CHRISTMAS EVE;

on, THE SUSPECTED VISITOR.

Josiah, Josiah, the fly is coming. All right; I'm ready.'

Nar, you are not ready, Josiah; you must something before you go. Jemima, bring in the kettle. Your master will go without a faste of food. Jemima, a stout country girl, bustled in with

the kettle, while Miss Penelope Oldburgh began to cut slices from some cold beet which was al ready on the table.

Meanwhile, a door slammed to up stairs, and the next moment Josiah appeared. He was a young man, not more than eight or nine and twenty, dressed well in black, and there was a crape band round the hat which he held in one hand, while he offered the other to his sister. Good-bye, Pen.

Not yet, Josiah; you must drink this to keep the cold out, and eat a bit of something." My dear Pen ' said her brother, we have

only just had breakfast. Nevertheless, he sat down with the air of a man who does a thing to rlease another rather than himself, and his sister looked through the window at the fly which was now drawing up to the door. It was a bitterly cold morning; the snow lay thick on the ground, and was trodden and dirty, as though it had lain a long time : and a sleety tain was falling - not a pleasant prospect, as Miss Penelope seemed to thick.

Are you sure you have got all your things, Josiah ?' she asked.

'Yes, thank you.'

· Have you the rug and knitted comforter, and these driving gloves which I found for you last night?

All right ! replied the brother laughing you will want we to have a bottle of hot water in the trap next.? Then he added, in a kinder and graver tone, 'I am really sorry to leave you, Pen, and on Christmas Eve. too; but you see, if I did not accept this invitation. I should that would be a slight from so old a friend as myself. Besides, you don't mind it much, do

you ? I cannot deny, fosiah, answered the young lady nervously. That I think this house a soli tary place for two females to be left alone in ; but I trust no harm will happen to us.

Harm, no-what nousense!' exclaimed her brother: 'a house in Chedleigh has not heen broker into within the memory of man. You are sife enough on that score, and I shall certainly come back to-morrow, and eat my Christ mas dinner with you. I would start to-night, but the weather really is so bad : and I should arrive too late to render any assistance in case of burglars,' he added, with a smile

I hope you will not think of coming before to morrow Josiah, replied his sister, with much affection, but evidently unable just then to participate in any raillery on the subject of her

Well, I will be home in good time depend upon it; and now I must go, or I shall miss the

She followed him to the door, and, when he was tauly off, returned to the window, and watched the vehicle until a turn in the road hid

it from view. It is much if the little soul hasn't a fit of the horrors before morning, either with a cause or without one,' said the young man to himself, as be drove along. I wish I had told her to send for Jacob and his son to sleep in the house to night; but Jemma will think of that, it she says anything to her.' And then feeling sure that any fears his sister might entertain were ground less, his thoughts naturally turned to his own affairs. The last six months of his life had been eventful. In that short space of time he had lost both his parents, who, ever since he could remember, had lived in the old fashioned Manor | about ! House he had just left, and he and hissister were and property. The old folks-partly from pride and partly because he had shown no inclination | ing blackguards. for farming-had educated him for a professional life, and he was now practising as a solicitor; cupied in arranging his late father's affairs, and looking out for a suitable tenant for the Manor. When he should have accomplished this task his intention was to return to his bachelor's would have been spent entirely in seclusion. -

a warmth at his beart which rendered the five-

before I come back to morrow; and the smile this resolve called up indicated plainly enough that he was not very doubtful of his fate beforehand.

Let us now return to Miss Penelope. The life a single gentlewomen leads in a country house does not present many opportunities for developing strength of character, and Miss Penelope, though naturally shrewd and clear headed enough, was not a strong-minded woman. There was a pervous timidity in her nature which recent melapcholy events and the altered circum-tances of the household had tended to in crease, and the prospect of being alone with Jemima in the house for a whole night presented itself to her imagination as an event of terrible magnitude. 'Here am I' argued she, 'a detenceless woman, and Jemima no better. There is not a house except. Jacob's cottage within a mile of us; and if it is known that Josiah will be away to night, who can tell what awful plot satan may nu into the heads of those who live hy plunder? It is all very well for Josiah to say there never have been any murders or robberies here; that is no reason why there may not be soon enough, and when so likely as on a dark winter night like this? I consider it a rare chance for them-such a chance as one reads of rin' parts.' them waiting and watching to get for weeks to-

