that she was really dead. To him she only appeared to sleep;—



and this infantine delusion Tom Rain gradually dissipated, making him aware of his sad bereavement in so delicate a manner, that a stranger would have believed him to be a father himself as well as an individual of the most upright and noble principles.

But if Rainford's morality was in some points of the most indifferent nature, he nevertheless possessed kind feelings and a generous heart; and the tears trickled down his cheeks, as he exerted himself to console the little stranger.

Children seem to be endowed with an intuitive power of discrimination between those who would treat them well, and those whose dispositions are severe and harsh; and Charles speedily acquired confidence in the good intentions of Rainford.

At length, when Tom fancied that he had obtained some degree of influence over the boy's mind, he led him away from the chamber where the poor woman had breathed her last.

Old Death had remained in the room below; and Jacob had been sent to fetch a surgeon, who now arrived, but departed again immediately upon learning that his services could no longer be rendered available. Toby and Mrs. Bunce had

quitted the chamber of death the moment Rain ejaculated, "O God! she is dead!"—and thus the child had no leisure to take particular notice of any one save the individual who manifested so much kindness towards him.

Fearing that the repulsive appearance of Old Death might alarm the boy, and even fill his mind with misgivings relative to the person who now took charge of him, Rainford stopped in the dark passage down stairs; and calling Mrs. Bunce from the back-room, he placed five guineas in her hand, saying, "The burial of that poor creature who has just breathed her last must be your care. See that it is performed decently; and if there are any papers about her person—any proofs of who she is—keep them for me. Be faithful in this respect—and what I have now given you may be considered as an earnest of additional recompense."

Rainford then left the house, leading the boy by the hand.

Proceeding to the nearest hackney-coach stand, Tom hired one of the vehicles, and desired to be driven to the Elephant and Castle.

Previously, however, to entering the vehicle, the

Thoughtful Tom Rain purchased some of the very best cakes which a shop in such a neighbourhood could produce; and, though the little boy kept sobbing as he repeated to himself, "Mamma is dead,"—for he was too young to understand that she had denied this maternity with her dying breath,—yet he ate greedily of the food—for he was famished.

Rainford said but little to him, beyond a few occasional cheering and consolatory words, as they rode along, because the heavy rumbling of the vehicle rendered it difficult to hear what was uttered within.

In about three-quarters of an hour the coach stopped at the Elephant and Castle; and Rainford, conducting the boy tenderly by the hand, plunged into the maze of streets which form a neighbourhood requiring a detailed description.

Any one who is acquainted with that part of London, or who, with the map of the great metropolis before him, takes the trouble to follow us in this portion of our narrative, will understand us when we state that, almost immediately behind the Elephant and Castle tavern, there is a considerable district totally unexplored by thousands and thousands of persons dwelling in other parts of the English capital. This district is now bounded on the north by the New Kent Road, on the east by the Kent or Greenwich Road, on the south by Walworth, and on the west by the Walworth Road. Built upon a low, damp, and unhealthy soil, the dwellings of the poor there throng in frightful abundance,—forming narrow streets half choked up with dirt, miserable alleys where the very air is stagnant, and dark courts, to enter which seems like going into the fetid vault of a church. Many of the streets, that appear to have been huddled together without any architectural plan, but merely upon a studied system of crowding together as many hovels as possible, have their back windows looking upon ditches, the black mire and standing water of which exhale vapours sufficiently noxious to breed a pestilence. When the sun shines upon these noisome ditches, their surface displays a thousand prismatic hues, thrown out by the decomposing offal and putrid vegetables which have been emptied into these open sewers. But sewers they cannot be called—for instead of carrying off the filth of the neighbourhood, those ditches preserve it stagnant.

A considerable portion of the district we are describing is known by the name of Lock's Fields; and the horrible condition of this locality can only be properly understood by a visit. The pen cannot convey an adequate idea of the loathsome squalor of that poverty—the heart-rending proofs of that wretchedness—and the revolting examples of that utter demoralisation, which characterize this section of the metropolis. The houses for the most part contain each four rooms; every room serving as the domicile of a separate family. Perhaps one of the families of such a family may be afflicted with some infectious malady: there he must lie upon his flock mattress, or his bundle of rags, or his heap of straw, until he become, through neglect, so offensive as to render one minute with him intolerable; and yet his relatives—four, five, or even six in number—are compelled to sleep in the same apartment with him, inhaling the stench from that mass of putrefaction, hearing his groans, breathing the steam from his lungs, and swarming with the myriads of loathsome animals engendered by the filth of the place. In another room, perhaps, we shall find some

old man, living by himself—starving upon the miserable pittance obtained by picking up bones or rags, doing an odd job now and then for a neighbour, and filling up the intervals of such pursuits by begging,—his entire furniture consisting of a cup, a kettle, and a knife—no chair, no table—but with a heap of rubbish in one corner for a bed, on which he sleeps with his clothes on. In a third room there is most likely a family consisting of a man and his wife, who at night occupy one mattress, and their grown-up sons and daughters who all pig together upon another. Shame and decency exist not amongst them—because they could never have known either. They have all been accustomed from their infancy to each other's nakedness; and, as their feelings are brutalised by such a mode of existence, they suffer no scruples to oppose that fearful intercourse which their sensuality suggests. Thus—for we must speak plainly, as we speak the truth—the very wretchedness of the poor, which compels this family contending in one room and as it were in one bed, leads to incest—horrible, revolting incest! The fourth room in the house which we take for our example of the dwellings in Lock's Fields, is occupied by the landlord or landlady, or both; and there is perhaps no more morality nor cleanliness in their chamber than in either of the others.

The shops in Lock's Fields are naturally in keeping with the means and habits of their customers. Beer-shops and public-houses abound; the lower and the poorer the locality, the greater the number of such establishments. But who can wonder? Crime requires its stimulants—and poverty its consolation. Men drink to nerve themselves to perpetrate misdeeds which are attended with peril; women drink to supply that artificial flow of spirits necessary to the maintenance of a career of prostitution;—and the honest poor drink to save themselves from the access of maddening despair. Children drink also, because they see their parents drink, and because they have acquired the taste from their earliest infancy;—and thus beer-shops and public-houses thrive most gloriously in the most wretched neighbourhoods.

Lock's Fields abound with small "general shops," where every thing is sold in the minutest detail—a pennyworth of sugar, a penny-farthling-worth of tea, a farthing saddle, or a quarter of a pound of bacon for a penny. There are also many eating-houses where leg-of-beef soup can be procured for five farthings the bowl. The knackers do a good business with the owners of these establishments. Trippe-shops are likewise far from rare; and upon their boards in the open windows, may be seen gory slices of black-looking liver, tongues and brains in a dish, sheep's heads, huge cow-heads, chitterlings, piles of horses' flesh and rolls of hotted offal upon sticks—the two last-mentioned species of article being intended for cat's-meat,—but the whole heaped pell-mell together, loathsome to behold, and emitting odours of the most fetid and nauseating description. Coal-sheds, where potatoes and greens may likewise be purchased, abound in Lock's Fields; as do also pie-shops and that kind of eating-houses where pudding fried in gross, stocking-pudding, and sop-in-the-pan are displayed in the windows, to tempt with their succulent appearance the appetites of hungry men passing to their work, or of half-famished children wearied of playing in the gutter.

It is wretched—heart-rending to linger on a dis-

erption of this kind: but we must endeavour to make it as complete as possible. The generality of the inhabitants of Lock's Fields are in a state of barbarian ignorance. Nine-tenths of the children, even of ten or twelve years old, are unable to read, and know not who Jesus Christ is, nor that the Saviour of Mankind suffered upon the cross to save them, as well as the proudest peers or the most brilliant peevesses that shine in the realms of fashion. Look more closely at the aspect of the population in Lock's Fields. What care is depicted upon the pale cheek of that emaciated woman who is hanging the one change of linen upon the elder-bushes skirting the black ditch behind her dwelling! And yet she is better off than many of her neighbours—because her family does possess the one change of linen! Behold that man sitting on the threshold of his door, smoking his pipe—his elbows rest upon his knees—he stares vacantly before him—not even the opiate influence of tobacco soothes him. He is thinking of what will become of his wife and children when he shall be out of work—because the job on which he has lately been engaged will be finished on the coming Saturday. His wife comes out to speak to him—and he answers her harshly: his children approach him, and endeavour to climb up his knees—but he knocks them away. Yet that man is not brutal by nature: he loves his wife and children—and was even debating within himself whether he should not soon turn thief in order to support them, when they thus accosted him and were repulsed. Let another person insult his wife—let a stranger lay a finger upon that man's children, and the demon will be raised within his breast. But he speaks harshly and treats them all brutally, because he is miserable—because he is dissatisfied with every thing and every body—because he is reduced to despair. The unfeeling aspect of the cold world around him—that world which frowns so sternly upon poverty, and smiles so sweetly upon wealth—has rendered him unfeeling. His hard fate drives him to the public-house:—talk of the infamy of which that man is guilty in spending a few pence—the pence which would buy his children more bread—upon beer or gin,—it is ridiculous! That man must drink—he must drown his care: thought drives him mad—and from thought he must therefore fly. But whither can he fly! The rich and the well-to-do have their theatres and places of amusement: if a penny tea-garden or a penny theatre be opened in Lock's Fields, or in any other poor neighbourhood, the magistrates must put it down—it is a source of demoralisation—it is a focus of thieves and prostitutes! But the swell-mob and dabb women frequent the Haymarket Theatre—and the Lyceum—and the Surrey—and the Victoria—aye, and Covent-Garden and Drury Lane Theatres also. "Oh!" cries the magistrate; "that is very different!" Yes—every thing in this country is different when the wealthy or the well-dressed are concerned on one side, and the poor and the ragged on the other. Then, whither can this paperised despairing man in Lock's Fields go to escape the bitterness of his reflections? To the public-house—or to throw himself into the canal:—these are the only alternatives!

Is it not dreadful to think that we have a sovereign and a royal family on whom the country lavishes money by hundreds of thousands,—whose mereit whims cost sums that would feed and clothe from

year to year all the inhabitants of such a place as Lock's Fields;—that we have also an hereditary aristocracy and innumerable sleek and comfortable dignitaries of the Church, who devour the fruits of the earth and throw the parings and the peelings contemptuously to the poor?—in a word, that we have an oligarchy feasting upon the fatted calf, and flinging the offal to the patient, enduring, toiling, oppressed millions,—is it not dreadful, we ask, to think how much those millions do for Royalty, Aristocracy, Church, and Landed Interest, and how little—how miserably little, Royalty, Aristocracy, Church, and Landed Interest do for them in return?

But let us go back to Thomas Rainford and the little boy, whom we left on their way to Lock's Fields—for it was to this district that the excellent-hearted man was leading his young charge.

And, as they went along, many were the kind words that Tom Rain uttered to cheer his artless companion.

"Come, don't cry, my dear little fellow," he would say: "here is another cake—and when we get home you shall have something nice for supper. Are you cold, Charley? Well, you shall soon warm yourself by the side of a good blazing fire. And to-night you shall sleep in a soft bed; and to-morrow morning you shall have some new clothes. I am going to take you where you will find a pretty lady, who will be as kind to you as the mamma you have just lost. Are you tired, Charley? Well, I'll take you up and carry you."

And Tom Rain lifted the poor child in his arms and kissed away the tears which ran down his cheeks. The boy threw his little arms around the neck of his kind protector, and said, "Oh! you are as good to me as my dear papa was."

"And how long has your papa been dead, Charley?" asked Rainford, supposing that the child meant by his father the husband of the woman who had died that evening in Toby Bunce's house.

"Not very long—but I do n't know how long," was the reply. "Oh! stay—I think I heard mamma say this morning that he died six months ago."

"And where did you live then, Charley?"

"At a cottage near a great town—Oh! I remember—Winchester."

"Winchester!" cried Rainford. "I know all that part of the country well—or at least I ought to do so," he murmured to himself, with a profound sigh. "But what made you leave your cottage?"

"When papa was buried, mamma had no money," replied the child; "and some naughty people came at last and took away all the things in the cottage, and turned mamma and me out of doors. And then mamma cried so much—oh! so much; and we were very often hungry after that—and we sometimes had no bed to sleep in."

"Poor little fellow!" cried Rainford, hugging the child closer still to his breast. "What was your papa's name?"

"What was—and my name is Charley Watts," said the boy.

At this moment Rainford stopped at one of the few decent-looking houses in Lock's Fields, and knocked at the door, which was immediately opened by a young and beautiful woman, who appeared over-joyed at his return.

"I have brought you a present in the shape of this poor little boy," said Rainford as he entered

the house. "If you wish to please me, you will behave to him as kindly as I shall."

The young woman took Charley in her arms, and kissed him as a proof that Tom's request should be attended to; and Rainford, well pleased at that demonstration, closed the street-door behind him.

CHAPTER X.

A SCENE AT THE HOUSE OF SIR CHRISTOPHER BLUNT.

ON the following afternoon, shortly after four o'clock, three gentlemen sat, sipping their wine after an early dinner, in a magnificently furnished room in Jermy's Street.

The one who occupied the head of the table was a red-faced, stout, elderly gentleman, with hair of that bluish-black which denotes the use of an artificial dye, and with large bushy whiskers of a similar tint. He was dressed in a blue coat with brass buttons, white waistcoat, and black kerseymer trousers fitting very tight. A massive gold chain depended from his neck; and on his fingers he wore several rings of great value. In manner he was affectative, even to rudeness; for, being immensely rich, he firmly believed that money constituted an aristocracy which had a perfect right to command. His pride was the more excessive too, as he had risen from nothing; that is, he had begun life as an errand boy in a linen-draper's shop, and had finished his mercantile career as a warehouseman in Wood Street, where he amassed a considerable fortune. He had filled the office of Sheriff, but had vainly endeavoured to procure an aldermanic gown; and, having failed to persuade the livery-men of Portoken Ward that he was the very best person they could possibly choose to represent them in the superior City Court, he had ever since affected to rejoice at his rejection, and to look upon all City men and City matters with contempt. In reality, too, he was dreadfully mortified at the fact of his low origin; but, with that clumsy duplicity which vulgar minds often employ in such cases, he pretended to make a boast of his humble beginning, and used the subject as a means of constantly reminding his friends and acquaintances of what he had done for himself. While he held the Shrievalty, it fell to his lot to present an address to the Prince Regent; and on that occasion he received the honour of knighthood. Such was Sir Christopher Blunt.

The gentleman who sat at the bottom of the table was Mr. Frank Curtis, Sir Christopher's nephew. He was a tall, spare, thin, sickly-looking young man, of three-and-twenty; with long, straight, black hair, large staring dark eyes, very bad teeth, and a disagreeable, impudent, pert expression of countenance. He was an orphan, and totally dependent upon his uncle, who had brought him up to no business, inasmuch as he had looked upon the young man as his heir. Sir Christopher, however, having reached his fiftieth year without ever thinking of matrimony, was suddenly smitten with Miss Julia Mordaunt, Lady Hatfield's friend; and as Miss Mordaunt belonged to a very ancient though a greatly impoverished family, Sir Christopher thought that he should gain his darling wish—namely, obtain standing and consideration in the fashionable world—by conducting that lady to the

hymeneal altar. This ardent desire he nevertheless kept to himself as much as possible; his first object being to get rid of his nephew in some way or another. For Mr. Frank Curtis had acquired considerable influence over his uncle; and the latter was too much of a moral coward to be able to tell his nephew boldly and frankly that he proposed "to change his condition." The passion which Frank had conceived for Miss Adolais Terrou seemed to furnish the knight with an opportunity to settle the young man, and thus throw off an influence which impeded his own matrimonial designs; hence the readiness of Sir Christopher to lend Mr. Terrou five thousand pounds as an inducement for that gentleman to compel his portionless daughter to accept Mr. Frank Curtis for a husband. We must add, that Frank had passed six months on the continent; and this brief sojourn in France had supplied the staple commodity of his entire conversational powers. Nor must we forget to observe that he was as arrogant a boaster as he was in reality a coward; and that he was so afflicted with the vice of mendaciousness, he could scarcely speak the truth by accident.

The third gentleman present in Sir Christopher's splendid dining-room, was Mr. Howard, the knight's solicitor. We need not say more relative to this individual than that he was about five-and-forty years old, enjoyed an excellent practice, was considered a fine-looking man by the ladies, and was noted for his devotion to the Turf.

The table was spread with a choice dessert and an assortment of the most exquisite wines, to which the three gentlemen appeared to be doing ample justice. Sir Christopher drank copiously, because he felt particularly well pleased at the prospect of getting rid of his nephew, for whom and the intended bride he had taken and furnished a beautiful house at Clapham; Frank had frequent recourse to the bottle, because he felt nervous and anxious;—and the lawyer stuck fast to the Burgundy, because he liked it.

"Take care, Frank, how you fill your glass too often," said Mr. Howard; "or the young ladies will not find you very agreeable presently."

"Do n't mind me, old fellow," exclaimed Curtis; "I can drink you under the table any day. Why, when I was in Paris I used to think nothing of a bottle of brandy with my breakfast. I recollect once letting thirty napoleons with an old Major of grenadiers at Bologna—"

"A drum-major, I suppose, Frank," said the lawyer with a smile.

"Frank could not so far forget himself as to associate with a drum-major," observed Sir Christopher, in a voice like that of a man who goes about with a Punch and Judy show. "Thanks to my honest exertions, I have placed myself—and, in placing myself, have placed him—in a position which you will permit me to call brilliant. You know I make no secret of what I was. I rose from nothing—and I'm proud of it. And if his gracious Majesty, in acknowledgment of my humble merits, condescended to bestow upon me the honour of knighthood—"

"Oh! blow that old story, uncle!" cried the dutiful nephew. "I was telling you how I laid fifty napoleons with a Colonel of French engineers that I would drink two bottles of champagne to every one of his share—"

"What time will the horses be round at the door!" demanded Howard of the knight; for the lawyer was anxious to escape the menaced tale.

"At six o'clock precise," answered Sir Christopher. "I am always punctual. I learnt punctuality when I was a lad; and I firmly believe it helped to make me what I am. When I look around and see how I am now situated, and think of what I was—"

"Do let me tell you this story," interrupted Frank, re-filling his glass: "it is a capital one, I can assure you. Well, so the French Major-General and me, we sat down at table, and spread out the hundred and fifty napoleons that we had bet. Then we rang the bell, and ordered three bottles of Burgundy to begin with—two for me, and one for him."

"Burgundy was it?" said the lawyer, sipping his wine.

"No—claret, and I told you so," exclaimed Curtis. "But how provoking you are! Well, so the Lieutenant-General and me, we began to drink the champagne just as if it was so much water—both of us eyeing the two hundred napoleons—"

"Half-past four," said Mr. Howard, looking at his watch, and with difficulty suppressing a yawn.

"For I felt sure of winning—and so did he," continued Frank Curtis. "Well, I soon disposed of my two bottles of Port, and the General drank 'is one like a Trojan. To work we went again—two more for me, and another for him. Then I proposed cigars, because I knew that I could stand smoking better than him. He agreed; and we puffed away like two factory-chimnies. At last he showed signs of distress—"

"Ah! got quite groggy, like a prize-fighter at the fourth round," observed Mr. Howard.

"Exactly," said Frank: "and so by the time I had finished my sixth bottle of Sherry, and the Field-Marshal had only got half-way through his third, he was completely sewn up. I pecked the five hundred napoleons, as a matter of course—rang the bell to desire the waiter to take the Admiral off to bed—and then went and did the amiable at an evening party, where no one could tell that I had ever been drinking at all."

"And so you think that a very pleasant adventure, Master Frank!" said Sir Christopher. "Now, for my part, I leave guzzling and hard-drinking to those vulgar citizens the other side of Temple Bar. Do you know, Howard, that I really believe it was the most fortunate day of my life when I lost the election for Portsoken? If I had become an Alderman—"

"You would have looked the Alderman to perfection, Sir Christopher," observed the lawyer.

"Well—well—I might have been dignified on the bench—or I might not," said the knight complacently: "that is a mere matter of opinion—although I have been told by a friend who is not accustomed to flatter, that I have more sense—sound sense, I mean—in my little finger, than all the Aldermen and Common Councilmen put together. But it was fortunate for me—very fortunate—that I escaped the vulgar contact of those citizens."

At this moment a servant entered the room, to announce that a gentleman desired to speak to Sir Christopher Blunt.

"Show him up—show him up," cried the knight. "I have no secrets that my nephew and solicitor may not hear."

The domestic retired; and in a few minutes he re-appeared, ushering in Rainford by the name of Captain Sparks.

Tom was dressed in his usual sporting garb, over which he wore a white top-coat—an article of attire much in vogue in those days amongst gentlemen who were accustomed to ride much on horseback. As he walked, his silver spurs clinked on the heels of his well-polished boots; and in his right hand he carried a whip.

"Beg your pardon, gentlemen, for this intrusion," said Tom, as he entered the room; "but having heard from my very particular friend Mr. Torrens of the little affair that is to take place to-morrow morning—"

"Pray sit down, Captain Sparks," interrupted Sir Christopher. "Any friend of Mr. Torrens is welcome in this house. I do not, however, remember that he has mentioned your name in my hearing."

"Very likely not," said Rainford, drawing a chair close to the table. "The fact is I have been travelling in the north, for my amusement, during the last two years; and I only returned to town this morning. The first thing I did was to run down and see my dear friend Torrens; and you may fancy how surprised and pleased I was to learn what an excellent match his eldest daughter was about to make."

"There is the bridegroom, Captain Sparks," said the knight, possessively waving his hand towards his nephew.

"Very happy to form your acquaintance, Mr. Curtis," exclaimed Tom, with a polite bow.

"Equally delighted to know you, Captain," replied the nephew. "Here's a clean glass—and there's the bottle. Help yourself."

"With much pleasure," said Tom, setting the seton to the word. "But I was about to tell you that Mr. Torrens did me the honour to invite me to the wedding; and as I was obliged to come back to town to have my pertmanteau sent down to the Cottage, I have made bold to intrude myself upon you, gentlemen, with the view of joining your party—that is, if you will permit me."

"We shall be quite charmed, Captain Sparks," answered Sir Christopher Blunt. "I need not inquire if you proceed to the Cottage on horseback!"

"Oh! yes—nose of your coaches or carriages for me," returned Tom. "I have put up my horse at the stables close by in York Street; for my grocer was taken ill a couple of hours ago—"

"Our horses are also there," interrupted Sir Christopher; "and one of my grooms," he added ostentatiously, "shall bring round yours when he fetches ours. But I beg pardon for my rudeness, Captain Sparks:—this gentleman is Mr. Howard—my solicitor."

Rainford and the lawyer bowed to each other; the wine went round; and Tom chuckled inwardly at the success of his stratagem to obtain access to the knight.

"You see, Captain Sparks," said Sir Christopher in a dictatorial tone, "this projected alliance has met with some little opposition on the part of the young lady herself."

"So Torrens told me this afternoon," observed Tom coolly. "But the qualifications of your nephew, Sir Christopher, are doubtless such—"

"I flatter myself," exclaimed Curtis, pleased with

this compliment, "that I have the knack of making myself agreeable to the women when I choose. Why, the day that I left Paris, a French Marchioness took poison, and a Countess went melancholy mad—both without any apparent cause; but I knew deuced well what was the reason, though."

"You're a bad fellow, Frank," said the lawyer. "Now why should you assert that?" cried the young man, affecting to be annoyed by the remark. "Did I tell you that any thing particular occurred between me and those ladies? Suppose the Duchess did have a little partiality for me—and suppose the Baroness was the least thing jealous—oh! What then?"

"Ah! what then, indeed?" said Tom Rain. "Mr. Curtis is too much a man of honour to betray those fair ones who were weak enough to be beguiled by his soft nonsense."

"Egad! you're right," exclaimed Frank, in whose good opinion the self-styled Captain was rapidly rising. "I would not give a fig for a fellow that boasts of his conquests. But if any one might boast on that subject, I think it is your humble servant. What do you say, Howard? Haven't I told you some queer tales at times?"

"You have indeed," answered the lawyer drily. "Talking of boasting, Captain Sparks," said the knight, who now found means to thrust in a word, "it is my opinion that the only legitimate boast is that which a man can make of having risen from nothing. Now I never attempt to conceal my origin: on the contrary, I glory in it. Why, sir, I began life without a shilling, and without a friend; and now look at me!"

Tom Rain did look at Sir Christopher, as he was requested to do; and it struck our friend that there was nothing very particular to admire in the worthy knight after all.

"You see me, Captain Sparks!" continued Sir Christopher, in an authoritative tone. "Well, sir—such as I am now, I made myself."

"And the more to your credit," said Tom, who could not help thinking that if the knight's words were to be taken literally, it was a great pity that he had not made himself a trifle handsomer while he was about it.

"Come, Howard, pass the bottle, old fellow," cried Frank Curtis, who always got disgustingly familiar when he was in his cups—which was so often that he was seldom out of them: and, as is the case with all persons who boast of the quantity they can drink, it did not require much to upset him. "Remember," he added, "we have rather a lonely road to travel part of the way—"

"Why—you surely cannot be afraid of robbers, Mr. Curtis?" exclaimed Tom, bursting out into a merry laugh.

"I afraid!" ejaculated the young man; "not I! I should think not, indeed! Why, when I was travelling from Abbeville to Paris in the mail, we were stopped by three highwaymen in the middle of the night. The government-courier and myself tackled them in a moment! we were the only persons in the mail, and the postboy was so frightened that he got off his seat and hid himself under one of the horses. Well, the poor courier was soon disabled; but I was not easily done up. Egad! in less than three minutes I forced the whole five scoundrels to sheer off."

"Oh! I have no doubt of it," said Tom very

quietly. "A powerful and courageous young gentleman like you must be a match for any five highwaymen in the world."

"Come, come now," exclaimed Frank: "I don't say that exactly. But I will assert this much—that I have no more fears of a robber than I should have of a child's stopping me on the highway."

"In that case," observed Mr. Howard, throwing a pocket-book across the table towards Curtis, "you had better take charge of the money that's to be paid over to Mr. Terrens presently."

"Oh! as for that—But, never mind," cried Frank, not appearing particularly to relish the office of treasurer thus forced upon him, yet unable to decline the trust after his magnificent vaunting: "I'll keep the two thousand safe enough, depend upon it."

Sir Christopher looked at his watch; and, finding that the hour for departure was approaching, he rang the bell to order the horses.

Precisely as the clock struck six, the party, attended by John Jeffreys, with whom Rain had found an opportunity to exchange a word or two, quitted Jernyn Street, and rode towards Westminster Bridge.

CHAPTER XL.

THE TWO THOUSAND POUNDS.—TURKENS COTTAGE.

THE evening was bright, clear, and frosty; and the stars shone resplendently on the wide arch of heaven.

Well wrapped up in their great coats, the party of horsemen pursued their way; and at about seven o'clock they turned from the main-road near Streatham Common, into a bye-lane leading towards Turrens Cottage, thus leaving Streatham itself on their right hand.

Sir Christopher and the lawyer rode about a hundred yards in advance, Tom Rain and Frank Curtis having stopped at a public-house to procure cigars. Jeffreys, the groom, was about fifty yards in the rear.

"You must come and see us, Captain Sparks, after the honeymoon," said Curtis. "We shall be delighted to make you welcome."

"I shall avail myself of your kind offer," returned Tom.

"And you and me will try who can stand his bottle best," continued the young man. "But what atrocious cigars these are! I remember when I was in Paris, I was very intimate with a certain foreign Prince who was staying there—and I do n't mind hinting to you that I was a great favourite with the Princess too. She was a charming woman—a very charming woman. I never saw such eyes in my life! Well, the Prince was a great smoker; and he one day gave me a box of his prime cigars—such cigars! I never smoked such beauties before or since. Poor fellow! he was killed in a duel shortly afterwards."

"Killed in a duel!" exclaimed Tom: "what—by you?"

"Oh! no—I was his second," replied Curtis, who, as usual, invented the story as he went on. "It seems that an officer of French horse-guards had been boasting of the favours which he proffered

to have received from the Marchioness; and the Marquis heard of it. He instantly sent for me, and desired me to carry the grandier-officer a message. I did so; and the hostile encounter took place in Boulogne-wood. The Hussar-officer poked the Count slap through in no time; for it appeared that he was the best swordsman in all France. Well, of course I was desperately savage to see my poor friend the Duke knocked off the hooks in that unceremonious way; and I determined to avenge him. So I challenged the light-infantry officer on the spot; and we fought for six hours without either of us getting a scratch or yielding a foot of ground. Our swords were worn as thin as skewers—"

"I have no doubt of it," said Tom coolly. "It must have been a splendid fight."

"It was indeed," returned Frank. "But at last I obtained a trifling advantage. The artillery-officer had a cold; and I watched him anxiously to catch him off his guard when he sneezed. Egad! that was a glorious idea of mine; and it succeeded too;—for after nine hours' hard fighting, I ran him through just as a cook spits a joint. You cannot imagine what a reputation that affair gave me in Paris. Every one was desirous to see the young Englishman who had killed the best swordsman in France. And, after all, without boasting, it was a feat to be proud of."

"Decidedly so," observed Tom. "But you are too brave a man, Mr. Curtis, to indulge in idle boasts."

"Of course," cried Frank. "Fellows like you and me, Captain, who know what swords and pistols mean, are the last to brag of their exploits."

"Do you carry pistols with you, Mr. Curtis?" asked Tom.

"Generally—generally," was the reply. "But I did not think it necessary to take them with me this evening."

"Well, I did," said Rainford. "And here is one," he added, producing the weapon from the pocket of his white great-coat.

"Pray do n't hold it near me, Captain!" cried Frank, reinsing in his horse with a trepidation most remarkable on the part of a gentleman who had performed such gallant deeds in resisting highway-men and as a duellist.

"Yes—but I shall not only hold it near you," said Tom: "I shall also fire it—unless you instantly, and without noise, hand me over that pocket-book which you have about you."

"Captain Sparks!" ejaculated the trembling young man: "this passes a joke. Come, now—"

"I never was more serious in my life," interrupted Rainford sharply. "Give me the pocket-book; or—"

And the sharp click of the pistol, as Tom cocked it, sounded like a death-warrant upon the cowardly boaster's ears. In fact, he sat paralyzed—motionless—speechless upon his horse, at a loss how to act.

"Come, be quick!" cried Rain, seizing him by the collar of his coat: "I have no time for any of your nonsense."

"You—you—can't—mean—" stammered the young man, "that—you—"

"Yes—I mean that I am a highwayman, if you like to call me so," interrupted Tom impatiently: "and so give me the pocket-book."

Curtis obeyed with trembling hand and sinking heart.

"And now" said Tom, as the sounds of the

trampling of a horse announced that the groom was approaching, "one word of caution! You are going to drag a young lady into a match most unwelcome to her. Beware how you accomplish her unhappiness by forcing her to accept as a husband such a contemptible boaster and arrant liar as you are; beware, I say—or you will see more than you like of Captain Sparks."

Having thus spoken, Rainford turned his horse round, and galloped away with lightning-speed.

John Jeffreys, whom he passed in the lane, did not of course attempt to molest him.

But when the groom overtook Frank Curtis, he said, "Any thing the matter, sir? I saw the Captain gallop back again like an arrow."

"Captain!" ejaculated the young man: "he is a robber—a thief—a gallowa-bird!"

"What do you mean, sir?" asked Jeffreys, affecting profound astonishment.

"He has plundered me of two thousand pounds, John," cried Frank, in so lamentable a tone that the groom could hardly suppress a violent inclination to laugh.

"Robbed you, sir!" exclaimed Jeffreys. "You're joking, sir: no two men in England could rob you."

"We had a desperate tussle for it, John," replied Curtis; "but the villain knocked me off my horse with the butt-end of his pistol. It was a cowardly blow—and I was not prepared for it."

"Most likely not, sir," said the groom dully. "But I thought he must have used some underhand means, because I know what sort of a customer you must be."

"You're right enough there, my man," returned Curtis. "I had got the better of him at one time; and although he has gone off with the two thousand pounds, he has carried away with him such a drubbing that he won't forget in a hurry. But let us ride after my uncle and Mr. Howard—because he might come back," added Frank, casting a terrified glance behind him.

The young gentleman and the servant put spurs to their horses, and in a quarter of an hour overtook the knight and the lawyer, to whom Frank related in his own style the adventure which had just occurred.

"And you mean to say that you surrendered the pocket-book—that you gave up two thousand pounds!" exclaimed Sir Christopher, in a passion.

"What could I do!" said Frank. "The scoundrel took the money from me by main force."

"He was stronger than the five highwaymen in France," observed the lawyer quietly.

"Stronger! I believe you," cried Curtis. "And then he was armed to the very teeth. Why, when he threw open his green cut-away coat, I could see by the starlight a belt stuck round with pistols, daggers, and sharp knives. Or else do you think for a moment that he could have mastered me?"

"Well, the mischief is done," said the knight in a doleful tone; "and a pretty figure we shall cut at the Terrens's. I dare swear that the rascal is no more an acquaintance of the family than he is of the King of England."

"It is to be hoped he is not," observed Mr. Howard, who was mightily pleased to think that he had handed over the money into Frank's keeping previously to setting out—"it is to be hoped notwithstanding your nephew, Sir Christopher, would be marrying into a nice family."

"Really, Mr. Howard, this is no time for jesting," exclaimed the knight. "But why did n't you try and stop the villain, John?"

"I, sir!" said the groom. "How should I know that he had committed a robbery when he galloped past me? Besides, if he is such a terrible chap as Mr. Frank represents him, it would have been useless for me to try my hand with him."

"Certainly! John is quite right," observed Mr. Curtis. "If I could do nothing with him, I'm sure no one else could. He is as strong as a lion; and, egad! how he did swear! It was quite horrible to hear him. But what shall we do?"

"Do, indeed!" ejaculated Sir Christopher. "We shall look like so many fools when we arrive at the Cottage."

"But Mr. Torrens will take your cheque, Sir Christopher," remarked the lawyer.

"True. We can manage it in that way," said the knight. "Still the cash would have appeared more business-like on such an occasion. But it is growing late; let us push on."

"Yes—let us push on," echoed Frank, casting troubled glances around, and trembling lest the highwayman should take it into his head to return and rob the remainder of the party.

In twenty minutes they reached Torrens Cottage, the inmates of which we must pause to describe.

Mr. Torrens was a widower, and had numbered about five-and-fifty years. He was a tall, thin, dry-looking man, with a very sallow complexion, a cold grey eye, and a stern expression of countenance. After having long held a situation in a Government office, he retired with a pension; and just at the same period a relation died, leaving him a few thousand pounds. With this sum he bought a beautiful little villa, which he denominated Torrens Cottage, and the household of some land at Norwood, where he set busily to work to build a row of houses to be called Torrens Terrace. He had long made architecture an amateur-study during his leisure hours; and the moment he was enabled to retire from his situation in the Ordnance Office, and became possessed of capital, he resolved to put his numerous architectural theories into practice. But, as it frequently happens in such matters, he grew embarrassed; and the works were menaced with stoppage for want of funds, when Mr. Curtis became enamoured of his eldest daughter, whom he met at the house of some of Mr. Torrens's relations in London. The bargain, already described, was soon after struck between Sir Christopher Biant and Mr. Torrens, who did not hesitate to sacrifice his daughter's happiness to his own pecuniary interests. Unfortunately, too, for the young lady, he did not regard the contemplated union in the light of a sacrifice at all; inasmuch as he naturally looked upon Frank Curtis as Sir Christopher's heir, not dreaming that the worthy knight entertained the remotest idea of perpetrating matrimony. Mr. Torrens therefore considered that his daughter Adela was about to form a most eligible connexion; and, although he was aware that her affections were engaged in another quarter, he acted upon the belief that parents must know best how to ensure their children's happiness.

His two daughters, Adela and Rosamond, were both charming girls, of the respective ages of eighteen and sixteen. Their dark clustering locks, their deep hazel eyes beaming with liquid light, and their

symmetrical figures filled all beholders with admiration. Adela was now pale, melancholy, and drooping; for she loathed the alliance that was in contemplation for her—loathed it, not only because her heart was another's, but also because the manner, conversation, and personal appearance of Frank Curtis were revolting in her estimation. Rosamond possessed a rich complexion, in which glowed all the innate feelings of her soul, animating and imparting to every feature of her beautiful face an additional charm. She was naturally the confidant of her sister, whose hard fate she deeply deplored; and many were the plans which the amiable girls had devised and discussed, with a view to overcome their father's cruel pertinacity in insisting on the sacrifice of Adela to Frank Curtis. But each and all of these projects had either failed, or involved proceedings repugnant to their pure and ardent minds. For instance, they had thought of abandoning the paternal roof, and endeavoring to seek their livelihood by needlework in some safe retirement; then Adela would not permit Rosamond to dare the misfortune of the world by flying from a home which she—the younger sister—had at least no personal motive to desert; and Rosamond on her side would not allow Adela to set out alone. Again, a clandestine marriage between Adela and her lover was often debated; the young man urged it himself;—but the daughters dreaded the father's eternal anger; and thus this project had been abandoned also. To be brief, the dreaded moment was now at hand; and the seal of misery was about to be set on the roll of the elder maiden's destiny.

And who was the lover of Adela? A handsome, generous-hearted, honourable young man, occupying a situation in the very Government office where Mr. Torrens had himself served for many years. But, although Clarence Villiers was so far provided for, and had every prospect of rising rapidly on account of his steady habits and assiduous attention to his employment, yet he was at present only a poor clerk with ninety pounds a year; and he had no capital. Mr. Torrens, as we have seen, required capital; and thus Frank Curtis was preferred to Clarence Villiers.

We cannot quit this description without alluding to the ardent affection which existed between the sisters. Having lost their mother in their childhood, and their father being almost constantly from home throughout the day, they were naturally thrown entirely upon each other for companionship. An indelible confidence sprang up between them—a confidence more intimate far than even that which usually subsists between sisters; because this confidence on the part of Adela and Rosamond extended to a mutual outpouring of their most trivial as well as of their most important thoughts, hopes, or aspirations. Thus, the reader will cease to be astonished that, when Adela, in the anguish of her heart, had contemplated flight from the paternal roof as the only alternative save a hateful marriage, Rosamond insisted upon accompanying her. Much as they loved and revered their father, they were both prepared to sacrifice even filial affection and filial duty for each other's sake. This feeling may be looked upon as one involving a grievous fault on their side: it was not, however, the less firmly rooted in their minds,—for they were all and all to each other!



CHAPTER XII.

ADELAID AND ROSAMOND.

SIR CHRISTOPHER ELUNT, Mr. Howard, and Frank Curtis were soon seated in Mr. Torrens' comfortable parlour, the walls of which were adorned with an infinite variety of architectural plans set in carved oaken frames.

A cheerful fire blazed in the grate; wine was placed upon the table; and the travellers were speedily as much at their ease as they could wish, or as their host could render them.

The young ladies were in another apartment, Mr. Torrens having desired them to remain in the drawing-room while the commercial part of the projected matrimonial arrangement was being settled in the parlour.

When the usual complimentary phrases had been exchanged, and Sir Christopher had observed that the weather was remarkably fine but very cold—a proposition to which Mr. Torrens entirely assented—for somehow or another people never do contradict each other when commenting on that subject;

—when, also, a glass or two of wine had been imbibed by each, the knight inquired whether Mr. Torrens happened to be acquainted with a Captain Sparks?

The answer was a negative.

Sir Christopher then began to relate the adventure of the evening; and, although he was constantly interrupted by his nephew, who was anxious to interpolate in the narrative certain saving clauses respecting his own valour towards the highwayman, the worthy knight nevertheless succeeded at length in bringing the tale to an end.

"It is clear," said Mr. Torrens, "that you were first duped and then robbed by an infamous scoundrel. But have you any notion how he could have learnt enough of the pending arrangements to be enabled to talk so familiarly with regard to them when he first introduced himself to you?"

"That puzzles me, my dear sir," returned Sir Christopher.

"And it is likely to continue to puzzle you, uncle," observed Frank; "for the whole business defies conjecture. I remember, when I was in France—"

"The villain evidently knew that you would leave

town with a considerable sum of money in your possession," said Torrens; "and his aim was to get it. He did get it too."

"But not without a deuced good thrashing into the bargain," cried Frank; "and that's some consolation."

"I dare say Captain Sparks, as he calls himself, would gladly be thrashed every hour in the day on the same terms," observed the lawyer. "But I think that when our little business is concluded, I should do well to return to London and give information at Bow Street as speedily as possible."

"By no means," exclaimed Sir Christopher. "We must keep the tale to ourselves. If it got into the newspapers, with all the particulars, it would only make us look ridiculous. We might punish the man; but we should never get back the money. No—no: let the matter drop—for all our sakes. Thank heaven," continued the knight, assuming a slower and more pompous tone, "the loss is paltry—very paltry in my estimation. I shall not miss the amount, I can assure you."

"But you have no objection to my giving the scandal another good drubbing, unless, the first time I meet him again?" inquired Frank Curtis, with great apparent earnestness.

"Oh! there can be no objection to that—if the Captain will allow you so to operate on him," said the lawyer drily.

"Allow me, indeed! I should like to know how he could prevent it," exclaimed Frank, affecting deep indignation at the remark. "You should have seen the struggle we had!"

"Very likely: but I noticed your great-coat when we came in just now—and it was not soiled," said Howard.

"Of course not: I had him down all the time."

"Then it was a great pity you did not keep him there."

"Come—come—enough of this fencing," cried Sir Christopher. "Produce the deeds, Mr. Howard: my friend Torrens will take my cheque for the two thousand."

"Oh! certainly," replied the venal father.

"And to-morrow, let us hope that I shall have to give you another for three thousand more," added Sir Christopher. "Thank heaven! my cheque is as good as a Bank-note. But it was n't twenty years ago, though. Times have altered since then. And yet, as my friend Howard knows, I am proud of my humble origin."

"Yes—yes, uncle," exclaimed Frank: "we all know that perfectly. But let's to business, and then join the young ladies. I shall make them laugh with the story of the highwayman. It's the first time in my life I was ever conquered—ever overcome: and now it has n't been by fair means. I remember once, when I was at Montreuil, three French peasants had some of their nonsense with me; but I just—"

"Here are the documents, gentlemen," said Mr. Howard. "Frank shall conclude his story presently."

The agreements for the loan of the five thousand pounds were then read over; Mr. Torrens signed them; Sir Christopher Blunt wrote him a cheque for two thousand on account—the remaining three to be advanced only on condition that the proposed marriage took place;—and thus terminated the commercial part of the business.

The four gentlemen then proceeded to the drawing-room, where the two young ladies were seated.

Adelais was excessively pale; and when the odious Mr. Frank Curtis tripped smirkingly up to her, and, taking her fair hand, pressed it to his lips,—his breath, heated with wine and rendered offensive by the fumes of the cigar, steaming upon that delicate skin,—the maiden recoiled as if from something loathsome.

Her father, who observed her narrowly, cast upon her a rapid but treful glance; and Adelais exerted herself strenuously to recover her composure.

Like a victim about to be sacrificed at the altar of some avenging god, she suffered her admirer to lead her to a seat in a remote part of the room; and placing himself by her side, Frank Curtis darted a triumphant look at Howard and Sir Christopher, as much as to say, "Just see how successfully I am going to play the amiable in this quarter."

Then, turning towards the lovely Adelais, whose large blue eyes were bent timidly down, and whose bosom palpitated with a variety of painful emotions, he observed, in what he considered to be a most endearing whisper, "Come, my sweet gal, cheer up: there's nothing to be frightened at in marriage. I know that I'm not quite a lady's man; but we shall get on better together by and bye. You see, my dear, I've always been used to manly sports or to seeking adventures where some glory was to be gained—such as knocking down watchmen, or fighting with highwaymen, or killing my man in a duel—and things of that kind. But I've no doubt it will be pleasant enough to be tied to your apron-string—if the string itself is n't too tight."

Adelais raised her fine blue eyes, turned them for a moment upon her admirer, and then again fixed them on the carpet, a profound sigh escaping her bosom at the same time—but that glance, so involuntarily thrown towards her companion, was one of sudden curiosity—as if she were anxious to discover by the expression of his face whether he were indeed serious in the insufferable rhodomontade with which he sought to captivate her.

"There—that's right, my dear gal," said Curtis, mistaking the motive of that rapid look which was directed towards him; "do n't stand on any ceremony with me. In a few hours more we shall be husband and wife—"

Adelais shuddered visibly.

"Ah! I like this little modesty—it's all very proper on your part," continued the disgusting young man; "but it will soon wear off—naturally so."

The young lady now started indignantly—her countenance became crimson—and then large tears burst from her eyes. Curtis caught hold of her hand—but she withdrew it,—she literally snatched it away, as if from the jaws of a hideous reptile.

"You need n't think I'm going to eat you, Miss," said Frank in a saucy tone. "But I forgot to tell you what an adventure I had just now with a couple of highwaymen," he continued in a milder voice. "You see, as me and my uncle and Howard were coming down the lane, I fell back a little—just to think of you, my dear, at leisure; when all of a sudden three chaps jumped over a bank, and pointed their blunderbusses at me. I did n't care a rap for that; but taking the riding-whip by the thin end, I knocked down three of them—one after the other—with the handle-part, you know, and had

just made up my mind to tackle the fourth, when my bars roared and threw me. For a moment I was insensible; and during that time the fifth scoundrel picked my pocket of the two thousand pounds which I may call the purchase-money of your own dear pretty little self."

"Sir!" exclaimed Adela, aloud: "is it your intention to insult me?"

And, without waiting for a reply, but yielding to the tide of anguish and indignation which now impelled her, she rushed from the room.

Rosamond, who, while engaged in conversation with her father, Sir Christopher, and Mr. Howard at the other end of the room, had never ceased to watch her sister with the most lively interest, now immediately followed the almost heart-broken girl.

The moment the sisters had reached their bed-chamber, Adela threw herself into Rosamond's arms, exclaiming, "I will never marry him—I will die sooner!"

"Has he offended you?" inquired Rosamond, affectionately embracing her disconsolate sister. "But I need not ask! Your changing countenance—your anxious looks—your convulsive movements—and then your tears, while he sate by you—"

"Oh! my very soul revolts against him!" cried Adela, emphatically, the conflicts of agonising emotions painfully expressed on her countenance. "At first—when he approached me—it required all the exertions of which my fortitude was capable to subdue the feelings of aversion and disgust—of bitter woe and heart-felt misery—with which I was agitated;—but when his coarse language met my ears—Oh! Rosamond!" exclaimed the distracted maiden, "I must fly—I must avoid this dreadful fate—or my heart will break!"

At this moment Mr. Torrens slowly opened the door, and entered the room.

His countenance wore an expression which gave evidence that anger and compunction were maintaining a fierce struggle in his breast; but the former feeling was rapidly obtaining the ascendancy.

"Rash—disobedient girl," he exclaimed, fixing his stern cold eyes upon Adela, who still clung to her younger sister, "what signifies this folly?"

"Spare me—spare me, my dearest father!" cried Adela, suddenly tearing herself from Rosamond's embrace, and falling on her knees before her sire: "I cannot marry that horrible man!"

Mr. Torrens bit his lip almost till the blood came. "Listen to me, my dear father," continued the despairing girl, joining her hands together, while her cheeks were of marble whiteness, unanimated by a tinge of vital colouring.—"I am your daughter, and must obey you; but if you persist in saying, 'Excuse that man as your husband,' it is the same as if you were to utter the word, 'Die!' Oh! no—you cannot—you will not sacrifice me in this cruel, cruel manner! What have I done to offend you, that my unhappiness has become your sin! Dearest father—relent—I implore you: on my knees, I beseech you to save me ere it be too late!"

"Adela," exclaimed Mr. Torrens, arming himself with that fatal sophistry which led him to believe that he was the only judge of what was fitting for his daughter's welfare and happiness.—"Adela, rise—I command you!"

The miserable girl obeyed, but staggered with vacillating and irregular steps towards a chair, in

which she sank, the agony of her soul now expelling all power of reflection from its seat.

"I have gone too far to retreat—even if I were so disposed," continued Mr. Torrens. "Your happiness will be ensured by this union."

"Her happiness, father!" said Rosamond, reproachfully. "Oh! no—never, never!"

"Undutiful girl!" cried the venal parent: "do you league with your sister against me? I tell you that Adela is about to become the wife of a young man who can give her an enviable position in society, and who at his uncle's death, will inherit an immense fortune. It is true that Mr. Curtis is somewhat rough in manner and incautious with his tongue; but perfection exists not in this world. To be brief, this marriage shall take place—it must—I dare not retract."

"Father, one word more," exclaimed Adela, suddenly recovering her power of thought and speech—those powers which anguish had for a few minutes completely subdued: "you are about to sell your daughter to that man—he boasted to me that a few thousand pounds were the purchase-money—and hence my abrupt departure from the room."

"The phrase was wrong—ill-chosen—coarse," ejaculated Mr. Torrens, evidently smarting under this announcement: "but we must not judge of words themselves—we must only look to the motives of him who utters them. Mr. Curtis is incapable of insulting you—"

"Oh! you know not how abhorrent is the coarseness of his language!" cried Adela, bursting into a torrent of tears.

"You provoke me beyond the limits of human patience!" ejaculated Mr. Torrens, stamping his foot with rage. "But no more of this. You know my will—prepare to obey it. I ask you not to return to the drawing-room to-night;—to-morrow morning let me hope that you will show yourself a dutiful daughter towards a father who is anxious only to ensure your prosperity."

Mr. Torrens then impressed a cold kiss upon the fair foreheads of Adela and Rosamond, and hastily quitted the apartment.

For some minutes after the door had closed behind them, the sisters sat gazing upon each other in the silence of painful and awful reflection.

Yet beautiful were they in their sorrow; for the unstudied attitudes and abandonment of limb which such a state of mind produces, gave additional grace to the just proportions of their forms, and imparted an expression of the most tender interest to the perfect composition of their features.

"Sister," at length said Rosamond, in a soft, mournful tone, as she approached Adela, "what will you do?"

This question suddenly aroused the unhappy young lady to a sense of the urgent necessity of adopting some decisive measure.

Winding her arms around Rosamond's neck, she said, "I must fly from my father's house—I must abandon the paternal dwelling. O heaven! wherefore am I reduced to so fearful an alternative?"

"Speak not only of yourself, beloved Adela," murmured Rosamond chidingly; "for you know that my fate, as well as my heart, is inseparably linked with thine."

"Oh! I doubt not the sincerity of your love for me, dearest sister," exclaimed Miss Torrens; "but I tremble at the idea of making you the companion of

my flight. Have we not read in books, dear girl, that London is a dreadful place—abounding in perils of all kinds, and concealing pit-falls beneath its most pleasant places? Oh! Rosamond, you are so young—so very young to quit your father's home and venture in that great city of danger and crime!"

"But with you as my companion, Adela, I shall have courage to meet all these perils of which you speak," responded Rosamond, the tones of her voice becoming so gentle, so melting, and so persuasive, that never did she seem so dear—so very dear unto her sister as at this moment.

And now all hesitation was banished on the part of Adela:—it was settled—it was determined—Rosamond should become the companion of her flight!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RUFEMENT.

LET us now return to Rainford, whom we left on his way back to London, after having so triumphantly eased the vain-glorious Mr. Frank Curtis of the two thousand pounds.

The highwayman,—for such indeed was the gay, generous-hearted, and brave Tom Rain,—searcely condescended to bestow even a chuckle of satisfaction upon a victory so easily won—an exploit so readily accomplished.

He would have valued the prize far more, had it been obtained by means of hard blows and as the result of a desperate encounter; for the love of adventure was inherent in his disposition—and he had often courted danger in his life, for the exciting pleasure of freeing himself from its intricacy.

Having galloped his good steed to the beginning of the lane, he checked its celerity, and then proceeded at a moderate pace along the main road to the public-house where Curtis and himself had stopped to purchase their cigars about half an hour previously.

Riding up to the door of the little establishment, the highwayman leapt from his horse, and threw the reins to a dependant of the place who was conversing with the postillion of a chaise and pair that had stopped at the door.

When Rainford ascended leisurely up to the bar, with his chimney-pot hat set rakishly on one side, his white coat comfortably buttoned up, and his riding-whip in his hand, the landlord instantly recollected him again, and observed, as he drew the liquor which the highwayman ordered, "Back to London, sir, to-night!"

"Yes," replied Tom carelessly: "I just escorted my friend as far as Terrens Cottage, and shall now get home again."

These words produced a visible emotion on the part of a tall, handsome, dark-haired young man, who was also standing at the bar. He was well protected by a great coat against the cold; and Tom therefore very naturally concluded that he was the traveller journeying in the post-chaise outside.

"Terrens Cottage!" cried the landlord. "Why, I do declare that's the very ticket. This gentleman here was just making inquiries whether I had any one that could take a note there in a confidential way."

The landlord blurted forth this announcement without heeding the significant coughs and "hems" of the tall young gentleman, who seemed greatly annoyed that the object of his call at the public-house should thus be published to the very first stranger who entered the place after him.

"You should keep a closer tongue in your head," said Tom Rain. "How do you know what harm might be done by your stupidity in letting out the gentleman's business in this kind of way? Fortunately, I am not the kind of fellow to do mischief; and in this case, it may be, that I can effect some good."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the tall young gentleman, his countenance suddenly exchanging the expression of annoyance which the landlord's garrulity had excited, for one indicative of hope and joy.

"Yes—I think so," said Tom. "But we must have a few words in private."

"Walk into the parlour, gentlemen," cried the landlord. "There's no one in that room at present."

Rainford and the tall stranger followed this suggestion; and when the door was closed behind them, the highwayman said, "If I am not very much mistaken, you must be the gentleman whom that lying braggart Frank Curtis is endeavouring to cut out!"

"My name is Clarence Villiers, sir," was the guarded reply.

"And you are the lover of Mr. Torrens's eldest daughter," continued Rainford. "Now do not waste valuable time by reflecting whether you shall make me your confidant, or not. I am disposed to serve you; tell me how I can do it."

"You will excuse me," said Villiers in a polite but somewhat reserved tone, "if I first request to be informed to whom I have the honour of speaking."

"Captain Sparks," was the immediate reply. "I happen to know old Sir Christopher and his precious nephew; and I rode down with them nearly as far as the cottage. But I did not accept their invitation to go in—for particular reasons of my own. You may, however, suppose that I am well acquainted with all the particulars of this infamous case. Miss Adela Torrens loves Mr. Clarence Villiers and hates Mr. Frank Curtis; but Mr. Frank Curtis is the successful suitor with the mercenary father, because a certain five thousand pounds—"

"Enough, Captain Sparks!" ejaculated Villiers. "I see that you do indeed know all. And will you serve me in this strain?"

"I will—honour bright!" cried Tom. "There's my hand upon it. Now say what is to be done. It is already past eight o'clock," he added, after a hasty reference to a handsome gold watch which he drew from his bosom.

"My object was to obtain an interview with Adela in some way or another, and urge her to—"

"Speak plainly, my friend," cried Rain. "To clope with you. Well!—do you mean every thing that is honourable?"

"As God is my judge," said the young man solemnly. "I have frequently urged the dear girl to consent to a clandestine marriage with me; but the purity of her soul has ever revolted against a course which she considers to be marked with duplicity."

"Where would you convey her during the inter-

val that must necessarily elapse before you can marry her!" asked Rainford. "Because, as she is a minor, I suppose you could not obtain a special licence without her father's consent."

"I have an aunt in London devoted to my interests," answered Clarence; "and she would receive her with even maternal affection until I should acquire a legal right to protect her."

"So far, so good," observed Tom. "And yet a young lady eloping at night with a young man—remember, I am only speaking for the good of both of you."

"I had foreseen that difficulty also," said Villiers hastily. "The fact is, Adelaï and her sister Rosamond are so linked together by the tenderest bonds of affection, that the one would not move a step unaccompanied by the other."

"The devil!" cried Rainford: "two ladies to carry off! That increases the embarrassment of the business. Now it is very clear that it is perfectly useless for us to send a messenger down with a note: it would be intercepted by the father. But if you will sit down and write what you choose, I will undertake to have it delivered to the young lady herself."

"You!" exclaimed Clarence joyfully.

"Yes: what I promise, I will perform," said Rainford. "Follow my directions—and all shall go well."

Clarence rang the bell, ordered writing materials, and in a few minutes completed a note to his beloved Adelaï, which he read to his companion.

"Seal it," said Tom; "because it may pass through the hands of another person, after it leaves mine, and before it reaches Miss Torrens."

This suggestion was instantaneously complied with; and Rainford secured the letter about his person.

"Now," he continued, after a moment's reflection, "do you proceed with the chaise down the lane, and stop as near the cottage as is consistent with prudence. I shall retrace my way there at once. Fear nothing—but wait patiently at the place where you pull up, until I make my appearance."

Villiers promised to fulfil these instructions; and Rainford, having taken a temporary leave of him, remounted his horse and galloped towards Torrens Cottage.

The highwayman had his plan of proceeding ready digested by the time the white walls of the building, rendered particularly conspicuous in the starlight, met his view.

Allighting from his horse at a distance of about a hundred yards, he tied the animal to a tree, and then repaired towards the dwelling.

Having reconnoitred the premises, he speedily discovered the stable; and, to his infinite joy, a light streamed from one of the windows of that building.

Leaping over the palings which separated the kitchen-garden from the adjacent fields, Tom Rainford proceeded to the stable; and there, as he had anticipated, he found John Jeffreys, the groom, busily employed with his master's horse.

John was alone; and his surprise was great, when, upon being tapped on the shoulder, he turned round and beheld the highwayman.

"Silence!" said Tom in a whisper; "we have no time to lose in idle chatter. Here's five guineas for you; and you must get this note conveyed so-

cretly to Miss Torrens—Adelaï, the eldest—you know."

"It shall be done, sir," replied Jeffreys. "I am already far in the good graces of the housemaid; the cock is old and deaf; and so there's no fear of my not being able to succeed."

"Good. And you will bring me the answer up the lane, where I shall wait for you."

"And how can you read it, when you get it?" demanded Jeffreys. "The night is not quite clear enough for that."

"The answer will be a verbal one—yes or no," replied Tom.

Jeffreys promised that no delay should occur on his part; and Rainford retraced his steps to the spot where he had left his horse.

Many novelists would here pause for the honest but somewhat tedious purpose of detailing all the reflections which passed through the mind of Rainford during the mortal half-hour that elapsed ere the sounds of footsteps upon the hard soil announced the approach of some person. But as we do not wish either to spin out our narrative with dry material, or to keep the reader in any unnecessary suspense, we will at once declare that at the expiration of the aforesaid thirty minutes John Jeffreys made his appearance at the appointed spot.

"What news?" demanded Tom impatiently.

"All right——"

"And the answer!"

"Is yes."

"That's well!" exclaimed Rainford. "You may now go back, John. All that I require of you is done."

"But I have something to say to you, sir," observed the servant. "Just now, Sir Christopher sent for me up into the parlour to give me some orders; and I heard Mr. Frank, who is uncommon far gone with brandy-and-water, making a boast to the lawyer-fellow that he'd walk all round the grounds to see that every thing is safe. It seems that the lawyer has been twisting him about his little business with you just now up the lane, you know; and so Mr. Frank is as bumptious as possible. I only thought I'd better tell you of this—in case you've any business in hand that's likely to keep you about the place."

"I am very much obliged to you, John," said Rainford. "Here's another five guineas for you—and I shall not forget to speak to Old Death in your favour. But you had better get back as soon as you can, for fear you should be missed."

Jeffreys thanked the highwayman for the additional remuneration, and returned to the cottage.

It was now past nine o'clock, and Rainford murmured to himself, "I wonder how much longer they will be!"

His horse, which was a high-spirited animal, began to grow impatient of this long stoppage; and he himself shivered, in spite of the good great coat, with the nipping chill.

Another quarter of an hour elapsed; and, to the infinite joy of Tom Rain, he suddenly beheld two female figures, well muffled in shawls and furs, emerge from the obscurity at a short distance.

"All right, ladies," he said, in as loud a voice as he dared use consistently with prudence.

Adelaï and Rosamond hurried towards him, as affrighted lambs to their shepherd; and yet, when

they were close to him, they seemed unable to utter a word.

"Fear not, ladies," exclaimed the highwayman. "I am the friend to whom Mr. Villiers alluded in his note."

"Save us, then, sir—save us," said Adela, in an urgent and imploring tone; "for Mr. Curtis saw us leave the house; he was in the garden—"

At that moment the sounds of voices were heard in the direction of the cottage; and they were evidently approaching.

"Hasten up the lane, young ladies—hasten, for God's sake!" said Tom Rain. "Mr. Villiers is there with the post-chaise—and I will remain here to bar the way."

Adela and Rosamond could not even give utterance to the thanks which their hearts longed to express; terror froze the words that started to their lips; and, not daring to glance behind them, they hurried up the lane.

Tom Rainford now mounted his horse, and took his station in the middle of the way; for several persons were rapidly approaching from the house.

In a few moments they were near enough to enable Rainford to catch what they said.

"The disobedient—self-willed girls!" exclaimed one, whom Tom was right in supposing to be Mr. Torrens.

"But was n't it fortunate that I twigged them?" said Curtis. "Egad!"

"It will be much more fortunate if we overtake them," observed the lawyer.

"Bless me!—I'm out of breath," cried Sir Christopher. "I wish John would come on with the horses. Did you tell him, Frank?"

"To be sure I did. We cannot fall to overtake them. But, poor things! suppose that highwayman should fall in with them—and me not there to defend them!"

"I think it would be all the same—"

Howard was interrupted by a sudden ejaculation on the part of Mr. Torrens, who was a few paces in advance of the others, but who now abruptly came to a full stop.

"What is it!" demanded Curtis, shaking from head to foot, in spite of all the liquor he had imbibed during the day.

"Some ruffian on horseback—there—do n't you see?" exclaimed Mr. Torrens. "But I am not afraid of him; his presence here is in some way connected with my daughters."

And the bearded father rushed furiously towards the highwayman.

"Stand back!" cried Tom in his clear, stentorian voice; and this command was followed by the sharp clicking of the two pistols which he cocked.

"The robber!" exclaimed Frank Curtis, clinging to the coat-tails of Mr. Torrens, who had retreated a few paces at the ominous sound of the pistols. "At him, my dear sir—at him! I'm here to help you."

"Villain—give up the two thousand pounds, and we will let you go—on my honour as a knight!" ejaculated Sir Christopher, keeping as far remote as he deemed prudent from the sinister form which, wrapped in the white great coat, and seated composedly on the tall horse, seemed, amidst the obscurity of the night, to be a ghost disdainful to touch the earth.

"I am very much obliged to you for your kind-

ness, Sir Christopher," said Tom: "but I am not at all in fear of the necessity of purchasing my liberty at any price whatsoever. I however give you every one due warning, that the first who tries to pass this way—"

"Scoundrel! my daughters—where are they?" vociferated Mr. Torrens.

"That's it—give it him!" cried Frank Curtis. "I'll be at him when you've done."

"Go on at once," cried Howard.

"And why are you standing idle there?"

"Because it is not my business to interfere."

"Well done, lawyer!" exclaimed Tom. "No fees can recompense you for a ounce of lead in the thigh: for if I do fire, I shall only try to lame—not kill."

"Mr. Curtis—Sir Christopher—will you not help me to arrest this villain who boards us to our very faces?" exclaimed Torrens, in a towering passion.

And again he rushed forward, while Frank Curtis bent a precipitate retreat behind his uncle.

"Stand back! or, by God, I'll fire!" thundered Rainford, suddenly spurring his horse in such a manner that the length of the animal was made to block up nearly the entire width of the bye-lane.

"You dare not murder me!" cried Torrens. "My daughters will escape!"—and he attempted to pass in front of the horse.

But by a skilful manœuvre, Rainford baffled him—arrested his progress—and kept him at bay, using all the time the most desperate menaces, which he did not, however, entertain the remotest idea of putting into execution.

"Mr. Curtis, sir—will you help me?" cried the infuriated father. "My daughters are escaping before your very eyes—you are losing your bride—"

"And you the rest of the money that was to have purchased her," said Rainford coolly. "Mercenary old man, you are rightly punished."

With these words, the highwayman suddenly wheeled his horse round, and disappeared in a moment.

He had succeeded in barring the way for upwards of ten minutes against the pursuers of the two fugitive ladies; and he calculated that in less than half that time they must have reached the post-chaise which Clarence Villiers had in readiness to receive them.

Jeffreys had purposely delayed getting the horses out; and even when he did appear with them, several minutes had elapsed since the highwayman had left the path free to those who thought fit to avail themselves of the services of the animals.

These were only two—Mr. Torrens and Jeffreys himself: the latter volunteering his aid for the purpose of misleading and embarrassing the father, rather than of assisting him.

Frank Curtis affected to be suddenly taken very unwell: Sir Christopher was really so; and the lawyer, although by no means a coward, did not see any utility in basarding his life against such a desperate character as Captain Sparks (for by that denomination only did he know Tom Rain) appeared to be.

Thus, while the knight, his nephew, and the attorney retraced their steps to the cottage, leading back the horses which had been brought out for their use, Mr. Torrens and Jeffreys galloped away towards London.

CHAPTER XIV.

LADY HATFIELD AND DR. LASCELLES.—ESTHER DE MEDINA.

Two days after the incidents which we have just related, Dr. Lascelles received a message, at about noon, requesting him to repair immediately to the dwelling of Lady Hatfield, who was seriously indisposed.

He obeyed this summons with more than usual alacrity; for ever since Lord Ellingham had made him his confidant, the curiosity of the worthy doctor had been strangely piqued by the unaccountable fact that Lady Hatfield should reject the suit of a man whom she not only professed to love, but who was in every way worthy of her.

On his arrival at Lady Hatfield's residence, he was surprised to learn from Miss Mordaunt that his patient was too unwell to quit her couch; and when he was introduced into Georgiana's bed-chamber, he found her labouring under a strong nervous excitement.

In accordance with the sacred privilege of the physician, he was of course left alone with her ladyship; and, seating himself by the side of the bed, he questioned her in the usual manner.

Georgiana explained her sensations; but, although she alluded to nothing beyond those physical details which directly came within the province of the medical man, still Dr. Lascelles had no difficulty in perceiving that the mind, rather than the body, was affected.

"My dear Lady Hatfield," he said, in as gentle and mild a tone as he could possibly assume, "it is in the power of the physician to administer certain drugs which may produce temporary composure; and an opiate will encourage a good night's rest. But you will forgive me for observing that the condition in which I now find you, is scarcely one to which medical science will apply successfully—unless seconded by aid of a more refined and delicate nature."

"I do not comprehend you, doctor," exclaimed Georgiana, casting upon him a glance of mingled surprise and uneasiness.

"I mean, Lady Hatfield," resumed Lascelles, "that you are the prey to some secret grief—some source of vexation and annoyance, which medical skill cannot remove. The aid of a refined and delicate nature to which I refer, is such as can be afforded only by a sincere and confidential friend. Without for an instant seeking to draw you into any explanations, it is my duty to assure you that unless your mind be tranquillised, medicine will not successfully encounter this nervous irritability—this intense anxiety—this oppressive feeling of congenial evil, without apparent cause—and this sleeplessness at night,—of all which you complain."

"I thank you most sincerely for this candour and frankness on your part, doctor," said Lady Hatfield, after a long pause, during which she appeared to reflect profoundly. "To deny that I have suffered much in mind during the last few days, were to practise a useless deception upon you. But I require no confidant—I need not the solace of friendship. To your medical skill I trust far, at all events, a partial restoration to health; and travelling—change of scene—the excitement of visiting Paris—or some such means of diversion, will effect the rest."

These last words were, however, accompanied with a deep sigh—as if upon the lady's soul were forced the sad conviction that happiness and herself must evermore remain strangers to each other.

"I should scarcely recommend travelling in the winter time, Lady Hatfield," observed Doctor Lascelles. "Surely our own city can afford that constant variety of recreation and those ever-changing scenes of amusement, which may produce a beneficial effect upon your spirits."

"I abhor the pleasures of the fashionable world, doctor," said Georgiana emphatically. "There is something so cold in the orientation of that sphere—so chilling in its magnificence—so formal in its pursuits—so ceremonial, so thoroughly artificial in all its features and proceedings, that when in the crowded ball-room or the brilliant soirée, I even feel more alone than when in the solitude of my own chamber."

"And yet, Lady Hatfield, throughout the extensive circle of your acquaintance," said the physician, "there must be at least a few endowed with intellectual qualifications adapted to render those agreeable. The most pleasant parties, composed of those select, might be given: your rank—your wealth—your own well-stored mind—and, pardon me, your beauty,—would ensure to you—"

"Oh! doctor," exclaimed Georgiana, "I can anticipate the arguments you are about to use; but, alas! my mind appears to be in that morbid state which discolours all objects with its own jaundiced thoughts. I speak thus candidly to you, doctor—because I am aware of your friendship for me—I know also that the admission I have now made will be regarded by you as a solemn secret—and perhaps your advice," she added, slowly and hesitatingly, "might prove beneficial to me. But, no—no," she exclaimed, her utterance suddenly assuming great rapidity, "it is useless to say more: advice cannot serve me!"

"There is scarcely a possible case of human vexation, grief, or annoyance, which cannot be relieved by the solace, or ameliorated by the counsel, of a friend," observed Doctor Lascelles, dwelling emphatically upon his words.

Georgiana played abstractedly with the long, luxuriant hair which streamed over her shoulders, and spread its shining masses on the white pillow; but at the same time the snowy night-dress rose and sank rapidly with the heaving of her bosom.

"Believe me, Lady Hatfield," continued Doctor Lascelles, after a short pause, during which he vainly awaited a reply to his former observation, "I am deeply grieved to find that one who so little deserves the sting of grief or the presence of misfortune, should suffer from either the sharpness of the first, or the agonies of the latter. But is it not possible, my dear lady,—and now, forgive me if I avail myself of the privilege of a physician to ask this question,—is it not possible, I say, that you have conjured up phantoms which have no substantial existence? Remember that there are certain conditions of the mind, when the imagination becomes a prey to the wildest delusions—"

"Doctor, I am no monomaniac," said Lady Hatfield abruptly. "But justly, indeed—oh! most justly and truly did you ere now assert that I little deserve the sting of grief! If through any little—any weakness—any frailty on my part, I had

merited the sore displeasure of heaven — at that time —

She checked herself abruptly, and burst into a flood of tears; and for a few moments her countenance appeared to be the sad index of a breaking heart.

"Doctor," she observed at length, "pardon this manifestation of weakness on my part; but my spirits are so depressed — my mind feels so truly wretched, that I cannot control these tears. Think no more of what we have been saying; I wish that we had not said so much! Leave me a prescription, and visit me again in the course of the day."

Lascelles wrote out a prescription, and then took his departure, wondering more than ever what secret cause of grief was nourished in the bosom of Lady Hatfield.

That this secret grief was the motive which had induced or compelled her to refuse the hand of Lord Ellingham, he could not doubt; — that it arose from no crime — weakness — nor frolic on her part, he felt assured; inasmuch as her own words, uttered in a paroxysm of mental anguish and not in a calm moment when deception might be her aim, proved that fact; — and that it was associated with any physical ailment, he could hardly believe. Because, if she were the prey to an insidious disease, no feeling of shame — no false delicacy could possibly force a woman of her good sense and naturally powerful mind to keep such a fact from her physician. What, then, could be that secret and profoundly-rooted cause of grief? Was it monomania of some novel or very rare kind? The curiosity of the man of science was keenly whetted; he already began to suspect that he was destined to discover some new phase in the constitution of the human mind; and he resolved to adopt all the means within his reach to solve the mystery.

This curiosity on his part was by no means of a common, vulgar, or base nature. Considering the profession and researchful disposition of the man, it was a legitimate and entirely venial sentiment. It was not that curiosity which loves to feed itself upon the materials of scandal. It was purely in connexion with the thirst of knowledge and the passion for discovery which ever animated him in that sphere of science to which he was so enthusiastically devoted.

The doctor was proceeding homewards, when he encountered Lord Ellingham. The Earl was walking by the side of an elderly gentleman, on whose arm hung a tall and graceful young lady; but the physician did not immediately catch a glimpse of her countenance, as it was turned towards Lord Ellingham, who was speaking at the moment.

The nobleman shook Lascelles warmly by the hand, and immediately introduced his companions by the names of Mr. and Miss de Medina.

The doctor bowed, and then cast a glance at the countenance of the young lady; but he started as if with a sudden pang, — for in the beautiful Jewess who now stood before him, he beheld — apparently past all possibility of error — the same female who a few days previously had attempted self-destruction in South-Moulton Street.

But, almost simultaneously with this unexpected conviction, the solemn promise which he had made to Tom Rainford (whom he only knew on that occasion by the denomination of Jameson) flashed to the mind of Doctor Lascelles; and, instantly con-

posing himself, he uttered some observation of a general nature.

"I am glad we have thus met, doctor," said Lord Ellingham, who had not noticed his sudden, but evanescent excitement; "for my friend Mr. de Medina is a comparative stranger in London, and it is as well," added the nobleman, with a smile, "that he should become acquainted with the leading physician of the day."

"I believe that no one enjoys health so good as to be enabled to dispense altogether with our assistance," said the physician, bowing in acknowledgment of the compliment thus paid him. "The most perfect piece of mechanism must necessarily need repair sometimes."

"Decidedly so," said Lord Ellingham. "But we will not assert that physicians are necessary evils, doctor — in the same sense as the lawyers are."

"I appeal to Miss de Medina whether his lordship be not, by implication, too hard upon my profession," exclaimed Lascelles, laughing.

"His lordship," replied Esther, "was yesterday riding a very high-spirited horse; and had he been thrown in such a manner as to have incurred injury, I question whether he would have believed that his medical attendant was an evil, however necessary."

"I owe you my profound gratitude for this powerful defence of my profession, Miss de Medina," said the doctor, who had thus succeeded in compelling the young lady to speak.

He then raised his hat and passed on; but he had not proceeded many paces, when he was overtaken by Lord Ellingham, who had parted from his companions to have a few minutes' conversation with the doctor.

"That is a lovely girl to whom your lordship has just introduced me," said Lascelles.

"And as good in heart as she is beautiful in person," exclaimed the nobleman.

"Ah!" cried the physician, with a sly glance: "is Lady Hatfield already forgotten?"

"Far from it!" said Arthur, his tone instantly becoming mournful and his countenance overclouded. "You cannot think me so fickle — so vacillating, doctor. No: the image of Georgiana is never absent from my memory. I had only encountered Mr. de Medina and his daughter a few minutes before we met you; and, not only am I bound to show them every attention in my power, as they are tenants of mine and were strongly recommended to me by mutual friends at Liverpool — but also I am glad to court intellectual society, wherever it can be found in this city, to distract my mind from the one topic which so constantly and so painfully engrosses it."

"Are Mr. de Medina and his daughter such very agreeable companions?" inquired Lascelles, apparently in quite a casual manner.

"Mr. de Medina is a well-informed, intelligent, and even erudite man," answered the Earl. "His daughter is highly accomplished, sensible, and amiable. I feel an additional interest in them, because they belong to a race whom it is the fashion to revile and often to despise. It is true that my acquaintance with Mr. de Medina and his daughter scarcely dates from a month back; but I have already seen — and if not, I have heard enough of them, to know that he is the pattern of integrity and the young lady the personification of every virtue."



The doctor made no reply. Certain was he that he "could a tale unfold" which would totally undeceive his noble friend relative to the character of Esther. But his lips were sealed by a solemn vow; and, even if they were not, there was no necessity to detail how he had been summoned to attend on the young lady and rescue her from the fate and crime of suicide,—how he had good cause to know that she was either a wife or a mistress, but he suspected the latter,—how he had seen that splendid form stretched half-naked upon the bed, the bosom heaving convulsively with physical and mental agony, and the exquisitely modelled arms flung wildly about with excruciating pain,—how the large black eyes had been fixed imploringly upon him, and the vermilion lips had parted to give utterance to words demanding from himself the fiat of her life or death:—there was no necessity, we say, to narrate all this, even if no vow had bound him to silence, because Lord Ellingham sought not that lovely Jewess as a wife.

That Esther de Medina and the lady of South Moulton Street were one and the same person, the doctor felt convinced. The tones of Esther's voice, flowing upon the ear with such silver melody,—the

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two rows of brilliant, beautiful teeth,—the face—the hair—the eyes,—the configuration of the form, with its fine but justly proportioned bust and slender waist,—all were identical! But what chiefly amazed—nay, bewildered the physician, was the calm indifference with which Esther had met his rapid, searching glance,—the admirable composure with which she had encountered him—the firmness, amounting almost to an insolent assurance, with which she had spoken to him,—never once quailing, nor blushing, nor manifesting the slightest embarrassment, but actually treating him as a person whom she saw for the first time, and as if he were totally unacquainted with any thing that militated against her character;—all this was naturally a subject of ineffable astonishment and wonder.

Lord Ellingham accompanied the doctor to Grafton Street; and when they had entered the house, Dr. Lancelotti made him acquainted with Lady Hatfield's indisposition.

"She is ill!" ejaculated Arthur, profoundly touched by these tidings: "and I dare not call even to inquire concerning her!"

"And wherefore should you not manifest that courtesy?" asked the doctor.

"I must forget her—I cannot demonstrate any farther interest in her behalf!" exclaimed the nobleman. "If there really exist reasons which render it impossible or imprudent for her to change her condition by marriage, it is useless for us to meet again—and if she be swayed by caprice, I cannot suffer myself to be made the sport of her whims."

"There are the wanton, wilful whims of a coquette," said the doctor, impressively; "and there are the delusions of the monomaniac—but the latter are not the less conscientiously believed, although they be nothing save delusions."

"Is it possible?" cried Arthur, a sudden ray of hope breaking in upon him. "Can Georgiana be subject to phantasies of that nature? Oh! then she can be cured, doctor—and your skill may yet make us happy!"

"Rest assured, my dear Earl," was the reply, "that all the knowledge which I possess shall be devoted to that purpose."

"My eternal gratitude will be due to you, doctor," said the nobleman. "With your permission I shall return in the evening to learn from you how your charming patient progresses."

The physician signified his assent; and Lord Ellingham took his departure, new hopes animating his soul.

CHAPTER XV.

THE OPIATE.

It was about seven o'clock in the evening when Dr. Lascelles returned to Lady Hatfield's house on Piccadilly Hill.

Miss Mordaunt, whom he encountered in the drawing-room, informed him that Georgiana had become more composed and tranquil since she had taken the medicine which he had prescribed for her, and that she had requested to be left alone, as she experienced an inclination to sleep.

"It is nevertheless necessary that I should see her," said the physician.

Julia accordingly hastened to her friend's apartment, and speedily returned with the information that Lady Hatfield was not yet asleep, and that the doctor might walk up.

Lascelles immediately availed himself of this permission; but he found—as indeed he had fully anticipated—that his patient was rapidly yielding to the invincible drowsiness produced by the opiate medicine which he had prescribed for her.

He seated himself by the bed-side, asked her a few ordinary questions, and then suffered her to fall undisturbed into slumber.

At length she slept profoundly.

A smile of satisfaction played for a moment upon the lips of the physician; but it yielded to a sombre cloud which almost immediately succeeded it—for a powerful struggle now suddenly arose in the breast of Dr. Lascelles.

In his ardent devotion to the science which he professed, he longed to satisfy himself on certain points at present admitting of doubt and involved in uncertainty; and, on the other hand, he hesitated at the accomplishment of a deed which he could not help regarding as a gross abuse of his privileges as a medical man. By virtue of the most sacred confidence he was admitted to the bed-chamber of his

female patient; and he shrank from exercising that right in an illegitimate way.

Then, again, he reasoned to himself that if he were enabled to ascertain beyond all doubt that no physical cause induced Lady Hatfield to shrink from marriage, he must fall back upon the theory that she had become subject to certain monomaniac notions which influenced her mind to her own unhappiness; and he at length persuaded himself that he should be acting for her best interests, were he to put into execution the project which he had already formed.

Such an opinion, operating upon a man who possessed but few of the delicate and refined feelings of our nature, and who was ever ready to sacrifice all considerations to the cause of the medical science, speedily banished hesitation.

Having convinced himself that Georgiana slept so profoundly that there was no chance of awaking her, he locked the door, and again approached the bed.

And now his sacrilegious hands drew aside the snow-white dress which covered the sleeping lady's bosom; and the treasures of that gently-beaving breast were exposed to his view. But not a sensual thought was thereby excited in his mind: cold and passionless, he surveyed the beautiful spectacle only as a sculptor might measure the proportions of a marble Venus or Diana the huntress.

And not a trace of cancer was there: no unseemly mark, nor mole, nor scar, nor wound disfigured the glowing orb that, rising from a broad and ample chest, swelled laterally over the upper part of the arms.

Yet wherefore did Dr. Lascelles abruptly start and why did his countenance suddenly assume an expression of surprise—or rather of mingled doubt and astonishment—as his glances wandered over the fair bust thus exposed to his view?

Carefully and cautiously refastening the strings of the night-dress, he now assumed the air of a man who had discovered some clue to a mystery hitherto profoundly veiled; and unhesitatingly did he resolve to clear up all his doubts and all his newly-awakened suspicions.

Five minutes afterwards Dr. Lascelles left the room, Lady Hatfield still remaining buried in a deep slumber.

His countenance expressed surprise mingled with sorrow; and, cold—phlegmatic though his disposition was, he could not help murmuring to himself, "Is it possible?"

Having just looked into the drawing-room, to take leave of Miss Mordaunt, and state that his patient was progressing as favourably as could be expected, Dr. Lascelles returned home.

Lord Ellingham was waiting for him; and this interview the physician now dreaded.

"Are your tidings favourable, doctor?" was the nobleman's hasty and anxious inquiry.

"I regret, my dear Earl," answered Lascelles, "that I should have encouraged hopes—"

"Which are doomed to experience disappointment," added Arthur bitterly. "Oh! I might have anticipated this—unfortunate being that I am! But how have you ascertained that your ideas of this morning are unfounded? How have you convinced yourself that Georgiana is not a prey to those mental

eccentricities which your skill might reach? Has she revealed to you her motive for refusing—for rejecting me,—as when she professes to love?"

"She has revealed nothing, my lord," replied the doctor solemnly. "But I have satisfied myself that monomania and Lady Hatfield are total strangers to each other."

"Then must I abandon all hope!" exclaimed the Earl; "for it is evident that I am the victim of a ridiculous caprice. And yet," he added, a sudden thought striking him, "I will see her once again. She is ill—she is suffering—perhaps she will be pleased to behold me—and who knows—"

"Not this evening, my lord—not this evening!" cried the doctor, stopping the nobleman who had seized his hat and was darting towards the door. "Lady Hatfield sleeps—and she must not be disturbed."

But Lord Ellingham was too full of his new idea to pay any attention to the physician; and he rushed from the house.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LOVER AND THE UNCLE.

A FEW minutes brought Arthur to the residence of Lady Hatfield; and his hand was already upon the knocker, when a sudden idea struck him—and he asked himself, "How can I demand admission to the bed-chamber of Georgiana?"

The madness of his project now being evident to him, he mournfully turned away, when the door suddenly opened, and a tall, stout, fine-looking man, dressed as a country squire, issued from the house.

Lord Ellingham immediately recognised Sir Ralph Walsingham, Georgiana's uncle, with whom he was well acquainted. The baronet also perceived the Earl; and they shook each other cordially by the hand.

"Were you about to call?" inquired Sir Ralph.

"I was," answered Lord Ellingham. "Hearing of Lady Hatfield's illness—"

"She is better—much better," interrupted the baronet. "I have just left her; and she has not long awoken from a profound and refreshing slumber."

"I am delighted to hear those tidings," said the nobleman.

The servant, seeing that Sir Ralph had stopped to converse with the Earl, still kept the door open; and, as Arthur had admitted that he was about to call, there was now no alternative save for him to leave his card.

The baronet then took his arm; and they walked away together.

"Georgiana is a singular being," observed Sir Ralph; "and although she is my niece, yet there are times when I hardly know what to make of her. She is too intellectual—too steady—to be capricious; and still—"

"My dear Sir Ralph," interrupted the Earl, "you have touched upon the very topic concerning which I longed to speak the moment I met you. Will you accompany me to my abode, and favour me for a short period with your attention to what I am so anxious to confide to you?"

"With pleasure," was the reply. "But I have already learnt from Georgiana's lips the principal

fact to which your lordship doubtless alludes; and it was indeed for the purpose of introducing the subject that I ere now made the remark relative to the occasional incomprehensibility of her character. Let us not, however, continue the discourse in the public street."

The nobleman and the baronet speedily reached the mansion of the former in Pall-Mall West; and when they were seated in an elegantly furnished apartment, with a bottle of claret before them, they renewed the conversation.

"Georgiana," said the baronet, "has informed me that your lordship has honoured her by the offer of your hand; and I need hardly assure you how rejoiced I should feel to welcome as a relative one whom I already esteem as a friend. But—to my inexplicable surprise—I find that—that—"

"That she has refused me," exclaimed the Earl;—"refused me without assigning any reason."

"I cannot think how it is to be accounted for," continued the baronet; "but Georgiana has invariably manifested a repugnance to the topic of marriage whenever I have urged it upon her. Of course, as her uncle—and double her age, my lord—I can give her advice just as if I were her father; and for some years past I have recommended her to consider well the propriety of obtaining a legal protector, her natural ones being no more. But all my reasoning has proved unavailing; and if your lordship cannot persuade my obstinate niece," he added, with a sly laugh, "then no one must hope to do so."

"I will frankly admit to you," said the Earl, "that my happiness depends on your niece's decision. I am no hero of romance—but I entertain so sincere, so ardent an affection for Lady Hatfield, that my life will be embittered by a perseverance in her refusal to allow me to call her mine."

"She will not persist in this folly—she cannot," exclaimed Sir Ralph emphatically. "It is a mere whim—a caprice; and indeed I have often thought that her disposition has somewhat altered ever since a dreadful fright which she sustained six or seven years ago—"

"Ah!" said the Earl. "What was the nature of the incident to which you allude?"

"I must tell your lordship," returned the baronet,—"unless, indeed, you are already acquainted with the fact,—that Hampshire was for three or four years—between 1818 and 1821 or 22—the scene of the exploits of a celebrated highwayman—"

"You allude to the Black Mask, no doubt!" interrupted Lord Ellingham interrogatively.

"Precisely so," answered the baronet. "The Black Mask—as the villain was called—was one of the most desperate robbers that ever infested the highways. He would stop the stage-coach as readily as he would a single traveller on horseback; and such was his valour as well as his extraordinary skill, that he defied all attempts to capture him."

"I remember reading his exploits at the time," said the Earl. "The most conflicting accounts were reported concerning him. Some declared he was an old man—others that he was quite young; but I believe that all agreed in ascribing to him a more forbearing disposition than usually characterises persons of his class."

"I will even go so far as to assert that there was something chivalrous in his character," exclaimed the baronet. "He invariably assured travellers

whom he stopped, that he should be grieved to harm them; but that if they provoked him by resistance, he would not hesitate to punish them severely. If he fell in with a carriage containing ladies, he never attempted to rifle them of their jewellery and trinkets, but contented himself with simply demanding their purses. Those being surrendered, he would gallop away. I never heard of any unnecessary violence—nor of any act of cruelty which he perpetrated. Neither did I ever meet a soul who could give anything like a credible description of his countenance. The invariable black mask which concealed his features, and from the use of which he derived his name, seemed a portion of himself; and although gossips did now and then tell strange tales about his appearance, they were all too contradictory to allow a sentimental of the real truth to transpire.

"But in what manner was the Black Mask connected with the fright which Lady Hatfield experienced some years ago?" asked the Earl impatiently.

"You are perhaps aware that the late Earl and Countess of Mauleverer possessed a country-seat between Winchester and New Alresford—not very far distant from Walsingham Manor, my own rural abode," said Sir Ralph. "It must have been seven years ago that Georgiana, who always preferred Mauleverer Lodge to the town-mansion—even during the London season,—was staying alone there—I mean so far alone, that at the time there were no other persons at the Lodge save the servants. Well, one night the Black Mask broke into the place—the only time he was ever known to commit a burglary—and such was the fright which Georgiana experienced, that for weeks and months afterwards her family frequently trembled lest her reason had received a shock."

"It must indeed have been an alarming situation for a young lady—alone, as it were, in a spacious and secluded country dwelling—"

"And Georgiana was but eighteen, I think, at the time," interrupted Sir Ralph Walsingham. "She certainly experienced a dreadful fright; and although, thank God! her reason is as unimpaired as ever it was, still we cannot say that the sudden shock might not have produced some strange effect which may probably account for the otherwise inexplicable whimsicality—for I can denominate it nothing else—"

"Oh! I thank you, my dear Sir Ralph, for this explanation," cried Lord Ellingham, in the joy of reviving hope. "Yes—I see it all: your niece experienced a shock which has produced a species of idiosyncratic effect upon her; but the constant kindness—the unwearied attention of one who loves her, and whom she loves in return, will restore her mind to its vigorous and healthy condition. Tomorrow will I visit her again—Oh! how unkind—how ungenerous of me to remain away so long!"

There was a pause, during which Arthur gave way to all the bright allurements of the pleasing vision which he now conjured up to his imagination.

At length Sir Ralph Walsingham felt the silence to be irksome and awkward; and he ventured to break it.

"We were talking just now, my lord," he said, "of the famous highwayman known as the Black Mask. He disappeared from Hampshire very suddenly; and the old women declared that his time

being out, he was carried off by the Devil, who had protected him against all the devices and snares imagined by the authorities to capture him."

"And perhaps the highwayman who robbed Lady Hatfield the other day," observed Lord Ellingham, "may be the very one who rendered himself so notorious in Hampshire a few years ago!"

"Your lordship judges by the fact that the scoundrel who stopped my niece near Hounslow wore a black mask," said the baronet; "but the generality of robbers on the high roads adopt that mode of disguise. Thank heaven! public depredators of the kind are becoming very scarce in this country!"

In such conversation did the nobleman and the baronet while away the time until eleven o'clock, when the latter took his leave, and Arthur retired to his chamber to dream of the charming but incomprehensible lady who had obtained such empire over his soul.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER.—JACOB.

ON the same evening that the interview between the Earl of Ellingham and Sir Ralph Walsingham took place, as narrated in the preceding chapter, the following scene occurred at the house of Toby Bunce in Earl Street, Seven Dials.

Mrs. Bunce was alone in the dirty, dingy back room, which could not be said to be lighted, but merely redeemed from total darkness, by the solitary candle that stood on the table; and she was busily employed in lighting the fire.

Having succeeded in this object, she placed the kettle on the grate to boil; and then took from a cupboard a bottle half full of gin, two common blue mugs, a broken basin containing a little lump sugar, and a couple of pewter spoons, all of which articles she ranged around the brass candle-stick with a view to make as good a show as possible.

Then she seated herself by the fire, and consulted an old silver-watch which she drew from her pocket, and which was in reality the property of her husband, whom she would not however trust with it under any consideration.

"Eight o'clock," she said aloud in a musing tone. "He can't be very long now; and Toby won't be in till ten. If he is, I'll send him out again—with a flea in his ear," she added, chuckling at the idea of her supremacy in her own domestic sphere. "I wonder who'd be ruled by a fellow like Toby! Not me, indeed! I should think not. But I wish old Bunces would come," she continued, with a glance of satisfaction at the table. "Every thing does look so comfortable; and I've put 'em in such a manner that the light falls on 'em all at once. Toby never would have thought of that. It's only us women that know what tidiness is."

Tidiness indeed! The windows were dingy with dirt—the walls were begrimed with smoke and dust—the floor was as black as the deck of a collier—and the cobwebs hung like filthy rags in the corners of the room.

Scarcely had Mrs. Bunce completed her survey of the place and its arrangements, when a low knock summoned her to the street-door; and in a few moments she returned, accompanied by Old Death.

The hideous man was very cold; and, seating

himself as near the fire as possible without actually burning his knees, he said, "Now, Betsy my dear, brew me a mug of something cheering as soon as possible."

"That I will, Ben," returned Mrs. Bunce, in as pleasant a tone of voice as she could assume; then she bustled about with great alacrity until the steaming liquid was duly compounded, and Old Death had expressed his satisfaction by means of a short grunt after the first sip.

"Is it nice, Ben?" asked Mrs. Bunce endearingly.

"Very. Now make yourself some, Betsy; and sit down quietly, for we must have a talk about you know what. Business has prevented me from attending to it before; but now that I have got an evening to spare—and Toby is out of the way—"

"Oh! you know very well, Ben," interrupted Mrs. Bunce, "that I can always manage him as I like. He's such a fool, and so completely under my thumb, that I should n't even mind telling him I'd been your mistress for years before I was his wife."

"Keep your tongue quiet, Betsy—keep your tongue quiet," exclaimed Old Death, with a hyena-like growl. "Never provoke irritation unnecessarily. But let's to business. Jacob is out on the watch after Tom Rain; and I told the lad to come up here before ten. And now about this letter," he continued drawing one from his pocket-book: "it proves, you see, that the child is well-born—and if the address had only been written on the outside, we might make a good thing of the matter."

"Just so," observed Mrs. Bunce. "When Mr. Rainford called this afternoon he was so particular in asking me whether I had found any papers about the woman's clothes; but I declared I had not—and he was quite satisfied. He paid me, too, very handsome for the funeral expenses and all my trouble. If he was to know about that letter, Ben!"

"How can he know!" exclaimed Old Death impatiently. "Now what I think," he continued in a milder tone, "is just this—the woman Watts was reduced to such a desperate state of poverty, that she wrote this letter to the mother of the boy Charles—"

"Why, of course," interrupted Mrs. Bunce. "She says as much in the letter."

"Will you listen to me!" growled Old Death angrily: "you do n't know what I was going to observe."

"Do n't be cross, Ben: I won't stop you again," said the woman in a coaxing tone.

"Mind you do n't, then," ejaculated Bunce, allowing himself to be pacified. "Well, this Sarah Watts wrote that letter, as I was saying, with the intention of sending it, no doubt, either by post or by an acquaintance to the lady in London. I think that is plain enough. Then, when she had finished writing it, something evidently made her change her mind, and resolve on coming up to London herself. This is also plain; because, if it was n't so, why did the letter never go—and why did she come to London!"

"How well you do talk, Ben," said Mrs. Bunce.

"I talk to the point, I hope," observed Old Death. "Now how stands the matter? Here is a very important letter, wanting two main things to render it completely valuable to us. The first thing it

wants is the name of the place from which it would have been dated, had it ever been sent: and the second thing it wants is the name of the lady to whom it was intended to be sent. In a word, it wants the address of the writer and the address of the lady to whom it was written, and who is the mother of that boy Charles."

"What good would it do you to have the address of the writer, since she is dead and buried?" asked Mrs. Bunce.

"Because I could then visit the place where the woman was when she wrote this letter," replied Old Death. "I could make inquiries concerning the late Sarah Watts; and I know too well how to put two and two together not to arrive at some certainty in the long run."

"To be sure!" ejaculated Mrs. Bunce. "How clever you are, dear Ben."

"I do n't know about being clever, Betsy my dear," returned the hideous old man; "but this I do think—that I'm rather wide awake."

And then he chuckled so heartily, while his toothless jaws wagged up and down so horribly, that he appeared to be a corpse under a process of galvanism; for if a dead body could be made to utter sounds, they would not be more sepulchral than those which now emanated from the throat of Old Death.

Mrs. Bunce considered it to be her duty to chuckle also; and her querulous tones seemed a humble accompaniment to the guttural sounds which we have attempted to describe.

At length the chuckling ceased on both sides; and Mrs. Bunce replenished the mugs with hot gin-and-water.

"But even as it is," suddenly observed Old Death, after a hasty glance at the letter, which he now slowly folded up and returned to his greasy pocket-book,— "but even as it is, we may still make something of the business. If we could only find a clue to the mother of that boy, it would be a fortune in itself. I tell you what we must do!" he exclaimed emphatically.

"What?" asked his ancient mistress.

"Get that boy into our own keeping," replied Bunce, with a sly smile; "and then we can pump him of all he may happen to know concerning the deceased Sarah Watts."

"Excellent!" cried Mrs. Bunce, clapping her hands. "But how will you find out where Mr. Rainford lives?"

"Jacob is after him. For several reasons I want to know as much as I can about that strange fellow. The very day that I made that bargain with him about smashing all the films he might bring me, he wrote an extraordinary note to the very lady whom he had robbed the night before; and he made her go into the witness-box at Bow Street and deliberately perjure herself to serve him. Then he starts off to Pall Mall, when the Jewess prisoner was brought up, and delivers a note at the house of Lord Ellingham; and Lord Ellingham comes straight down to the Police-Court and swears black and blue that the Jewess is innocent."

"And was she?" asked Mrs. Bunce.

"That's more than I can say," answered Old Death; "seeing that I know nothing at all about the affair. Well, these two strange things, showing an extraordinary influence on the part of Rainford over Lady Hatfield on the one side, and Lord

Hillingham on the other, have quite puzzled me. He is an enigma that I must solve."

"Does not Tullock know all about him?" demanded Mrs. Bunce.

"Tullock knows only that Tom took to the road some years ago, down in the country; for Tullock then did at Winchester just what I do now in London: only," added Bones, with a knowing glance and a compressed smile of the lips which puckered up his hideous face into one unvaried mass of wrinkles,— "only, my dear Betsy, Tullock never had the connexion which I have. He had no correspondent at Hamburg to whom he could send over the notes that are stolen, and stopped at the Bank: he had no well-contrived places to receive goods—places," continued Old Death, emphatically, "which have baffled the police for thirty years, and will baffle them as long again—if I live."

"And why should you not, dear?" said Mrs. Bunce coaxingly.

"Because I cannot expect it," replied Old Death abruptly. "However—you know what I have done for myself, and in what way I manage my business. You only, Betsy dear, are acquainted with my secrets."

"And you are as safe with me as if I was deaf and dumb unable to write," rejoined the woman.

"I know that—I know that," said Bones, hastily; then in a slower tone he added significantly, "Because if there was a smash, we should all go together, Betsy."

"Lor! Bee—do n't talk in that way—do n't!" cried Mrs. Bunce. "Let's see—what were we saying! Oh! you was telling me about Mr. Rainford." "I was only observing that Tullock lost sight of him for some years, and knows nothing that happened to him till he turned up in London the other day."

"I do n't suppose Rainford is his proper name!" observed the woman inquiringly.

"Tullock never told me," answered Bones; "and as he and Tom are thick together, I can't ask him too many questions. The fact is, Rainford will prove the most useful man I ever had in my service, as I may call it; and I must not risk offending him. See how neatly he did that job the other night—how beautifully he came off with the two thousand!"

"And it never got into the papers either," observed Mrs. Bunce.

"Not a bit of it!" cried Old Death, with another chuckle. "Tom calculated all that beforehand—or he never would have been fool enough to go so quietly and introduce himself as Captain Sparks to the very people he meant to rob. Ha! ha! clear-headed fellow, that Tom! He first ascertained the precise character of all the parties concerned; and he knew that he might plunder them with impunity. Sir Christopher and Mr. Torrens were sure not to talk about it, for fear of the whole disgraceful story about the purchase of the daughter coming out. Frank Curtis is a cowardly boaster, who would not like it to be known that a single highwayman had mastered him;—the lawyer was sure to speak or hold his tongue, just as his rich client Sir Christopher ordered him;—and Jefferys was safe. Tom weighed all this, and boldly introduced himself to them without the least attempt at disguising his person. Oh! it was capital! managed—and Tom is a valuable fellow!"

Mr. Bones seldom spoke so long at a time; but he was carried away by his enthusiastic admiration of Tom Rainford; and he accordingly talked himself so effectually out of breath, that a fit of coughing superseded, and he was nearly choked.

Betsy, however, slapped him on the back; and the old man gradually recovered himself—but not before his fierce-looking eyes were dimmed with the scalding rheum which overflowed them.

"You are afraid to offend Mr. Rainford," said Mrs. Bunce, after a pause, "and yet you think of taking away that boy from him."

"Pshaw!" cried Old Death, whom the coughing-fit had put into a bad humour; "do you think I should steal the child and then tell him of it?"

"Of course not," said Mrs. Bunce. "I am a fool."

"You are indeed, Betsy," rejoined Old Death. "And yet you are the least foolish woman I ever knew; or else I never should have made you my confidant as I have done. And now I tell you, Betsy, that I have many great schemes in my head; and I shall require your assistance. In the first place we must get hold of that boy Charley somehow or another—provided we can find out Rainford's abode, which I think is scarcely doubtful. Then we must act upon all the information we can glean from the child, and find out who his mother really is. In the next place I must ascertain all I can concerning this Jewess—this Esther de Medina. If she did steal the diamonds, she is the cleverest female thief in all England—for she has managed to get clean off with her prize; and such a woman would be invaluable to me. Besides, if she pursues the same game—supposing that she has really begun it—she will want my assistance to dispose of the property; and she will gladly listen to my overtures. Such a beautiful creature as I understand she is, could insinuate herself any where, and rob the best houses in London. Ah! Betsy, I must not sleep over these matters. But, hark! That's Jacob's knock!"

"Poor Jacob!" cried Mrs. Bunce, with a subdued sigh: "if he only knew—"

"Silence, woman!" cried Bones in a furious manner. "Go to the door."

Mrs. Bunce was frightened by the vehemence of Old Death's manner, and hastened to obey his command.

In a few moments she returned, followed by Jacob, who seemed sinking with fatigue.

"Well," said Old Death impatiently, "what news!"

"Give me something to eat first—for I am famished," cried Jacob, throwing himself upon a chair.

"Not a morsel, till you tell me what you have done!" exclaimed Bones angrily, as he rose from his seat.

"I will not speak a word on that subject before I have had food," said Jacob, his bright eyes flashing fire, and a hectic glow appearing on his pale cheeks.

"You make me wander about all day on your business, without a penny in my pocket to buy a piece of bread—"

"Because he who has to earn his supper works all the better for it," ejaculated Bones, his lips quivering with rage. "Now speak, Jacob—or, by God—"

"You sha'n't bully me in this way," cried the lad, bursting into tears, and yet with all the evidences of

intense passion working upon his countenance. "By what right do you treat me like a dog! You fling me a bone when you choose—and you think I will lick your hand like a spaniel. I tell you once for all, I won't put up with it any longer."

"You won't, Jacob—you won't, eh!" said Old Death, in a very low tone; but at the same time he dealt the lad such a sudden and severe box on the ears, that the poor youth was hurled heavily from his chair on the hard floor.

But, springing up in a moment, he flew like a tiger at Old Death, whose small amount of strength was exhausted by the effort which it had required on the part of so aged a man to deal such a blow; and Jacob would have mastered him in another instant, had not Mrs. Bance interfered.

With a loud scream, she precipitated herself on the lad; and, seizing him in her bony arms, forced him back into his seat, saying—"There, Jacob—for God's sake be quiet; and I'll give you something nice directly."

The lad made no reply, but darted a look of vindictive hate towards Old Death, who had sunk back exhausted on the chair which he had ere now quitted.

Then Mrs. Bance hastened to the cupboard and produced a loaf and the remains of a cold joint, which she placed before Jacob, who, enraged as he was at the treatment he had just received, could not help wondering within himself how Toby's wife had become so liberal as to place the viands without reserve at his disposal.

The woman seemed to penetrate his thoughts; for she said, "Eat as much as you like, Jacob; do n't be afraid. I sha'n't mind if you eat it—nearly all."

The lad smothered his resentment so far as not to permit it to interfere with his appetite; and he devoured his sapper without once glancing towards Old Death, who on his side appeared unable to recover from the surprise into which Jacob's unusually rebellious conduct had thrown him.

A profound silence reigned in that room for several minutes.

At length Jacob made an end of his meal; and then Old Death spoke.

"And so this is the reward," he said, "which I receive for all my kindness towards you. Without me, what would have become of you! Deserted by your parents—a foundling—a miserable infant, abandoned to the tender mercies of the workhouse authorities—"

"Would that I had died then!" interrupted Jacob emphatically. "You make a boast of having taken care of me—of having reared me—such a rearing as it has, been!—and yet I wish you had left me to perish on the workhouse steps where, you say, you found me. I have tried to be obedient to you—I have done all I could to please you; but do you ever utter a kind word to me? Even when I succeeded in doing your bidding, what reward is mine? Blows—reproaches—sorry meals, few and far between—"

"Well, well, Jacob—I think I have not quite done my duty towards you," said Old Death, who in reality could have murdered the boy at that moment, but who was compelled to adopt a conciliatory tone and manner in order to retain so useful an auxiliary in his service: "but let us say no more about it—and things shall be better in future. Instead of having no regular place of abode and sleep-

ing in lodging-houses, you shall have half-a-crown a week, Jacob, to hire a little room for yourself."

"There—Jacob; only think of that!" cried Mrs. Bance, in a tone expressive of high approval of this munificence on the part of Old Death.

"And you shall have three-pence every day for your dinner, Jacob," continued Bance, "in addition to your breakfast and tea which you always get here."

"But will you keep to that arrangement?" asked the lad, considerably softened by this prospect, which was far brighter than any he had as yet beheld.

"I will—I will," replied Old Death. "And if you have brought me any good news to-night, I'll give you ten shillings—ten whole shillings, Jacob—to buy some nice clothes and shoes in Monmouth Street."

"Put down the money!" cried Jacob, now completely won back to the interests of the crafty old villain who knew so well how to curb the evanescent spirit of his miserable slave.

"I will," said Bance; and he laid four half-crowns upon the table.

"That's right!" exclaimed Jacob, his eyes glittering with delight at the prospect of fingering such a treasure; then he glanced rapidly at his ragged apparel, with a smile on his lip that expressed his conviction of shortly being able to procure a more comfortable attire.

"Go on," said Old Death. "What have you done?"

"When Mr. Rainford went away from here this afternoon," returned Jacob, "I followed him at a good distance—but not so far off that I stood a chance of losing sight of him. Well, first he went to Tullock's; and there he stayed some little time. Then he walked into an eating-house in the Strand; and at that place he stopped about a couple of hours—while I walked up and down on the other side of the way. At length he came out, with another gentleman—"

"What was he like?" demanded Old Death.

"A fine—tall—handsome man—with dark hair and eyes," responded Jacob.

"I don't know him," said Bance. "Never mind;—go on with your story, and let it be as short as possible."

"Well," continued the lad, "this gentleman and Mr. Rainford walked together as far as Bridge Street, Blackfriars; and there they parted. The gentleman went into a house in Bridge Street—and Mr. Rainford crossed the bridge. It was now getting dusk; and I was obliged to keep closer to him. But he seldom turned round—and when he did, I took good care he should not see me. So, on he went till he came to the Elephant and Castle; and close by there he suddenly met a lady with a dark veil over her face, and holding a little boy by the hand. They stood and talked for a moment just opposite a shop-window which was lighted up; and I saw well enough that the little boy was the very same that was brought here the other night by the woman who was buried so quietly this morning."

"Then we know that the boy is still in his care!" ejaculated Old Death, exchanging significant glances with Mrs. Bance. "Go on, Jacob. I can see that the ten shillings will be yours."

"Yes—that they will!" cried the lad, apparently having forgotten the blow which he had recently received. "Well, so I knew the boy at once, though

he is much changed—nicely dressed, and already quite plump and rosy. Mr. Rainford patted him on the face, and the boy laughed and seemed so happy! Then Mr. Rainford gave the lady his arm; and they walked a little way down the road till they came to a jeweller's shop, where they stopped to look in at the window. Mr. Rainford pointed out some article to the lady; and they went into the shop, the lady still holding the little boy carefully by the hand. The moment they were safe inside, I watched them through the window; and I saw Mr. Rainford looking at a pair of ear-rings. In a few moments he handed them to the lady. She lifted up her veil to examine them; and I knew her again in a moment. But who do you think she was?"

Old Death shook his head.

"No—I do n't think you ever could guess," cried Jacob.

"Then who is she?" demanded Bones impatiently.

"The Jewess who was accused of stealing the diamonds at Bow Street the other day," answered Jacob.

"Either de Medina!" cried Old Death. "The very person we were speaking about just now!" he added, exchanging another glance with Mrs. Bunce. "But go on, Jacob—go on."

"I was rather surprised at that discovery," continued Jacob; "because I thought it so odd that both Mr. Rainford and the Jewess should have been had up on the very same day at Bow Street, on different charges, and that both should have got off."

"It is strange—very strange!" murmured Old Death. "But did you find out Tom Rain's address? That is the chief thing I want to know."

"Do n't be in a hurry," said Jacob; "let me tell my story in my own way. Well, so the Jewess seemed to like the ear-rings; and she gave Mr. Rainford such a sweet smile—Oh! what a sweet smile—as he patted out his purse and paid for them. I do n't know how it was—but it really went to my heart to think that such a beautiful lady should—"

"Never mind what you felt, Jacob," interrupted Old Death abruptly. "Make an end of your story."

"Well, the ear-rings were put into a nice little box, with some wool to keep them from rubbing; and the lady drew down her veil again, before she left the shop."

"Now, Jacob—tell me the truth," said Old Death: "did either Tom Rain or the Jewess take any little thing—at a moment, you know, when the jeweller's back was turned—"

"No—not a thing!" cried the lad emphatically. "I can swear they did not."

"You are quite sure?" observed Old Death.

"As sure as that I'm here; for I never took my eyes off them from the moment they entered the shop till they came out," responded Jacob. "And when they did come out, I was very near being seen by Mr. Rainford—for I was then in front of them; and I had only just time to slip into the shade of the wall between the windows of the jeweller's shop and the next one. Then I heard Mr. Rainford say to the Jewess, 'Now this little present is in part a recompense for the diamonds which I made you give up.'—The lady said something in a low tone; but I could not catch it—and they went on, the little boy with them."

"Then she did steal the diamonds!" exclaimed

Old Death. "But how could such a man as Lord Ellingham feel any interest in her? and how could he have been induced to perjure himself to save her?"

"Is n't it strange?" said Mrs. Bunce.

"I'm all in the dark at present," returned Bones. "But go on, Jacob."

"They walked on till they came to a street on the left-hand side; and into that street they turned. I never lost sight of them once; but two or three times I thought Mr. Rainford would have twigg'd me. He did not, though; and I at last traced them to a house in Lock's Fields—"

"Lock's Fields—eh?" cried Old Death. "Can they possibly be living there?"

"They are," returned Jacob; "and I can take you over to the very street and the very house any time you like."

"Well done!" ejaculated Bones, indulging in another long and hearty chuckle, which was echoed by Mrs. Bunce; and then they both rubbed their hands gleefully to think that they had made such important discoveries through the medium of Jacob.

Fresh supplies of grog were brewed; and the lad was not only permitted to consign the four half-crowns to his pocket, but was also regaled with an occasional sip of gin-and-water from Mrs. Bunce's own mug.

The return of Toby at ten o'clock prevented any further conversation on the interesting topics which had previously been discussed; for Mrs. Bunce's husband was not admitted to the entire confidence of his spouse and of Mr. Benjamin Bones, alias Old Death.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LOVERS.

It was noon; and Lady Hatfield sat alone in her drawing-room.

She felt herself so much better, and Dr. Lascelles had that morning so earnestly recommended her to quit the bed-chamber and seek the change of scene which even a removal from one apartment to another ever affords—especially to an invalid, that she had not hesitated to follow her own inclination and his advice, both of which were fully of accord.

Her uncle, Sir Ralph Walsingham, was announced shortly after Lady Hatfield had descended to the drawing-room.

"My dear Georgiana," exclaimed the honest and kind-hearted man, as he entered the apartment, "I am delighted to find you here. But why are you alone? Where is Miss Mordaunt?"

"In the parlour below," replied Lady Hatfield. "Julia has a visitor," she added with an arch smile, in spite of the melancholy which still oppressed her mind.

"A visitor!" ejaculated the baronet. "Sir Christopher Blunt, I'll be bound!"

"You have guessed rightly, my dear uncle. But how—"

"How should I know anything about it?" interrupted Sir Ralph. "Surely, Georgiana, you must be too well acquainted with your friend's disposition to suppose that she could have possibly held her tongue relative to the presumed attachment of the worthy knight? Why, all the time she was at the



Manor, did she not absolutely hurl Sir Christopher's name at every soul whom she could engage in conversation? Was it not 'Sir Christopher had told her this last season,' and 'Sir Christopher had assured her that?' and did she not go much farther than merely to hint that Sir Christopher was dying for her? For my part, I was sick of Sir Christopher's name. But now I suppose he has come to lay his title and fortune at her feet, as the newspapers say: or else what could possibly signify a visit at so unseasonably an hour as mid-day?"

"It will be an excellent match for Julia," remarked Georgiana, by way of saying something. "She is not one of those who believe that marriage should be only a convention of hearts, and not of worldly interests."

And as Lady Hatfield made this observation, a profound sigh escaped her bosom.

"What means that sigh, niece?" demanded the baronet. "Are you envious of Miss Morlaunt's worldly-mindedness? I am convinced you are not. By the way, I met Lord Ellingham last evening—"

"His lordship left his card," said Lady Hatfield,

casting down her eyes, while her bosom again rose and fell with a long and painfully-drawn sigh.

"Georgiana," exclaimed Sir Ralph, seating himself by the side of his niece, and taking her hand in a kind manner, "your conduct towards that young Earl is not just—is not generous—is not rational."

"Oh! my dear uncle," cried Lady Hatfield, starting wildly, "for heaven's sake renew not the discussion of last evening!"

"Pardon me, my dear niece," said Sir Ralph, affectionately but firmly, "if I give you pain by referring to the topic of that discussion. I am your nearest relation—I am a widower, and childless; you know that my property is extensive—and my fond hope has ever been, since the death of your aunt Lady Walsingham, that you would marry, and that your children should inherit those estates and that fortune which I can bequeath to whomsoever I will. But you refuse to accept the hand of a man who is every way worthy of you—you reject an alliance which, in every human probability, would be blessed by a progeny to whom my wealth and yours may alike descend. Nay—interrupt me not, dear Georgiana: I am old enough to be your father—"

love you as if you were my daughter—and I have your welfare deeply at heart. To speak frankly, I had a long conversation last evening with Lord Ellingham—

Georgiana's attention was for an instant broken by a wild start of despair.

"My God! what signifies this grief, Georgiana!" asked her uncle. "I thought to give you pleasure by the assurance I was about to disclose,—an assurance which conveys to you the unalterable fidelity of the Earl's affection—his readiness to bury in oblivion any little whim or caprice which induced you to subject him to the humiliation of a refusal the other day—his determination to study your happiness so entirely that any cloud of melancholy, or unknown and unfounded presentiment—any morbid feeling, in a word—which hangs upon your mind, shall speedily be dissipated. Such are his generous intentions—such are his tender aspirations, Georgiana!—can you reject his suit again?"

This appeal, made to the unhappy lady by an individual who, though only related to her by the fact of having married her mother's sister, had still ever manifested towards her the sincerest affection and friendship,—this appeal, we say, came with such overwhelming force upon the mind of Georgiana, that she knew not how to answer it.

"You consent, Georgiana—you consent!" exclaimed Sir Ralph, entirely mistaking the cause of her profound silence; and, starting up, he rushed from the room before her lips could give utterance to a syllable that might have the effect of stopping him.

"Merciful God! what does he mean to do!" cried Georgiana, clasping her hands together, while a species of spasmodic shuddering came over her entire frame.

Hasty footsteps approached the door.

Wildly did the unhappy lady glance around her—with the terrified and imploring air of one whom the officers of justice were about to fetch to the scaffold.

The door flew open: Georgiana averted her eyes;—but at the next moment her hands were grasped in those of another, and warm lips were pressed upon each fair hand of hers—and for a single instant there streamed through her whole being the electric warmth of ineffable delight, hope, and love!

She sank back upon the sofa whence she had risen: her eyes, which for a moment had seemed to lose the faculty of sight, were involuntarily turned toward the Earl of Ellingham, who was kneeling at her feet;—and simultaneously her uncle's voice, sounding like the knell of destiny upon her ears, exclaimed, "I told you she had consented, Ellingham: be happy—for Georgiana is yours!"

The door of the apartment was then closed hastily; and Lady Hatfield now knew that she was alone with her lover.

"Oh! my dearest Georgiana," murmured Arthur, still pressing the lady's hands in his own, "how happy have you at length made me—and how can I ever express the joy which animates me at this moment! My heart dances wildly with joy and gratitude; and all the anguish which I have lately experienced, is forgotten—as if it never had been. Indeed, my beloved one, it is for me to implore your pardon—for I should not have remained absent from you so long. But now that we are re-united, and your disposition has passed,—now that your mind has

recovered its naturally healthy tone,—there is nothing, my Georgiana, to interrupt the free course of our felicity."

Lady Hatfield was seized with a certain involuntary horror, which completely stupefied her, as these impassioned exclamations fell upon her ears: and vainly—vainly did she endeavour to reply.

Arthur rose, and seating himself by her side on the sofa, passed his arm around her slender waist, and drawing her gently towards him, said in a subdued tone, "From this day forth, beloved Georgiana, you must have no secrets unknown to me. Confide in me as your best and sincerest friend—and the tenderest sympathy shall flow from my heart to soothe you in those moments of melancholy which no mortal, however prosperously placed, can hope altogether to avoid. In the society of a husband who will never cease to love you—whose constant care shall be to ensure your felicity—and whose unwearied attention shall be devoted to the promotion of your happiness, your life will be spent in an atmosphere into which a cloud shall seldom intrude. Oh! what pictures of perfect bliss present themselves to my imagination!"

The enamoured nobleman pressed the fair one closer to his breast, as he thus poured forth his soul with all the ardour of his sincere and devoted love; and she—in spite of herself,—bewildered, stupefied, intoxicated as she was by the suddenness with which this scene had been brought about,—she gazed with mingled rapture and surprise upon that handsome countenance which the glow of inward passion and ineffable joy now rendered still more expressive.

She felt as if the hysterical shriek, which for some moments past had threatened to burst from her lips, were subdued—stilled by some unknown power, whose influence was strangely sweet and consoling;—her soul almost sickened in the bliss of that love by which she was surrounded, and to which her woman's heart could not do otherwise than respond.

Then, again, she felt as if she must start from his arms—reject his love—dash down that chalice of heated happiness from which they both were drinking deep draughts—and proclaim to him that it was all a hideous mistake—that she had never consented to receive him as her husband—that her uncle had committed a fearful error—and that they must separate, never, never again to meet!

But at the very moment when she was about to do all this, Arthur drew her nearer to him;—his breath, sweet as that of flowers, fell on her burning cheek—his hand pressed hers—she found herself linked to him in heart by a spell which no mortal courage could at such a moment have broken—then she caught herself looking into his fine eyes, and reading the thrilling language of love that was written there—and in another moment their lips met in one long and delicious kiss.

"Sweet Georgiana, I adore you!" murmured Arthur, his glances speaking more eloquently than his words. "And now there breathes not a happier man on the earth's wide surface than I. Say, Georgiana—say, does not that happiness which I myself experience impart pleasure to you? Could you now do aught to torture my soul again with the agony of suspense—with the despair of baffled hope? Believe me, my dearest angel, that if destiny, in its malignant spite, were now to separate us—if tomorrow I came and found you gone, or here but cold and altered,—in a word, if any impediment

were to arise to the accomplishment of our union, I should not survive the blow! As a distracted maniac should I be borne to a mad-cell—or, if my reason were left me, my grave would be stained with a suicide's blood!"

Georgiana was appalled by this terrible announcement; and in the agony of feeling which it excited within her, she cast a glance of profound tenderness upon the Earl, unwittingly pressing his hand at the same time.

"Oh! now I know that you entertain the same sentiments as myself," he cried, mistaking these convulsive movements on her part for the tender evidences of love: "now I know that your heart beats in unison with mine. Oh! thrice happy day—the happiest that I ever yet have known. And happier does it seem, too, because it has dissipated so much previous anxiety—healed so much acutely-felt pain. Yes—dearest Georgiana—I am almost glad that you rejected my suit the other day; for the wretched feelings of the interval have, by contrast, made the present moment indescribably sweet. And shall I tell you, my beloved one; that I am now acquainted with the nature of that secret—"

"That secret!" cried Georgiana, with a cold shudder—which Ellingham did not perceive, for at the moment he pressed her fondly towards him.

"Yes, dearest," he continued: "I know all the power which that secret influence must occasionally have over you; and, believe me when I declare that—instead of being any longer annoyed at the fact of that circumstance having induced you to refuse my hand the other day—I deeply sympathise with you! And if I now allude to that event—that incident which years ago, at your late father's country-residence in Hampshire—"

A short convulsive sob burst from Georgiana's breast.

"Oh! pardon me—pardon me, beloved one!" cried the Earl, again imprinting a kiss upon her lips: "I know that I was wrong to allude to an event which you can never entirely forget. But if I mentioned it ere now—it was for the first and the last time—and merely to convince you that he, whom you will soon receive as your husband, is aware of that secret influence which holds a sway over your mind; and that he implores you to forget it—to abandon yourself only to the thoughts of that happiness which our love and our brilliant social position must ensure us. And now, my dearest Georgiana, no more on that head: never again let the topic enter into our discourse—never let us allude to it, even by a single syllable!"

"Oh! generous—excellent-hearted—noble-minded man," exclaimed Georgiana; "and is your love for me indeed so strong as this?"

"Can you doubt it, dearest?" said the Earl. "If so—tell me how I can prove its sincerity!"

"Have you not given me a proof the most convincing that man can give to woman?" asked Lady Hatfield, concealing her blushing countenance on Arthur's breast. "Are you not content to receive as your wife one who—"

"No more—no more!" exclaimed the Earl, tenderly hushing her words with kisses. "Have we not agreed never again to allude to that topic?"

"But one word, Arthur," said Georgiana: "only one word! Who could have acquainted you—"

"Your uncle, dearest," answered Lord Ellingham;—"that excellent man who has been mainly

instrumental in procuring me the happiness which I now enjoy!"

"My uncle!" murmured Lady Hatfield, her soul subdued with astonishment of the most overwhelming nature.

But the Earl's ears caught not the repetition of his answer; neither did he notice the effect which it produced upon Georgiana;—for her head was pillowed upon his breast—his hand clasped hers—her fine form leant against him—and he had no thought save of the pure but intoxicating happiness which he now enjoyed.

Oh, Love! thou art the sweetest charm of life—the dearest solace in this sphere of trial and vicissitude—the sentiment that, shining on us as a star, adds the most refulgent brightness to our lot. Ambition never imparted consolation to the breaking spirit, and places no curb on the wild passions and insatiable vices which too-often dominate the human heart. Wealth makes its possessor envied, but also encourages the daring of the robber, or sharpens the knife of the murderer who seeks to grasp it. Honours engender hatred in the breasts of those who once were friends. Pleasure is bought by gold, and must be paid for ever and ever again by the health. Genius is a consuming fire: like the spear to the gallant steed, it urges its votary on, but draws the life-blood in the act. Glory is the eruption of the volcano—bright, majestic, and resplendent to gaze upon—yet bearing death in its halo. But thou, O Love! art the star which beams brighter as the gloom of this cold and selfish world becomes darker;—thou art the sunshine of the soul—teaching man to emulate the gentleness, the resignation, and the holy devotion of woman—and raising woman but one remove from the nature of angels!

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. FRANK CURTIS'S PLEASANT ADVENTURE

ABOUT half an hour previous to the visit of Lord Ellingham, Mr. Frank Curtis was lounging along Piccadilly with a swell-mob kind of ease and a Bagnigge Wells' independence, when a young female, of good figure and pretty face, attracted his notice.

As he was proceeding in one way, and she in another, they passed each other; and, Mr. Curtis having nothing to do, it struck him that he would endeavour to scrape an acquaintance with the young person alluded to.

He accordingly turned round—hesitated for a moment how to devise an excuse for addressing himself to her—and then, drawing forth his own white cambric pocket-handkerchief, hurried after the object of his interest.

"I beg your pardon, Miss," he said, tapping her gently upon the shoulder; "but I think you dropped this handkerchief."

The young female immediately replied in the negative; but a smile played upon her lips, and her blue eyes assumed an arch expression, implying that she fully saw through the young man's trick, which was indeed transparent enough.

"I really thought it was yours, Miss," exclaimed Curtis, by no means abashed. "But if it is not—why, I must keep it till I find the owner—that's all."

"I rather think it is with the owner now, sir," answered the young woman.

"Well, my dear," said Frank, "I see you suspect my stratagem. But you are such a sweet pretty creature, that I was resolved to introduce myself to you. Now do you be angry, my love: I mean all I assert—and if you will only tell me where and when I can see you again, I'm sure you won't be sorry to make my acquaintance."

"Upon my word!" cried the young woman, in that dubious manner which might have meant disgust, or which might be taken as encouragement.

Mr. Curtis, strong in his self-conceit, adopted the latter view, and became more pressing in his attentions.

"Now do let me see you again, there's a dear," he exclaimed, continuing to walk by her side. "If you'll only agree to meet me this evening, I'll take you to the play—and I'll buy you a gold chain. Money is no object to me, my love: a man with ten thousand a-year—and a peerage in the perspective—may indulge his little fancies, I hope."

These falsehoods, conveyed by implication, were uttered in such a tone of assurance, that the young woman was evidently dazzled by their splendour; and she threw a rapid, but encouraging glance towards the mendacious Frank.

"Come, now—will you meet me again?" he demanded. "I was going over to stay a few days with the Prime Minister of France early next month; and I had promised to pass my Christmas with his Holiness the Pope at Rome:—but if you was only kind, now—why, there's no saying that I might not seek excuses to both of them, and stay in London for the pleasure of seeing you."

"But you men are such gay deceivers," said the young female.

"Well—we may be—sometimes!" ejaculated Frank, rather looking upon the imputation as a compliment than a reproach. "But you're too pretty for a man to find it in his heart to deceive you, my dear. In one word, where shall you be at seven o'clock this evening?"

"I did think of calling upon a friend which in lady's-maid in a family living in Conduit Street," replied the young woman.

"And if your friend is a lady's-maid, my dear," said Frank, "what may you be?"

"The same, sir," was the answer.

"The very thing!" cried Curtis. "If there's one class of young ladies that I like more than another, it is the ladies-maids. Why, my dear, when I left Paris—where I stayed some time with the Archbishop of that city,—for his Grace and I are as thick as two thieves—the ladies-maids held a meeting, and appointed a committee to draw up an address expressive of regret and all that sort of thing at my going away. They did, upon my honour! But let us come to the point, my dear. Shall you be in Conduit Street this evening at about seven?"

"I think it's very likely, sir," was the answer. "But you must not go with me any farther now—for I live at the house with the bay-windows there."

"But whose service are you in, my dear?" asked Frank.

"In Lady Georgiana Hatfield's," replied the young woman.

"Indeed!" cried Curtis. "I've heard an uncle of mine speak of her ladyship, I think. But this is a great nuisance, though."

"What is it?" asked Charlotte, whom our readers may remember to have been mentioned at the opening of this tale.

"Why—that you and me must separate just at the moment that we are getting so friendly together—and without a single kiss, either."

Charlotte giggled—but said nothing.

"You will really be in Conduit Street this evening, my dear?" urged Frank Curtis, after a brief pause.

"I think I shall be able to get out," responded Charlotte. "But her ladyship is an invalid; and Miss Moedaunt—her friend, or companion, or whatever she is—may want me to dress her for some ball or party; and so I cannot promise for sure."

"But you will try?"

"Yes," murmured the young woman; and she hurried on to the front-door of Lady Hatfield's house.

Curtis stopped at a short distance and watched her as she tripped along, her pretty feet and ankles peering from beneath the folds of her dress.

Now it happened that at the very moment when Charlotte was about to ring the bell, the front-door opened, and a livery-servant issued forth, doubtless upon some errand. After exchanging a word or two with Charlotte, he passed on, and the young woman entered the house. But ere she closed the door she turned a sly glance upon Frank Curtis, who, the instant he saw the livery-servant make his appearance, sauntered very leisurely along in the most innocent-looking manner in the world.

The livery-servant was now out of sight—and the pretty face of the lady's-maid lingered at the door which she kept ajar.

Curtis looked hastily around; and, the coast being tolerably clear at the moment, he darted up to the entrance.

Charlotte had merely remained on the threshold to give him a parting glance of intelligence for the purpose of assuring him of the sincerity of her promise that she would endeavour to meet him in the evening,—for the young lady was of an intriguing disposition, and flattered herself that she had captivated some very great, or at all events some very wealthy person:—but, when she saw him thus precipitately rush towards the entrance, she drew back and endeavoured to shut the door.

Frank was, however, too quick for her: and he fairly thrust himself into the hall, closing the street-door behind him.

"For God's sake, go away, sir," said Charlotte imploringly.

"Not till I have had one kiss—just one," cried Frank; and he threw his arms round the lady's-maid's neck.

"Oh! do let me go, sir—the servants will come—and I shall be ruined," she murmured, vainly struggling with the young man, who not only considered the adventure a capital joke, but was also excited by his present contact with a pretty girl.

He glued his lips to hers, and pressed her closely to him, when a loud double-knock suddenly echoed through the hall.

"Good heavens! what shall I do?" exclaimed Charlotte, in a tone of despair: then, in another moment, she recovered her presence of mind, and throwing open a side-door, said in a rapid and earnest tone, "Go in there, sir—and, if any one comes, pray invent some excuse for your being here—but do not compromise me."

Curtis darted into the parlour with which the side-door communicated: the lady's-maid hurried away; and old Mason speedily made his appearance to answer the summons conveyed by the double-knock.

"Is Miss Mordaunt at home?" inquired a voice which Curtis, who was listening anxiously on the inner side of the parlour door, immediately recognised to be that of his worthy uncle.

"Yes, Sir Christopher—Miss Mordaunt is at home," replied Mason. "Please to walk in, sir. This way, sir—Miss Mordaunt is with Lady Hatfield in the drawing-room."

"I wish to see Miss Mordaunt alone, if you please," said Sir Christopher. "Give my compliments, and if Miss Mordaunt will accord me a few minutes—upon some little matter of a private nature—"

"Certainly, Sir Christopher," responded the domestic. "Have the goodness to step into this room, sir."

And Frank Curtis—now as miserable as he was incoherent and exulting a few moments previously, when embracing Charlotte in the hall—heard the footsteps of Mason and his uncle approaching the very door at which he was listening.

Not a moment was to be lost. He was too much confused—too much bewildered to think of meeting the embarrassment of his position with a good face and a bold excuse: and concealment instantly suggested itself to his coward-mind.

A cheerful fire was burning in the grate; and near it was drawn a sofa, the cushion of which had rich fringes that hung all round, and drooped nearly to the carpet. To thrust himself beneath this friendly sofa was the work of an instant with Frank Curtis; and so rapidly was the manœuvre executed, that the fringes had even ceased to rustle, when Sir Christopher Blunt stalked pompously into the apartment.

Mason withdrew to deliver the knight's message to Miss Mordaunt; and in the meantime the knight himself paced the room in somewhat an agitated manner.

At length he walked straight up to a handsome mirror, and looking fully at his image as it was reflected in the glass, began to apostrophise himself.

"Sir Christopher Blunt—Sir Christopher Blunt," he exclaimed aloud, in a solemn tone, "what is it that you are about to do? Are you taking a wise, or an imprudent step? Are you, in a word, about to ensure your own happiness, or—or—to make a damned old fool of yourself?"

Frank Curtis was astounded at this language which came from the lips of his uncle. Despite of his fears and the unpleasant predicament in which he found himself, he was on the point of yielding to his natural propensity for mischief and blurting forth an affirmative response to the latter portion of the knight's self-interrogation, when the door opened and a lady entered the room.

Curtis accordingly held his peace, and his breath too as much as he could; for his curiosity was now so intense as to master even his fears.

"Miss Mordaunt," said the knight, suddenly turning away from the glass and advancing as jauntily as his massive frame would permit, to meet the lady, "I have to apologise for this early visit—"

"Oh! no apology, Sir Christopher," exclaimed Julia, in a most affable manner. "Pray be seated."

"Allow me," said the knight; and taking her hand, he led her to the very sofa beneath which his nephew lay concealed. Then, seating himself at a respectful distance from her—but also on the sofa, he continued thus:—"I hope, Miss Mordaunt, that I shall not offend you with what I am going—that is, with what I am about—I mean, with what I am on the point of—"

"Very intelligible, all this!" thought Frank Curtis to himself.

"Sir Christopher Blunt is incapable of offending a lady—especially a young one," observed Miss Julia, blushing in the most approved style on such interesting occasions—for she could anticipate what was coming.

"Sir Christopher Blunt thanks you for that compliment, Miss Mordaunt," said the knight pompously, and encouraged also by the lady's tone and manner. "Yes—I am indeed incapable of giving offence willfully; although there are certain vulgar people east of Temple Bar who pretend that I treat them cavalierly. And, thank heaven! Miss Mordaunt, for I never could have put up with all the filthy guzzling and swilling—excuse the expressions, ma'am—that seem inseparable from City affairs. You know, perhaps, Miss Mordaunt, that my origin was humble—I may say that it was nothing at all. But I glory in that fact: it is my boast—my pride."

"True merit is sure to force its way in the world, Sir Christopher," observed Julia, with a smile which, displaying her white teeth, quite enchanted the amorous knight.

"Again I thank you for the good opinion of me implied by that remark," he said, edging himself a little closer to the lady. "My large fortune—for large it notoriously is, Miss Mordaunt—has all been acquired by my own honest industry; and the title which I have the honour to bear, was bestowed upon me by a gracious Prince in approbation of my conduct as a public officer."

"You occupy an enviable position in society, Sir Christopher," said Julia.

"Do you really think so, Miss?" asked the knight, endeavouring to assume a soft and plaintive tone, but with as little success as if he were a boatswain labouring under a severe cold: "do you really think so?"—and again he edged himself nearer to his companion. "Ah! my dear Miss Mordaunt, how happy should I be to lay my fortune—my title—my all, at the feet of some charming lady, who, like yourself, would not despise the man that has risen by his own honest exertions to I may say affluence and honour."

Miss Mordaunt cast down her eyes and worked herself up into a most interesting state of blinking excitement; while Sir Christopher boldly took her hand and pressed it to his lips.

The knight's foot was thrust some little way under the sofa; and as he wore blucher boots, it was not difficult to stick a pin into the calf of his leg, if any one had felt so disposed. Such an idea certainly struck his dutiful nephew at that instant; for Mr. Frank Curtis now fully comprehended the object of his uncle's visit to Miss Julia Mordaunt; and the matrimonial designs of the said uncle forebode any thing but essential benefit to himself. Then—although he was not the brightest young man in existence—the selfish motive of Sir Chris-

topher, in agreeing to purchase Mr. Torrens's elder daughter as his (Frank's) wife, flashed upon his mind; and in an instant he comprehended the entire policy of Sir Christopher as well as the reader already understands it, with regard to the recent matrimonial speculation, which Tom Rainsford had so materially aided to render abortive.

We digressed just at the point where Sir Christopher was venturesome enough to press the hand of Miss Mordaunt to his lips.

"Oh! Sir Christopher," murmured the lady, apparently quite abashed, and forgetting, most probably in the agitation of the moment, to withdraw her fair fingers.

"Julia, my love—for so you must now permit me to call you," exclaimed the enamoured knight, "will my suit be rejected? can you receive it favourably? At this moment you see before you a man whom it is in your power to render happy or miserable for life. And, ah! dear me—what a dreadful dream I had last night! It was that dream which made me come to you so early to-day, to know your decision. For whether it was your image, my beloved Julia—or the cold roast pig that I eat for supper, I'm sure I can't say; but true it is that—Oh!" screamed the knight, in a fit of agony.

"My dear Sir Christopher, what—what is the matter?" asked Miss Mordaunt, alarmed by the sudden ejaculation, which was accompanied by an equally sudden start.

"Oh! nothing—nothing," said the knight, endeavouring to compose himself: "a sudden twitch in the leg—just like the pricking of a pin—but it is nothing—a mere sensation! I was going to tell you, my dear Julia, about that horrid dream—"

"Pray, Sir Christopher, do not tell me any thing about horrid dreams," exclaimed Miss Mordaunt: "you will frighten me out of my wits."

"Well, dearest, I will not. But you have not told me yet whether I may consider that this fair hand which I now press to my lips—Oh!"

And again the knight started violently.

"What is the matter, Sir Christopher?" asked Julia earnestly.

"Really—I can't make it out—I don't know—but this is the second time that the same sensation has seized me in the left leg," stammered the knight: "just for all the world like the pricking of a pin. And yet of course it cannot be that. But pray, pardon these unpleasant interruptions, Julia; and relieve me from suspense at once. Say—tell me, dearest one—will you, will you consent to be mine?"

"Oh! Sir Christopher, what do you ask!" murmured Miss Mordaunt, as if there were any thing extraordinary or unexpected in the question.

"What do I ask?" repeated the enamoured knight: "I ask you to bestow upon me this fair hand."

"How can I refuse you, Sir Christopher!" sighed the lady. "You are so killing!"

"Am I, dearest!" ejaculated the knight; and, encouraged more than ever by this assurance, he boldly kissed his companion. But almost immediately a cry of agony burst from his lips; and, starting up from the sofa, he exclaimed, "My leg! my leg! the—the devil's in it—and that's the fact!"

The fact was however somewhat different; for Mr. Frank Curtis, having very quietly and delib-

erately taken his breast-pin from the frill of his shirt, was amusing himself with the very pleasant pastime of thrusting the point into his uncle's leg.

On the third occasion of the application of the aforesaid breast-pin, Sir Christopher started up and danced about the room, while Miss Mordaunt, who was most anxious to bring the delicate topic of discourse to such a point that she might satisfy herself as to the very day on which she was to change her condition, endeavoured to her utmost to console him.

Convinced that the pain he experienced could be nothing more than some sudden but very galling spasmodic attack, neither Sir Christopher nor Julia entertained the least thought of looking beneath the sofa: they therefore re-seated themselves upon it, and continued their tender discourse.

"And when shall it be?" asked Sir Christopher, taking it for granted that it was to be.

"Whenever—that is—so soon—I mean—when you choose," murmured Miss Mordaunt. "But you will communicate your intentions to my brother, who obtained his captaincy a few days ago, and whom I must consult."

"And why consult him?" asked Sir Christopher, a misgiving entering his mind.

"Oh! he might—I do not say that he will—but he might object," answered Miss Mordaunt.

"Then perhaps you wish me to state my views to my nephew also," said the knight somewhat testily: "as he might also object."

"But a nephew, Sir Christopher," urged the lady,—"a nephew is not a brother."

"Very true," replied Blunt, as if some grand truth had just been made apparent to him. "And yet it appears, Julia," he added, in a coaxing tone, "that we have each a relation to whom we would rather not mention the matter—until after it was over."

"Oh! you killing man—what would you have me understand by that remark!" cried Miss Mordaunt.

"Simply that we should—"

"Should what, dear Sir Christopher?"

"Should be married privately—or run away to Gretna Green," answered the knight. "And now the truth is out."

"Oh! naughty—naughty man!" exclaimed Julia, casting on her swain one of her most bewitching smiles: but at the same time she imagined to herself all the excitement attending a run-a-way match to Gretna—the rapidity of travelling—the bustle that would be excited at the way-side inns—the sensation that must arise in the fashionable world—the paragraphs in the newspapers—the *feils* attached to such a proceeding—and the importance with which her reappearance in town, after the union, would be attended:—of all this she thought—and the knight's proposal was therefore most welcome to her; for, while she contemplated the agreeable side of the picture, she never once reflected on the ridicule and absurdity that must attach themselves to such a step on the part of two persons of the respective ages of Sir Christopher Blunt and herself.

"Well, dearest, what are you thinking of?" asked the knight.

"Of what you were saying, dear Sir Christopher," murmured the lady in a languishing tone.

"Then, how shall it be! a private marriage—or Gretna!"

"The arrangements for a private marriage might be suspected," sighed Julia, casting down her eyes

and managing a blush, which was respectable enough, seeing that it scarcely came voluntarily to her aid.

"Just my opinion!" ejaculated Sir Christopher. "I would not have that prying nephew of mine, Frank Curtis—the young scapegrace—getting a hint of it beforehand, for any money."

"Nec would I wish my brother to know of it until it is all over, dear Sir Christopher," returned Julia.

"Then be it Gretina!" exclaimed the knight. "And now when shall it take place?"

"I could not say to-day, Sir Christopher—but to-morrow—to-morrow—" murmured the lady in a faint tone, as if quite overpowered by the importance of the step she was about to take, but which she would willingly have taken long before, had the proposal been made to her—"to-morrow," she added, "I shall be prepared to—"

"I understand you, my angel," interrupted the knight; and this time he caught the lady fairly in his arms and subjected her to a process of hearty kissing.

Mr. Frank Curtis had in the meantime restored his breast-pin to the frill of his shirt; for, since the conversation had turned upon a regular elopement, the matter had become far too serious for him to trifle with. He suddenly found himself menaced with something bordering on total disinheritance in respect to his uncle's property; for, even if this projected union should yield no issue, still the lady might obtain so much influence over the knight as to induce him to will all his fortune to herself. Frank was therefore in rather an unpleasant state of mind, as well as being in an uneasy predicament under the sofa. He nevertheless saw that cunning must be met with cunning; and he now lay as quiet as a mouse, in order to avoid detection. But he vowed seriously that the moment he should escape from the kind of prison in which he found himself, he would not let the grass grow under his feet ere he adopted measures to defeat the matrimonial scheme of Sir Christopher Blunt and Miss Julia Mordant.

At length, to his unspeakable relief, the knight took his leave of Miss Mordant, after having settled the hour and place where they were to meet on the following evening.

Sir Christopher being gone, Julia also left the room; and poor Charlotte, who had been on the tenter-hooks of suspense and alarm ever since Frank Curtis had first entered the house, now hurried to the parlour, wondering how he could possibly have managed to avoid an exposure.

But when she entered the room, and perceived no one, she was more astonished still.

Her surprise was not, however, of long duration; for Curtis, having peeped through the fringe and ascertained who the new-comer was, suddenly emerged from his hiding-place.

"Oh! dear me, sir," exclaimed the young woman, "what a fright I have been in, to be sure!"

"And what a pickle I have been in!" cried Frankulkily.

"You cannot say that it was my fault, sir," observed Charlotte reproachfully.

"Nec more I do, my dear," answered Curtis, warming himself into a better humour by means of a kiss or two on the lady's-maid's red lips. "But, I say, my dear," he continued, after a few moments'

dalliance of that sort, "you must come to meet me this evening; because, independent of my desire to chat with you and all that sort of thing, you can be of service to me."

"Lor'! sir," cried Charlotte, astonished at this intimation.

"Indeed you can; but I must not stay to explain myself now," returned Curtis. "Here, my dear—take these five guineas as an earnest of what I will do for you; and mind and be punctual in Conduit Street at seven o'clock this evening."

"I shall not fail, sir," replied Charlotte.

"And in the meantime," added Frank, "watch Miss Mordant well. Do n't ask me any questions now—I will tell you all about it this evening. But mind you watch her; and if possible, get into conversation with her. Should she ask you to do her any service—no matter of what kind—promise her that you will; and leave the rest to me. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir—and I will do as you tell me," was the answer.

"Well, then—that's right," said Curtis. "And now let me see if I can't slip out without running plump up against one of your liveried funkeys here."

"Wait an instant," cried Charlotte; and she disappeared from the room, closing the door carefully behind her.

In a few moments she returned, with the welcome tidings that the coast was clear; and Frank Curtis succeeded in quitting Lady Hatfield's house without being perceived by any one save the faithful Charlotte.

CHAPTER XX

HAPPINESS.—THE DIAMOND-MERCHANT.

WHEN Lord Ellingham took his leave of Lady Hatfield, the latter hurried to her bed-chamber; and, locking the door behind her, sat down in an arm-chair near the fire to ponder unconstrainedly upon the conversation of the previous hour.

And that hour—what changes had it worked in respect to the mind and prospects of this patrician lady!

"Oh! how generous and noble-hearted is my Arthur!" she mused inwardly: "how boundless is his love for me! But is it possible that I am really to become his wife? or am I the sport of a wild and delusive dream? No—it is all true: I am awake—I see the various objects around me—there is no confusion in my brain. Yes—it is all true; and he will marry me—he will make me his wife—in spite of—But let me avoid thinking of the past! The future is now bright and glorious before me. My own Arthur—whom I love so fondly, and who alone has ever possessed and will possess my heart,—my own noble, generous Arthur has surmounted all prejudice—flung aside all dignities—and has promised to make me happy! Oh! not in the wildest of my dreams could I have imagined so much bliss. The clouds which have so long hung heavily around the star of my destiny, have been suddenly dispersed by one who views my heart aright—who understands me—who knows my sad history, but recognises my innocence—who, in a word, rises superior to all the prejudices which shackle the world. Oh! dearest

—dearest Arthur! how can I ever reward you adequately for this generosity on your part? All the love which I bear you—all the adoration I feel for you—all the devotion I shall manifest towards you, will not repay the immense debt that I owe you! It is true that I possess great wealth—that the services of my father to the State induced his Majesty to create me a Peeress in my own right—and that I have some pretensions to beauty:—all this is true—but it is not sufficient to induce my noble-hearted Arthur to make me the partner of his bed. No! for he himself is rich far beyond his desires—he also owns a proud and ancient name—and England has daughters far lovelier than I. But he loves me for myself—apart from all selfish considerations: and, Oh! what bliss to be thus loved!”

Lady Hatfield sank her head upon her fair hand, and gave way to the new and ineffable bliss which had so suddenly enveloped her in its hale.

At length another idea struck her.

“But my uncle—how could he have known my secret?” she exclaimed aloud. “And how did he discover it? Oh! he must have been aware of it from the very first! The good—the kind-hearted man—never to have even appeared to—”

Georgiana’s reverie was interrupted by a hasty knock at her door.

She rose, unlocked it, and gave admission to her friend Julia.

“My dear Lady Hatfield,” exclaimed Miss Mordaunt, her entire countenance illuminated with joy, “congratulate me. It is all settled!”

“That you are to become Lady Blunt?” asked Georgiana, smiling.

“Yes, my dearest friend—Lady Blunt! How well it sounds! only think of ‘Lady Blunt’ upon a card—printed, for instance, in the old English letter—or German text—or whatever it is. And then—‘Lady Blunt’s carriage!’—and all that sort of thing! Really I am so happy—I don’t know whether to dance or sing—or both!”

“I am delighted to see you so happy, my dear Julia,” said Lady Hatfield; “and most sincerely do I congratulate you. But have you acted prudently to accept Sir Christopher without communicating his proposal to your relations?”

“I think that I am quite old enough to manage my own affairs in this respect at least,” answered Julia, laughing; “and yet—after all—I am not so very old—only just thirty. Still it is high time to settle one-self in life. But for the present, my dear Lady Hatfield, I must implore you to keep my engagement a profound secret—for reasons which I will explain in a few days—”

“I shall keep your secret, Julia, without seeking to learn your motives until you may choose to communicate them,” replied Georgiana. “And now I am about to surprise you in respect to myself. Lord Ellingham has been here this morning.”

“So I heard from old Mason just now,” said Miss Mordaunt. “But you know he would call, my dear friend, after leaving his card last night. And—if you speak candidly—you will confess that you hoped he would.”

“I did hope he would call, Julia,” answered Georgiana; “but I could not imagine that our interview would have terminated—However,” she added, checking herself, and smiling joyously, “you must now congratulate me; for in a few weeks I shall become the Countess of Ellingham.”

“I do indeed congratulate you, my dearest Lady Hatfield,” replied Miss Mordaunt. “But upon my word, wonders will never cease. Here were you only a few days ago rejecting the Earl in opposition to every thing like common sense—and certainly against the wishes of your very best friends—”

“Let us not talk of the past, Julia,” interrupted Georgiana. “The future opens so brightly before me, that I am almost dazzled by its brilliancy. And I am happy—supremely happy—Oh! almost too happy!”

As she uttered these words, Georgiana threw herself into the arm-chair which she had quitted for the purpose of giving admission to Miss Mordaunt; and never did the beauty of her soul-speaking countenance shine to greater advantage than at that moment.

And no wonder that even her friend, whose volatile disposition seldom permitted her mind to settle its attention on subjects concerning another, was struck by the loveliness of Lady Hatfield on this occasion:—no wonder, we say, that Julia gazed with admiration for a long time on that beauteous woman: for happiness seemed to have invested her with new charms.

Her cheeks—lately so pale with mental anxiety and partial indisposition—were now tinged with a warm carnation hue;—joy flashed from her large liquid eyes, usually of so mild though lustrous a languor;—and smiles played upon those rosy lips which were wont to remain apart with serious expression.

The Earl of Ellingham, upon taking leave of Georgiana that morning,—but, be it well understood, with the promise of returning to pass an hour or two in the evening,—experienced that kind of heart-felt happiness which requires a vent by means of imparting the fact of its existence to a friend.

To the abode of Dr. Lascellas was the Earl accordingly hastening, when he was suddenly accosted by a gentleman, who addressed him by name, and whom in another moment he remembered to be Mr. Gordon, the diamond-merchant.

“I beg your lordship’s pardon for thus stepping on you,” said that individual: “but I thought you might be gratified to learn that the jewels which I lost so mysteriously, have been restored to me.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Arthur. “I am rejoiced to hear these tidings. And now, I presume, you are fully convinced that Miss Rether de Medina was entirely innocent of the theft so ridiculously imputed to her.”

“On the contrary, my lord,” answered the diamond-merchant: “I am more than ever certain that Miss de Medina was the person who took them.”

“Mr. Gordon,” exclaimed the Earl indignantly, “I should have thought that, after the investigation which took place at the office in Bow Street, you would not have clung to an opinion so dishonourable—so unjust towards an innocent young lady. Moreover, sir, I should have conceived that my testimony to that young lady’s character would have dispelled any doubts which had still hung on your mind.”

“That your lordship gave such testimony conscientiously, I cannot for an instant question,” was the firm but respectful answer. “At the same time



that your lordship was and is still deceived in that young lady, I am confident."

"Perhaps, sir," observed the Earl coldly, "you will have no objection to communicate the reasons which have thus induced you to change your opinion; for, if I remember rightly, you yourself declared, in the public office, that you were satisfied there was some grievous mistake, and that Miss de Medina was innocent of the deed imputed to her at first."

"I admit, my lord," replied the diamond-merchant, "that I was staggered by the singularity of the turn given to the proceedings when your lordship appeared to speak in Miss de Medina's defence. But listen, my lord, to the subsequent events which revived all my suspicions. Upon leaving the police-court I returned home, but was scarcely able to attend to my business, so bewildered was I by the occurrence of the morning, and so annoyed was I also at the loss which I had so mysteriously experienced. It was probably four o'clock in the afternoon, when a lady was announced; and the moment she raised her veil, I recognised Miss de Medina. You may conceive, my lord, how surprised I was by this visit; but

much greater was my astonishment, when she said to me, without a single word of preface, 'Sir, what is the value of the diamonds which you have lost?'—'Six hundred pounds,' was my answer.—Miss de Medina immediately drew forth a small packet from her dress, and counted six bank-notes, each of a hundred pounds, and which she placed before me on the table.—'Here is the amount, sir,' she said; and I offered her a receipt, which she however declined. For a few moments she lingered—as if anxious to say something more; then, suddenly turning away, she abruptly quitted the house."

"Extraordinary!" cried the Earl of Ellingham.

"And yet—"

"One instant, my lord," interrupted Mr. Gordon: "the most mysterious part of the whole transaction is yet to be revealed to you. Not ten minutes had elapsed from the moment of Miss de Medina's departure, when a person, whom I remembered to have seen in the court, was announced. I do not know whether you observed at the office a man of florid complexion—light curly hair—red whiskers—and dressed in a sporting suit—"

"I not only observed him," replied the Earl;

"but from the description subsequently given by one of my servants, whom I questioned after my return home from the police-office, I have every reason to believe that the individual whom you describe was the bearer of a letter which had induced me to hasten to Bow Street to give my testimony in proof of Miss de Medina's innocence."

"And does your lordship know that man?" inquired the diamond-merchant.

"I never saw him, to my knowledge, until that day, when the attention he appeared to devote to the proceedings attracted my notice—although he was in the midst of the crowd congregated near the door. But please to continue your own narrative."

"This individual, my lord, of whom we have been speaking," returned Mr. Gordon, "was the person introduced to my office a few minutes after the departure of Miss de Medina. He seated himself in a free and easy, off-hand manner, and said, 'I think I can give you some little information concerning the diamonds which you have lost.'—'Indeed!' I exclaimed; and, anxious to hear what he was about to state, I said nothing relative to the visit of Miss de Medina and the payment of the amount at which the lost jewels were valued.—'Yes,' he continued; and, with the utmost coolness, he produced a pistol from one pocket and a small parcel, wrapped up in brown paper, from the other.—'What is the meaning of this strange conduct?' I demanded, glancing towards the weapon which the man held in his hand.—'Oh! it is soon explained,' he said. 'This pistol is surely to defend myself in case you should take it into your head to give me into the charge of a constable on suspicion of being connected with the person who stole your property; and as for the parcel, open it, and see what it contains.'—Thus speaking, he tossed the packet across the table to me, crossed his legs, and began to hum a tune. I opened the parcel; and to my surprise perceived the diamonds which I had lost.—'Is the set complete?' asked the man.—'Quite perfect,' I replied in the most unfeigned astonishment at the singularity of the whole proceedings. 'But how does it happen,' I continued, 'that you have come to restore them to me, when a quarter of an hour has scarcely elapsed since Miss de Medina herself called and paid me six hundred pounds at which they are valued?'—It now appeared to be the man's turn to be surprised; but, in another moment, he exclaimed, 'Oh! I understand it all.'—'What do you understand?' said I; 'for I must candidly confess that I understand nothing of the whole transaction, which is now involved in the deepest mystery.'—'So let it remain,' he cried abruptly; 'and now mark me,' he added in a slower and more impressive tone; 'beware how you ever utter a word derogatory to the honour of Esther de Medina.' And he quitted the apartment, leaving me in possession of my jewels and of the six hundred pounds also."

"This narrative is so singular, Mr. Gordon," said the Earl of Ellingham, "that were you not a respectable merchant, and that you can have no possible interest in amusing me with a fiction, I should not believe the portion which relates to Miss de Medina."

"I declare before my Maker," ejaculated the diamond-merchant solemnly, "that I have not exaggerated one tittle of my history. I have even more to state. The restoration of my property convinced me that I had no right to retain the money which

Miss de Medina had paid to me as a recompense for its loss. I therefore determined to give it back to her. But I was unacquainted with her residence. Then I recollected that your lordship had stated that Mr. de Medina had become your tenant for a house and small estate about seven miles from London. I immediately repaired to your lordship's residence in Pall Mall to inquire the address of Mr. de Medina; but you were not at home. Your valet, however, furnished me with the information I required; and on the following morning I proceeded to Finchley. I called at the house to which I had been directed, and learnt that Mr. de Medina and his daughter did not intend to settle there until the Spring; but from the servant in charge of the premises I ascertained where Mr. de Medina resided in town. I accordingly returned to London, and forthwith repaired to Great Ormond Street, where I obtained an interview with Miss de Medina. Her father was out—a circumstance which, on the occasion, appeared to give her pleasure; because she asked the servant who announced me, whether Mr. de Medina were in his study; and on receiving a reply to the effect that he had gone out a few minutes previous to my arrival, she was evidently relieved of some anxiety. I communicated the nature of my business; but when I mentioned the particulars of the visit I had received from the light-haired gentleman, her countenance suddenly assumed so singular an expression that I can scarcely define its meaning. It was not alarm alone—nor surprise—nor shame—nor sorrow, which her looks denoted; but a feeling composed of all those sentiments blended together. Then, when I explained to her that this man had restored my lost diamonds, her countenance suddenly assumed an expression of joy. I handed her the six hundred pounds, which she received; and then—as on the occasion of her visit to me the preceding evening—she seemed anxious to make some remark, to which she could not, however, give utterance. The silence became awkward—and I took my leave. Your lordship now knows all."

"And can you for one moment imagine that Esther de Medina was the person who stole your diamonds?" exclaimed Lord Ellingham: "or that she was in any way connected with that man who restored them to you?"

"My belief is that she parted with them in some way to that man," answered Mr. Gordon; "and that her father most probably gave her the money to recompense me for my loss; but that when she paid it, she was unaware that the man had the intention of restoring the jewels."

Lord Ellingham made no answer; for there suddenly flashed upon his mind a reminiscence which staggered him.

The reader will recollect that when Mr. de Medina encountered his daughter at the police-court, he said to her, "Oh! Esther—Esther, I can understand it all. You have brought this upon yourself!" These words were overheard at the time by Lord Ellingham; but they had since escaped his memory—or else failed to make any very deep impression upon him,—his own mind, since that day, having been a prey to much acute anxiety, suspense, and conflicting feelings, on account of Lady Hatfield.

But now, when he recalled those words, and considered them in all their significance,—when he pondered upon the tale which he had just heard

from the lips of the diamond-merchant,—when he remembered that the man who had restored those jewels was doubtless the same who had conveyed to Pall Mall the letter which so mysteriously urged him to hasten to the police-court and give his testimony in Esther's defence,—he began to share Mr. Gordon's belief that there must be some connection between that florid, light-haired man and Miss de Medina.

At the same time, Lord Ellingham was convinced that Esther had not stolen the diamonds; or that, if she had, Mr. Gordon had mistaken the hour of the day, if not the day itself, on which such thefts were committed. Because Arthur remembered, beyond all possibility of error, that from two o'clock on the afternoon until near eleven o'clock at night, on the day specified by the diamond-merchant, Esther was engaged in visiting the house which her father had hired from him (Lord Ellingham), and which was situate about a mile beyond Finchley. Arthur himself accompanied Mr. de Medina and Esther on that occasion; and Esther was never absent from his sight, save perhaps for a few minutes at a time, during the interval above named.

There was a profound mystery somewhere; and though the Earl was not characterised by any feeling of impertinent curiosity, yet he longed to clear up the doubts and misgivings which had at length arisen in his mind. He entertained the greatest respect for Mr. de Medina, and—until now—the same sentiment towards Esther, whom he had hitherto looked upon as a model of purity, amiability, and innocence. He therefore felt grieved—vexed—disappointed—annoyed, for the honour of the human race, and especially for the credit of the female sex, to think it possible that he had been so grossly deceived in that beautiful Jewess.

He walked slowly along, the diamond-merchant by his side.

"Well, my lord," said the latter, at length breaking the protracted silence, "what is your opinion now?"

"I confess that I am bewildered," was the reply. "But I shall not judge hastily. In the meantime, I pray you so far to suspend your opinion upon the subject as to avoid the utterance of aught prejudicial to Miss de Medina's character; and if I succeed in fathoming this mystery, the fact of that young lady's guilt or innocence shall be duly communicated to you."

The diamond-merchant bowed respectfully, and departed in another direction; while Lord Ellingham continued his way towards Grafton Street.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE OATH.

DR. LASCELLES WAS at home, and immediately granted an audience to the Earl of Ellingham.

Popular physicians are potentates in their way, and access to them, save on matters of professional business, is frequently difficult.

But the doctor had taken a greater fancy to the young nobleman than he was ever known to entertain for any of his acquaintances; and he therefore received him as one who did not encroach on his very valuable time.

"Well," said the physician, as the Earl made his appearance in the professional reception-room,

"something new about Lady Hatfield, I'll be bound!"

"You are right, my dear doctor," answered the lover: "and I am the happiest of men."

"I am charmed to hear it," said Lascelles, casting a glance of curiosity, not unmingled with surprise, towards the Earl.

"Yes, doctor," cried the latter, his handsome countenance irradiated with the lustre of complete felicity, "the beautiful Georgiana has consented to become my wife."

"Your wife!" ejaculated the physician.

"And wherefore not?" asked the Earl, astonished at the tone and manner of his friend. "Do you think that I will allow what must be considered a misfortune to stand in the way of my happiness?"

"Certainly—if you can rise superior to a prejudice which influences the generality of the world," said the physician, thrown off his guard by Lord Ellingham's last observation. "I do not see—"

"Ah! then you also know all!" ejaculated the Earl. "But let us not dwell on this topic. Suffice it that I have heard from Sir Ralph Walsingham enough to convince me that his niece is to be commiserated in a certain respect; and I have had a full explanation with her on the subject. In a few weeks she will be Lady Ellingham; and it shall be my duty—as it will also prove my delight—to make her so completely happy that she shall forget the incident which has had so powerful an effect upon her mind."

"I sincerely wish you all possible felicity, my dear Earl," said the doctor, shaking the young nobleman warmly by the hand.

"A thousand thanks, doctor," exclaimed Arthur, cordially returning the pressure. "But how became you acquainted with that incident in Georgiana's life which has exercised such influence over her? I thought you told me yesterday that she had not entered into any explanations with you?"

"Neither had she—nor has she, my dear lord," observed the physician, who seemed slightly surprised, if not pained, by the observations of his young friend. "But—as you yourself ere now said—let us not dwell on that topic;—it is of too delicate a nature."

"It is delicate, my dear doctor," responded the Earl. "But as I am my own master, and labour not under the necessity of consulting my relatives as to these proceedings which are connected with my interest or happiness—"

"Oh! certainly," said the doctor. "You love Lady Hatfield—and she loves you in return. It is quite natural. I have known many such cases—more, perhaps, than you could imagine."

"I do not doubt you," replied the Earl. "But I will not longer intrude on your valuable time," he added, smiling; "for I know that you are not in the habit of receiving visits of a merely friendly nature at this period of the day."

"To you only am I accessible on such terms," replied the physician.

The Earl then took his leave, and was about to return home, when he bethought himself of the strange communication he had received from Mr. Gordon, the diamond-merchant; and, as the weather was fine and frosty, he determined to walk as far as the residence of Mr. de Medina in Great Ormond Street.

On his arrival at that gentleman's house, he found the servant standing at the front-door in the act of receiving some articles from a tradesman's boy; and this trivial fact is only recorded, inasmuch as it explains the reason how Lord Ellingham ascended to the drawing-room without being duly announced. He considered himself to be on terms of sufficient intimacy with Mr. de Medina to take such a liberty; and when the domestic made a movement to conduct him up stairs, Arthur desired him in a condescending manner not to take the trouble, as he knew the way.

Accordingly, the Earl proceeded to the drawing-room, where he did not, however, find Mr. de Medina and his daughter, although, from the statement of the servant, he had expected to meet them there.

The floor was spread with a thick, rich Turkey carpet, on which his footsteps fell noiselessly. He was about to seat himself, when voices in the adjoining apartment, which was only separated from the drawing-room by folding-doors, met his ear.

"Eather," said Mr. de Medina, speaking in an earnest and solemn tone, "this is the third anniversary of that dreadful day which—"

"Oh! do not refer more than is necessary to that sad event, dear father!" exclaimed the Jewess, in an imploring voice.

"Heaven knows, my child," responded her sire, "that—if you feel as I do—"

"I do—I do, dearest father!" cried Eather.

"Yes—but not all the degradation—the infamy—the shame—"

"All—all, father,—even as acutely as yourself!" she said, in a voice denoting the most intense anguish.

"And yet, undutiful girl that you are," exclaimed Mr. de Medina, "you persist in seeing that lost—abandoned—"

The sudden rattling of a carriage in the street drowned the remainder of this sentence.

"Oh! my dearest father, forgive me!" cried Eather in a tone of the most earnest appeal. "You cannot imagine the extent of my love—my boundless love—for that unfortunate—"

"Unfortunate!" repeated Mr. de Medina angrily: "no—no! Say that most wretched—guilty—criminal—"

"My God! use not such harsh terms!" almost shrieked the beautiful Jewess; and the Earl of Ellingham could judge by the sound that she fell upon her knees as she spoke.

"Yes—Eather—on your knees implore my forgiveness for your oft-repeated disobedience!" exclaimed Mr. de Medina. "Consider, undutiful—ungrateful girl—of the position—the scandalous, disgraceful position in which you were placed a few days ago. That ring which was sold to the diamond-merchant—"

"Pardon me, dearest father—oh! pardon me!" cried the young lady, her voice becoming wildly hysterical.

Again a vehicle rolled along the street; and of the Jew's reply all that the Earl could distinguish were the words—"those diamonds, Eather—the theft of those diamonds! Oh! my God—I shall yet go mad with the dreadful thought!"

"Oh! this is cruel—most cruel, after all I have suffered!" cried Eather. "Wherefore revive those terrible reproaches now! Say—speak, father—"

what do you require of me? wherefore this conversation!"

"Again I must remind you," answered Mr. de Medina solemnly, "that this is the third anniversary of that day—"

"I know it—I know it! Oh! how can I ever forget it!" said Eather in a tone of the most painful emotion.

"And now," continued Mr. de Medina, apparently but little moved by his daughter's grief,— "now must you swear, Eather—upon that book which contains the principles of our creed—that you will never, under any circumstances—"

Mr. de Medina here sank his voice to so low a tone, that the Earl could only catch a few disjointed phrases, such as these—"renew your connexion with—acknowledge that—such infamy and disgrace—honoured name—family—seduced my daughter—robbed her of her parity—although the world may not suspect—degradation on yourself—discard you for ever—Thomas Rainford—"

"I swear!" said Eather, in a tone which led the Earl to imagine that she took the prescribed oath with a dreadful shudder.

"And now rise," exclaimed Mr. de Medina. "It is over."

These words suddenly awoke the Earl to a consciousness of his position; and his face became scarlet as the thought flashed upon his mind that he had been playing the part of an eaves-dropper. He despised himself for having listened to the dialogue between Mr. de Medina and his daughter; but his attention had been so completely rivetted to this strange—mysterious—and exciting conversation, that he had unwittingly remained a hearer. An invisible spell had nailed him as it were to that spot—had forced him to linger and drink in that discourse which, alas! appeared to speak so eloquently to the discredit of her whose character he had so warmly defended two hours before!

And now, suddenly awaking—as we said—to a sense of his position, he perceived that a subterfuge could alone save him from the imputation of being an eaves-dropper; and to that subterfuge was this really noble-minded peer compelled to stoop.

Hastily stepping to the drawing-room door, he opened it and closed it again with unusual violence, so that the sound might fall upon the ears of Mr. de Medina and Eather, and induce them to believe that he had only just entered the room.

The stratagem succeeded; for Mr. de Medina immediately made his appearance from the inner apartment, and welcomed the Earl with his wonted calmness of manner.

In reply to Arthur's polite inquiries relative to Miss de Medina, the father replied that his daughter was somewhat indisposed, and hoped the Earl would excuse her absence.

A quarter of an hour passed in conversation of no particular interest to the reader; and Lord Ellingham then took his leave.

When he found himself once more in the open street, he could scarcely believe that he was not the sport of some wild and delusive dream. Had he heard aright? or had his ears beguiled him? Was it true that all those reproaches had been levelled by an angry father at the head of a daughter who did not attempt to deny her guilt, but who was compelled to implore that outraged parent's for-

giveness? Had he not prescribed to her an oath which seemed to imply, in plain terms,—although the Earl had caught but detached portions,—that Esther had been seduced—robbed of her purity,—and that the villain was one Thomas Rainford? Had not that oath been administered for the purpose of binding her to break off her connexion with this Thomas Rainford? And did not Mr. de Medina assure her that, though the world might not suspect it, yet she had not the less brought degradation on herself? In fine—did not the angry father threaten to discard her for ever, unless she swore to obey his injunctions?

In what other way could the blanks in the terms of the oath—as Ellingham had gathered them by means of the few but significant disjointed passages thereof,—in what other way could these blanks be filled up than in the manner above detailed?