Now when one's reading is chiefly confined to pensational novels and newspapers, and these last the weekly issue of a small country town, there are always horrors sufficient contained in them to produce a waking nightmare if one is so disposed; and Miss Penetope having called to mind all the accounts of secret consuracy and open violence, disjuises, surprises, treachery on the part of servants, and cases of aseault and hat ery she could think of, came to the conclusion that her present position was one of unspeakable danger, and telt it accordingly. As the short wintry day closed in, and she listened ling through the bare trees that encircled the not see the Greysons before they go abroad, and house, her thought became so dismal that even the comfortable aspect of things indoors was not have a chat with Jemima in the kitchen. Jemima like many another of her class, not being given | candle. to firm opinions of her own, except on matters connected with the routine of her daily work, slightly awkward and embarrassed air. was always ready to echo those presented to be mind, and so was, perhaps, as undesirable a companion as could well be for a person suffering from nervous alarms. She was, moreover, in do and found . sitting with her hands before her' the most difficult task of the day.

'It seems very lonely here to-night, doesn't it, Jemima ? said Miss Penelope.

. That it do, miss ; the house isn't itself now the beasts are gove.' Mr Oldburgh had sold all his father's stock, incending that the new tenant should bring his own) 'There's no | give me a welcome; and a hearty one, too.' milking, time or butter making to speak of, went on Jemima. Pve just been wishing that we'd a cheese agate, or but er to churn, or summat, for I'm dead heat for want o' work."

· Have you locked the doors, Jemima?'

'Yes, miss.

And fastened the shutters?

wents fetchin' up to night, and thankful I am, say exactly what her thoughts were as she glancfor it isn't fit to turn a dog out."

As if the big dog chained in the yard wished to echo this humane sentiment, he began at this did not look altogether like a gentleman; at moment to bark furiously. Miss Penelope turned pale, and listened.

What do you think is the matter with him,

Jemima?" 'I cannot say, misa, I'm sure. He's a dog as never barks unless there's some one about the

place," was the consoling reply. Oh. Jemimo, suppose there is some one

'Lor', miss,' gasped Jemima, ' Jacob told me now the sole representatives of the family name to-day as there were some tramps in the village, and they're after no good, that's certain, swear

much in a tone of reproof for the bad language ly as she could. but for the last four months had been fully oc- as it would have been in a calmer moment;

listen! Don't you hear voices?" The maid and mistress, standing breathless, distinctly heard voices, and, what was still more felt he would be expecting me. As things are, dernized. extraordinary, the sound of wheels on the gravel; I see nothing for it but to go back as I camethen came a loud ringing of the front door bell, chambers in London. The visit to the Greysons was the first since his bereavement; and which hung in the kitchen, not more than a yard had it not been that a stronger feeling than mere from their heads, and gave them such a start as friendship actuated him, this first Christmas the reader may imagine. The dog baving a notion that the responsibility was now in other As it was, however, in spite of much genuine hands than his, ceased barking, and the peal of grief and many business anxieties, there was the bell was followed by a dead silence.

· Ob, miss, cried Jemima, pressing her bands miles drive to the station, and the bad weather, on her stays, 'how it made me jump! I'm fit

I cannot thinks of marrying for snother six . Hush, Jemima, said Miss Penelope again, smile, which said as plainly as a smile could that to get? thought Miss Penelope.

Sure it cannot be any one with bad intentions coming this way, and so soon.2

They both glanced at the clock and were reassured at finding that it was only a few minutes past seven. The three hours since the candles were lighted had seemed interminable.

'You must go and open the door, Jemima, and if they want your master, say he is not at home: but do not say that he is coming to night, and do not ask them in."

Jemima went as she was bidden, and Miss Penelope listened intently, but could only hear the gust of wind when the door was opened, a confused hum of voices, and then the tread of heavy feet along the lobby. Immediately after wards Jemima appeared.

' He's come io, miss; I couldn't belp it,' said she. 'When I said master wasn't in, he asked me who was; and when I told him, he looked bothered, but said he would see you; and his name's Jowler, or something like that.'

'Is he a gentleman, or only a man?' asked poor Miss Penelope. 'What is he like, Jemi-

'V'ell, miss, he's big enough and horrid enough, i think; and he looks like one from fur-

say, as she turned to leave the kitchen, and went up the dark passage. It was not far to the parfor door, but quite far enough for Miss Penc lope to picture to herself on the way a series of seasational tableaux.