"It is too apparent!" thought the Earl within himself: "and Esther is an abandoned—lost—degraded girl! And yet how deceptive is her appearance—how delusive her demeanour! Purity seems to be expressed in every glance—innocece characterises every word she utters! Merciful heavens! what must I think of the female sex after such a discovery as this? And yet, let me not judge harshly of the whole, because one is frail. My own Georgiana is quite different from that artful hypocrite, Esther de Medina. Georgiana conceals not a tainted soul beneath a chaste exterior: she is purity in mind as well as in appearance. And, after all, Esther did steal the diamonds: her father upbraided her with the theft! He even alluded to the ring which she sold to Mr. Gordon. Yes—it is indeed too apparent: she is utterly depraved! But that name of Thomas Rainford—surely I have heard it before!"

The Earl strove to recollect himself.

"Oh! I remember now!" he thought at the expiration of a few moments: "it was Thomas Rainford who was accused of robbing my Georgiana on the high-way! How strange is this coincidence! And yet it was not that man who plundered her—for she proved his innocence of at least this imputation. But it was doubtless Rainford who sent me the letter desiring me to appear in the defence of Esther; and it must also have been he who restored the diamonds to the merchant! That Esther stole those diamonds is clear—for her father accused her of it. At least such is the inference that must be drawn from his words! But that Gordon was wrong as to the day, or the hour of the day on which the theft was committed, is also clear; inasmuch as Esther was at Finchley at the time stated! Still Gordon was so positive—and, when he appeared to prosecute the Jewess at the police-office, so short a time had elapsed—only a few hours, indeed—since the act was perpetrated, that it is difficult to believe how he could have mistaken the date! There is a mystery yet attending on this affair;—but that its elucidation would establish Esther's innocence, cannot for a moment be believed!"

Such was the train of thought into which the Earl of Ellingham was naturally led by the dialogue he had overheard between the Jew and his daughter.

He was sincerely grieved to be forced to come to the conviction that Esther de Medina was a lost and ruined girl, instead of the pure and artless being he had previously believed her to be. Although his

affections were undividedly Georgiana's, yet he had entertained a sentiment of friendship for the Jewess; and he was pained and shocked to think that he had ever experienced any interest—even the slightest—in a female so utterly unworthy his notice. For the father he will feel respect, which was also now blended with profound commiseration; for he beheld in him an honest and honourable man, who was cursed with a daughter characterised by bad passions and evil propensities.

The Earl was well aware that Mr. De Medina was a very rich man: he could not therefore suppose that necessity had induced Esther either to dispose of the ring or to steal the jewels. What, then, could he conclude? That she required funds to support a worthless, abandoned, and lost man—her paramour! Hence the sale of the ring—hence the theft of the diamonds.

Arthur now remembered his promise to Mr. Gordon to make him acquainted with any particulars which he might discover relative to that business. But how could he fulfil his pledge? He shrank from the contemplation of the circumstance which had made him acquainted with Esther's guilt: he felt annoyed and vexed with himself for having allowed his curiosity so far to dominate his honourable principles as to render him an eaves-dropper. He would not therefore aggravate his offence by imparting its results to another; and, with an endeavour to banish the subject from his memory and turn his attention to more pleasurable topics, he hastily pursued his way homeward.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ALARM.—THE LETTER.

IN the meantime Esther de Medina had retired to her own apartment, immediately after the strange, painful, and exciting scene which had taken place with her father.

Seating herself upon a sofa, she burst into a violent flood of tears.

The delicate tinge of carnation which usually appeared beneath the clear, transparent olive hue of her complexion, was now chased away; and she was pale—very pale.

Her grief was evidently intense: anguish overwhelmed her spirit.

Oh, Esther! if thou art indeed a guilty—frail—fallen being, the eye cannot refuse a tear of pity to thy low condition!

No:—for never has even the enamoured poet in his dreams conceived a form and face more perfect than nature had bestowed upon her. There appeared, too, such a virgin freshness about that charming creature who was just bursting into womanhood,—such a halo of innocence seemed to surround her,—so much modesty, so much propriety characterised her slightest attitudes and her most unimportant words, that to contemplate her for a few minutes and yet retain the stubborn conviction that she was a wanton, amounted almost to an impossibility.

And now—to behold her plunged in grief—alone with her own wretched thoughts, and weeping,—who could believe that the lips, on which purity appeared to dwell, had ever been pressed by those of the seducer,—that the sylph-like form, whose

sweeping, undulating outlines were so gracefully set forth by the mournfulness of her attitude, had ever unveiled its beauties on the bed of illicit love,—that the rude band of licentiousness had ever disturbed the treasures of the bosom so carefully concealed:—who could believe all this?

Nevertheless, says the reader, appearances are so completely against her—the evidences of her guilt seem so damning—that, alas! there is not a hope of her innocence!

But let us continue the thread of our narrative.

For half an hour did Esther remain absorbed in the most profound affliction—a prey to thoughts and reminiscences of a very painful nature.

At length she rose abruptly, and evidently strove to conquer her grief.

She wiped away the tears from her fine black eyes, and advanced towards the window, from behind the curtains of which she gazed into the street with the view of directing her thoughts into some new channel.

Suddenly an idea struck her; and she hastened to her writing-desk, at which she sat down and began to pen a letter.

While she was thus engaged, the crystal drops ever and anon started from her eyes, and trembled on the jetty fringes, the glossy darkness of which no oriental dye could have enhanced.

In the midst of her occupation—the progress of which was marked by many an ill-subdued sob—a female servant entered the room to acquaint Miss de Medina that her father had just received a letter on some business that required his immediate attention, and that she was not to expect him home to dinner.

The domestic then withdrew; and Esther finished her letter, which she folded and concealed in her bosom.

It was now five o'clock; and she descended to the dining-room;—but she had no appetite—and the ceremony of the repast, to which she was compelled to sit down alone, was by no means calculated to enliven her spirits.

Quitting the table as soon as possible, she returned to her chamber, put on her bonnet and shawl, and hurried into the fresh air, which she hoped would have an exhilarating influence upon her.

Esther drew her veil closely over her face, and proceeded to Southampton Row, where she entered a shop at which the local post-office was stationed.

The woman who stood behind the counter appeared to recognize her, and immediately handed her a letter which was addressed simply to "A. E. C. Post-Office, Southampton Row. To be left till called for."

Miss de Medina purchased a few articles of fancy stationery—evidently with the view to recompense the shopkeeper for the trouble of receiving her letters, and not because she required the things; and while the woman was occupied in making up the parcel, Esther proceeded to read the communication just placed in her hands.

For this purpose she raised her veil, and approached the light which burnt near the window.

The letter was short: but its contents drew tears from the eyes of the beautiful Jewess.

Scarcely had she terminated the perusal, when she was startled by hearing a voice at the door distinctly exclaim, "There she is, by heaven!"

Instinctively glancing in that direction, she be-

held a very pale-faced lad of apparently fifteen or sixteen gazing intently upon her from the immediate vicinity of the threshold of the shop; and close behind him—with his eyes also fixed upon her—stood a very tall, thin, old man of most repulsive aspect.

The instant Esther looked towards them, the old man laid his hand on the lad's shoulder and hurried him away; and Esther—somewhat alarmed by the incident—took up the little parcel of stationery, wished the woman a courteous "good evening," and quitted the shop.

When she again found herself in the street, she drew down her veil, and hastened towards the nearest hackney-coach stand.

A vehicle speedily drew alongside of the kerbstone for her accommodation; and as she was stepping into it, she distinctly beheld, through the folds of her veil, the tall old man and the pale lad entering another vehicle at a little distance.

She could not be mistaken—for the shops sent forth a flood of light which rendered the forms of those two persons plainly visible.

The coachman had to repeat his inquiry whether he was to drive, ere Esther could recover her presence of mind sufficiently to reply.

"To the nearest post-office in Holborn!" she at length said.

"Why, Lord bless you, ma'am—there's one close by here—not ten yards off," answered the Jarvey, who was an honest fellow in his way.

"Never mind," said Esther. "I wish to be taken to another."

The man urged no farther objection, but mounted his box and drove away—quietly settling in his own mind that his "fare" was either mad or tipsy, he neither knew nor cared which.

Miss de Medina could not shake off an oppressive suspicion which had forced itself upon her. She fancied that she was watched;—and, for the simple reason that she knew nothing of the old man and the lad, her uneasiness increased into actual alarm.

This feeling was enhanced, too, when her quick ears caught the rumbling sound of another vehicle behind; and she began to blame herself for having ventured abroad at such an hour.

Then she reasoned with herself that no harm could possibly happen to her in the midst of a densely populated city, and while people were walking about in all directions;—but still, in spite of this attempt at self-assurance, the pale countenance of the lad and the sinister looks of the old man haunted her like spirits of evil.

But in a few minutes the hackney-coach entered Holborn; and the blaze of light—the bustle—the throng of vehicles—the crowd of foot-passengers—and the animated appearance of the whole scene, dispelled nearly all her alarms.

The vehicle drew up nearly at the corner of Fetter Lane; and Esther alighted.

Another hackney-coach stopped simultaneously at a short distance; and her eyes were immediately directed towards it.

"Here's the post-office, ma'am," said the driver of the vehicle which she had hired.

Miss de Medina started—recollected herself—and hastened to thrust into the letter-box the epistle which she had written ere she left home.

The address on that epistle was—"E. E., No. 5, Brandon Street, Lock's Fields."

This superscription was caught by the sharp eyes

of the pale-faced boy, who had stolen—quick as thought—up to the shop-window, and now stood by Esther's side as she dropped the letter into the box.

When Esther turned hastily to regain the vehicle, she beheld the lad retreating with strange speed from the spot.

"What can this mean!" she thought within herself. "Who is it that is thus watching my movements!"

And, seriously alarmed, she hurried back to the coach, giving orders to be driven direct to Great Ormond Street.

Away went the vehicle again; and the noise of crowded Holborn prevented the Jewess from judging by sounds whether the other hackney-coach was following—for that she was watched, she had no longer any doubt.

Suddenly a suspicion struck her like an icy chill. Could her father have employed spies to dog her—to mark her movements? Circumstances, on the one hand, suggested the probability of such an occurrence; while, on the other, the character of her parent was of a nature repugnant to such a proceeding. He was stern and severe, but strictly honourable; and Esther knew that he was not a man likely to adopt underhand measures.

Then wherefore was she watched? and why had the lad crept close up to her as she put the letter into the box?

The coach had turned up Gray's Inn Lane, which thoroughfare was more quiet than Holborn; and Esther could hear no sounds of a second vehicle.

Our readers are probably aware that the generality of hackney-coaches have, or rather had (for they are nearly extinct at the present day) a little window behind, covered with a sort of flap made of the same material as the lining.

Esther turned round and raised the flap to assure herself that there was really no vehicle following the one in which she was. But at the same instant a face disappeared as if it had suddenly sunk into the earth; but not before the Jewess had recognised the pale features and dark eyes of the lad.

A faint cry escaped her lips; and she fell back on the seat, a prey to vague but serious alarm.

In a few moments she recovered her self-possession, and again endeavoured to dispel her fears by arguing that no harm could possibly befall her—that, if any outrage were intended, her screams would speedily bring hundreds to her rescue—and that after all no real cause for apprehension might exist.

She arrived without accident in Great Ormond Street; and when she alighted at her own door, the lad who had terrified her was no longer to be seen.

Her father had not yet returned; and she was therefore again left to the companionship of her own thoughts. But when she was seated by the cheerful fire in the drawing-room, and with the bright lamp burning on the table, she smiled at those alarms which had ere now oppressed her.

The entire adventure now were quite another aspect in her imagination. The old man and the boy were probably thieves who prowled about to pursue their avocation where they could; she had most likely been mistaken in the idea that they had entered a hackney-coach in Southampton Row simultaneously with herself; but they had followed her

vehicle on foot; and when she stepped out to post her letter, the lad had taken that opportunity of creeping close up to her to pick her pocket. Having failed by the suddenness with which she had turned round, he had afterwards got up behind the coach to dog her to the end of her journey, with the hope of still succeeding in his predatory design; but when she had looked through the back-window, he had disappeared.

Such was the explanation which she now arranged in her mind for her own satisfaction. But, then, what could mean the words uttered at the door of the shop in Southampton Row—"There she is, by heaven!"

Fancy again came to her aid to set this point at rest;—she had most probably been watched by the old man and the lad before she was aware of the fact; and they had lost sight of her; but when they passed the shop her presence there had elicited the ejaculation from the youth.

Such was the manner in which Esther tranquillised herself relative to the little occurrence that had so much alarmed her;—whether her conjectures were well-founded, or not, the reader may judge by what we are about to relate.

No sooner had she posted her letter in Holborn, than Jacob, who had managed to get sight of its superscription, darted back to the second hackney-coach which had stopped near the top of Peter Lane, and leaping in, said to Old Death, who was inside, "The letter is addressed to 'T. R., No. 5, Brandon Street, Lock's Fields.'"

"And that is Tom Rain's place," ejaculated Boney. "Well—do you follow her—get up behind the coach—and meet me at Bunce's presently."

Away started Jacob; and when he was gone, Old Death alighted from the vehicle which he had hired in Southampton Row to follow Esther, dismissed it, and walked boldly into the shop where that young lady had attended behind the letter.

A lad was in attendance belted the counter. "My boy," said Old Death, in as pleasant a tone as he could assume, "I just this minute dropped a letter into the box; and I remember that I have made a mistake in a particular circumstance mentioned in its contents."

"You can't have it back again," replied the boy. "It's against the rules."

"Well, I know it," said Old Death coaxingly. "But it's of the greatest consequence to me to alter a particular part of it; and, if you'll oblige me, here's a half-a-crown for your trouble."

Thus speaking, he displayed the proffered coin.

Now half-a-crown was a great temptation to a lad who only earned eighteen-pence a week in addition to his food; moreover, the master of the shop was absent at the moment, and not very likely to return in a hurry—for the boy knew he was with a party of friends at a neighbouring public-house;—and thus Old Death's sly argument was effectual.

"Well—I s'pose I must," said the youth. "But do n't tell any body about it, though. What's the address?"

"T. R., No. 5, Brandon Street, Lock's Fields." The boy unlocked the letter-box, selected the particular epistle, and handed it to Old Death, who threw the half-crown on the counter, and marched off with the letter.

He could not restrain his curiosity until he reached

Seven Dials or any other place which he was in the habit of frequenting, and accordingly turned into a public-house in the neighbourhood. There he ordered some refreshment, seated himself in a corner of the parlour, and carefully opened the letter in such a way that it might be concealed without exciting a suspicion of having ever been tampered with.

He then read the contents, which ran as follows:—

"I sit down in anguish of heart to pen a few lines to you—to you whom I love so sincerely, but whom I must never see more. My father has just made me take a terrible oath to that effect; and so determined was his manner—so resolute was his—so stern—so severe—(alas! that I should be compelled to say so)—that I dared not refuse to obey his command. And yet you know that I am so devotedly attached to you as ever—all I have suffered—all I have undergone on your account, must convince you of my unchanged, unchangeable affection. Do not, then, think ill of me on account of the oath which my father wrung from me! My God! how my heart palpitates, as I write these lines! Oh! if you knew the state of my mind you would pity me! I am wretched—heaven send that you are more happy than I! Alas! cannot you take compassion upon me—upon me, your own tender Esther—and quit the path which you are pursuing? It is not too late to do so—it is never too late. All might yet be well; my father would forget the past—and we should be re-united. Think of this—ponder well upon it—and remember how much happiness will be wrecked for ever, if you persist in a course which I tremble to reflect upon. To be connected with a highwayman is dreadful! Pardon me—forgive me for speaking thus plainly;—but you know how sincerely I love you—and if I write that terrible word 'a highwayman,' it is merely to fix your thoughts the more seriously on that point. What must be the end of this course of life! Public infamy—or perhaps a scaffold! Again I say, forgive me for writing thus—I scarcely know what I commit to paper—there are moments when my brain reels as I contemplate the subject of my letter. I can write no more. Perhaps I shall find a note from you at the post-office in Southampton Row; I hope so—and I also hope that I may discover in it some cause of satisfaction to myself. Adieu—dearest, adieu.

"ESTHER."

The contents of this letter sadly puzzled Old Death. They were quite different from what he had expected to find them; but without waiting to reflect upon their nature, he obtained a piece of sealing-wax from the waiter, and so cleverly closed the letter again that even a clerk in the General Post-Office could not have told it had been opened.

He then retraced his way to the shop in Holborn where it was originally posted, and threw it back into the box.

This being done, he bent his way towards Toby Bance's house in Earl Street, Seven Dials.

CHAPTER XXIII.

OLD DEATH.

WHEN Bance reached the place whither he had bent his steps, he learnt to his satisfaction that Toby Bance had been sent out by his wife on some errand which would keep him at least an hour away. He accordingly followed Mrs. Bance into the back room, and explained to her all that had occurred.

Having stated how he and Jacob had followed Esther in the hackney-coach from Southampton Row to Holborn, he said—"When Jacob first pointed her out to me as she was reading a letter in a shop, I felt sure he must be mistaken; for I could not conceive why she should be up at that part of the

town, since from what Jacob discovered last night, I thought she was certainly living with Tom Rain in Lock's Fields. However, I determined to follow her; and when she got down at a shop in Holborn, I told Jacob to jump out and get another good look at her, if possible. But, instead of going into the shop, she merely stopped there to post a letter; and Jacob was quick enough to catch sight of the address. Well, when he came back to me, and told me what that address was, I desired him to follow her directly; for I thought that if she was writing to Tom Rain, it was clear she did n't live with him, and therefore it was as well to find out where she does live."

"To be sure," said Mrs. Bance approvingly.

"Then it struck me," continued Old Death, "that if I could only get sight of the contents of that letter which she had posted to Tom Rain, it might open some farther clue to the nature of their connexion. And I did get the letter—"

"Oh! you clever fellow!" interrupted Betsy, shaking her head with mock gravity. "But what did the letter say?"

"Why, it was a regular sermon," answered Old Death. "It talked about how much she loved him—all she had done and suffered on his account—and a lot of gammon of that kind. She told him how her father had made her take an oath not to see him any more, and how unhappy she was. Then she begged of him to repent and leave a course of life that is sure to end at Tuck-up Fair."

"Did she use them words?" demanded Mrs. Bance.

"No, you fool!" cried Old Death. "She writes quite like a lady, and in a beautiful hand too! But, after having said all I have told you, she let him know that she shuddered at the idea of being connected with a highwayman; and she begged his pardon for calling him so."

"A pleasant letter for Tom to receive!" observed Mrs. Bance.

"Very. And she drops a hint," continued Old Death, "that if he will give up his business, there is a chance of her father forgiving Tom for what is past, and of their being re-united—that's the very word."

"Do you think they are married, then?" asked the woman.

"I should say not," replied Bance; "because she talks of being connected with a highwayman—and that's not a word a wife uses to her husband. Besides, the whole letter did n't look like one written by a wife—but rather a mistress. And then it ends by saying that she hopes to find a letter from him at the post-office in Southampton Row."

"Find a letter—when?" asked Mrs. Bance.

"Why, to-day—this evening, I suppose," said Old Death. "She had evidently written her letter before she went to the post-office in Southampton Row, where she did find one from him—because she was reading a note when Jacob first twiggled her. And it was singular enough that we were just talking of her at that very identical moment."

"Then the letter you read was n't an answer to the one she received in Southampton Row?" said Mrs. Bance.

"Of course not, stupid!" cried Old Death. "We followed her straight down to Holborn, and she never stopped or went in any where to write an answer. The letter I read was already written—"



written too in the afternoon, most likely just before she came out to go to Southampton Row. And another reason that made me anxious to get hold of her letter to Tom Rain, was that she did n't post it at the office where she received his, but took the trouble to go down to Holborn to put it into another box."

"I wonder why she did that!" said Mrs. Bunce. "Oh! most likely to avoid exciting any suspicion or curiosity at the office in Southampton Row. Then there's another thing that puzzles me:—she was with Tom Rain last night—Jacob saw them together, and followed them home to Lock's Fields; and she is away from him to-day—writes to him this afternoon—and hopes to find a letter from him when she goes to Southampton Row this evening. One would think, by this, that they have been in the habit of corresponding together, and that the place in Southampton Row is where he directs his letters to her. So it's pretty clear that they do n't live together for good and all. But what perplexes me most is the sermon that she wrote him. It's plain she stole the diamonds, from what Jacob overheard Tom say to her when he gave her the ear-rings last night; and yet she

does n't reproach herself a bit in the letter to him. She only tries to convert Ral-ford; and, to read that letter, one would think she was as innocent of a theft or such-like thing as a child unborn."

"Oh! I dare say she wrote the letter for some object or another which we can't see," observed Mrs. Bunce.

"I scarcely think so," returned Bones: "there was so much seriousness about it."

"But she's a precious deep one, depend on it," said Betsy. "Look how she got off about the diamonds. And, after all, perhaps her father had been talking her over; and so, if she wrote to Tom Rain in a serious way, the humour won't last very long."

"Well—we shall see," exclaimed Old Death. "I should like to secure her in my interests."

"What did you do with the letter she wrote to Tom Rain?" asked Mrs. Bunce.

"Put it back into the post," was the reply. "Fancy if Esther and Tom did get together again, and, on comparing notes, he found that the letter from her had miscarried, he might suspect a trick somewhere, and fix foul play on me. No—no: it was more prudent to let the note go, since I had gathered its contents."

"Well—perhaps it was," said Mrs. Bunce. "One thing is very clear, Ben—"

"What's that, Betsy?"

"Why, that since Father isn't any longer with Mr. Rainford in the fields, it will be much easier to get the little boy away."

"I thought of that just now," said Old Death; then, after a pause, he added, "And I'll tell you what's to be done. The boy must be got into our power to-morrow night."

"To-morrow night!" repeated Mrs. Bunce.

"Yes—to-morrow night," returned Bones emphatically. "I'll trump up something to get Tom out of the way; and me, Toby, and Jacob, will go over and kidnap the child. If we don't do it quick, the Jewess will be getting spoonony on Tom again and going back to live with him in spite of her oath to her father; and then we may not find such another chance for some time to come."

Mrs. Bunce smiled an approval of this scheme, and was about to offer a comment, when a knock summoned her to the front-door.

She shortly returned to the back-room, followed by Jacob.

"What news?" demanded Old Death.

"I found out where the Jewess lives," was the lad's answer; and he named the address in Great Ormond Street.

"Good!" exclaimed Bones. "That shows why she has her letters sent to Southampton Row—it is close by; and as she's known in the neighbourhood, the gossie her answers at another place. But give Jacob his supper—and brew me some grog, Betsy."

While Mrs. Bunce was busily employed in executing these orders, another knock at the front-door was heard. Jacob hastened to answer it, and returned with a letter directed to "Mr. TOM BRUCE;" but which, having a peculiar mark placed somewhere amidst the writing, was instantly discovered by Old Death to be intended for himself.

He accordingly opened it, and read as follows:—

"Tim put on the lute yesterday and went out a durrak in the shlovers, gadding the hood. He banished a bluck and a shaketer of a pack and a skin. His jamaa Mutton-Face Sal, with her well-back queering a ruelin, stilled. A cross cove, who had his regular, tipped the office 'Gop Jump' and Tim twiggid that a pig was marking. So he speeded to the crib, while his jamaa shoved her trunk too. To-day Tim sent the pack to church and christies; but the churchman oozed to it through' post, as Tim's shaker had shoooned on him a speat and an elder-noon last week. So Tim didn't fight coom enough, and was grabbed. The skin had three Bangs and a foot, which I've got at the padding-hen, Ty 25, where I'll cop them to you for edging the gal. A By Whidder-gunnoff will leave this tin.

"TWENTY-FIVE"

Old Death having read this singular composition to himself, threw it into the fire.

He then sat pondering for a few moments upon the course which he should pursue under the circumstances just made known to him.

And while he is thus engaged in meditation, we will lay before our readers a translation of the slang document:—

"Tim dressed himself in rags yesterday, and went out disguised as a beggar half-naked and without shoes or stockings. He robbed a gentleman and a lady of a watch and a purse. His mistress Mutton-face Sal, with her reticule, and looking like a respectable female, was on the

look-out close at hand. A confederate-thief, who went shares with Tim, suddenly gave the alarm, so that Tim might hand him over the plunder; and Tim saw that a person was watching him. So he hurried off home, while his woman got off safely also. To-day Tim sent the watch to have the works taken out and put in another case and to get the maker's name altered; but the watchmaker informed against him through spite, because Tim's mistress had passed off on him (the watchmaker) a bad six-pence and half-crown last week. So Tim wasn't wary enough, and was taken into custody. The purse had three five-pound notes and a sovereign in it, which I have got at Thompson's lodging-house, No. 25, where I will hand them over to you if you will try and get Tim off. A sharp boy-thief will leave this letter."

The signature "TWENTY-FIVE" indicated the number attached to the writer's name in Old Death's private list of those thieves who were accustomed to do business with him.

"Anything new?" inquired Mrs. Bunce, handing him a glass of hot gin-and-water.

"Nothing particular," was the reply. "Only Tim the Summer" got himself into a scrape. But I shall go and see about it directly."

"Tim isn't on your list—is he?" demanded Mrs. Bunce.

"No; but Josh Pedlar—that's Number Twenty-five—has got Tim's money, and will hand it over to me. So—"

A loud knock at the door interrupted Old Death's observation.

Jacob was sent to answer the summons; and in a few moments Tom Bain walked jauntily into the room.

"Well, my prince of fencibles," he exclaimed, addressing Old Death, as he cast himself unceremoniously into a chair, and stretched out his legs in a free and independent manner, "anything new in the wind?"

"Yes—a trifling job—for to-morrow night, Tom," answered Bones. "But you'll be making your fortune at this rate?" he added, with one of his hideous chuckles.

"The sooner, the better," cried the highwayman.

"And then you'd be able to retire from business—marry—and settle yourself comfortably," said Old Death, with apparent indifference of manner, but in reality watching Rainford's countenance attentively as he uttered the word "marry."

"Oh! as for settling," exclaimed Tom, laughing. "I am not the chap to bury myself in a cottage in Wales or Devonshire. I don't like that sort of thing. Business and bustle suit me best."

"But what do you say to marriage, Tom? A good looking fellow like you might do something in that line to great advantage," observed Old Death.

"That's my own affair," returned the highwayman hastily.

"By-the-by, what have you done with the boy that was thrown on your hands 'o'her night?" asked Old Death.

"I am taking care of him, to be sure," was the answer. "If I abandon him, he must go to the workhouse. But what is the little job you were talking about?"

"A worthy citizen and his wife will pass over Shooter's Hill to-morrow night, at about eleven o'clock, in a yellow post-chaise," replied Bones, inventing the tale as he went on. "The cit will

* Summer—a thief

have enough in his pocket-book to make it worth while to ease him of it; and the post-boy will stop when he's ordered to do so. They were to have gone to-night; but something has happened to put off their journey till to-morrow."

"Good," said Tom. "The business shall be done. Any thing else to communicate to-night?"

"Nothing," was the answer.

"Won't you stay and take a drop of something warm, Mr. Rainford?" asked Betsy Bunce, in her most winning way.

"No, thank 'ee," returned Tom. "I must be off. Good night."

And the highwayman took his departure.

When the front-door was closed behind him, Old Death said, with a chuckle, "Well, he'll be out of the way to-morrow night; and we shall get hold of the boy. But I shall now just step up to Castle Street, and see what's going on at twenty-three."

"Shall you come back here to-night?" asked Mrs. Bance.

"I can't say. It's now nine o'clock; and if I do, it will be by ten. Jacob, my boy, you need n't wait unless you like."

Old Death then left the house.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CASTLE STREET, LONG ACRES.

To the north of Long Acre runs Castle Street—for many years notorious as a nest of thieves, prostitutes, and juvenile vagabonds of the most degraded description.

At the period of which we are writing, a person of the name of Thompson, owned—and probably still possesses—the lodging-houses numbered 23, 24, and 25 in Castle Street. This individual resided in Mint Street, Borough, where he had similar houses, in addition to others in Backeridge Street, St. Giles's.

The houses in Backeridge Street would make up one hundred beds; and those in Castle Street sixty.

At lodging-houses of this description the rooms are filled with low trundle-beds, each having a straw mattress, two coarse sheets, a blanket, and a rug. The price of half a bed is three-pence; and it need scarcely be observed that men, women, and children sleep together in these filthy receptacles without the slightest regard to decency or modesty. Sometimes, when the lodging-houses are particularly crowded, three persons will share one bed;—or motives of economy frequently compel a poor family thus to herd together. It is by no means an uncommon occurrence for a grown-up girl to sleep with her father and mother, or with her brothers;—a poor married couple will even share their bed with a male friend;—and so shame is known!

Who can define where the shades of doubtful honesty and confirmed rascality meet and blend in these low lodging-houses? The labouring man is in nightly company with the habitual thief—his wife and his as yet uncorrupted daughter are forced to associate with the lowest prostitutes. How long will that wife remain faithful—that daughter faultless? The very children who breathe that infected atmosphere soon become lost, and triumph in their degradation!

The principal frequenters and patrons of these

low lodging-houses are regular customers, and consist of thieves, prostitutes, beggars, coiners, burglars, and hawkers. The casual lodgers are labouring men and their families whom poverty compels to sleep in such herculean places.

The hawkers make a great deal of money. They can buy steel-pens for 5d. a gross, pocket-books for 3d. each, snuff-boxes for 6d. each, and penknives for 4d. each. On every article they can gain one hundred per cent. Many of these hawkers consider nine or ten shillings to be only a reasonable, and by no means a good, day's work.

Some of the women who frequent the lodging-houses in Castle Street and elsewhere, and who have no children of their own, hire infants for 4d. or 6d. a day, and obtain in the shape of alms at least four or five shillings a day each. Females of this class care not whether their husbands or lovers work or remain idle; for they boast that they can keep them—and keep them well, too. Some of these women knit caps in the streets; and they make more money than those who merely trust to the children accompanying them as the motive of charitable persons' compassion.*

In the low lodging-houses of Castle Street, and wherever else they may be found, the most frightful dissipation as well as the most appalling immorality prevails. Drunkenness is the presiding genius of these dens.

And how much has STRONG DRINK to answer for!

It is strong drink that helps to fill the gaols—the hulks—the asylums for the wretched, the diseased, and the insane. It is strong drink that calls forth so many sighs and such bitter tears—shortens existence—perpetuates family disease—and fosters maladies of all species and of all kinds. Strong drink often places the criminal in the condemned cell, and reduces the beautiful girl to barter her charms for bread. Strong drink strews the land with old rags and mending bones.

Let Temperance and Moderation be the guides of all;—for what are the results of Intemperance and habitual Drunkenness? Behold them in all the poor and low neighbourhoods of London! And if you ask, reader, by what signs you are to recognise them, we will tell you;—by the leaden eyes—the tottering steps—the shaking limbs—the haggard countenances—the feverish brows—the parched lips—the dry and furrowed tongue—the hot and pestilential breath—and the tremulous voices, of the confirmed votaries of strong drink. Apoplexy—palsy—delirium tremens—enlarged liver—ostified

* A police-serjeant, from whom we have obtained much valuable information relative to the poverty, mendacity, immorality, and crime in London, one day informed us that he knew of two sisters, both single women, who were confined at about the same time, and who took it by turns to go out with the children. They passed the halber off so trivial, and made upon an average seven shillings a day by this impudent. The money was spent in riotous living and debauchery, in the evening, along with their flash men, who called in complete Misses. Living, however, far better than many a poor tradesman. One evening, the police-serjeant above alluded to had occasion to visit the room which the sisters occupied at one of Thompson's houses in Castle Street (a robbery having been committed in the dwelling), and he found the two young women and their passengers at supper. On the table were a baked shoulder of mutton and potatoes, two quarts of port, and a bottle of gin. One of the sisters is at the present moment a prostitute in Fleet Street.

heart—impaired digestion—yellow jaundice—cancerous stomach—and dropsy,—all these attend upon strong drink. And the hideous catalogue of evils includes, also, broken limbs—fearful accidents and gushing wounds,—as well as many of those hereditary maladies which are handed down from father unto son!

In an earlier chapter we ridiculed the phrase of "Merry England." Oh! is it merry to see so much misery—so much crime—so much oppression—so much sorrow—so much absence of sympathy? If all this be joyous, then, of a surety, is England the merriest country, and London the merriest city, on the face of the earth. If a man can find music in the cries that issue from our crowded prisons and the wails that flow from our barbarous workhouses, then may he dance long and heartily to that melody—for it never ceases. If poverty can excite felicitous sensations within him, heaven knows he need never be sad. If crime can bring smiles to his lips, his countenance need never wear a melancholy aspect. And if he can slake his thirst in the heart-wrangling tears of human agony, he need never step out of his way to look for a fountain or a spring!

In this light, England is indeed merry; for the observer of human nature, as he walks through the crowded streets of London, is jostled and hemmed in by all the gaunt and hideous forms that bear the denominations and wear the characteristics of Crime—Poverty—Disease—Sorrow—and Despair!

Old Death knocked at the door of No. 23, Castle Street, and was instantly admitted by a tall, pale, and rather handsome girl, who exclaimed, "Ah! my fine fellow—I thought you would come."

"Is it you, Mutton-Face?" said Bones, with a grim smile.

"Me—and no one else," answered the girl. "But walk in."

Old Death accepted the invitation, and followed Mutton-Face Sal into a room where about two dozen persons, male and female, were crowded round a large fire.

* One was a young man, of the name of Quin, and who obtained a handsome income by means of imposture. He was accustomed to appear in the streets as a wretched-looking, deplorable old man, bent double with age and infirmity, supporting himself on a stick, and crawling along in a painful manner at the slowest possible rate. He used to swallow a dose of some strong acid every morning to make himself look ghastly pale; and he succeeded so well in counterfeiting an aspect of the most lamentable nature, that he seldom returned to Castle Street at night with less than ten shillings in his pocket. He had now thrown off his disguise, and was whiling away the time, after a good supper, with a quart of egg-hot.

Next to him sat a young woman, stout, florid, and rather good-looking. She was in her stays and petticoat, having very quietly taken off her gown to mend a rent; and she experienced not the slightest shame at thus exposing all the upper part of her person to the mixed society present. Neither did they appear to think there was any thing at all remarkable in her conduct. How, indeed, could it be otherwise?—since she would presently undress herself entirely in that very room—and before all her companions, who would do the same—male and female—when the hour arrived to repair to the beds ranged along the wall. This girl was known as

Jane Cummins, and was the mistress of the impostor Quin.

Farther on was a fellow who was sitting upright enough in his chair then, but who appeared daily in the streets as a bent cripple. He was accustomed to go about imitating a curlew, by which avocation he made a good living. He invariably got drunk every night.

Next to this impostor was a little deformity who was tied round the body to his chair. He had no legs, and was dragged about the streets of a day in a kind of cart drawn by two beautiful dogs, and having a banner unfurled behind him. The woman in charge of No. 23 paid him the greatest attention—put him to bed at night—helped him to rise in the morning—carried him out to his vehicle—strapped him in—and saw him safe off on his excursion about the metropolis. He usually returned at four to his dinner, and did not go out afterwards. His "earnings" were on the average ten shillings a-day.

A woman of about thirty, dressed in widow's weeds, and far advanced in the family way, sat next to the little deformity. She had never been married, but was possessed of five children, who were now playing in one corner of the room. She was accustomed to take her stand in some public thoroughfare, with her children drawn up in a row; and this game she had carried on, at the time of which we are writing, for four years—rather a long period of widowhood. She disliked fine weather, because the hearts of the charitable are more easily touched by the spectacle of a "destitute family" standing in the midst of a pouring rain or on the snow; and she reckoned that in bad weather she could earn eight or nine shillings a-day. Every Saturday night she took her station in some poor neighbourhood—such as Church Street (Bethnal Green), Leather Lane, Lambeth Marsh, High Street (St. Giles's), or Clare Market; and on those occasions she often obtained as much as fifteen shillings. But then, as she very justly observed, Sunday was a day of rest; and so it was indeed to her—for she was in the habit of getting so awfully drunk every Saturday night, after her return home to Castle Street, that she was compelled to lie in bed all the next day until three or four o'clock, when she rose to a good dinner. She always kept herself and children remarkably neat and clean—not from any principle, but as a matter of calculation. Charitable people thought she was a good mother, and a deserving though distressed woman; and alms poured in upon her. When questioned by any individual who relieved her, she would reply that "her husband was a bricklayer who had fallen off a ladder and killed himself six weeks ago;" or that "he was an honest, hard-working man whose career was suddenly cut short by his being run over by a gentleman's carriage;" or some such tale.

Next to her sat a young woman who was wont to take her stand in the evening, after dark, close by the entrance to Somerset House. In the summer she would hold a few flowers in her hand; in the winter, lace and bobbins; and her invariable cry was "Oh! pray, dear sir"—or "dear lady," as the case might be—"pray do assist me! I have only this moment come out of the hospital, and have nowhere to sleep." By these means she realized her five shillings in three or four hours, and hastened back to Castle Street to spend them with a worthless fellow—her paramour.

Another individual whom we must mention, was an elderly man, who in his youth had been apprenticed to a chemist. He obtained his living by displaying a fearfully ulcerated arm, having himself originally produced the sores by means of corrosive acids and by the juices of various plants—such as the *ranzanculus acris* and *sceleratus*, the spongi-laurel, esphorbium, arum maculatum, &c. He regularly revived and aggravated the ulcers every time they began to heal, and his arm was really shocking to contemplate. He would take his stand before a window, and, raising his shirt-sleeve, display the ulcers, so that the ladies or gentlemen at the easement sent him out a sixpence or a shilling, as much for the purpose of getting rid of so leathsome a spectacle as through motives of charity. It was this man's boast that three hours in a fashionable street or square would produce him seven or eight shillings.

Another impostor present on this occasion was a man of about forty, who was a perfect adept in disguising his person, and who feigned a different malady for every change in his attire and outward appearance. At one time he was suffering from ophthalmia, produced by the application of irritants—such as snuff, pepper, tobacco, blue vitriol, salt, alum, &c. At another he would actually produce blindness for a time by the application of belladonna, henbane, or sponge-laurel; and then he was led about by a little boy. Again, he would appear as a miserable creature afflicted with a horrible jaundice—the yellow colour being produced by a dye. He was also perfect in the counterfeit of spasmodic complaints, paralysis, and convulsions. His earnings were usually considerable: but on one occasion, "when things were very bad," he obtained admission into a hospital as an epileptic patient; and so well did he assume the dreadful attacks at particular intervals, that he remained in the institution for several weeks.

Lying on one of the beds, in a filthy state of intoxication, was a miserable object who was accustomed to go about the streets on his hands and knees, holding iron grappels. His spine was bent upwards—rounded like that of a cat in a passion; and his legs were moreover deformed. His supine position was no counterfeit: he could not walk on his feet like other human beings. Thus far he certainly was an object of compassion: but in his character he was a worthless fellow—abusive, insolent, drunken, and addicted to thieving.

Sitting on another bed, and so far gone in liquor that he could scarcely hold the pipe he was smoking, sat a man about forty years of age, named Barlow. He had been a clergyman and was now a begging-letter impostor. He possessed an excellent address, and was most plausible in his speech as he was fluent with his pen; but the moment he obtained any money, he was never sober until it was spent. He had travelled all over England—knew every nobleman's or gentleman's country seat—and had carried on an excellent business by means of his begging-letters.*

A labouring man, his wife, and daughter were amongst this precious company. The girl was about fifteen, and tolerably good-looking. The family had been three days in that lodging-house; and she

already laughed at the obscene jest and applauded the licentious song.

Two or three hawkers—a couple of juvenile thieves—and some young girls, confirmed prostitutes, made up the amount of the precious company into whose presence Mutton-Face Sal had conducted Old Death.

Those who were acquainted with him saluted him respectfully; for he was a great man—a very great man—amongst persons of a particular class.

"Who is that horrible old wretch?" asked the labourer's daughter, in a whisper to Jane Cummins.

"The richest fence in London," returned the other in the same low tone of voice.

"And what's a fence, Miss?"

"A fence, you fool, is a buyer of stolen goods, as the books call it. That old covey is rolling in riches—shabby and mean as you see him. He has been at it, they tell me, upwards of thirty years, and has never got his-self lumbered yet. But the best of it is, no one knows where his stores are: no one even knows where he lives. He has certain houses of call; but the cunningest Bow Street Officer can't find out his abode."

"What do you mean by lumbered?" asked the girl, whose name was Matilda.

"Put into quod, to be sure. But how green you are. We must teach you what's what, I see that. Here—help me to put on my gown—it's mended new. Thank'ee. Now come with me to the window, and I'll tell you what a happy kind of life I lead—and how you may do the same if you like."

But even as she uttered these words, Jane Cummins heaved a sigh—although she strove hard to subdue it.

The girl walked aside with her; and they continued their conversation in whispers at the window.

"I'm afraid our Tilda'll get no good here," said the labourer, in a low tone, to his wife, as he glanced uneasily towards his daughter.

"Nonsense, you fool!" returned the woman. "You can't get no work—and we must starve if we do n't do something. Our gal can keep us, if she will—and she must too. Sooner or later it will come to that with her—and as well now as ever."

The poor labourer sighed; he would have remained honest, and kept his wife and daughter so, if he could; but want and houseless wanderings in the cold street stared him in the face—and he resigned himself to the bitter destiny that was thus forced upon him and his family!

In the mean time Old Death had taken a seat near the fire, and was deep in a whispered conversation with Mutton-Face Sal.

"Where's Josh Padler?" he asked.

"He'll be in shortly," was the answer. "He's only gone out to fetch something for his supper."

"And so Tim the Snammer is lumbered?" said Old Death.

"Yes; he's in Clerkenwell. But you'll get him off when he goes up again 'fore the bank on Saturday—won't you, old chap?—now, won't you?"

"I do n't know—I do n't know. He is n't one of my men: he never would give me a turn. His name do n't appear against a number on my list."

"But he will give you all his business in future, if you'll get him off this time—just this time," said the girl coaxingly.

* All the characters just depicted are real ones. Some of them are still about town.

"We shall see what Josh has to tell me—I never promise in a hurry," returned Old Death. "Besides, it's not the rule to assist a man that goes to others to do his business. Tim gets his notes changed at old Isaac's*—or at Millberry's†—or at Mrs. Davis's;—or at Rayner's‡—or—"

And as Old Death enumerated his competitors, telling them off on his fingers slowly, one after the other, his jealousy arose to such a pitch that the workings of his countenance became absolutely frightful.

"Now, what's the use of going on like this!" said Sal. "I tell you that Tim shan't have no more to do with them people, if you'll only get him off this time. None of them can do it as sure as you; and if you only tell me it shall be done, why—it's as good as done."

At this moment the door opened, and a tall, rather good-looking, but rakish and shabbily-dressed man, of about five-and-twenty, made his appearance.

"Here's Josh!" cried the girl.

The thief and Old Death exchanged greetings; and the latter proposed to adjourn to a public-house in the neighbourhood to talk over the business. Thither the two men, accompanied by Mutton-Face Sal, accordingly repaired; and Bones suffered himself to be persuaded to receive the three five-pound notes and the sovereign, mentioned in the flash letter, as the price of his endeavours to procure the discharge of Tim the Scammer.

The old man then took his departure, and Josh Pedler returned with Sal to the lodging-house.

CHAPTER XXV.

MATILDA, THE COUNTRY-GIRL.

In the meantime Jane Cummins had been using all her eloquence for the purpose of inducing Matilda Briggs, the poor labourer's daughter, to become as bad as herself.

"You don't know what a pleasant life we lead," she repeated, when she had drawn the girl aside to the window. "Quin—my man—earns lots of money—and we know how to spend it. To-night we'd a roast loin of pork and apple-sauce for supper at a slap-up-esting-house; then we'd some rum-and-water; and then we came home here. Look how Quin's enjoying himself with that egg-hot. Is n't he a capital fellow to be able to get so much money—and all so easy too? and do n't you think I'm happy to have nothing to do but to help him spend it!"

Again the young woman struggled fruitlessly to keep down a sigh; for—in reality—she loathed, she abhorred the life which she was leading.

"And what do you suppose will become of you and your father and mother!" she continued. "Why—if it wasn't for that good-natured fellow Josh Pedler you'd have all been turned out last night into the streets. And when the woman came in just now to collect the three-pence, did n't he

take and pay for you and the old people? And did n't he give you all the grub you had to-day!"

"Why do you speak so much about him?" asked the country-girl.

"Oh! I do n't know—only because he seems to have taken a fancy to you," returned Jane Cummins. "And I tell you what it is—you may become his jenns if you like."

"His what!" said Matilda, blushing—for she half understood the meaning of the word.

"Why—his wife, over the left, if you choose," was the answer. "But what a fool you are! You're not so innocent as you pretend to be. Come—tell me—have you ever had a lover!"

"Never," replied the girl.

"Then it's high time you should. The truth is, Josh told me to sound you," she added in a mysterious manner; "and if you only say the word, we'll have a wedding here to-night. Josh has got plenty of money at this moment. He found a parcel the day before yesterday—"

"Where!" inquired the country-girl.

"In a gentleman's pocket, at the theatre," returned Jane coolly; "and he talks of setting up a mint—"

"A mint! what with!" asked Matilda.

"With Queen's metal, to be sure," responded the other; "and I think he's a very thriving young fellow. You'd be as happy as a princess along with him;—and would n't he come out strong to-night with the lark, if you was to say yes."

"But my father—my mother—"

"Oh! leave them to me!" said Jane Cummins. "Go and sit down again—I'll manage the old woman—and she can manage the old man herself."

Matilda returned to her seat; and Quin, who could pretty well guess what his mistress had been about, handed the country-girl the quart-pot of egg-flip. She declined to partake of it; but he pressed her hard—and she drank a few drops.

"Oh! that's nothing—a mere taste!" cried Quin. "Take another slip. Come."

And she did as she was desired.

"Lord bless the girl—she's quite afraid of it!" said Quin. "But you must and shall have a good draught."

Resistance was vain; Quin held the pewter-pot to her lips, and forced her to imbibe a considerable quantity.

He then passed the measure to her mother, who did not require any entreaty to drink; and the labourer himself was not one likely to refuse good liquor when it was offered to him.

Quin thus got upon very pleasant terms with the poor family; and, making Briggs sit next to him, he began to chatter away in a familiar style, not forgetting to hand round the quart-pot at short intervals.

Meantime Jane Cummins had drawn Mrs. Briggs aside, and made certain representations to her—the result of which was that Matilda should that very night become the mistress of Josh Pedler. The arrangement was, however, to be kept quiet until Josh should return, for fear that he might have altered his mind since he spoke to Jane on the subject in the morning.

At length Pedler came back, accompanied by Mutton-Face Sal; and, as he entered the room, he exclaimed, "Well, pals, it's all right! Old Death

* A notorious fence living in Ligerwood Street.

† A flash public-house at the corner of Laurence Lane, St. Giles's.

‡ A fence living in Beoken Street.

§ A stick-maker, and a noted fence, living in Coach and Horse Yard, Drury Lane.

has took it in hard—and so Tim is as good as out. I've ordered round a gallon of gin-punch to make merry in consequence."

This announcement was received with loud cheers.

"Come you here, Josh," cried Jane Cummins: "I want to say a word to you."

"Well—what is it!" demanded the thief.

"Oh! nothing bad," she replied, with a significant look at her paramour Quin, who laughed heartily—as if an excellent piece of fun were in preparation.

Jane then whispered a few words in Josh Pedler's ears: the man did not, however, wait to hear all she had to say; but, bursting away from her, caught Matilda Briggs in his arms, and, giving her three or four hearty smacks with his lips, shouted, "A wedding, pals! a wedding!"

"A wedding!" repeated those who were only now let into the meaning of all the mysterious whispering that had been going on—first between Jane and Matilda—then between Jane and Mrs. Briggs—afterwards between Mrs. Briggs and her husband—and lastly between Jane and Josh Pedler:—"a wedding!" they cried: "hooray!"

"Yes—a wedding, in right good earnest!" exclaimed Josh. "But where 's that drunken old file Barlow!"

He 's fallen asleep on his bed," observed Mutton-Face Sal.

"Then rouse him—and be damned to him!" cried Pedler.

Sal approached the bed, and speedily awoke the parson, who was at first mighty wroth at what he considered to be a very great liberty: but when he was informed that his services were required to perform a matrimonial ceremony—that he was to have five shillings for the job—and that a gallon of gin-punch was expected immediately, he uttered a tremendous oath by way of expressing his joy, and leapt up with as much alacrity as the fumes of liquor, which still influenced his brain, would permit him to display.

A circle was then formed, in the midst of which Josh Pedler, Matilda Briggs, and the begging-letter-impector parson took their station. One of the hawkers produced a common brass ring, which he handed to Barlow, over whose person Quin threw a sheet by way of surprise, while another individual gave him an obscene look.

The greatest excitement now prevailed amongst the rogues and loose women present: and even Matilda herself entered into the spirit of the proceeding—for she was excited with the liqueur which Quin had forced upon her. Her poor father alone experienced a qualm of conscience—but he dared not utter a word calculated to betray his scruples or manifest his regrets—for his wife, of whom he stood in dread, cordially approved of the arrangement.

The drunken parson now commenced the ceremony; and assuming, as well as he could, the seriousness of former days, he recited the following slang chant:—

"I, parish prig and bawling ben,
Do here, within this padding ken,
Josh Pedler—if thou wilt agree—
Cap that young shaver unto thee.
To her a fancy block be thou—
Tip manley—she's thy Jemina too."

Barlow made the bride and bridegroom join hands, and then continued thus:—

"When thou art out upon the cross,
May she be faithful to thy doan.
If things go rough, and traps are nigh,
May she upon the nose be thy."

The company then repeated in chorus the last line; after which display of their vocal powers, the ceremony was continued by the parson in the following words:—

"If you should pinch a lob—or plan
A sneezer, or a rattleman—
Or work the bulls and cotter run—
Or go the jump and speel the drum—
Or turn shop-bouncer at a pinch,—
Should you do this and get the clinch,
May she, while thou art lumbered, be
Still true and faithful, Josh, to thee."

The parson paused for a few moments, and concluded with this dithich:—

"Be witness, all, to what is said—
And with this fawney ye are wed!"

Barlow handed Josh the ring, which the thief placed on the girl's finger, and then gave her a hearty kiss.

The spectators immediately set up a shout of acclamation; and at that instant the gin-punch made its appearance.

A scene of debauchery—noise—quarrelling—and ribaldry now followed. The parson was voted into the chair, which was constituted by the foot of one of the beds; and the punch went rapidly round in pewter-pots.

The bowl was soon emptied; whereupon Josh Pedler sent to the public-house and ordered another. The little deformity, without legs, sang a filthy song: even the man with the curved spine, and who went about on grapple, forgot his wonted ill-humour and insolence, and joined in the mirth.

The woman, who had charge of the house, was summoned; and, for a consideration of seven shillings and sixpence, she agreed to provide a separate room for the accommodation of the "happy couple."

* The following is a glossary which will enable the reader to comprehend the slang terms used in the thieves' marriage-services:—

Parish prig, clergyman.
Bawling ben, bawling man.
Padding-ben, lodging-house.
Cap, make over.
Shaver, girl—young lady.
Fancy block, paramour—fancy man.
Tip manley, shake hands.
Jemina, paramour—fancy girl.
On the cross, out thieving.
Duan, bed.
Traps, constables.
Upon the nose, on the watch.
Fig, alert.
Pinch a lob, rob a till.
Plan, steal.
Sneezer, snuff-box.
Rattleman, a silk pocket handkerchief.
Work the bulls, pass bad ix pieces (a favourite sport with cotners in those days).
Cotter, sovereigns.
Nose, bad—spurious.
Go the jump, steal into a room through a window.
Speel the drum, run away with stolen property.
Shop-bouncer, shop-lifter.
Get the clinch, be locked up in goal.
Lumbered, imprisoned.
Fawney, ring.

This amount was duly paid; and the woman was made drunk into the bargain for her trouble.

At length some one proposed a dance; to which the parson objected, and moved "another bowl of punch" as an amendment. Jane Cummins, however, put an end to the argument by addressing herself, and performing sundry salutatory evolutions in a complete state of nudity—an example which was very speedily followed by Mutton-Face Sal, whose grief for the loss of her paramour, Tim the Boaster, was temporarily drowned in punch. Even the woman in widow's weeds was about to adopt the same course; but she was too tipsy to accomplish her purpose, and, on rising from her chair, fell on one of the beds and into a profound sleep at the same time.

The noise, confusion, and disgusting licentiousness of the scene increased to an extraordinary degree; but Josh Pedler led Matilda away—or rather carried her; for the unfortunate girl was now in a complete state of intoxication.

* * * * *

Revuling as the contemplation of such a scene as that just described must be to the rightly-constituted mind, it was nevertheless requisite to introduce it into such a work as the present.

Its details prove how necessary it is to establish in the great metropolis cheap and well-conducted lodging-houses for the use of poor but honest families.

This cannot be done by private speculators, because an efficient management could only be secured by legislative enactment.

The Government, then, should direct its attention to this very important subject.

A poor man is compelled to quit his native town or village in the provinces, and comes to London to seek for work. He is accompanied by his wife and daughter. Penury compels him to fix upon the cheapest lodging he can find; and a cheap lodging-house cannot be a respectable one. Its landlord and landlady have neither the time nor the means—even if they possess the inclination—to discriminate between the various applicants for admission:—on the contrary, they are well aware that the worst characters are most likely to prove their best customers. Their only consideration is to make their establishment answer; and so long as their lodgers pay for the accommodation they seek, no questions can be asked.

To such a den, therefore, is the poor man forced to take his wife and his daughter. The obscene language which falls upon this young girl's ears—the fact of being compelled to lay aside her garments in the presence of several males, who unconcernedly undress themselves before her—the debauchery of the day—the licentiousness of the night,—to all these elements of ruin is she immediately exposed. A veil drops suddenly, as it were, from before her eyes; and she finds herself hemmed in by moral corruption—surrounded by temptation—excited by new desires—and encouraged to go astray by her companions. How can she leave that gulf of impurity, otherwise than impure? how can she quit that abode of infamy, otherwise than infamous? Many a high-born lady has succumbed to the seducer under circumstances less venial,—under influences admitting a far less amount of extortion!

Were the Government, with the consent of the Legislature, to establish lodging-houses for poor but honest persons, an immense benefit would be conferred upon that class, and the fearful progress of immorality would receive a check at least in one point. The respectability of such institutions might be ensured by placing trustworthy married couples at their head, and applying a system of rules which would enforce regular hours, exclude ardent spirits, and only permit a moderate quantity of beer to be brought in for the use of each individual, and likewise empower magistrates to punish those who might be brought before them charged with breaking the regulations, or otherwise subverting the wholesome discipline enjoined.

Thieves, prostitutes, and bad characters would not attempt to obtain admission to establishments of this description:—no more than a person enjoying a competency would endeavour to become the inmate of a workhouse. Scenes of debauchery and unbounded license alone suit abandoned males and females;—and thus every guarantee would exist for the respectable management of those institutions which would save the honest poor from the low lodging-houses of London.*

* When Mr. Mills was instructed to draw up his "Report on Prison Discipline," he obtained the necessary information and evidence from a variety of sources. One of the witnesses whom he examined was Inspector Titterton of the Metropolitan Police Force. This intelligent officer deposed as follows:—"St. Giles's abounds with low lodging-houses. The most notorious are kept by Groat. He is a rich man, and has elegant private houses at Hampstead, and the lowest sort of lodging-houses in every part of London. He generally visits these dens daily,—keeps his horse and gig. Price of these houses, as all others, three-pence or fourpence a night in a room with a score or two of other people. Men and women sleep together anyhow. A man and woman may have a place scooped off, which they call a room, for eightpence a night; but they are seldom so delicate. These houses are brothels. Groat is the monopolist of low lodging-houses. The St. Giles's prostitutes commit many robberies upon drunken countrymen whom they entice to those places, and either bully or lacerate them. The last is to sleepify them with opium or laudanum in their drink. Girls elish, and keep a man between them. Inspector has known instances of girls robbing men even of their clothes. In one case the victim had been deprived abruptly of his shirt, because it was a good one; this man the inspector carried home in a policeman's great coat. At the census Groat returned that 160 persons slept in one of his houses in Laurence Lane. His ground-landlord is Nagge, the great tailor. The lodging-houses in St. Giles's are like rabbit-burrows; not an inch of ground is lost; and there are stairs and passages innumerable. While Groat is thus the landlord of hundreds and hundreds of thieves, vagrants, and prostitutes, he lets his beautiful Hampstead villas to genteel and fashionable families."

We have already shown that Thompson was (and perhaps is still) a lodging-house proprietor in a considerable way of business. A person named Southgate is also eminent in the same line. He possesses houses which make up altogether 300 beds. These houses are as follow:—Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, Charles Street, Long Acre; seven houses on Sadron Hill; five in Mitre Court, St. John Street, Clerkenwell; No. 11, New Court, Cow Cross, Smithfield; and two in Turnmill Street, Clerkenwell. These last are exclusively occupied by Italian boys and their masters. A man named Elliott has also lodging-houses in Charles Street; namely, Nos. 23, 24, and 25. In Shorter's Gardens, a person called "Lucky Dick" has Nos. 8 and 9.—An officer whom Mr. Mills examined, deposed thus:—"To return to lodging-houses, there are cheap ones in all towns; most of them have two sorts of bladders. The labourers and hawkers live in a better room, and pay fourpence a night for their bed, halfpenny for coal, half-



CHAPTER XXVI.
THE LADY'S-MAID.

In the meantime Mr. Frank Curtis had met the buxom Charlotte, according to appointment, in Condalt Street.

The youthful lady's-maid, who had not numbered quite nineteen years, but who concealed a warm temperament and a disposition ripe for wanton mischief, beneath a staid and serious demeanour, when in the presence of her mistress or of those in whose eyes it was prudent to be looked upon as "a very prudent and steady young woman,"—the youthful lady's-maid, we say, walked quietly along the street,

penny for the use of plates and hot water, and a halfpenny for the cooking apparatus. Regular beggars, the low sort of sadder fellows, live in the other kitchen, and pay a halfpenny for coal, and have nothing found there. The beggars go on very bad at night in the lodging-houses. They can make in a day in the country by begging, let alone what they make by thieving. They never think of work, unless they can contrive to carry something in hopes of an opportunity to slip off with it."

And it is in such dens as these that honest poverty must seek shelter and a bed

and pretended not to notice Mr. Curtis, who was leaning against a lamp-post, smoking a cigar.

But the light of the lamp fell upon her pretty countenance; and he, having immediately recognised her, stretched out his hand and caught her by the shawl, saying, "Well, Miss—do you mean to pretend you did n't see me?"

"Lor! you there now!" exclaimed Charlotte, affecting to be quite surprised at this encounter.

"Just as if you thought I should n't come!" cried Frank, laughing. "But take my arm, my dear; and though this very arm has often supported duchesses—and marchionesses—and even on one occasion the young and beautiful queen of the Red-Skin Indians,—yet I do n't know that it was ever more agreeably pressed than by your pretty little fingers."

"How fine you do talk!" said Charlotte, by no means displeased with the compliment. "But where are you going?"

"Oh! I'll show you, my dear," returned Frank, as he led her along. "And now tell me—has anything happened in respect to you know what?"

"Yes—a great deal," answered Charlotte. "But

here I am walking with a gentleman whose very name I do n't even know! Is n't it odd?"

"Very, my dear. I will, however, soon satisfy you on that head. My name is Mr. Curtis to the world—but Frank to you; and some day or another I hope to be Baron Dampington. But what was it that you had to tell me?"

"Something about Miss Mordaunt," replied the girl, who firmly believed the Dampington story and entertained a proportionate amount of respect towards the young gentleman who was heir to so honourable and distinguished a title.

"Come—out with it, my dear," exclaimed Frank. "Business first, and love afterwards—as my dear lamented friend the Prince of Cochin-China used to say when we were intimate together in Paris, before he hung himself for love in his garters."

"Did he, though?" cried the lady's-maid. "How shocking!"

"Shocking enough, my dear. But pray tell me what you have to say about Miss Mordaunt."

"Why, sir," resumed Charlotte, "this evening when I was dressing her for dinner, she began to sound me about how I liked my place in Lady Hatfield's service, and whether I should be glad to better myself. So, keeping in mind what you had told me to do, I seemed to fall in to all she asked me, and gave her to understand that I should n't object to better myself. Then she began to smile and smile, and at last let out plump that she was going to run away with a gentleman—but she did n't say who—to-morrow night."

"That gentleman, my dear, is an uncle of mine," said Curtis.

"I'll be bound, then, it's the same Sir Christopher Blunt—"

"The very same, my dear. But go on; you speak almost as well as I did when I was in Parliament—or as my uncle the Earl of Dampington."

"Do I, though? Well," continued Charlotte, "and so Miss Mordaunt told me how she could n't think of travelling alone with the gentleman, and that she must have a lady's-maid—"

"And you agreed to go with her!" cried Frank.

"I did," answered Charlotte; "and we settled and arranged every thing quite comfortable."

"Did she tell you where she is to meet my uncle to-morrow night?" inquired Frank.

"No; but she told me to mind and be ready to save in the evening at about seven o'clock," returned Charlotte.

"Well—fortunately I do know where they are to meet—and that's close by the tarpick at Islington Green," said Frank. "She's to go up in a hackney-coach, and be there punctual at eight o'clock; and the old chap is to have the post-chaise and four in readiness. Does n't he already fancy himself tearing along the great north road, as if the devil was after him! And so nice too did he arrange his plans with his Julia, that there's to be a supper prepared for them at St. Alban's—and off again! Egad! he's settled it pleasant enough; but I'll be even with him!"

"What do you intend to do?" asked Charlotte.

Curtis did not immediately reply; but, after a few moments' consideration, he abruptly exclaimed, "Can you trust any female friend of yours in this business?"

Well—I do n't know—unless it is my own

slister Alice, which is a very nice girl, and will do any thing I tell her," was the reply.

"The very thing!" ejaculated Frank. "Is she out at service?"

"No—she's at home with mother," answered Charlotte.

"And will she just consent to take a short ride in a post-chaise and four along with you, if I give her a five-pound note?" demanded Frank.

"To be sure she will," returned Charlotte, who, with the quickness of female perception, began to comprehend Mr. Curtis's design.

"Then I'll tell you how we must contrive it," said Frank. "It's of the greatest consequence to me, my dear, to prevent this marriage; and if I can only expose my stupid old uncle, I shall fairly laugh him out of it. Now, do n't you think you could manage to pass yourself off as his Julia, and get your sister to play the part of yourself, as far as St. Alban's? and I would be there with three or four friends of mine—all jolly dogs—ready to receive Sir Christopher and you girls. You might cover your face well with a thick veil; and as he will be sure to hurry you into the post-chaise the moment you get down from the hackney-coach just beyond the tarpick on the Green, you need n't speak a word. Then you can pretend to be so overcome with fear and anxiety—"

"Oh! leave all that to me!" exclaimed Charlotte, who relished the joke amazingly. "But what shall I do about my place at Lady Hatfield's?"

"Dress take your place, my dear!" cried Frank. "I'll secure beautiful lodgings for you in some nice, quiet, retired street at the West End, and you shall be as happy as the day's long. We'll have such fun together—and I'll take you to plays and all kinds of amusements. Lord bless you! I think so more of a cool thousand or two than I should of blowing out a chap's brains if he was to insult you."

"Oh! dear me, do n't talk so horrid!" exclaimed Charlotte, laughing. "And you really will do all you say—if I help you in this business?"

"Yes—and much more," returned Frank. "And now the only thing to manage, is to prevent Miss Mordaunt keeping the appointment by herself. Oh! I have it!" he exclaimed, after a minute's reflection. "I can imitate my uncle's handwriting to a t. He writes just as if he had a shewer instead of a pen—and so do I, for that matter. So I'll just tip Miss Julia a note to-morrow afternoon about four, as if it came from Sir Christopher; and I'll tell her in it that the elopement must be postponed until the next night. Egad! this is a stroke of policy that beats hollow any thing my cousin the Duke of Dampington ever did."

"I thought he was your uncle, sir!" remarked Charlotte.

"I meant my uncle, love," replied Frank; "but it's all the same. The Marquis of Dampington is my relation—and that's enough. And now, my sweet creature, that we have settled all this business—suppose we adjourn to a nice quiet place that I know—"

"But I must see my sister to-night and tell her all that there is to be done," interrupted Charlotte.

The fact is that the pretty lady's-maid had kept the appointment given her by Frank Curtis, with the full intention of abandoning her person to him for she was alike wanton in her passions and mer-

enary in her disposition; and the five guineas which he had given her in the morning had stimulated her with the desire of making farther inroads upon his purse. Nay—she had even hoped that he would fulfil the sort of promise he had given her at their previous interview, and, in plain terms, establish her as his mistress in a comfortable manner. But the intrigues just concocted for the purpose of defeating the matrimonial designs of Miss Mordaxant and Sir Christopher Blunt, had engendered new ideas in the breast of the lady's-maid; and she resolved that her intimacy with Mr. Curtis should progress no farther for the present.

The young man, who at this moment cared much more for the success of his scheme against his uncle than for the attractions of Miss Charlotte Styles, willingly allowed her to repair at once to the abode of her mother for the purpose of tutoring Alice how to play the part which that younger sister was to enact in the great drama planned by Mr. Curtis.

Charlotte accordingly separated from Frank, with a promise to write to him if any thing should go wrong; but with an understanding, on the other hand, that her silence was to be construed by him into a proof that all was progressing favourably to his views.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LONDON ON A RAINY EVENING.—A SCENE IN A POST-CHAISE.

LONDON has a strange appearance on these evenings—so peculiar to our climate—when a cold, drizzling, mist-like rain is falling. The lustre of the gas-lights in the shops is seen dimly, as if through a gauze; and the lamps in the streets have an air as though they struggled to preserve themselves from total extinction. Clogs and pattens create a confused rattling on the pavement; and to a bird's-eye view, such crowded thoroughfares as Cheapside, Fleet Street, the Strand, and Holborn, must appear to have their trottoirs arched with umbrellas.

Then aristocracy seems to urge the horses of its carriages more quickly on, as it whisks to the club, the Parliament, or the dinner-party;—the member of the middle class buttons his tailcoat for his great-coat over his chest;—the individual of a humbler sphere tries to make his wasty tweed cover as much of his person as it will;—and poverty wraps its rags around its shivering limbs, apparently forgetful that in drawing them over one place they leave another bare.

In the entrance of courts and covered alleys and in deep doorways the "daughters of pleasure" (oh! the frightful misnomer!) collect and huddle together in their flaunting attire, the pattering of the rain rendering their poor thin shoes as pulpy as brown paper, and splashing over their stockings;—and thus aiding ardent spirits and nights of dissipation to plant the seeds of consumption more deeply in their constitutions.

The drivers of cabs and omnibuses thrust their heads as far into their hats—or else push their hats as far down on their heads—as possible; and, straggling up their shoulders, sit with rounded backs and faces bent downward, on their vehicles;—while the conductors or omnibus-eads, in their oil-skin coats, seem to find consolation for the un-

pleasantness of the weather in the fact that they can speedily fill their vehicles without the usual exercise of the lungs or gymnastic movements of the arm.

And, on a rainy evening such as we are attempting to describe, what business—what bustle prevail in front of the Angel Inn at Islington! Omnibuses after omnibuses comes up, from every direction, discharging and receiving their animated freight with wonderful rapidity. The red-nosed man at the booking-office seems to have something better to do than merely lounge at the threshold, with his right shoulder leaning against the door-post off which it has worn the paint in one particular spot; for inquiries now multiply thickly upon him. Indeed, we are afraid that that last share of "a quarters and two cuts" which he took with the Elephant and Castle six o'clock cab, has somewhat obfuscated his ideas: for he thrusts an elderly lady with a hand-box into a Chelsea, although she particularly requested to be placed in a Bank omnibus; and he has sent that tall lady with her three children and a baby over to Kensington, in spite of her thrice repeated anxiety to repair to Sloane Square.

What a paddling and stamping of feet, and pattering of clogs, and collision of umbrellas there are in every direction,—up the New Road, and down the City Road,—along St. John Street and Goswell Street Road,—and also up towards the Green! The most addic-pated writer may find some food for his pen, if he only take his stand at the Angel door—with a cigar in his mouth, too, if he like—on a rainy evening.

Does he wish to see how a party of pleasure may be spoiled by a change in the weather! Let him study that little procession of a family who have passed the day at Copenhagen House, and are now returning home, wet—cold—uncomfortable—and sulky; the husband dragging the chaise, in which two children are squalling—a labby boy of eight or nine pushing behind—and the wife, with a baby on one arm, and holding up her gown with the left hand, paddling miserably through the rain, and venting her ill-humour on her husband by declaring that "it was all his fault—she knew how it would be—she had begged and prayed of him to come home an hour before—but he would stay to have that other glass of gin-and-water!"

If our moralist, whom we station at the door of the Angel, be an admirer of pretty feet and ankles, he may now gratify his taste in that respect; for, of a surety, those who have good ones raise their dresses above the swell of the leg. Ah! ladies—it is really too bad of you!—we almost suspect that you care little for the rain, since it enables you to display those attractions!

The policeman, with his oil-skin cape, emerges from the public-house close by, drawing the back of his hand across his lips, just for all the world as if he had been taking "something short" to keep the cold out;—and very likely he has, too—for we are sure that the most rigid disciplinary of an inspector or sergeant would not quarrel with him for so doing on such an unpleasant evening. The apple-stall woman puts up an umbrella, and maintains her seat on the low basket turned bottom upwards; for she dares not absent herself from her post, for fear of the hungry urchins that are prowling about.

Within the door-way of the Angel a knot of young gentlemen, in pea-coats, and with sticks in

their hands, are smoking cigars. They are not waiting for the omnibuses, but are merely collected there because the bustle of the scene amuses them, and they like to "look at the gals." Listen a moment to their conversation:—they are talking about some favourite actress at an adjacent theatre—and, to hear their astute observations, one would think that they must at least be the dramatic-critics of the newspapers assembled there. Or else, perhaps, their discourse turns on politics; and, then, one would be apt to imagine that they were Under-Secretaries of State in disguise, so profound are their remarks! They call the Minister of the day by his surname without any titular adjunct; and one of them, no doubt wiser than the rest, shakes his head solemnly, and very kindly prophesies the said Minister's approaching downfall. Then the conversation flies off at a tangent to some less important subject; and they most probably proceed to comment upon the "excellent lark" they had the other night at such-and-such a place. Presently one of them proposes a "go of whisky" each; and they accordingly adjourn to the public room of the Angel, where, what with the goes of whiskey and the going of their tongues, they create so much noise that the old gentleman at the next table flings down the last Sunday's paper in despair, before he has read through the third murder.

Well, reader, it was on such a rainy evening as this that two grand events in our history were to take place:—we mean the affair of Sir Christopher Blant on the one hand, and the project of Old Death to kidnap Charley Watts on the other.

It is our intention, however, to proceed with the former little business in this chapter.

At a quarter to eight o'clock a post-chaise and four passed through the turpike at Islington, and drew up in the lower road, alongside the enclosure of the Green.

The right-hand window was then lowered; and a head, enveloped in a fur travelling-cap, with lap-pets over the ears and tying under the chin, was protruded forth.

This head—which belonged to Sir Christopher Blant—looked anxiously up and down the thorough-fare, and was then withdrawn again.

But the worthy knight's patience was not tested to any great extent; for in a few minutes after his arrival at the appointed spot, and before the clock had struck eight, a hackney-coach rattled up to the place where the chaise was waiting.

Sir Christopher threw open the door of the chaise, kicked down the steps, and leaped out with the agility of a small elephant; and in a few moments he very gallantly handed two females, well muffled up in cloaks, boxes, and veils, from the hackney-coach.

"Dearest Julia!" he murmured to the taller of the two, as he assisted her to ascend into the post-chaise.

An expressive squeeze of the hand was the reply to this affectionate apostrophe on the part of the knight.

The shorter female, whom Sir Christopher concluded to be his fair one's attendant,—inasmuch as Miss Mordaunt had informed him by note in the morning that she had secured a faithful maid to accompany her,—was also handed into the post-chaise: the knight followed—and the vehicle hurried away like wild-fire.

Sir Christopher and the female whom he believed to be Miss Mordaunt, sat on the back seat, and the other young lady occupied the seat facing them.

For some time there was a dead silence inside the chaise; but at the expiration of about ten minutes, Sir Christopher began to fidget like a gentleman at a public dinner, who, though "unaccustomed to public speaking," nevertheless experiences a nervous anxiety to address the audience.

"My dear Julia—ahem!" began the knight: "I hope you—you do n't feel cold, dear?"

The female then addressed three her arms round Sir Christopher's neck, and clasped him so fondly that, what with the tightness of the embrace and the contact of the fur in which she was enveloped, he might have been pardoned had he fancied for a moment that he was being hugged by a bear.

"Oh! dearest Julia—how happy I am!" exclaimed Sir Christopher, nearly suffocated by this display of fondness. "And you, Julia—are you happy, my love?"

"Quite—too happy!" murmured his companion.

"And yet—methinks your voice sounds strange, Julia," said the knight. "What—what is the matter with you?"

"Only this, Sir Christopher—that I am not Miss Mordaunt—"

"Not Miss Mordaunt!" ejaculated the knight, preparing to throw down the window and order the postillions to stop.

"No—not Miss Mordaunt," was the answer: "but one who loves you as well—or better—and is, I flatter myself, six times as good-looking."

"Then who are you, in the name of heaven?" cried the knight, so completely bewildered that he knew not how to act.

Charlotte—for it was she—threw back her veil, and, by the light of the shops which they were just passing in the outskirts, Sir Christopher recognised Lady Hatfield's dependant, whom he had seen on two or three occasions when he had called on Miss Mordaunt in Piccadilly.

"And who is your companion?" he demanded hastily.

"My sister Alice—at your service," replied Charlotte. "But listen to me for one moment, Sir Christopher!"

"Well—for one moment, then," said the knight, so strangely perplexed and annoyed that he could take no decisive step.

"Miss Mordaunt never loved you, Sir Christopher," continued the wily Charlotte.

"Never loved me! Then why did she tell me so?"

"Only to laugh at you. It was all planned between her and your nephew Mr. Frank Curtis—"

"The devil!" ejaculated the knight. "Go on." "They determined to make themselves merry at your expense, and yourself ridiculous at the same time."

"By heaven! I will be revenged!" cried the hero of this pleasant adventure, slapping his thigh emphatically with his open palm.

"They accordingly hired me and my sister to persecute Miss Mordaunt and a lady's-maid," proceeded Charlotte; and "and we were to carry on the deceit till we got to St. Alban's, where Mr. Frank Curtis and a party of his friends are already waiting to receive you."

"The villain!" shouted Sir Christopher, completely deceived by this plausible tale.

"But I always admired you, sir," continued Charlotte; "and I was resolved not to be made a party to carry out the trick to the end. I should have written to you—or called to explain it: but I feared you might not believe me;—and so I thought it best to let matters go as far as they have gone now, just to convince you that what I say is perfectly true."

"Oh! I believe it all—it is too clear—too apparent!" exclaimed the knight. "That scoundrel Frank—I'll discard him—I'll stop his allowance—I'll never speak to him again! To get a party of friends to meet us at St. Alban's—oh! Just where I'd sent word to have a good supper in readiness!"

"Miss Mordaunt told him all that, sir," observed Charlotte, who had kept one of her arms round the knight's neck, and had gradually approached her countenance so closely to his that her breath now fanned his cheek.

"Yes—I understand it all!" cried Sir Christopher. "I have been grossly deceived—vilely treated—basely served! But I am not the man to put up with it. At the same time, Miss," he added, in a softening tone, "you are a very good girl to have saved me from cutting so ridiculous a figure at St. Alban's!"

"I have only done my duty, sir," murmured Charlotte, with a profound sigh; and—of course by accident—her cheek touched that of the knight.

"A good girl—a very good girl!" repeated Sir Christopher: "as good as you are pretty—for you are pretty—and I've often remarked it."

The arm thrown around Sir Christopher's neck pressed him gently.

"And I really do not know how to reward you sufficiently, my dear girl," he added, new ideas entering his mind.

Again the arm pressed him tenderly.

Sir Christopher could resist the exciting contagion no longer; and he fairly kissed the cheek that was so close to his lips.

Charlotte sighed again, but did not withdraw her face.

"Really this is very ridiculous!" exclaimed the knight. "Here we are, galloping along like lightning—and without any particular object that I know of. Upon my word, I have a great mind—a very great mind to revenge myself on both Miss Mordaunt and Master Frank at one and the same time!"

"In what way, Sir Christopher?" asked Charlotte, in a languidly murmuring tone.

"By marrying you, my dear," was the emphatic response.

"Oh! Sir Christopher—is it possible—such happiness!" sighed Charlotte, again embracing him in the most tender manner.

"It is so possible, my dear," answered the knight, "that if you consent to have me, the horses' heads need not be turned back again towards London."

"How can I refuse you, dear Sir Christopher?" exclaimed Charlotte;—"I, who always thought what a fine-looking—handsome—kind—gentle—fashionable man you was from the first time I ever saw you!"

"I'm sure I always heard sister speak in the highest terms of you, sir," said Alice, now taking up her easel.

"Well, then, my dear—what is to hinder us from being happy?" cried Sir Christopher.

With these words, he pulled down the window, ordered the postillions to stop, and gave them directions to change their route in such a manner as to avoid St. Alban's.

The vehicle then whirled along with renewed speed; and while Sir Christopher felt wonderfully elated at the idea of punishing his nephew and avenging himself on Miss Mordaunt by showing her that she was not the only female in the world to whom he was compelled to address himself,—Charlotte, on the other hand, rejoiced at the success of a scheme which had been suggested by the part she was originally engaged to play in this pleasant drama, and which, as the reader will now perceive, was the motive that prevented her from extending her intimacy with Mr. Frank Curtis on the previous evening.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TOM RAIN'S LODGINGS IN LOCK'S FIELDS.

NEARLY opposite to the house where Tom Rain lived, in Brandon Street, Lock's Fields, there was a boozing-hen, well known to Old Death; and shortly after nine o'clock on the same evening which marked the events related in the preceding chapter, that cunning fence, accompanied by Toby Bones and the lad Jacob, were introduced by the landlady into a front room on the first-floor of the said fish establishment.

Jacob was ordered to station himself at the window and watch for Tom Rain to take his departure on the expedition devised for him by Old Death; while Bones himself and his acolyte Toby seated themselves opposite a cheerful fire, to discuss hot gin-and-water until the hour should arrive for putting into execution the scheme that had brought them thither.

Although the rain was falling with a mist-like density, and no gas-company had been enterprising enough to lay down pipes in such a neighbourhood as Lock's Fields,—so that there were neither stars nor lamps to light the street,—still the eagle-eyes of Jacob could distinguish sufficient of the scene without, to quiet any fear lest the movements of Tom Rain should escape him. Old Death moreover stimulated his energies by means of a sip of hot gin; and the lad remained as motionless at the window and as earnestly intent on his object as a cat watching near the hole into which a mouse has escaped.

"Well," said Old Death, as he sipped his liquor complacently, "I suppose we shall have no difficulty in managing this little job by-and-by? Jacob watched all day long in Great Ormond Street, until we joined him to come over here; and the Jewess never stirred out once—did she, Jacob?"

"No—not once," was the answer.

"But you knew that she was at home?"

"Yes; because I saw her at the window for a moment, every now and then," replied the lad, speaking without averting his eyes from the street.

"Good!" exclaimed Old Death. "It is not at all likely that she has come over to Tom's lodgings this evening, or that she will come—specially after the long sermon she wrote—"

Bones checked himself; for he was not in the habit of being communicative with Toby Bunce; and Toby, on his side, never sought to pry into the motives or designs of the old fence by whom he was made so complete a tool.

"Who is there in the house besides Mr. Rainford and the boy?" asked Toby, after a pause.

"Only the old widow woman that keeps it," responded Mr. Benjamin Bones.

"There!" cried Jacob, suddenly: "the door opens—and Mr. Rainford comes out! He's gone."

"All right!" said Old Death. "I suppose he's going for his horse, wherever he keeps it."

"I could see by the light in the passage, when the door was opened, that he had his white coat on and his great riding-whip in his hand," remarked Jacob. "It was a woman that held the candle—because I could just catch a glimpse of her shadow, and that's all."

"You don't think it was the Jewess?" asked Bones.

"I could n't say, because the shadow was n't plain enough," returned Jacob. "But it's hardly probable that she could have got over here before us, even if she was coming to Mr. Rainford's lodgings to-night."

"Well said, Jacob," observed Old Death. "You're getting a knowing lad—you are; and now you shall have a glass of grog to yourself."

"What! a whole glass?" ejaculated Toby Bunce, in astonishment at this unweaned liberality on the part of Old Death.

"Yes—a whole glass—a sixpenny glass," responded Bones; and, having summoned the landlord, he gave the requisite order.

The liquor was brought for Jacob's express benefit; and Old Death drew forth the money to pay for it. But, as he did so, a paper with writing upon it fell upon the floor, unperceived by any one save Jacob.

The lad instantly drew a chair near the fire, and as he seated himself, placed his foot upon the paper, which, being somewhat dingy in hue, he took to be a bank-note.

The landlord withdrew; and the conversation was resumed between Old Death and Toby Bunce.

"I hope Betsy will have something nice for supper when we get back again," remarked the latter.

"She's sure to do that," replied Old Death. "You ought to be very fond of your wife, Toby—for she's very fond of you."

"D'ye think she is, Mr. Bones?" exclaimed Bunce.

"I'm sure of it. Does n't she take great care of you?"

"Rayther too much," was the reply, which came from the bottom of Toby's heart; then, perceiving that he had uttered something which seemed to imply that he had dared to form an opinion for himself, he hastened to add, "Not but what it's very kind of her to keep the money—and my watch too—and every thing else in her own care, because I know I'm an old fool—"

"No—you're not a fool, Toby," interrupted Bones; "but you want looking after. Ah! it was a blessed day for you when I recommended you to marry that virtuous—well-conducted—patterning-woman, as one may say, who is now your wife. I had no interest but your good—and hers—"

"I'm well aware of that, Mr. Bones," cried

Toby; "and you've been an excellent friend to us. I'm sure Betsy respects you as if you was her—" Toby was about to say "father," but he remembered that Old Death did not like to be revivified of his age, and so he substituted "brother."

"Well—well," said Bones: "I've no doubt of what you tell me; and so long as you're happy together, that's every thing."

Toby smothered a sigh with a deep draught of gin-and-water;—Old Death poked the fire; and Jacob availed himself of the opportunity to stoop down and pick up the paper, which he dexterously conveyed to his pocket, unperceived by either of his companions. But a sudden disappointment seized upon him—for he could feel that it was too stiff for a bank-note, and was moreover folded like a letter.

The time passed away; and at length Old Death, after consulting his watch, declared it to be close upon eleven o'clock.

There were no lights visible in the house opposite; and it was therefore determined to commence operations without farther delay.

"Before we leave here," said Old Death, "remember what you are to do. Jacob and you, Toby, will put on your masks, rush in, shut the door, and make the old widow secure. Then you, Jacob, will come out and fetch me. It won't do for the woman to see me at all, because I'm so tall that if she described me to Tom Rain when he comes back, he would know who it was directly; but as there's nothing particular about either of you, he can't make you out from description."

"We'll take care, Mr. Bunce, how the thing is managed," said Toby.

The trio then quitted the public-house; and, while Toby and Jacob crossed to the other side of the street, Old Death walked a little way on.

The coast was quite clear, and a profound silence reigned throughout the neighbourhood.

Toby Bunce and the lad stopped at the door of the widow's house, slipped on their black masks, and knocked. In a few moments the door was opened by the widow herself. Quick as lightning, the candle was knocked from her hand, and the scream that half-burst from her lips was arrested by a large plaster which Toby instantaneously clapped upon her mouth. The poor woman faltered through excess of terror, and was borne into the nearest room, where Jacob hastened to stick a light.

Having succeeded thus far, Toby remained in charge of the landlady, while Jacob hastened to fetch Old Death.

In a few moments the lad returned with that individual; and the front-door was again carefully closed.

The widow continued in a swoon; and Toby did not give himself any trouble to recover her.

"Do you remain here," said Old Death, addressing himself to his mysterious Bance; "and if the woman revives and attempts to struggle or say nonsense of that kind, give her a knock on the head just to quiet her—but no more."

"All right," returned Toby, rejoiced to find that he had only a female to deal with.

Old Death then took the light, and, followed by Jacob, cautiously ascended the stairs.

They entered the front-room on the first-floor. It was a parlour, very neatly furnished; but no one was there.

"The boy must be in the back chamber," murmured Old Death; and thither they proceeded.

Having opened the door as noiselessly as possible, they advanced slowly into the room; but scarcely had the candle shed its light upon the bed, when they beheld the boy—the object of their enterprise—cradled on the bare and beautifully modelled arm of a female also wrapped in slumber, and whose coal-black hair spread itself over the white pillow, and partially concealed her glowing bust.

"The Jewess!" whispered Jacob, in a rapid, concentrated tone.

Old Death instantly shaded the light with his hand, and retreated from the room, followed by the lad.

But at that moment a loud knock at the front-door was heard; and simultaneously a piercing shriek burst from the apartment below, where Toby Bunce had been left in charge of the landlady.

Old Death muttered a terrible curse, extinguished the light, and hastened down stairs as noiselessly as possible—Jacob following with equal caution.

"The back way," murmured Old Death; "but first go and help Toby, who is in some trouble or another with the landlady."

Jacob darted into the front-room; and as it was quite dark, he stumbled over a chair.

The struggle between Toby and the landlady, who had succeeded in getting off the plaster, was now renewed; and, releasing her throat from the suffocating grasp which her assailant had upon it, she screamed for help a second time.

The knocking at the front-door was redoubled; and in a few moments a light gleamed from the head of the stairs.

"Perdition!" murmured old Death: "it is the Jewess!"

Then, rushing into the front room, he exclaimed, "Come off this moment!" and he was about to beat a retreat by the back way, when the house-door was forced in with a vigorous push.

"What the devil is doing here?" cried the well-known voice of Tom Rain, as he banged the door behind him and drew the bolt. "Who was screaming? What—"

"Oh! Tom—is that you?" exclaimed a melodious, though excited voice on the stairs; "there are thieves—murderers in the house!"

And the half-naked lady, with her coal-black hair floating around her shoulders and over her bosom, suddenly appeared at the turning of the narrow staircase, holding a candle.

The light illumined the small passage below, and showed Tom Rain, standing with his back against the front-door, and with a pistol in each hand.

A third scream burst from the parlour.

Rainford rushed in; and, encountering Toby and Jacob, dragged them—or rather hurried them, as if they were two children in his grasp, into the passage.

There the light revealed to him their countenances—for their masks had been torn away in the struggle with the landlady; and Rainford was for a few moments so astounded at the recognition of Old Death's agents or confederates, that he was unable to utter a word.

"The villains!—the murderers!—the assassins!" cried the landlady, rushing forward, with her hair all in disorder, her garments torn to rags, and the blood streaming from her nose. "Shall I go and fetch a constable, Mr. Rainford?"

"No, I thank 'ee," returned Tom: "leave me to manage these scoundrels. Here, my love," he continued, addressing himself to the Jewess, who had remained half-way up the stairs, "give me that light, and do you retire to your room. I must speak to these rascals in private. My good woman," he added, turning once more to the landlady, "have the kindness to go up stairs and keep my wife company; and fear nothing—now that I am here."

The two women hastened to obey these injunctions; and Rainford, provided with the candle, made an imperative sign for Toby Bunce and Jacob to precede him into the room from which he had dragged them a few minutes previously.

"Answer me directly," said Tom, in a stern—resolute manner, as he closed the door behind him, and deliberately drew forth the pistols which he had thrust into the pockets of his white great-coat when he first entered the parlour to rescue the landlady.—"answer me directly—either one of you, I care not which—what brought you here?"

"Jacob knows best, Mr. Rainford," replied Bunce, eyeing the pistols askance.

"No—I do n't," said the lad, in a sulky tone. "You are game to your employer, I have no doubt, Jacob," ejaculated Rainford. "And now, Toby Bunce, answer for yourself—or, by God! I'll shoot you through the head! In short, what brought you here?"

At this moment there was a low knock at the room-door, against which Tom Rain was leaning.

"Who's there?" demanded the highwayman.

"Me," replied the sepulchral, hollow voice of Old Death.

"Ah! the plot thickens," said Tom; and, opening the door, he gave admittance to Mr. Benjamin Bunce.

"It's all a mistake, Tom—it's the wrong house!" exclaimed Old Death. "You do n't know how annoyed I am—you do n't indeed!"

"Well—I confess I do not," said the highwayman coolly; "and it will take you a long time to persuade me that you are speaking the truth. If it was the wrong house, why did n't these people of yours tell me so when I first questioned them?"

"Because I saw you would not believe me," cried Jacob hastily.

"And I was so flurried by them barkers," added Toby, pointing to the pistols.

"I'm not such a fool as you take me to be," observed Tom Rain. "Without being able to fathom your intentions, I can smell treachery as easy as I could gunpowder. How did you find out that I lived here? You must have had me dogged and watched, Old Death. And perhaps the very job you sent me after to-night, was a mere subterfuge to get me out of the way! Fortunately I did not wait for the yellow chain, because I picked up something better the moment I reached Blackheath; and I thought I had done quite enough for one evening's work—so I returned without delay. Lucky it was that I did so. But am I to have an explanation of this affair!—or do you mean us to break with each other for good and all?"

"What can I say—what can I do to prove to you that this is all a mistake?" cried Old Death, sadly perplexed between the fear of complete detection and the dread of losing the valuable services of the highwayman.

"I will tell you," answered Tom, after a few

moments' consideration. "Let these two followers of yours go their ways—and you and me will have a little discourse in private."

A sudden misgiving—a horrible suspicion flashed to the mind of Old Death. Could Rainsford mean to murder him?

"Why do you hesitate?" demanded the highwayman, penetrating his thoughts. "Do you suppose for an instant that I intend you any harm? Why, you miserable old wretch," he added, with a proud contempt which rendered him strikingly handsome for the moment, "I would sooner blow out my own brains than defile my hands by laying them violently on such a piece of withered carrion as you are—unless you give me ample cause."

Old Death's lips quivered with rage; but, subduing his emotions as well as he was able, he made a sign for Toby Bunce and Jacob to depart.

This hint was obeyed; and in a few moments Bones was alone in the room with the highwayman.

"What is it you require of me?" asked the old man, in a tremulous voice—for there was something in Rainsford's tone and gesture which alarmed him.

"I will explain myself to you," said Tom. "When we first knew each other, you boasted that all your transactions were conducted with so much equity, that none with whom you had dealings even knew where you lived. Was it not so?"

"Very likely—very likely," returned Old Death. "But what of that?"

"Simply that as it suited you to keep your place of abode secret from me, so did I wish that my residence should remain unknown to you," answered Rainsford. "Now, mark me, Mr. Bones—or whatever the devil your name may be—you shall have no advantage over me. Hitherto our compact has been fairly kept; but at length I find you practising falsely towards me. You need not interrupt me with vows and protestations—because I shall not believe you. But I tell you what you will do—and this night, too."

"What?" groaned Old Death.

"You will place us on even ground—you will give me the same advantage that you have gained over me: in a word, you will take me straight to the place where you live, and you will show me your stores where you keep all the property you receive or purchase from those who are in league with you."

"I—I have no stores," said Old Death; "and, as for my lodging—I—I have no settled place. I sleep sometimes in one crib—sometimes in another—"

"All lies!" ejaculated Tom, in a determined tone. "You have enormous dealings with all the housebreakers and thieves in London; you have said as much to me—and you have boasted that they are ignorant of your residence. Now then, you have a residence—and I swear that before I am six hours older, I will know so much about you, that you shall never dare to practise any treachery towards me."

"What treachery could I practise against you, Tom?" asked Old Death in a conciliatory tone.

"I will tell you," replied Rainsford. "You boast that for thirty years you have monopolised the business of fence to all the people worth dealing with in London; and, during that time, you have never got into a scrape. But how could you have enjoyed

so wonderful a safety—so uninterrupted a security unless you now and then sacrificed—you, sacrificed—an accomplice or two?"

"I!" ejaculated Old Death starting in spite of himself.

"Yes—yes," rejoined Rainsford, fixing his eyes sternly and searchingly on the ancient villain's hideous countenance. "Do you think that I am unacquainted with your real character? do you suppose that I was at a loss to understand you, even the very first moment we ever met? That flippancy of manner—that off-handedness—that reckless indifference, which characterise me, are a species of mask from behind which I can penetrate into the deepest recesses of the hearts of others. I know you as well as you know yourself—or nearly so. At all events, I know enough to render me cautious and wary; and, by the living God! you shall never have an opportunity of selling me to save yourself!"

"Tom—my dear Tom!" exclaimed Old Death, now actually frightened by the other's manner, and astonished at his words; "you cannot think of such a thing seriously!"

"So seriously do I think of it," replied Rainsford, "that I will drag you into the pit, if I am destined to fall. So now, without another word, prepare to reveal to me all the mysteries in which you have for thirty years enveloped yourself."

"And if I refuse?" said Old Death, doggedly.

Rainsford deliberately cocked his pistol. "You have inviolated me into a snare—you have sent away those who might protect me—and now you seek an excuse to murder me!" exclaimed Old Death, his voice sounding like ringing metal.

"Did I not say ere now that I would not harm you, unless you gave me just cause?" demanded Rainsford. "And think you that your refusal to comply with my present wish does not constitute such just cause? You have discovered my lodging, which it does not suit me to leave on that account—you may also have found out that I am not alone here—"

"I know that a certain Jewess is your mistress," said Old Death, with a savage leer—for all the vindictive passions of his nature were aroused by the conduct of the individual who dared to coerce him—his, who had never been coerced before!

"A certain Jewess!" repeated Rainsford, surveying Old Death with a singular expression of countenance.

"Yes—Eather de Medina," added Bones.

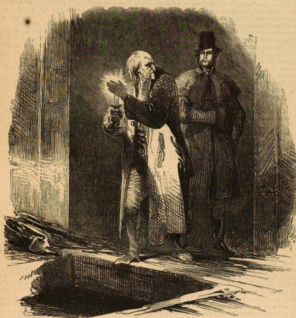
"Eather de Medina is as pure and innocent as the babe that is unborn!" cried the highwayman, with impassioned emphasis.

"Then she must be your wife," said Old Death.

"Liar!" thundered Tom Rains, rushing forward and seizing the ancient villain by the throat; then, as if ashamed of the sudden transport of rage into which he had suffered himself to be betrayed, he withdrew his hand, and said in a more quiet but still determined manner, "Mention not the name of Eather de Medina with disrespect—or I warn you that my vengeance—yes, my vengeance—will be terrible! And now prepare to lead me to your place of abode—for I am wearied of this long parley."

He again drew forth one of his pistols, which he had consigned to his pocket when he rushed on the old man in the way just described.

"You'll repent this, Mr. Rainsford," said Old



Death, endeavoring to impress the highwayman with vague and undefined alarms.

"You see how evil your nature is, since you can threaten me thus," cried Tom. "But I care little for your menaces. I have but two alternatives to choose between:—one is to blow your brains out at once—the other is to get you as much into my power as you have got me into yours. Either way will answer my purpose. So now make up your mind which it shall be. The people in Lock's Fields wouldn't take much notice, if they heard a pistol fired; and there's a pretty deep ditch at the bottom of the yard behind the house."

Old Death shuddered; for there was something awfully determined in the highwayman's manner.

"Well—and if I take you to a certain place," he said, "how do I know that you will not split upon me?"

"Trust to me as I shall *flaw* trust to you," ejaculated Rainford. "Shall we not continue to be necessary to each other? And on my part, I shall at least experience more confidence, since I shall know that you cannot ruin me without bringing destruction on yourself!"

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"Be it as you say," growled Old Death; and, fixing his greasy cap upon his head, he prepared to depart.

"One moment—while I say a word up stairs," said Rainford; and, hastily quitting the room, he locked the door behind him.

Scarcely a minute elapsed ere he returned—to the great relief of the old man, who had begun to entertain serious misgivings at being made a prisoner.

"There are marks of dirty boots upon the carpet in the bed-room above," said Tom, confronting Bones, and fixing upon him a searching look. "What were you doing there?"

"I was not there——" began Old Death, quailing beneath that glance.

"Damnable liar!" cried Rainford. "I have half a mind——But, no," he added, checking himself: "time will show what your purpose was, in invading this house; and I shall know how to punish any treachery on your part. And now mark me! You will lead the way—and I shall follow you. Avoid great thoroughfares——"

"Had we not better take a coach?" asked Old Death.

"No—we will walk, be it to the other end of London," replied the highwayman resolutely. "I shall follow close behind you—beware how you attempt to address yourself to a soul whom you may meet—beware also how you trifle with me. But stay—I will have a guarantee for your good faith. Give me your pocket-book!"

"My pocket-book!" ejaculated Old Death, with something approaching a shudder.

"Yes—your pocket-book," replied Rain. "I know that it contains Bank-notes, and memoranda of value or utility to you; and I will retain it in this house, until we return from the expedition on which we are about to set forth. Come—quick! I have no time for idle delays!"

"My pocket-book!" repeated Old Death, with increasing dismay.

"Do I not speak plain enough?" demanded the highwayman. "If I cannot make myself intelligible by words, I may by deeds; so permit me to help myself to the article I require. It will not be the first time I shall have rifled a pocket," he added, with a merry laugh.

"Do you know that you are treating me in a manner that I never experienced before?" said Old Death, his hideous countenance convulsed with rage.

"I can very well believe what you state," returned Tom Rain coolly. "Hitherto you have had to deal with men whom you got completely into your power—whose lives hung on a thread which you could snap without endangering yourself—who were mere puppets in your hands, and did not dare say their names were their own. Oh! I am well aware how you have played the tyrant—the griping, avaricious, grinding miser—the crust, relentless despot! But now,—now, Mr. Bones, you have another sort of person to deal with—a man who will so even with you anywhere and everywhere,—and who will never let you gain an advantage over him without acquiring one in return."

"Who are you," demanded Old Death, in strange bewilderment, "that talk to me thus?"

"Why—Thomas Rainford, to be sure!" cried the highwayman, laughing—yet with a certain chuckling irony that sounded ominously on the old fence's ears. "And I need not tell you," he continued after a few moments' pause, "that I am rather a desperate character, who would as soon shoot you in the open street—aye, or in the midst of a crowd, too—if you attempted any treachery towards me, as I would ease a gentleman of his purse upon the lonely road. But we are wasting time: give me your pocket-book."

Old Death's courage had gradually eared away during this strange colloquy; and he now mechanically obeyed the command so imperiously addressed to him.

But suddenly recollecting himself, as he was about to hand the pocket-book to the highwayman, he said, "There is one letter here—just one letter—which I should like to keep about my own person."

"Well—take that one letter," returned Tom; "and beware how you endeavour to secrete any thing else."

Old Death's hand trembled as he unfastened the clasp of the greasy old pocket-book; and, when he had opened it, he sighed deeply, as his eyes alighted first on a roll of Bank-notes. Then he turned the

papers over—one after another; and clouds gathered thickly and more thickly upon his countenance.

"This is strange—very strange!" he muttered, as he fumbled about with the letters and memoranda.

"What is strange?" demanded Rainford.

"That I cannot find the letter I want," returned Old Death, with increasing agitation. "Surely I cannot have lost it? And yet—I remember now—I was referring to it this afternoon—and—Oh! yes—yes—I recollect—I put it into my pocket—"

But the search in his pockets was vain; the letter was nowhere to be found.

"Come—there's enough of delay and such-like nonsense," exclaimed the highwayman, snatching the pocket-book from his hand.

Again Rainford quitted the room, locking the door behind him; and in a couple of minutes he returned, saying, "Your pocket-book is safe where no one will meddle with it till we come back. I is now past eleven; let us set off. Come—you first!"

Old Death led the way, and Tom Rain followed, the latter conveying some pleasant intimation, as he closed the front-door behind him, about an ounce of lead in the other's back, if he showed the slightest sign of loachery.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MYSTERIES OF OLD DEATH'S ESTABLISHMENT.

FROM the back of the Sessons House on Clerkenwell Green, towards Smithfield Market, runs a thoroughfare the upper portion of which is known by the name of Turnmill Street, and the lower part as Cow-Cross Street.

Numerous rag-shops and mangle-stores here meet the eye,—establishments where the thief in a small way may obtain a ready sale for the proceeds of his roguery. It is really curious to stand for a few moments and observe the miscellaneous assortment of articles crammed together in the dingy windows of these places,—as if they were receptacles for all the rags that misery could spare, and all the rubbish which domestic neatness throws into the street.

Some of the old clothes-shops in the thoroughfare which we are describing, are strikingly characteristic of the neighbourhood; for you cannot gaze a minute upon the silk handkerchiefs, the bonnets, the shirts, the gowns, the coats, the trousers, and the waistcoats, and other articles hanging outside the windows, or suspended to nails stuck into the walls, without being able to form a pretty accurate computation of the proportion which has been stolen, and that which has been obtained by legitimate purchase.

The women lounging at the doors in Turnmill and Cow-Cross Streets are of dissipated, dirty, and leathome appearance: nor have the men any advantage over them in these respects.

Take a duchess from the saloons of fashion,—a duchess in her satin or velvet, with her feathers and her diamonds, her refined manners, her elegant demeanour, her polished discourse, and her civilising influence,—and place her by the side of one of these degraded women in Turnmill Street,—a woman with a raspy voice, revolting manners, increased with

shirt, clothed in the meanest apparel, if not in absolute rags, and interlarder her conversation with oaths and obscenities,—place those two specimens of the female sex together,—and how astounding is the contrast!

But the duchess has no more claim to praise for the polish—the fascinations—the exquisite refinement which characterize her, than the poor woman of Turnmill Street deserves to be blamed for the degradation and repulsiveness in which she is steeped to the very crown of her head.

Had the two been changed at their birth, she who is now the duchess would have become the dissipated, leathsome, ragged wretch of Turnmill Street; and the babe who has grown to be this ragged wretch, would have sprung up into the splendid lady with the fatal coronet on her brow.

The rich and the high-born do not reflect upon this fact—they fancy that their very aristocracy is innate as it is hereditary, and that the poor are naturally degraded, vicious, and immoral. Oh! the terrible error—the fearful mistake! For, after all, many a proud peer is in reality the son of his reputed father's groom or footman; and many a dazzling beauty owes her being to her mother's illicit amours with a butler or a page!

The young Prince of Wales, if he live, will doubtless become one of the most polished gentlemen in the universe:—but had he been stolen at his birth, and brought up by poor people, he would even now be running bare-footed in the streets—groping in the gutters for halfpence—gnawing cabbage-stalks and turnip-parings—thieving pudding from cooks' shops and bacon from chesemongers' windows—causing old gentlemen of their handkerchiefs—and familiar with all the horrible vocabulary of the slang language!

No credit, then, to the aristocracy—no blame to the poor! Neither can help being what they are. The influences of the sphere of refinement must have a tendency to refine; the miseries of the poor must produce degradation, immorality, and recklessness.

Ah! my Lord Duke—how ineffable is your contempt for you poor trembling wretch who now stands in the dock at the Old Bailey, before his judge! Your Grace never did a dishonourable action—your Grace has never committed even a crime so gentle as forgery! But has your Grace ever known what starvation is? Has your Grace wandered for hours, like a madman, through the streets of a city teeming with all the luxuries of the earth, while a wife and children were weeping for bread in a cheerless garret up some filthy court! No—your Grace has never been placed in such a position; or, believe me, you would probably have pertained a loaf of bread or fished a handkerchief or a purse—even as did that poor trembling wretch in the dock, whose guilt has filled your Grace with so much disgust!

And you, too, my Lady Duchess—how closely your Grace wraps that elegant, warm shawl around your form, lest its mere hem should happen to touch the garments of that poor unfortunate girl who is passing just at the moment when your Grace is stepping from the Opera-door into the splendid equipage which is to whirl your Grace to your palace-home! Oh! I well understand the loathing—the disgust which the menaced contact with that wretched creature excites in the bosom of your Grace. But—ah! does she deserve no pity—no

sympathy, as well as such sovereign contempt—such boundless aversion! The entire sex is not outraged by her fall;—and consider, my lady Duchess—had you been a poor man's daughter and so hemmed in by miseries of all kinds from your very birth until the age of womanhood, that emancipation from such incessant privations were a very paradise, even though purchased by a crime,—thinkest thou, my lady, that thy virtues would have been stronger than that of the poor wretch who seems to insult you by even breathing the same air that surrounds your aristocracy!

Merciful heavens! how unjust the upper classes are to the lower! The great lord and the haughty lady blame where they should pity—turn away with loathing where they should commiserate—proclaim as innate wickedness that social aspect which is the inevitable result of poverty and oppression—denounce as inveterately depraved those unhappy beings who sever were taught nor had a chance to be good!

The infamy of the upper class towards the lower in this country, is immense. A landowner gives his labourer eight shillings a-week, and says, "Go and live comfortably—be neat and clean—attend divine worship on the Sabbath—educate your children—let them read good books—keep them tidy in their appearance—and avoid debt!" Then when this landowner finds the family naked and starving—the man frequenting the public-house in despair—instead of the church in holy gratitude—the wife a slattern and a gin-drinker—the children incipient prostitutes and thieves,—when he sees all this, he raises his hands, exclaiming, "Oh! the inveterate, innate wickedness of the working classes!"

The aristocracy and the landowners of this country are, as a whole, the most cruel and heartless set of legalized robbers that ever preyed upon the vitals of suffering millions;—they are now what the French aristocrats and landlords were previously to the Revolution of 1793;—and solemnly—solemnly do we declare our belief that the despotic—tyrannical—remorseless oligarchy which usurps the right of domination, is hurrying the United Kingdom to a similar catastrophe!

But to continue our narrative.

The mist-like rain was still falling, and midnight had struck some time, when Old Death, closely followed by Tom Rain, merged from Cow-Cross Street, and stopped at the entrance to a narrow court in Turnmill Street.

Casting a glance around, to assure himself that Rainford was at his heels, Old Death plunged into the court; and Tom, fancying that the ancient feroe meant to elude him, sprang after him and caught him by the skirt of his grey coat.

"No noise," whispered Bones. "Here we are."

Thus speaking, he opened a side-door in the court with a key which he took from his pocket, and, hurrying Tom Rain with him, closed the door carefully again behind them.

The place into which the highwayman was introduced, was as dark as pitch; and, not choosing to be led into an ambushade, Rainford said, "One moment, my worthy friend! If you have no means of obtaining a light, I will very soon get those means from some public-house—"

While he was yet speaking Old Death procured a light from a tinder-box; and a candle, which stood ready on a low shelf near the door, soon dis-

fused sufficient lustre around to enable the highwayman to observe what kind of place he had been introduced into. It was a small, dingy-looking room, without a vestige of furniture in it, and having the entrance to a narrow staircase on one side, and a second door, facing that by which he and Old Death had entered, on the other.

When a thief arrived at this place with any stolen property, he pulled a wire, the handle of which hung against the wall in the court; a bell rang within—the outer door opened by unseen means, and the thief closed it behind him on entering the little room. He then tapped at the inner or second door which we have noticed, and which had a hatch in it that immediately drew up; no one appeared—but the thief threw in his bundle or parcel. The hatch then closed. In a few moments—or according to the time required for the inspection of the goods—the hatch was raised again, but merely high enough to admit the passage of a small piece of paper, whereon was marked the highest price that would be given for the articles offered for sale. If the paper were immediately returned by the thief, the money was thrust forth; the door in the court opened again by invisible means, the thief departed, and the door was closed behind him; if, however, he did not return the paper, it was considered that he would not accept the amount proffered, and the bundle was restored to him through the hatch.

"Thus, you perceive," said Old Death, whom Rainford compelled to reveal the mysterious use of the hatch in the inner door, "no one is seen by those who come here to dispose of their property."

"And who manages this business for you?" demanded the highwayman; "for it is clear that you cannot be here—there—and everywhere at one and the same time."

"I have a faithful and trustworthy man who has been in my service for many—many years," answered Old Death.

"But the people who have dealings at this place must know that it is your establishment?" said Rainford.

"Quite the contrary!" exclaimed Bones, with a grim smile. "This fencing-crib is called *Théobald's*—and none of the flash men in London know that I have the least connexion with it. It takes its name from my managing man. When I have business to do that I must transact in person, I meet my friends at public-houses and patten-cribs—and my very intimate ones, such as you, at *Bance's*. But come up stairs."

Old Death led the way to an indifferently furnished room, where a man, as well stricken in years and as repulsively ugly as himself, though apparently not near so tall, was in bed.

"It's only me, Tidmarsh," said Old Death.

"Only you!" growled the man, sitting up in bed, and staring suspiciously at Rainford.

"Me and a friend—a very particular friend, Tiddy," added Bones. "Indeed, it's Mr. Rainford."

"Oh! that's different!" said Tidmarsh, in a more conciliatory tone. "Your fame, sir, has reached me even in this crib. Take some rum, sir."

And he pointed to a bottle and glasses standing on a table.

"Well—I don't mind if I do—just to keep out the damp, and drink your health, Mr. Tidmarsh."

cried Rainford in his usual merry, off-handed strain; and, suiting the action to his words, he took a small dram.

Old Death followed his example; and Mr. Tidmarsh suffered himself to be prevailed upon to imbibe a like quantum.

"Now, go to sleep, Tiddy," said Bones, in a patronising manner. "We shan't disturb you any more."

Mr. Tidmarsh gave a species of grant, by way of assent to the recommendation offered, and threw himself back upon his pillow.

Old Death conducted Rainford into the adjoining rooms on the same storey, and then to the upper chambers; but they were all quite empty. Their walls were black with dirt—the ceilings seemed as if they had originally been painted of a sombre hue—the window-panes were so grained that it was evident they could admit but a feeble light even in the broad-day—the floors sent up clouds of dust as the feet trod upon them—and dense masses of cobwebs actually rounded off all the corners. There was, moreover, an earthy, infected smell in those rooms, which would have made a weak stomach heave with nausea.

Tom Rain was quite surprised to find all the chambers empty. He had expected to be introduced into warehouses teeming with the produce of three-parts of all the robery committed in the great metropolis; but not even so much as an old rag met his eyes. Indeed, the rooms appeared as if they had not been tenanted, or even scarcely entered, for many—many years.

"This may be your reception-house," he said, in a jocular manner; "but it certainly does not contain your stores."

"All the goods are sent away as soon as they are received," replied Old Death.

"And where are they sent to?" demanded Rain.

"To the small dealers—and some to the continent," answered Bones, eyeing him askance.

"Well and good," observed the highwayman coolly. "But you have not a hundred errand-boys, to distribute the bundles and parcels about France every hour in the day."

"What—what do you mean, Tom?" asked Old Death.

"I mean that you are trying to deceive me," exclaimed the highwayman, sternly. "But, look you! we are alone in this house—for I consider your old man down stairs as nobody; and, by God! if you attempt any of your nonsense with me, I'll fell you with the butt-end of this pistol."

"What would you have me do?" said Old Death, trembling at the determined manner in which his companion spoke.

"I would have you show me where you keep your stores," was the resolute answer. "And now—delay not—or it will be the worse for you."

Old Death still hesitated for a moment; but, seeing that Rainford stamped his foot impatiently and raised his pistol in a menacing manner, he disposed himself to do with a good grace what he could not avoid.

Raising the candle high up, so as to light the way thoroughly, he retraced his steps down the narrow, precipitous, and broken staircase, Tom Rain following close behind.

Having reached the little room on the ground-

floor, and which we have already described as the place where stolen property was purchased, Old Death opened the door containing the hatch, and ten Rainford into a small back chamber, having the air of an office. Its furniture consisted of a desk, a high stool, and one of those large, old-fashioned eight-day clocks which used to be seen in the kitchens of gentry houses, and the walnut cases of which were as big as coffins. On the desk were writing materials, and a huge ledger, especially dirty, as if it had been well thumbed by hands not too intimately acquainted with soap.

"This is Tidmarsh's crib, I suppose?" said Rainford, inquiringly.

Old Death nodded an affirmative.

The highwayman opened the book, in which the entries of each day's transactions were regularly made. We shall quote a specimen of these accounts, prefacing the extract with the necessary explanation, that the numbers prefixed to some of the memoranda were those which tallied with the names of the thieves, burglars, or prostitutes entered in Old Death's books, as was stated on a previous occasion:—

No. 31. Two belchers, a cream-fancy, a rafflesman, and a blue billy; three wedge feeders, a yack, and a dog.

A Stranger—looked like a shallow one. Roll of snow, six mouse cases, three naps, and a blood-red fancy. 2s.

A Stranger—looked like a Spanish fencer. Green king's-man, water's-man, yellow-fancy, and yellow-man; pair of slinksters, a fan, and a dummie. 12s. 6d.

No. 4. A cat, six pair of shaker's's crabs, and a cule, 12s. No. 52. Yack and onions. 4s. 12s. 6d.

A Stranger—looked like a snow dropper. Twelve mill-tops. 6s.

A Stranger—looked like a paterman. Busy-sack, rodge-pack, six wedge feeders, and tops in busy-sack. 4s. 12s.

A Stranger—looked like a mushroom faker. Lily benjamin. 2s. 6d.

A Stranger—looked like a cross. To smash three double knaps. 4s. 12s. 6d.

A Stranger—looked like a high-fly. Rodge fawney. 1s. 6d.

Luzon. To smash a single knap. 4s. 12s. 6d.*

* The ensuing glossary will explain these otherwise significant entries:—

Belcher—close striped handkerchief.

Cream fancy—any pattern of handkerchief on a white ground.

Handsome—green handkerchief, with white spots.

Blue billy—blue ground handkerchief, with white spots.

Wedge feeders—silver spoons.

Yack—watch.

Dog—pocket-book of small size.

Shallow case—a fellow dressed in a Guernsey jacket, and looking like a sailor.

Roll of snow—piece of Irish linen.

Mouse-cases—yellow cases.

Naps—collar shirts.

Blood-red fancy—handkerchief all-red.

Spanish fencer—match-seller.

Green King's-man—handkerchief of any pattern on a green ground.

Water's-man—sky-coloured handkerchief.

Yellow-fancy—yellow handkerchief, with white spots.

Yellow-man—handkerchief all yellow.

Kingsters—trousers.

Fan—whitewash.

Dummie—pocket-book of large size.

Cat—mitt.

Shaker's's crabs—ladies' shoes.

Cule—reticule.

Yack and onions—watch and seals.

Snow-dropper—one who steals linen from hedges or drying-grounds.

Mill tops—linen shirts.

"Quite a secret police-book, this," observed Tom Rain, after he had gained an insight into its contents.

Old Death smiled grimly.

"But do you mean to say," continued Rainford, "that these persons who are noted by means of numbers—for I can understand the meaning of all that—do not know that this is your crib?"

"Not they!" replied Bones. "I tell you that they call it Tidmarsh's; and I may add that not one of our hundred who come here, even know old Tidmarsh by sight."

"And how does he recognise these fellows who are denoted by the numbers?" asked Tom Rain.

Old Death pointed to a small hole, not larger than a pea, in the wood-work which separated the two rooms; and this hole was covered with a little moveable piece of wood on the inner side—that is, in the office where Tidmarsh was accustomed to sit.

"Things begin to grow a little plainer," said Rainford. "And now, my worthy old fence, to the store-rooms, and to your own special residence."

This command was significantly backed by the motion of Rainford's right hand towards the pocket where he had deposited the pistol with which he had ere now menaced his companion.

Mr. Benjamin Bones swallowed a profound sigh—for it went to his heart to think that he was compelled to yield to the coercion of one whom he had marked out for a slave, but who had become a master.

But as he took up the candle from the desk whereon he had placed it, to enable the highwayman to examine his memorandum-book, a gleam of heretofore satisfaction shot athwart his countenance—as if some idea of a consolatory nature had suddenly struck him.

Tom Rain whistled a tune with an air of the most perfect indifference: but that abrupt change in Old Death's features—that scintillation of delight, momentary as its expression was, had not escaped the notice of the highwayman.

The ancient fence now approached the clock, which was ticking in a gloomy, monotonous manner; and, as he laid his hand upon the key which opened the door of the case, he turned sharply towards Rainford, saying, "You persist in going farther to-night?"

"Yes—such is my determination," answered Tom.

Old Death opened the clock, and touched some secret spring inside. This was immediately followed by the noise of wheels, accompanied by a peculiar sound, as of a windlass turning rapidly; and in a few moments, Rainford perceived that the entire clock itself was moving slowly along the wall, revealing by degrees an aperture in the floor.

Paterman—a robber who cuts trunks from the back of carriages.

Busy-sack—carpet bag.

Rodge pack—gold watch.

Tops—clothes.

Mushroom faker—a man who goes about ostentatiously in a top hat, but really to thieve.

Lily benjamin—white upper coat.

Cross—an itinerant quack doctor.

Smash—change.

Double knaps—ten-pound notes.

High-fly—gentle begging-letter impostor.

Rodge fawney—gold ring.

Luzon—common woman.

Single knap—five-pound note.

In about a minute the working of the machinery ceased—the clock-case was once more stationary—and in the place where it first stood was an opening cut in the boards, large enough to admit the passage of even a moderately stout man.

"Shall I go first?" asked Old Death, with a sardonic smile, which seemed to indicate his opinion that Rainford would not venture to follow him.

But if such were really his idea, he was disappointed; for the highwayman said in the coolest manner possible, "By all means, old chap. And make haste about it—for the night is passing away, and as yet I have seen scarcely anything."

Old Death made no answer, but began to descend an iron ladder, to which the aperture led; and as he gradually went down the steps, he held up the candle in one hand, and with the other supported himself by means of a rope hung for the purpose.

Tom Rain unhesitatingly followed him; and when he reached the bottom of the ladder, he found himself in a long, narrow, vaulted passage, apparently stretching for underground, but to the end of which it was impossible for the eye to penetrate, so feeble and flickering was the light afforded by the candle.

"Wait an instant while I close the entrance," said Old Death: "it is a precaution I never neglect."

"Quite right," observed Tom coolly; and while he affected to be leisurely whistling a tune, he was in reality keeping a most careful watch upon his companion's movements.

Old Death pulled a thick wire which hung down from the top of the vault, and the mechanism of the clock was again set in motion, until the clock-case itself had resumed its usual station over the entrance to the vaulted subterranean.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE STORE-ROOMS.

THE reader has already seen and heard enough to be fully aware that Thomas Rainford was a man of undaunted courage; nor did he now tremble when he found himself immured, as it were, in that subterranean, along with a character so full of cunning and malignity as Old Death.

Although completely ignorant of the dark and gloomy locality to which he had been brought, and well aware that his companion was quite capable of the foulest treachery, the highwayman followed the old fence with so firm a step, and whistled away in a manner indicative of such utter recklessness of danger, that his guide was himself astonished at so much daring.

But Rainford was keenly observant of all the movements of his companion; and, resolutely as he walked, he was nevertheless careful in following as precisely as possible in the steps of Old Death, so that he might not be entrapped by any pitfall in that gloomy place.

On his part, Old Death proceeded at a somewhat rapid pace, shading the light with his hand so as to protect it from the strong current of air which rushed through the passage.

This passage, or long subterranean vault, was about ten feet wide and six high. It was walled and arched with rough stone, and paved with huge

flags. The masonry at the sides and over-head was green with the damp; and, even by the fitful light of the candle, Rainford could perceive that this strange place must have been in existence for many—many years.

Here and there he observed little niches in the wall; and in one there was the remnant of an image of the Saviour on the cross. It instantly flashed to the mind of the highwayman that this sinister-looking subterranean had once been connected with some monastic establishment; and his imagination suggested that he was probably treading on the very place where the victims of ancient Popish tyranny had been confined and left to perish through famine.

Old Death and Tom Rain had proceeded about sixty yards, as well as the latter could guess, along the vaulted passage, when the former suddenly stopped, and the highwayman perceived that their further progress was barred by a huge door, studded with iron knobs.

"You are now about to enter my sanctuary—as I may call it," said Old Death, turning abruptly round on Rainford; "and again I ask you what guarantee I have that you will not betray me?"

"The same security which I have that you will not prove treacherous to me," answered Tom.

Old Death hesitated for a few moments, as if he were about to make another observation; but, yielding to a second thought, which most probably showed him the inutilty of further remonstrance, he proceeded to unbar the massive door.

It opened inwardly, and led to a spiral flight of stone steps, up which the two men mounted, Rainford having previously secured the door, which had huge bolts on each side.

Having ascended some forty steps, Old Death, who went first, placed the candle in a niche, and pushed up a trap-door, which immediately admitted a strong current of air; but the precaution observed in respect to the light, prevented it from being extinguished.

"I ought to have brought a lantern with me, by rights," murmured Old Death. "But come along."

"You go on first," said Rainford; "and I'll take care of the candle."

"No—give it to me," replied Bones hastily; and he extended his hand to grasp it.

But Rainford hit him a hard blow on the wrist with the butt-end of his pistol, and then seized the candle.

"What did you do that for?" demanded Old Death savagely.

"Because I suspect you of treachery," returned the highwayman, in a severe tone. "But, remember—I am well armed—and, at the least appearance of evil intent on your part, I fire!"

"You are wrong, Tom—my dear fellow," said Old Death, coaxingly, as he still lingered at the top of the steps.

"Well—I may be; and I shall be glad to find that I am," exclaimed Tom: "and now lead on."

Old Death ascended the few remaining steps; and Rainford followed with his pistol in one hand and the candle in the other.

They were now in a small room furnished as a bed-chamber; and when Old Death had let down the trap-door again, he unrolled and spread a small carpet over it.

"This is your residence?" said Rainford inquiringly.

The old man nodded a grim assent.

"And your store-rooms are in this house?—for I can perfectly well understand that we have come ~~to~~ another house—and, by the direction of the subterranean, I should say it must be in Red Lion Street."

"You know London well," said Old Death.

"I do," replied Rainford.

"Although you lived so long in the country," said Bones.

"Right again, old fellow!" exclaimed Tom.

"And now for a farther insight into the mysteries of your abode."

With these words the highwayman approached a door on one side of the room; but Old Death, hastily advancing towards another door, said, "This way, Tom—this way: there is nothing in that quarter—worth seeing."

But the ancient fence seemed agitated; and this was not lost upon his companion.

"Well, as you choose," observed the latter, resuming his careless, off-hand manner. "Lead on."

Bones had already opened the door; and he now conducted the highwayman into a spacious apartment, surrounded by shelves, whereon were ranged an assortment of articles of the most miscellaneous description.

Clothes and china-ware—candlesticks, plated and silver, all carefully wrapped up in paper—piles of silk pocket-handkerchiefs, and heaps of linen garments—carpet-bags and portmanteaus—every species of haberdashery—silk dresses and cotton gowns—velvet pelisses and shawls of all gradations of value—muffs, tippets, and boas—ladies' shoes and gentlemen's boots—looking-glasses and candelabras—lamps and pictures—tea-urns and costly vases—meerschaum-pipes and dressing-cases—immense quantities of cutlery—piles of printing paper—saddles and bridles,—in short, an infinite variety of articles, to detail which would occupy whole pages.

"Your magazine" is crowded, old fellow," said Rainford, who, even while surveying the curious place in which he found himself, did not the less keep a strict watch upon his companion.

"Are you satisfied now?" demanded Old Death.

"Not quite," answered Rainford. "You must have another room where you keep your jewellery and all those kinds of things!"

"What kind of things?" asked Bones sharply.

"Oh! things that require to be packed away with caution, to be sure," replied Tom Rain.

For an instant the old man cast upon him a glance of searching inquiry, as if to penetrate into the most secret profundities of his soul; but the highwayman affected to be very intent in his contemplation of a picture, and the countenance of the fence grew more composed.

"Well," said Rainford, after a few moments' pause, "there's no use in delaying the matter. I want and will make myself acquainted with every nook of this place."

Old Death moved towards a door facing the one by which they entered the apartment; and Rainford was conducted into a smaller room, but fitted up with shelves like the first.

On these shelves were several boxes, of various dimensions, and numerous 'ewel-cases wrapped up in paper.

"Watches and plate, I suppose?" said Rainford, pointing to the boxes.

"Something in that way, Tom," replied Old Death.

"Would you like to see any of them?"

"No, thank 'ee," was the answer. "I am not particularly curious in that respect."

Then, as he appeared to glance casually round the room, his eyes dwell for an instant upon an iron safe let into the wall.

"Well—have you seen enough?" asked Old Death. "It's getting very late."

"It must be early, you mean," replied the highwayman, with a smile. "But still there is time for the business that I have in hand," he added, his manner suddenly changing to seriousness.

Old Death glanced towards him uneasily. Indeed, for some time the fence had been suspecting that Rainford had an ulterior object in view, independent of the mere wish to become acquainted with his abode; and vague alarms now filled his mind. What could the highwayman mean? Was he other than he seemed? Did he intend to betray him?

All these ideas rushed rapidly through the imagination of the horrible old man; and, though he had formed a plan whereby to avenge himself on the only individual who had ever yet dared to coerce him, he trembled lest he should be unable to put it into execution. He knew that Rainford was a man of dauntless bravery, and believed him to be a desperate one; and now he found himself completely in this formidable person's power. Not that Old Death lacked courage himself; and he certainly was not deficient in treachery. But he wanted the strength—the physical strength to maintain a deadly struggle with the highwayman, if it should come to that.

Thus was it that for the first time, perhaps, the hardened miscreant trembled for his life.

To throw open the window and call for assistance, in case of danger, was to invite the entrance of persons who would discover all the mysteries of his abode; and death were an alternative scarcely more frightful!

"Yes—there is time enough for the business that I have on hand!" repeated Rainford, his countenance assuming so stern—so determined an expression, that Old Death trembled with a colder shudder than before.

"What do you mean?—what is that—that—that—?" stammered Old Death.

"Sit down—there—on that seat!" thundered the highwayman, pointing imperiously to a chair.

"Sit down, I say—or, by heaven! this pistol—"

"Well—I will—I will, Tom," said Bones, perceiving the deadly weapon levelled point-blank at his heart; and he sank into the chair accordingly.

"But do tell me—if I have offended you—if—"

"Hold your tongue!" ejaculated Rainford, in so authoritative a manner that the ancient villain's powers of utterance were suddenly paralysed.

"And now mark me," continued the highwayman: "I have a certain task to perform, which nothing save a superior physical strength on your part can prevent. But, in the first place it is necessary that I should bind you—that I should render you incapable of molesting me."

Old Death was unable to reply; but he stared with vacant terror on the individual whose proceedings were alike so mysterious and so alarming.

Rainford took a coil of rope from a bale of goods that stood upon the table, and with extraordinary rapidity proceeded to fasten Old Death's arms and legs to the chair, uttering terrible menaces the whole time that this operation lasted; while the appalling state of the aged fence's mind was indicated only by low moans and convulsive movements of uneasiness.

Having made fast the end of the rope to the iron bars of the fire-place, in such a manner that Old Death could not shift the chair beyond the length of the tether thus formed, Rainford leant himself against the table, and proceeded to address his prisoner.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ANOTHER DEED OF INFAMY BROUGHT TO LIGHT.

The scene was not a striking one.

In that small chamber—the shutters of which were securely closed,—by the light of a dimly-burning candle, two men of criminal avocations but of entirely discrepant characters, were seated opposite to each other,—one fastened, pinioned to a large arm-chair—the other placed in a determined attitude against the heavy oaken table.

Fear and vague alarm rendered the always repulsive countenance of Old Death now truly hideous; while excitement and a certain air of bold triumph invested the features of the highwayman with an expression which made him appear perfectly, though sternly handsome.

The gleaming eyes of Old Death flickered in sparkles beneath his shaggy, over-hanging brows—for fierce, ferocious malignity mingled with the terror that oppressed him—while Rainford surveyed him with combined abhorrence and contempt.

"Thirty years and ten months have elapsed," said the highwayman sternly, "since one Benjamin Bones sold his half-sister Octavia to a nobleman, who purchased the prize of her virtue for gold!"

For a few moments a dead silence ensued, after these words had fallen from the lips of Rainford; but, when that interval was passed, a wild—a savage—a hyena-like howl, expressive of mingled rage and astonishment, burst from the lips of Old Death.

"Silence, miscreant!" exclaimed the highwayman, in a tone and with a manner of terrible earnestness. "Ah! I have doubtless surprised you by this announcement—this denunciation of a secret that you little deemed to be known to me!"

"My God! who are you?—how came you to learn that secret?" demanded the old fence, writhing in the agony of suspense and wild excitement.

"I will tell you who I am presently," was the answer: "and you will also see wherefore I have compelled you to conduct me hither this night."

"Then you had another motive, besides the mere wish to become acquainted with my abode?" said Old Death, perceiving that he had been over-reached in this respect—as indeed he had, for the last half-hour, suspected.

"Fool!" ejaculated Rainford, contemptuously: "of what use was it to me to know where you lived, or to visit your secret repositories of plunder, unless I had some essentially important motive? The fact of your having discovered my abode gave me, in truth, but little uneasiness—for I could have moved

elsewhere in a few hours. That fact, however, furnished me with an apparent excuse to force you to conduct me to your den; for I knew that were I to acquaint you with my real object in coming here, you would have risked every thing to prevent it!"

"Again, I say, who are you?" demanded Old Death, a kind of superstitious awe now taking possession of him.

"Listen to me," said Rainford. "Nearly thirty-one years have elapsed since you sold your half-sister, Octavia Manners, for the gold which laid the foundation of the immense fortune you have amassed. Yes—this atrocious deed was perpetrated; and one of England's proudest peers was the purchaser of that young creature's virtue—for she was but sixteen, old man, when her ruin was effected through your vile agency! She was sold to the embrace of a man old enough to be her father—aye, even her grandfather;—and the affection which she entertained for a deserving youth in her own sphere of life, was lighted—crushed! She died of a broken heart—leaving behind her a male child whom you swore to protect!"

Old Death seemed to recoil from this avowal as from a hideous spectre suddenly starting up before him; for, in spite of his confirmed wickedness, the present topic had awakened painful reminiscences and compunctious feelings within him.

"Yes," continued Rainford, fixing his eyes reproachfully upon the old fence; "she forgave you on her death-bed—forgave you the wrong that you did her,—forgave you, because you promised to make amends for your conduct towards her, by your behaviour to the babe whom she left to your charge."

"And who can say that I did not fulfil my promise?" demanded Old Death, trembling in suspense at what might be the nature of the reply which Rainford would give.

"Who can say that you did not fulfil your promise?" repeated the highwayman, in a slow—deliberate—bitter tone, while his eyes appeared to send daggers to the heart of the old man bound helplessly in the chair. "There is damning evidence against you in that respect!"

"Where—how?" ejaculated Old Death.

"You shall soon learn," replied Rainford. "The nobleman who had purchased your half-sister, provided liberally for the support of her child—her child—and gave a large sum, to be used for the offspring of that sad connexion. But you—"

"I—I did my duty—towards the child," stammered Old Death, "till—it died—"

"Liar!" thundered Rainford, advancing in an appallingly menacing manner towards the helpless captive wretch. "You sold the child to a tribe of gipsies—"

"Mercy! mercy!" groaned Old Death. "Do not kill me, Tom—do not hurt me! I am in your power—spare me!"

Rainford had raised his pistol, as if to dash the butt-end against the forehead of the old man; but mastering his passion, he consigned the weapon to his pocket—for he was afraid to trust his hand with it, while his excitement was so terrible.

"Mercy, indeed!" exclaimed Rainford, in a tone of bitter hatred, not unmingled with contempt: "what mercy did you show towards that hapless child? When Octavia Manners was on her death-bed, that nobleman to whom you sold her virtue, visited her—implored her forgiveness—and placed



in your hands a thousand guineas to ensure a provision for the boy."

"My God!" ejaculated Old Death, a terrible suspicion now flashing like lightning to his mind: "how can you know all this!—even if—you, yourself—"

"Yes—I am the son of that nobleman and your half-sister Octavia!" cried Rainford, placing himself in front of Old Death, on whom he gazed with eyes flashing fire from beneath sternly contracted brows.

"Spare me—spare me!" murmured the wretched man, hanging down his head—for the glances of his injured nephew seemed to scorch and sear his very heart's core.

"Look up—look up!" thundered the highwayman; "and meet the gaze of him whom, when a child, you sold to gipsies—sold, that you might grasp all the gold which was supplied to you for my benefit! Yes—you sold me to strangers—even making a profit of me by the very way in which you rid yourself of my presence in your dwelling! Had it not been for your treachery—your vile avarice in this respect, I might have grown up to be an honest

man. But, no—no," added Rainford bitterly—and a tear trembled on his eye-lash,— "had you kept me with you, I should have been worse—aye, a myriad, myriad times worse than I even now am!"

At the imperious command of the highwayman, Old Death had raised his head; and Rainford then beheld a countenance so fearfully distorted with varied emotions, that he felt he was already partially avenged in having been able to produce such a powerful effect on that aged—that inveterate sinner.

"What do you mean to do to me, Tom?" asked the hideous old fence, now more than ever trembling for his life.

"Not to harm your person," replied the highwayman scornfully; especially," he added, in a tone of bitter sarcasm, "as you and I can boast of kinship. But I am wearied of the life I am leading—and my aim is to settle in some foreign clime, where the evil reputation of my deeds in this way not follow me. There are times when I abhor myself—happy, reckless, and indifferent as I usually seem—for my career has been marked with many a deed at which I blush—all robber, plunderer that I am! And

this discourse, which has turned upon the foul crime perpetrated against the honour and happiness of my mother—Oh! it has reminded me of one act in my life that presses sorely—God knows how heavily upon my conscience!

Rainford walked thrice up and down the room, apparently oblivious of the presence of Old Death, who had never before seen him exhibit so much painful emotion.

"But regrets are useless—save as they prepare our minds for a better course of life," exclaimed Rainford, abruptly starting from his reverie; then, again confronting Old Death, he said, "And now comes the moment of punishment for all your misdeeds towards me!"

The fence groaned audibly.

"Fear not for your life," continued the highwayman: "I am no murderer:—my hands were never stained with blood—neither shall they be now! But, in regarding that which is my own—and with interest—aye, compound interest, too—I shall touch a heartless, grasping wretch a lesson that may render him more cautious in future how he sacrifices every human life at the shrine of avarice! For even amongst such as you—such as I—such as the vilest wretches whose villany has helped to fill these stores,—the claims of kinship—the bonds of relationship have a recognition and a name. Many and many a man who is noted for his misdeeds—or who has even shed the blood of a fellow-creature—would respect the vow which he pledged to rear his dead sister's child. But you—you ruthlessly thrust away the helpless infant,—you cast off the offspring of that connexion which your own fearful thirst for gold had brought about! Now, then, shall I punish you through the medium of that passion which prompted you to sell my mother to the nobleman, and myself to the gipsy!"

With these words Rainford advanced close up to his prisoner, and said in a short, commanding manner, "The key of that safe—where is it?"

"The key!" repeated Old Death, his countenance becoming ghastly white.

"Yes—the key!" cried the highwayman; and he thrust his hands into the pockets of his captive's grey coat.

"No—no: you shall not have my gold!" howled the fence, agitating convulsively on his chair.

"Keep quiet!" thundered Rain; "or I shall do you a mischief yet! Keep quiet, I say.—Ah! here is the key! And now roll about, and rave, and foam as you will—I care not!"

"Villain! what are you doing?" exclaimed Old Death, his eyes glaring with ferocious hate—with infernal spite—with blood-thirsty malignity,—glaring, indeed, like those of a famished tiger caught in the snare of the hunter, and beholding a stately deer at a little distance: "what are you doing? You are going to rob me—to plunder me—after all I have done for you—all the good things I have put in your way! But I will be revenged yet—I will send you to the scaffold—I will wreak a terrific vengeance on your head. Keep off, I say—touch not that safe! Damnation light upon you!—perdition seize you! Oh! Tom—dear Tom—don't rob me—don't! You'll drive me to despair—I shall die of grief—and you will be my murderer! Tom—do listen to me! Ah! he opens the safe—the wretch—the villain!"

Thus did Old Death menace and pray—coax and

mean by turns; but at last his voice swelled into a howl of fiend-like rage, which rose like the wailing of a damned soul upon the silence of that early morning-hour.

But Rainford seemed indifferent alike to his earnest beseechings and his paroxysms of fury.

That last, ferocious outburst of rage had completely exhausted the old man; and gasping as if under the influence of strangulation, he fell back in the seat to which he was fastened by the strong cords. But his convulsive motions—his hollow, flashing eyes—his parched lips—and the quivering of his hands, denoted how acutely—how keenly he felt the work of degradation that was in progress.

For Rainford had opened the safe, and was now busily engaged in examining the various drawers, and also sundry pocket-books which he found therein. The former contained hoards of gold coins, and the latter were filled with Bank-notes, making an aggregate of immense value.

The highwayman secured about his person a sum of five thousand pounds, murmuring to himself, "This is sufficient to enable me to become an honest man: I will not leave the old villain penniless."

He then searched the safe for any private papers that might be deposited there; and in a drawer which he had well-nigh overlooked, he found a small leather case containing a roll of letters, tied round with a piece of ribbon so faded that it was impossible to determine what its colour might have originally been. A single glance at these documents awakened such emotions of mingled pleasure and pain within his breast, that he determined to possess himself of them; and replacing them in the leather case, he secured them about his person with even more care than he had bestowed on the Bank-notes.

Having thus rifled the safe of as much as he chose to take away, he closed the iron door, locked it, and placing the key on the table, said to Old Death, "I am now about to take my departure from this house. Is there any one living here besides yourself?"

The fence only stared at him in a fierce and sombre manner; for the brain of the old man had become a chaos of wild and terrible thoughts at the contemplation of the daring robbery which was thus practised on him—the patron of robbers!

Indeed, the incidents of this eventful night were sufficient to level the powers of a mind stronger even than that of Old Death—for those incidents had followed each other in such rapid, whirlwind-like succession, and were all so hostile to his interests, that he felt as if he were the victim of a hideous nightmare composed of all the most frightful images that the terrors of a guilty conscience can possibly conjure up during the long dark nights of winter.

The failure of his expedition to Lock's Fields—the exposure of his treachery to Tom Rain—the discomfiture he had undergone in the presence of Toby Bunce and the lad Jacob—the coercion exercised to force him to discover the secrets of his receiving-house and the mysteries of his store-rooms and dwelling-house—the discovery of his deeply injured nephew in the highwayman, and the revival of the history of his villany in reference to one long since dead,—and, lastly, the robbery of his money and papers,—all these events, occurring with such consecutive rapidity that they appeared to

form but one single dreadful blow, were sufficient to paralyse the energies of the old villain.

"Is there any one living in this house besides yourself?" repeated Rainford. "It is for your own good that I ask; for I shall leave you bound in this chair—but, if you are really alone here, I will hasten to drop your friend Tidmarsh a hint, that he may come presently and release you, by which arrangement I shall get as long a start of you as I require."

"There is no one here but myself," at length replied Old Death, aroused from his torpor by the words thus addressed to him.

"Then good bye," said Tom; and, taking up the candle, he quitted the room, heedless of the prisoner's intercession to be released from his captivity.

On gaining the bed-chamber situate above the spiral staircase leading to the subterranean passage, the highwayman remembered two circumstances which made him pause ere he raised the trap-door.

In the first place he recalled to mind the anxiety of Old Death to prevent him from securing the candle at the moment when they were about to emerge from the secret avenue; and it struck Rainford that the old man had intended to have extinguished the light as if by accident—but whether for motives of treachery, or merely to avoid the discovery of something that the fence wished to be concealed, Tom was at a loss to conjecture.

Secondly, Rainford remembered that Old Death had manifested considerable uneasiness when he had approached the first of the two doors opening from that bed-chamber; and he now thought it probable that the fence had been desirous of extinguishing the light in order to prevent Rainford from observing that there were two doors in that room.

"At all events," said Tom to himself, "let us see where this other door leads to."

It was unlocked—as he had expected to find it; because, had it been otherwise, Old Death would not have manifested so much anxiety when he had approached it on their entrance into the bed-chamber.

Proceeding with caution—so as not to incur the risk of having his light extinguished, and equally to avoid any sudden surprise in case the house might really have other occupants besides Old Death—Rainford entered a spacious room which seemed to be fitted up as a chemical laboratory. On a large oaken table were galvanic batteries, and an infinite variety of electrical apparatus as well as the articles on which experiments are usually made with the subtle fluid,—such as pieces of glass, amber, sulphur, wax, silk, cotton, loaf sugar, several containing a variety of oils, metallic oxides, several common stones, metallic ores, the metals and semi-metals, &c. Leyden jars, batteries, electrophori, electrometers, discharging rods, &c., were also crowded together on the table. In a large earthen pan under the table were the flayed carcasses of several rabbits, frogs, and such vermin as rats and mice, all of which appeared to have been only very recently stripped of their skins—for they emitted no putrid smell, and the blood was still oozing from them.

On a shelf were plaster of Paris casts of upwards of fifty heads of men and monkeys. On the base of some of the heads there were inscriptions in black

letters, stating the originals from which the casts were made; and, with a rapid glance, the highwayman read the principal ones, which were these:—

ARTHUR THISTLEWOOD.
Executed for High Treason, 1820.

DAVID HOGGART.
Executed for Murder, 1821.

GEORGE BARRINGTON,
The Notorious Pickpocket—died 1811.

HENRY FAUNTLEROY.
Executed for Forgery, Nov., 1824.

JOHN THURTELL.
Executed for Murder, 1824.

WILLIAM PROBERT.
Executed for Horse-stealing, 1825.

There were casts from the heads of several other celebrated criminals; but we need enumerate no more.

Intrepid—dauntless—bold as Tom Rals was, he nevertheless experienced a cold shuddering as he surveyed the objects ranged upon that long shelf; for this thought forced itself upon him—"I wonder whether a cast of MY head will ever be there!"

In order to chase these gloomy reflections from his mind, Rainford turned away from the contemplation of the shelf and its sinister contents. A cupboard-door stood partially open in one corner of the room; and he hastened to inspect the recess.

But what pen can depict his horror—what language can describe his astonishment, when upon a shelf within that cupboard he beheld four human heads staring out at him with eyes wide open but perfectly motionless, and on the pupils of which the rays of the candle flashed with extraordinary brilliancy!

For an instant the highwayman felt afraid:—in what description of place was he? what meant that ghastly spectacle?

But, conquering his terrors, of which indeed in another moment he was ashamed, he approached nearer; and the idea struck him that he beheld admirable models in wax. Still the flesh was so closely resembling that of the dead—the appearance of the countenances and of the crown of the heads, which were all closely shaven, was so natural, that he extended his hand and touched the cheek of one of those appalling objects.

Great God! it was indeed human flesh,—icy cold, and producing a sensation which the touch of saught beside can produce!

In spite of himself, Rainford cast a shuddering glance around him: then, once more ashamed of his weakness, he resumed his inspection of the heads.

They were evidently prepared for preservation; for an odour of strong spices emanated from them, and the eyes, fitted into the sockets, were of glass. Hence the strange brilliancy produced by the reflection of the candle.

The highwayman was still absorbed in the contemplation of these frightful objects, when a door at the farther end of the room slowly opened; and a man, enveloped in a loose dressing-gown, and holding a lamp in his hand, appeared on the threshold.

But the instant he beheld Rainford, he uttered

an ejaculation of surprise and alarm—hastily retreated—and barred and bolted the door behind him.

He had, however, been long enough in the room for Rainford to obtain a full view of his countenance; and it was with profound astonishment that the highwayman had recognised Dr. Lascelles!

"What!" he thought; "that respectable physician in league with Old Death!"

And he stood for some moments gazing vacantly at the door by which the doctor had entered and also so abruptly disappeared again.

Then it suddenly struck him that the physician might discover the state of bondage in which Benjamin Bones had been left; and not only would the immediate release of the old fence follow, but an active pursuit be probably instituted by both individuals after himself.

He accordingly determined to beat a retreat as speedily as possible. Not that he was afraid of encountering Old Death and the doctor; but he knew not what principles of danger the establishment possessed, and which might be turned against himself. He had seen quite enough of the house in Turnmill Street and of that where he now was (in Red Lion Street) to be well aware that they were no ordinary places of abode; and he was also sufficiently well acquainted with the character of Old Death to feel conscious that no mercy was to be expected at his hands, should he fall completely into his power.

It is, therefore, no disparagement to the heroism of the highwayman to state that he was now anxious to effect his exit from the strange place wherein he found himself; and it naturally struck him that there must be a more speedy and convenient avenue of egress than the subterranean. He readily comprehended that the underground passage was used as a medium of transferring goods from the house in Turnmill Street to the store-rooms of the establishment in Red Lion Street; and that it might also serve, at a pinch of need, as an avenue of escape for Old Death from his own bed-room.

But that the subterranean was the only means of ingress and egress in respect to the house in Red Lion Street, Tom could not for an instant suppose; as a dwelling without a door, or with a door that was never opened, would soon become an object of suspicion in the neighbourhood.

Judging by the direction of the subterranean passage, the highwayman was enabled to conclude that the room in which he now found himself was at the back of the house, and that the one where he had left Old Death was in the front, as was also that into which Dr. Lascelles had retreated; and he was moreover convinced that these apartments were all on a first or upper story, but decidedly not on the ground-floor.

Now as the laboratory, Old Death's bed-chamber, and the larger store-room formed the suite at the back of the house, and there was no flight of stairs connecting them with the ground-floor, it was clear to Rainford that the means of communication with that ground-floor must be from the front part of the house; and into the rooms looking on the street he did not choose to penetrate, because he might there encounter the doctor and Old Death. He therefore came to the conclusion that he must escape by the back part of the house, or else dare the subterranean.

All these calculations, which have occupied us some time to record, were made and summed up, in a few moments by Tom Rain.

Nor did he now hesitate what course to adopt.

Placing the candle upon the table, he hastened to throw up a window; but, to his annoyance, he found it securely barred;—and his hand assured him that the bars could not be removed by mere physical strength.

He had not time nor implements to attempt to force a way through this difficulty; and the only alternative appeared to be the subterranean.

Resuming possession of the candle, he returned into Old Death's bed-room—drew away the carpet—raised the trap-door—and commenced the descent of the spiral staircase, closing the trap after him and bolting it inside.

But scarcely had he proceeded ten steps downwards, when his foot suddenly slipped; and, in the attempt which he made to recover himself, the light went out.

At the same instant he heard heavy steps treading upon the trap-door overhead, and then the hum of voices—but whose he could not distinguish—in the room which he had just left.

"Now, Tom Rain, look alive, old fellow!" he murmured in self-encouraging apostrophe; and, with a resolute step, he hastened rapidly down the spiral staircase, amidst a darkness so intense that it was all but felt!

CHAPTER XXXII.

RAINFORD IN THE SUBTERRANEAN.

TOM RAIN reached the bottom of the stairs in perfect safety; and, as he had carefully noted the geography of the subterranean when he traversed it an hour previously with Old Death, he experienced but little difficulty in threading his path along it, even amidst the black darkness through which he literally seemed to be pushing his way.

In a few minutes his progress was stopped by a wall, which his extended arms encountered; and he now knew that he had reached the extremity communicating with the house in Turnmill Street.

Having succeeded in grasping the wire which, passing through the top of the vault, was connected with the mechanism of the clock overhead, he pulled it vigorously.

But the machinery moved not!

Then, for the first time during this eventful night, the highwayman became appalled at the dangers on which he had entered.

Again he tugged at the wire; it snapped short close by the roof, and the long piece thus broken off, fell at his feet.

"Damnation!" cried Rainford; and he stamped impatiently on the cold, damp stones.

Suddenly it struck him that there might be one wire to move the clock over the opening at the head of the iron ladder, and another wire to move it away from that opening.

He accordingly began to feel with his hands for this second wire the existence of which was suggested by his imagination; but at the end of a minute he was compelled to admit to himself that it did indeed exist only in imagination.

No such second wire was to be found!

He then hastily ascended the ladder, and endeavoured

voured to hurl the clock from off the opening which it covered: but the huge machine was as solidly fixed there as if it had formed a portion of the vaulted roof itself.

Escape seemed to grow every moment more hopeless; and now came the appalling thought that Old Death and the Doctor would soon have had sufficient time to repair from the house in Red Lion Street to that in Taramill Street, and thus secure against him the avenue covered by the clock—even if it were not sufficiently secured already!

What was he to do?

Again and again he tried to force away the heavy clock: but there it stood, immovable—and when he paused to reflect, its steady, monotonous ticking fell ominously upon his ears.

At length it struck him that he would retrace his way to the other extremity—force up the trap-door leading to Old Death's bed-chamber—and, with a pistol in each hand, dare every thing.

But what if that trap-door were secured on the other side?

No:—he remembered to have observed that there was not a bolt nor a bar to break the level of its upper surface as it fitted in flush with the floor.

Encouraged by the scintillation of hope that thus gleamed in upon him, Rainford hurried back to the other end of the subterranean—ascended the spiral staircase—grasped his pistols—and listened attentively.

All was still in the room above:—not the murmur of a voice—nor the creaking of a footstep!

He then slowly and carefully drew back the bolt of the trap-door, and tried to raise it.

But it moved not!

He applied additional force, under the impression that some heavy piece of furniture might have been dragged over the trap: but still it was as motionless as the thick, solid, substantial flooring in which it was set.

Rainford returned the pistols to his pockets, so that nothing might impede the application of all his strength to the task on which his liberty depended: but no—the door moved not!

The highwayman bit his under lip almost till the blood started forth—for he felt that his calmness was abandoning him.

Then how bitterly did he repent the course which he had adopted after his interruption in the laboratory by the appearance of Doctor Lascelles. Instead of trusting himself to that hideous subterranean, he should have essayed an escape by means of the front rooms of the house.

Regrets were, however, useless:—he must act—and not waste time in self-reproach!

Yes: he must act—if he would not die in that dreadful place, where the vindictiveness of Old Death would be sure to leave him!

To act!—oh! how easy to think of acting!—But how was he to put his thought into execution?

A stone pavement beneath—stone walls on either side—a stone ceiling overhead—at one end an avenue closed by a huge clock—at the other a trap-door evidently secured on the outside,—these were the obstacles—these were the barriers against which he had to contend.

And what were the implements within his power? His two hands—a clasp-knife—and a pair of pistols!

Quick as lightning the idea flashed across him

that the iron ladder at the other extremity of the subterranean was movable, and that it would serve him as a battering-ram.

Rejoiced at this thought, he once more retraced his way along the vaulted passage, and eagerly grasped the ladder.

His conjecture was right: it merely hooked on to two iron rings fixed into the masonry just below the aperture covered by the clock; and, heavy though it was, yet Rainford now bore it as easily as if it were of wood—for renewed hope had rendered him strong and bold as a lion.

It was, however, somewhat difficult to drag the iron ladder up the spiral staircase; but in a few minutes this portion of the task was accomplished; and Rainford now prepared to assault the secret entrance to Old Death's dwelling.

Placing himself in such a position that he might deal a vigorous blow upwards with his ponderous engine, and then be able to seize his pistols the instant they might be required, he went to work with a stout arm and a still stouter heart.

Once—twice—thrice—and up swung the ladder:—that single blow was sufficient—and the trap-door burst from its setting.

Quick as thought, Rainford seized his pistols, and thrusting up the trap, ascended the last few steps of the spiral staircase.

Throwing back the carpet which had been replaced over the trap-door, he found, to his infinite surprise, that there was no resistance to his egress from that subterranean where, at one time, it seemed probable that he was destined to find a tomb; and, gazing rapidly around the room, he neither perceived Old Death nor the Doctor—nor indeed a single living soul.

Recovering all his wonted calmness, he proceeded to examine the trap-door, for the purpose of ascertaining how it had been secured against him: and, on a close inspection, he observed a spring-bolt let into the side of the trap-door in such a way that, when the trap was closed, it neither appeared above nor below it. This bolt was either held back within the wood, or made to fly into a hole made to receive it in the beam against which the trap-door closed, by means of two screws that could easily be pressed inward. But the force of Rainford's battering-ram had unsettled this artfully-contrived piece of mechanism.

It was clear that some one had secured the trap-door; because even if the spring-bolt had flown into its socket by accident, still the carpet could not have spread out of its own accord. Moreover, when Rainford had retreated to the subterranean, he had heard footsteps and voices in Old Death's room. It therefore struck him that those who had so secured the trap-door, had departed to protect the avenue of escape in Taramill Street, in the confidence that the said trap-door was too strong to be forced.

Nevertheless, it was necessary to guard against the possibility of an ambush; and Tom held his pistols in a manner calculated to render them instantaneously available.

He determined to proceed by way of the laboratory; but, on trying the door, he found it locked.

Without an instant's hesitation he forced it open with one vigorously applied blow of his foot: but here again he encountered no resistance.

Passing through the laboratory, he tried the door by which he had seen Dr. Lascelles appear and dis-

appear again so abruptly; and this time he was aware the necessity of violent exertion,—for the door was not locked.

He now entered a passage leading to a flight of stairs; down which he hastened, and reached a kind of hall, from whence the street-door opened.

But he did not immediately issue forth. He experienced an invincible curiosity to ascertain if Old Death had in reality been released from the state of bondage to which he had left him; and, forgetting the terrible dangers whence he had escaped with so much difficulty, he re-ascended the staircase.

The appearance of this part of the house was dirty and neglected. Indeed, it afforded no evidence that the tenement was inhabited at all; but conveyed quite the contrary impression. The fan-light above the front-door was boarded over; and thus the hall itself was nearly dark, the only light it enjoyed being admitted through the ill-closed joints of the boarding just mentioned. The paper was falling away from the walls of the staircase; and dust and dirt had accumulated wherever the hand touched or the eye could penetrate.

On regaining the landing on the first-floor, Tom Rains tried a door opposite to that by which he had issued from the laboratory; but it was locked. He forced it open, and found himself, as he suspected he should, in the very room where he had left Old Death; for that apartment had two doors.

And, to his ineffable surprise, Old Death was still there,—still sitting in the chair to which he had been fastened with a strong cord;—and that cord had not been removed.

The head of the fence was bent forward, and hung—or rather drooped, upon his breast.

The highwayman was alarmed, and hastened towards him.

But the moment he caught a glimpse of his features, he started back horror-stricken,—and stupefied as it were by the hideous spectacle that presented itself to his view.

For the old man's countenance was fearfully distorted, and nearly black—the eyes protruded from their sockets, and seemed staring on vacancy—and the under jaw had fallen.

"Holy God! he is dead!" ejaculated Rainford at length: "and I—I have killed him!"

At that instant the door leading from the inner apartment was slowly and cautiously opened; and the highwayman, yielding to a natural impulse, turned and fled abruptly by the one communicating with the passage, and which he had forced open a few moments previously.

This movement on his part was so sudden and so quickly executed, that he did not perceive the person who was entering the room; but whether that person observed him, or not, he was unaware.

Descending the stairs three or four at a time, the highwayman quitted the house by the front door, and did not breathe freely until he had closed it behind him and found himself at length in the open street.

Dauntless—daring as he was, the idea that he had caused, though unintentionally, the death of the old fence, prostrated for a time the powers of a naturally vigorous mind; and horror threw all his thoughts into chaotic confusion.

He did not even pause a moment to examine, as well as the darkness of the hour would have permitted him, the outward appearance of the house

which he had just left; but hurried away as quickly as he could go from the vicinity of a place where he had seen and undergone so much in such an incredibly short space of time.

For it was about one o'clock when he and Old Death had entered the house in Turnmill Street; and Saint Paul's proclaimed the hour of three as Rainford crossed Smithfield Market.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MRS. MARTHA SLINGSBY.

THE reader who is acquainted with the West End of the great metropolis of the British Empire, cannot have failed to notice the air of gloomy grandeur which characterizes the aristocratic mansions of Old Burlington Street.

The dingy brick-fronts—the massive doors, all of a sombre colour—the windows, darkened by heavy hangings—and the dead silence which seems to prevail within, produce upon the passer-by a strange and almost melancholy effect.

There is nothing bustling—nothing cheerful in that street: on the brightest day of summer its aspect is cold—mournful—prison-like.

It seems to be the last refuge of the aristocracy of the old school,—that aristocracy which still clings to all its ancient prejudices, its haughty notions, its exclusive pride,—an aristocracy which finds its influence each day narrowing into a smaller compass, in proportion as that of the masses expands around it.

And God grant that every thing in the shape of hereditary aristocracy may shortly expire altogether—crushed by the weight of new interests and modern civilization!

In one of these gloomy-looking houses of Old Burlington Street dwelt Mrs. Slingsby—a lady of about forty-two, but who, enhancing by art a natural conservation of beauty truly miraculous in a female of her age, seemed at least five or six years younger.

Her hair was very dark; and as she wore the sweetest French caps that Parisian fashion could suggest, she was invested with that air which bewilders the common observer between its admirable coquettishness and its maternally sedateness.

Her complexion was clear and delicate; and a careful but regular use of cosmetics concealed those incipient wrinkles which appeared at the corners of the eye-lids. Her teeth were perfect, white, and even; and her figure, though upon a large scale, was maintained in fine symmetry by the skill of her dress-maker. She had naturally a splendid bust; and as she usually wore very high dresses, she was the better enabled to maintain its appearance of youthful firmness in spite of the prominent expansion it had experienced as the lady herself increased in years.

Mrs. Martha Slingsby was the aunt of Mr. Clarence Villiers, the lover of Adolais Torrens. When very young, she was sacrificed by her parents to a gentleman double her age, and who had acquired a fortune while he lost his health in India. Shortly after this union, circumstances compelled Mr. Slingsby to return to Calcutta; and his youthful wife accompanied him. There they remained about eight years, at the expiration of which period

Mr. Slingsby died of a broken heart, his immense wealth having been suddenly and entirely swept away by the failure of a great mercantile and banking establishment in the Anglo-Indian capital. Mrs. Slingsby, however, found a friend in the person of Sir Henry Courtenay—a baronet who had long held a high office in the Council of India, and who was about to return to England, having relinquished the cares of employment in the public service. He was upwards of fifty at that period—a widower—but having a family of young children. The moment that the misfortunes of Mrs. Slingsby were reported to him by a mutual friend, Sir Henry proposed to her that she should enter his family to supply, as far as possible, the attentions of the mother whom the children had lost. This offer was gratefully accepted; and Mrs. Slingsby, who had no offspring of her own, returned to England with the baronet.

For some years after her arrival in London, she remained in the family of Sir Henry Courtenay,—where she appeared to be treated as a near relation, and not as a dependant. But when the boys and girls were old enough to be placed at school, she removed to the house in Old Burlington Street, in which we now find her. Ramour declared that she was enabled to take so handsome an establishment, in consequence of the sudden and unexpected recovery of a portion of that fortune which was supposed to have been irretrievably swallowed up in the failure of the bank at Calcutta, and the loss of which had broken her husband's heart. At all events, she paid her way regularly—and was famed for her numerous charities. Calumny had never assailed her; for she was so regular in her religious duties—so retired in her mode of life—so ready to assist the deserving poor—so constant in her donations to all humane and philanthropic institutions—and so zealous a patroness of Missionary and Bible Societies, that her neighbours looked upon her as a very pattern of Christian virtue.

Between herself and the Courtenay family the most sincere attachment appeared to exist. Whenever the young gentlemen and the young ladies returned home for the holidays, they invariably passed a week with her when they almost looked upon as a mother; and Sir Henry himself, in speaking of her to his friends, seemed to take a delight in eulogising the manner in which she had performed her duty towards his children. The consequence was that his relations and acquaintances echoed these praises elsewhere; and Mrs. Martha Slingsby was quoted at the West End as the perfect model of a good and excellent woman.

Thus, at the age of forty-two, Mrs. Slingsby had escaped that ordeal through which so many beautiful widows are doomed to pass; we mean, the whisperings of calumny. Not a breath had ever sullied her fame;—not a blot had ever been dropped to her disparagement. Scandal seemed to avoid her threshold as an evil spirit is supposed to recoil from the vicinity of the temple of worship.

We must observe that Sir Henry Courtenay was now close upon sixty-three—thirteen years having elapsed since Mrs. Slingsby had entered his family in India. He was nevertheless a fine man, on whose brow time seemed to sit lightly, considering how great a portion of his mortal career was already run. It is true that he wore false teeth and false hair; but art had rendered these substitutes

so natural in appearance, that few suspected they were really false. Elegant in his manners—endowed with a mind which had treasured up the richest stores of intellectual wealth—fascinating in his conversation—and evincing in his attire the taste of a polished gentleman, Sir Henry Courtenay was one of the brightest stars of the fashionable world—a favourite at Court—and welcome in every gay circle.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon of that day which followed the events related in the few preceding chapters, that Mrs. Martha Slingsby was seated in her elegantly furnished drawing-room, revising the list of her usual Christmas donations to the humane, philanthropic, and religious Societies.

Adelais and Rosamond Torrens were seated one on each side of her, and aiding their kind friend in her pious task.

Rosamond held in her hand a memorandum-book from which she read the names of the various associations alluded to;—Mrs. Slingsby had a cash-box open before her;—and Adelais made entries, according to this lady's dictation, in another memorandum-book.

The two beautiful girls appeared to be the daughters of the elegant and handsome woman who sat between them; and there was so much sweetness in the countenances of all three—so much animation, and so much modesty—that a painter would have been rejoiced to depict the group as Charity dictating to Benevolence and Mercy.

"Proceed, dear Rosamond," said Mrs. Slingsby, when Adelais had finished a note in her memorandum-book.

"The *Orphan Children's Free-School Association* madam,* read the young maiden then addressed; "and last year you gave ten guineas."

"This Christmas I shall subscribe fifteen, my love," observed Mrs. Slingsby, in a mild and silvery tone of voice. "There is no duty so sweet—so holy as to contribute to the religious instruction of those poor creatures who are deprived of their natural protectors. Besides, the committee have manifested the most praiseworthy readiness to attend to any suggestions which I may deem it right to offer. For instance, it was the custom until lately to have three multiplication-table lessons to only one Bible-reading; and this, you must admit, my love, was very indiseeret—I will not use a harsher term. But, in consequence of my recommendation, the dear children have now three Bible-readings to one multiplication-table lesson. Have you written down *five guineas*, my dear!" she inquired, turning towards Adelais.

A reply was given in the affirmative; and Mrs. Slingsby wrapped the amount up in an elegant sheet of rose-coloured paper, and, having noted in pencil the contents of the little packet, added it to several others which were ranged before her on the table.

Rosamond then read the next item.

"The *Poor Authors' Assistance Fund*; and last year you gave five guineas, madam."

"And this year I shall only send two, my loves," said Mrs. Slingsby. "Authors and Journalists are ruining the country, both politically and morally, as fast as they can. They are writing for the people, and against the aristocracy; and this, my love, is a crying abomination. Heaven forgive me

for speaking in such harsh terms—so inconsistent with pious meekness and Christian forbearance; but it would disturb the patience of a saint to behold the attacks made by these men upon our blessed Constitution—our holy Church, and its most necessary union with the State—the prerogatives of our monarch—the rights of the upper classes—the privileges of wealth—and all those institutions which were perfected by the wisdom of our ancestors. Do you understand me, my loves?”

“Oh! quite, madam,” answered Adela, who already began to look upon liberal-minded authors and journalists as a set of incarnate fiends banished against every thing worth preserving in society.

“Besides, my dear girls,” added Mrs. Slingsby, “the *Poor Ankers' Assistance Fund* does not publish a Report of its proceedings nor a list of those who subscribe to it; and, under all circumstances, I think that I should be acting more consistently with my duties as a Christian and as an Englishwoman devoted to the blessed institutions of her happy country, to decline any donation whatever to a Society encouraging infidels and republicans. So you may draw a pen through the name, Rosamond, love. There!—now my conscience is at rest. Which is the next item?”

“*The Distressed Milliners' Friends Society*, madam,” was the answer.

“That is another Association from which I must withdraw my patronage,” observed Mrs. Slingsby, her countenance losing its serene placidity in an air of severity. “You are too young and too prejudiced to understand my motives, dear girls; but when I tell you that most of these distressed milliners are very saucy women, you will perceive the justice of my conduct. And then they endeavour to make their penny an excuse for their turpitude! Oh! how wicked—how sinful is human nature, my loves! Erase that name also, dear Rosamond. And now what is the next?”

“*The Seal-Six Aided Bible-Circulating Society*, madam; and last year you gave thirty guineas.”

“That is indeed a blessed institution!” exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby, turning her eyes piously upward; “and it is to this Society's rooms that we are going in the evening to hear that estimable man, Mr. Joshua Sheepshanks, give an account of the mission from which he has just returned. I shall increase my donation by five guineas in this instance.”

Adela accordingly wrote down thirty-five guineas, which sum was duly wrapped up in rose-coloured paper and added to the other packets.

Rosamond then read the next item in her memorandum-book.

“*The Naked Savages General Clothing Association*, and last year—”

“Pardon me, dearest girl,” said Mrs. Slingsby, “I cannot support that Society any longer. There is in its title a word most offensive to the ears of decency; and I do not know how I could have ever been prevailed upon to lend it the countenance of my name and the aid of my purse. Besides, I do not think the object of the institution is useful; for in India one sees the natives of the lower orders in the country districts, going about in a state bordering on nudity, and one gets so accustomed to it that it produces no disagreeable effect whatever. The name of the Association is decidedly indecent; but there is nothing repulsive in the fact

of savages going about in a state of nudity. You may strike out the item, Rosamond love.”

“I have done so, madam. The next is, *The—*” Rosamond was interrupted by a loud knock at the front-door, which resonated through the house.

In a few moments Sir Henry Courtenay was announced.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE PIOUS LADY.

THE baronet entered the room with a smiling countenance and a graceful salutation.

“Pray be seated, ladies,” he exclaimed, addressing himself to Adela and Rosamond, who had risen from their chairs. “My dear Mrs. Slingsby, I need not inquire concerning your health—for you look quite charming this morning.”

“You know, Sir Henry, that I am not pleased by flattery,” said the lady in a reproachful tone.

“A thousand pardons, my dear madam,” returned the baronet. “But you must remember that we have now been acquainted for some years—that our friendship is not only of yesterday's date—and that if I venture on a little freedom with you, it is as a brother might address himself to a sister for whom he has the highest esteem. Yes, ladies,” he added, turning towards Adela and Rosamond, “this excellent woman—this almost angel, as I may designate her—was a mother to my children; and this is a circumstance which I can never forget.”

“You attach more importance than is necessary, Sir Henry, to the mere performance of a duty,” observed Mrs. Slingsby, in a calm and modest manner.

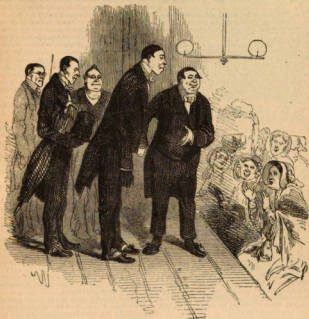
Adela and Rosamond exchanged glances, which seemed to say, “Admirable woman! we already love her as much as if she were our maternal parent!”

“But I am afraid that I am interrupting an occupation of more value than my idle chit-chat can possibly prove to be!” exclaimed Sir Henry, who surveyed Rosamond with an ill-concealed admiration. “Some useful or pious labour was engaging you, young ladies, no doubt;—for, in the society of Mrs. Slingsby, not a moment is likely to be passed without producing a benefit to at least some section of the great human family.”

“The anniversary of that holy day on which the Saviour of Mankind suffered on the cross, is approaching, Sir Henry,” observed Mrs. Slingsby, in a tone and manner suiting the solemnity of her remark; “and you know that I am in the habit of forwarding my mite at this season of the year to those humane, religious, or philanthropic institutions which deserve support.”

“I never forget any of those pious duties which you have taken upon yourself, my dear madam,” said the baronet. “And, indeed, the object of my present visit is—But the act of charity of which I am desirous to make you the instrument,” he added, glancing towards the young ladies, “involves details of so painful a nature, that—”

“I understand you, Sir Henry,” interrupted Mrs. Slingsby; “and this consideration for the feelings of those who are not accustomed to look upon the dark side of the world's picture, is worthy of your generous disposition. Adela, my love—Rosamond, dearest—pray retire for a short period.”



This request was conveyed in a manner so affectionate and with such witching softness, that the maidens to whom it was addressed, could not help embracing their kind friend ere they left the room.

The moment the door had closed behind them, Sir Henry drew his chair close to that of Mrs. Slingsby, and, placing his arm round her waist, imprinted a kiss of burning desire upon her lips.

"Martha, you are really surprisingly beautiful to-day," he whispered in her ear.

"Do you think so, Henry!" she murmured, her eyes lighting up with the excitement of that coquetry. "And yet I have fancied that your behaviour has been somewhat cold towards me of late."

"Do not entertain such a suspicion, my dearest creature!" exclaimed the baronet, plunging his hand into the bosom of this pious lady's dress. "Had either of us a right to complain, I think it would be myself; for—"

"Oh! do not reproach me, Henry!" she murmured, abandoning herself to his lustful toyings. "But ever since the difficulty I experienced in producing that last miscarriage, I have been so frightened last—"

"Nonsense, Martha! do not alarm yourself without a cause," interrupted the baronet. "Even if it did come to that, the matter could be easily arranged. A few weeks' retirement into the country, on some charitable mission—ha! ha!"

"True!" said the frail fair one. "But the chances of detection—oh! I shudder when I think of it! Consider how admirably we have hitherto managed—"

"And how completely the world is deceived in regard to us," added the baronet, laughing. "There is nothing like a religious demeanour to throw dust in people's eyes. Were a syllable breathed against you, you have the patrons of all these humbugging Societies to defend you. But what are you going to do with yourself this evening? Can you not devote a few hours to me?"

"I wish I could, Henry," returned the lady; "but it is impossible! A dreadful bore named Sheepshanks is going to entertain the devout with his nonsense; and it would seem so odd—so very odd if I were not present."

"It is now upwards of three weeks since we

sleep together," said the baronet, in a tone of reproach.

"Yes—but you know that I cannot pretend too often to pass the entire night by the sick-bed of some poor woman," returned Mrs. Slingsby. "And now, dearest Henry, I have a favour to ask of you."

"Name it," said the baronet, in a low murmur—for his passions were furiously excited by the voluptuous toyings with his mistress.

"You must write me a check for a thousand pounds," replied the lady, winding her arms round his neck, and then literally gushing her lips to his.

"Oh! you are becoming very extravagant, Martha," said the baronet. "But I suppose I must yield."

"You are a dear, generous fellow," murmured the lady, as she suffered herself to be led to the sofa.

A quarter of an hour afterwards, Mrs. Slingsby rang the bell; and a sleek, comfortable-looking footman answered the summons.

The lady was then sitting, in her usual quiet, placid manner, in a chair near the table; and the baronet was placed at a respectful distance from her.

"Bring up luncheon, James," said Mrs. Slingsby. "Sir Henry, you will take a glass of champagne? I know you are somewhat partial to it. But a decaiter of water for me, James."

"Yes, madam;"—and the domestic withdrew. In a short time he returned, bearing a tray, which he placed on the table, and then retired again.

Having paid their respects to the cold viands placed before them, the lady and gentleman did honour to the champagne, both drinking out of the same glass, the servant having only brought up one of the description suited to that particular wine.

When the collation was ended, Mrs. Slingsby drank a tumbler of water to take away the smell of the champagne from her mouth; but she did not appear to relish the lympid beverage quite so well as the rich juice of Epernay.

The baronet then wrote the lady a cheque on his banker for a thousand pounds; and, having made a certain little appointment with her for a particular evening in the ensuing week, and at a place of rendezvous as convenient as it was safe, he took his leave.

Immediately after Sir Henry had left the abode of Mrs. Slingsby, that lady's housekeeper sought the presence of her mistress, and was forthwith admitted to the private interview which she desired.

"What is it, Magdalen?" inquired Mrs. Slingsby, when the housekeeper stood in her presence.

"I'm sorry, ma'am, to have any thing unpleasant for such ears as yours," was the answer; "but I am convinced that scullion-girl is in the family-way."

"Magdalen!" ejaculated the pious lady, horrified at the mere idea. "Oh! do not utter any thing so uncharitable!"

"I am sure of it, ma'am, I repeat," persisted the housekeeper. "In fact I've had my suspicions about it for a long—long time; and now I'm certain."

"Magdalen," said Mrs. Slingsby, in a tone of profound solemnity, "this is a dreadful occurrence to take place in a house which, I may safely assert,

has never yet been tainted with the breath of scandal—at least so long as I have occupied it. Are you sure that your conjecture is right?"

"I would take my salvation oath that it is, ma'am," responded the housekeeper.

"That expression on your part is incorrect, Magdalen," observed Mrs. Slingsby, in a tone of mild reproach. "But I of course believe all you tell me relative to that miserable—degraded girl. Let her be sent from the house this minute, Magdalen—this very minute! Pay her any wages that may be due to her, and inform her that her boy shall be sent after her to her parents, with a note acquainting them of the reason for her abrupt discharge."

"She has no parents, ma'am—she is an orphan."

"But she has friends, no doubt!" said Mrs. Slingsby, inquiringly.

"No, ma'am: I took her from the workhouse, on the recommendation of a lady—a friend of yours, ma'am—who visits them kind of places on a Sunday, distributing hymn-books."

"Disagreeable as the duty is, it must nevertheless be performed, Magdalen. And that duty, so incumbent upon us, is to turn the lost girl into the street. Pay her the wages—"

"She has nothing to receive, ma'am. I advanced her money to buy herself decent clothes—"

"Then let her go away without any money—since she has none to receive," interrupted Mrs. Slingsby. "To give her a single shilling, were to encourage her in that shameful career of profligacy wherein she has already so far entered."

"Your orders shall be obeyed, ma'am," replied Magdalen; and she withdrew to execute them—for she had a spite against the poor scullery-girl, who had been intriguing with one of this over-particular housekeeper's own lovers.

Shortly after this little occurrence which we have just related, Mr. Clarence Villiers made his appearance in Old Burlington Street.

He found his aunt alone in the drawing-room and, the moment he had paid his respects to her, he inquired for his much-beloved Adela and her sister.

"They are safe and well, Clarence," answered Mrs. Slingsby. "But before I summon them, it will be necessary that we should have a little conversation relative to the proper and prudent course now to be adopted. Sit down, Clarence, and grant me your attention."

The young man obeyed, and prepared to listen with all the patience he could call to his aid; for much as he respected and really loved his aunt—who he looked upon as a pattern of moral excellence and virtue—he nevertheless experienced the anxiety of a lover to find himself in the presence of Adela.

"I shall not detain you long, Clarence," resumed Mrs. Slingsby; "and it is for your good that I am about to speak. In the first place, I feel it due to myself to explain to you that, in receiving those young ladies into my house the other evening—and at so late an hour—I was influenced solely by that affection which I entertain towards you, and by my conviction of your thorough integrity of purpose."

"The mere fact of my bringing those almost friendless girls to seek an asylum with you, dear aunt," said Clarence, "must prove to you how careful I was of their reputation."

"And it was to assist your upright views that I

received them without a moment's hesitation," added Mrs. Slingsby. "You know that I had the means, you should long ago have been put in possession of a sufficient fortune to have enabled you to compete with Mr. Francis Curtis in bidding for the necessary Mr. Torrens for his daughter. But—although my income is sufficient for my wants, and, thank heaven! for a few little purposes of charity—"

"My dear aunt!" interrupted Villiers; "wherefore renew an explanation so unnecessary?"

"Because I would not have you suppose, Clarence, that I would for an instant sanction any underhand proceedings in respect to your union with Miss Torrens, had it been possible to have ensured that aim by means of her father's consent. But," continued Mrs. Slingsby, "I conceive that there are so many extenuating features in the case, that I cannot regret having granted an asylum to that dear girl and her sister, and in thus securing them alike from the perils of London, and from the pursuit of their father."

"Your kindness towards them will render their hearts as grateful as mine is," exclaimed the young man warmly.

"During the few days that my house has become their home," continued Mrs. Slingsby, "they have endeared themselves to me by their affectionate dispositions—their tranquil habits—their readiness to please—and a thousand amiable qualities; and therefore—for their own sakes, as well as yours—I am ready to do all in my power to serve them. But should Mr. Torrens happen to discover their abode, conceive the scandal that would be created—the observations that would be excited!"

"My dear aunt, I would not for worlds compromise you in any way!" ejaculated Clarence. "But still—"

"Do not fear that I am anxious to rid myself of their charming company," added Mrs. Slingsby. "I am only desirous that you yourself should adopt due caution, so as to avoid being followed hither by any one who might be employed by Mr. Torrens to watch you."

"No imprudence on my part shall mar the success of my plans," returned Clarence. "The banners have been published at St. George's once already—and next Sunday will be the second time! It is scarcely probable that Mr. Torrens will become aware of this circumstance; and be certainly would not, without any previous hint, conjecture that the preliminaries for our union had been adopted in so fashionable a church as that in Hanover Square," added Clarence, with a smile. "Let two more Sundays pass without the abode of my Adelsa being discovered, and she will then become indissolubly mine!"

"Have you seen any more of your kind friend, who so generously took your part the other evening?" inquired Mrs. Slingsby, after a pause.

"Captain Sparks!" exclaimed Clarence. "Not since I met him, as I before informed you, at a tavern in the Strand—"

"A void taverns, my dear nephew!" interrupted Mrs. Slingsby, a cloud overspreading her countenance; "for—by all I have ever heard or read concerning them—they are fearful sinks of iniquity."

"Oh! not the respectable taverns, aunt," replied Villiers. "I had purchased a very handsome pair of pistols to present to the Captain as a token of my esteem; and then I recollected that I was totally

unacquainted with his address. I flew to the great army-agents at Charing Cross; but there was no such name as Captain Sparks in the List. Well—I thought he might be in the Navy, and off I went to the Admiralty; but no Captain Sparks! I therefore considered it fortunate when I accidentally met him in a tavern which I entered to procure some refreshment. He positively refused to accept the pistols—declaring that he had done nothing more than I should have done for him under similar circumstances. But I thought there was something singular in the merry laugh which burst from his lips, when I proffered the case containing the pistols. However, he is an excellent-hearted fellow—and I shall always hold myself his debtor. We walked together, on that occasion, as far as my own lodgings in Bridge Street, and he entertained me with a perfect fund of anecdotes all the time. Indeed, I am as much pleased with him, as I feel myself under an obligation to him."

"Gratitude is a rare virtue in this world," remarked Mrs. Slingsby, who seldom lost an opportunity of letting drop a moral maxim. "And now," she continued, with a smile, "having taxed your patience to such an extent, I must give you the well-merited reward. My kind and generous friend, Sir Henry Courtenay, has advanced me a certain sum of money, one half of which I require for charitable purposes of my own; but the other I place at your disposal, to enable you to hire and furnish a suitable dwelling to receive your bride. Take this cheque, and to-morrow you can bring me my moiety."

"Oh! my dear aunt, have you borrowed of your friends to assist me?" exclaimed Clarence, overwhelmed by so much apparent generosity.

"Not entirely to assist you, my dear nephew," was the calm reply; "but partly, as you perceive, for myself. However,—say no more about the trifle which I present to you; and reward me by making a good use of it."

Clarence embraced his relative; Adelsa and Rosamond were then summoned; and the lovers were soon happy in each other's society.

We must now afford the reader some explanation relative to Mrs. Slingsby's behaviour towards her nephew; and, in so doing, we shall throw additional light upon the character of this lady.

She was of a crafty—calculating disposition, and seldom performed any act, however trivial, without a selfish motive. The fact was that she had a very difficult part to play. Devoured with raging desires, she was compelled to adopt a calm, modest, and reserved exterior, and to conceal her debauchery beneath the cloak of religion. Sir Henry Courtenay was necessary to her in more ways than one: necessary as a lover—and necessary as a treasurer, for she was totally dependent upon him in a pecuniary sense. The report relative to the recovery of a portion of her late husband's fortune, was a mere fabrication to account for her comfortable mode of life. Still she considered her position to be so dangerous, that she was compelled to fortify it by all possible means. She really loved her nephew—for it often occurs that women of her description are capable of a strong attachment of this nature:—but even had she entertained no regard for him at all, she would have pretended to do so—because he was necessary to her. He was a means by which she could constantly trumpet forth her "charitable deeds," while she herself appeared unconscious that

they ever transpired. Taking good care that he should know all she did in the cause of religion or humanity, she led him to believe in a great many things which she did not do; and the consequence was that Clarence was never wearied of repeating, wherever he went, those praises which he conscientiously considered to be his aunt's due.

Now, when a near relation corroborates the statements made by friends, those statements receive a weight which places them beyond the pale of disbelief. Thus the world read Mrs. Slingsby's character as Clarence himself read it and reported it, and with such an amount of testimony in her favour, she could defy scandal. Even the most maliciously-inclined dared not venture a shake of the head, nor a shrug of the shoulder; for "surely her own nephew must know whether she were as good as she was represented! Relations seldom praise each other behind their backs; and when a dashing young fellow, like Clarence, was so enthusiastic in praise of his aunt, it was that he was thoroughly convinced of the sterling merit of her character!" Such would have been the arguments opposed to any detraction observations that scandal might dare to let drop concerning Mrs. Slingsby.

The lady, finding her nephew so necessary to her interests, naturally sought not only to maintain the most complete deception relative to herself in his mind, but also to attach him towards her by substantial acts of kindness. Thus she had readily consented to receive Adela and Rosamond into her house, to oblige Clarence; and she now, with the same interested motive, made him a handsome pecuniary present. She let him know that she had been compelled to borrow the money (in advance of her imaginary income), to enhance the value of the gift, and also that the natural impression should arise in his mind—"Excellent aunt! she embarrasses herself to benefit me!"

The reader now fully understands how complete a mistress of duplicity—hypocrisy—and deceit was the widow of Old Burlington Street. Beneath that calm and placid demeanour—under that veil of sanctity—raged the most ardent passions, and agitated the most selfish feelings. She was a living—walking—breathing lie. Her existence was one immense falsehood; and yet so well did she maintain the semblance of even the sternest virtues, that her real character was known only to two persons—Sir Henry Courtenay, and another whom it is not at present necessary to name.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MR. SHEEPSHANKS.

IN a large room, on a first-floor in St. Martin's Lane, some three or four hundred persons, male and female, were assembled.

At one end of the apartment was a raised platform, in the middle of which stood a capacious arm-chair behind a desk; and on the said platform several sleek, oily, comfortable-looking gentlemen, all dressed in black, and wearing white cravats with no shirt-collars, were grouped together in conversation.

The body of the room was occupied by chairs for the accommodation of those who had "front-seat tickets," and forms for those who possessed "back-seat tickets."

It is a remarkable fact that the votaries of the Established Church invariably create social distinctions in the very places instituted to propagate or maintain their creed. Thus every church belonging to the "Establishment" has its pews for the rich and its paper-seats; and in the assembly-rooms of the religious associations the same distinction is drawn between aristocracy and democracy. And these lines of demarcation are traced by men practising—or rather pretending to practise—a religion which proclaims that all are equal in the eyes of God!

Oh! the vile hypocrisy of those ganting psalm-singers!

The room to which we have introduced our readers, was well lighted with wax-candles, and had two cheerful fires blazing away in the grates.

The atmosphere was warm—there were no unpleasant draughts—and the floor was covered with a thick drugget;—for your religious people are mightily fond of comfort; and comfort was certainly studied at the office of the South Sea Bazaar Bible-Circulating Society.

In the second row of the "front-seat ticket" department, sat Mrs. Slingsby and the Misses Torrens. The two latter had their veils carefully drawn over their faces; for Mrs. Slingsby had insisted upon their accompanying her to this "pious and soul-refreshing entertainment," as they had not previously stirred out of doors from the moment they had taken up their abode with her.

At a quarter-past six o'clock, two ushers, bearing white wands, passed up the room, preceding a short, stout, brandy-faced gentleman, who tried to look as demure and humble as he could, but who could not, however, subdue that consciousness of importance which seems to say, "Ah! now I am causing a sensation!"

And a sensation, too, he produced, sure enough; for the gentlemen began clapping their hands and stamping on the floor, while the ladies waved their handkerchiefs as if he were some victorious general who had just defeated a French army of a hundred thousand men.

Upon reaching the platform, the brandy-faced gentleman shook hands with the sleek and oily individuals before alluded to; and the "sensation" became more exciting on the part of the spectators, as if it were a very clever thing indeed to shake hands in public.

Then the brandy-faced man stepped a few paces back, and pretended to enter into very earnest conversation with some leading member of the Committee, while another member, in a drawing-dog-song tone, "that their respected President, Mr. Jonathan Pughwash, do take the chair."

This proposal was received with renewed applause; and the brandy-faced gentleman (for he it was who delighted in the euphonious name of Pughwash) started as if quite astonished that such an honour should have been destined for him. He then proceeded to establish himself in the large arm-chair before mentioned; and in a voice which sounded as if he were talking inside a barrel, called upon "their respected friend, the Reverend Malachi Sawkins, to open the meeting with prayer."

Mr. Sawkins—a very demure-looking man indeed—proceeded to draw out a long extempore prayer, in the course of which he led his audience to infer that heaven favoured that particular Society

more than all others; and when he had concluded, the chairman rose to explain the object of the extraordinary assembly that evening, although the said object was already well known to every individual present—aye, and to every soul who, passing up or down St. Martin's Lane, might choose to stop and peruse the enormous bills placarded at the entrance.

Mr. Jonathan Pugwash commenced by expressing his thanks for the high honour done him by selecting him to preside over that meeting—an honour the more distinguished, inasmuch as it had been perfectly unexpected on his part. [This was completely false, it having been settled in Committee three days previously that he was to preside on this occasion; but your zealous do not mind a white lie at times.] He was well aware of his own unworthiness (*Cries of "No! no!"*); yes—he was an unworthy vessel—but he hoped the Lord would sustain him in the onerous duty thrust upon him. (*"Amen!"* in a hollow, sepulchral tone from the *Rev. Malachi Sheepshanks*.) He thanked the ladies and gentlemen—or he should rather say his Christian sisters and brethren present, for the kind—the handsome—the feeling manner in which they had contradicted his expressed belief of his own unworthiness. (*Cheers*, and "*Go it, Pugwash!*" from a drunken gentleman in a remote corner of the room.) He need scarcely inform the highly respectable and influential meeting then and there assembled, that the object of such assembly on that occasion was to hear certain accounts of the progress of the good cause, from the lips of a revered brother (*cheers*) who had just returned (*removed chairs*) from a long (*more cheering*)—arduous (*prolonged cheering*)—and most perilous (*voliferous cheering*)—mission to the islands of the South Seas (*tremendous cheering, mingled with "Bravo!"* from the drunken gentleman in the remote corner.) He need scarcely say that he alluded to their dear—venerated—respected—highly-prized—gifted—talented—persevering friend, Mr. Sheepshanks! (*Cheers*.) With these few observations, he would introduce Mr. Sheepshanks to the meeting. (*Prolonged cheering*.)

The chairman sat down in an awful state of perspiration; but, in another moment he rose again; for a little door at the back of the platform had just been opened by one of the ushers—and behold! Joshua Sheepshanks appeared before the enraptured spectators.

It would be impossible to describe the enthusiasm which now prevailed in the room. The cheering was tremendous—the waving of the ladies' handkerchiefs created a perfect gale of chill air—and the drunken gentleman in the corner shouted so vociferously that one old lady who sat near him would certainly have fainted (as she subsequently observed) if another old lady next to her had not happened, "by the merest accident in the whole world," to have a small flask of cognac in her muff, and most charitably to place the said flask at her disposal.

Mr. Sheepshanks was a tall, thin, sallow-faced man, with black hair combed sleekly over his forehead, and sharp, piercing grey eyes, which seldom settled anywhere—but when they did, it happened (singularly enough!) that they were sure to fix themselves on the prettiest faces in the room.

Order being restored, Mr. Sheepshanks rose to address the audience. Having expressed his gratitude for the truly Christian reception he had re-

ceived, he entered upon the subject so dear to all who had the good cause at heart. He stated that in the year 1823 the Committee of the Society had determined to send a missionary to some of the South Sea Islands to pave the way for the effectual carrying out of the objects of the Association. A sum of five hundred pounds was voted for the purpose; and he (Mr. Sheepshanks) had offered himself as a willing sacrifice to the good cause, although, as he perfectly well knew, at the risk of being roasted and eaten by the savages amongst whom he was to venture. Understanding that a French ship was to sail for the South Sea, from Cherbourg, on an exploring expedition, he had repaired to that port, and had taken a passage in the vessel alluded to. In due time, and after experiencing tremendous weather, the ship touched at the Cape of Good Hope, and thence proceeded towards the southern islands. "It was on the 14th of March, 1824," continued Mr. Sheepshanks, "that we anchored off the beautiful island of Squirrel-o-Koo; and I fell on my knees on the deck, to return thanks to that Providence which had at length brought me within sight of the scene of my labours. A refreshing influence came over me; and my heart leapt, like a porpoise on the wide waters, at the cheering thought that I was about to render myself useful amongst the benighted savages so near at hand. A boat was lowered; and the captain, the third mate, the purser, and myself were rowed ashore. I was provided with my Bible; the captain and the mate took with them quantities of looking-glasses, buttons, and toys; and the ungodly purser armed himself with a bottle of rum."

An awful groan burst from the *Rev. Mr. Sawkins*, whereas Mr. Pugwash, who had fallen asleep, woke up.

"Yes—dear Christian friends," exclaimed Mr. Sheepshanks; "a bottle of rum!"

"And so fool he!" cried the drunken gentleman in the corner.

"Order! order!" vociferated Mr. Pugwash, rubbing his eyes.

At this crisis, a gentleman of foreign appearance, well-dressed, and adorned with a pair of very fierce moustaches, advanced from the body of the room towards the platform; but at every three steps he took, he paused for a few moments to examine Mr. Sheepshanks with strict scrutiny by the aid of an eye-glass. At first he seemed uncertain relative to some idea which had entered his head; but the nearer he approached the platform, and the more closely he examined Mr. Sheepshanks, the fainter became his doubts and the stronger his suspicions.

At last—just as the missionary was about to resume the history of his adventures in respect to the island of Squirrel-o-Koo—the foreign stranger leaped upon the platform, confronted the pious gentleman, and said in an ironical tone, "How you do, Monsieur Shipshang? me vare much delight to see you dis vonce again."

Mr. Sheepshanks seemed confounded at the sudden apparition of the foreign gentleman; but, speedily recovering his self-possession, he said, "Really, sir, you have the advantage of me. But if you will step into the private office—behind there—for a short time, I—"

"Oh! yes—you really have de advantage on me, Monsieur Shipshang," interrupted the foreigner; "but you not get it again, do you see? How do

Madame Sheepshank, and de little Sheepshank as was born at my house?"

"This gentleman, sir," said the Reverend Mr. Sawkins, addressing the foreigner in a tone of awful solemnity, and pointing towards Mr. Sheepshanks, "is not married and has no children. His life is devoted to celibacy and good works."

"Good works!" ejaculated the Frenchman: "den vot for he come and swindle me—"

"Oh!" groaned the Reverend Mr. Sawkins, holding up his hands in horror at the supposed baseness of the Imputation against the most savoury vessel of the whole Society.

"Oh!" reverberated in a long echoing groan throughout the room; for, as the reader may suppose, this strange scene had excited a powerful sensation amongst all present.

"Ah! it all vare well," exclaimed the Frenchman, indignant at the awful groaning with which his words were received; "but let dis fellow Sheepshank look me in de face, and—"

"Call in a constable!" roared Mr. Pugwash, the chairman.

"Give the Frenchman fair play!" cried several voices.

"Dat is all me do ask of de British public," said the Frenchman.

But while he turned to address these words to the audience, Mr. Sheepshanks disappeared with remarkable abruptness by the private door at the back of the platform.

"Where's our reverend brother!" demanded Mr. Pugwash, looking anxiously around.

"I am afraid he must be taken ill," returned Mr. Sawkins. "I will go and see."

And this reverend gentleman followed the pious missionary.

The Frenchman then proceeded to acquaint the audience that he kept an hotel at Cherbourg, where Mr. Sheepshanks arrived at the beginning of the year 1823; that the reverend gentleman continued to reside with him for upwards of ten months, spending money as profusely as if he possessed the purse of Fortunatus; that at the expiration of that period Mr. Sheepshanks departed, but returned at the end of a month, accompanied by a lady whom he represented to be his wife, and who presented him with a pledge of her affection some eleven months afterwards; that Mr. Sheepshanks and the lady, with the child, continued to honour the hotel with their presence until the middle of the year 1825, when they suddenly evaporated, leaving behind them a heavy bill unpaid and a portmanteau full of stones and straw; that business had brought the Frenchman to London, and curiosity had induced him to enter that assembly upon reading the placard, wherein the euphonious name of Sheepshanks promiscuously figured, at the door.

This narrative produced, as may be supposed, an extraordinary sensation amongst the salots gathered together on this occasion.

And no wonder! Was it, then, all a fabrication relative to Mr. Sheepshanks' visit to the South Sea Islands? Had he never proceeded farther than Cherbourg? were the funds of the Society lavished in riotous living and on a mistress? was it the better to carry out the deception that he had pretended to sail in a French ship, instead of an English one? was he, in a word, an unmitigated impostor? and were all the members of the Society his dupes?

These opinions seemed to be confirmed, when the Reverend Mr. Sawkins came back with the astounding intelligence that Mr. Sheepshanks was no where to be found in any part of the Society's offices.

Mrs. Slingsby was overwhelmed with grief, and her two fair companions with astonishment; and as they rode home in a hackney-coach, the pious widow never ceased from dilating on the tremendous injury which the "good cause" would receive from the exposure of the flagrant turpitude of Mr. Sheepshanks.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE BARONET AND HIS MISTRESS.

ON the following day—at about twelve o'clock, and somewhat to the surprise of Mrs. Slingsby, who did not expect to see him so soon again—Sir Henry Courtenay paid the lady a visit.

She happened to be alone when he was announced; and there was a constraint—amounting almost to an embarrassment—in his manner which she immediately perceived, and which alarmed her. "Has any thing happened, Henry?" she inquired anxiously, as he took a seat at some distance from her.

"Nothing, Martha—nothing," answered the baronet. "But I wish to have some very particular conversation with you."

"I am all attention," she said, her suspense increasing.

"Now do not be frightened," exclaimed Sir Henry. "Nothing has happened to annoy either you or me; but what I am about to propose to you, is rather of an embarrassing nature—and—"

"Then pray be quick and let me know what brings you hither this morning," said the lady, somewhat impatiently.

"Have patience!" cried the baronet. "The fact is I have taken a fancy in a certain quarter—and, though I have striven hard to wrestle against it, it is every hour growing more powerful than my opposition."

"What do you mean! what can you mean!" asked the widow, completely bewildered.

"Why do you receive into your house two young ladies of a beauty so ravishing—"

"Henry! is it possible?" exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby, a light suddenly breaking in upon her mind.

"It is very possible that I should feel an unconquerable—as invincible passion for Rosamond Torrens," added the baronet, growing bolder now that the ice was fairly broken.

"And you tell me this to my face!" murmured the widow, in a hollow tone, while her countenance became purple with a rage which she dared not suffer to explode.

"It is expressly to you that I am compelled to make the avowal," was the deliberate reply; "since it is at your hands that I expect assistance."

"At my hands!" almost shrieked the widow.

"Beware how you alarm the house!" said the baronet. "You will do much better to listen to me attentively."

"Proceed," gasped Mrs. Slingsby.

"You are well aware that there are certain natures which cannot master their inclinations, however strenuously they may endeavour to do so,"

resumed Sir Henry Courtenay, drawing his chair closer to that on which his mistress was seated. "You yourself are of such a disposition—and I am not less so. It would have been impossible for you to remain chaste; your passions are of that ardour which must be gratified—or they would consume you."

"Wherefore this strange expatiation upon my failings?" inquired the widow bitterly.

"Simply to prove an extenuation for myself," was the response. "I have seen Rosamond but three times, and have not spoken a dozen words to her; and yet I am maddened with desire—devoured with cravings which the possession of her can alone assuage. I again assure you that I have essayed to conquer these feelings, for my sake—for hers—but principally for yours,—and all in vain! I do not love you the less—I shall not neglect you on her account. And, as a woman of the world," he added, fixing his eyes in a penetrating manner upon her countenance, as if to read the impression his words made on her mind,—“as a woman of the world, I repeat, you cannot imagine that it is possible for me always to remain faithful to you!”

"At least you are candid with me," observed the widow, her tone expressing bitter irony.

"That is the great merit of my present avowal," said the baronet calmly. "But how foolish you are to manifest so much annoyance. You are well aware that I cannot subdue my feelings, nor control my passions more than yourself; and it will be better for you to assist me—"

"Assist you in debauching that young girl—the sister of her whom my nephew is to marry!" ejaculated Mrs. Slingsby.

"Listen, Martha," exclaimed Sir Henry. "I have formed this sudden caprice—or whim—or whatever you may choose to term it; and I will spare no money and no trouble to accomplish my purpose. A man with twenty thousand a-year can afford a trifle to gratify his wishes in this or any other respect."

"But the idea is perfectly insane!" cried the widow. "Even if I were to consent to aid you in your purpose, the result must inevitably involve a fearful exposure."

"Not at all," replied the baronet. "The means are easy, and can be rendered perfectly secure. I gave you a thousand pounds yesterday—the largest sum you have ever yet had from me at one time; and I will present you with a cheque for two thousand more the day that Rosamond becomes mine."

"You would not swerve her?" exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby, in a tone of unconcealed alarm.

"Yes—rather than not possess her," replied the baronet.

"Oh! this is truly absurd!" said the widow. "What! so powerful an attachment towards a young girl whom you have only seen three times!"

"Strange as it may appear, it is nevertheless a fact!" cried Sir Henry. "But there is a wide difference between the feelings I entertain towards you and her. You are necessary to me, to a certain extent—because you are an agreeable companion as well as a desirable woman. She is a mere child—but a very beautiful one; and, moreover, the sudden fancy I have taken for her is so strong that I cannot resist it. You see that my resolution is fixed. With or without your aid, I prosecute my purpose."

"If you are really so determined—"

"I am," said the baronet.

"Then I must assist you in this dangerous—difficult proceeding," added Mrs. Slingsby, somewhat consoled by the idea of the two thousand pounds that were to find their way into her purse as the price of her services. "But when I reflect on the matter, I behold a thousand perils from which I recoil. Were an exposure to take place, the entire fabric of—"

"Hypocrisy," suggested the baronet. "You and I need not mix words together."

"Well—hypocrisy," continued the lady, "would be thrown down—and I should stand revealed to the world in the most dreadful colours. Then, the real nature of our connexion would be instantly perceived—"

"But all these terrific evils are to be avoided by prudence," interrupted the baronet. "I am not more anxious for exposure than yourself; nor should I wish to compromise you. Our amour has existed for years—and the world suspects it not, even in the most distant manner—we will contrive to retain the veil over it until the end."

"Then how do you wish me to proceed?" inquired the widow, with a cold shudder, as she thought of the perils attending the undertaking.

"By operating on the mind—by modelling the imagination of that young girl to suit my purpose," answered Sir Henry. "With a woman of the world like you, this is an easy task. Instillate certain notions into her bosom—inflame her—excite her—"

"This is more difficult than you imagine," interrupted Mrs. Slingsby; "because she and her sister are constantly together."

"Devise a means to employ Adela in one room for two or three hours at a time, while you have Rosamond with you in another," said Sir Henry. "If you enter on the task with a good will, you will find it easy enough."

"But in ten days Adela will become the wife of Clarence; and the sisters, accompanied by him, will repair to Torrens Cottage to throw themselves at the feet of the incensed father. Rosamond will then quit my house altogether."

"Ten days are sufficient to imbue her now innocent mind with such new sensations—such voluptuous thoughts—such eager desires, that her surrender will be easy and certain," persisted the atrocious villain, who thus calmly reasoned on the means of undermining so much virtue.

"I do not think so," observed Mrs. Slingsby.

"If I proceed too rapidly, I shall alarm her, instead of inflaming her imagination. Besides, you judge the world by what you yourself are, and by what you know of me. But, frail and guilty as I am, Henry," she added in an impressive tone, "believe me when I declare my conviction that more virtue is to be found in woman than you would be inclined to suspect."

Sir Henry laughed heartily at this observation; then, rising from his seat, he took up his hat, saying, "At all events, farewell Martha, act so that I may present you with the cheque as soon as possible."

He kissed her, and departed from the house, chuckling at the success of his endeavour to make his mistress the instrument of his diabolical design against the pure—the beautiful—the unsuspecting Rosamond.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

TOM RAIN AND JACOB.

It was Saturday evening; and Rainford was proceeding up Gray's Inn Lane, wrapped in his white great coat, and with a woollen "comforter" reaching up almost to his nose, when he suddenly felt some one pull him by the sleeve.

He turned round, and, by the light of a lamp, beheld the lad Jacob.

"Well, you young rascal!" exclaimed Tom—but with an anger more affected than real, for he was not a man to cherish vindictive feelings towards an enemy so utterly unworthy his resentment as that pale, weak, and sickly boy: "I wonder you have the face to accost me, after joining in that abominable scheme to intrude upon the privacy of my dwelling three or four nights ago."

"I hope you will forgive me, Mr. Rainford," said the lad: "for you must know," added he emphatically, "it was n't altogether my fault. I was bound to obey the man who gave me food. But do you know, sir, what has become of him? Oh! Mr. Rainford—I am well aware that he *did* deserve punishment at your hands; but—pray forgive me—I hope—"

"You hope that I did not kill him!" said the highwayman in a deep, hollow-toned voice. "Why—do you suppose that I am a likely person to commit murder—intentionally?"

"Oh! no—no," replied the boy. "And yet—"

"And yet what?" asked Rainford.

"And yet it is so strange that he should never have been seen at any of his usual haunts," added Jacob.

"Come along with me," said Rainford abruptly. "We cannot stand talking in the street—and I want to have some conversation with you. But do you know any place close at hand—any public-house, I mean—where we could have a private room for an hour or so?"

"Yes, sir," replied Jacob, after a moment's reflection. "This way."

He turned abruptly down into a narrow, dark, dirty thoroughfare, called Baldwin's Gardens, and conducted the highwayman into a low public-house, where, upon inquiry, they were immediately accommodated with a private room on the second floor.

Rainford ordered the fire to be lighted and a bottle of wine to be brought up; and when these instructions were complied with, he renewed the conversation with Jacob.

"And so nothing has been heard of Old Death?" he said, in as tranquil a manner as he could assume.

"Nothing," replied Jacob. "A man named Josh Pedler called at Bunce's this morning early, and wanted to see Mr. Bunce, on account of a thief, known as Tim the Snammer, who was to go up before the magistrate to-day; and it appears that Mr. Bunce had promised to get him off. Pedler was in a dreadful way when he heard that we had n't seen any thing of the old man for two or three days; and he swore that it was all a hoax, and that Bunce wanted to stick to the money that had been paid him, and shirk the job. Then comes a girl about an hour afterwards; and she said she was Tim the

Snammer's wife—Matton-faced Sal they call her—and a deuce of a rumpus she made also."

"Do you know a person called Tidmarsh?" demanded Rainford, after a few moments' reflection—for he was anxious to learn if the boy were acquainted with the establishments in Turzmill and Red Lion Streets.

"I know him by name very well—and that's all," replied Jacob. "He is a fence, and lives somewhere in Clerkenwell. But pray tell me, Mr. Rainford, if you know what has become of the old man."

"I can tell you nothing about him, my boy," said the highwayman. "Surely he was not so very kind to you—"

"He kind! Oh! no—far from that!" cried Jacob, in a tone of evident sincerity. "But I was so dependant on him, that—unless I turn thief again—as I once was—"

He stopped short, and burst into tears.

"My poor lad," said Tom Rain, affected by this exhibition of grief on the part of the wretched boy, "if you are afraid of wanting bread, you may banish those alarms—at least for the present."

And he threw a handful of sovereigns upon the table.

"Are these for me?" cried Jacob, scarcely able to believe his eyes.

"Yes—every one of them," answered the highwayman. "But on this condition—that you tell me how Old Death discovered my late abode in Lock's Fields, and what was his object in entering it along with you and that sneaking fellow, Toby Bunce."

"I will tell you all—everything I know, Mr. Rainford," exclaimed Jacob. "But," he added slowly, "you will find that I do not deserve this kindness at your hands."

"I can scarcely blame you for obeying the person on whom you were dependant," said the highwayman. "Come—gather up the money, and make haste with your information."

As Jacob secured the gold about his person, his dark eyes were lighted up, and his cheeks were flushed with a glow of animation.

"I can tell you much more than you suppose, Mr. Rainford," he resumed in a few moments; "and if I begin at the proper place, what I have to say will go farther back than the affair the other night in Lock's Fields."

"Then begin with the beginning, Jacob," said Tom, lighting a cigar. "There—drink another glass of wine; and now fire away. But mind and tell me nothing save the truth; for I shall soon see if you are deceiving me."

"I won't deceive you, Mr. Rainford," cried the boy; "and will soon convince you that I am in earnest. Besides, it is my interest to make a friend of you—even if it was n't my inclination. And now to begin. You remember the morning you was had up at Bow Street? Well—Old Death had told me to watch you when you came out of Tallock's—to dog you about—to find out where you lived and any thing else I could glean concerning you."

"What was that for?" demanded Tom.

"He did not tell me then," answered Jacob—"but I have ascertained since—and you will be able to guess by and bye. Well, I did follow you that morning—I saw you nabbed by Dykes, the runner—and I went up to Bunce's to tell Old Death what had happened. Then he cut off to Watkins and Bertinshaw, who came and bailed you. I was



ordered to watch about the police-court, and see where you went to; and I followed you to Pall Mall—then I dogged you back again—and when the Jewess's case was over, I lost sight of you somehow or another."

"And you duly made your report to Old Death!" said Tom inquiringly.

"Of course," replied Jacob. "Two or three days afterwards I was not to watch you again, when you left Buzze's one afternoon; and I followed you down to an eating-house in the Strand. You stayed there about two hours; and at length you came out with a tall, handsome young gentleman——"

"Ah! I recollect!" cried the highwayman: "it was Clarence Villiers. But go on, my boy."

"I only mention all these little things to convince you that I am telling the exact truth," said Jacob.

"Well—from the Strand I followed you and the gentleman as far as Bridge Street, Blackfriars, where you parted. I dogged you, Mr. Rainford, over to the Elephant and Castle Tavern, where you met a lady and the little boy——"

"Yes—Charley Watta!" ejaculated the highwayman, gradually becoming more interested in

Jacob Smith's narrative, because each successive step thereof afforded fresh evidence of its truth.

"You joined the lady and the little boy," continued Jacob; "and when you all stopped for a short time at the window of a jeweller's shop, the lady lifted up her veil—and I knew her again."

"Ah!" cried Tom, with a sudden start.

"Yes, sir,—I recognised Miss Esther de Medina. —But are you angry, sir? have I said anything to offend you?"

"No—no, Jacob," returned the highwayman, the cloud which had gathered upon his countenance suddenly disappearing. "Go on, my boy."

"Then I saw you take the lady and the little boy into the shop, and you bought a pair of ear-rings, which you gave to the lady; and as you came out again, I heard you say to her, 'This present is a kind of recompense for the diamonds which I made you give up,'—or something to the same meaning."

"Yes—I remember that I did make use of those or similar words!" cried Rainford. "But how the deuce did it happen that I never once caught a glimpse of you?"

"Oh! sir—I acted with so much caution," replied

the lad; "and then you did not suspect that you was watched."

"True!" said Tom thoughtfully. "And of course you reported all this to Old Death?"

"I followed you on to Lock's Fields, and then returned to Seven Dials, where I told Mr. Bones and Mrs. Bunce all I had seen and heard."

"And what did they say? Tell me every thing, Jacob," exclaimed the highwayman.

"They seemed very much surprised to think that you and Miss Esther were intimate together——"

Jacob suddenly paused—for again did a dark cloud overspread Tom Rain's countenance.

"Go on, Jacob," he said, observing that the lad was alarmed. "I am subject to a sudden pain—but it is nothing at all. Go on, I say. You were telling me that Old Death and that disgusting woman, Mrs. Bunce, were very much astounded at a certain circumstance. Well—and what did they say?"

"They asked me whether either you, sir, or the lady took any little thing—when the jeweller's back was turned," replied Jacob, timidly, "but I assured them that you did not."

A scornful smile curled the highwayman's lips, and then he puffed away violently at his cigar—apparently wrapped in deep reflection.

"Shall I tell you any more, sir?" asked Jacob, when a few minutes of profound silence had elapsed.

"Yes, my boy: go on!" cried Tom, turning towards him again.

"The very next night," resumed Jacob, "Mr. Bones and me were walking down Southampton Row, Russell Square, you know—when I observed Miss Esther do *Modina* in a shop——"

"Where there was a post-office?" ejaculated the highwayman, hastily.

"Just so, sir. And she was reading a letter," continued Jacob. "Then me and Old Death followed her down to another post-office—it was in Holborn—where she posted a letter which she had with her. I crept close up to her and saw the address on it just before she dropped it into the box."

"And what was that address?" demanded Rainford.

"T. R., No. 5, Brandon Street, Lock's Fields," was the answer.

"And you of course told that to Old Death?"

"Yes—and he desired me to follow the lady to see where she lived; which I did, and traced her to Great Ormond Street. Then I went back to Bunce's, and acquainted Mr. Bones with this fact also. He was very much pleased; and soon afterwards you came in. He then told you about going to Shooter's Hill to stop a tradesman and his wife; but I afterwards found out that it was only a gag to get you out of the way next night."

"Ah! I thought as much!" cried Rainford. "And now, I suppose, we come to the visit which Mr. Bunce, Toby Bunce, and yourself paid to my lodgings?"

"Exactly so," said Jacob. "Early the next morning I was ordered by Old Death to post myself all day long in Great Ormond Street, and see that Miss Esther did n't go out. I kept watch, and saw her several times at the window just for a moment: so I knew she was at home. In the evening Old Death and Mr. Bunce came and fetched me, and we went over to a public-house opposite your lodgings in Brandon Street. On the way I learnt what

they meant to do; for it was to carry off the boy——"

"Poor little Charley Watts!" ejaculated Rainford, totally unprepared for this announcement. "But what harm had he done to them? or what could they want with him?"

"I do n't exactly know, sir," replied Jacob. "Indeed, I do n't think Toby Bunce knew himself. But I can't help thinking that it was somehow or another connected with a certain letter which Old Death let fall, and which I picked up and kept. It bears the signature of Sarah Watts——"

"The poor woman who died at Bunce's house!" cried the highwayman. "Where is that letter?"

"Here, sir," answered Jacob; and with these words he produced the document from his pocket, and handed it to Tom Rain.

The highwayman hastened to peruse it with the greatest interest and attention; but he was evidently disappointed when he perceived that it afforded no clue to the person to whom it was originally intended to be sent.

"I shall keep this letter, Jacob," he said, after some minutes of profound reflection.

"Do so, Mr. Rainford," returned the lad. "And now you see that I am acting sincerely with you."

"Quite," remarked the highwayman, in an absent manner; for he suddenly remembered the circumstance of Old Death declaring that he had lost a particular letter on the memorable night which was marked with so many strange occurrences.

"Yes, Jacob," he continued, after a long pause, "you are right. It must have been in connexion with this letter that the old man wanted to carry off the boy. Perhaps he had discovered some clue to unravel the mystery of Charley's birth, and meant to turn the secret to his own advantage?

But, if so, he must have had some better trace than this letter, which certainly says a great deal, and yet leaves the one grand point—*who Charley's mother really is*—in complete darkness! However," added Tom, who had been musing aloud, rather than addressing his remarks to Jacob, "time will perhaps clear up all."

"You see, sir," continued Jacob, "I was set to watch in Great Ormond Street to find out whether Miss Esther went over to you——"

"To me?" ejaculated Rainford, as if taken by surprise. "But—go on, my boy—go on!"

"And as I knew that she was at home when Old Death and Toby Bunce came to join me there," pursued the lad, "we of course thought it was all right. You may, therefore, judge how Old Death and me were surprised, when we went up into the bed-room at your lodgings——"

"Enough of that, Jacob!" cried Rainford, starting uneasily. "And now tell me why Old Death seemed so anxious all along to find out every thing he could about me?"

"Lord! sir, can't you guess?" exclaimed the boy. "He knew that you could be useful to him, and he wanted to get you completely into his power. By knowing all that concerned you, he——"

"I understand, Jacob," again interrupted the highwayman; "and it is just as I suspected. You are a good lad for telling me all this—and I will not leave you to wait—in case," he added hastily, "your old masters should not happen to turn up again. But I do not think I shall stay many days in London, Jacob. However, I will see you again shortly—"

and we will have a talk together about what is best to be done for you. One word, by the bye—do you know how this letter which you gave me, happened to fall into Old Death's hands?"

"Not all, sir—unless Mrs. Bunce found it about the poor woman who died the other night at her house."

"That is what I suspect," observed Rainford. "Indeed, it must have been so. The deceitful woman!—after my paying her so handsomely, to keep back the document! But it has found its way to my pocket at last, in spite of her and Old Death. And now, Jacob, tell me about yourself. How long have you been in the service of Mr. Benjamin Bones?"

"I wish you had time, sir," said the boy, "to listen to my story: it would be a relief to me to tell it—for I already feel towards you as I never felt to any one before. Indeed, I was sorry to be employed against you in any way; but I could n't help myself. I remember the evening that I watched you over to Lock's Fields—I was so moved—I hardly can describe how—by seeing that little boy Charley with you; for I thought how good you was towards sin, and what an excellent heart you must have, —and when I got back to Bunce's, I could n't pluck up courage to tell Old Death any thing about you, for fear he might mean you some injury. However," added Jacob, wiping his eyes, "he did get it all out of me at last—"

"Never mind, my lad," interrupted Rainford, moved by Jacob's contrition: "all you have told me this evening has fully atoned for the mischief you previously did me. Besides, as I before said, you were forced to obey your master. And now," he added, after referring to his handsome gold repeater, "I do n't mind if I sit another hour with you here; and while I smoke my cigar, you shall tell me the history of your life."

"I will, sir," exclaimed the boy, eagerly. "But I warn you before-hand it is a long one—that is, if I tell it as I should like to do."

"Tell it in your own way, my boy," cried Rainford; "and never mind the length."

The highwayman settled himself in a comfortable manner in his chair; and Jacob proceeded to relate the history of his life.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE HISTORY OF JACOB SMITH.

"My earliest recollections are associated with the occupation of playing all day long in the streets, in company with other infants. This was in Upper Whitecross Street, St. Luke's; where I and those other children lived with a woman, who pretended to keep a boarding-school at which she received children to live with her altogether for one shilling and eight-pence a-week each; but she used to turn us all out early in the morning with a piece of hard mouldy bread to nibble for our breakfast, and fetch us home again when it grew dark in the evening. She would then give us each another piece of bread for supper, and we went to bed. But what a bed! A few old sacks thrown over a heap of straw in a little room about six feet long by four and a half in width, served upwards of a dozen children as a sleeping-room. There we used to cry

ourselves to rest, famished with insufficiency of food—and awake again in the morning to undergo fresh privations.

"I said there were about twelve of us under the care of this Mother Maggs—as she was called. They chiefly belonged to very poor parents, who were engaged all day long at work, and were therefore glad to get rid of their children, who would otherwise only be an encumbrance to them. Some few were, however, the illegitimate offspring of poor servant-girls in place; but nearly all had parents who came to see them from time to time and perhaps gave them a few pence. I was not, however, so fortunate as the rest; for no one ever came to see me—at least that I was aware of—until I was about nine years old; and I heard that the twenty-pence a-week allowed for my board and lodging, was left regularly for Mother Maggs at the neighbouring chandler's shop every Saturday morning. Mother Maggs seemed to think that I had really no friends—for, though she bullied us all pretty well, she bullied me ten thousand times more than the rest.

"The habit of turning a dozen little children, some of whom were only just able to walk, into the street in the way I have described, was not likely to be always unattended with disagreeable consequences. Sometimes a child was run over, and either severely wounded or killed. In the latter case, no Coroner's Inquest ever sat on the body: the exposure of Mother Maggs's neglect towards us, would have drawn the attention of the parochial authorities towards her. But when a death happened in that way, the old woman used to put the body into a sack and carry it some distance into the country, where she would sink it in a pond or ditch. Often, however, the corpse of a dead child has been allowed to remain in our room till it was quite putrid, Mother Maggs not having time or inclination to remove it before. And, on those occasions, we who were alive in that room were so frightened to be with the dead body in the dark, that we shrieked and screamed till the noise reached the old woman's ears in the public-house next door; and so savage was she at being disturbed in her gin and her gossip, that she has half murdered us by way of making us hold our tongues!

"Sometimes a child was lost; and if the parents, on being informed of it, expressed regret or anger, Mother Maggs would take some trouble to find it again; if not, she did not put herself out of the way respecting the matter. In addition to her boarding-house for children, she let out lodgings to persons of either sex; and, as she was not particular so long as she got paid, her house was nothing more or less than a common brothel. She was always saying she had no time to do any thing which ought to be done; and if being all day in the public-house was a necessary duty, she certainly had no time for other purposes. Though not often tipsy, she was never actually sober—but in a constant state of muzziness. Liquor did not improve her temper: on the contrary it made her irritable—sometimes ferocious; and I have seen her fight with other women until her face was covered with long scars made by the finger-nails, and pouring with blood.

"You cannot suppose that all these things which I have just told you or that I am going to tell you directly, in connexion with Mother Maggs's esta-

blishment, were noticed or understood by me when I was quite a child there; but you must remember that I stayed at that den until I was nine, and in the course of those years all I saw made a deep impression on my mind; and what was then dark and unintelligible to me, has since been made clear and plain by experience and by reflection on those scenes and circumstances.

"You will wonder how my wretched companions and myself managed to live, since we only had a piece of bread each, night and morning. We kept body and soul together in a variety of ways, chiefly feeding, like swine, upon all the offal and remnants of vegetables, cooked or raw, that we found in the street. There was a dust-bin in the court where Mother Maggs's house was in Whitecross Street; and every day, just upon one o'clock, we used to crowd round it, waiting till the neighbours came to empty their potato-peelings or the refuse of their meals into that general receptacle. Then we would greedily appropriate to our use the scraps which not even the very poorest of the poor chose to eat. The potato-peelings (most poor families skin their potatoes after they are boiled) were quite a dainty to us; the heads and bones of fish and such-like refuse were also welcome to our empty stomachs. Then we were accustomed to go prowling about the street to snatch a slice of raw bacon or a bit of cheese from the board in front of a butter-shop; or steal a turnip or a carrot from an old woman's stall; or else lay unlawful hands upon the horses' flesh in the cats'-meat shops. This last article of food was much fancied by us. It was comparatively easy to steal; and when we did get such a prize as a large lump of carrion, with a stick thrust through it, we felt as happy for the time being as if we had found a treasure. Then we used to conceal ourselves in some dark court, and take a little round—each in his turn—until it was all gone. I am afraid I disgust you with these details; but you desired me to tell my story in my own way—and I want you to understand the dreadful mode of life which thousands of poor children lead in the wealthiest city in the world. I am sure, when I have thought of it all since, and when I see little boys and girls paddling in that neglected manner about the streets, my blood runs cold at the idea that while some human beings are riding in their carriages and living in palaces, others are prowling in the low neighbourhoods, happy if they can steal a lump of putrid carrion!

"You may next ask what we did for clothes—it being very clear that Mother Maggs could not supply us with wearing apparel out of twenty-pence a-week. Well—the fact is we scarcely had any clothes on at all. As for a cap or shoes and stockings, I declare solemnly I never wore any one of those articles from the earliest period of my recollection until I was nine years old. A little ragged frock, and that was all; yes, that was all—summer or winter! But where did even the ragged frock come from? I really hardly know; I am at a loss to say exactly how we did get even that one garment each. Sometimes a child would be taken away by its parents, who might, perhaps, bring it some decent clothing; then the cast-off rags in this case would fall to the lot of the most ragged of those who were left behind. Now and then a slip-seller in the neighbourhood would give one of us some old frock which was useless to himself; and occasionally we

would steal one, when we could. You may ask me why we did not steal shoes also? So we did, if an opportunity served; but then we could do without shoes, and the eldest of the lot of us was on these occasions commissioned to sell the plunder at a rag-shop, to afford means to buy a little better food than usually fell in our way. These occurrences were, however, rare—so rare, that they constituted perfect holidays in the hideous monotony of our famished lives;—for the shopkeepers in poor neighbourhoods are constantly on the alert to watch the movements of the juvenile prowlers.

"The ages of the children under the care of Mother Maggs averaged from three to ten; and the eldest of course bullied the youngest, while Mrs. Maggs bullied us all. Misery did not make us little ones friendly together. On the contrary, we fought, quarrelled, and ill-treated each other as much as we could. I must relate to you one anecdote—although I now shudder when I think of it, and have often since shed tears of repentance. There was one boy, named Tib Tucker, about eight years old, who used to behave in a more merciless manner towards me than the rest did. He would take away my bread from me whenever he caught me eating it apart and alone; and he laid to me many thefts on Mother Maggs's cupboard which he himself committed. These false reports got me many and many a good beating from the enraged hag; and, in a word, this boy's tyranny became so insufferable, that I was resolved to adopt some desperate measure to put an end to it. I was then but little more than six years old; a fiendish instinct of revenge, however, urged me to act. I secreted a pin about my rage; and one day when Tib Tucker was trying to take away the morsel of mouldy bread which Mother Maggs had just given me, I suddenly thrust the pin into his right eye. He screamed in dreadful agony, and brought down Mother Maggs into the court. I had not run away—terror, or rather horror at what I had done, nailed me to the spot. The bully's tale was soon told. I expected to be half murdered by the dreadful woman; but, to my surprise, she suddenly took my part—declared that I had shown a proper spirit—and consoled Tib Tucker with the assurance that if he would only permit me to operate on the other eye in the same manner, he would prove a perfect fortune to his parents. 'There's nothing like a blind child to draw alms,' she said; 'but one eye's no good—you should be blind of both.'—I remember her words as well as if they had only been uttered yesterday; and, the more so, as they seemed to be prophetic—as I shall explain presently.

"The terrible vengeance which I had taken upon my persecutor, who lost his eye in consequence, not only awed him in future, but made me feared by all the rest; and my existence grew somewhat less wretched—at least in reference to the treatment I experienced from my companions. Mother Maggs also seemed to change towards me—whether through fear, or admiration at what she termed 'my spirit,' I cannot say. I was less bullied by her—but not a whit better fed.

"About six weeks after the incident which I have related, the parents of Tib Tucker returned to London from the country where they had been harvesting. They passed the evening with Mother Maggs, and great quantities of gin were sent for from the public house. This I afterwards learnt from my

companions; for, as to myself, I kept out of the way through fear of being punished by the boy's parents for the vengeance which I had wreaked upon him. When it was quite dark, I returned to the house, and stole up to the miserable garret where my companions were already huddled together on the straw and old sacks. Tib Tucker was amongst them; for I heard him talking about a promise his parents had made to take him with them into the country, where they were going again in a few days. One of the eldest girls—for, I forgot to say, Mother Maggs's juvenile boarders were of both sexes—asked him what his parents had said about the accident. He replied that they had laughed at it, and had declared that they would turn it to some good account. Scarcely had he thus spoken, when the door opened, and Mother Maggs appeared, with a candle in her hand. Ordering Tib Tucker to get up and follow her, she added that his father and mother had a little treat in store for him, and had meant him all along to sit up to supper. Tib was overjoyed at these news, and made haste to accompany Mother Maggs to a lower room where she had left his parents; and we, in our miserable dark garret, envied the boy who had a good supper in view.

"I remember—Oh! well do I remember, how I cried that night, to think that no friends ever came to see me, and that indeed I was ignorant whether my parents were alive or not. I had often asked Mother Maggs whether she knew my father and mother; but I invariably received a cuff by way of reply—and therefore at length grew tired of putting the question. There were, however, times when my wretched—*forlorn*—abandoned condition almost broke my heart; for, young as I was, I knew that there were boys and girls in the world much better off than myself!

"While Tib Tucker was absent, the other children began to discourse amongst themselves, saying how lucky he was to come in for a good supper; and then they set to work to guess what the meal was likely to consist of. But all on a sudden a dreadful shriek echoed through the house, and startled us in our miserable garret. There we lay—crouching and huddling nearer to each other, holding our breath, not daring to utter a word, and filled with vague alarms, as if some dreadful danger hung over us. At length sleep came to my relief. When I awoke in the morning and ran down into the court, the first object that met my view was the wretched boy Tib Tucker, being led away by his parents—for he was now blind of both eyes!

"I was so frightened, that I ran into the street, where I wandered about all day—forgetting even the pangs of hunger. I had suddenly conceived such a dreadful terror of Mother Maggs, that I had not dared to present myself at her room-door to obtain my usual morsel of bread, along with the rest. It was a very rainy day, and yet I remember that I roved and roved about the whole neighbourhood, at one time crying bitterly—at another stifled, though still moving about like a sleep-walker. When the evening came on, I was so tired and hungry that I was forced to retrace my way to the horrible den, which I only discovered again with the greatest difficulty. Mother Maggs did not take any notice of my absence from the morning distribution of bread, but gave me my evening ration along with the rest; and once more did I return to the straw and filth of the close garret.

"Months and years passed—and I reached the age of nine. The last few months opened my eyes to more wickedness than I had as yet known or dreamt of. I just now told you that Mrs. Maggs's juvenile boarders consisted of boys and girls; and I believe you understood that we all huddled together in the same garret. It was a regular pig-stye, in which we wallowed like swine; and like that of brutes also was the conduct of the eldest boys and girls. If the other rooms in the house were used as a brothel by grown-up persons, no stew could be more atrocious than our garret. The girls were more precocious than the boys, and the latter were corrupted by the former. Mere children of nine and ten practised the vices of their elders. But, my God! let me draw a veil over this dreadful scene. Oh! sir—I have seen much—gone through much; but the mere thought of the horrible licentiousness—the beastliness—the monstrous depravity that took place there, even now makes my blood run cold in my veins!

"And can you wonder that such should be the case? Not one of all us children had ever been taught what virtue was; and all that we knew of crime was that it was something which a constable took you up for. We had not the least notion of the Saviour—none of us had ever heard that the Son of God died for the sins of the world. I had once seen a Bible, because I stole one from a book-stall; and the eldest girl, who went to sell it, gathered from what was said by the person who bought it, that it was a Bible. But even if I had previously known that the book was called a Bible, I should not the less have stolen it; because I could not read, and no one had ever told me at that time what the Bible really was. We had all heard of the name of God, and used it pretty often too—for oaths were familiar to us even when we could only lip them; but we knew not who God was, and had no one to tell us—even if we had wished to learn. You may think it strange that there should be children of even ten years old in London who are completely ignorant of every thing concerning religion; but I can assure you that I have met with youths and girls of fifteen or sixteen who were equally in the dark in that respect.

"I was nine years old when Mother Maggs one day fetched me out of the street where I was playing in the gutter with my companions, and took me into her own room, where I saw Mr. Bones for the first time—I mean the first time as far as my recollection is concerned. He looked at me a long time; and then turning to the old woman, said, 'I do n't think you have taken the very best care of him.'—'Yes, I have,' she answered, 'He has had his belly-full every day of his life: bread-and-butter for breakfast and supper; potatoes for dinner on week days, with may-be a bit of pudding or so now and then; and always a good dinner on a Sunday. Have n't you, Jacob, dear?'—and, as she asked me this question, she gave a terrific frown, unseen by Old Death, and the meaning of which I well understood. So I muttered a 'yes'; and she seemed satisfied.—'But I am going to take him away all the same, Mrs. Maggs,' said Mr. Bones; 'because he is of an age now to be useful to me.'—'I hope you will recommend me where you can,' cried Mother Maggs. 'I do all I can to make the poor little dears happy; and if Jacob is so shabby just the very day you drop down upon us, like, it's only because

his new frock is in the ends; and as for shoes and stockings, it makes boys hardy to go without them.—I do not remember that Old Death made any answer to these observations; because the portion of the dialogue which I have just detailed, produced so deep an impression on my mind—young as I was—that had it been continued, I should most probably have recollecting the rest. But this I cannot forget—that when Old Death told me to follow him, and Mother Maggs took me in her arms to embrace me at parting, I screamed with affright—for the spectacle of the blind boy instantly recurred to my memory!

“Old Death took me to a shop in Whitecross Street, and bought me a complete suit of clothes—shabby and mean, it is true; but royal robes compared to the rags I now threw off. And how great was my astonishment—how wild was my delight, when I was actually supplied with a pair of stockings and shoes! Never before—never since, have I known such perfect joy as I felt at that instant. Sight restored to the blind could not be more welcome than were these articles. Not that I required them—for my feet were insured to nakedness, and to walk even on the pointed flints;—but I experienced an indescribable sensation of mingled pride and satisfaction which made me supremely happy. My joy was, however, somewhat rudely interrupted by a hard blow on the head which Old Death bestowed upon me, because I dared to laugh in the fulness of my poor heart; and then I burst into tears. He cursed me for a ‘snivelling fool,’ and ordered me to put on the cap which he had also bought me, and make haste to accompany him. The cap was another article of clothing till then quite strange to me; and once more my tears were succeeded by smiles!

“At length the purchases were complete; and I followed Old Death from the shop. But I walked as if I was tipsy. The cap seemed to be quite a weight on my head; and the shoes threatened every moment to trip me up. I have never worn skates,—but I can fancy how a person must feel when he puts them on for the first time; and I imagine that my awkwardness in stockings and shoes was something of the same kind. Near the point where Upper Whitecross Street joins Old Street Road, I beheld my late companions huddled together at the mouth of a passage belonging to a pawnbroker’s shop. They did not know me, till I called some of them by name; and then they could not believe their eyes. I must have seemed a kind of prince to them. They instantly overwhelmed me with questions—but Old Death looked back and called me in a cross tone, and I hurried away. I declare solemnly that the tears started from my eyes as I thus separated from the companions of all my infant misery; and though I know not whether my own fate was about to be improved, still my heart was smitten with the idea that I was leaving them behind to their wretchedness—their rags—their starvation—and their fatal den at Mother Maggs’s house. Never until that instant had I experienced the least sympathy in their behalf; but then—at that moment—I felt as if I could have remained with them, and loved them!

“Mr. Bones conducted me to some public-house—I can’t recollect where it was, but I think it must have been in Brick Lane, St. Luke’s,—and there he ordered bread and cheese and ale. What a glorious dinner did I make that day! Never had

I tasted any thing so delicious before! The *cheese* was so nice—the bread so white and new,—and the ale—it was good beyond all description. At least, so the food and drink then appeared to me; and what was better still, was that I was allowed to eat as much as I chose! When we had ended our meal, Old Death began to talk very seriously to me—for we were alone in the room together. He gave me to understand that he had found me, when quite a baby, lying on the steps of a workhouse—that he had taken me to some good, kind woman whom he knew, and who had treated me well—that afterwards he had been obliged to place me, when I was three years old, with Mother Maggs—and that I therefore owed every thing to him. I naturally believed at the time that I was under the deepest obligations to him; and then he proceeded to inform me that I might be useful to him in certain ways, and that if I did all he told me and was a good boy, he would never desert me. I of course listened with as much respect as it was in my power or nature to show; and, though I did not quite understand all he said to me, I was nevertheless impressed with the conviction that he had a right to do what he chose with me, and that I was bound to obey him.

“We remained some time at the public-house—indeed, if I remember right, until it was dark; because Old Death had a great deal to say to me, and as I was so very young and so miserably ignorant, it was not an easy matter for him to make me understand his meaning. But there can be no doubt that he laboured to convince me of the right which certain privileged persons had to prey upon others who were not so privileged;—or, in plainer terms, that whenever I could obtain a handkerchief, a purse, or any thing else worth taking, and in such a manner that there was no chance of my being detected, I was perfectly justified in availing myself of the opportunity. My morals had not been so carefully attended to, as to excite any repulsive feelings at this species of reasoning; on the contrary, having from my infancy practised the art of pilfering podding from cooks’-shops, bits of bacon from chesemongers’ windows, carrots and turnips from old women’s stalls, and lumps of tripe or carriage from the boards of cats’-meat establishments, I was well prepared to go a step farther. There can be no doubt that Old Death was all along aware of the real nature of Mother Maggs’s house and of the manner in which she reared the children entrusted to her. A man of his experience could not help knowing all this; and it was not probable that he was deceived by the lying statements she made to him relative to the manner in which I had been treated—although he took, as far as I recollect, no notice of her words. In fact, he had intentionally placed me in a position to learn every thing that was bad—to fall in an apprenticeship of petty vice, that I might enter on a career of crime, wherever the profits were to be his own!

“Taking me now in a somewhat kind manner by the hand, he led me down to St. Paul’s Churchyard. Although having hitherto lived within a mile of that place, I had never been there before. It is true that from the garret windows of Mother Maggs’s dwelling, I had sometimes seen the huge dark dome surmounted by the cross which shone like gold on a bright, sunny day; but I had never thought of asking what it was—nor had I any no-

tion that it was so near. Often, too, in the silence of the night, when cold and hunger kept me awake in that hideous den, had the deep but glorious sound of the mighty bell, booming through the air, and proclaiming the hour, fallen on my ears: but still I had never thought of inquiring which clock it was that struck so loud and was so tediously long in striking. Thus, when I entered Saint Paul's Churchyard for the first time, in company with Old Death, I was struck with amazement to find myself at the foot, as it were, of that tremendous giant of architecture. Just at that moment, too, the mighty bell began to strike six; and I started—for, young as I was, that well-known sound, though never heard so near before, re-awakened a thousand conflicting thoughts within me. All the misery and wretchedness I had endured at Mother Maggy's house rushed to my mind; and again I shed tears as I reflected on the poor children whom I had left behind me there?

"Oh! Mr. Rainford—if any kind and benevolent person had taken me then under his protection and care, and taught me to do good and practise virtue, as Old Death was teaching me to do evil and practise vice, I feel—yes, I feel that I should not have been unworthy such humane attention!

"But let me not interrupt the thread of my narrative more than I can help. Mr. Bones kept me by the hand, and walked slowly—very slowly through the churchyard, pointing out to me the beautiful shops, and telling me that if I was a good boy and only did what he told me, I should soon be rich enough to be able to walk into those shops and treat myself to jewellery, or fine clothes, or anything else I might fancy. This assurance gave me the most heart-felt joy; and I already began to determine in my mind what I should buy when the happy period of such affluence might arrive. All on a sudden my gay reverie was interrupted by Old Death, who, dragging me hastily to the entrance of a passage leading into Paternoster Row, pointed to an elderly gentleman standing at a shop-window at the corner where this passage joined St. Paul's Churchyard. 'Do you see his handkerchief peeping out of his coat-pocket?' demanded Old Death hastily.—'Yes,' I replied.—'Then go and get it, and I will give you sixpence, if you bring it to me, without the old fellow perceiving that you have taken it.'—Sixpence! It was an inexhaustible treasure, such as I had often heard of, seldom seen, and never touched. Without a moment's hesitation I proceeded to execute the task. It was winter-time; and though the evening was dark, yet the shop-windows were brilliantly lighted. This was against me—but on the other hand, the place was crowded with people passing both ways, and this circumstance was in my favour. Old Death stood watching me at the entrance of the passage—no doubt ready to glide away in case of me being detected. But my skill in cribbing victuals and other little articles in Upper Whitecross Street had been so well practised, that it only required to apply the same art to another and rather more difficult branch of thieving, to be completely successful. And this success far exceeded Old Death's expectations; for when I returned to him in the passage, I was enabled to place in his hands not only the old gentleman's pocket-handkerchief, but also his gold snuff-

box.

* You may suppose that Mr. Bones was well-

pleased with me; and he testified his approval of my conduct by placing a shilling in my hand. I could scarcely believe that I was indeed the possessor of such a sum; and I immediately made up my mind to ease as many old gentlemen as possible of their handkerchiefs and snuff-boxes, as long as a deed so simple was so generously rewarded.

"Old Death now conducted me to Drury Lane, and showing me a public-house, said, 'Jacob, though a young boy, you are a very good and clever boy, and I think I can trust you. If you assure me that you will do just as I tell you, I will give you a treat.'—I gave him the assurance he required.—'Well, then, walk boldly into that public-house; run up stairs, just as if you had been there a hundred times before; and go straight into the large concert-room that you will come to. You will have to pay a penny for going in. Then sit down at a table, call for bread and cheese and a glass of ale—of the nice ale that you like so much, you know; and enjoy yourself. You will find several other young lads there, who will no doubt speak to you; and you may talk to them as much as you like. I shall come into the room presently; but do n't come near me; and do n't tell any one there that you know me. I have my reasons; and if you do all I tell you, you shall often have a treat to a concert and such like places. When you see me going away, you can follow me at a little distance. Now do you understand?'—I assured him that I did; and I then walked into the public-house as bold as if I had been a grown-up person and a constant customer. I had money in my pocket, and for the first time in my life felt that confidence which the possession of coin produces.

"The concert-room was speedily reached; my shilling was changed to pay the entrance fee; and I entered the place of amusement. It was—or had I not better say, it is a very large room; for it was at the *Megal*, in Drury Lane, to which I had now introduced myself. The place was crowded; and the music and singing were going on. I was quite delighted, and, seating myself at a table near some other boys, all older than I was then, I told the waiter to bring me bread and cheese and a glass of ale. 'Better say a pint, old fellow,' observed one of the boys to me; 'and I'll help you to drink it.'—I threw down the eleven-pence, saying, 'Bring bread and cheese and ale for all this.'—I remember that the waiter looked at me for a moment in a strange way, before he gathered up the money; but he said nothing, and hurried off. In a few minutes he returned with a pot of ale, bread and cheese, and several glasses. I was already on friendly terms with the boys at the same table; and we now get quite intimate over the ale. They soon let me know that they were all prizes; and I answered 'Yes' to every question they put to me about my own pursuits. Presently I saw Old Death walk slowly up the room; but I pretended to be looking quite another way.

"The conversation which I had on this occasion with the boys at the penny-concert, completed what was no doubt Old Death's design in sending me there; namely, to render me as familiar as possible with that class of lads at whose hands I was to receive my initiation into the career of roguery to which I was destined. The ale excited me to such a degree that I was even then ready to obey any one who would suggest a deed by which money could be

obtained; for I saw that money was the key to all kinds of enjoyment. Presently Old Death walked slowly out of the room; and two or three minutes afterwards I followed him, having told my new companions that I should be sure to meet them again there next night. In the street I joined Old Death, who asked me how I liked all I had seen! You can guess what my answer was. 'Well,' said he, 'it is for you to get a handkerchief and a snuff-box, or any thing of that kind, every day; and then you shall have money to go to concerts, and to buy nice ale, and to enjoy yourself along with those pleasant boys that you met there.'—I was delighted with this prospect; and I thought Old Death the kindest gentleman in the world, in spite of the box on the ears he had given me at the stopseller's shop in the morning. But all this time, remember, I did not know either his real or his nick-name; nor did I trouble myself about such matters.

"He now conducted me to Castle Street, Long Acre, and putting sixpence into my hand, pointed to a particular house. 'Go and knock at that door,' he said, 'and ask for a bed. You will have to pay two-pence for it. The four-pence left is to buy your breakfast in the morning, which the woman of the house will give you for that money. If the people you meet there ask you any questions, say as little as possible, and don't speak a word about me. If you do, I shall be sure to know it, and I will never see you again. Be a good boy; and at nine o'clock to-morrow morning, meet me at the corner of this street.'—I promised to mind all he told me; and he hurried away, while I gained admittance into one of those filthy lodging-houses that swarm in Castle Street.*

* Although our aim is to render the "History of Jacob Smith" a regular and connected narrative of the initiation of a neglected child in the ways of vice and the career of crime, there are necessarily many phases in the history of juvenile iniquity which cannot be introduced into the text, as it would be impossible that the boy who is telling his story could have gone through all the scenes alluded to. We must, therefore, further illustrate our aim by means of a few notes, derived from authentic sources; and this course we are the more inclined to pursue, inasmuch as we hope that the episode formed by the "History of Jacob Smith" may have the effect of directing public attention more seriously than ever to the awful nature and extent of juvenile depravity in this metropolis. Mr. Miles, in his "Report to the House of Lords on Poverty, Mendicity, and Crime," places on record the following observations:—

"The women and the girls in these districts live with their men as long as they can agree together, or until one or the other be imprisoned or transported. The very children are prostitutes, living with their "fancy lads;" and it is difficult to say which are the most degraded, the men or the women, the girls or the boys. It is true that I suppose crime is more engendered in low neighbourhoods, where the poorest and the most idle congregate; and I now beg to continue my remarks upon the second head, namely, the neglect of parents. The various pursuits of these parents all them from home during the greater portion of the day, and their children are left to play and idle in the streets, associating with other ials of more experience than themselves, until, seeing and hearing how easy it is to steal, they commence their career of crime, unchecked on the one hand and applauded on the other. There are some parents who turn their children out every morning to provide for themselves, not caring by what means they procure a subsistence, so that

At this place, where I procured the half of a bed, my companion being a young girl of thirteen, who had already been a prostitute eighteen months. I received further lessons in the school of vice. In the morning I obtained a cup of coffee and a couple of rounds of thick bread-and-butter for my fourpence; having disposed of which, I hastened to my appointment with Old Death. He was waiting for me at the corner of the street, and asked me a great many questions about the people I had seen at the lodging-house. I satisfied him as far as I could; but, through some lingering feeling of shame, I did not tell him that a prostitute had been my bed-fellow. He desired me to follow him at a considerable distance, but to mind and not lose sight of him. He then led me for a long walk all about the West-end of London,—proceeding slowly, so that I might have an opportunity of looking at the shops and obtaining some knowledge of the position of the different streets: in a word, that I might be able to find my way about by myself another time. At about one o'clock we went into a public-house, where we had something to eat and drink, and rested for two or three hours. Then we set out on our wanderings again, and at about seven o'clock in the evening, we came to a halt in St. Giles's, where Old Death gave me money to enter a penny-theatre. I had not practised my hand at stealing any thing all day long; because he had not instructed me to do so. Neither, from that moment, did he ever put my abilities in that way to the test in his presence; so I suppose that the little affair in St. Paul's Churchyard was merely an experiment made to enable him to judge whether I had any talent in the art of cozening, or not. In fact, he had tried me to ascertain whether I could be made useful; and,

the expense of feeding them does not abstract from their means of procuring gin or beer. Other parents require their children to bring home a specified sum every night, to obtain which they must beg or thieve. Others hire out their children to beggars, for 3d. a day (a cripple is considered worth 6d.); and many women hire children in arms about the same age, to pass them off in the public thoroughfares as twins. Groups of these young neglected vagabonds herd together, and theft becomes their study; even if a child was well disposed, it is not probable that he could escape the contagion of such bad example. There is a community of children, who live and are separated from persons more advanced in years. Moreover, there is so rapid and so certain a communication among them all over the metropolis, that if they discover any of their slang or flash words to be known out of their circle, they will substitute another, which in the course of a day or two will be adopted by the fraternity. There are lodging-houses exclusively for their accommodation, public houses which are chiefly supported by their custom, and the landlords of both sorts of establishments are ever ready to purchase any plunder they may bring. With this neglect of parents on the one hand, and the facilities to crime on the other hand, can it be expected that these children can resist temptation? The wonder would be if a boy was honest. My conclusion, therefore, is, that the neglect of parents in these low neighbourhoods renders them sources of crime. The number of boys in London who live by plunder is very—very considerable; and this society is maintaining them at a great expense, either in the shape of prison expenses, or by the value of the property they steal, especially when it is considered that the prostitutes never give one quarter the value; and there is not a boy that who, on the average, does not expend 5s. per diem.*



finding that I could, his object was now to introduce me to scenes and places where my morals might become confirmed in iniquity, or where there was a spare for the exercise of my abilities.

"I need not therefore dwell on this part of my story; for in a few days the use which Old Death calculated to make of me was fully explained. I was to thieve where I could and when I could, and every evening I was to meet my employer at some place that he would appoint, and hand him over the articles so stolen; when he was to give me enough money for the following day's expenses. I was, moreover, charged to enlist in the same service as many boys as I could; and now for the first time I learnt that my hitherto unknown protector was named Mr. Benjamin Bone, and my companions soon informed me that he was a famous *bone*, usually bearing the denomination of 'Old Death.' I must not forget to state that my employer counselled me never to allude to him in any manner, unless it was in the way of enlistment, as just now mentioned. He said, 'It will perhaps happen, Jacob, that a constable or a Bow Street runner may catch hold of you sometimes; but do not breathe a word about me,

and I will always get you out of the scrape. If, on the other hand, you confess that you are employed by me, or that you are in my service, it will do you no good, and I shall cast you off for ever. Indeed, I should leave you to rot in prison; whereas, hold your tongue, whatever may happen, and you will find me your best friend.'

"I promised to obey him; and now, behold me at the tender age of nine, the companion of the worst juvenile pickpockets, and a pickpocket myself! No link had we to bind us to society; the world was our harvest-field, in which we considered that we had a right to glean; and whenever a member of our fraternity got 'into trouble,' we clubbed together to maintain him well in prison. If he was condemned to punishment, he and ourselves looked upon it as a piece of bad luck—and that was all. I found that my companions were as reckless and imprudent as could be, ever fulfilling the old adage, 'Eight come, Nght go.' They used to play at 'pitch and toss,' or skittles, the stakes varying, according to their means at the moment, from a halfpenny to a sovereign. I was not often enabled to join in these sports; because Old Death kept me

rather short, and he had obtained such an astonishing influence over me that I dared not attempt to deceive him. Sometimes I thought of appropriating a portion of a 'day's work' to my own private use; but his image haunted me like a ghost—and I could not do it. He constantly told me that he had the means of ascertaining every robbery that was committed, and who perpetrated it, and that if I attempted to play him any tricks, I should be sure to be found out. I believed him—for he occasionally gave me proofs of the most extraordinary knowledge of all that was passing. He would say, for instance, 'Your friend Such-a-one filched a snuff-box and a pocket-book yesterday in Regent Street: he gave his employer the book, and pawned the box on his own account. Now, mark me, Old Death would add, 'that boy will get into trouble soon, and no one will help him out of it again.'—And this prophecy would come true. I was therefore alarmed at the mere idea of deceiving Old Death—or rather, attempting to deceive him; and, though my companions often jeered me and urged me to 'set up on my own account,' I lacked the moral courage to break with Mr. Benjamin Bones.

"I was very expert in the art of pickpocketing, and seldom had to disappoint Old Death when I met him in the evening. If I did, he gave me my money all the same: I suppose I was too useful to him to be lost; and perhaps he knew that I always did my best. He allowed me three shillings and sixpence for each day's expenses; and this money was usually laid out in the way I will now explain:—

Breakfast.—Pint of coffee, 3d.; loaf of bread, 2d.; butter, 1d.	6s. 6d.
Dinner.—Beef, 3d.; potatoes, 1d.; bread, 1d.; beer, 2d.	0 7
Tea.—Half-pint tea, 1½; toast, 3d.	0 4½
Supper.—Leg of beef, 3d.; bread, 1d.; potatoes, 1d.; beer, 2d.	0 7
Oil and water, 1s.; bed, 4d.	1 4
	3 3½

—leaving me 2½d. a day for any casual expense. This allowance of 3s. 6d. may perhaps seem rather liberal; but it was seldom that my earnings during the day were not sufficient to produce Old Death at least fifteen or twenty shillings—and often a great deal more.

"There are various grades, or classes, of juvenile thieves.* The most aristocratic amongst them are

* In the First Series of the "MYSTERIES OF LONDON," Vol. II. ch. CXXII., there is a detailed account of an association designated "The Forty Thieves." Soon after the Weekly Number containing that chapter appeared, we were inundated with letters, chiefly expressing unqualified disbeliefs of the astonishing particulars recorded in respect to the Forty Thieves. We answered all those which contained the real names and addresses of the writers, assuring them that the details related were strictly true, and that we actually possessed a printed copy of the regulations by which the Forty Thieves were governed. Still, most of our correspondents were sceptical. It was therefore with a feeling almost bordering on satisfaction that we saw in the *Morning Chronicle*, a few weeks ago, a report of a policeman in which the prisoner who figured before the magistrate was described as "belonging to an association designated the 'Forty Thieves,' and whose head-quarters were in the Mint, Southwark." We take this opportunity of assuring our readers that of what they had remarked in the "MYSTERIES OF LONDON," there is more in fact than they might at first suspect.

those who have been admitted into the fraternity of swell-mobbiters, or who have taken a hand in house-breaking. The next class, on the descending scale, is the pickpocket who dives only for purses, watches, pocket-books, or snuff-boxes, but who would scorn to touch a handkerchief. The third section consists of those who dive for any thing they can get, and whose chief game does consist of handkerchiefs. The fourth division comprises shop-sneaks and area-sneaks: the former enter a shop slyly, or crawl in on their hands and knees, to rob the tills; the latter get down area-steps and enter kitchens, whence they walk off with any thing they can lay their hands on. This same section also includes the shop-bouncer, who boldly enters a shop, and, while affecting to bargain for goods, purloins some article easily abstracted. The fifth division is made up of thieves who prowls about shop-doors; or who break the glass in shop-windows, to abstract the goods; or who rob merchants by introducing a bent wire through the holes of the shutter-boards and draw out lace, silk, or ribands. The sixth, and last division or grade, consists of the very lowest description of thieves—such as pudding-namers, who letter about cooks' shops, and when customers are leaning forth with plates of meat and pudding, or pudding alone (as is often the case), pounce on the tables and run away with them before the persons robbed have even time to recover from their astonishment. These miserable-thieves sell all they cannot eat, to other boys, and thus manage to get a few halfpence to pay for a lodging. I mention all these circumstances to you, sir, because I do not believe that you can have ever found yourself in a position to have seen what I am now relating.*

"On one occasion a certain robbery in which I was concerned, made some noise; and the Bow Street runners got a pretty accurate description of me. This I learnt from Old Death, who advised me to go up into the Holy Land—which I need scarcely tell you is St. Giles's—and remain quiet there for a few days until the thing was pretty well blown over. I followed this advice, which was very welcome to me; because Mr. Bones gave me plenty of money to make myself comfortable, and I was

* Mr. Miles, in his Report (from which we have previously quoted) says, "In considering the subject of juvenile delinquency, it is requisite to take into account the various causes which compel them to be vicious; and though we must, of course, still be most regret that no efficient means have been adopted to prevent this lamentable evil. Young thieves have often confessed to me, that their first attempts at stealing commenced at apple-stalls, and that having acquired confidence by a few successful adventures, they have gradually progressed in crime, allured by others, and in their turn alluring. They find companions to cheer them and instruct them, girls to share their booty and applaud them, and every facility to sell their daily booty. There is, moreover, a kind of lottery adventure in each day's life; and as these entertainments are attainable at so easy a rate, it is strange that these children are fascinated with and abandon themselves to crime? Imprisonment to a young rascal who steals and has no other means of subsistence is no punishment; for it is indifferent to him where he exists, so long as he has food and raiment. It is in prison that boys form acquaintances, more mischievous than themselves. Many lads have owned to me that they had learned more in a pad than out of one. I once asked a lad if there was any school where boys were taught to pick pockets? Upon which he significantly observed, 'No occasion for one, sir: the best school for that sort of thing is 'mas'!' alluding to the prison in which I saw him."

not expected to do any 'work' for at least a week. I happened to take up my quarters at a lodging-house in Lawrence Lane, and found it chiefly used by the very lowest Irish. Never did I see such a set as they were! Filth, misery, and drunkenness were familiar enough to me, heaven knows!—but there I saw such filth, so much misery, and yet such constant and such horrible drunkenness, that I was perfectly shocked—and it required something strong to shock me. Mr. Rainford! The house was a brothel; and the daughters of the man who kept it were their own father's best customers. The most frightful debauchery prevailed there. Old women used to bring young boys, and old men young girls—mere children,—to that beastly stew. I have seen a dozen men and women all dancing together stark naked in the largest room in that house; and some of them brothers and sisters! On another occasion I saw an Irish wake in the same place: the corpse, which was that of a prostitute, was laid upon the floor, with candles placed round it; and the friends and relatives of the deceased woman all got so awfully drunk that they commenced a dreadful battle, tumbling about in all directions over the dead body!

"I stayed at this lodging-house in St. Giles's about a week, and never went out except on an evening for about an hour, when I looked in at Millberry's—the flash public-house in Lawrence Lane. Were you over there, sir? No. Well—it is worth your while just to give a look in any time you are passing. The public room is fitted up with fine tables and high-back partition. Fronting the door is a large black board, whereon the following inscription may be read:—

My pipe I can't afford to give,
If by my trade I wish to live;
My liquor's good, my measure's just,
Excuse me, sir, I cannot trust."

'To prevent MISTAKES all liquors to be paid for on delivery!

"As soon as the little affair which had driven me up into St. Giles's, was blown over, I returned to my old haunts, and fell in again with my old companions. I was now ten years old, and was considered so cunning and clever that Old Death began to employ me in other ways besides thieving. If he required to know any thing concerning a particular party, he would set me to dog and watch him, or to make inquiries about him. Sometimes I was sent to the flash public-houses frequented by gentlemen's servants who were accustomed to arrange with the crackmen for burglaries in their master's houses—or 'just up cracks,' as they are called. These public-houses are principally at the West End;—the most famous are in Duke Street (Manchester Square), and Portland Street. There I got into conversation with the servants, or merely acted the part of a listener; and all the information I could glean was of course conveyed to Mr. Bones, who no doubt knew how to turn it to his greatest advantage.

"I was also a visitor to every flash-house in London, at different times, and on various errands for

* We cannot allow the readers to attribute to our imagination a hint so disgusting as this. We received the information from a police-officer who was an eye-witness of such a scene, and from whom (as stated in a previous note in this Series) we have gleaned many remarkable facts relative to the 'lived orders.'

Old Death. The more his business increased, the more necessary did it become to him; and at that period he was not so near and stingy as he since became. Whenever I succeeded in any difficult undertaking, he would reward me with something like liberality; and I don't know whether I actually liked him—but it is certain that he exercised an immense power over my mind. I was, in my turn, much looked up to by my companions: they considered me Old Death's lieutenant; and moreover I was so skilful as a pickpocket, that no one could excel, and few equal me. I had all the qualifications necessary for the art—a light tread, a delicate sense of touch, and firm nerves. For I was then strong and healthy: now I am sickly—wasted—and have within me the seeds of an incurable madness! I used at that time to wear shoes of a very light make—as indeed do nearly all professional pickpockets. It is very easy for one who is any thing of an acute observer, to recognise juvenile pickpockets in the street. Their countenances wear an affected determination of purpose, and they always seem to be walking forward, as if bent on some urgent object of business. They never stop in the street, save to 'work.' If they wish to confer with their pals, or if they meet a friend, they dive into some low public-house, or court, or alley. A knowing pickpocket never lingers about in the street; because that is the very first thing that draws suspicious glances towards lads. I have read—and how I came to be able to read, I shall presently tell you)—in the newspapers that many people have a notion that pickpockets use instruments in casing gentlemen or ladies of their purses or other articles of value; but the only instrument I ever knew a pickpocket to use, or used myself, is a good pair of small scissors, which will either rip a pocket up or cut it off in a twinkling.

"I do believe that London thieves* are the very

* Mr. Miller's Report says, "London thieves have no sense of moral degradation; they are corrupt to the core; they are strangers to virtue and character, even by name; for many of them are the children of thieves or of exceedingly dissolute people, consequently they can have no contrition; they are in a state of predatory existence, without any knowledge of social duty; they may lament detection, because it is an inconvenience, but they will not repent their crime; in fact they will ponder on the past, curse their 'evil stars,' and look forward with anxiety to the moment of their release; but their minds and habits are not constituted for repentance.

Mr. Chamberlaine, of the House of Correction, informed me that he considers reformation among juvenile offenders to be utterly hopeless; he observed, that 'boys brought up in a low neighbourhood have no chance of being honest, because on hearing a god they return to their old haunts, and follow the example of their parents or associates.' Lieutenant Tracy, of the Westminster Bridewell, has pointed out to me lads who live constantly in gaol.

* Captain Kinsaid, of the City Bridewell, informed me that one-half of the number under his lock on the day that I inspected the prison (June the 30th) had been more than once committed, many of them several times, especially the boys. Mr. Teague, of the Gillespie-street Compter, is of opinion that young thieves are mostly incorrigible—that nothing will reform them; an opinion which, he says, he has formed from the experience of many years. Mr. Capper, of the Newgate Office, stated, in his evidence, that out of 200 juvenile convicts, on board the bark *Europa*, the eldest of whom was not 17, 125 had been committed more than once; and an experienced bargainer told me that young thieves cannot and will not reform. 'The only thing, sir,' he remarked, 'that may save them is transportation, as it removes them from evil companions.'

"The young thief is a wretched mischief. A young pick-

worst in the whole world. Their prodigality commences so early; and there is every thing to harden them. Imprisonment raises them into heroes amongst their companions. Only fancy a boy of twelve or thirteen, perhaps, — or even younger, — placed behind huge massive bars which ten elephants could not pull down! He of course thinks that he must be a very clever fellow, or at least a very important one, that the law is compelled to adopt such wonderful precautions to restrain him. He believes that society must entertain a marvellous dread of his abilities. That boy, too, is the superior in the eyes of the whole fraternity of thieves, whose punishment is the heaviest. A lad who has been tried at the Old Bailey, thinks much more of himself than one who has only passed through the ordeal of the sessions. The very pomp of justice, — the idea that all those judges and barristers in their gowns and wigs should be assembled for the sake of a boy, — that the Old Bailey street should be crowded with policemen, — that newspaper reporters should be anxious to take notes, — that spectators should pay shillings to obtain sittings in the court, — in a word, the whole ceremony and circumstance of the criminal tribunals actually tend to imbue juvenile thieves with a feeling of self-importance. Now, might not this very feeling be acted upon to a good and beneficial purpose, — to the advancement of industry and honest emulation? I think so; but society never seems to adopt really useful measures to reform — it contents itself with punishing. You may be surprised to hear such reflections come from my lips; but who is better able to judge than one who has passed through the entire ordeal?*

Here Jacob paused, and then inquired if he were wearing Tom Rains with his narrative.

pocket, named Stuart, aged 13, informed me that his parents daily sent him into the streets to 'look about,' that is, to plunder whatever he could lay his hands upon; that his principal associates were three young thieves with whom he 'worked,' or robbed; that when he was 10 years old he stood at a horse's head while his companion stole a great coat from the gig; that he got sixpence for his share of the plunder; that he had committed many robberies because he was made to do it; and that he lived entirely by plunder. Mr. Chesterton states, in his evidence before the select committee of the House of Commons in answer to query 474, 'Some of the parents lead their children into evil courses. It is no uncommon thing, when we are listening to the conversation between the prisoners and their parents, to hear a conversation that shows at once the boy's situation; but the old thieves are in the habit of bringing in with them young inexperienced lads. Whenever the elder thieves are recognised, they are frequently recognised with another.' He also observes (397) that 'the elder thieves are continually corrupting young lads, and bringing them into prison.'

"I am informed that Captain Brenton considers the total number of juvenile offenders within the bills of mortality to be 12,000. Dr. Lushington, I believe, computed the number still higher; and from the evidence above quoted it is evident that each elder offender is daily spreading the mischief far and wide.

"There is a youthful population in the metropolis devoted to crime, trained to it from infancy, adhering to it from education and circumstance, whose associations prevent the possibility of reformation, and whom no punishment can deter; a race 'not generic,' different from the rest of society, not only in thoughts, habits, and manners, but even in appearance; possessing, moreover, a language exclusively their own. There are lodging-houses kept by old thieves where juvenile offenders herd together, and their constant intercourse tends to complete corruption. It is in these hotbeds of vice that they revel in the fruits of their plunder; and though extremely young, they live with girls, indulging in every kind of debauchery."

"So far from your doing so, my good fellow," replied the highwayman, "that although I have several things to attend to, I mean to stop and hear you to the end. Come, drink a glass of wine. There I now you will be the better able to proceed. I will light another cigar—for I fancy that I can attend more earnestly while smoking."

Rainford once more settled himself in a comfortable posture; and the lad pursued his narrative in the following manner.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CONTINUATION OF THE HISTORY OF JACOB SMITH.

"I NOW come to an important event in my life—in fact, that portion of it which will account for this sickly condition of health in which you see me. Old Death one evening took me with him to supper at a place where he had never introduced me before. This was Bunce's in Earl Street, Seven Dials. Mrs. Bunce immediately seemed to take a great fancy to me—made me sit next to her—and, in spite of her meanness, helped me to the best of every thing on table. It was a very good supper; for Old Death, who provided it, had declared that he meant to launch out for once. But I suppose it was only to put me into such a good humour that I was the more likely to fall into the scheme which he had in view. This was not, however, the reason of Mrs. Bunce's kindness; because since then she has often treated me in a manner that has made me forget many a sorrow. It is true that these likings only take her by fits and starts—and she has not unfrequently used me cruelly enough. I can scarcely make that woman out, as far as I am concerned; and there are moments when I think a great deal of any kind words she has ever uttered to me, or any kind treatment she has ever shown me.

"But I am wandering from the subject which I had entered upon. You remember that I was telling you about the supper at Bunce's house. Well, after the things were cleared away, and the grog was going round pretty fast,—I used to drink then as much as a man, although little more than ten years old;—Old Death began to talk a great deal about the money that might be made by a clever lad like me being able to get admittance into the houses of rich people. He went on to say that I should begin to think of doing business that would leave me more time to amuse myself, and be also less dangerous than going about the streets picking pockets. I assured him that I was heartily sick and tired of the life I was leading, and that I wished I was old enough to be a housebreaker. 'For,' said I, 'a crackman does have some time which he can call his own. If he does only one job a week, he is satisfied; but I am obliged to gad about all day to get the means of living on the next. Besides,' said I, 'I am of course running a thousand times more risks by doing so many jobs each day, than I should if I only did one or two a week.'*—'Everybody

* Every juvenile delinquent is as anxious to rise in his "profession" as the military or naval officer, or the member of any other hierarchy. But with the votaries of crime the apex of promotion is—the gibbet! Mr. Miles says, "I have questioned many boys of shrewd understanding concerning their opinions, and the opinions of their associates, as to their ultimate fate (for all thieves are fatalists). They look upon

most have his apprenticeship,' retorted Old Death 'and you have now served yours. I agree with you that it is high time for you to be doing something better; and I have a plan ready chalked out for you.'—Mrs. Bunce mixed me another glass of grog; I produced my short pipe, and blew a cloud while Old Death explained his scheme. At first I did not much relish it: but he backed it with so many arguments, that I agreed to try it.

"And, sure enough, at six o'clock one morning—a few days afterwards—a boy, black as a devil, with soot-bag over his shoulder, and brush and scraper in his hand, was making the round of Bloomsbury Square, hawling, "Sleep!" as lustily as he could. That boy was myself. Presently a garret-window opened, and a female voice called me to stop. I obeyed. In a few minutes down came the cook to the front door, and I was desired to walk in and operate on the kitchen-chimney. The cook was a fat, middle-aged, good-natured body, and asked me a great many questions about myself,—how long I had been a sweep—how it happened that I became one—whether I had any father or mother—and a host of such queries; to all of which I replied in the most sorrowful manner possible. I assured her that I had been a sweep from infancy—that I had swept a chimney when I was only five years old—that I had no parents—that my master beat me cruelly—and that I had had nothing to eat since the morning before. The good creature shed tears at my narrative; and, when I had swept the chimney—which I did in a manner that scarcely bore out

their inevitable doom to be either sooner or later transportation or the drop! It is *desire* to imagine a state of more gloomy wretchedness *desire*, despairingly horrible than the self-correction of *conviction*, punishment, without one gleam of hope to clear the melancholy perspective. Punishments and whippings are therefore useless, for the mind is prepared to endure more, and every imprisonment is only looked upon as another step in the ladder of their sad destiny. The lad is hopeless, consequently reckless in his conduct,—hardened to the present, and irremediable as to the future. It is not by prison discipline that reformation can be effected: the temptations, the facilities, and the love of idleness are too alluring. Crowds of young thieves will wait round a prison-gate, to hail a companion on the morning of his liberation, and to carry him off to treat him and regale him for the day. I have asked boys under sentence of transportation if they thought they could reform, if returned again upon society, and the general reply has been, "No." Their reasons for that conclusion I give in their own words:—"If we were to be free tomorrow, we must go to our old haunts and our old occupations, for where else can we go? If we try to be honest we cannot, for our 'pals' (associates) would torment us to return; in short, we should only have to come back here at last, but we are now going to another country, where we hope to be honest men."

"I have, moreover, questioned many lads as to what method they would adopt to prevent other boys from falling into crime, and their remarks have been, 'Stop playing in the streets, for a pocket is soon picked, and there are many who show others how to do it'—and the next thing is to stop those cursed receivers; for if a receiver knows a boy to have dealt with him, (that is, to have sold him property,) he will make him go out to thieve; he will never let him rest; and even should we get into employment, he will tease us till he makes us rob the master, or will tell of us to the police.' These remarks prove the boys to be good judges of their own cases; so, like a skilful physician, they know where to apply the remedy; and as I feel convinced that many of those wretched persons every requisite to be good and useful members of society, so am I certain that their reformation, in a majority of cases, is as practicable, under proper means, as their ultimate ruin is now certain, under the present system."

the assertion of my long experience—he gave me a quantity of broken victuals in addition to the money earned. I then took my departure, having very quietly deposited half-a-dozen silver forks and spoons in my soot-bag, while her back was turned.

"This business I carried on successfully enough for some months; till at last Old Death told me that he had seen several paragraphs in the papers, warning people against thefts committed by sweeps. I therefore gave up the employment, and once more took refuge in St. Giles's. But my health was seriously injured by the occupation I had just renounced; and from that time I have always been ailing and sickly. Although I had seldom turned sweep more than twice a week, and an hour after each robbery that I thus committed was as clean again as if I had never been near a chimney in my life,—yet the seeds of disease were planted in me, and I feel the effects here—here—in my chest!

"The life that I led when I gave up the chimney-sweep business, did not certainly tend to improve my health. I hired a room in St. Giles's, and took a girl into keeping—I being then eleven, and she thirteen. Of all profligate creatures, Peggy Wilkins was the worst. The moment she awoke in the morning, she must have her half-quarter of gin; and then she would go on drinking at short intervals all day long. If I attempted to stop the supplies, she would fly into the most dreadful passions, break every thing she could lay her hands on, or else throw the domestic articles at my head. When tipsy, she would loil half naked out of the window, and chaff the people passing in the street. In the evening she went to the penny concerts or penny theatres,* and generally came home so gloriously

* Mr. Brandon, in his Preface to Mr. Milne's Report, makes the following observations, which are too important to need any apology for their quotation:—

"If a religious fanatic brings a Bill into the House for the 'better observance of the Sabbath,' whose comforts are to be stridged? Why, the poor man's and those of the middling classes; for it is the stage-coaches and omnibuses that are to be prohibited from making their appearance, while the streets may be thronged with carriages; and though the labourer is not permitted to purchase his necessary food on that sacred day, unable to have accomplished it before from not having received his wages till too late the preceding night, yet the schoolmaster may carry the turbot cool that is to grace his lady's Sunday table, and send it home on the very day, just in time to be prepared for dinner.

"Penny theatres, too, are decry'd and suppressed, while the larger ones are permitted—the reason assigned being that the company who frequent the former render the step necessary, but the delinquency does not arise from cheap exhibitions—it is from the inefficiency of the law to restrain the audience; for in the plays themselves there is no improper language used. Holland, a notorious thief, in his examination, said he had heard bad language at those places before the curtains drew up, but never any thing indecent on the stage. This is a damning proof where the fault lies; if the laws were such as to restrain vice, and those properly administered, it would effectually prevent the improper conduct of the loose individuals, and preclude the necessity of refecting the pleasures of the poor; pockets are picked every night at the royal theatres, and scenes of the worst description carried on in the lobbies; yet it never entered into the creases of the wisest that if the theatres were shut up, these abominations would be effectually eradicated. It is highly gratifying to witness the order and pleasure with which cheap divisions are conducted on the continent, even as close to us as Dusseldorf and Calais, where may be seen the lowest classes enjoying themselves in dancing and visiting the various public gardens, the extensive in which is far equivalent to our penny. Another proof of the difference with which our laws

drunk that the entire house, much less our little room, would scarcely hold her. You may wonder why I continued to live with her; but the fact is, I liked her in spite of her outrageous conduct, and as I was sometimes very dull and low, her noisy, rascally disposition positively helped to put me into good spirits. She knew nothing of my connexion with Old Death; but she was aware that I was laying hid in St. Giles's in consequence of having robbed houses disguised as a sweep; and she used to laugh heartily when I told her several amusing anecdotes relative to that portion of my career.

"One night—after having lived about a month in idleness in the Holy Land—I was compelled by the falling short of supplies, to call at Bunce's in Seven Dials, for the purpose of seeing Old Death. After waiting there a short time, he came in; and I immediately noticed that his face was more serious than usual,—a certain sign that he had something new on hand. I did not, however, venture to ask any questions; for I still stood in the greatest awe of him, and knew that his disposition was irritable and easy to be provoked. At length he said to Mrs. Bunce, 'Give that lad a good strong glass of grog; he's shivering with cold.'—I was not, but I took the grog, because I never refused spirits at that time. When Old Death thought I was primed enough to embrace any new plan with eagerness, he said, 'Jacob, I have something for you to do that I am convinced will yield a good harvest.'—I instantly became all attention.—'There's a widow lady,' he continued, 'living at the West End, in a swell street; and, by all I can learn, she is very well off. She is also very charitable, and belongs to a number of what's called Religious Societies; and I am sure you could get into her house as easy as possible. The chimney-sweep business has well-nigh blown over, if not quite; and it's his high time to begin a new dodge.'—He then explained his plan; and I agreed to adopt it.

"When I got back to my lodging in St. Giles's, I found Peggy sitting in company with a young fellow of about fifteen, drinking raw spirits. She had not expected me home so early, and was for a moment quite taken aback. But soon recovering herself, she put a good face on the matter, and introduced the young chap as her brother; saying that she had not seen him for many years before that evening, when she had met him by accident. I pretended to believe her; but the moment he was gone, I gave her a good beating and overwhelmed her with reproaches. She showed less spirit than I had expected, and did not attempt to return the blows; neither did she treat me with sulks or ill-humour.

"On the following evening, at about nine o'clock, I very quietly laid myself down on the door-steps of a house in Old Burlington Street. I was in such rags and tatters as to be almost naked; and having pricked my feet, with a pointed bit of wood, in several places, they were almost covered with blood, as if chapped with the cold and cut by the sharp stones. This was in the depth of winter; and my appearance was most miserable. Presently a carriage drove up to the house, and a fine, tall, elderly gen-

tleman got out. I was crouched up close by the threshold of the door, and I purposely let him tread on one of my naked feet. Then I began to sob as if with pain; and he now observed me for the first time. He muttered an oath; but at that instant the front-door opened, and his manner changed directly. He spoke kindly to me, and put half-a-crown into my hand. A lady was crossing the hall while the door stood open, and this gentleman was still speaking to me; and she immediately turned to ascertain what was the matter. 'Here's a poor, wretched creature,' said the gentleman, 'who was so huddled up against the door, that I did not observe him; and I am afraid I trod on his leg somewhat heavily.'—The lady instantly spoke in the most compassionate terms, and desired that I might be brought into the house. The man-servant raised me, for I affected to be unable to walk; and the lady said, 'Poor boy, he is paralysed with the cold.'—When I was moved into the hall, and placed in a chair, the state of my feet was observed; and this increased the compassion I had already excited. She ordered the servant to take me into the kitchen, and give me a good supper, while I warmed myself by the fire.

"All these commands were immediately executed; shoes and stockings were also supplied me; and in the course of an hour the lady herself came down to speak to me. She asked me who I was, I told her a long and piteous tale, already prepared for the occasion,—how I had been apprenticed to a tradesman at Liverpool, and had undergone the most dreadful treatment because I refused to work on the Lord's Day and insisted on my right to go to church; how the cruelty of my master had increased to such an extent, that I was obliged to run away; how I had wandered about the country for the last two months, subsisting on charity, but often half-starved; how I had that morning found my way to London, and had been obliged to sell my shoes for a penny to buy a roll, which was all I had eaten during thirty-six hours; but that I had an aunt who was housekeeper to a certain Bishop, and that I knew she would do all she could for me. The lady seemed to eye me suspiciously until I spoke of the aunt and the Bishop; and then her countenance instantly changed in my favour. 'Well, my poor lad,' she said, 'you shall remain here to-night; and the first thing to-morrow morning, one of my servants shall take a message from you to your aunt.'—I of course expressed my gratitude for this kindness; but the lady assured me that she required no thanks, as heaven rewarded her for what she did towards her suffering fellow-creatures. I really thought that there was something very much like what I and my usual associates were accustomed to call 'gumson' in all this; and then I actually reproached myself for the idea, and began to repent of imposing on so much virtue and goodness.

"When I was well warmed with the cheerful fire and plentiful supper, the housekeeper of this lady conducted me to a little room on the top story, and having wished me a 'good night,' retired, locking the door behind her. But this did not give me much uneasiness; for beneath my rags I had concealed the necessary means to counteract such a precaution. Accordingly, about an hour after I had heard the servants withdraw to their bed-rooms, which were on the same floor as the one where I

are administered according to the parties affected, is manifest in the proceedings against the various houses for play in the metropolis, the clubs of the aristocracy and the 'little gow,' little bells, &c. of the poor."

was placed,—and when I thought the house was all quiet,—I took off the lock of the door by means of a little turn-screw, and crept carefully down stairs. Just at that minute the clock struck eleven. My intention was to visit the drawing-room first; but when I reached the door, I perceived there were lights within. I listened, and heard the gentleman and lady talking together. 'Oh! ho,' thought I, 'I shall have time to inspect the lady's bed-room first, and perhaps secure her jewels.'—So, naturally conceiving that this chamber must be the one immediately over the drawing-room, I retraced my way up stairs, and entered the front apartment on the second floor. A rush-light was burning in the room; but no one was there. I lost no time in commencing my search in all the cupboards; but I found nothing except clothes. There was, however, a mahogany press which was fast locked. I drew forth a small skeleton key, and was about to use it, when I was alarmed by footsteps in the passage. In another moment I was safely concealed under the bed.

"Some one almost immediately afterwards entered the room, and only closed the door without shutting it. I dared not move even to peep from beneath the drapery that hung round the bed to the floor; but I could tell by the rustling of silk and the unlacing of stays, that the person in the room was undressing herself—and I felt satisfied it was the lady of the house. I was now seriously alarmed. She was evidently going to bed; and my only chance of escaping from the chamber was when she should be asleep. But might I not disturb her? My situation was very unpleasant—and a prison seemed to open before my eyes.

"In about a quarter of an hour the lady stepped into bed. How I longed to catch the first sound that should convince me she was asleep! But she was not dreaming of closing her eyes yet awhile; for scarcely had she laid herself down, when the door was gently opened—then carefully closed again—and another person, evidently without shoes or boots on, came into the room. They said a few words to each other; and to my astonishment I found that the gentleman who had arrived in his carriage (which of course had been sent away) was going to pass an hour in company with the charitable lady. 'Well,' thought I, 'this is the way in which heaven rewards her for all she does towards her suffering fellow-creatures!'

"The gentleman undressed himself, and got into bed. Nearly two hours, instead of an hour, passed away—very pleasantly, it seemed, for the lady and gentleman, and very much to my amusement. I was now no longer under any alarm on account of myself—for I had learnt a secret which placed the lady in my power. Well, the gentleman got up at last and dressed himself; and the lady went down stairs with him to bolt the street-door after him. Their movements were so cautious, that I could plainly perceive the servants must have fancied that the gentleman had gone away long before, and that this care was taken to avoid disturbing them with any noise likely to excite suspicion.

"The moment the lady had left the room with her lover, I thought of beating a retreat. But should I go empty-handed? No; and yet I had not time to force open the mahogany press, which I believed must contain her jewels, before she would come back, as she had gone down in her night-clothes. I

therefore resolved to stay where I was, and accomplish my purpose when she was asleep; because if matters did come to the worst and she should awake, she dared not expose me. So I laid quiet; and she came back in a few minutes, shivering with the cold—for I could hear her teeth actually chatter. Half an hour afterwards she was fast asleep—as I could tell by her deep and regular breathing. The rush-light still burnt in the room; and I crept carefully from beneath the bed. Yes—she was sleeping; and, though not a young woman, she appeared very beautiful. But I had not a minute to lose: my skeleton key was again at work—the bolt of the lock flew back—and the door of the press moved on its hinges. Move! yes—and creak, too, most awfully; so that the lady started up in bed, and uttered a faint scream. I instantly rushed up to her, saying in a low but determined tone, 'Madam, not a word—or I betray you and your lover!'—By the feeble light of the candle, I saw that she became as red as crimson.—'Yes, madam,' I continued, 'your tricks are known to me; and I have been all the while concealed under this bed.'—'You!' she exclaimed: 'why, surely you are the poor boy that I received into the house this evening!'—'To be sure I am, ma'am,' was my answer; 'and, being troubled with a habit of sleep-walking, I found my way to this room.'—'But what were you doing at the bureau?'—'Merely examining it in my sleep, ma'am.'—'This is ridiculous,' she said impatiently. 'I understand what you are; but I will treat you well on condition that you do not mention to a soul what you have been a witness of this night.'—'I have no interest in gossiping, ma'am.'—'And were you to do so, I can deny all you may state,' added the lady, who was dreadfully excited and nervous, as you may suppose. 'But if you follow my directions, I will reward you well.'—I readily gave a promise to that effect. She then took a reticule from a chair by the side of the bed, and drawing out her purse, emptied its contents into my hands. At a rapid glance I saw there could not be less than fifteen or sixteen sovereigns, besides a little silver. She then took from her bag a Bank-note for twenty pounds, which she also gave me.

"I secured the money about my person, and she asked me whether I was satisfied? I said, 'Perfectly.'—'Then stand aside for a few moments, and I will show you how to act.'—I stepped behind the curtain, while she rose and put on a dressing-gown; having done which, she took the rush-light in her hand and desired me to follow her as noiseless as possible. We went down into the kitchen, where she told me to take all the cold victuals there were in the larder; and she gave me a napkin to wrap them up in. There happened to be a silver spoon in one of the dishes—left there most probably by accident. This she also desired me to take; and you may be sure I did not refuse. These arrangements being made, she led me to the front door, and having reminded me of my promise not to talk about a certain affair, let me out of the house. I have no doubt that there was a great deal said next morning in Old Burlington Street, about the ungrateful lad who was 'taken in as an object of charity, and who decamped in the middle of the night with the contents of the larder and a silver spoon into the bargain.'

"But you have not mentioned the name of this lady, Jacob?" interrupted Tom Rain.

"I did not think it was worth while, sir—as she used me very well—"

"Still I have a very particular reason for wishing to be informed on that head," said the highwayman.

"Oh! if that's the case, I shall not hesitate," replied Jacob. "The name of that lady was Mrs. Slingsby."

"I thought so from the very first moment you began to speak of her!" cried Tom. "And the name of the gentleman—did you learn that?"

"Yes, sir," answered the lad: "I heard the servants talking about him, when I was in the kitchen. His name was—let me see!—Oh! yes—I remember—Sir Henry Courtenay."

"Thank you, Jacob," exclaimed Tom; then, in a low, musing tone, he said, "Poor Clarence! you are woefully deceived in your saint of an aunt!"

"Shall I continue my story, Mr. Ralsford?" asked Jacob. "It will not last much longer now."

"By all means go on, my boy. I would sit here till day-light, sooner than miss the end."

Thus encouraged, Jacob continued in the following manner.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION OF THE HISTORY OF JACOB SMITH.

"On my return to Earl Street, Seven Dials, which was at about three o'clock in the morning, I found Old Death and Mrs. Bunce sitting up for me, Toby having gone to bed. I related the adventures which I had met with, but said not a word about the intrigue of the lady and the baronet; for I could not help thinking that the kind treatment I had in the first instance received from Mrs. Slingsby, deserved the reward of secrecy on that head. Old Death very kindly permitted me to retain five pounds out of the money which I myself had obtained; and I hurried back to my lodging in St. Giles's. Peggy was in bed and fast asleep; and I lay down by her side without awaking her.

"When I again opened my eyes, the sun was shining in the brightness of a frost; air even through the dingy panes of my window; and I started up. Peggy had already risen; and I supposed she had gone out to get things for breakfast. But something like a suspicion arose in my mind—and I felt uneasy. I searched the pockets of the ragged pair of trousers I had purposely worn on the previous night, and the five sovereigns were gone. Now I was really alarmed; Peggy had certainly decamped. A further search showed me that she had even carried off the few little articles of decent wearing apparel that I had, leaving me only the miserable rags in which I had appeared at Mrs. Slingsby's house. Yes—Peggy had run away with all I possessed that was worth the taking; and now the question naturally rose in my mind—'Will she betray me?' I thought her conduct was so suspicious, that I determined not to give her a chance if I could help it; particularly as I remembered the manner in which she took the beating I gave her, and which now made me think that she had resolved on being revenged. So I dressed myself in my tatters as quick as I could, and got away from the house. But at the end of the street I met a certain Mr. Dykes—the Bow Street runner, whom you happen to know, Mr. Ralsford—and though I

endeavoured to dive into a narrow court, he pounced upon me in a twinkling.

"In less than an hour I stood in the felons' dock at the police-court, Bow Street, charged with a robbery committed by me in Bloomsbury Square, in the disguise of a sweep. I was remanded for a week, and sent in the meantime to Clerkenwell Prison. There I was placed in No. 12, Reception Yard, where Mrs. Bunce, who pretended to be my aunt in order to get admittance to me, visited me in the afternoon. She told me that Mr. Bones could not possibly come to see me, but that he would do all he could for me if I remained staunch and did not mention his name in any way—not even to my fellow-prisoners. 'We are afraid that you will be committed for trial,' said Mrs. Bunce; 'but all shall be done that can be done to buy off the witnesses. If that won't succeed, such evidence of former good character shall be given, that your sentence will be a light one; and in the meantime you shall have as much money as you want to live gloriously in prison. Mr. Bones has sent you up a sovereign for the present, and I will bring you a good suit of clothes to-morrow, so that you may go up swell before the beak next time. Be staunch, Jacob; and Mr. Bones will never desert you. But if you only mention his name to a soul in an improper way, he'll leave you to your fate, and you'll be transported.'—Mrs. Bunce impressed all this on my mind; but I assured her it was unnecessary, as I knew that I should not better my own plight in any very considerable degree by nosing against Bones, whereas he might be useful to me if I behaved well in the matter. She went away satisfied; and I spent the rest of the day in jollification with my fellow-prisoners, amongst whom my money raised me to the rank of a hero.*

"That night I slept in the Receiving Ward; and next morning I was taken to the bathing-room, a new suit of clothes having been already sent in to me by Mrs. Bunce. But I found that I was to bathe in the same water which had already served to wash the filthy bodies of several tramps who had also been sent to prison the day before on a charge of robbery; and I knew that when they entered they were covered with vermin. I therefore gave the turnkey half-a-crown to allow me to dispose with the bath, put on my new clothes, and was turned into the Felons' Yard. There I found persons, who had committed all degrees of crime, huddled together as if there was no difference in the charges against them. A boy who had stolen a pound of potatoes, value one penny—myself, who had stolen plate in a dwelling-house—a gentleman, who had wounded another in a duel and could not get bail, but who was a very superior person—a burglar—a coiner—and a man charged with murder, were all in one room together! It did not strike me then—but it has often struck me since—how wrong it was to put that boy who had stolen potatoes, along with a burglar, a coiner, and a practised thief as I was,—how unjust it was to put the gentleman with any of us,—and how shocking it was to put a murderer along with prisoners whose hands were not at least stained with blood. And what were the consequences? The boy, who had merely stolen the potatoes because his mother was ill and starving, and who had never done any thing

* The discipline of criminal prisons was particularly lax at the time of which Jacob Smith is supposed to be speaking.



wrong before, was entirely corrupted by the cozier, and made up his mind to turn prig the moment he got out;—the gentleman was worked up to such a pitch of excitement, by being in such society, that he was removed to the infirmary, and died of brain fever, as I afterwards heard;—the burglar helped the murderer to escape, and got safely away with him!

* Our amusements in goal were chiefly gambling and drinking. Money procured as much liquor as we could consume; and with such I was well supplied. Cards and dice were not allowed, it is true; but we used to play with bits of wood cut and marked like dominoes, or by chalking the table into a draught-board, or by tossing halfpence. Then there was such fighting, quarrelling, and bad language, that nothing could equal the place! In the upper, or sleeping ward, things were much worse: the prisoners robbed each other. The very first night the duellist-gentleman was there, he lost his purse containing several sovereigns; and when he threatened to complain, he was quietly informed by the burglar and the murderer that if he did, he would be hung up to the bars of the window with

his own handkerchief the very next night, and his end would be attributed to suicide.*

† At the end of the week I was had up to Bow Street once more; and the evidence was so conclusive against me, that I was committed to Newgate for trial. This I had expected, and cared but little for, as Mrs. Duncas at each visit which she paid me at Clerkenwell Prison, assured me that Mr. Bones would do all he could for me. And he kept his word—but more, I suppose, for his own sake than mine. What a dreadful place I found Newgate to be! Hardened as I was,—acquainted with all degrees of debauchery,—and familiar with vice, I declare solemnly that I shrank from the scenes I there witnessed. Fighting, quarrelling, gambling, thieving, drinking, obscene talking, bullying, and corrupting each other,—all these took place to a great degree in the Clerkenwell Prison; but in Newgate they were carried out to an extent dreadful to think of, and associated with other crimes impossible to mention.‡

* This dreadful state of things continued in the New Prison, Clerkenwell, up to the year 1828.

† The Report of the Prison Inspector: of the Home Dis-

"I now seemed to awake, for the first time, from a long dream of wickedness, and to become aware of the frightful precipice on which I stood. My eyes were suddenly opened—and I shuddered. A man was hanged at the debtors' door, while I was in Newgate; and I saw him pass from the condemned cell to the kitchen, which is just within the debtors' door. I experienced a sudden revulsion of feeling, and took a solemn oath within my own breast that I would never there again. But as I

trict contains these observations upon the state of Newgate:—
"The association of prisoners of all ages, and every shade of guilt, in one indiscriminate mass, is a frightful feature in the system which prevails here; the first in magnitude, and the most pernicious in effect. In this prison we find that the young and the old—the inexperienced and the practical offender—the criminal who is sentenced with a conviction of his guilt, and the hardened villain whom scarcely any penal discipline can subdue, are congregated together, with an utter disregard to all moral distinctions, the interests of the prisoners, or the welfare of the community. In such a state of things, can it be a matter of wonder that the effects should be such as have been described? Every other cell is aggravated by this; and it would be worse than life to attempt a remedy for the rest, while this demoralizing temperature of criminals of all ages and degrees of guilt is suffered to frustrate the very ends of Prison discipline, and to give full scope to all their mischievous inclinations, and passions, upon which fitly necessary operating, and which it is the design of justice to discourage and repress. Apart from higher considerations, sound policy demands that such a system should be instantly rectified, for as long as it continues, society is nursing a moral pestilence in its bosom, and maintaining an institution in which are forged those weapons that are destined to be wielded with fatal dexterity against the community itself. Every device by which the forces of property may be overcome is here framed, and divulged to ready agents. Every fraudulent artifice, every successful trick, every ingenious mode of over-reaching the cautious, or of plundering the unguarded, is perfected here, and communicated to those who had not hitherto been initiated in the mysteries of crime.

But the most distressing circumstance connected with this system, is the cruel indifference with which it regards the condition and necessities of those on whom the extreme penalty of the law is doomed to fall. Prisoners actually awaiting the execution of the awful sentence of death are placed, by the evil influence of compassion, in the most unfavourable circumstances for self-reflection. Religion and humanity combine to point out the imperative necessity of providing men, brought by the sentence of the law to the verge of eternity, with the means of spiritual improvement and consolation; but the system of Prison Discipline in Newgate practically defeats every such merciful design. No human authority has a right thus to trifle with the eternal interests of a dying criminal. Against this serious evil the chaplains have repeatedly and loudly protested; and it is in evidence that the unhappy victims themselves have earnestly implored the officers to deliver them from a situation in which it was impossible for them to devote the few remaining hours that the law allowed them to reflection and prayer. The companions in guilt of these wretched men become further hardened by the influence of this association. The indulgence of thoughtless spavity, unbecoming speech, or reviling ribaldry, are productive of innumerable mischief to the minds of those who are subjected to their influence. The prisoner who witnesses with levity or indifference the last moments of a culprit in Newgate, comes forth a greater villain than when he went in. In his evil principle has done its work, and the very exhibition of terror which justice designed for the reformation of the survivors, by a perversion of moral influence, irremediably hardens the heart which it was intended to soften and amend. If human ingenuity were tasked to devise means by which the most profigate of men might be rendered amenable to the last degree of moral reform, nothing more effectual could be invented than the system now actually in operation within the walls of the first metropolitan prison in England!"

knew nothing of religion, and could not read or write, I was not likely to reform very rapidly nor very completely. I still laughed and joked with my fellow-prisoners, and appeared to enter into most of their fun, though I really began to loathe them. But when the chaplain visited us, and the other boys jeered and mocked him, I stood by and dwelt on every word of gentle remonstrance that fell from his lips. Next Sunday I paid great attention to his sermon, while pretending to be asleep: for if I had been caught actually lending a patient ear to his discourse, my fellow-prisoners would have led me no peace afterwards. I understood but little—very little of that sermon: still I gleaned some notion of the existence of a Saviour a belief in whom was the stepping-stone to virtue. I also heard the happiness of heaven explained for the first time; but I must confess that I was greatly puzzled when the chaplain declared that the man who was hanged for a dreadful murder on the preceding Monday, had gone to that place of joy, because he had repented in his last moments—for I thought to myself, 'Well, then, a human being is quite safe in leading as terrible a life as he chooses, as long as he repents at the end.' And, again, I was bewildered when I heard the clergyman say those words, which made so great an impression on me that I have never forgotten them, and never shall:—*As I stood with that penitent man on the drop, last Monday morning, I ENVIED HIM HIS FATE, because I knew that his soul was about to ascend to Heaven!*"

"The day of my trial came; and I was placed in the dock before the Common Serjeant of London. The clerk of the Court asked me, 'How will you be tried—by God and your country?'—I knew not what reply to make, and was actually on the point of saying 'that I would rather not be tried at all this time, since it seemed to be left to my own choice; and that I would faithfully promise never to there again,'—when the turnkey who had charge of me, whispered in my ear, 'You damned young fool, why don't you speak? Say 'By God and my country,' damn you.'—I did as I was directed; and the trial commenced. The charge against me was fully proved; and a verdict of Guilty was recorded. The Common-Serjeant asked if I had ever been convicted before. The keeper of Newgate, who was present, said I had not. The counsel who had been retained for me by Old Death, then requested to be allowed to call witnesses to character. This was permitted; and three or four tradesmen, who I well knew were Old Death's friends, got up one after the other, and swore that I had been in their service (each one of course giving different periods of time), and that I was an honest, hard-working, and industrious lad, until I fell into bad company and got into trouble. Dykes, the runner, was then questioned about me; and he said that I was not known as a thief—although he knew the contrary perfectly well. But Old Death had kept his word, and had not spare his gold. My offence was, however, a grave one—robbing in a dwelling-house; and there were two or three other indictments of the same kind against me, though the prosecutors did not come forward. Old Death had made it right with them too. I was accordingly condemned to seven years' transportation, with a hint that this sentence would be commuted to two years' imprisonment at the galleys.

* Fact.

"I was but little more than eleven when my career of crime was thus interrupted; and I was glad that it was so interrupted—for I regained that it should not be renewed when I regained my liberty. This was scarcely a resolution produced by moral considerations, but by fear; and it therefore required strengthening. Whether it was, or not, I shall soon inform you.

"A few days after the sessions terminated, I was removed with several other boys to the *Euryalus* Convict-Hulk at Woolwich. This vessel has three decks: the upper is appropriated to lads convicted the first time, the second to the next grade of juvenile criminals, and the third, or lowest, to the worst kind of offenders. I was assigned to the upper deck, where there were about sixty of us. On being received on board we were first sent to the wash-houses, where we were bathed and well cleansed; and we then received the suit of dark grey that denotes the felon. Our employment was to make clothes for the entire establishment: that is, shirts, jackets, waistcoats, and trousers. The person who taught us was a convict-boy, who had been a tailor; the cutters-out belonged to the second deck, and visited our department as often as their services were required.

"We were divided into sections, each having at its head a boy selected as the chief on account of his good conduct when in prison. I will describe the routine of the day—taking the period when the summer regulations are in force. At five o'clock in the morning all hands were called, the ports were opened, the hammocks were lowered and lashed up, and we washed ourselves for chapel. At half-past five the signal was given for prayers; and we went to the chapel in sections, or divisions, taking our seats in profound silence. The morning hymn was sung; the schoolmaster read the prayers; and we returned to our wards on the upper deck. There we stood in ranks till six o'clock, when breakfast was served. The steward of the ship superintended the giving out of the provisions, and saw that each boy had his fair allowance of bread and gruel. This being done, the steward ordered each rank, one after the other, to approach the tables, hold up the bread, say grace, and then sit down and eat. At half-past six, we were marshalled on the quarter-deck, in divisions; and the officers of the hulk were then prepared to hear any complaints or receive any reports that might have to be submitted to them. Such complaints were noted down for after investigation. Some of the boys were kept above to wash the quarter-deck, and the remainder were sent down to cleanse their own deck. At eight o'clock we were all set to work at tailoring, a strict silence being preserved. At nine o'clock the report upon the complaints was received from the commander of the hulk, and the punishments awarded were made known:—such as a good thrashing with a cane, stopping the dinner, or solitary confinement on bread and water. At twelve o'clock the dinners were served out, the steward superintending. The quartermasters and guards were also present, to see that one boy's allowance was not taken from him by another. From half-past twelve to half-past one we were allowed to take air and exercise on the quarter-deck, but without making any noise. At half-past one we were marched down again to our work. At two, a section of one-third of us was sent into the chapel, where we were taught

reading and writing by the schoolmaster. At five we left off work or schooling, cleaned the wards, and then washed ourselves. This being done, supper was served out; and we went on the quarter-deck again for air and exercise till seven, when we were once more marched to the chapel for evening prayers and the catechism. At eight o'clock we returned to our own deck, where the signal was given for getting out the hammocks and slinging them up. At nine profound silence was ordered; and the whole ship was then as quiet as if there was not a soul on board,—this deep tranquillity being only broken by the striking of the bell and the cry of 'All's well!' every half-hour.

"Such was the life led on board the *Euryalus* convict-hulk. But I was happier—much happier there than I had ever been before. The schoolmaster was an excellent man, and took a delight in teaching those who were anxious to learn. I was of this number, and my improvement was rapid. I quite won his regard, and he devoted unusual pains to instruct me; so that at the end of a year he obtained leave for me to give up the making of clothes and assist him as an usher. This was an employment that pleased me greatly, and allowed me plenty of time to read the books lent me by the worthy schoolmaster. So fond was I of reading, that I used to take a book with me on the quarter-deck at those times devoted to air and exercise; and sitting apart from the others, I would remain buried in study until it was time to go below again. I examined how books were written and how I was accustomed to speak: that is—I compared the language of those books with my own; and I was shocked to find how wretchedly ignorant I had hitherto been in respect to grammar. This ignorance I strove hard—oh! very hard to surmount; and the good schoolmaster assisted me to the utmost of his power. I read and studied the Bible with avidity; and the more I became acquainted with it, the more fixed grew my determination to avoid a relapse into the ways of crime when I should be released.

"During the two years that I passed at the hulk, Mrs. Bunce came very often to see me, passing herself off as my aunt; but relations were not allowed to speak to us except in the presence of a guard, and so the name of Old Death was never mentioned by either of us. But Mrs. Bunce used to tell me that 'my uncle would give me a home when my time was up;' and I supposed by this, that she meant her husband Toby. I knew that Old Death was the person who had directed those assurances to be given me; and often and often did I lay awake of a night, deliberating within myself what I should do when I was set free, to earn an honest livelihood and avoid the hateful necessity of returning to the service of Mr. Benjamin Bones.

"At length the day of liberation came—and I had no plan of proceedings settled. My clothes were given to me, and a shilling was put into my hand by the steward. The old schoolmaster was absent at the time; and I was sorry that I had not an opportunity of thanking him for all his kindness and imploring his advice how to proceed. It struck me that I would appeal to the commander of the hulk. I did so, and solicited him to counsel me how to get an honest livelihood. He burst out laughing in my face, exclaiming, 'I suppose you think I am to be deceived by your husband, and

that I shall put my hand into my pocket and give you half-a-guinea to see your way with. No such thing, my lad! I used to do so when I was first here; but these I assisted in that way were always the first to come back again."—And he turned on his heel, leaving me quite astounded at the reception my sincerity of behaviour had experienced. But a few moments' reflection showed me that I could scarcely blame him for his conduct; and I quitted the ship in tears.

"The moment I stepped from the boat that landed me in Woolwich, I met Mrs. Bunce. She threw her arms round my neck, and called me her '*dear Jacob*,' in such a loving manner that one would really have believed her to be my aunt, or even my mother if she had chosen to represent herself so. Then, pointing to a public-house at a little distance, she said, 'Your good and kind friend Mr. Bones is there; and he will be so delighted to see you. He has ordered a nice steak and some good ale, and we mean to let you enjoy yourself.'—The idea of having such a glorious repast after being kept on short commons on board the *Euryalus*, made my mouth water; but then I remembered all the influence Old Death had been accustomed to exercise over me—and I knew that if I once again entered within its range, I should never have the moral courage to withdraw from it. So my mind was made up; and suddenly darting down a bye-street, I was beyond Mrs. Bunce's view in a twinkling. I heard her shrill, screaming voice call after me; but I heeded it not—and hurried onward, as if escaping from a wild beast.

"Presently I relaxed my speed, and at length entered a public-house, where I called for a pint of beer. Two or three soldiers and as many young women were sitting at another table, drinking, and indulging at the same time in the most filth discourse. Suddenly one of the females started up, advanced towards me, and, after considering me for a few moments, exclaimed with a terrible oath, 'Well, I thought it must be my old fancy cove Jacob!'—and she offered to embrace me. I however repulsed her with loathing; for in the miserable, tattered, sickly wretch before me, I had already recognised Peggy Wilkins. She seemed ashamed of herself for a minute; then, recovering her impudence, she said, 'Damn and blast you for a sally, snivelling bound! Who the devil are you that you can't treat me civilly? Do you think I don't know all that's happened to you? Why, you've only this moment left the hulks—and you can't deny it.'—The soldiers, hearing this, demanded if it was true; and, without waiting for my answer, thrust me out of the place. I had reached the end of the street, when I recollected that I had not received the change for my shilling, which I had tendered in payment of the beer. I therefore went back to ask for it; but the pot-boy who had served me, swore that I never gave him a shilling at all; and the landlord evidently believed that I was a vagabond endeavouring to swindle his servant. So I was kicked out—penurious!

"I was for some time before I could muster up courage to adopt any plan for my support. Indeed, I sat down in a retired nook and cried bitterly. I even regretted having left the hulks, so miserable did I feel. At last hunger compelled me to act; and I entered a shop to inquire if a boy was wanted. The man behind the counter said he did not require

the assistance of a lad, but that a neighbour of his would probably hire me. I went to the place pointed out to me, and, having explained my business, was asked for testimonials of good character. I candidly confessed that I had just been discharged from the *Euryalus*, but that I thought the school-master on board would recommend me. The man flew into a dreadful passion, and rushing round from behind the counter, would have kicked me out of the shop, if I had not run away of my own accord.

"I am sure that I tried twenty different shops that day in Woolwich. At some I explained my position—at others I carefully concealed the fact of my late ignominious punishment. But character—character—character! where was it? Even for a starving lad who only asked a fair trial—who promised to work from sunrise to sunset, and to be content with a morsel of bread to eat and a collar to sleep in, as a recompense for his toils,—even to one who offered so much and required so little in return, character was necessary! Night came—I was famishing and in despair. At length a charitable baker gave me a roll; and my hunger was appeased. It struck me that the tradesmen at Woolwich were perhaps more cautious than people elsewhere how they engaged the services of young lads, in consequence of that place being a station for the convict-hulks; and I therefore resolved to try my luck in another quarter. I set out for Greenwich, which I reached at midnight, and slept till morning in a shed near some houses that were being built. Cold, famished, and dispirited did I awake; and with a sinking heart I commenced my rounds. Before noon I had called at a hundred shops, public-houses, or taverns, without success. Few required the service of boys; and those people who did, demanded references. I begged a piece of bread of a baker, and then set off for London.

"So slow did I walk, and so often, was I compelled to rest, that it was evening before I reached the Blackfriars Road. There, again, did I endeavour to procure honest employment—but in vain! I remember that when one shop-keeper—an old man—listened to me with more attention than the rest, I burst into tears and implored—besought—prayed him to receive me into his service, if it was only to save me from becoming a thief! I did not tell him I had already been one. But he shook his head, saying sorrowfully, 'If you have already thought of turning thief, your morals must be more than half corrupted.'—He gave me a few halfpence, and I went away.

"I balanced for some minutes between the cravings of my stomach and the fatigue of my limbs—that is, whether I should spend those halfpence in food or on a bed. I decided in favour of the food, and having satisfied my hunger, crept into a timber-yard on the bank of the Thames, and slept there till morning. I awoke at sunrise, and crossed Blackfriars Bridge. My limbs shivered with ague, and my clothes were damp with the dews of night. I knew not what to do—which way to turn. Hope had deserted me. There was I, a poor—wretched—homeless—friendless—starving being, anxious to remain honest, yet impelled by circumstances towards a relapse into the career of vice. I prayed as I went along the streets,—yes, I prayed to God to save me from that dreadful—that last resource. But no succour came. All day long did I rove about: night arrived again—and for twenty-four

hours I had eaten nothing. I dragged myself back to the timber yard; but there was a great dog prowling about—and I dared not enter. I sought shelter elsewhere, for the rain began to descend in torrents; but I was wet through before I could even find the entrance of a court to screen me. I never slept a wink that night; I was afraid to lie down on the cold stones—they were so chill. Morning came again—and I was now so weak that I could hardly put one foot before another. I was more-over starving—yes, *starving*! I passed a baker's shop and saw the nice hot bread smoking in the windows, and I went in to explore a stale crust. But I was ordered out; and then the idea struck me that in a few minutes I might obtain money to buy a good breakfast—not only bread, but meat and tea! That was by picking a pocket! The idea, however, assumed a horrible aspect a moment afterwards—and I recoiled from it. No; I would sooner plunge into the river and end my woes there—than steal again!

"To the river's brink I hurried—dragging myself slowly so mere—but running, yes—absolutely running fast to terminate my wretchedness by suicide. It was near Westminster Bridge that I was on the point of throwing myself into the Thames, when my collar was suddenly grasped from behind, and I was drawn back. I turned—and saw Old Death!

"Then I uttered a scream, and struggled dreadfully to get away, that I might still accomplish my purpose; but he held me tight, saying, 'Silly boy! why do you fly from life, since it may yet have many pleasures for you!'—'No!' I cried: 'I will never become a thief again!'—'And I will never ask you to do so,' he replied. 'But come with me, and let us talk over your prospects.'—'Prospects!' I repeated in a hysterical manner; and then I followed him mechanically to an early breakfast-house close by. He ordered a plentiful meal; and I ate ravenously. The food and hot coffee cheered me; and I began to feel grateful to Bones for having supplied the means to appease the hunger that was devouring me. Moreover, one looks with quite a different eye upon suicide after a good meal; and I could not do otherwise than regard him as the saviour of my life. I was therefore already prepared to listen to him with attention; and when he proposed that we should repair to Bones's, where we could converse without fear of being overheard, I willingly agreed to accompany him. But during our walk to Seven Dials, I constantly repeated within my own breast the most solemn vows not to yield to any threats or representations—menaces or coaxings—to induce me to become a thief again!

"When we reached the house in Earl Street, Mrs. Bones received me with more kindness than I had expected to meet at her hands, after the trick I had played her a few days before at Woolwich. But she did not treat me thus without a motive; for when once she and Old Death got me between them, they endeavored to the utmost of their power to persuade me to resume my old avocations. I was faithful to my vow, and assured them that they might kill me sooner than I would again do anything to risk imprisonment in that horrible Newgate. It was not the talk I so much dreaded—nor yet transportation, because I knew nothing of it; but I shrank from the mere idea of going through the ordeal of Newgate a second time. Old Death

saw that I was not to be moved—at least then; and he gave up the point. 'But,' said he, 'you must do something to get a living; you can't starve; and we won't maintain you in idleness. If you like, I'll take you into my service to run on errands, look after people that I want to learn any thing about and make yourself useful in that way; and I'll give you a shilling a-day.'—I agreed—for I could not starve.

"Now, of course it is as plain to you as it was even then to me, that Old Death was playing a deep game with me. I was the cleverest thief that ever served him; and he had received ample—ample proofs that he could trust me. He knew that he was safe with me. I was therefore too useful a person to lose; and he thought that by throwing me again amongst my old companions, and keeping me on very short allowance, the disagreeable impressions of gaol would soon wear away, and I should relapse into my old habits. He was quite mistaken. I do n't pretend that any particular idea of virtue made a great change in me; but I had been in Newgate—and there I had seen a man going out to be hanged; and I thought that if I got into that dreadful gaol a second time, I should become hardened, and that I also should go out some day to be hanged! So I resisted all temptation—and lived as well as I could on the shilling a day, without increasing my means by theft or villany.

"This mode of life on my part did not suit Old Death. A few weeks passed, and when he found that I was resolved not to return to my former ways, he stopped my allowance altogether. I was now steeped to the very lips in wretchedness and misery; but somehow or another I managed to get a crust here and there just to keep body and soul together—although I oftener slept in the open air than in a bed. Mrs. Bones showed me a little kindness now and then, but quite unknown to Old Death; and, to my surprise, she did not urge the necessity of my returning to the career of theft. For several weeks I saw nothing of Mr. Bones; but at last he fished me out in some low place, and told me I might return into his service if I liked, and that he should pay me according to the use I proved myself to be to him. To glean information for him—run on errands—dog and watch persons—or even loiter about in police-courts to hear what cases came up before the magistrates,—these were my chief duties; and badly enough they were paid. But I was now permitted to get my breakfast an tea regularly at the Bunces'; and that was something. As for my lodging, if I got together a few pence to enable me to hire a bed, or a part of a bed, in one of those low houses that I have already described to you, I was contented,—for I always had this consolation, that I could walk about the streets without being afraid of meeting a Bow-Street runner."

Jacob passed—for his tale was told.

"Well, my boy," said Tom Rafe, "you have gone through much, and seen enough to form a good stock of experience. I commend your resolution never to put yourself within reach of the law again; for that's just my determination also. You have got money in your pocket now; and I will do something more for you before I leave England."

"Ah! Mr. Rainford," exclaimed Jacob, much affected, "how I wish that I had met with such a friend as you earlier in life! And how I wish, too,

that I could go with you—wherever you are going—and be your servant—your slave!"

"Well—well, Jacob, we will talk of that another time," said Tom. "Rest assured I will not desert you. Call at Tullock's on Monday evening, and you will either see me there or find a note from me."

Jacob was overjoyed at the species of promise thus held out to him; and, as it was now midnight, Rainford intimated his intention of taking his departure from the public-house where he had passed the evening with the poor lad.

When he had issued from the door, the highwayman bade Jacob "Good night;" and they separated—pursuing different roads.

In fact, Jacob went towards Leather Lane, while Tom Rainford repaired in the direction of the lodgings which he at present occupied in Gray's Inn Lane—he having removed to that locality from his former abode in Lock's Fields.

CHAPTER XLII.

FRESH ALARMS.

RAINFORD was within twenty yards of the house in which he dwelt, when a woman jostled him somewhat violently as she endeavoured to pass him while pursuing the same direction.

There was no excuse for this rudeness on her part, inasmuch as the pavement was wide in that particular spot, and no other person was on the footway.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the female; "I'm sure—Bless me!" she cried, in a shrill, unmistakable voice,—*"if it is n't Mr. Rainford!"*

"Ah! Mrs. Bunce," returned the highwayman; "what are you doing in this neighbourhood so late?"

"I'm going to pass the night with a relation of mine that's ill, and which lives at the top of the Lane," answered Mrs. Bunce. "But, Oh! Mr. Rainford, what a shocking thing this is about poor dear Mr. Bones!"

"What?" ejaculated Tom, with a kind of guilty start.

"Why, sir—he's dead, poor man!" sobbed Mrs. Bunce: "dead and buried, sir!"

"Dead—and buried!" repeated the highwayman mechanically. "And how came you to know this?"

"His friend Mr. Tidmarsh came and told me and Toby about it this blessed morning; and in the afternoon we all followed the poor old gentleman to the grave in Clerkenwell churchyard."

"His death was sudden, then?" said Tom, anxious to glean how far the woman might be informed relative to the particulars of the event which she was deploring.

"Mr. Tidmarsh is n't given to gossiping, sir," replied Mrs. Bunce; "and he said very little about it. It was quite enough for us to know that the poor dear old gentleman is gone—and without having made any Will either: so me and Toby are thrown as you may say on the wide world, without a friend to help us."

"But Mr. Bones was rich—very rich—was he not?" demanded Tom, who felt particularly un-

comfortable at this confirmation of his worst fears—for he to some extent looked upon himself as the cause of the old fencible's sudden death.

"Rich, God bless ye! Ah! as rich as a King!" exclaimed Mrs. Bunce. "But no one knows where he kept his money—unless it is that Tidmarsh."

"And where did he die?" asked Rainford.

"At Tidmarsh's own place in Turnmill Street, Clerkenwell," was the answer. "Poor old man! But you must have seen him only a short time before he went off, Mr. Rainford," she added, as if recollecting the fact: "for it was on that very night when he took Toby and Jacob over with him to a house in Lock's Fields, and which turned out to be where you lived. You know he stayed with you while Jacob and Toby went away. Poor old man! he's a great loss—a very great loss!"

"Were you so dependent on him, then?" asked Rainford.

"Yes, almost entirely, as I may say," was the reply. "And then there's poor Jacob, too; what in the world he'll do, I'm sure I can't say—for me and Toby can't afford to keep him now that our best friend's gone. But good night, Mr. Rainford: I must go on to my cousin's—for it's very late, and she, may be, will pop off the hooks before I get to her."

"Good night," returned Tom, slackening his pace so as to allow the woman to proceed as far ahead of him as possible ere he entered his own dwelling, which was now close at hand.

In a few moments the form of Mrs. Bunce was lost in the darkness of the night.

Rainford was now convinced that Old Death was indeed no more—that no prompt assistance had resuscitated him, even if the vital spark were not extinct at the moment when he saw him for the last time, bound to the chair, at the house in Red Lion Street. Yes—it was clear enough—too clear: Benjamin Bones was dead—and Tidmarsh had pointed upon all his property.

"Well—let him enjoy it," thought Rainford within himself. "I have enough for my purposes, and do not wish to dispute the inheritance with him—even if I had the right or the power. And yet—and yet," he mused, with a feeling like a contraction of the heart, "I would give ten years of my own life so that I had not been the instrument of abridging his! But it's too late to repent or regret. Repent, did I say? I have nothing to repent of. I did not do this deed wilfully: it was not murder. And as for any share that I had in the matter at all, that does not seem to be suspected. Oh! I can understand Master Tidmarsh's proceedings! It was no doubt he who entered the room just at the moment when I discovered that Old Death was dead. Of course he would say nothing about finding him tied in a chair, or of my having been with him that night: a word on these heads would have excited suspicions—led to inquiries—Coroner's inquest—and all that sort of thing. Then some relation might have turned up, claimed the property, and cut Tidmarsh out. Yes—yes; it is plain enough—and Tidmarsh is a prudent as well as a lucky fellow! But what could the laboratory in that house mean? what were those pickled human heads kept in the cupboard for? and why was Dr. Lancelotti familiar with that den?"

Even in the midst of his musings, Rainford did not hazard a conjecture to account for the mystery

just enumerated. They indeed appeared unaccountable.

The highwayman walked some distance past the door of his lodgings, to convince himself that he was not watched by Mrs. Bunce; and having assured himself on that head,—at least so far as he could judge in the darkness of the night,—he turned back and entered his dwelling.

The next day was the Sabbath; and Rainford was sitting, after breakfast, reading a Sunday paper in the neat parlour of his lodgings.

On the other side of the fire sat a young—beautiful—and dark-eyed woman—in all the rich flush of Jewish beauty,—the softly sweeping outline and symmetrical undulations of her form being developed, rather than concealed, by the loose morning wrapper which she wore; while the ray of the frosty morning's sun glanced on the glossy surface of her raven hair.

Little Charley Watts, nicely dressed, and with his rosy countenance wearing the smiles of happy innocence, was seated on a footstool near Tom Rain, looking at a picture-book, but every now and then glancing affectionately towards those whom he had already learnt to love as if they were his parents.

"Do the advertisements tell you when the next ship will sail from Liverpool for New York, Tom?" inquired the lady.

"Next Friday, my love," answered Rainford. "We will therefore leave London on Thursday."

"Four more days," remarked his female companion. "Oh! how glad I shall be when we are out of sight of England! And yet," she added, with a profound sigh, "I can scarcely bear the thought of parting—perhaps for ever—"

"You must not give way to those mournful reflections," interrupted Tom, in a kind tone. "Remember that we are going to a country where my personal safety will not be endangered,—where we shall not be obliged to shift our lodgings half-a-dozen times in a fortnight,—and where, too, we need not start at every knock that comes to the door. We shall be as happy as the day is long; and, with the money which I now have at my disposal, I may embark in some honest pursuit and earn myself a good name."

"The money will be at the New York banker's before we reach America, I suppose!" said the lady, inquiringly.

"To be sure," replied Tom; "since I paid it all into the hands of the London agent two days ago. Have you taken care of the receipt, or acknowledgment?"

"I locked it up in the little iron box, together with all your other papers," was the answer.

"And those documents that I brought home with me the other night—or rather morning—"

"All safe, dear Tom. But really when you allude to that dreadful night, you make me shudder. Oh! how long—how long did those weary hours seem, until you returned! When you came up into the bed-room and told me that you were going away with that dreadful man Benez—that the time had at length come—that opportunity had at last served your purposes—"

"Well, my dear girl—I recollect all that took place," interrupted Tom, laughing. "You begged me not to go with him—you said you had your misgivings; but I was resolved—for such an occasion might not have occurred again. Did I not tell you

before-hand, when we were down in the country, that if I came up to London and purposely threw myself in the way of Old Death, accident would be sure sooner or later to enable me to wrench from his grasp that gold of which he had plundered me! And have not my words come true? You must not reproach me now, dear girl, at all events—for the danger is over."

"Yes—and the dreadful man is dead!" exclaimed the Jewess, in a tone which expressed a thanksgiving so unequivocally that a cloud for a moment gathered on Rainford's brow.

"He is dead—and can molest us no more," he observed, in a serious tone. "But I could have wished—However," he added, abruptly, "let us avoid that subject: it is not altogether an agreeable one. And now, to return to our intended departure for America, I am somewhat at a loss how to set in respect to that letter, which I obtained last night from Jacob Smith, and which so deeply regards—"

He paused, and glanced significantly towards Charley.

"What can you do in the matter, Tom?" said his beautiful companion. "The letter is too ambiguous—"

"Scarcely ambiguous—but deficient in certain points of information," interrupted Rainford.

"Which is equally mortifying," added the Jewess. "You cannot risk your safety by remaining in England to investigate the affair—even if we had not gone so far in our arrangements for departure—"

"Certainly not," replied Tom: "but I was thinking that I would entrust the letter to my friend Clarence Villiers; and who knows but that some accident may sooner or later throw him into the way of sifting the mystery to the very bottom?"

"Your project is an excellent one," answered the Jewess. "But are you sure that he does not suspect—"

"Suspect what I really am!" ejaculated the highwayman, with that blithe, merry laugh of his which showed his fine white teeth to such advantage. "Not he! He does not know Sir Christopher Blunt—nor the lawyer Howard; and his acquaintance with that consummate fool Frank Curtis was always slight, and not likely to be improved by all that has occurred: for Frank must suspect that Clarence had something to do with the elopement of Old Torrens's daughters. So, all things considered, Clarence cannot have heard of the little affair by which Sir Christopher lost his two thousand pounds."

"Then you will entrust Mr. Villiers with the letter!" said the lady, inquiringly.

"Yes: I will call upon him this evening," responded Tom; "for I have a little hint to give him relative to a certain aunt of his—"

At this moment there was a knock at the front-door of the house; and the servant presently made her appearance to inform Rainford that a young man named Jacob Smith wished to speak to him.

Tom's brow darkened—as the thought flashed across him that the lad had dogged him on the preceding night. But instantly recovering his self-possession, he desired the Jewess and Charley to retire to another room, while he received the visitor.

When Jacob entered the parlour, Rainford looked sternly at him, but said nothing.

"I know what is—what must be passing in your

shed, sir," said Jacob hastily; "but you wrong me—that is, if you think I found out your address by any underhand means of my own."

"Sit down, my boy" cried Tom frankly: "I am sorry if I suspected you even for an instant. But what has brought you here this morning? and how—?"

"I will explain all in a few moments, Mr. Rainford," said Jacob. "Two hours ago—at about eight o'clock—I went up to Bunce's, just to see if they had heard any thing of Old Death; and, to my surprise, I learnt that he was buried yesterday."

"So I have already heard. But go on."

"You know I told you last night that yesterday morning two or three people called in Earl Street to inquire about Old Death, as he had promised to get a thief off at the police-court? Well—at that time, it seems, neither Mrs. Bunce or Toby knew what had become of Mr. Bones: but just afterwards, as I'm told, and when I had gone away from the house, up goes old Tidmarsh, the fuzee, with the news that Mr. Bones was dead, and that the funeral was going to take place in a couple of hours. Quick work, was n't it, sir? So Toby Bunce and his wife went to the funeral; and now it's certain what has really become of Old Death. Tidmarsh told them he died suddenly three or four days ago at his house—of apoplexy. I'm sure he did n't look much like an apoplectic man."

"The best part of all this I learnt last night, soon after I left you," said Rainford.

"And I only heard it when I went up to Bunce's this morning," remarked Jacob. "Well, sir—when Mrs. Bunce had told me this, she said, 'Jacob, I want you to do a particular favour for me, and I will give you a sovereign.'—I asked her what it was."

"I'm pretty sure," she says, 'that Mr. Rainford lives somewhere in Gray's Inn Lane, between Ligonier Street and Colthorpe Street, on the same side of the way as those streets; and you must find out where it is, because I want particularly to know.'—So I promised her I would; and I of course took good care not to say that I had seen you last night. But I was determined to give you notice of Mrs. Bunce's desire to have you watched; and I have been knocking at every door in the neighbourhood, asking if such a gentleman as yourself lived there. In describing you, however, I did not mention any name."

"That was right, Jacob," said Tom; "because I am not known as Rainford here. But what the devil can that old wretch want with me? Has she inherited Old Death's scheming disposition? or does his vengeance pursue me, even from the tomb?"

These last words were totally unintelligible to Jacob, who knew not that the highwayman had had any share in the death of Mr. Benjamin Bones.

"Of course, sir," remarked the lad, after a pause, "I shall go to Mrs. Bunce this evening and assure her that no such person as yourself lives in this neighbourhood. I hope you are not offended with me for hunting after you?"

"Far from it, Jacob," returned Tom: "for I am sure I can trust you. At the same time, you must be cautious how you act, so as not to let Mrs. Bunce imagine that you are playing her false. Try and find out what she wants with me, and meet me at Tullock's to-morrow evening, between seven and eight. No—not at Tullock's either—because that woman knows I am in the habit of going there: but come to me at the public-house in Baldwin's

Buildings where we were last night. Remember—to-morrow evening, at about half-past seven."

"I shall not fail, sir," responded Jacob: and he then took his departure.

The moment he was gone, Rainford hastened up stairs to the bed-room, whither the Jewess and little Charley had retired; and closing the door, he said, "My dear girl, we must be off directly. That horrid woman Mrs. Bunce, of whom I have spoken to you, is after me—and I am afraid for no good."

"Off!" exclaimed the lady: "what—to Liverpool at once?"

"No: but to another lodging—or to a tavern rather—for it will be difficult to obtain apartments on a Sunday. I must stay in town for a day or two longer—or at least till I have seen Villiers. Come—pack up your things, my love—and let us be gone."

"Are you afraid of that lad who has just been?" demanded the Jewess.

"Not a whit! He is staunch to the back-bone—I will swear to it! But he might be followed—or he might commit himself somehow or another, and betray me involuntarily. By-the-bye," ejaculated Tom, after an instant's pause, "I tell you what we will do! We will return to Lock's Fields. It is clear that Mrs. Bunce has found out that we are not living there now—otherwise she would not have set this Jacob to watch me, which she has done; and she would never suspect that we have gone back to our old quarters. So look alive, my love; and pack up the things, while I settle with our landlady here and send for a coach."

Tom Rain's directions were speedily obeyed; and by mid-day the Jewess, Charley, and himself were once more located in Lock's Fields.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE PARAGRAPH IN THE NEWSPAPER.

HAVING partaken of a good dinner and imbibed a glass or two of wine, Tom Rain returned to the perusal of the Sunday newspaper, which he had brought with him to his old lodgings; for the highwayman loved a newspaper dearly—especially the police reports and Old Bailey trials.

But as his eye glanced down a column principally devoted to "Fashionable Intelligence," he was struck with mingled horror and astonishment by the ensuing announcement:—

"It is rumoured that the young and wealthy Earl of Ellingham will shortly lead to the hymeneal altar, the beautiful and accomplished Lady Hatfield. Her ladyship is a peeress in her own right, that distinction having been conferred upon her in consequence of the eminent services of her ladyship's deceased father."

Tom Rain was absolutely stupefied by this paragraph!—so stupefied, indeed, that he sat gazing upon it in a species of vacant wonderment,—not starting, nor uttering any ejaculation—so that neither the Jewess nor Charley Watts, who were both in the room, noticed his emotion.

At length he recovered himself, and read and re-read the paragraph until he could have repeated it by heart.

The shades of evening were gathering fast over this hemisphere; and he had therefore now a good excuse for going out—for that announcement is



the Sunday paper had produced such an effect upon him that he felt he could not rest until he had performed a duty—an imperious but most painful duty!

Having hastily arranged his toilette in the bedroom up stairs, and put on a dark upper coat and a large woollen "comforter," he called forth—but not without having previously kissed both the Jewess and little Charley.

At the nearest coach-stand he entered a hack-vehicle, and ordered the driver to take him to the residence of Lady Hatfield, in Piccadilly.

But ere the coach arrived quite opposite the front door of the fair patrician's abode, Rainford alighted, and dismissed the vehicle.

Then he advanced to the house:—but it was with the step of a man who would rather—oh! a thousand times rather—have fled in any other direction.

His hand was on the knocker, and he hesitated,—yes, he hesitated; and that hand trembled.

It must have been some powerful cause that could have made the gallant—daredevil—almost hair-brained Tom Rain manifest so much emotion.

But at length the summons was given; and a livery-servant opened the door.

To Rainford's inquiry whether Lady Hatfield were at home, an affirmative answer was given.

"Say to your mistress," returned the highwayman, "that a person wishes to speak to her upon very particular business—and do me the favour to show me to a room where I can see her ladyship alone."

The servant hesitated a moment—for the excited tone in which the request was made somewhat surprised him. But remembering that it was not his business to question his lady's visitors, he conducted Rainford into a parlour where a fire was burning in the grate; and, having lighted the candles, the domestic retired to deliver to Lady Hatfield the message which he had received.

The few minutes which elapsed ere the door of that room again opened, seemed like an age to Tom Rain. He first sat down; then he rose again and stood before the fire in a state of extraordinary nervousness. In fact, he appeared perfectly unarmoured.

We can conceive the feelings of appalling doubt—hope mingled with terrific fear—and agonising

surprise, that must be experienced by an individual accused of a capital crime, and awaiting in the dock the return of the jury in whose hands are his life and death.

Such was the state of Tom Rains during the five mortal minutes that elapsed ere the door again opened.

At length it did open—and, though he had his back turned towards it, yet the rustling of silk and a light, airy tread convinced him that the lady of the house was now in that room.

He turned: the light streamed full upon his countenance—for he had laid aside his hat and woollen comforter; and Lady Hatfield—for it was she—uttered a faint scream as her eyes met his.

"Pardon this intrusion—fear me not now, my lady!" exclaimed Rainford hastily: "but grant me five minutes' attention, I implore you—not for my sake—for yours!"

Georgiana had started back, and had become pale as death when she recognised the highwayman: but even while he was yet speaking, she recovered herself sufficiently to approach the spot where he was standing.

Then, without sitting down—but leaning her arm upon the mantelpiece, as if for support,—she said in a hoarse and hollow tone, "My God! what would you with me?"

"Lady Hatfield," returned Rainford, in a mournful and even solemn tone, "forget the past—if you can—for a few minutes—"

"Forget the past!" repeated Georgiana hysterically, her whole frame convulsed with horror. "Oh! terrible man, wherefore have you come hither! have you not injured me enough! what do you now seek!—my life?"

And, as she uttered these last words, the syllables seemed to hiss between her set teeth—and her bosom heaved and fell rapidly with spasmodic palpitation.

"Listen to me, madam—I implore you!" exclaimed Rainford, earnestly perplexed and deeply touched by the agonising emotions which his presence occasioned. "I know that the sight of me must be abhorrent—loathsome to you; but it will be your fault if our interview is protracted beyond the few minutes which I ask you to grant me."

"Speak, sir—speak quickly!" cried Georgiana hysterically. "But mark me, sir," she added in a firmer and more resolute tone, while her usually placid glances seemed to glare with deadly hatred against the highwayman,—"*mark me!*" she repeated—"*if your intention be to coerce me again to commit a crime for your sake, you will not succeed. But a few days have elapsed since the stain of perjury—rank, abhorrent perjury—was fastened on my soul—and to save you! Oh! that I could have been so weak as to yield to your insolent command to swear to that which was false—atroaciously, vilely false, at the bar of justice! And now proceed, sir, with the business which has brought you hither!"*

"Lady Hatfield—I cannot, I dare not explain myself, while you labour under this dreadful excitement!" said Rainford, himself painfully excited. "Calm yourself, I implore you—for what I have to say most nearly concerns your interests."

"My interest!" repeated Georgiana in a sorrowful voice. "But proceed—go on, sir—I will be calm."

"I observed in a newspaper of this day's date,"

continued Rainford, "that your ladyship is about to become the wife of the Earl of Ellingham."

Lady Hatfield gazed upon the highwayman in that vacant manner which left it doubtful whether she were the prey to feelings of surprise—terror—or despair.

"And if that rumour be true, my lady," added Rainford, after a moment's pause, "I would have you reflect on the propriety of this matrimonial connexion."

"My God! he assumes a right to dictate to me!" almost shrieked Georgiana, as she sank back upon a sofa, clasping her hands together in the excess of her mental anguish.

"No—my lady—*not* to dictate!" said Rainford. "I have not a shadow of a right to do that: it were the height of madness—the height of presumption—an insolence beyond all parallel on my part—in fact a deed so monstrously inconsistent with even common sense—"

"That you are surprised I should have entertained the idea!" added Georgiana, with an irony and bitterness which seemed lent her by despair.

"My God! I forewarn all the terrors of this interview!" exclaimed Rainford with feverish impatience.

"Then wherefore did you come!" demanded Georgiana. "Is it to expose me—to persecute me who have never offended you, but who have suffered so deeply—deeply—"

"Madam, I came to perform a painful duty," interrupted the highwayman; "and the sooner I accomplish it the better. Oh! you know not—you will not give me credit for the ineffable pity—the profound commiseration which I feel for you,—as well as the loathing—the abhorrence—the shame—the disgust in which I hold myself:—but I cannot recall the past. Would to God that I could!"

"Then you mean me no harm!" exclaimed Georgiana eagerly.

"Mean you harm, madam!" repeated Rainford enthusiastically: "merciful heavens! if to mitigate one single pang of the many—many with which your breast must throbb, poor innocent sufferer that you are—a sufferer through my detestable crime,—if to relieve you of any portion of the load that weighs upon your mind—were that portion no heavier than a hair,—if to do this my life would suffice, I would lay it down, madam, at your feet! Think you that I glory in what I have done? No—no: bad as I am—criminal as I am—robber, plunderer as I am, and as you know me to be,—yet I have feelings—aye, and a conscience too! And, often—often, my lady, when the smile is upon my lip, that conscience is gnawing my heart's core—for I think of you! And all this is true as God's own justice is true,—true as that you are an innocent and a noble lady, and that I am a despicable villain!"

And Tom Rains—the gallant, dashing, almost hair-brained Tom Rains—burst into tears.

Georgiana gazed upon him in astonishment—in profound astonishment; and she was softened towards that bold and desperate man who wept on her account!

"But wherefore have you sought me this evening!" she said, in a milder and more gentle tone than she had yet used during this remarkable—this solemnly interesting meeting.

"It is not to demand your pardon, madam," returned Rainford, dashing away the tears from his

manly countenance; "because that you can never give! It is not to assert any presumed right to dictate to you in respect to your marriage, because that were adding the most flagrant cruelty to the most atrocious wrong. But it is to inform your ladyship that if you contract this marriage with the Earl of Ellingham, you wed one who is——"

"Who is what?" gasped Georgiana, almost suffocating.

Rainford paused for a few moments: it required these few moments to enable him to conquer emotions of so terrible a nature that they almost choked his powers of utterance:—then, bending down until his very lips touched Georgiana's ear, and his hair mingled with hers, he whispered a few words in a faint and scarcely audible tone.

But she heard them plainly—oh! far too plainly: and when he withdrew his face from its proximity to her head, and glanced upon her countenance, he saw, with feelings awfully shocked, that she sat mute—motionless—the image of despair.

Alas! she spoke not—she looked neither to the right nor to the left: her eyes seemed to be fixed upon the face of the highwayman;—and yet she saw him not—she was gazing on vacancy.

This dreadful state of stupefaction—the paralysis of despair—lasted for upwards of three minutes,—a perfect age alike to her who endured, and to him who beheld it.

Then suddenly burst from Lady Hatfield's lips a long—loud—piercing scream,—a scream so appalling that the very house appeared to shake with the vibration of the air which was cut by that shriek as by a keen-edged sword.

"Merciful God! if the whole place will be alarmed!" ejaculated the highwayman. "Compose yourself, madam——"

But vainly did he thus address himself to the unhappy Georgiana: she had fallen back insensible upon the sofa.

The door opened abruptly; but Tom Rain was rooted to the spot where he stood gazing on the motionless form of that wretched lady,—stood gazing too in horrified amazement at the effect which his whispered words had produced.

The scream to which Lady Hatfield had given vent in the paroxysm of her ineffable anguish, had reached the ears not only of the domestics in the kitchen but also of the company in the drawing-room— for there were guests that evening at Georgiana's residence.

Thus, when the door burst open, a crowd of persons poured in,—Lord Ellingham, Dr. Lascelles, Sir Ralph Walsingham, three or four ladies, and all the servants.

Miss Mordaunt, we should observe, was no longer an inmate of Lady Hatfield's abode—for reasons that will be explained hereafter.

Lord Ellingham was the foremost of the crowd; and the first object that met his eyes, as he rushed into the room, was his Georgiana stretched senseless on the sofa. He saw a man standing near, but did not pause to cast a second glance upon him: the state in which he found his beloved engrossed all his thoughts.

He raised her in his arms—the ladies produced their smelling-bottles—the female servants hastened to fetch water, vinegar, and anything else that struck them as useful under the circumstances—and Dr. Lascelles, who had recognised Tom Rain, though

without appearing to do so, professionally superintended all the means resorted to for the purpose of restoring suspended animation,—while the highwayman still looked on with a kind of mechanical attention.

At length Georgiana opened her eyes slowly; but the moment they caught a glimpse of Lord Ellingham's countenance, a faint cry escaped her lips—and she covered her face with her hands as if to shut out some terrible object from her view.

"Georgiana, dearest—'tis I," murmured Arthur in her ear.

But a dreadful shudder seemed to convulse her entire frame.

"Some one has terrified her—alarmed her!" exclaimed the Earl, colouring with anger; and as he glanced rapidly around, his eyes met those of the highwayman.

At that moment Dr. Lascelles desired that Lady Hatfield should be supported to her own chamber; and this suggestion was immediately followed by the female friends and servants, the physician accompanying them.

CHAPTER XLIII.

LORD ELLINGHAM AND TOM RAINFORD.

LORD ELLINGHAM and Sir Ralph Walsingham remained behind in the apartment, where Rainford also still was.

"Sir," said the nobleman, advancing towards the highwayman, "you will perhaps be kind enough to explain the cause of her ladyship's emotion?—for the scream which reached our ears, and the condition in which we found her, denote something more serious than sudden indisposition. This gentleman, sir," added the Earl, indicating Sir Ralph Walsingham with a glance, "is Lady Hatfield's uncle: you therefore need not hesitate to address yourself to him—even should you decline to vouchsafe an explanation to me, who am a total stranger to you."

"Yes, my lord—for I know you well by sight—we are total strangers to each other," replied Rainford in a singularly mournful tone. "And yet——"

But he stopped short, seized his hat, and was about to hasten from the room, when the Earl caught him somewhat rudely by the arm, saying,— "Mr. Rainford—for such I believe to be your name—we cannot part with you thus! A lady—dear, very dear to me, and who indeed will shortly be my wife,—dear also to Sir Ralph Walsingham, who is now present,—that lady has been alarmed—terrified in some manner, by you; and we must insist upon an explanation."

"My lord," returned Tom Rain in a tone of deep emotion, as he gazed with peculiar—almost scrutinizing attention upon the Earl's countenance,— "no other man on earth would thus have dared to stop me with impunity. As for explanations," he continued, his voice suddenly assuming a little of its usual reckless indifference, "I have none to give."

And again he moved towards the door.

But Lord Ellingham hastened to place his back against it in a determined manner: while Rainford, as if discouraged and daunted, fell back a few paces.

"Mr. Rainford," exclaimed the Earl, "this matter cannot pass off thus. I insist upon an explana-

tion; or I shall consider it to be my duty to detain you until Lady Hatfield be sufficiently recovered to declare the nature of the treatment she has experienced at your hands. Moreover, sir," added the nobleman, observing that Rainford's lip blanched and quivered nervously, "you are to a certain degree an object of suspicion in my eyes. A variety of circumstances have combined to prove to me that you were implicated, to some degree, in the theft of diamonds which lately caused so much embarrassment at the police-court."

"My lord, that business does not regard you," replied the highwayman. "The diamonds were restored to their lawful owner; and—more than that—I even ascertained from Mr. Gordon's own lips that they were paid for, before their restoration, by one who—But let me depart, my lord, I say!" ejaculated Tom, his manner suddenly changing from nervous trepidation to the excitement of impatience.

"You must remain here, sir," said Arthur coldly, "until we ascertain whether it be Lady Hatfield's pleasure that your detention should assume a more serious aspect."

"Allow me to pass, my dear Earl," exclaimed Sir Ralph; "and I will hasten to ascertain how my niece is now, and what her intentions are with respect to this person."

Rainford paced the room in an agitated manner, while Lord Ellingham afforded egress to the baronet, and then resumed his position of sentinel with his back placed against the door.

"My lord," at length said the highwayman, advancing close up to the Earl, and speaking in a low, oppressed tone, "you will find that her ladyship has no complaint to make against me. Permit me to take my departure; and again I tell you that of no other living soul would I solicit as a favour what I would demand by force."

"I cannot allow you to leave this room—at least until the return of Sir Ralph Walsingham," answered the Earl. "Lady Hatfield must have been insulted or menaced by you in some way—"

"I take God to witness that I neither insulted nor menaced her!" interrupted Rainford, warmly.

"If your liberty be endangered," said the nobleman, "it is well worth a falsehood to attempt to avert the peril."

"My God! this from *him*!" muttered Rainford bitterly to himself, as he once more turned round to pace the room: then, at the expiration of a minute, he said in a calmer tone, "Well, my lord—I am content to wait until the decision of her ladyship is made known in respect to me. And since it appears that we shall have a few moments more of each other's society, permit me to ask,—your lordship having just now alluded to a certain transaction at a police-court,—permit me to ask, I say, whether you really believe that Miss Esther de Medina was innocent or guilty of the charge imputed to her?"

"This is rather a singular question—coming from you, Mr. Rainford!" exclaimed the Earl; "and before I answer it, allow me to ask whether it was not you who left a certain letter at my house, desiring me to repair to the police-office on that occasion?"

"I will not deny the fact, my lord," replied Rainford. "Indeed, I did not particularly study concealment respecting it—else would I not have af-

forded your lordship's servants an opportunity of describing to you the personal appearance of the individual who left that letter. But if your lordship entertains even the shadow of a suspicion injurious to the character of Miss de Medina, you are wrong—you are in error!—yes—as grievously in error as ever mistaken man could be. Besides, my lord," added Rainford hastily, "you are well aware that the *alibi* which your lordship proved was correct."

"And how knew you that Miss de Medina was with her father and myself at Finchley on the very day, and at the very hour, when the diamonds were alleged to have been taken?" demanded the Earl.

"It would be useless to pretend that accident gave me the information," answered Tom Rain. "But think not that she employed me as an agent or as a messenger to obtain the intervention of your lordship—"

"Mr. Rainford," said the Earl haughtily, "I dislike the present conversation. I have the highest opinion of Mr. de Medina, and should be sorry to think ill of any one connected with him. But I must candidly confess that there is so much mystery respecting the character of his daughter—a mystery, too, existing on account of yourself, for which reason alone do I condescend to discuss with you any affair relating to Mr. de Medina or his family—"

"Lord Ellingham," interrupted Rainford in a hasty and impetuous tone, "Esther de Medina is the very personification of innocence and virtue! As God is my judge, she was ignorant of my interference in her behalf on that day when she was accused of a deed from which her pure soul would recoil with horror;—she knew not even that I was in the court—"

"And yet you were there, Mr. Rainford," exclaimed the Earl: "for I noticed you—although at the time I knew not who you were."

"But Miss de Medina was not aware of my presence," rejoined Rainford emphatically; "for she does not know me by sight!"

A smile of incredulity curled the nobleman's lip—for the oath which Mr. de Medina had administered to his daughter, and in which her connexion with Rainford was so emphatically mentioned, was uppermost in his mind. But he dared not allude to that circumstance; although he would have been truly rejoiced to receive the conviction that Esther was indeed far different from what he was at present compelled to believe her to be.

"Your lordship said *ere* now," resumed Tom Rain, "that you noticed me in the court, although at the time you knew not who I was. Those were your words. Does your lordship now know who I am?"

"I cannot boast of a very intimate acquaintance with you or your affairs, Mr. Rainford," returned the nobleman with a hauteur bordering on contempt; "and what I do know of you is so little in your favour that you see I am detaining you here on the suspicion that your visit to Lady Hatfield was for so good purpose. In fact, the first I ever heard of you was in reference to the charge on account of which you yourself figured at Bow Street some short time since,—a charge of which, I am bound to say, you were honourably acquitted, Lady Hatfield having satisfactorily proved that you were not the person who robbed her on the highway."

"Thus far, my lord," said Rainford, "you have no just ground to speak disparagingly of my character."

"Certainly not. But then comes the affair of the diamonds; and I do not hesitate to inform you that Mr. Gordon related to me all the particulars of your interview with him, when you called to restore the jewels, and when he made you aware of the fact that Miss de Medina had already been to pay him the full value thereof."

"Ah! Mr. Gordon was thus communicative!" observed Rainford.

"Yes—and not sparing of his aspersions against the character of Miss de Medina," returned the Earl. "But I defended her, Mr. Rainford—I defended her then—"

"And wherefore should you not defend her now, my lord?" demanded the highwayman. "Oh! were I to reveal to you by what wondrous combination of circumstances—but, no! I dare not. And yet, my lord," he added in an earnest, solemn tone, "you are an upright—a generous-hearted man; and I appeal to your good feelings—I implore you not to trant to outward appearance. As there is a God above, Esther de Medina is innocent of every thing—any thing that scandal or misconception may have imputed to her. Again you smile incredulously—and yet mournfully, my lord! Ah! I can assure you, that Esther is innocent—oh! believe her to be innocent!"

At this moment footsteps were heard approaching the door, which Lord Ellingham accordingly opened; and Sir Ralph Walsingham re-appeared.

"How is Georgiana now?" inquired the nobleman hastily.

"My niece is ill—very ill," returned the baronet. "Ill!" ejaculated Arthur. "Ah! villain—this is your work!" he cried, rushing towards the highwayman.

"Keep off!" thundered Rainford: "you know not when you would strike!"

"No—touch him not!" cried Sir Ralph, catching the Earl by the arm, and holding him back. "I have seen my niece—Dr. Lascelles is now alone with her: she is more composed—though very far from well;—and she begs that this person may be allowed to depart without the slightest molestation."

"Her ladyship shall be obeyed, Sir Ralph," returned the nobleman. "Mr. Rainford, you have heard the message that has been sent relative to yourself."

Having thus spoken, Arthur turned aside;—for a strange mingling—a vague suspicion—no, not a suspicion either,—but a feeling of dissatisfaction had stolen into his mind. If Rainford had alarmed or insulted Lady Hatfield, wherefore should she allow him to go unpunished? Was it not more probable that he had brought her some evil tidings? But how could there exist any connexion, however remote or slight, between that man of equivocal character and Georgiana Hatfield? What business could possibly bring them together, and produce so strange—so powerful an impression upon her?

All these ideas rushed to the Earl's mind in rapid and bewildering succession; and the reader need not be astonished if we repeat that a sentiment of dissatisfaction—almost amounting to a vague suspicion, but of what he knew not—had suddenly taken a firm hold of his imagination.

Who was this Rainford, after all? Was he other than he seemed? Could he be in any way connected with that narrative of the Black Mask which the Earl supposed to have partially affected his Georgiana's mind, and which he looked upon as the cause of that apparent fickleness or caprice which had first led her to refuse his proffered hand? The more he involved himself in conjecture, the deeper did he plunge into a labyrinth which grew darker and more bewildering at every step.

When he turned round again towards the place where he had left Rainford standing, that individual was gone; and the nobleman was alone with Sir Ralph Walsingham.

"You have seen Georgiana?" said Arthur, advancing towards the baronet and grasping his hand with the convulsive violence of deep emotion.

"I have, my dear Earl; and she appears as if she had received some severe shock," was the reply.

"What, in the name of God! does all this mean?" exclaimed the nobleman, with wildness in his tone.

"I know not—I cannot comprehend it," answered the uncle, as much bewildered as the lover.

"But did you not question your niece? did she offer no explanation? did she not state the cause of her emotion—that piercing scream—that fainting—that movement of horror when she recovered?" demanded the Earl, impatiently.

"I questioned her; but, perceiving that it only augmented her agitation, I did not press a painful interrogatory," replied Sir Ralph. "When I informed her that you had detained that man, whom I heard you address by the name of Rainford, and whom I therefore supposed to have been the person suspected of robbing my niece,—when I informed her that you had detained him, I say, she was greatly excited, and desired me to hasten and request you to allow him to depart immediately, as she had no cause of complaint against him."

"Strange!—most strange!" murmured the Earl.

"Have patience, my dear Arthur," said Sir Ralph. "To-morrow Georgiana will be better; and then she will doubtless explain—"

"To-morrow—to-morrow!" repeated the nobleman impatiently. "Oh! what suspense—what terrible suspense! Ah! Sir Ralph, you know not how wretchedly will pass the weary hours of this night! If I could but see her—only for a moment! Would it be indiscreet? Dear Sir Ralph, have pity upon me, and ask Lascelles to come and speak to me."

The baronet, who was a kind-hearted man, instantly departed to execute this commission; and in a few minutes he returned, accompanied by the physician.

To the latter the Earl repeated the same question which he had already addressed to Sir Ralph Walsingham:—"What, in the name of God! does all this mean?"

And the Doctor gave almost a similar reply:—"I know not—I cannot understand it."

But there was less sincerity in this answer as given by Lascelles than there was in the same response as uttered from the heart by the frank and honest baronet:—for the physician had his suspicions relative to the mysterious connexion which now appeared to subsist between Lady Hatfield and the individual whose visit had caused so much painful excitement.

"That villain Rainford! I am sorry even now

that I suffered him to escape!" ejaculated the Earl, scarcely knowing how to act or speak.

"Rainford!" cried the physician. "Why, that is the name of the man who was taken up on suspicion of having robbed her ladyship near Hounslow!"

"And that was Thomas Rainford who was here ere now!" returned Arthur, with bitter emphasis, as if he hated the name.

"Rainford!" repeated the physician, in astonishment. "I thought that man's name was Jameson!"

The reader will remember that such was the denomination under which the highwayman passed when residing in South Moulton Street.

"What! do you know him!" demanded the Earl, gazing upon the doctor with unfeigned surprise.

"I once attended a patient at his abode," was the laconic reply: for Lascelles remembered the solemn promise which he had made to Tom Rain on that occasion.

"And where did he live?" inquired Arthur, eagerly. "I may wish to see that man again."

"Where he lived then, he does not live now," returned the physician; "for he moved away the very next day after I was called in; and whither he went to, the people of the house know not."

"I believe him to be a man of bad character," observed Arthur hastily. "But enough of him—at least for the present. Doctor, can I be permitted to see Lady Hatfield for a few minutes?"

"Impossible for to-night, my dear Earl," replied the physician. "Her ladyship is in a state of nervous agitation—feverish excitement, indeed,—and must not be disturbed. Her maids are now with her, and she is about to retire to rest. To-morrow, my dear Ellingham, you shall see her—that is, provided she is more composed."

"Then must I submit to this weary night of suspense!" exclaimed the young nobleman. "But to-morrow, Doctor, I may see her. You have promised that I shall see her to-morrow! My visit will be somewhat early. Will it be indiscreet if I call at eleven?"

"Call at eleven, then," returned the physician, smiling at his friend's impatience. "But I think I ought to administer a composing draught to you."

The Earl and Sir Ralph Walsingham shook hands with Dr. Lascelles, and took their departure. The other guests had already gone; but the physician remained behind to see his fair patient once more ere he returned home.

When Lascelles found himself alone in the apartment which the young nobleman and the baronet had just left, he fell into a train of reflection which, like the Earl's state of mind, was strangely characterized by perplexity. Were the Doctor's thoughts put into words, they would assume as nearly as possible the ensuing shape:—

"Well, this is an evening of unpleasant adventure! That Jameson, or Rainford, or whatever his name is, has brought confusion and dismay into the house. Perplexities increase rapidly. I remember all that Ellingham said to me the day that he called to inform me that he was the happiest of men, and that her ladyship had accepted him. He declared then that he knew all—that he would never allow what must be considered a misfortune to stand in the way of his happiness—and so on. I also remem-

ber complimenting him on his moral courage in rising superior to a common prejudice; and then we dropped the conversation because we agreed that it was a delicate subject. And so it was, too! a devilish delicate subject! And I had found out the grand secret by stealth! Ah! the effects of that opiate were powerful, and she has never suspected that I did find out the secret. But Ellingham scarcely seems to have his wits about him; or else he must suspect the object of this Rainford's visit. It's as clear as daylight! Rainford is the man—and now he wants to extort money from her ladyship. But Ellingham cannot put two and two together as I can;—and the physician rubbed his hands complacently, little suspecting that his sapient conjecture relative to the object of the highwayman's visit was totally wrong, as the reader is aware.—"This Rainford is an extraordinary character; and I do believe that he really robbed her ladyship, but that she did not dare say so in the police-court. He has the cut of a dashing fellow who would as soon rifle a pocket as drink a bumper of wine. Curse him, for having intruded on the mysteries of my laboratory! Oh! if Ellingham only knew what I know about the beautiful Esther de Medina—the charming Jewess! What deceivers some women are! To look on Esther, one would think she was purity itself! And yet—"

The physician's reverie was interrupted by the entrance of a female servant, who came to inform him that Lady Hatfield had retired to her bed, and that the Doctor might now visit her again. He accordingly repaired to her chamber, and having prescribed some composing medicine, took his departure, without once alluding to the incidents of the evening; for he was anxious that Georgiana's mind should remain as free from causes of excitement and agitation as possible.

CHAPTER XLIV.

MR. FRANK CURTIS AGAIN.

In the meantime, Thomas Rainford had quitted the abode of Lady Hatfield with a heavy heart: for the duty which he had felt himself called upon to perform, in making a particular statement to Georgiana, had pained—scarcely pained his generous soul.

He had not proceeded many yards from that lady's dwelling, when he suddenly encountered Mr. Frank Curtis; and as at that precise moment the glare of a lamp streamed full upon Rainford's countenance, he was immediately recognised by that impudent young gentleman.

"Ah! Captain Sparks!" ejaculated Frank: "so we meet again, do we? Well, it's very fortunate that I did see accept my friend the Duke's invitation to his select dinner-party; or else I should have missed this pleasure. Now what is to prevent me from collaring you, my fine fellow, and raising a hue and cry?"

"Fear, Mr. Curtis—fear will prevent you," returned Tom Rain, recovering all his wonted presence of mind; and, taking the young man's arm, he said, "Walk a little way with me. I want to have a few minutes' chat with you. Here—put your hand on my great coat pocket: that's right! Now you can feel a pistol inside—eh? Well, his companion is in the other pocket; and you must

know enough of me already, to be fully aware that my treachery on your part would meet with its reward; for I would shoot you in the open street, if you attempted to place my liberty in danger."

"I'm sure I—I do not want to injure you, Captain Sparks," stammered Frank, trembling from head to foot as he walked along, arm-in-arm with the highwayman. "I always took you for a capital fellow—and I should very much like to drink a bottle of wine with you. What do you say? Shall we go into the *Gloster*, or *Hatchett's*—"

"Neither one nor the other, Mr. Curtis," interrupted Rainford. "I thank you for your civility all the same."

"Oh! it's nothing, Captain. I learnt politeness in France, where, to be sure, I had excellent—I may say peculiar advantages. The King was very much attached to me—and as for the ladies of the Court—Oh! do not ask me to speak about them, Captain Sparks!"

"Indeed I will not," returned Tom drily. "I want you to let me know how your uncle gets on. Does he still remember that pleasant little adventure—ha! ha!"—and the highwayman's merry laugh denoted that his spirits were reviving once more.

"Sir Christopher! Oh! the old fool—do not talk to me about him!" ejaculated Frank Curtis. "I have done with my uncle—I shall cut him—I can never speak to him again, Captain Sparks. He has disgraced himself—disgraced his family, which was a very ancient one—"

"I always thought Sir Christopher made a boast of having risen from nothing!" said Tom broadly.

"Ah! so he did. But that was only a part of his system of gammoning people," continued Frank. "His family was originally the celebrated *Biscodivilles* of France: about three thousand years ago they settled in Scotland, and their name was corrupted to *Biscodil*—then a branch came to England about fifteen hundred years ago, and in process of time they spelt their name with a *i*—*Biscodil*. At last the *e* was left out, and it became *Biscodil*; and God only knows why, but three hundred and seventy-seven years ago, come next Michaelmas, the *e* was dropped, and the name settled down into simple *Biscod*. So you see, Captain, that Sir Christopher is of a good family after all."

"Why do not you try and get a situation in the *Herald's College*!" demanded Rainford. "You would be able to find pedigree for all the *Browns*, *Jones's*, *Thompsons*, and *Smiths* in the country."

"Come—come, Captain Sparks," exclaimed Frank; "this observation is not fair on your part. I may have my faults—I know I have; but I do not shoot with the long bow. I hate that kind of thing!"

"But let us return to the subject of your uncle Sir Christopher," said Tom. "What has he been doing?"

"Ran away with a lady's-maid—gone to *Gretna* with *Lady Hatfield's* female servant *Charlotte*!" cried Frank, with great bitterness of tone. "The damned old fool!—but I'll cut him—cut him dead—and that's some consolation."

"Gone to *Gretna* with *Lady Hatfield's* maid!" exclaimed Rainford.

"Maid, indeed! I hope he'll find her so!" said

Curtis. "The hussey! But I'll be even with her yet!"

"And when did this happen?" inquired Tom.

"Oh! only a few days ago. They are not come back yet. I dare say Sir Christopher already repents his bargain. But I'll cut him!"

"I'm afraid if you cut his acquaintances, he'll cut off your supplies," observed Rainford jocosely.

"And what does that matter?" ejaculated Frank.

"Do you think there are no rich women in London that would be glad to have a decent-looking fellow like myself. Egad! I've already got introduced to a widow as wealthy as if her late husband had been a *Nabob*. It's true that she's blest with five pledges of the said late husband's affection; but then she's got five thousand a-year—and one five is a good set-off against the other, Captain Sparks. Rather so—eh! old fellow?"

"Well, I think it is," returned the highwayman.

"But how did all this happen about Sir Christopher and the lady's-maid?"

"I'll tell you," answered Curtis. "You see, Sir Christopher was going to run away with *Miss Merdaunt*, *Lady Hatfield's* friend, and I found it out in one of my clever ways. So I resolved to haul Sir Christopher; and I bribed this lady's-maid *Charlotte*—in fact, I gave her five hundred pounds and a gold watch, the hussey!—to go to the appointment, get into the carriage, personate *Miss Julia Merdaunt*, and keep up the farce until they got to *St. Alban's*, where me and a parcel of my friends were to be at the inn to receive them. That was to be the joke."

"And how did the joke turn so completely against yourself?" asked Tom.

"Why, me and my friends waited—and waited—and waited at the infernal hotel at *St. Alban's*; and no Sir Christopher—no *Charlotte* came. We had a glorious supper, and made a regular night of it. All next day we waited—and waited again; but no Sir Christopher—no *Charlotte*. 'What the devil can this mean?' thought I to myself. So I came up to London, leaving my friends at the inn at *St. Alban's* in pawn for the bill—for somehow or another some of us had money enough about us to settle in. Well, when I came back to town, I went home; that is, you know, to my uncle's house in *Jernyn Street*; and there I found a letter that had just come for me by the post. It was written from some town a good way north, and was from Sir Christopher. I began to think something was wrong; and sure enough there was! For, when I opened the letter, I found that my silly old uncle had written to thank me for throwing in his way a delightful and most amiable woman, who had consented to take his name and share his fortune. The letter went on to say that they were then pretty far on their road to *Gretna*, and that as they should stop at *St. Alban's* as they came back, I might be there, if I chose, to have the pleasure of handing my sweet out of the carriage. That was all said to irritate me, you know, Captain Sparks; and most likely that wixen *Charlotte* made Sir Christopher write the letter just to annoy me. But I'll cut them both dead; and we shall see what my precious oscar—for such she is by this time, I suppose—will say then!"

"This is really a very pleasant little adventure," cried Tom Rala. "But I think you carried your joke too far, Mr. Curtis; and so it has recoiled on yourself. Have you seen Mr. *Torrans* lately?"

"Not I!" exclaimed Curtis. "But don't you confess, Captain, that you carried matters a trifle too far that night? Never mind the two thousand pounds: I'm glad my old hunk of an uncle has lost that! But I allude to the affair of helping the gals to run away. I suppose you were in league with Villiers all the time!"

"What makes you think that Villiers had any thing to do with the matter?" inquired Rainford.

"Simply because I do n't imagine you carried off the gals for your own sake. However," continued Frank, "I care but little about the matter now. I certainly liked Adela's very much at the time; but there are plenty of others in the world quite as handsome. Besides, I now see through all Sir Christopher's trickery in wanting me to marry Miss Torrens in such a deuce of a hurry, and in giving me a separate establishment. The old bird wanted to commit matrimony himself; and I should have been poked off with a few paltry hundreds a-year."

"And so you will now," said Tom. "Or matters may be even worse, after the trick you endeavoured to play upon your uncle."

"Not a bit of it!" cried Frank. "Had old Blunt's scheme succeeded, I should have been married to a portionless gal, and forced to live on whatever he chose to give me. Now that his project has failed, I am free and unshackled, and can secure myself a position by marriage. I might even look as high as my friend the Duke's niece; but she is horribly ill-tempered, and so I think of making an offer of my heart and hand—I can do the thing well if I like, you know, Captain—to Mrs. Goldberry, the widow I spoke of just now."

"The same sounds well, I confess," observed Tom. "But did your uncle never—I mean, did he not instruct his lawyer to adopt any proceedings about that little affair of the two thousand pounds?"

"Not he, Captain!" exclaimed Frank Curtis. "As far as my uncle is concerned, you may rest quite satisfied that he will never take any notice of the business; and Howard would n't act without his instructions."

"They had now reached Charing Cross; and Tom Rain, having had quite enough of Mr. Curtis's company, signified his desire that they should separate.

"You won't pass an hour with me over a bottle of wine?" said the young man. "I really should like to have a chat with such a gallant, dashing fellow as you are, Captain; and you're quite after my own heart—having the—"

"The highway business—eh?" cried Tom, laughing. "Why, you cannot for a minute suppose that it is my regular profession, Mr. Curtis? No such a thing! I merely eased you of the two thousand pounds for the joke of it—just as you played off your tricks on Sir Christopher."

"You talk about easing me, Captain," returned Frank; "but I can assure you that you're the real man that ever got the better of me. Don't fancy for a moment that I—I'm a coward, Captain 'Sparks—"

"Far from it, my dear sir," exclaimed Tom. "I know you to be as brave as you are straight-forward in your conversation. So good night—and pray take care not to follow me; for I've an awkward habit of turning round and knocking on the head any one that I imagine to be watching me."

With these words the highwayman hurried off up the Strand; and Frank Curtis entered a cigar shop, muttering to himself, "Damn the fellow! I almost think he meant that for insolence. Egad! if he did, the next time I meet him—"

But the valiant young gentleman did not probably make up his mind what he should do, in the case supposed; and any resentment which he experienced, speedily evaporated with the soothing influence of a cheroot.

Meantime Tom Rain pursued his way along the Strand and Fleet Street, and repaired to the lodgings of Mr. Clarence Villiers in Bridge Street.

That gentleman was at home, and received his visitor in a very friendly manner.

"You are most welcome, Captain Sparks," he said; "and the more so if you intend to pass an hour or two with me; for my aunt is so very particular that she would take the girls to church with her this evening; but of course I did not offer to accompany them, as I could not wear a veil over my face, you know," he added, laughing; "and were I recognised by Mr. Torrens or any of his friends, attention would be immediately directed to any ladies who might happen to be in my company. So I shall not visit Old Burlington Street this evening; and if you will bear me company over a bottle of wine—"

"I cannot possibly remain many minutes," interrupted Rainford. "In fact I am going to leave England very shortly—"

"Leave England!" ejaculated Clarence. "I am truly sorry to hear that announcement—just as we begin to get friendly together."

"Circumstances compel me to take this step," answered Rainford; "and my time for preparation is short. I have called to-night upon business—for, in a word, you can do me a service, perhaps, if you will."

"As if there were any doubt relative to my inclination, provided I have the power," exclaimed Clarence, who was busily employed in decanting a bottle of port-wine; then, having placed upon the table two glasses, which he filled, he said, "You know, Captain Sparks, that I am under the greatest obligation to you. Through your kind—and your generous intervention, Adela's will be mine. The laws were published at St. George's, Hansover Square, a second time to-day; and to-morrow week we shall be united. The bridal breakfast will take place at my aunt's; shall we not have the pleasure of your company? Pray, do not refuse me."

"It is impossible—much as I should rejoice at being the witness of that union which no avenger or mercenary father will be able to subvert," said Rainford in a feeling tone. "My affairs compel me to leave this country—at least for a time; and for that reason I am anxious to place in your hands a certain document, the mystery of which some accident might probably lead you to clear up."

Rainford then produced the letter which had been found about the person of the deceased Sarah Watts, and which he now requested Villiers to peruse.

"You observe that there is no address to indicate the name of the lady to whom that letter was written," continued the highwayman, when Clarence had read it with attention. "The child to whom it refers is now in my care; accident threw him in my way—and his adopted mother, who was the writer of that letter, is no more."



"Will the child accompany you?" asked Villiers.
 "He will. But I will write to you the moment I reach America—to which country I am going—and let you know my address, or at all events through what channel a letter will come direct to me. Then, should you have made any discovery—which is however scarcely to be expected—still, as a wise precaution, I have adopted this step—"

"You are right, Captain," said Villiers; "and I shall not forget the trust you have now confided to me. Should anything transpire respecting this matter, I will not fail to communicate with you. But will you not pass one evening with me in the society of my aunt and the two young ladies, who will all be delighted to receive you? Mrs. Slingsby is a most amiable and excellent woman—"

"A little of a saint—is she not?" exclaimed the highwayman dully.

"She is certainly of a religious turn of mind—indeed, I may say, enthusiastically so," answered Villiers. "But she is extremely charitable—and her benevolence embraces a very wide circle."

"I believe she is a handsome woman, too!" observed Tom Bain.

"She is possessed of personal as well as mental attractions, Captain Sparks," responded Villiers seriously. "But, when in her society, you would think of her only as the pious—benevolent—and compassionate woman, whose heart is ever ready to sympathize with the woes of her fellow creatures."

"To speak candidly, Mr. Villiers," said Rainford, "I am no friend to the saint. It may be a prejudice on my part—but I can't help it. Excuse me for my frankness—I beg of you to take it in good part; still I always think that the stillest water runs deepest; and I would not—"

"Remember, Captain Sparks," interrupted Villiers, somewhat warmly, "that you are speaking of my aunt, who is a most worthy and estimable woman. Deeply as I am indebted to you—much as I am inclined to esteem you—yet—"

"I understand you, my dear Mr. Villiers," cried Tom; "you cannot permit me to breathe even a suspicion against Mrs. Slingsby in your presence. Well—I know that it is most ungracious on my part; still, as I was more or less instrumental in inducing these too artless, confiding young ladies

to quit their father's home—to abandon the paternal dwelling—”

“Good heavens! what do you mean!” ejaculated Clarence, now seriously alarmed. “I see that there is something at the bottom of all this! Captain Sparks, I implore you to explain yourself. You are evidently well-intentioned—you have shown the greatest friendship for me—I reciprocate the feeling most cordially: fear not, then, to speak.”

“My dear Villiers,” answered the highwayman, “how can I enter upon particulars the narration of which would be most painful for you to hear? And yet I should not be acting consistently with my duty towards those young ladies—no, nor towards yourself who are about to make one of them your wife—”

“Hesitate not: speak freely!” exclaimed Clarence, seeing that his companion paused. “Should the breath of scandal have waited to your ear anything prejudicial to the character of my aunt, I cannot blame your motive in confiding the fact to me. And I the more earnestly solicit you to be frank and candid—that is, to act consistently with your nature, which is all frankness and candour,—and reveal to me the cause of this distrust—this want of confidence relative to Mrs. Slingsby,—because I have no doubt of being able to convince you that you have been misled.”

“And should I succeed in convincing you to the contrary?” asked Rainford.

“Then I should say that you had indeed performed the part of a friend,” replied Villiers emphatically. “Although I know beforehand that such a result is impossible—yet, for your complete satisfaction, do I declare that should you prove my aunt to be in any way an unsuitable guardian for that dear girl Adelsai, and her sister, I shall conceive it to be my duty immediately to seek for them another home—yes, another home—even for the few days that remain to be passed ere I shall acquire a right to protect Adelsai as her husband and Rosmond as her brother.”

“You have spoken well and wisely, Villiers,” said Rainford; “but I do not recommend any extreme measure, which might only irritate your aunt, and perhaps lead to the forced restoration of the young ladies to their father before you can have obtained the right you speak of. I merely wish you to be on your guard—”

“But the grounds of your suspicion, Captain!” cried Clarence impatiently. “Pardon my interruption—and pity my suspense.”

“I do both,” returned the highwayman. “And now remember that I am no mischief-maker between relations or friends; and were it not for the peculiar circumstances of this case, in which two innocent young ladies are concerned, I should never have thought it worth while to utter a word of any thing I know injurious to Mrs. Slingsby's character—no, not even to unmask the most disgusting hypocrisy,” added Rainford warmly.

“Do you still allude to my aunt!” demanded Clarence, colouring with indignation.

“I do. But start not—I am not seeking a quarrel with you, Villiers—and you promised to listen patiently.”

“To no other living being should I have listened so patiently as I have already done to you,” said Clarence. “But pray let us hasten to dispose of so disagreeable a topic in one way or the other.”

“I am most anxious to do so,” continued the highwayman. “Do you know Sir Henry Courtenay?”

“Certainly: he is my aunt's best friend.”

“And her lover,” added Rainford coolly.

Villiers started from his seat, exclaiming, “Captain Sparks! you presume upon the obligation which I owe you, to calumniate—”

“Then good evening, Mr. Villiers,” interrupted the highwayman. “If this is the fair and impartial hearing which you promised to give me,—if this is the manner in which you treat one who has not—cannot have an improper motive in offering you wise counsel—”

“Stay, my dear friend—stay!” exclaimed Clarence, actually thrusting Rainford back into his seat; “and pray forgive my impetuosity. But this accusation—so sudden—so unexpected—so very strange—”

“And yet it is substantially true,” added Rainford emphatically: “and it is proper that you should know it. For my part, I am not the man to blame Mrs. Slingsby for having a lover—nor yet the lover for having her as his mistress: it's human nature both ways. But when I know that she has been entrusted by you with the guardianship of two young ladies of tender age and spotless innocence, and one of whom is so very, very dear to you, I consider it necessary for you to be enlightened as to her true character. I've no doubt that you must feel deeply this communication: but it is better for you to learn that your aunt is something that she ought not to be, than to find out when it is too late that your wife or her sister have been corrupted by bad example.”

Clarence paced the room in an agitated manner: then, at the expiration of a few minutes, he turned suddenly, exclaiming, “Not for a moment, Captain Sparks, do I suspect you of any sinister object: but you will pardon me for soliciting the proof of this charge which, if substantiated, must so completely and so painfully change my opinion of a relative whom I have until now venerated as the pattern of virtue and propriety.”

“The mode of proving the charge may be left to yourself,” replied the highwayman. “Did you ever hear the circumstance of your aunt's house being robbed by a boy to whom she gave a night's lodging, some four or five years ago?”

“Certainly,” exclaimed Villiers. “I recollect the incident well. Mrs. Slingsby herself communicated it to me. The ungrateful young villain—”

“I know that boy,” interrupted Tom Raindrill; “and I am convinced that he told me the truth when he declared that, during the night—or rather the portion of the night, which he passed in Mrs. Slingsby's house, accident made him a witness to a scene which leaves no doubt as to the fact that Sir Henry Courtenay and Mrs. Slingsby are as intimate as man and wife together.”

“And would you receive the testimony of a thief—”

“When well corroborated,” added the highwayman.

“But how happened it that you should have any connexion with this lad, Captain Sparks!” demanded Clarence, in a cold and suspicious tone.

“Suppose that the boy has repented of his errors—that he has merited my interest by a service

which accident enabled him to render me—that he related to me his entire history, in which this incident is comprised—and that, on questioning him closely, I learnt that the occurrence took place at the residence of your aunt!"

"I am bewildered—amazed—grieved—profoundly grieved!" ejaculated Villiers. "To suppose for an instant that this kind and affectionate relative—who has always been so good to me, and through whose bounty I am enabled to prepare and fit up a suitable dwelling for the reception of my beloved Adela,—to think that this much-respected and long-revered woman should conceal the greatest prodigality beneath the mask of charity and religion—oh! it is a cruel blow!"

"Again I say that the mode of proving the charge may be left to yourself," observed Rainford. "Seek an opportunity to be alone with Mrs. Slingsby—make some pointed allusion to the incident—and mark how she receives it."

"I will call at my aunt's residence to-morrow morning early—the very first thing," exclaimed Villiers. "The whole affair is most serious; and, now that I can at length contemplate it with something bordering on calmness, I am bound to confess—But let us quit the topic," he added, in a tone of deep veneration, in spite of his asserted self-possession.

"And you bear me no ill-will for the course I have pursued?" said Rainford.

"Far from it. You have acted in a most friendly manner—whatever the result may be!" cried Villiers, grasping the highwayman's hand most cordially.

"I have performed a very painful duty," rejoined Tom: "and now I must take my leave of you—perhaps for a long, long time—if not for ever."

"Farewell," said Clarence; "and may prosperity attend you in another clime."

"Farewell," replied Rainford; "and may you be happy with your Adela."

The highwayman then hurried from the room, considerably affected by this parting from one for whom he already experienced a most sincere regard.

Nor was Villiers unmoved by this farewell scene; for, on his side, he was particularly attached to the individual who had not only rendered him so essential a service on that memorable night which first made them acquainted with each other, but whose apparent frankness of disposition and manliness of character were well calculated to engage the good opinion of the confiding, warm-hearted, and unsuspecting Clarence.

CHAPTER XLV.

MR. DYKES AND HIS MYRMIDONS.

It was midnight; and profound silence reigned throughout the region of Lock's Fields.

But suddenly that silence was broken by the tread of several persons, who emerged from a by-alley in the immediate vicinity of Brandon Street.

At the corner of this street they paused to hold a hasty conference.

They were six in number—five men and a woman.

"This is the street," said the woman.

"Oh! this is it, Mrs. Bunce—oh!" returned Mr. Dykes, the Bow Street officer, rubbing his nose

with the knob of his stout ash-stick, while his countenance, on which the bright moon-beams played, showed an expression of calm determination.

"Yes; and that's the house—there: the sixth on t'other side of the way," added Mrs. Bunce.

"Well—now we don't want you no more, ma'am," said Dykes; "cos women is all very well in their place; and darling creature's they are too. But when a grab is to be made, they're best at home, a-bed and asleep. So good night to you, ma'am."

"Good night, gentlemen all," responded Mrs. Bunce; and she hurried away.

"Now, Bingham and you fellows," said Mr. Dykes, "we must mind what we're up to; for we shan't catch a weazel asleep. You, Bingham, take one of the runners and get round to the back of the house. Me and t'other chaps will make the entry in front. But we shan't stir a peg for one quarter of an hour; and by that time you'll be at your post."

"All right," returned Mr. Bingham; and this individual accordingly moved off, followed by one of the subordinate runners.

In the meantime, Tom Rainford was sleeping, not dreaming of danger, in the arms of the beautiful Jewess.

Charley Watts was cradled in a little bed made up for him in the warmest corner of the room.

A light burnt in the apartment, where naught was heard save the slow, regular breathing of the sleepers.

The clear, transparent olive complexion of the beautiful Jewess contrasted strongly with the florid countenance of the highwayman; and the commingling of the raven hair of the one with the light, almost yellow locks of the other, produced a strange effect, as the marked discrepancy of hues was set off by the snowy whiteness of the pillow. By the feeble light of the candle, it appeared as if ebony and gold were blending on a white ground.

But, hark! what is that sound which breaks on the silence of the chamber?—and wherefore does the highwayman start from his sleep?

He awakes—and listens.

The Jewess also awakes—and also listens,—one of her beautifully modelled arms thrown around the neck of him whom she loved so fondly.

"Some one is trying the back-door," whispered Rainford at length; and he leapt from the bed.

In less than a minute he had thrown on his clothes; and grasping his pistols, he hastened to the window.

But at the same instant the back-door was forced in;—more violently, no doubt, than Bingham and his co-operator had intended; and the sound was too unequivocal to permit Tom Rain to doubt the meaning of the disturbance.

Returning to the bed, he said in a hurried but solemn and deeply impressive tone, "Dearest, I am betrayed. If I escape, you shall soon hear from me: if I am captured, I charge you—by all the love I bear for you—by all the love you bear for me—not to attempt to visit me in prison! Farewell—dearest, dearest girl!"

He embraced her fondly—affectionately,—oh! most lovingly; while she sobbed as if her heart would break.

Then in a moment he tore himself away!—foot steps—many footsteps were already ascending—nay, rushing up—the stairs.

He darted from the room, sprang up a ladder

which stood on the landing—pushed up a trap-door—and in another moment was on the roof of the house.

The officers were close upon him. Dykes and his two men had effected an entry by the front-door of the house almost at the same moment that Bingham and his follower had broken in at the back; and the entire posse reached the landing just at the moment that the trap-door fell down heavily into its place.

"He has escaped by the roof!" cried Dykes. "Bingham, my boy, take a couple of chaps, and watch the backs of the houses: he can't get away by the front—it's too high for him to leap into the street. Me and t' other chap will after him to the tilings."

Thus saying, Dykes ascended the ladder as quickly as his unwieldy form would permit. The trap-door was easily raised, as it only fastened inside; and the portly body of the Bow Street officer, who possessed more courage than alacrity, was forced through the small aperture. The operation was slow and difficult; but at last Mr. Dykes stood on a narrow ledge which ran along the whole row of houses, and from which the roof rose obliquely behind. This ledge was only protected by a parapet about two feet high; and the officer felt his position to be any thing but a safe one.

But he was not the man to shrink from danger.

"Come along, you feller," he cried out to his follower, who speedily emerged from the opening. "You cut along that way, and I'll go this."

And they proceeded in different directions on the roof of the house.

The moon shone brightly, but Thomas Rainford was not to be seen.

Suddenly an exclamation of triumph burst from the yard at the back of one of the adjacent houses.

"Hollice!" vociferated Dykes, from the eminence on which he stood.

"We've got him, fast enough," returned Bingham.

A piercing shriek from a window that had been thrown open, denoted the anguish of the Jewess, whose ears had caught these words.

Mr. Dykes and his attendant subordinate now retraced their way to the trap-door, through the aperture of which they once more forced themselves; and when they had regained the landing Dykes said, "Now you go and join my partner Bingham, 'cos this Rainford is a desperate feller, and the more there is to guard him the better."

The man accordingly took his departure, and Mr. Dykes knocked gently at the door of the bedroom.

"Who is there?" asked a voice within,—a voice soft and melodious, but now expressive of the most intense anguish.

"Beg pardon, ma'am," said Dykes; "but I must do my duty; and if so be you'll have the kindness to dress yourself, I should like to examine the boxes and cupboards, and such like—just for form's sake, and that's all."

"Must you thus add to the grief which is already—"

The plaintive voice was interrupted by a violent fit of sobbing, with the mournful sounds of which the crying of the little boy now commingled.

"I do n't want to annoy you, ma'am," returned Dykes.

"I should haps not, indeed!" exclaimed the landlady, who, having been alarmed by the disturbance, had got up and dressed herself, and was now ascending the stairs. "But what is it all about? and why do you break into a respectable house in this way? I do n't suppose you're thieves—or else—"

"I am an officer, ma'am," exclaimed Dykes, drawing himself up with offended dignity, as the candle which the landlady carried in her hand lighted the landing-place:—"I am an officer, ma'am—and my partners have just taken one Thomas Rainford, a highwayman—"

"A highwayman!" ejaculated the widow, who had never suspected the character of her lodger, and who was a prudent woman that never troubled herself about other people's business so long as her rent was regularly paid.

"Yes—a highwayman," added Dykes. "But I've no time to stand palavering. I believe there's a lady in this room here; and as I must overhaul the place—as the case is a serious one—you'll do well to step in and let me do the job quietly. I do n't want to annoy her; the law is n't at loggerheads with her—and so she's nothing to fear. As for me, I'm as gentle as a lamb when a lady's concerned."

The widow urged the afflicted girl within the room to open the door; and as the latter had by this time dressed herself, the request was complied with.

But the Jewess wore a deep black veil over her head, when the officer and the landlady entered the bed-chamber; and, taking Charley in her arms, she seated herself in a chair near the bed, whispering a few words of consolation to the little boy even amidst the terrible violence of her own grief.

As for Charles, he knew that something wrong was occurring; but he was too young to comprehend the real nature of the appearances which terrified him.

Dykes just opened a cupboard, plunged his hands into a trunk, and turned out the contents of a carpet-bag; but he did not prosecute his search any farther; for he was too much experienced in the ways of robbers and rogues to suppose for a moment that he should find on the premises any portion of the money stolen from Sir Christopher Blunt,—this being the charge on which Rainford was arrested.

The search, such as it was, was merely for form's sake; because the magistrate was sure to inquire whether the prisoner's lodgings had been carefully examined; and this superficial glance at the contents of the boxes would enable Mr. Dykes to give an affirmative answer without any very great deviation from the actual truth.

He accordingly quitted the room within a minute after entering it; but he turned on the landing just to beg "the dear young lady not to take on too much," and also to assure the mistress of the house that she should be recompensed for the injury done to her abode by the violent entry effected by himself and his companions.*

* We should observe that at the time of which we are writing, it was by no means unusual for Bow Street officers to be employed in the pursuit or capture of desperate characters in Surrey, although this county was as strictly within their district.

We must leave the landlady to console—or endeavour to console the unhappy Jewess,—and accompany Mr. Dykes, who passed out of the house by the back way, and stopped over two or three low fences which separated the yards of the respective dwellings, until he reached that one where Tom Rains was in the custody of Bingham and the subordinate rangers.

It appeared that the gallant highwayman, finding how hotly he was pursued when he was escaping by means of the trap-door, and dreading lest the whole neighbourhood should be alarmed ere he could possibly get away, had resolved on the dangerous expedient of sliding down from the roof to the back of the buildings, by means of the perpendicular leaden water-pipe. But when he was half-way down in his perilous descent, he missed his hold, and fell upon the stone pavement of the yard beneath. He endeavoured to get up and escape—but could not: his right ankle was sprained, almost to dislocation; and in a few minutes he was discovered and captured by the detachment under the orders of Bingham.

He heard the piercing scream which followed the announcement of his arrest by this officer; and that scream—oh! it went to thy generous heart, Tom Rains!

But he uttered not a word: he offered no resistance, although he had his pistols about him. He not only shrank from the idea of shedding human blood: but he was also well aware that his case was now too desperate to be benefited by even desperate means. For, even if he slew all the officers, he could not drag himself away ere the neighbours would collect and capture him.

And by this time, the whole line of houses was awake with bustle and excitement. Light after light appeared at the different casements: windows were thrown up; and the rangers spread like wildfire, that a famous highwayman had just been arrested.

The reader may well conceive the nature of the sensation which now prevailed all along the back of Brandon Street;—but in one room there was a beautiful woman convulsed with torturing—maddening anguish,—for deep was her love for thee, Tom Rains!

"Now, then," cried Dykes, as he made his appearance in the yard, where the highwayman was sitting on an inverted wash-tub, surrounded by the rangers, to whom he had surrendered his pistols;—"now, then, lady—let's off with him to quod. How d'ye do, Mr. Rainsford! Do n't want to crow over a gentleman in trouble—but thought I should have you some day or another." Then, stooping down, he whispered in Tom's ear, "I was obliged to give a look in at the crib up there just now; but I only stayed a moment, and shan't trouble the poor lady any more. She had a veil over her face—and so I don't know who she is: that is, you see, I shan't know, if I'm asked any questions by the book—but of course I'm aware it's the handsome Jewess that did the diamond business."

"You are mistaken—you are mistaken," said Rainsford, emphatically. "But, if you showed her any civility, I sincerely thank you—"

"Lord bless you! Mr. Rainsford—I would n't do any thing to annoy you for the world. I can't help admiring a brave man—and you're one. The poor dear lady will be troubled no more by us; and it's

nothing to me who she is, or who she is not. The law do n't want her, at all events."

"One word more," said Tom. "Who has done this business for me?"

"A lawyer named Howard," was the answer—"But I can't say no more—"

"Then what is the charge against me?" asked Tom, a considerable load already removed from his mind.

"Sir Christopher Bixant's little business—that's all," replied Dykes. "But come along; we must be off to Horsemonger."

Mr. Dykes and Mr. Bingham politely offered Rainsford their arms; and the procession passed through the house, in the yard belonging to which the capture had been made. The occupants of that dwelling—men, women, and children, all in their night-dresses—crowded on the stairs to catch a glimpse of the "terrible highwayman," whose good looking appearance excited the sympathy of the female portion of the spectators.

Half an hour afterwards Tom Rains was lodged in a cell in the criminal department of Horsemonger Lane Gaol;—but his heart was lighter than the reader might possibly suppose—for he was relieved of the first and most natural fear that had assailed him; namely, that it was on account of Benjamin Bones's death that he was pursued!

"If I must be hanged," he thought within himself, "I would rather it should be for highway robbery than ought else!—But, O Tamar! Tamar! what is to become of thee?"

And, as he sat on the humble pallet in the darkness of his solitary cell, he buried his face in his mangled hands.

In another moment a moonbeam penetrated through the barred window; and in that silver ray glistened the tears which trickled between his fingers.

And yet it was not for himself he wept!—thou wast so coward—but thou hadst a generous heart, Tom Rains.

CHAPTER XLVI.

EXPLANATIONS.

AT eleven o'clock on the following day, Lord Ellingham, who had passed a sleepless and wretched night, called at the house of Lady Hatfield, and was immediately conducted to the drawing-room, where Georgiana was alone in readiness to receive him.

She was dressed in a morning garb, and, though very—very pale, looked surpassingly lovely.

"My dear friend," she said, extending her hand, which, as he offered to press it with rapture to his lips, she gently but still resolutely withdrew,— "my dear friend—for such henceforth must I call you—"

"Georgiana!" he exclaimed, starting back: "what means this coolness?"

"Be seated, Arthur—and listen to me attentively," she said in a plaintive and sweetly touching tone. "I am not very well—my nerves are not strong to-day—and you must not manifest any impatience towards me. Indeed, I ought to have postponed this interview: but I considered it to be my duty—a paramount duty owing alike to yourself and to me—to enter into as early an explanation as possible."

"This preface forebodes nothing favourable to my happiness," murmured the Earl, as he sank into a seat to which Georgiana pointed—but which was not by her side!

"Arthur," she continued, with difficulty maintaining sufficient control over her emotions to enable her to speak calmly and collectedly, "you know not how much I love you—how dearly I am devoted to you. For your sake, and to bear the name of your wife, I could consent to become a mendicant—a wanderer on the face of the earth,—renounce fortune—rank—society—all, in fine, that we women are generally deemed to hold so dear,—yea, all this could I do for your sake, so that you were my companion! Then, conceive how hard it is for me—oh! how very hard, my well-beloved Arthur, to be compelled to see that benefactor who must know each other only as friends!"

"Merciful heavens!" ejaculated the Earl, uncertain whether the imagined capriciousness of his Georgiana was about to assert its tantalizing influence again, or whether any thing of a more serious nature, and connected with the incidents of the preceding evening, was about to present an insuperable bar to his happiness.

"Yes—Arthur," continued Georgiana, in an impressive tone, "henceforth we must be but as brother and sister to each other. And as a dear, fond, affectionate sister will I ever be to you; for your generosity would have made me your wife in spite of—But you cannot wish me to refer to that! And yet it is that one sad episode in my life which now asserts an inexorable influence over the conduct which we must both pursue. It is that event, which you—in the noble candour, in the warm liberality of your admirable disposition—"

"You praise me too highly, Georgiana," exclaimed the Earl. "I loved you—I love you dearly; and in spite of all that you now say, hope is not quenched within me. But, my God! when will this painful suspense pass? When shall I behold you no longer a prey to an influence—"

"Alas! that influence must endure for ever!" murmured Lady Hatfield, tears now trembling upon her eye-lashes.

"No—no!" cried the Earl with impassioned energy. "When, but a few days ago, we entered into explanations with each other—when I informed you that I was aware of the nature of that secret influence which tyrannised over you,—did I not assure you that, as a loving husband, I would so completely study your happiness—"

"Oh! yes," interrupted Georgiana; "and did I not declare that you had given me a proof of affection such as man seldom gave unto woman? Believe me—believe me," she added earnestly, "I felt all that there was great—generous—and noble in your conduct: for, knowing that secret—that sad, that fatal secret—you banished all prejudice—discarded even those scruples which the most high-minded of men so often entertain under such circumstances—"

"Dearest Georgiana!" exclaimed the Earl; "you attach far too much importance to the secret of which you speak. What man that truly loves a virtuous—beautiful—accomplished—and amiable woman, would allow himself to be swayed—"

"Ah! every heart is not so generous as yours!" interrupted Georgiana. "You recognise the complete innocence of my soul—"

"I cannot believe that you would be guilty of the wanton cruelty of inflicting these tortures upon me, Georgiana," said the Earl, "were it not for that strange—that almost morbid state of mind which is at times produced by the recollection of a serious fright which you experienced some years ago, and from the effects of which you have not completely recovered. But, after all, wherefore do you praise me so highly—wherefore do you thank me so much for the simple fact of not allowing the knowledge of this occasional access of morbid feeling to weigh with me—"

"Arthur!" almost shrieked Georgiana, losing all control over herself; "then, you know not the secret—the dreadful secret—"

"Yes; have I not proved to you that I know it!" exclaimed the Earl, surprised and grieved at the strange manner of Lady Hatfield. "Your uncle put me in possession of the facts: and what is there in them, after all? It is a mere adventure which one would now tell only as a Christmas tale—or to amuse children,—had it not produced so serious an influence upon your nerves, and—"

"Arthur! Arthur! is this a cruel pleasantry!" demanded Georgiana hysterically; "or have we misunderstood each other all along!"

"You know that I am incapable of turning to ridicule or making a jest of any thing that regards you, Georgiana," returned the Earl. "And as for any misunderstanding between us, there is none. Our explanation the other day was full—complete—satisfactory—"

"No—no," cried Lady Hatfield, painfully excited. "I see that I am mistaken—that you have learnt a bare fact—"

"Yes; and since we are now conversing on the topic," said the Earl, "let us enter fully into it and then abandon it for ever. I see that you attach much importance to this subject—and that, when we are united, there may be no necessity ever to recur—"

"If ever we are united!" repeated Georgiana, clasping her hands in anguish of heart.

"Yes, my well-beloved," continued the Earl. "And now listen to me. About seven years ago you were staying alone at Maulverer Lodge in Hampshire—"

"Oh! the fatal time—the fatal place!" cried Georgiana hysterically; and though she would have given worlds to cut short the conversation, she had not the power—for her mind was agitated like the ocean in a storm.

"You were staying alone at Maulverer Lodge, proceeded Arthur, not observing the extent of her emotion; "you were alone, save in respect to the servants; but you had no relation—no friend there at the moment. And one night—a man broke in—"

"A man—with a black mask—" murmured Georgiana, almost wringing her hands.

"And bearing the denomination, too, of the Black Mask," continued Lord Eillingham;—"this man broke into the house—and—"

"And—merciful heavens! Spare me the recital of the rest!" shrieked Lady Hatfield, covering her face with her hands.

"Good God! do not thus give way to a reminiscence which, though painful, should no longer exercise any influence over a strong mind!" said the Earl, in a kind and soothing tone, as he approached

and seated himself next to Georgiana. "Consider, my dearly beloved—my angel—my intended wife!—reflect, I implore you, upon the childishness of this behaviour!"

"Childishness!" repeated Georgiana, with a convulsive shudder.

"Pardon the expression," said the Earl; "but I would reason with you—I would endeavour to persuade you that an occurrence which is past and gone, and which happens frequently in other houses, should not thus paralyse all the naturally fine energies of your soul. What, in the name of heaven! can it matter now, if a robber broke into a dwelling some six or seven years ago? Your uncle told me that for some months fears were entertained for your reason; but—Oh! my Georgiana, I do implore you now—now that we are once again touching on this painful—most painful theme—to exercise more command over yourself. You praise me—you thank me, because I am willing to espouse one whose reason was shocked long years ago;—for that is your secret, after all, Georgiana—dearest Georgiana;—and you perceive that I know it!"

"My God! how have we misunderstood each other!" murmured the unhappy lady;—"my secret—he knows it not!"

But the Earl could not catch the sense of the words which she thus whispered to herself; and, with the fond hope of consoling her—for the events of the preceding evening were for the time banished from his memory—he took her hand, pressed it to his lips, and began to utter syllables of tenderness and love.

Then, how terrible was his surprise—how acute the anguish which filled his soul, when Georgiana, suddenly starting from the half-embrace in which he was already enfolding her, exclaimed in a tone indicative of the most exquisite mental agony, "No—Arthur—so; you are not acquainted with my secret—and now, never, never will you learn it! We have misunderstood each other—and I consented the other day to become your wife, while labouring under a dreadful—oh! a dreadful error! But heaven has interposed to prevent the consummation of your misery—and mine! And now," she added, with the calmness of despair, "let us separate, Arthur—and henceforth be unto each other but brother and sister;—for your wife I cannot become!"

"Georgiana, this is cruelty the most refined—the most wanton!" exclaimed the Earl. "Am I again to pass through all the phases of suspense—uncertainty—mystery—and doubt!—and will you in a few days repeat of all you have said, and recall this stern decision! But—much as I love you—deeply as I am attached to you—I cannot—cannot endure a treatment—"

"Pardon me—forgive me!" cried Georgiana; "but you do not comprehend me! My reason is not unhinged,—I am subject to no whims—no caprices, Arthur! A fatal mistake on my part alone induced me the other day to consent to become your wife. That error has now been cleared up—our conversation of this morning has convinced me of the tremendous misunderstanding that had nearly wrecked all your happiness! But, even had it not, there was another reason which would imperatively command us to think no more of each other in the same light as we so lately did!"

"Ah! you allude, perchance, to the incident of

last evening!" exclaimed Lord Ellingham. "Permit me, then, to ask the object of that Rainford's visit! Did he insult you? did he attempt to extort money from you? If so—"

"No—no!" cried Georgiana, in whose bosom the mere mention of the highwayman's name appeared to excite the most agonising feelings. "I sent down a message to that effect last night. He did not insult me—he did not come to injure me—"

"But his presence excited you most painfully, Georgiana!" interrupted the Earl; "and it has also revived in your imagination—Oh! I understand it all!" he cried, suddenly interrupting himself: "this Rainford is the Black Mask—the noted highwayman of Hampshire!"

Lady Hatfield cast upon the young nobleman a look expressive of so much mental suffering, that he was deeply touched—profoundly affected: and yet he knew not how to administer consolation.

"Georgiana," he at length said, in as calm and collected a tone as he could assume, though his heart was in reality rent by the most painful emotions, "there is some terrible mystery in all this! I begin to believe—as you yourself are now endeavouring to persuade me—that your reason is in no way affected—that you are not subject to mere whims and caprices. No—the cause of your grief—your anguish—your horror at the reminiscence of that event in Hampshire,—an anguish and a horror cruelly revived last night by the presence of that Rainford, who is doubtless identical with the Black Mask,—an anguish and a horror perpetrated, too, until now," continued Arthur, more emphatically,—"the cause of all this is far—far more serious than I had at first imagined. You say that you cannot become my wife—and that you have laboured under a misapprehension; you wish us to look upon each other as brother and sister. And yet you do love me well enough to become my wife—did not some terrible and fearfully mysterious obstacle stand in the way. Oh! if you really love me—then pity me, and tell me this dreadful secret which weighs upon your mind! Unless, indeed—"

And he paused abruptly, as an awful suspicion rushed into his brain.

Georgiana only turned her head aside, and sobbed convulsively.

"Unless, indeed," continued the Earl, after a few moments' silence, "it would bring a blush to your cheek to enlighten me; and I cannot—cannot ask you to humiliate yourself in my presence!"

"Arthur, I dare not become your wife!" exclaimed Georgiana, suddenly falling upon her knees before him; "and if you demand the reasons—as, after all that has passed between us, you have a right—I will confess—"

"Georgiana, no more!" cried the Earl, hastening to raise her. "Not for worlds would I bring a blush to your cheek." Then, in a different—more serious—and very mournful tone, he added, "Henceforth we will be to each other as sister and brother."

With these words he touched her hand lightly with his lips, and was about to hurry from the room; when, animated by a sudden thought, Georgiana held him back, saying in a hollow, thick tone of voice, "Whatever suspicion you now entertain—you do not believe that I—was guilty?" she added, as if the very words were choking her.

"No, much injured woman!" cried the young nobleman warmly. "A light has broken in upon my mind—and I understand it all."

"Yes—for a pure soul dwells in a tainted body," murmured Lady Hatfield; "and if I have said this much—and you can well believe how painful to my feelings the mere necessity of making such an assertion must be,—but in making it, I am influenced only by the hope—the earnest hope of removing from your mind—the mind of one whom I so much respect—so highly esteem—"

"Say no more, my dearest sister!" interrupted the Earl emphatically: "for as a sister do I now look upon you—and as a brother," he added sternly, "will I avenge you. For that was I ere now hurrying away so abruptly!"

"Avenge me!" repeated Georgiana, looking wildly on the young nobleman's countenance, which wore a calm but determined expression.

"Yes, Georgiana," replied the Earl: "wrongs so deep as yours demand a deadly vengeance. And who so fit to become the instrument of that vengeance, than he whom those wrongs which you have sustained so cruelly redound upon? But for that incarnate fiend Rainford, would you not already—yes, already have been my loved and loving wife? Am I not, then, also wronged by him? have I not something to avenge?" he demanded bitterly. "And to consummate this vengeance, Georgiana, I—your brother henceforth—will forget my proud title—cast aside the remembrance of my elevated rank;—and, dressed in mean attire, I will visit the noisome dens—the foul courts—the low neighbourhoods of London, until I discover that miscreant Rainford. Then will I—still forgetting the proud title and the elevated rank—dare him to meet me in a duel, from which at least but one shall depart alive, and wherein both may happily fall! I will not yield him up to the hangman, Georgiana," continued the Earl, fearfully excited; "because in his last moments he might confess his crimes, and include amongst them the foul wrong he has inflicted on thee, my sister! But I will descend to make myself his equal—I will place myself on a level with that black-hearted ruffian—"

"Hold! hold!" screamed Georgiana, suddenly recovering the powers of utterance which had been paralyzed by this tremendous explosion of generous indignation on the part of that proudly-born noble who proclaimed himself her champion. "Hold! hold! Arthur—you know not whom you calumniate—whom you would provoke to the duel of death!"

"Yes—too well I know the miscreant!" cried the Earl furiously.

"No—no—you know him not!" screamed Georgiana wildly.

"This is childish—stilly!" said the Earl impatiently. "Was it not Rainford who—"

"Yes—yes; but this Rainford—"

"Is a fiend, with a heart so black—"

"Hold! hold! again I say," ejaculated Lady Hatfield, clasping her hands in despair. "That Thomas Rainford whom you would make the victim of your vengeance, is—"

"Is what!" demanded the Earl hastily.

"Is—"

"Who? in the name of heaven!"

"YOUR BROTHER!" was the hysterical reply.

CHAPTER XLVII.

FARTHER EXPLANATIONS.

"MY brother!" repeated the Earl of Ellingham, with a wild glance and a sudden start, indicative of the most painful surprise. "My brother! Georgiana!—oh! no—impossible! 'Tis true that my father—but no—that child died—"

"I can give you no particulars—offer you no evidence in this most strange and mysterious matter," said Lady Hatfield, endeavoring to subdue the excitement produced in her much-agitated mind by the preceding scene. "All that I know is—all that he told me was that secret which I have now revealed to you! Thus, Arthur, you perceive that—independent of the other reason which would prevent me from becoming yours, and you from receiving me as your wife—"

"But wherefore did you not mention this at first—at the commencement of our conversation this morning!" demanded the nobleman, utterly bewildered by the revelation that had been made to him, and scarcely knowing whether to regard it as a substantial fact or a miserable fiction.

"Because Rainford himself appeared to tell it to me as a profound secret," observed Georgiana. "Not that he desired me to consider it as such; but his manner—and then the nature of the revelation itself, which could not be gratifying to your feelings—oh! I scarcely know what I am saying, Arthur—but I would have spared your feelings, had you not compelled me to make that revelation, to prevent the mad—the insane designs of vengeance which you had formed—"

"I understand you, Georgiana," interrupted the Earl: "and deeply—oh! deeply do I feel your generous consideration on that point. But there is one question that I wish to ask you—a question—"

"Speak, Arthur! This is the day of mutual outpourings of confidence," said Lady Hatfield: "and, remember—we are henceforth to stand in the light of brother and sister to each other!"

"The question I would ask is relative to the robbery that was perpetrated on you and Miss Mordant a short time back near Hounslow," continued the Earl. "Was that highwayman—"

"He was—he was!" exclaimed Georgiana, once more painfully excited. "But do not look coldly on me, Arthur—do not despise me for that dreadful crime of perjury which I committed to save him. He wrote me an imperious note, commanding me to stop all proceedings instituted in reference to that matter. What did such a note imply? It was a menace—a dreadful menace—a threat to expose me, if I did not obey his mandate! Consider, Arthur—oh! consider how I was placed—my reputation at stake—my fame in the hands of one who—but can you wonder that I preferred the dread alternative of perjury to the danger of disgrace and infamy which seemed to impend over my head?"

"Alas! I cannot blame you, poor, suffering woman?" ejaculated the Earl in a tone of deep commiseration. "We never know how we should act until we find ourselves placed in circumstances of difficulty and embarrassment; and then—then even the most rigid integrity often yields! But let us sit down quietly, Georgiana, for a short half-hour—compose ourselves, if we can—collect our



scattered thoughts—and converse together as sister and brother. For I will now communicate to you the little I know concerning the birth of Thomas Rainford—if he indeed be the offspring of that amour—”

Arthur ceased, and passed his hand over his brow as if to calm the warfare of thoughts and conjectures which agitated his brain.

Georgiana seated herself on the sofa, and the Earl at length took a chair near her.

He then continued in the following manner:—

“My father, the late Earl, was married twice: his first matrimonial connexion was formed when he was thirty; and this union was unproductive of issue. Lady Ellingham, as I have heard, was a woman devotedly attached to the dissipation of a fashionable life. She seemed to exist only to shine in the gay assemblies of the West End; and, as she had no children, and her husband was immersed in politics, she possessed no ties to bind her to her own fireside. She played deeply—for play was very fashionable then amongst ladies, and is even now to a considerable extent. Her extravagances were great, and she made rapid inroad upon my father's fortune. By the time

he was forty he found himself involved in debts; and moreover, rumour began to be so busy with the name of his wife, imputing to her the most shameless infidelity, that he determined to separate from her. I should not allude to this circumstance—I would not for a moment revive statements prejudicial to the memory of a woman who has long ago gone to render an account of her deeds to her Maker—were it not that respect for the name of my lamented father renders me anxious to discover any extenuation which offers itself for his subsequent conduct. Well, a separation was resolved upon: a certain income was settled upon Lady Ellingham; the estate was put ‘to nurse,’ as the law-phrase has it; and my father, who was a proud man, retired to a small property which he possessed in Ireland, ostensibly for the purpose of giving up the cares of public life, but in reality to conceal the necessity of retrenching his expenditure. Ten years passed away; and when my father was upwards of fifty, he returned to London, his estates having in the meantime been relieved of all their incumbrances. Lady Ellingham was still living; but the smallness

of her income and the impaired condition of her health, forced her to dwell in the strictest retirement. She had moreover become a devotee, and manifested no desire to return into the dazzling scenes of fashionable life.

"I am now speaking of about thirty-one years ago; when I was not born. It was at that period that my father encountered a young and very beautiful girl, named Octavia Mansons. She was the half-sister of a marble-store dealer, who bore the disagreeable appellation of Benjamin Bones. By all I have heard, Octavia must have been a charming creature; and her manners, acquirements, and conversation were far superior to her humble condition in life. I cannot give you any details respecting the way in which my father became acquainted with her: suffice it to say that he grew deeply attached to her, and his visits were encouraged by her brother. But, alas! from all that I have heard, I have grounds—oh! too strong grounds to believe that those visits were most unwelcome to Octavia; for she was beloved by a young man in her own sphere of life, and whom she loved in return. And it is now that I would palliate—as far as possible—the conduct of my sire, while I am bound to admit that his proceedings in respect to that unhappy girl were most unworthy the noble and the man. My heart aches, too, as I utter those words: but I am telling you a history, the truth of which must not be disguised nor in any way misrepresented. But some allowance—some little excuse may be found for a man who was separated from a wife whom he had not seen for many years, and to whom there were positively no moral ties, although the legal ones still existed, to bind his fidelity. He was devotedly attached to a young and beautiful girl who unfortunately could not return his love, and who did not even seem flattered by his visits, as so many maidens in her sphere would have been. No—she shrunk from his addresses, and implored him not to persecute her!

"But he persisted in his visits; and the first sad result was that the young man to whom Octavia's faith was pledged, would not believe that she discouraged the attentions of the nobleman who condescended to appear at that humble dwelling. I cannot of course inform you, although we may both imagine, how the young man reproached Octavia, and how she defended herself: but it is certain that he suddenly quitted the neighbourhood, leaving behind him a note declaring that he should never see the unhappy girl again. Alas! that I should now be compelled to recite the tale of my father's guilt—my father's crime! His love for Octavia knew no bounds—he was determined to risk all—every thing—"

"Spare your feelings, Arthur—dear Arthur!" exclaimed Lady Hatfield; "for I can fully appreciate the grief which this revival of such a subject must cause you!"

"Octavia, then, was purchased—purchased with gold—my father's gold, Georgiana;—and the deed of—dare I call it aught save *infamy*?—was consummated!" said the Earl, in a low and subdued tone, as if he were overcome by the enormity of his sire's guilt—that guilt which, with a venial filial affection, he had vainly endeavoured to palliate. "Yes—'twas done," he continued sadly; "and the vile half-brother sold the honour of that young and

already too deeply afflicted girl. Too deeply afflicted, I say, because she had lost him on whom the affections of her youthful heart were set. The very day after her disgrace—her ruin, she fled from her brother's house; and for several months no trace was discovered of her. It was feared she had committed suicide; and my father was almost distracted. At that precise period his wife died, having ended as a devotee that life of which so much of the early portion was passed in dissipation and ill-kept amours. She had not been laid many weeks in the family vault, when my father, by some means unknown to me—perhaps, by accident—discovered that Octavia was living, and that she was in the way to become a mother. He hastened to the miserable garret which she occupied, and found her in the most abject state of poverty—endeavouring to earn a subsistence with her needle. A girl of the gipsy tribe, and whose name was Miranda, was the friend and companion of poor Octavia. How they grew acquainted—how they came to live together, I am not aware: but Miranda was much attached to poor Octavia, and was nearly her own age. Indeed Octavia was not seventeen even at that time; and this Miranda of whom I speak, was about fifteen. Much mystery envelopes this portion of the sad tale: it is, however, certain that my father visited Octavia for several days—that he passed hours with her—that she even appeared to be reconciled to his presence—and that they went out together, and remained absent for hours, on two or three occasions. Again she disappeared—suddenly—abruptly—without having intimated her intention to my father, and without even having confided her design to her friend Miranda. For Miranda remained behind at the lodging, and when my father called and found Octavia not, he was seized with a paroxysm of the deepest grief.

"Another year passed away; and behold, poverty and distress drove the unfortunate Octavia to seek an asylum at the house of her half-brother. She would not, doubtless, have gone near that fatal dwelling where her ruin was accomplished, had it not been for the child which she held in her arms. That child—a boy—was the fruit of her connexion with my father,—or rather of the dreadful deed which gave her, when under the influence of an opiate, into his arms. But she was dying—yes, she was dying, when she knocked at her brother's door; and on her death-bed she implored that my father might be sent for. He flew to her: he knelt by her side—he took the child in his arms, and embraced both the dying mother and the innocent babe. By a strange—a wondrous coincidence, Miranda entered the house at that moment: she had come to make inquiries concerning Octavia—and found her dying. The poor mother forgave those who had wronged her,—forgave her half-brother—blessed my father—yes, blessed him—and recommended her infant to his care—that infant being also his own! Then my father requested to be left alone with her; but scarcely had the villain Bones and the faithful Miranda quitted the room, when they were recalled by a dreadful cry which burst from my father's lips;—and they hurried back to find that Octavia was no more."

Arthur paused to wipe away the tears which were trickling down his cheeks; nor were Georgiana's eyes unmoistened by the sweet dews of sympathy.

"When my father had sufficiently recovered himself to attend to more worldly matters," continued the young Earl, "he gave directions for the funeral of his victim; and to Miranda did he entrust the child. Then he placed in the hands of Benjamin Bones, in the presence of Miranda, a thousand guineas to be placed out at interest, in order to provide the means of supporting the infant and his nurse. I should also inform you that a small roll of papers, carefully wrapped up in a piece of thick brown paper, was found upon the person of Octavia, shortly after her death; and these were taken possession of by Benjamin Bones, my father having previously quitted the house. Of the nature of those documents I know nothing; but I have been informed that when the half-brother read them, he was greatly excited, and secured them under lock and key.

"A year elapsed, during which my father called several times to see the little boy, who thrived well in Miranda's care. But at the expiration of that period his visits ceased altogether;—for he was about to marry again. Twenty-nine years ago the Honourable Miss Stamford became his second wife; and twenty-six years ago I was born. But before the date of my birth—and within six months after the marriage of my father appeared in the newspapers—Bones discharged Miranda on some pretence; and she returned to her tribe. Some few months afterwards she fell in with another tribe; and to her profound surprise, she discovered the child Thomas in the possession of a woman named Egyptia. Of the child's identity Miranda had no doubt, because it had a peculiar mark near the shoulder of the right arm. She and her sister-gipsy then compared notes, and Egyptia told her that she had received the child from a man named Benjamin Bones—a marine-store dealer in Greville Street, Hatton Garden; that Bones had given her twenty guineas to take the child; that the money was all gone; and that she already repented of the bargain. Miranda, who was attached to the child, offered to take it; and her proposal was accepted. For seven years did the faithful Miranda rear that boy as if he were her own; but at last she fell dangerously ill—was long delirious—and when she awoke to consciousness again, she learnt from her companions that the boy had died of the same epidemic malady beneath which she herself had nearly succumbed."

Again the Earl paused for a few moments; and when he again broke silence, it was to conclude his narrative.

"My father, as you are aware, Georgiana, died when I was only a year old; and I was brought up by my mother. At the age of nineteen I went to Oxford; and it was in the neighbourhood of that city I one day fell in with a party of gipsies. They offered to tell my fortunes; and I consented for the amusement of the farce. The young female who undertook the task commenced by giving me my real name; for I had doubtless been pointed out to her in the city, as the gipsies had been there and in the vicinity for several days.* But the moment my name was mentioned, another gipsy-woman, who had probably seen forty summers, uttered an ejaculation of surprise—looked hard at me—and then

inquired abruptly whether I was the son of the late Earl of Ellingham. I answered in the affirmative; and she let drop some observations which excited my curiosity. I took her aside, thrust a guinea into her hand, and demanded of her the meaning of her words. She returned me the money, and, after much persuasion, narrated to me the whole history of Octavia Manners—that is to say, as much of it as I have now told to you. You now understand, Georgiana, how it is possible that this Thomas Rainsford may be my half-brother: but, if he be, the account of his death, received by Miranda from her companions, must have been false;—for I need hardly tell you that the elderly gipsy who unfolded to me the details of my father's fatal conduct towards poor Octavia, was none other than Miranda herself. Shortly afterwards my mother died; but I never revealed to her the story of her late husband's guilt and Octavia's wrongs."

Scarcely was this strange narrative concluded, when the door of the apartment opened, and Sir Ralph Walsingham entered the room.

"Well," he exclaimed, "Mr. Rainsford, who honoured this house with a visit last night, and frightened you, Georgiana, so sadly, has got himself into a pleasant scrape at last—"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Lord Ellingham hastily: "what—?"

"He is arrested on a charge of highway robbery—a robbery, in fact, committed on no less a person than our acquaintance Sir Christopher Blunt," returned the baronet.

"Arrested!" ejaculated the Earl, exchanging a rapid glance with Georgiana, as much as to enjoin her not to allow the subject of their previous conversation to transpire in the presence of Sir Ralph Walsingham.

"Yes—arrested last night—lodged in Horsemonger Lane Gaol, as a character, too desperate to put into the usual lock-up—and examined before the Magistrates at the office in the Borough this morning," continued Sir Ralph. "I happened to be in the neighbourhood an hour ago, and heard all about it. But he is remanded for a week, at the solicitation of Mr. Howard, the attorney for the prosecution, Sir Christopher not being in London. Well, poor fellow! I am really sorry for him,—for he seems to be a dashing, daring, gallant blade, by all accounts. Pardon me, however, my dear Georgiana," he added, seeing that his slice was deadly pale; "I ought not to have spoken a word in favour of a man who terrified you so; but—"

Lord Ellingham interrupted Sir Ralph by taking his leave of him and Georgiana; and as the nobleman took the latter by the hand, he said in a hoarse whisper, "I will go and see him at once!"

He then left the house, entered a hackney-coach at the nearest stand, and ordered the driver to take him to Horsemonger Lane Gaol.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

LORD ELLINGHAM AND TOM BAIN.

THE interview between Lady Hatfield and the Earl of Ellingham had lasted a considerable time and it was close upon three o'clock in the afternoon when his lordship reached Horsemonger Lane Gaol.

* For the mode adopted by Gipsies to glean information relative to persons in the various neighbourhoods they visit, see "The History of Skillgales" in the First Series of "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON."

He communicated to the governor his desire to see Thomas Rainford; and although visitors were usually compelled to speak to prisoners through an iron grating, yet the rank of the nobleman and the fact of his being in the commission of the peace for another county (Middlesex), procured him immediate access to the highwayman's cell.

Rainford was sitting in a pensive attitude at a table on which his dinner remained untouched. We have before said—and we now repeat—that he cared but little for the peril of his own predicament: there were, however, ties which bound him to the existence that was now in jeopardy, and to the freedom that was lost.

He started from his seat with unfeigned surprise, when the Earl of Ellingham entered the cell.

"You are astonished to see me here, Mr. Rainford!" said the nobleman, in a mild and mournful tone.

"It is a visit, my lord," was the answer, "that I certainly did not expect."

"And yet—if the statement you made to Lady Hatfield be true—I am but performing a duty—"

"Ah! then she has told you that?" exclaimed the prisoner.

"She has told me that you claim a near—a very near relationship to me," rejoined the nobleman, his voice trembling with emotion—for the reader has seen enough of him to be aware that he possessed a generous heart.

"Yes—my lord," replied Rainford: "the same father was the author of our being—although our mothers were different."

"Is this true?—is it really true?" demanded the Earl hastily.

"As true as there is an Almighty God who now beholds the great peer and the prisoned highwayman face to face!" replied Rainford solemnly; and divesting himself of his coat, he bared his right arm and exhibited a particular mark.

"I cannot doubt it—I cannot disbelieve you!" exclaimed the nobleman, tears starting from his eyes.

And then the great peer and the prisoned highwayman were folded in each other's arms.

"But, my God!" exclaimed Arthur, when the excitement of this fraternal recognition had somewhat passed away: "in what a condition do I find you, my poor brother!"

"Grieve not for me, Arthur," said Rainford: "my fate will soon be decided now; and whatever it may be, I shall be prepared to meet it as becomes a brave man."

"Talk not thus, Thomas!" cried the nobleman, pressing his hand warmly. "I have money to buy off your prosecutors—interest to use in your behalf—"

"If I say to you, 'Ye, we beock,' Arthur," replied the highwayman, "it is only because there is one who loves me well, and for whose sake I could wish to live."

"I understand you—you allude to Miss Etheridge Medina," said the Earl. "But there is another for whose sake you must hope to live and enjoy freedom again: and that is the brother who now stands before you, and who, for our father's sake, will never—never desert you!"

"My dear Arthur, your kindness unmans me," said Rainford; "and yet—if you knew all—you would perhaps think that I am not altogether un-

worthy of your sympathy! But, sit down, and let me show you that, though of lost and raised reputation, I am not without some feeling!"

The Earl took one of the two chairs that there were in the cell; and Rainford seated himself near his half-brother on the other.

"That you are acquainted with a considerable portion of my history, I know," resumed the highwayman; "for some seven or eight years ago you encountered a gipsy-woman near Oxford, who revealed to you—"

"The faithful Miranda indeed told me all she knew!" interrupted the Earl. "But at that period she believed you to have been long dead."

"Yes—and it was only a short time ago that I met her in Hampshire," answered Rainford; "and accident led us to converse together. A word or two which I dropped without anticipating the result, induced her to make certain inquiries: then she requested me, in a hurried and excited manner, to bare my right arm—and it was only on the occasion of which I am speaking, and which occurred a few months since, that I learnt the real narrative of my birth. It appears that when Miranda had fallen so dangerously ill, and had become delirious, the gipsies considered me to be a burthen to them, as I was not born of their race; and one of them took me to Winchester, in the neighbourhood of which city the tents were pitched at the time; and there he purposely abandoned me. What subsequently became of me I have not time now to relate; my history has been most eventful, and could not be compressed into a short narrative. But should the laws of my country demand that my misdeeds be expiated on the scaffold, I will leave that history, written out in all its remarkable details, for your contemplation."

"Talk not thus, Thomas—oh! talk not thus!" cried Arthur. "I will save you yet—even if I throw myself at the feet of my sovereign, and proclaim that you are my brother!"

"God grant that you may prove successful, for the sake of one who loves me well!" said Rainford, solemnly. "But let me pursue the thread of that much of my story which I have now to relate to you. It appears that when Miranda did recover from her serious illness, the gipsies did not like to tell her the truth relative to myself; and they therefore invented the tale of my death to account for my disappearance. Thus was it that, until a few months ago, she remained in ignorance of the deceit that had been practised upon her; and the same day which revealed to her the fact that I was still alive, made me acquainted with the history of my birth. Miranda also told me that Benjamin Bones was still in existence and was reputed to be a rich man. She had recently been in London; and curiosity had prompted her to make inquiries concerning him. All that she had gleaned, she communicated to me. It then struck me that I would come to London—that I would throw myself in the way of that man who had plundered me of my inheritance—and that I would watch for some favourable opportunity to wring from him the amount with interest and compound interest, that was fairly mine. I learnt from Miranda that certain papers had been found about the person of my poor mother, after she was dead, and that the perusal of them had excited the interest of this Bones. It therefore struck me that I might recover those

documents, as well as the money of which I had been plundered. If the documents should prove in any way interesting or valuable, I thought, so much the better; if not, to harm would be done in obtaining possession of them. I came to London; and accident enabled me, through the intervention of a mutual acquaintance named Tallock, to meet with Benjamin Bones. I offered him my services in a particular way—and he accepted them. To be candid, he was to plan deeds of villany—and I was to execute them. His terms were so ridiculously exorbitant that I should have laughed at them, had I not a particular object to serve in connecting myself with him. And the opportunity which I sought presented itself sooner than I had anticipated. In a word, I had succeeded in all I had undertaken: I was enabled to help myself to as much as I chose of his hoarded treasures—and I discovered the papers that I have alluded to.

"And were they of any interest?" asked the Earl.

"Of such interest and of such value, Arthur," returned Tom Rain, "that perhaps there is no other man in England who would have failed to avail himself of the brilliant prospects that they opened to my view. But I was not to be dazzled by them—not to be led away by the temptation. No; I knew that my character was gone—that my reputation was tarnished—that my misdeeds were numerous and great;—and I felt also for you, Arthur—as well as for the haughty name of Ellingham!"

"What do you mean, my dear brother!" cried the noble, struck by the impressive tone in which Rainford uttered those words.

"I mean," answered the debased highwayman to the great poor, "that within the last few days there has been within my reach a jewel which I might have had, and might still have, for the mere trouble of extending my hand to reach it: a jewel such as men toil all their lives to gain! This jewel is a proud title and a princely fortune—"

"Thomas!—my brother!" ejaculated the Earl, a strange and exciting suspicion flashing through his brain.

"Yes—a proud title and a princely fortune, Arthur," repeated Rainford; "but I desire neither! Yet—solemnly and seriously do I declare that, amongst those papers which I discovered in the den of Benjamin Bones, there was one which would make me rich at the expense of another—enable me to the prejudice of one whom the proud title better becomes,—and that individual who would thus suffer is *yourself*! For Octavia Manners is the Countess of Ellingham—and I—the debased highwayman, am thine elder brother, legitimately born!"

"Oh! what do I hear!" exclaimed Arthur; "and how much generosity does your conduct display! But think not, dearest brother, that I grieve at the announcement which you have just made! No—far from that! To know that my father did justice to your poor mother—to be able to entertain the conviction that the author of our being was less guilty than I imagined—is a source of satisfaction so pure—so sincere—so heart-felt, that I would gladly purchase it even with the loss of title and of fortune!"

"It is you who are generous, Arthur," said Rainford—for so we shall continue to call him, at all events for the present. "But that coronet which sits so gracefully on your noble brow, and that for-

ture which enables you to do so much good, shall never be lost to you. No—never, Arthur! Titles I care not for—great wealth I do not crave;—and even if I yearned for the one or aspired to the other, of what avail would be that idle—ineffectual ambition? Here am I in a vile dungeon—accused of a serious offense—my life endangered! And, even if your interest should save me, must I not for ever become an exile from the land of my birth! Yes! for whether you deter the prosecutors from further proceedings in my case,—or, should they push the matter to the extreme verge, and my life be saved only at your intercession,—can I remain in England? If released from custody, how can I hope to gain an honest name in this clime?—if condemned to death, and then reprieved, will not this leniency on the part of the Crown be conceded on the condition of banishment for the remainder of my days? Thus, Arthur, even did I desire to possess the proud name of Ellingham—did I aspire to that coronet which adorns thy brow—I could not be mad enough to yield to the temptation. But, I repeat—I care not for rank—I need not much wealth; and thus neither my position nor my inclination will for an instant permit me to disturb you in the enjoyment of the family honours and the hereditary estates."

"Alas! how much—how deeply do I regret that we had not met before to embrace as brothers!" exclaimed the Earl. "Though crimes are imputed to you, Thomas,—yet do you possess a heart endowed with the loftiest—the most generous feelings! Ah! well do I now understand wherefore you were agitated last night at Lady Hatfield's house—and why you told me that from no other man in England would you ask as a favour that right of egress from the mansion which you could command by force! And I, who was once on the point of striking you! But wherefore did you not then reveal to me what you have told me now!"

"The secret of my birth you should never have learnt from my lips," answered Rainford. "No—I would not have allowed you to know that you possessed a relative for whom you would have to blush. But I was compelled to make that revelation to Lady Hatfield—because—"

"Ah! let us not talk of her, brother!" said Lord Ellingham mournfully. "I would not for words reproach you—and yet you know not how profoundly I have loved that woman—how tenderly I love her still! But my hopes there—Let us change the topic, I say!" he added, hastily interrupting himself. "And now tell me if there be any thing I can do in order to soften the grief which must be experienced by that one to whom you alluded ere now—any message that I can take to her—"

"Yes: you must see her," said Rainford, after a moment's reflection; "and you must tell her that she is to give up to you all those papers which relate to the marriage of our father and my mother and to my birth. She is acquainted with every thing that concerns me and my affairs. It was my original intention to keep those papers—not to serve any purpose—never to use them,—but to gratify one of those unaccountable whims which sometimes influence the most strong-minded amongst us. I thought that, perhaps, when in a foreign land,—for it was my intention to have quitted this country in a few days,—I might sometimes feel a pleasure in contemplating documents so closely connected with

thy parentage and my birth. Perhaps, too, I might have been swayed by some little sentiment of pride in being able to say to myself, 'A title and a precisely fortunate are within my grasp; and I will not take them, because I feel myself so utterly unworthy of the first, and because I require not the other.'—But now, let my fate be whatever it may, it is prudent that these papers should be destroyed. She, who has them in her keeping, loves me—adores me; but she has one foible—our weakness which has already produced serious embarrassment. She is fond of gay apparel—of costly jewels—of those trinkets and that outward show which dazzle the minds of so many women; and this passion on her part is stronger than herself. In a word, then, I would rather that the papers should not remain in her hands—I would sooner that they should be burnt at once than become the source of a temptation which circumstances might perhaps some day render irresistible to her. If you really wish to ease my mind of any portion of that weight of anxiety which now hangs upon it, you will at once visit her; and when you tell her all that has passed between you and me ere now, she will give you up these documents, which I enjoin you to commit to the flames, when you have perused them."

"I will do your bidding, Thomas, in all respects save one," returned Lord Ellingham: "and that is with regard to the destruction of the papers. No—if you are generous to a degree, I must at least be just; and I will keep these documents for you—safely, religiously keep them—to be at your disposal at any time, however remote, should altered circumstances induce you to claim them."

"Then you imagine," said Rainsford, with something of bitterness in his tone, "that should the future smile upon me, I might be tempted to pluck the coronet from your brow to place it on mine own? You wrong me—yes, you wrong me, Arthur!"

"Heaven knows that I would not willingly—wantonly do so!" cried the nobleman enthusiastically. "But, justice—"

"Well—be it as you say," interrupted Rainsford, with a view to terminate the discussion on this topic. "Obtain the papers—they will be safer with you than with her, much as she is devoted to me. And now must I reveal to you another secret—a secret of a strange and romantic nature, connected with her whom you are about to visit—"

"With Esther!" said the Earl hastily.

"Ah! ever harping upon that name!" exclaimed Rainsford. "Did I not assure you last night that Esther is as pure and innocent as woman can be, and that she does not even know me by sight? See, then, if I have deceived you!—but I will not keep you in suspense—"

At this moment, the turnkey entered with an intimation that it was impossible to allow the interview to be protracted any longer on the present occasion, as the hour for locking up had already passed some time.

"To-morrow, then, you will come again," said Rainsford, in a low whisper to his brother. "And now go to No. 5, Brandon Street, Lock's Fields—it is not very far from here—and inquire for Mrs. Rainsford."

The Earl pressed his hand in assurance of obeying the directions thus given; and, as the turnkey appeared impatient, the young nobleman hurried away from his brother's cell.

But the mystery relative to Esther de Medina—whatever it might be—was not so soon to be cleared up as the Earl of Ellingham expected.

Upon leaving the prison, he observed an ill-looking fellow loitering about at the gate, and on whose forbidding countenance the light of the lamp streamed fully when the wicket was opened to afford the nobleman egress—for our readers will remember that all the incidents yet related in this narrative occurred in the winter time, when it is dark at four o'clock.

But it was now nearly six o'clock; and the atmosphere was hazy with mist.

The Earl walked rapidly away from the prison-gate; but when he had proceeded about thirty yards, he inquired of a passer-by the way to Lock's Fields. The man was a stranger in the neighbourhood, and could not tell him.

"Please, sir, I'll show you the way," exclaimed another individual, stepping officiously forward.

Lord Ellingham immediately recognised, by the light that glimmered from a window in Horseman-gate Lane, the ill-looking fellow whom he had noticed at the door of the prison; and for an instant he hesitated to accept his services. But at the next moment he felt ashamed of this vague alarm, and directed the man to lead on.

The fellow turned abruptly round, saying, "You are going out of your way, sir. We must get down to the Fields by the back of the prison."

And he led the way, the Earl following him, down Horseman-gate Lane towards Harper Street. But as they passed along the prison-wall, Arthur observed two or three men loitering about at short intervals from each other; and it struck him that his guide coughed in a peculiar fashion as he passed them.

A misgiving, which he vainly endeavoured to resist, was now excited in the Earl's mind; but still he would not turn back nor question his guide.

Suddenly he was seized from behind, and pulled violently backward, while a strong hand fastened itself as it were over his mouth. He struggled desperately; but his guide turned on him, and he was now in the grasp of four powerful men, whose united strength it was impossible to resist.

Still he endeavoured to release himself; and once he managed to get the hand away from his mouth, an advantage of which he instantly availed himself to cry out for help.

But in another instant he was stunned by the blow of a pistol on the head.

When he awoke, he was in total darkness, and lying on a hard bed.

He instinctively stretched out his arms: his right hand encountered a rough and damp stone wall.

He rose and groped cautiously about him;—but it required not many moments to convince him of the terrible though mysterious truth—that he was the inmate of a narrow dungeon!

But where was he thus imprisoned?

Who were the authors of this outrage?

And for what purpose was he made a captive?

These three queries defied all conjecture; and the young nobleman was left to the darkness of his dungeon and the gloom of his meditations.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A PAINFUL INTERVIEW.

WE must now go back a few hours—only to the morning of this eventful day—in order to describe the interview which Mr. Clarence Villiers had with his respectable aunt Mrs. Slingsby, at her residence in Old Burlington Street.

He called at her abode as early as nine o'clock,—for he had passed a sleepless night, in consequence of the communication made to him by the individual whom he as yet knew only as Captain Sparks, and of whose arrest on the preceding night he was as yet ignorant.

Mrs. Slingsby, Adela, and Rosamond were seated at breakfast in a comfortable little parlour, when Clarence was announced.

At first his appearance at so unusual an hour and when he was supposed to be on his way to his office in Somerset House, excited some alarm, lest he had had news to communicate; and the sisters already trembled for fear their father had discovered their abode. But he speedily reassured them by declaring that he intended to give himself a holiday that morning, and had therefore come to join them at the breakfast-table.

"You are welcome, Clarence," said Mrs. Slingsby, while Adela appeared so pleased at this unexpected visit that the enhanced carnation tinge of her cheeks and the joy that flashed in her fine eyes rendered her transcendently beautiful.

But Rosamond seemed pensive and even melancholy—although she endeavoured to smile and appear gay.

"I had a visit from Captain Sparks last evening," observed Clarence. "He is going to America, and he called to take leave of me, as well as to entrust me with some little commission, which I of course undertook."

"And we heard a most wholesome and beneficial discourse from the Reverend Mr. Sawkins," observed Mrs. Slingsby.

"Was Mr. Sheepshanks present?" inquired Villiers, without looking at his aunt, and apparently intent only on carving the ham.

"My dear Clarence," said Mrs. Slingsby in a serious, reproachful tone, "your question is light and inconsiderate. You doubtless intended it as a jest, but the object to which it refers is one painfully calculated to wound those who have the good cause at heart. Mr. Sheepshanks has conducted himself in a manner that has produced the most lively grief as well as the greatest astonishment in what may be strictly termed the religious world. Sir Henry Courtenay was shocked when I narrated the incident to him."

"Oh! Sir Henry was shocked, was he?" exclaimed Clarence. "Well, for my part, I should have conceived that a man of fashion would have cared very little for all the Sheepshanks' and Sawkins' in the universe."

"Clarence!" said Mrs. Slingsby, "what is the matter with you this morning? There seems to be an unusual flippancy in your observations—"

"Not at all, my dear aunt. Only, I conceive that a man who is fond of gaiety—who goes to parties—mixes with the elite of the West End, and so on, can have but little time to devote to the interests of Canibal-Clothing Associations."

"My dear nephew, you astonish me!" exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby. "Is it so affix a vulgar nickname to an admirable institution, that you call it a Canibal-Clothing Association? I once thought you had some degree of respect for the philanthropic and religious establishments which are the boast and ornament of your native land. But—"

"My dear aunt, pardon me if I have offended you," said Clarence—but in a cool and indifferent tone. "I really forgot at the moment the name of the institution to which that arrant hypocrite and scoundrel Sheepshanks belonged."

"Use not such harsh words, Clarence," enjoined Mrs. Slingsby, who knew not what to think of her nephew's unusual manner and discourse. "Mr. Sheepshanks has lost himself in the estimation of all persons of rightly constituted minds; but the Christian spirit of forgiveness commands us to be lenient in our comments on the actions even of the wicked."

"That may be," said Clarence. "But as I read the account in the newspapers, it certainly looked so black against this Sheepshanks, that had he been sent to Newgate, he would have had no more than his due. Now, my opinion is this—robbery is always a heinous crime; but he who robs his fellow-creatures under the cloak of religion, is an atrocious sinner indeed. Hypocrisy, my dear aunt, is a detestable vice; and you, as a woman of sound sense and discerning judgment, must admit the truth of my observation. But we were talking of Sir Henry Courtenay."

"You must not utter a word against him," said Adela, in the most artless manner possible; "for Rosamond has conceived so high an opinion of him—"

"Because dear Mrs. Slingsby has represented his virtues—his mental qualifications—his admirable character to me in terms which make me as enthusiastic as herself in extolling so good and amiable a man," exclaimed Rosamond, speaking with an ardour which was the more striking, because the natural parity of her soul prevented her from seeing the necessity of checking it.

Mrs. Slingsby coloured and glanced uneasily towards her nephew, who did not, however, appear to notice that the conversation had taken a turn which was disagreeable to her.

In fact, the suspicions originally excited in his mind by the communications of the preceding evening, were now materially strengthened; and the more he contemplated the character of his aunt, the more transparent became the film that had so long blinded him as to its real nature.

"And so you are a great admirer of Sir Henry Courtenay, Rosamond!" he said, endeavouring to maintain as calm and placid an exterior as possible.

"Rosamond is fully aware that virtue deserves respect, wherever it exists," returned Mrs. Slingsby hastily.

"And Sir Henry Courtenay is the pattern of all virtue, dear madam—is he not?" exclaimed Rosamond.

"He is a very good man, my dear, as I have frequently assured you," said the pious widow. "But let us change a conversation which does not appear agreeable to Clarence."

"I would not for the world manifest so much selfishness," observed Villiers, coolly, "as to quit a topic which gives so much gratification to Rosamond."

mond. At the same time—as the future husband of Adela, and therefore soon to be your brother-in-law, dear Rosamond—I must warn you against conceiving extravagant notions of the integrity and immaculate virtue of any man who belongs to what is called the Fashionable World.”

“But dear Mrs. Slingsby has assured me, Clarence,” ejaculated Rosamond, warmly, “that Sir Henry Courtenay is an exception to the general rule—that he is the very pattern of every thing generous and good—and that no one could err in following his advice, whatever it might be. Oh! I can assure you—”

Rosamond stopped short; for Mrs. Slingsby, seeing that her nephew’s countenance was becoming purple with indignation as the artless girl thus gave vent to the enthusiasm excited in her soul by the most insidious representations,—Mrs. Slingsby, we say, had touched her with her foot beneath the table—a movement naturally construed by Rosamond into a hint to cut short her observations.

“You can retire, dear girls,” said Mrs. Slingsby. “I wish to have a little conversation with Clarence.”

“Do not keep us away long, dear madam,” exclaimed Adela, in a playful manner, as she rose to quit the room with her sister.

Clarence and Mrs. Slingsby were now alone together; and the position of each was a most painful one.

The aunt saw that something was wrong; and her guilty conscience excited a thousand vague fears within her bosom; while the nephew felt convinced that the relative, whom he had hitherto loved and respected, was worthy only of his abhorrence and contempt.

There was a long pause in the conversation after the sisters had left the room; but at length the silence, so irksome to both nephew and aunt, was broken by the latter.

“Clarence—something appears to have vexed—to have annoyed you this morning,” she observed, in a tremulous tone.

“Do you know,” he said, turning abruptly round towards her, and fixing a searching glance upon her countenance, “that you act most unwisely—most indiscreetly—nay, most incorrectly, to expatiate so much upon the virtues of Sir Henry Courtenay? When I first entered the room this morning, I found Rosamond pensive and thoughtful; and she said not a word until that man’s name was mentioned, when she became as it were enthusiastic in his defence, although no actual attack was made by me upon his character. What is the meaning of this strange conduct?”

“Clarence—if, in my respect for Sir Henry Courtenay—I have been too warm in my praises of his character,—if—”

“Aunt, there is no supposition in the case,” interrupted Villiers, almost sternly. “You have been too warm—and heaven only knows with what object! God forbid that I should impute the worst motives to your conduct in this respect: but a dreadful suspicion has been excited in my mind—”

“A suspicion!” murmured Mrs. Slingsby faintly, while the glance which she threw upon her nephew was full of uneasiness.

“Yes—a suspicion!” he repeated; “and most painful—oh! most painful is it to me to be compelled to address you in this manner. But the case is too serious to allow me to remain silent. In one

word, have you not made an impression on the mind of that artless girl which may endanger her peace?—have you not been encouraging in her breast an admiration for a man old enough to be her grandfather—an admiration which is not natural, and which is calculated to inspire her with feelings towards a sexagenarian dandy—”

“Clarence!” exclaimed the pious lady, in a hysterical manner; “how dare you address me in this dictatorial tone? Would you seek to invest my conduct in bestowing well-merited praise on a good man, with an aspect so black—”

“Your indignation is well feigned!” cried Villiers, his lips quivering with rage. “But the day of deception has passed—hypocrisy shall no longer impose upon me. If I accuse you unjustly, I will grovel as an abject wretch at your feet to manifest my contrition. Before I thus debate myself, however, you must prove to me that you are indeed the noble-minded—the open-hearted—the immaculate woman I have so long loved and revered! Tell me, then, the real—the true history of that night when a boy was received into this house through charity—a few years ago—”

Mrs. Slingsby became as pale as death, and sat gazing with laggard eyes upon her nephew—unable to avert her glance, and yet shrinking from it.

“Then you are guilty, madam,” he said, after a few moments’ pause; “and the excellent—the virtuous—the upright Sir Henry Courtenay is your lover! My God! did the world ever know hypocrisy so abominable—so black as this!”

These words were uttered with extreme bitterness—and Mrs. Slingsby burst into a flood of tears, while she covered her face with her hands.

Clarence possessed a generous heart; and this sight moved him.

“My dear aunt,” he said, “I do not wish to mortify you—much less to humiliate you in my presence. In your own estimation you must necessarily be humiliated enough. Neither will I dwell at any length upon the pain—the intense grief which I experience in finding you so different from what I have ever believed you to be—until now!” he added, in a mournful tone. “Were you my sister, or did you stand with reference to me in a degree of relationship that would permit me to remonstrate and advise, I should perhaps both reproach and counsel you. But it would ill become a nephew to address his aunt in such a manner.”

“Clarence, will you expose me? will you ruin me?” demanded Mrs. Slingsby, in a hysterical tone.

“Not for worlds would I injure you!” ejaculated the young man. “But I must receive no more favours at your hands! Here—take back the money which you gave me a few days ago. Thank God! I have not yet expended any of it—and the arrangements I had made to furnish a house for the reception of my Adela, can be countermanded. She will not object to share a lodging with me—until, by my own honest exertions,” he added proudly, “I may be able to give her a suitable home.”

And, as he spoke, he cast a roll of Bank-notes upon the table.

“Oh! Clarence—if I have been weak—frail—culpable,” cried the widow, “you are at least severe and cruel; for I have ever done all I could to serve your interests.”



"Were I to express my real opinion on that head," answered Villiers, "I might grieve you still more than I have already done. A bandage has fallen from my eyes—and I can now understand how necessary an instrument of publicity I have been for your assumed virtues; but, in the name of God! let us argue the point no further; for sincerely—sincerely do I assert my unwillingness to give you additional pain. Pardon me, however, if I declare how impossible it is—how inconsistent it would be—to leave those innocent girls in a dwelling which is visited by such a man as that Sir Henry Courtenay."

"How could you remove them elsewhere, without exposing me, Clarence?" demanded his aunt in an imploring tone. "What explanation can you or I give them, to account in a reasonable manner for the suddenness of such a step?"

Villiers paced the room in an agitated manner.

He knew not how to act.

To leave Adelaï and Rosamond in the society of his aunt was repugnant to his high sense of honour and his correct notions of propriety; and whither to remove them he knew not.

He had seen and heard enough at the breakfast-

table to convince him that Mrs. Slingsby had some sinister motive in creating in the mind of Rosamond,—that innocent, artless maid, which was so susceptible of any impression which a designing woman might choose to make upon it,—a feeling of admiration in favour of the baronet; and although he had to a considerable extent curbed the resentment and the indignation which his aunt's conduct in this respect had aroused within him, still to leave that young maiden any longer within an atmosphere of infection, was impossible! No: he would sooner restore the sisters to their father, and leave to circumstances the realization of his hopes in regard to Adelaï!

While he was still deliberating within himself what course to pursue, and while Mrs. Slingsby was anxiously watching him as he paced the room with agitated steps, the servant entered with the morning's newspaper.

Clarence took it from the table in a mechanical manner and glanced his eye over the first page; but his thoughts were too painfully pre-occupied to permit him to entertain, even for an instant, any idea of reading the journal.

No—it was one of those unwitting actions which we often perform when sorely embarrassed or bewildered,—an action without positive motive and without aim.

But how often do the most trivial deeds exercise a paramount influence over our destinies! And this simple action of glancing at the newspaper proved to be an instance of the kind.

For at the moment when Clarence was about to throw the journal back again upon the table and resume his agitated walk, his eyes encountered an advertisement which instantaneously arrested his attention.

Then, with beating heart and with an expression of joy rapidly spreading itself over his countenance, he read the following lines:—

"To A. and R.—Your distressed and almost heart-broken father implores you to return to him. The past shall be forgotten on his side; and no obstacle shall be opposed to the happiness of A. Your father is lying on a sick bed, and again implores that this prayer may not be made in vain."

"God be thanked!" cried Villiers, no longer able to restrain his joy; and handing the newspaper to his aunt, he directed her attention to the advertisement.

"Here is an apology at once for the removal of the young ladies from this house, Clarence," observed Mrs. Slingsby. "And now that you are saved from the embarrassment in which you were plunged but a few minutes back, will you promise never—never to reveal—and, if possible, to forget—"

"You allude to your conduct towards Rosamond!" said Villiers. "Tell me its motive—and I swear solemnly—"

"In one word, then," interrupted his aunt, "let Rosamond beware of Sir Henry Courtenay! And now answer me a single question—for I see you are impatient to be gone:—How came you to discover—what meant your allusion—to—the boy who was received into this house—"

"I cannot stay to explain all that," cried Villiers, "but rest assured that your character stands no chance of being made the subject of scandalous talk—unless, indeed, your future actions—"

"Enough, Clarence!" exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby. "I know that you must despise me; but spare me any farther humiliation!"

She then rang the bell, and desired the servant to summon Adels and Rosamond.

We need not pause to describe the joy which these fair beings experienced when Clarence showed them the advertisement inviting them to return home; although tears immediately afterwards started into their eyes, when they read that their father was upon a bed of sickness.

They once more retired to their bed-chamber to prepare their toilette for departure; and, when a hackney-coach drove round to the door, they took leave of Mrs. Slingsby with demonstrations of gratitude which struck to her heart like a remorse.

Clarence accompanied them back to the cottage; and his heart palpitated violently—he scarcely knew wherefore—when he assisted them to alight.

The front door was opened by the female servant, who uttered a cry of joy on beholding the young ladies once more; and with trembling steps Adels and Rosamond entered the parlour, followed by Clarence.

To their surprise—and, at first, to their great delight—the sisters found themselves, on crossing the threshold of the room, in the presence of their father, who was looking pale, it was true—but with concentrated anger, and not with illness.

Adels and Rosamond fell on their knees before him, exclaiming, "Forgive us, dear father—forgive us!"

"How am I to receive you, Adels!" he asked in a cold voice; "as Miss Torrens—or as—"

"As Miss Torrens at present, sir," answered Clarence stepping forward, and speaking in a firm though respectful tone. "But, in accordance with the promise held out in that advertisement which appears in to-day's journal, I hope that your elder daughter will soon be mine—and with your permission and blessing also."

"Where have my daughters been residing during their absence, sir?" inquired Mr. Torrens, without appearing to notice the latter portion of Villiers' observations.

"Under the protection of a female relative of mine, sir," answered Clarence, with increasing misgivings at the cold demeanour of the father of his beloved.

"Thank you for the information, sir," said Mr. Torrens, with a smile of triumph. "At least you have so far disarmed my resentment, that you have brought me back my daughter pure and innocent as when you enticed her away, with the aid of a villainous robber."

"A robber!" ejaculated Clarence indignantly.

"Yes, sir," continued Mr. Torrens, in a sneering tone; "your worthy colleague, Captain Sparks, is a common highwayman—a thief—properly named Thomas Rainford; and at this moment he is a prisoner in Horsemenager Lane Gaol. Scarcely ten minutes have elapsed since I received a note from Mr. Howard, a solicitor, informing me of the fact."

Clarence was so astounded by this announcement, that for a few moments he could make no reply, and the young ladies, who had in the meantime slowly risen from their suppliant posture and were now standing timidly by their father's side, exchanged glances of painful surprise.

"Yes," resumed Mr. Torrens in a stern and severe tone, "that man, who aided you to effect the abduction of these disobedient girls, is a common highwayman—and you could not be ignorant of that fact!"

"As I live, sir," ejaculated Clarence, at length recovering the power of speech, "I was ignorant of the fact; and even now—But," he added, correcting himself, "I cannot doubt your word! At the same time, permit me to assure you that I had never seen him until that night—"

"I require no farther explanation, sir," interrupted Mr. Torrens. "My daughters are now once more under the paternal roof—invaldly back again, it is true, by a stratagem on my part—"

"A stratagem!" repeated Clarence, while Adels uttered a faint shriek, and sank weeping into her sister's arms.

"Yes—a stratagem, sir!" ejaculated Mr. Torrens. "And now learn my decision, Mr. Villiers! Sooner than she shall become your wife," he continued, pointing towards the unhappy girl, "I would give her to the meanest hind who tills for his daily bread. Depart, sir!—this house is at least a place where my authority can alone prevail!"

"Mr. Torrens—I beseech—I implore you—"
began the wretched young man, whose hopes were
thus suddenly menaced so cruelly.

"Depart, sir!" thundered the angry father; "or
I shall use violence—and we will then see whether
you will strike in return the parent of her whom
you affect to love!"

And he advanced towards Villiers in a menacing
manner.

"I will not stay to irritate you, sir," said Claren-
ce, feeling as if his heart were ready to burst.
"Adelaide—remember one who will never cease to
remember you! Rosamond, farewell!"

Mr. Torrens became more and more impatient;
and Villiers quitted the house with feelings as dif-
ferent from those which had animated him when
he entered it, as the deepest despair is different
from the most joyous hope.

But the anguish of his heart was not greater than
that which now filled the bosom of her from whom
he was so unexpectedly and cruelly separated.

CHAPTER I.

THE LAWYER'S OFFICE.

A FEW days after the events just related, the fol-
lowing scene took place at Mr. Howard's office in
Golden Square.

It was about four in the afternoon, and the law-
yer was seated in his private room, at a table covered
with papers, as a clerk entered and announced
that Sir Christopher Blunt and his lady had just
arrived.

"His lady with him—oh!" exclaimed the solici-
tor. "Well—show them in at once."

And, accordingly, in a few minutes the worthy
knight, with Charlotte—or, we beg her pardon,
Lady Blunt—hanging upon his arm, entered the
office.

The old gentleman was all smiles—but the quick
eye of Mr. Howard immediately perceived that they
were to some extent forced and feigned; and that
beneath his janynt aspect there was not altogether
the inward contentment, much less the lightsome
glee, of a happy bridegroom.

As for Lady Blunt—she was attired in the richest
manner, and in all the colours of the rainbow,—
looking far too gaudy to be either genteel or fashion-
able.

"My dear Sir Christopher, I am quite charmed
to see you" exclaimed Mr. Howard, rising to wel-
come his client and the bride. "Your ladyship—"

"Yes—this is my loving and beloved Lady Blunt,
Howard," said the knight pompously; "a delightful
creature, I can assure you—and who has vowed to
devote herself to my happiness."

"Come now, you great stupid!" said the lady;
"finish your business here, and let us see about the
new carriage. Of all places in the world, I hate a
lawyer's office—ever since I was once summoned to
a Court of Conscience for seventeen shillings and
sixpence-halfpenny, and had to call on the thief of
an attorney to get him to take it by instalments of
sixpence a-week. So, you see, I can't a-bear the
lawyers. No offence, sir," she added, turning to-
wards Mr. Howard; "but I always speak my mind;
and I think it's best."

"My dear creature—my sweet love!" ejaculated

Sir Christopher, astounded at this outbreak of petu-
lance on the part of his loving and beloved wife.

"Pray do not distress yourself, my dear Sir
Christopher," said the lawyer. "We are accus-
tomed to receive sharp rebukes from the ladies
sometimes," he added, with as courteous a smile as
he could possibly manage under the circumstances.
"But pray be seated. Will your ladyship take this
chair!"—and he indicated the one nearest to the
fire.

Lady Blunt quitted her husband's arm, but made
an imperious sign for him to bring his chair close
to hers; and he obeyed her with a submission
which left no doubt in the lawyer's mind as to the
empire already asserted by the bride.

"I am very glad you have called to-day, Sir
Christopher," said the lawyer; "for—"

"He could n't very well come before, sir," inter-
rupted Lady Blunt; "because we only came back
from the matrimonial trip last night."

Mr. Howard bowed, and was preparing to con-
tinue, when the knight exclaimed, "My dear sir,
what a all this to-do about the highwayman who
robbed me of the two thousand pounds! I thought
I told you so particularly that I would rather no
steps should be taken in the matter; and now—the
moment I come back to town—"

"Instead of having all our time to ourselves, to
gud about cozie together," again interrupted Lady
Blunt, "we are forced to come bothering here at a
lawyer's office."

"The ends of justice must be met, Lady Blunt,"
said Mr. Howard drily. "In consequence of particu-
lar information which I received, I caused this
Thomas Rainford to be apprehended; and I appeal
to Sir Christopher himself—who has served the high
office of Sheriff—"

"And once stood as a candidate for the alder-
manic gown of Portoken, until I was obliged to
cut those City people," added the knight, drawing
himself up.

"And why should you cut the City people?" de-
manded his wife. "For my part, I'd sooner see the
Lord Mayor's show than Punch and Judy any day;
and that's saying a great deal—for no one can be
more fond of Punch and Judy than me."

"My dear Charlotte," exclaimed the knight, who
now seemed to be sitting on thorns, "you—"

"Charlotte at home—Lady Blunt in public, Sir
Christopher—if you please," interrupted the bride.
"But pray let Mr. Howard get to the end of this
business."

"Well, my dear," exclaimed Sir Christopher, "if
it annoys you, why would you come? I assured you
how unusual it was for ladies to accompany their
husbands to the office of their solicitors—"

"Oh! I dare say, Sir Christopher!" cried Char-
lotte. "You do n't think that I'm going to trust
you out of my sight, do you now? I'm not quite
such a fool as you take me for. Why, even when
we are walking along the street together, I can see
your wicked old eye fixed on the gals—"

"Lady Blunt!" exclaimed the knight, becoming
literally purple; "you—you—you do me an injus-
tice!"

"So much the better. I hope I am wrong—for
both our sakes," returned her ladyship. "Depend
upon it—But, no matter now; let Mr.
Howard get on with his story."

"With your permission, madam, I shall be do-

lighted to do so," said the lawyer. "I was observing just now that having received particular information, I caused this scoundrel Thomas Rainford, alias Captain Sparks, to be apprehended; and on Monday morning, Sir Christopher, you must attend before the magistrate to give your evidence."

"But who authorised you to proceed in this affair, Mr. Howard?" demanded the knight.

"What a strange question!" exclaimed the lawyer, evidently unwilling to give a direct answer to it. "Only reflect for a moment, my dear Sir Christopher. A robbery is committed—you, your nephew, and myself are outwitted—laughed at—set at defiance,—and when an opportunity comes in my way, I very naturally adopt the best measures to punish the rogue."

"Quite proper too, sir," said Lady Blunt. "The idea of any one daring to laugh at Sir Christopher! I'd scratch the villain's eyes out, if I had him here. To laugh at Sir Christopher, indeed! Does he look like a man who is meant to be laughed at!"

Lady Blunt could not have chosen a more unfortunate opportunity to ask this question; for her husband at that moment presented so ludicrous an appearance, between his attempts to look pleasant and his fears lest he already seemed a henpecked old fool in the eyes of his solicitor, that a man possessing less command over himself than Mr. Howard would have laughed outright.

But with the utmost gravity in the world, the lawyer assured her ladyship that nothing could be more preposterous than to laugh at a gentleman of Sir Christopher Blunt's rank and importance; and he also declared that in arresting Thomas Rainford, he had merely felt a proper anxiety to punish one who had dared to ridicule the knight, after having robbed him.

Lady Blunt was one of those capricious women who will laugh at their husbands either as a matter of pastime or for the purpose of manifesting their own independence and predominant sway, but who cannot bear the idea of any other person taking a similar liberty. She therefore expressed her joy that Mr. Howard had caused Rainford to be apprehended, and declared, of her own accord, that Sir Christopher should attend to give his evidence on the ensuing Monday—"for she would go with him!"

"Well, my dear, since such is your pleasure," observed the knight, "there is no more to be said upon the subject. I will go, my love; and I think that when the magistrate hears my evidence, he will feel convinced that I know pretty well how to aid the operation of the laws, and that I have not been a Sheriff for nothing. Although sprung from a humble origin—"

"Oh! pray do not begin that nonsense, Sir Christopher!" exclaimed the lady; "or I shall faint. It is really quite sickening."

At that moment the door opened somewhat violently; and Mr. Frank Curtis entered the room.

"Ah! Sir Christopher, my jolly old cock—how are you?" exclaimed that highly respectable young gentleman, whose face was dreadfully flushed with drinking, and who smelt so strong of cigars and rum-punch that his presence instantly produced the most overpowering effect.

"Mr. Curtis!" began the knight, rising from his chair, and drawing himself up to his full height, "I—"

"Come—it's no use to be grumpy over it, uncle," interrupted Frank. "Matrimony does not seem to agree with you very well, since you're so soon put out of humor. Ah! my dear Char—my dear aunt, I mean—beg your pardon—quite a mistake, you know;—but really you look charming this afternoon."

"Get out with you, do!" cried Lady Blunt, who was somewhat undecided how to treat Mr. Curtis.

"What! doesn't matrimony agree with you, either, my dear and much respected aunt!" ejaculated Frank. "Why, I once knew a lady who was in a galloping consumption—given up, in fact, and the undertaker who lived over the way had already begun to make her coffin—for he knew he should have the order for the funeral; when all of a sudden a young chap fell in love with her, married her, and took her to the south of France—where I've been, by the bye—and brought her home in six months quite recovered, and in a fair way to present him with a little one—a pledge of affection, as it's called."

"Mr. Curtis, I am surprised at you," exclaimed Sir Christopher, in a pompous and commanding tone;—"to talk in this way before a lady who has only recently passed through that trying ordeal."

"I'll be bound to say it was n't so recent as you suppose, old buck," cried Frank, staggering against the lawyer's table.

"Sir, Lady Blunt has only been recently—very recently married, as you are well aware," said the knight sternly. "And now let me tell you, sir, that the detestable device schemed by Miss Mordaunt and you have recoiled upon yourselves—"

"Miss Mordaunt and me!" exclaimed Frank, now unfeignedly surprised: "why—I never spoke to Miss Mordaunt in my life!"

"The monster!" half screamed Lady Blunt. "The audacious liar!" vociferated the knight.

"Pretty names—very pretty," said Frank coolly; "but I'm rather tough, thank God! and so they won't kill me this time. But I can assure you, uncle, you've got hold of the wrong end of the stick when you say that me and Miss Mordaunt planned any thing against you. As I once observed to my friend the Count of St. Omers,—'My lord,' says I,—'What!' asks the Marquis.—'My Lord Duke,' I repeated, in a firmer tone—"

"Cease this nonsense, Mr. Curtis," interrupted Sir Christopher Blunt sternly.

"Yes—and let us come along, my dear," said Lady Blunt, rising and taking her husband's arm. "Your nervy does smell so horrid of rum and cigars—"

"And very good things too," cried Frank; "ain't they, Howard? Me and a party of young fashionables have been keeping it up a bit to-day at my lodgings—on the strength of my intended marriage with Mrs. Goldberry, the rich widow—"

"Your marriage, Frank!" exclaimed Sir Christopher. "What—how—when—"

"Lord bless you, my dear uncle," said Mr. Curtis, swaying himself to and fro in a very extraordinary manner, "you don't half know what kind of a fellow I am. While you was away honeymooning and nonsense—"

"Nonsense, indeed!" exclaimed Lady Blunt, indignantly. "Come, Sir Christopher—it's no good staying here talking to Mr. Imperance."

"Going to Condit Street—eh, aunt?"

Frank, with a drunken leer. "Bat, by-the-bye, you regularly choused me out of five guineas, you know, aunty—and something else, too—"

"Eh?—what?" said Sir Christopher, turning back. "Mr. Curtis, do you dare to accuse Lady Blunt—"

"Of having made a very great fool of me, but a much bigger one of you, old fellow," added Frank; and, snapping his fingers in his uncle's face, he exclaimed, "I don't care a penny for you, Sir Christopher! In a few days I shall marry Mrs. Goldberry—you are very welcome to be as happy as you can with your Abigail there. So remember, we're cuts in future, Sir Christopher—since you want to come the bumptious over me."

The knight was about to reply; but his better-half drew him hastily away from the lawyer's office, saying, "Come along, you great stupid! What's the use of staying to dispute with that fellow?"

The door closed behind the "happy couple;" and Mr. Frank Curtis, throwing himself into the chair which Lady Blunt had just quitted, burst out into a tremendous fit of laughter.

"You have gone too far, Frank—a great deal too far," said the lawyer, shaking his head disapprovingly. "Sir Christopher has been a good friend to you; and although he has committed an egregious error in running off with that filly, still—"

"What do I care?" interrupted Frank. "I proposed to Mrs. Goldberry yesterday—and she accepted me, after a good deal of simpering and blushing, and so on. She's got five thousand a year, and lives in splendid style in Baker Street. I made her believe that I was n't quite a beggar myself; but all's fair in love and war, as my friend the late Prince of St. Omers used to say in his cups. But what about this fellow Rainford! and how the deuce did he come to be arrested?"

"I received information of his residence," answered Howard coolly; "and I gave him into custody accordingly."

"It's very odd," continued Frank, "but I met him last Sunday night; and I do n't mind telling you that we went into the middle of Hyde Park and had an hour's wrestling together, to see who was the better man. I threw him sixteen times running, and he threw me seven; then I threw him three times—and he gave in. So we cried 'quits' for old scores, and I gave him my word and honour that nothing would ever be done against him in respect to the little affair of the two thousand pounds. You may therefore suppose that I'm rather vexed—"

"The officers had already received instructions to apprehend him at the time your alleged wrestling match came off," said the lawyer; "and your evidence will be required next Monday morning."

"And I suppose the whole affair of the robbery will come out!" observed Curtis interrogatively.

"Decidedly so. You must state the exact truth—if you can," added Mr. Howard.

"If I can! Damn it, old fellow, that observation is not quite the thing—coming from you; and if any body else had uttered it, egad! I'd send him a hostile message to-morrow morning—as I did to my most valued friend, the Marquis of Boulogne, when I was in Paris. I'll just tell you how that was—"

"Not now, Frank," interrupted the lawyer; "because I am very busy. It's getting on for past time

—and I have not a minute to spare. Bat mind and be punctual at the Borough police-office on Monday morning at ten."

"Well—if I must, I must," said Curtis. "But, after all, I think it's rather too bad—for this Sparks, or Rainford, or whatever his name is, seems a good kind of fellow, after all."

"The law must take its course, Frank," observed the attorney in an abrupt, dry manner.

Curtis accordingly took his leave, and returned to his lodgings, where by dint of cold water applied outwardly and soda-water taken inwardly, he endeavoured to sober himself sufficiently to pay a visit to Mrs. Goldberry.

For it was literally true that there was such a lady—that she lived in splendid style in Baker Street—that Frank had proposed to her—and that he had been accepted;—but we have deemed it necessary to give the reader these corroborative assurances on our part, inasmuch as the whole tale would otherwise have appeared nothing more nor less than one of the innumerable children of Mr. Curtis's fertile imagination.

CHAPTER LI.

LORD ELLINGHAM IN THE DUNGEON.

FOUR weeks had elapsed since the arrest of Tom Rain and the extraordinary adventure which had snatched the Earl of Ellingham from the great world and plunged him into a narrow—solitary cell.

Yes—four weeks had the nobleman languished in the terrible dungeon,—ignorant of where his prison-house was situated—why his freedom was thus outraged—and who were his persecutors.

Every morning, at about eight o'clock, a small trap in the door of his cell was opened, and food was passed through to him. A lamp had been given him the day after he became an inmate of the place; and oil was regularly supplied for the maintenance of the light. His food was good, and wine accompanied it;—it was therefore evident that no petty spite nor mean malignity had led to his captivity.

Indeed, the man who brought him his food assured him that no harm would befall him,—that his imprisonment was necessary to suit certain weighty and important interests, but that it would not be protracted beyond a few weeks,—and that the only reason for placing him in such a dungeon was because it was requisite to guard against the possibility of an escape.

Often and often had Lord Ellingham endeavoured to render his gaoler more communicative; but the man was not to be coaxed into garrulity. Neither did he ever allow the nobleman to catch a glimpse of his features, when he brought the food to the trap-door. He invariably stood on one side, and spoke in a feigned tone when replying to any question to which he did vouchsafe an answer.

The day after his strange and mysterious arrest, Arthur received from this man the assurances above mentioned; and a considerable weight was thereby removed from his mind. His imprisonment was not to be eternal; a few weeks would see the term of the necessity that had caused it. Bat still he grieved—nay, felt shocked to think of the state of suspense in which those who cared for him would remain during his long absence. The source of affliction he mentioned to the man who attended

upon him; and the reply was to some extent satisfactory.

"I will supply you with writing materials, and you can address letters to your friends, stating that sudden business has called you abroad—to France, for instance; and that you may probably be absent six weeks. Write in this manner—the excuse will at least allay any serious fears that may be entertained concerning you; and those letters shall be sent through the post to the persons to whom they are addressed. But you must deliver them unsealed into my hands, that I may satisfy myself as to the real nature of their contents."

Small as the satisfaction resulting from this proceeding could be to Lord Ellingham, it was still far preferable to the maintenance of a rigid silence in respect to his friends. He accordingly wrote a laconic letter in the sense suggested by his gaoler; and addressed copies to Lady Hatfield, Thomas Rainford, and Mr. de Medina. The next time his gaoler visited him—or rather, came to the door of the dungeon, the prisoner was informed that the three letters had been duly forwarded through the two-penny post.

The reader will scarcely require to be informed of the mental anxiety which the nobleman suffered during his incarceration. This was naturally great—very great. He was also frequently plunged in the most bewildering conjectures relative to the authors, the motives, and the locality of his imprisonment. Nor less did he grieve—Oh! deeply grieve, when he thought of the surprise—the alarm—and the screw with which Lady Hatfield on one side and Rainford on the other must view his mysterious absence. He had left the former with the intention of seeing the latter, and she would naturally expect him to return if for no other reason than to give her an account of their interview; and he had quitted Rainford with the promise to perform a certain task, and also having pledged himself to use his influence and his wealth in his behalf.

The idea of the feelings that must be entertained by Rainford relative to his absence, afflicted him more than any other. That generous-hearted man had told him to keep his coronet and his fortune to the prejudice of him—the elder brother, legitimately born; and yet that interview in Horsemaner Lane Goal seemed destined to be the last which they were to have together! What would the poor prisoner think when the Earl returned not, and when a letter containing a cold and wretched excuse was put into his hands! Oh! this was the maddening—maddening thought; and the Earl shrank from it far more appalled than from the stern reality of his dungeon! Because Rainford might be judged, and, alas! the law might take its course—its fatal course—ere he, the Earl, could stretch out a hand to save that generous-hearted half-brother.

But amidst all the bitter and bewildering reflections which tormented him during his imprisonment of four weeks in that dungeon of unknown neighbourhood, there was still a predominant idea—a gleam of hope, which, apart from the assurance that his captivity would soon have a term, cheered and animated him often.

For whether will not the rays of Hope penetrate! Even when Hope is really gone, her work is often done by Despair; and the latter feeling, in its extreme, is thus often akin to Hope herself.

The hope, then, that cheered and animated the Earl at times, was—**ESCAPE!**

Yes; he yearned to quit that dungeon, so to speak, for his own sake—oh! not nearly so much, as for that of his half-brother, who was involved in such peril, and who needed influence and interest to save him! For the Earl well knew that the law in criminal cases is not so tardy as in civil matters; and that to take away a man's life, all its machinery is set into rapid motion—although to settle his claims to a fortune or to give him justice against his neighbour it is, heaven knows! heart-breakingly slow and wearisome!

To send a man to the scaffold, takes but a few weeks at the Old Bailey;—to decide the right of this man or that man to a particular estate, or legacy, occupies years and years in the Court of Chancery. Oh! how thirsty do our legislators appear to drink human blood. How rapidly all technicalities and causes of delay are cleared away when the capital offender stands before his Judge! A day—perhaps an hour is sufficient to decide the death of a human being; but half a century may elapse ere the conflicting claims to an acre of land or a few thousand pounds can be settled elsewhere.

And, strange—ah! and monstrous, too, is it, that the man who loses a case in which he sees his neighbor for twenty pounds, may appeal to another tribunal—have a new trial granted—and, losing that also, perhaps obtain a third investigation of the point at issue, and thus three verdicts in that beggarly business! But the man who is doomed to die—who loses his case against the criminal prosecutor—cannot appeal to another tribunal. No judges sit solemnly in banco for him: one verdict is sufficient to take away a life. A way with him to the scaffold! In this great commercial country, twenty pounds—consisting of pieces of paper printed upon and stamped with particular figures—are of more consequence than a being of flesh and blood! What though this being of flesh and blood may have others—a wife and children—dependent on him! No matter! Give him not the chance of a new trial: let one Judge and one Jury suffice to consign him to the hangman! There can be no appeal—no re-investigation for his case, although it be a case of life and death: but away with him to the scaffold!

What blood-thirsty and atrocious monsters have our law-givers been: what cruel, inhuman beings are they still, to perpetuate so abominable—so flagrant—so infamous a state of jurisprudence! For how many have been hanged, though innocent,—their guiltlessness transpiring when it is too late! But there is no court of appeal for the man accused of a capital crime: he is a dog who has got a bad name—and public opinion deems him to be hanged, days and weeks before the jury is sworn or the Judge takes his seat to try him!

And therefore is not this infamous state of the law, which allows appeals to the case of monetary claims, but none to the case of capital accusations,—wherefore is not this state of the law altered! Because our legislators are too much occupied with their own party contentions and strifes;—because they are ever engaged in battling for the Ministerial benches—the "loaves and fishes" of power; because it seems to them of more consequence to decide whether Sir Robert Peel or Lord John Rus-

sell shall be Prime Minister—whether the Conservatives or the Whigs shall hold the reins of power. Or else, gentle reader, the condition of Greece—or Spain—or Turkey,—or even perhaps of Otahaiti,—is a matter of far greater importance than the lives of a few miserable wretches in the condemned cells of criminal gaols!

But, in our estimation—and we have the misfortune to differ from the legislators of the country—the *life of one of those wretches* is of far greater consequence than the state of tyrant-ridden Greece—the Spanish marriages—the quarrels of the Sultan and his Pashas—or the miserable squabbles of hypocritical English missionaries and a French governor in Tahiti. Yes—in our estimation, the life of one man outweighs all such considerations; and we would rather see half a session of Parliament devoted to the discussion of the grand question of the PUNISHMENT OF DEATH, than one single day of that session given to all the foreign affairs that ever agitated in a Minister's brain.

It was the twenty-eighth day of Lord Ellingham's imprisonment; and it was about six o'clock on the evening of this day.

The nobleman was at work upon the masonry of his dungeon,—his efforts being directed to remove the stones from the immediate vicinity of a small square aperture, or sink in the corner of the cell.

His implements were a knife and fork, and one of the screws of the frame-work of his bed.

But with these he worked arduously.

Nor was this the first day of his labours. No; for twenty-six days had he been toiling—toiling—toiling on, to make an opening into what he believed to be the common sewer,—even at the risk of inundating his dungeon, and thus perishing miserably!

But all those toils, and all that risk, were sustained and encountered for thee, Tom RAIN!

Slowly—slowly—slowly had the work progressed; but now—on the twenty-eighth day—Arthur found himself so far advanced that escape from the dungeon was at least open to him.

But escape into what region?

Into those drains and sewers which run beneath the streets of London, and form a maze to which the only clue is a knowledge of the point whence he, who enters the labyrinth, originally starts! And this clue was not possessed by Arthur; for in what part of London his dungeon was situate, he had not the least idea. It could hardly be said that he was confident of this dungeon being in the metropolis at all;—and yet he had many reasons to believe that it was. For, in the first place, his gaoler had mentioned the fact of his letters having been sent by the *necessary post*; secondly, he had ascertained that his cell was situate in the very vicinity of a common sewer, and sewers were not at that time formed in the villages surrounding the metropolis; and thirdly, he could scarcely believe that those who had arrested him in London, would have run the risk of removing him out of its precincts—for he was well aware that atrocious outrages and diabolical crimes may be perpetrated with greater chances of impunity in the metropolis than elsewhere.

But, although he was thus tolerably well convinced that his prison-house was within the boundaries of London, he had not the least notion of the

precise locality. And when he had removed sufficient of the massive masonry to form an aperture large enough to permit a full-grown man to pass into the sewer,—and when he heard the muddy, slimy waters gurgling languidly in the depths below, he shuddered, and his blood ran cold—for he thought within himself, "I have heard of men who venture into these places in search of treasures, and who, having wandered for miles and miles beneath the streets of London, have issued safely forth again. But they knew whence they started; and thus that starting-post was a clue to guide them in the maze. But I know not whether, on entering that slimy shallow, I should turn to the right or to the left,—nor which channels to pursue in that terrible labyrinth!"

Then, ashamed of his fears—reproaching himself for his hesitation, he drank a deep draught of the wine that had been supplied him in the morning; and holding the lamp in one hand, and in the other a stout stick cut from one of the cross-beams that supported the mattress of his bed, he entered the common sewer.

His feet sank down into the thick slime, and the muddy water reached to his knees. There was a nauseous odour in the dreary passage, and the filthy fluid was very thick. These circumstances convinced him that it was low water in the river Thames; and by examining the masonry forming the sides of the sewers, he saw that the tide was running out. He therefore resolved to follow the course of the muddy stream, with the hope that he might at length reach one of the mouths by which the sewers discharge their contents into the river.

Armed with his stick to protect himself against the rats as well as to sound his way so as to escape any hole or abrupt depth that there might chance to be in the bottom of the sewer,—and holding the lamp in his left hand, the great peer of England pursued his appalling path in a channel seven feet wide and beneath a vaulting twelve feet high.

From time to time the sudden rush of a number of vermin along a ledge by the side of the channel, and then the sound of their plunge into the slimy water, startled him to such a degree that he almost dropped his lamp; and then the conviction which flashed to his mind that *if he lost his light, he should be inevitably devoured by those vermin*, caused such a chill to pass through him—as if ice were unexpectedly placed upon his heart—that his courage was oftentimes nearly subdued altogether.

But he thought of his half-brother who had manifested so much generosity towards him,—he thought of her whom he had promised to love as a sister,—and he also remembered that were he to retrace his steps, *even if he could find his way back*, he should be returning to a dungeon—of all this he thought—and he went on,—in that revolting and perilous maze!

Yes: with lamp held high up, and stick grooving in the filthy mud—stirring up nauseating odours,—on—on went the daring, enterprising, chivalrous nobleman—breathing an infected and almost stifling air,—an air formed of such noxious gases, that it might explode at any moment, ignited by the lamp!

But, hark! what is that rumbling sound—like thunder at a vast distance?

Arthur pauses—and listens.

The truth in a few moments flashed to his mind; he was beneath a street in which vehicles were

moving. Oh! now he felt convinced—even if he had entertained any doubts before—that he was in London.

Watching the progress of the slimy stream, he turned first to the left, up a channel that branched off from the one which he had originally entered;—then he turned to the right into another—the hollow rumbling sounds overhead gradually increasing in volume and power.

Suddenly he beholds a light glancing upon the patescent surface of the slimy stream through which he is wading knee-deep. That light is half-a-dozen yards in front of him—flickering playfully.

He advances: sounds of footsteps—human footsteps—come down from overhead. He looks up—and, behold! there is a grating in the street above; and through that grating the light of the lamp streams and the sound of the footsteps comes.

He hears voices, too—as the people pass,—the voices of that world from all communication with which he is for the time cut off!

Shall he cry out for assistance? No: a sense of shame prevents him. He would not like to be dragged forth from those filthy depths, in the presence of a curious—gaping—staring crowd. He prefers the uncertainty and the peril of his subterranean path, in the fond hope that it may speedily lead to some safe issue.

The Earl accordingly passed on—disturbing the water on which the light from the street-lamp played,—disturbing, too, the vermin on either side with the splash of the fetid fluid as he waded through it.

But when he had proceeded a dozen yards, he looked back—as if unwilling to quit the vicinity of that grating which opened into the street.

In another moment, however, he conquered his hesitation, and pursued his way in a straight line, without again turning off either to the right or to the left.

Upwards of an hour had elapsed since he had quitted the dungeon—and as yet he had found no issue from that labyrinth of subterranean passages.

Grim terrors already began to assume palpable forms to his imagination, when suddenly he beheld a dim twinkling light, like a faint star, at a great distance ahead.

That light seemed a beacon of hope; and as he drew nearer and nearer, its power increased. At last he saw another twinkling light, struggling as it were betwixt glimmer and gloom;—and then a third—and then a fourth. The air appeared to grow fresher too; and the Earl at length believed that an opening from the maze must be near.

Yes: he was not mistaken! The lights increased in number and intensity; and he was soon convinced that they shone upon the opposite bank of the Thames.

A few minutes more—and all doubt was past! The fresh breeze from the river fanned his cheek—and, as he reached the mouth of the sewer, and hurried away his lamp, he saw the mighty flood stretched out before him—a bridge spanning its width at a little distance on his left hand.

He knew that bridge;—he recognised it by the pale lustre of the moon—for the evening was clear and fine.

It was Blackfriars Bridge!

Thence, from which direction had he come?

Remembering the turnings he had taken, he could

fix upon the district of Clerkenwell as the scene of his late imprisonment. But he did not pause to reflect on a matter now so trivial,—trivial, because he had escaped, and was once more free!

It was low water—and a bed of mud received him knee-deep, as he leapt from the mouth of the sewer.

But what cared he for his unsmooth and filthy appearance?—since he had escaped, and was once more free?

For four weeks his beard had not been shaved, nor his toilette carefully performed; and his hair, too, was long and matted. It was therefore necessary to cleanse himself and change his attire as soon as possible.

Hastening along the muddy margin of the river's bed, he ascended the steps of a wharf, and plunged into the district of Whitefriars. There, selecting the humblest-looking public house he could find, he entered; and, as he had his purse about him (for those who had imprisoned, did not rob him), he was enabled to command the necessaries and attentions which he required. Indeed, the landlord willingly supplied a complete change of linen and a suit of his own clothes to a guest who spared not his gold; and as "mine host" and the Earl happened to be of the same height and equally slender in figure, the garments of the former suited well enough the temporary need of the latter.

A hundred times, while performing his hasty toilette, was the Earl on the point of summoning the landlord, and making inquiries concerning Tom Rains; but the extraordinary appearance which he himself had worn on entering the public-house, must, he felt convinced, have already engendered strange suspicions concerning him; and prudence suggested to him the necessity of avoiding any conversation which might strengthen these suspicions, and thereby lead him into some embarrassment from which the revelation of his name and rank might alone extricate him.

But, oh! how painful—how acutely painful was the suspense which he endured while passing through the details of ablution and change of attire; and, although never were the duties of the toilette more necessary, yet never had the Earl hurried them over with such feverish excitement.

At length, as St. Paul's Cathedral proclaimed the hour of eight, on that eventful evening, Arthur sallied forth from the public-house—leaving the landlord and landlady a prey to the wildest and most unsatisfactory conjectures as to what he was, and how he had happened to be in the condition in which he at first presented himself at their establishment. They, however, both agreed that it was a very good evening's work for them; inasmuch as their strange guest had paid them with a liberality which would have rendered a similar visit every night of their lives a most welcome God-send.

In the meantime the Earl of Ellingham had gained Fleet Street, with the intention of entering some tavern or hotel where a file of newspapers was kept. But he was struck by the deserted appearance of the great thoroughfare—for the shops were all shut, and the vehicles, instead of pouring in two dense streams running different ways, were few and far between.

It then struck him that it was Sunday evening—for though, in his dungeon, he had been enabled to count the lapse of each day through the date afforded by the morning visits of his gaoler, yet he



had not kept so accurate a calculation as to mark each day by its distinctive name.

As he stood in Fleet Street, uncertain how to proceed, it suddenly struck him that he would purchase a newspaper. The office of the *Weekly Dispatch* was facing him: he entered, and bought that day's number.

Such was his intense curiosity—nay more, his acute and agonising suspense,—and so awful were the misgivings which crowded upon his soul,—that he lingered in the office to glance over the newspaper.

And, my God! how he started—how his brain seeled—how crushed and overwhelmed did he feel, when his eyes encountered the dreadful words at the head of a column—

THE CONVICT RAINFORD.

He staggered against the wainscot of the office, and the journal nearly dropped from his hands. He endeavoured to master his emotions, and refer to the fatal column for further particulars; but his brain swam—his eyes were dim—his glance could not settle themselves upon the point which he

vainly endeavoured to make the focus of his attention.

The clerk in the office fancied that he was suddenly attacked with indisposition, and made a polite inquiry to that effect. But the Earl, without giving a direct reply, put hasty and impatient questions to him; and, though his ideas were strangely confused, he nevertheless understood the appalling announcement—that *Rainford* had been condemned to death and that the sentence was to be carried into execution on the following morning at *Horsemaner Lane Gaol*!

The Earl threw down the paper—and darted from the office,—recovered from his state of stupefaction, but only to become the prey to the most maddening feelings of despair.

An empty hackney-coach was passing at the moment: he stopped it, and leapt in—exclaiming to the driver, "To Horsemaner Lane Gaol."

The coachman saw that his fare was impatient to reach that place; and he whipped his horses into a decent pace. Over Blackfriars Bridge—down the wide road went the vehicle: then it turned to the

left at the Obelisk—and, in a short time, it stepped in front of the gaol.

The Earl sprang forth, and was rushing up to the entrance of the governor's house; when an ominous hammering noise fell upon his ears.

He instinctively glanced upwards;—and there—on the top of the gaol—standing out in bold relief against the moon-lit sky, were the black spire of the gibbet which the carpenters had already erected for the coming morning's work!

CHAPTER LII.

LORD ELLINGHAM'S EXERTIONS.

NOT A CRY—not a word—not even a moan betrayed the feelings of the Earl of Ellingham, as this frightful spectacle met his eyes.

He was paralysed—stunned—stupified.

Despair was in his heart;—and he could not lower his glance, which were fascinated—rivetted by that awful engine of death on the summit of the gaol.

This state of complete prostration of all the intellectual energies was suddenly interrupted by a gentle pull at his sleeve; and turning abruptly round, he beheld, by the pale light of the moon, a young lad of sickly appearance standing at his elbow.

"Do you know me? what would you with me?" demanded the Earl sharply.

"Yes—my lord, I know you," was the answer, delivered in a mournful—melancholy tone; "and I also know that good—generous man who—"

The lad burst into an agony of tears, and pointed wildly towards the gibbet.

"Oh! you know Rainford!" exclaimed the Earl eagerly. "Tell me, my boy—speak—have you seen him lately?"

"This day—this evening," replied Jacob Smith—for it was he: "and I have taken leave of him—for ever! He begged me not to visit him—tomorrow—"

"For ever!" echoed the Earl, in a low and hollow voice. "But," he continued, again speaking eagerly and rapidly, "how does he support his doom?"

"With a courage such as the world has seldom seen," replied Jacob: "and he frequently speaks of you, my lord!"

"He speaks of me, my boy—"

"Yes: my lord—he fears that some tidings—some evil reports which you have probably heard, have set you against him—for he received a letter from you a day or two after his arrest—"

"My God! he suspects me of coldness!" exclaimed the Earl, in an impassioned tone. "Oh! I must see him—I must see him this moment—"

And he was rushing towards the governor's door, when Jacob again caught him by the sleeve, saying, "It is useless, my lord: you cannot be admitted to-night."

"The keeper of the prison dare not refuse me," cried the Earl; and he hastened to the door.

"Would it not be better, my lord," asked Jacob, who had followed him, "to use the valuable time now remaining, for the purpose of saving him?"

"True!" exclaimed the Earl, struck by the observation. "An interview with him at this moment

would effect no good, and would only grieve me altogether. Come with me, my lad: you take an interest in Rainford—and you shall be the first to learn the result of the application which I will now make in the proper quarter."

Thus speaking, Arthur hurried back to the hackney-coach, and as the door closed upon himself and Jacob, he said to the driver in a firm tone, "TO THE HOME-OFFICE!"

During the ride, the Earl put a thousand questions to Jacob Smith relative to the convict.

From the answers he received it appeared the Rainford was well convinced that neither Sir Christopher Bunt nor Mr. Curtis had directed Mr. Howard to prosecute him for the robbery for which he was doomed to suffer; indeed, they had declared as much when giving their evidence at the police-court and at the Old Bailey. Neither did he believe that Howard had instituted the proceedings through any personal motive of spite; but he entertained the conviction that some secret and mysterious springs had been set in motion to destroy him, and that Howard had been made the instrument of the fatal design.

It seemed that Jacob had visited him as often as the prison regulations would permit; and that he had been the bearer of frequent letters between Rainford and the beautiful Jewess, who had removed from Brandon Street a few days after his arrest—this change of residence being effected by the express wishes of Tom Rain, who was afraid lest the malignity of his unknown enemies might extend to herself. Jacob also casually mentioned that the very first time he had been sent to see the Jewess (which appeared to have been the morning after Lord Ellingham's laconic letter was received by Rainford) she enclosed a number of papers in a packet, which she carefully sealed and which Jacob conveyed to the prisoner.

"When I was with him this evening," added the lad, "he gave me that packet, which he re-directed to your lordship, and desired me to leave it at your lordship's residence to-morrow—when all should be over; but since I have thus unexpectedly met you—"

Sobs choked the youth's utterance, as he passed the sealed packet to the Earl, who received it in profound silence—for well did he divine the nature of its contents, and his heart was rent with anguish as he felt all the generosity of that deed on thy part, Tom Rain!

But, in a few moments, the spark of hope that already scintillated within him, was fanned into a bright and glowing flame; for he now possessed proofs to convince the Secretary of State that in allowing the law to take its course, an individual rightly entitled to an Earldom would suffer death; and Arthur was well aware of the influence which such an argument would have in supporting his appeal for a commutation of the sentence.

"Thy generous act in giving up the papers which these nighties have used to save thy life," he thought within himself, apostrophising his doomed half-brother, "shall not be thrown away on me! Ingratitude to thee were impossible!"—Then, turning to Jacob, he said aloud, "I am much mistaken, my boy, if these papers which you have placed in my hands will not effect the great object that we have in view."

"Oh! my lord," exclaimed Jacob, with the most

sincere joyfulness of manner, "is there really so much hope? Ah! if not for him—at least for that poor lady who loves him so deeply—"

"Has she seen him?" hastily inquired the Earl.

"Once—once only," answered Jacob: "and that was this afternoon. I was not present at the farewell scene; but I was in the neighbourhood when she came out again—and I do not wish ever to witness a beautiful woman's grief again. My lord, I have passed through much—seen much,—and distress and misery in all their worst forms are known to me. But as long as I live will the image of that poor creature, as the wind blew aside her veil for a few moments—Oh! I cannot bear to think of it!"

"He shall be restored to her, my lad!" exclaimed the Earl emphatically. "The more I ponder upon the case, the more firmly do I become convinced that it is one in which the Home Secretary may exercise the prerogative of mercy. It is not as if blood had been shed—"

At this moment the hackney-coach stopped at the door of the Home Office; and the Earl alighted, bidding Jacob await his return.

But what language can describe the violence of that sudden revulsion of feeling which Arthur experienced, when, on inquiry, he learnt that the Home Secretary was neither at his official nor his private residence in London, as he had set out on the preceding evening for his country seat in the north of England!

With the rapidity of lightning did the Earl calculate the chances of overtaking him by means of fleet horses: but a few moments' reflection showed him the impossibility of accomplishing that undertaking in time to make its result, supposing it were successful, available to the doomed victim. The reprieve might be granted—but it would arrive in London too late!

The Earl was well aware that it was useless to seek the Prime Minister; as that functionary would have no alternative save to reply that he could not possibly interfere in a case so essentially regarding the department of the Home Secretary.

Arthur's mind was accordingly made up in a very few moments:—he would repair at once to the King, who, as he learnt at the Home Office, was, fortunately for his purpose, at Buckingham Palace!

It was now ten o'clock at night: there were but ten hours before him—but in that interval much might be done.

Returning to the coach, he desired to be driven to his own house; and, while proceeding thither, he acquainted Jacob with the cruel disappointment he had sustained by the absence of the Secretary of State, and stated his resolution to repair at once to the dwelling of the King.

Thus the poor wretched lad became, by his generous sympathy for Tom Rains, the companion and confidant of the great noble!

Great was the joy which prevailed amongst the Earl's household, when he made his appearance once more at his own abode. The servants had indeed heard from Dr. Lascelles as much as the physician himself had learnt through the medium of the vague and laconic letter which the Earl was permitted to write to him from his dungeon—but still the protracted absence of their master had occasioned them the most lively uneasiness and

they were therefore heartily glad to behold his return.

But he was compelled to cut short the congratulations proffered him; and the orders that he issued were given with an unworded degree of impatience.

"Let the carriage be ordered round directly. Let some one hasten to acquaint Lady Hatfield with my return; and also send up to Grafton Street to request Dr. Lascelles to come hither as soon as possible, and to wait for me—never mind how late. Let this lad be taken care of," he added, indicating Jacob: "and see that he wants for nothing."

Then, hastening up stairs to his own chamber, he locked himself in, having declined the attendance of his valet.

He took open the packet which Jacob had given him, and beheld a small leathern case. This case contained a roll of letters and other documents tied round with a piece of ribbon so faded that it was impossible to determine what its colour might have originally been. There was also, accompanying this roll, a brief note addressed to himself.

With trembling hand he opened the note, and, with beating heart and tearful eyes, read the following words:—

"I have sent you the papers, my dear brother—for so I shall make bold to call you still,—to convince you that I did not forge an idle tale when we met last. Whatever your motive for abandoning me in my last hours may be, I entertain no ill feeling towards you; on the contrary, I hope that God may prosper you, and give you long life to enjoy that title and fortune which in so short a time will be beyond the possibility of dispute.

"I had promised to leave behind me a written narrative of my checkered and eventful history for your perusal: but—need I explain wherefore I have not fulfilled this promise?"

"T. R."

The Earl wept—Oh! he wept plentifully, as he read those lines.

"He thinks that I have abandoned him—and he expressed the most generous wishes for my prosperity!" he cried aloud. "Oh! my God—I must save him—I must save him!"

He waited not to examine the roll of papers: his half-brother intimated that the necessary proofs were there—and, though no human eye watched the Earl's motion at that instant, still he would not imply a doubt of Rainsford's word by examining the documents.

But he hastened to dress himself in attire suitable to his contemplated visit to the King; and his toilette was completed just as the carriage drove round to the door.

A few moments afterwards he was rolling rapidly along in the vehicle towards Buckingham Palace, the papers carefully secured about his person, and his heart palpitating violently with the cruel suspense of mingled hope and fear.

Alas! he was doomed to another disappointment.

Though it was but little past eleven o'clock, King George the Fourth had already retired to rest,—or rather had been borne away in a senseless state from one of those beastly orgies in which the filthy voluptuary so often indulged.

This much was intimated to the Earl by a nobleman attached to the royal person, and with whom Arthur was well acquainted.

Quitting the palace in disgust combined with despair, Lord Ellingham returned home.

But, no—we were wrong: he did not entirely

despair. One hope of saving Rainford's life—one faint hope remained,—a hope so wild—so extravagant—and involving a chance with such fearful odds against it, that it could only have been conceived by one who was determined to leave no means, however difficult, unadopted, in order to attain a particular end.

On crossing the threshold of his door, Arthur's first inquiry was whether Doctor Lascelles had arrived.

The reply was an affirmative; and the Earl hastened to the apartment to which the physician had been shown.

It is not however necessary to relate the particulars of their interview; inasmuch as the nature of the conversation which passed between them will be developed hereafter.

CHAPTER L'II.

THE EXECUTION.

THE fatal Monday morning broke, yellow—heavily—and gloomily; and the light stole—or rather struggled by degrees into the convict's cell.

Shortly before seven o'clock Tom Rain awoke; and casting his eyes rapidly around, they successively fell upon the turnkey who had sat up with him—the still flickering lamp upon the common deal table—the damp stone walls—and the massive bars at the windows.

For an instant a cold shudder convulsed his frame, as the conviction—the appalling truth burst upon him, that the horrors of his dreams were not to cease with the slumber that had given them birth.

But, with knitting brow and compressed lip—like a strong-minded man who endeavours to conceal the pain inflicted on him by a surgical operation of a dreadful nature—he struggled with his emotions; and, when the governor and clergyman entered the dungeon, they found him firm and resolute, though not insolent nor reckless.

The chaplain offered to pray with him; and he consented to join in devotion.

There was profound sincerity—but no affectation, no hypocrisy, no passionate exclamation—in the prayer which Tom Rain uttered extemporaneously.

As the clock chimed half-past seven, he arose from his knees, saying, "I am now prepared to die."

But there was yet another half hour before him.

Scarcely had the clock finished chiming, when the door was opened, and the Earl of Ellingham entered the cell.

Headless of the impression which his conduct might produce upon the prison authorities present, Arthur rushed forward and, threw himself into Rainford's arms, exclaiming, "No—I had not wilfully abandoned you, Thomas!"

"Just now I said that I was prepared to die," answered the convict, returning the embrace with congenial warmth; "and now I may even add that I shall die contented!"

"The time is too precious to waste in mere details," returned Arthur; "or I would tell you how I have been kept away from you by force—by a vile outrage. But you do not now believe that I was willingly absent—that I wantonly neglected you?"

"No—no," exclaimed Rainford. "I seek not an explanation—I require none. It is enough that you are here now—at the last hour!"

The Earl then related, in a few hurried words, the vain exertions he had made on the preceding evening on behalf of Rainford, who expressed his lively gratitude.

Arthur next requested the governor to permit him to have a few minutes' private conversation with the prisoner: but this favour could not be granted—and the Earl dared not persist in his demand, as the chaplain hinted that the convict had hidden eddies to the affairs of this life, and had but little time left for devotion.

Thus was it that Arthur and Rainford had no opportunity of speaking together in private,—although the former had something important to communicate, and the latter perceived that such was the fact.

"Arthur," said Tom, approaching close to his half-brother, and speaking in a low solemn tone, "is there any hope?"

"None—on this side of the scaffold," returned the Earl, with a significant glance as he dwelt on his words: and, as he spoke, he took the prisoner's hand as if to wring it fervently.

But Rainford felt something in the Earl's palm, and instantly comprehended that it was an object which he was to take unnoticed by the gaol authorities. Then, rapid as the lightning flash, he perceived a double meaning in the words—"on this side of the scaffold," because he knew that Arthur would not use those awful words, "the scaffold"—but would have said "the tow," had he not had some special, profound motive.

And Rainford did comprehend the hint—the hope conveyed; and though he thanked his half-brother with a rapid, expressive glance, yet a sickly smile played upon his lip—indicative of the faintness of that hope so created.

At the same instant heavy footsteps were heard approaching the cell; and the chaplain said in a solemn tone, "The hour is almost come!"

Then Arthur once more threw himself into the prisoner's arms, and whispered rapidly in his ear, "Keep the tube in your throat—and you will be saved!"

Rainford murmured an assent; and the brothers embraced with a fervour which astonished those present, to whom their relationship was totally unknown.

Arthur then tore himself from the cell:—not for worlds could he behold that horrible process termed the *toléte*.

He had also another motive for quitting the dungeon before the last moment:—this was to meet the Sheriff of the County in the passage.

And, behold! in the corridor, he encountered that functionary, the javelin-men, and the under sheriff, behind whom came the executioner and his assistant.

The Earl accosted the Sheriff, with whom he was acquainted, and who was naturally surprised to meet the nobleman there.

Drawing him aside, Arthur said in a hasty tone, "I have a favour—a great favour to ask of you. The convict is well connected, and his friends demand the body to bury it decently. The earnest prayer that I have to offer you on their behalf, is that you will not prolong the feelings of shame and

ignominy which they will experience during the time the corpse remains suspended."

"My lord," replied the Sheriff, "the body shall be cut down at twenty minutes past eight, and delivered over to the unhappy man's friends."

"A thousand thanks!" said the Earl, praising the Sheriff's hand.

He then hurried away—and the procession moved on to the cell.

Immense was the crowd gathered around the goal to witness the execution of the celebrated highwayman who had been proved on his trial to be none other than the notorious Black Mask who some years previously had performed the most extraordinary deeds of daring and audacity in the county of Hants.

Yes; immense was the crowd;—and not only did the living ocean inundate all the open spaces about the goal and all the thoroughfares leading thither,—but it seemed to force its off-shooting streams and channels up the very walls of the surrounding dwellings, so densely filled with faces were the open windows—even to the house-tops.

Near the front gate of the goal stood a black coach and a hearse;—and concealed between the vehicles and the prison wall, were the Earl of Ellingham, Dr. Lascelles, and three of the nobleman's own men-servants, all muffled in black mourning cloaks, and holding white handkerchiefs to their faces so as to hide their features as much as possible.

Lord Ellingham was convulsed with grief. Far—far more than the convict himself did the generous-hearted nobleman suffer on this terrible morning. He was bombarded with cold—his body felt like a dead weight which his legs could scarcely sustain—his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth—a suffocating sensation oppressed him—and he felt as if all the most frightful misfortunes had suddenly combined to fall with crushing burden on his own head!

The clock of St. George's in the Borough began to strike eight—the clock of the prison echoed these iron notes, which sent upon the wing of the air the signal for death.

Suddenly the hum of the multitudes ceased; and an awful silence prevailed.

The Earl and the physician knew by those signs that the convict had just appeared on the roof of the goal.

But from where they were stationed they could not command a view of the dreadful scene above; and even if they had been differently placed, Lord Ellingham at least would not have raised his eyes towards the fatal tree.

And now, amidst that solemn silence, a voice was heard,—the solemn, deep-toned, monotonous voice of the chaplain, saying, "I am the resurrection and the life, and he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my skin shall I see God."

The voice ceased: a sudden sensation ran through the crowd like an electric shock;—and the Earl of Ellingham groaned deeply—groaned in the bitterness of his spirit,—for he knew that the drop had just fallen!

"Compose yourself, my dear friend," whispered

the physician: "for now is the time to arm yourself with all your energies!"

"Thanks, doctor—a thousand thanks for reminding me of my duty," said the Earl. "But this is most trying—most horribly trying! I have lived a hundred years of agony in the last few minutes!"

"Hope for the best, my dear Earl," rejoined the physician. "Do you think that he fully understood you—?"

"He did—I am convinced of it!" replied Arthur, anxious to argue himself out of all doubts as well as to convince his companion. "He received the silver tube, and I saw him conceal it in his sleeve. But, alas! we had no opportunity to speak alone—though I had so much to say to him—so many explanations to give—such numerous questions to ask—My God! if after all, this plan should fail!"

"If that boy Jacob will only follow my instructions to the very letter," answered Lascelles, "I do not despair of success!"

"Oh! he will—he will!" returned the young nobleman, as he glanced towards the hearse. "He is as intelligent as he is attached to my dear brother!"

The rattlings in front of the goal kept the crowd at a considerable distance from the mourning vehicles; and thus the observations which passed between the Earl and the physician were not heard by any save themselves.

And now how languidly—how slowly passed the interval of twenty minutes during which the Sheriff had stated that the body must remain suspended.

To the Earl it seemed as if each minute were a year—as if he were living twenty years in those twenty minutes!

And the crowds had broken the silence which had fallen upon them like a spell;—and ribald jests—obscene remarks—terrible execrations—and vile practical jokes now proclaimed how efficacious is the example of public strangulation!

At last the prison-clock chimed the quarter past eight; and more acute—more agonising grew the suspense of the Earl of Ellingham.

A thousand fears assailed him.

Raisford might not have been able to use the silver tube,—or its imagined effect might have failed,—or the knot of the rope might have broken his neck? Again—the Sheriff might forget his promise, and allow the convict to hang an hour according to the usual custom? And even if all these fears were without foundation, the physician might not be able to fulfil his expectations!

Cruel—cruel was the suspense,—appalling were the apprehensions endured by the young nobleman.

He looked at his watch: it was seventeen minutes and a half past eight.

Two minutes and a half more—if the Sheriff had not forgotten his promise!

But, no; he was even better than his word;—for scarcely had Arthur returned the watch to his pocket, when a sudden sensation again pervaded the multitude—and several voices cried, "They are going to cut him down!"

Then came a dead silence.

An intense heat ran, like molten lead, through the Earl's veins; and, at the next moment, he turned death-like cold as if plunged into an ice-bath.

If he had thirteen lived years in minutes—he now seemed to exist whole centuries in moments!

All the fears which had previously struck him one by one, now rushed in an aggregate crowd to his soul.

The next two minutes were all of fury and horror—fury in his brain, horror in his heart!

But at last the gate of the goal opened; and a gruff voice exclaimed, "Now then!"

The Earl's three men-servants hastened to range themselves near the door of the hearse, which one of them opened: and when the gait-officials appeared, heaving the coffin, these servants advanced a few paces to relieve them of their burthen, and thrust it into the hearse, while Dr. Lascelles diverted the attention of the officials by distributing money amongst them.

This proceeding, which had been pre-arranged by the Earl and the physician with the three servants, was absolutely necessary: because Jacob Smith was concealed within the hearse!

The affair having proceeded successfully thus far, the hearse moved away; and the five persons who acted as mourners entered the black coach, which also drove off.

For the sake of appearances it was necessary that the vehicles should move slowly along, until the outskirts of the multitude were entirely passed: and then—when Blackman Street was reached—the hearse and the black coach were driven along at a rate which is adopted by funeral processions only when the obsequies are over.

CHAPTER LIV.

GALVANISM.

By the time St. George's Church was passed, the drivers had whipped their horses into a furious gallop;—and on—on went the mourning vehicles like the wind.

The sleek and pampered black horses panted and foamed; but the coachmen cared not—they were well paid for what they were doing.

Down Union Street rolled the chariot and the hearse—into the Blackfriars Road—up the wide thoroughfare to the river—over the bridge—along Farringdon Street—and through Smithfield to Clerkenwell Green.

In an incredibly short space of time, the two vehicles stopped at the door of a house in Red Lion Street.

Dr. Lascelles was the first to leap from the mourning coach, and, taking a key from his pocket, he opened the door of the house, into which, quickly as active men could move or work, the coffin was borne from the hearse.

Jacob Smith was helped out immediately afterwards, and he followed the Earl, the physician, and the three servants into the house, while the mourning coach and the hearse still waited at the door.

A quarter of an hour afterwards, the coffin, with the lid now screwed down, was borne back to the hearse;—the three servants returned to the mourning coach, and the funeral procession was set in motion again—but with slow and suitable solemnity.

In another half hour, the coffin, with the name of "THOMAS RAINFORD" upon the plate, was in-

terred in St. Luke's churchyard; and thus ended this ceremony.

But did that coffin really contain the cold corpse of the once gallant highwayman?

No: it had been hastily filled with stones and straw at the house in Red Lion Street.

And the body—

The moment the coffin was borne into the house in Red Lion Street, in the manner already described, Jacob Smith closed the door behind him, and exclaimed in a triumphant tone, as he produced the silver tube from his pocket, "It was in his throat! I took it out—and I rubbed his temples with hartshorn and applied it to his nostrils the whole way from the goal to this place! Oh! he will be saved—he will be saved!"

The lid of the coffin, which had not been screwed down, was removed; and in the shell lay the highwayman—with eyes closed—and pale as death!

The Earl of Ellingham shuddered convulsively, and uttered a groan of anguish; but Dr. Lascelles gave his instructions with so much presence of mind and yet such rapidity, that the intensity of the nobleman's grief was soon partially absorbed in the excitement of the scene that now followed.

The body was removed as hastily as possible up stairs, and carried into a spacious laboratory, where it was immediately stretched upon the table.

The three servants then retraced their way down stairs, filled the coffin with stones and straw, screwed the lid tight, and departed with it, as already stated, to St. Luke's church-yard.

In the meantime, the physician, the Earl, and Jacob Smith remained in the laboratory; and now was the profound scientific knowledge of Dr. Lascelles about to be applied to the most wonderful of human aims—the resurrection of a corpse who had been long dead!

The poles of a powerful galvanic pile were applied to the body, from which the animal heat had not altogether departed when it was taken from the coffin; and the force of the electric fluid almost immediately displayed its wondrous influence.

An universal tremor passed over the frame of Rainford; and ejaculations of ineffable joy burst from the lips of Lord Ellingham and Jacob Smith.

Dr. Lascelles continued to let fall upon the body a full quantum of the electric fluid; and in less than a minute the right arm of the highwayman moved,—moved with a kind of spasmodic quivering; then, in a few seconds, it was suddenly raised with eagerness and impatience, and the hand sought the throat.

With convulsive motion that hand kept grasping the throat as if to tear away something that oppressed it—as if the horrible rope still encircled it.

Then Rainford's chest began to swell and work with the violence of returning respiration—as if a mighty current of air were rushing back to the lungs.

"He breathes! he breathes!" cried Ellingham and Jacob Smith, as it were in one voice.

"He will be saved," said the physician calmly, as he again applied the poles of the battery;—"provided congestion of the brain does not take place—for that it is to be dreaded!"

But the nobleman and the poor had heard not this alternative of sinister and dubious import: they had no ears for anything save those blessed words—"He will be saved!"

And they were literally wild with joy.

Lascelles, without desisting from his occupation of applying the electric fluid, and apparently without noticing the excitement—the delirium of happiness and hope which had seized upon his two companions, began leisurely to explain how it was necessary to adopt means to equalise the reviving circulation; and though he called for harkshorn, he was not heard. At length he stamped his foot violently on the floor, exclaiming, "Will neither of you give me the harkshorn? Do you wish him to die through your neglect?"

The Earl instantly checked the exuberance of his joyous emotions, and hastened to obey all the instructions which the physician gave him.

The harkshorn was applied to Rainford's nostrils; and in a few moments his lips began to quiver;—then, on a sudden, as Lascelles let fall upon him a stronger current of the electric fluid, a terrific cry burst from the object of all this intensely concentrated interest!

But never was cry of human agony more welcome to mortal ears than now; for it told those who heard it that life was in him who gave vent to it!

The physician felt the highwayman's pulse: it beat feebly—very feebly—but still it beat!

And now his limbs moved with incessant trembling,—and he waved his right hand backwards and forwards, his breast heaving with repeated sighs, and gasps, and painful moans.

The doctor applied a small mirror to Rainford's mouth and nostrils; and it was instantly covered with a cloud.

His eyes opened his eyes slowly; they were much blood-shot—but the pupils indicated the reviving fires of vitality.

His breathing rapidly grew more regular; and though he retained his eyes open, yet he seemed unconscious of all that was passing around him, and gazed upwards with the most death-like indifference.

Lord Ellingham cast a glance of frightful apprehension towards the physician; but the countenance of Dr. Lascelles wore an expression of calm and complacent satisfaction—and the Earl was reassured.

Twenty minutes had now passed since the galvanic operation had commenced; and at last Dr. Lascelles said emphatically, "*He is saved!*"

The Earl embraced him as if he were a father who had just manifested some extraordinary proof of paternal love, or who had forgiven some deep offence on the part of a son.

"We must put him to bed immediately," said the physician, with difficulty extricating himself from the nobleman's embrace, and fearing lest he should be compelled to undergo a similarly affectionate process at the hands of Jacob Smith, who was equally enthusiastic in his joy—"we must put him to bed immediately," repeated Dr. Lascelles; "and fortunately for us, there is a bed-chamber in the house."

The three then carefully lifted Tom Rain into a small room furnished as a bed-chamber, and where they undressed him and deposited him in the bed.

"And now," said Jacob Smith, "we should re-

member that there is one, who will feel as much joy as ourselves—"

"True!" cried the Earl. "But where does she live?"

"I am acquainted with her abode," returned the lad. "If your lordship will allow me—"

"Yes, my good boy," interrupted Arthur. "It is for you to convey these joyous tidings. But perhaps she may have returned home to her father—for, after all that has occurred, and considering Mr. de Medina's affection for his daughter—but all this while we are talking enigmatically in the presence of my excellent friend the doctor, from whom there must be no secrets—"

"Never mind me," said Lascelles laconically, who perfectly well comprehended the nature of their allusions. "I care little for your secrets; and, even if it were otherwise, I am too much occupied with my patient here—"

"Then we will not trouble you with explanations at present," interrupted the Earl. "Jacob, my lad, hasten to the lady of whom we speak—break the happy tidings to her gently—and bring her hither."

"Yes, my lord," answered the lad, delighted at being chosen as the messenger of good tidings in such a case. "Fortunately, Miss de Medina moved from Brandon Street into the heart of the City, by Mr. Rainford's positive directions; and I shall not be long before I come back with her."

The Earl put gold into his hand; but Jacob returned it, declaring that he was not without money; and in another minute the front door of the house closed behind him.

CHAPTER LV.

THE LABORATORY.—ESTHER DE MEDINA.

WHEN Jacob had taken his departure, Dr. Lascelles returned to his laboratory, mixed some liquid ingredients in a glass, and returning to the bed-chamber, poured the medicine down Rainford's throat.

He then felt his pulse, applied his ear to his chest to listen to the pulsation of his heart, and carefully examined his eyes, which were far less blood-shot than when they opened first.

"He is getting on admirably," said the physician. "His pulsation is regular, and neither too quick nor too slow—but just as I could wish it. He seems inclined to sleep—yes—he closes his eyes; and he will awake to perfect consciousness.—But do you know, my dear friend, that in order to oblige you, I have incurred an awful risk!" continued the doctor. "The law would not believe me, were I to declare that it was in the interest of science I made these galvanic experiments, and that having succeeded in recalling the man to life, I was not capable of delivering him up to justice."

"Let us hope that there will be no necessity to make such an excuse at all," said the Earl. "You have rendered me an immense service, doctor—"

"Then I am satisfied," interrupted Lascelles; "for, after all you told me last night, I cannot help liking your half-brother here. He is a generous-hearted fellow; and one would risk much to save such a man from death."

"You had frequently mentioned to me your galvanic experiments," said the Earl: "and last night,