' Suppose he should be standing on the hearth, with a pistol pointed at the doorway, or be ransacking the drawers, or demand the key of the plate chest, or wind his arms about her to carry her out into the wild night?"—as had bappened many a time before to becomes in books, after and, as it is I doubt my best endeavors to unquite as little preparation, and with as little apparent cause. When, at last, she opened the door, the object of her fears, though not engaged I daresay I look more like a bush-ranger than a to the heavy rain and fittal gusts of wind whist- in, or proceeding to, any of the above mentioned acts, seemed to her formidable enough. He rose from a chair as she entered; a tall, stout sufficient to counteract them, so she went to through wearing a rough pilot coat and stand ing in the dim, flickering light of a fire and one

' Miss Oldborgh, I presume?' said he, with a

Miss Pearlope bowed. beard. Miss Pen-lope hated beards.

the unenviable condition of one who, having hear, he went or, looking as though he thought ling it. done her bousehold work, has nothing else to she would have spoken; but I dare say you are aware that he is expecting me?"

'I don't know,' stammered Miss Penelope he didn't say so.'

Bless me !' cried the stranger. 'I wrote to tell bim I would be here to night, and spend

'My brother did not mention it when his letters came this morning,' said Miss Penelope in a doubtful tone, 'and he is gone to some distance.

The stranger besitated a moment, and then went to the window and looked. Miss Penelope, more emborrassed than he, sat down in a 'Yes, miss. There is nothing I know of as chair by the fire. It would be impossible to evidently in a state of much perplexity. He least, there was a roughness about his appearance which seemed incompatible with such a pretension: but perhaps his travelling dress, and a long journey on a story night, might account in some measure for that.

'Will he be long?' he asked, after a short

once how unprotected we are,' thought Miss Penelope; but there was no escape—he was waiting for an answer. It is possible that he 'Hush, Jemma,' said Miss Penelope, not so may not come until morning,' she said, as brave-

> Well, Miss Oldburgh,' rejoined the stranger. I have travelled from London this afternoon; and have written to your brother yesterday. I and the prospect is not pleasant-or to stay where I am. I have dismissed the fly which brought me from the station, and don't think 1 could find my way back in the dark; and if you can direct me to an unn, or suggest any other place by which I could await your brothers return, I would rather not try.'

This was said frankly enough; and if Miss Penelope had ventured a look at the speaker's face, she would have seen there a good-natured

months,' thought be; 'but I will know my fate this time with a sort of desperate calmness .-- (guessed ber thoughts, and was rather more amused than offended at them.

> 'The nearest inn is at least two miles off,' said Miss Penelope, and I have no one to send with you. Besides, if you are a friend of Josiah's"-(she was too agitated to note how expressive was the doubt her words implied) - he would not like you to go there. 1-I will make arrangements for you to stay here."

'Thank you,' said the stranger, promptly, and with another smile; but pray do not put youring it."

This was an unfortunate admission; and the careless way in which he stripped off his great coat, and seated himself in a lounging-chair, as though relieved that the question was settled, and he had now a right to make himself at home. did not mend matters.

'I only reached England last night,' he said, from New Zealand, and Jos is about the only friend I have in the world, so I went at once to his chambers, and found that he was here, and the letter has miscarried, I suppose it will not reach here before morning."

'There will be no delivery of letters here tomorrow,' said Miss Penelope, still doubtful whe-'Oh, Jemima !' was all! Mis Penelope could ther or not believe this plausible story. 'Christ mas Day is kept like Sunday.'

She rose as she spoke, and left the room murmuring something about getting him refresh ments after his journey.

'By Jove,' said Mr. Sowler, to himself, as the door closed behind her, 'was ever a poor fellow in such a fix as this? It is impossible to turn out, and yet I believe she thinks I am a burglar in disguise. If she were not Jos's sister I should be tempted to carry on the joke; deceive her will only make matters worse; for it is so long since I was in civilized society, that gentleman. It isn't flattering to a fellow on coming back to his native country to be tiken for a ticket-of-leave man. However, I must be man, looking all the taller and stouter just then as polite as I can to my prim little hostess, and to-morrow will set all right.?

Meanwhile Miss Penelone, with a sinking heart, had made her way back to the kitchen. and destroy." Her worst fears were realized. Here, under the the night. It was the beginning of some hourd dition to their forces, went to had. 'Your brother is not at home just now I tragedy, and she saw no possible means of avert-

face, 'who is he?'

This was easier asked than answered; but Christmas with him. If he got my letter, I Then Miss Penelope sat down by the fire, whilst know Jos well enough to be sure that he would Jemina we t about getting the supper in an absent way-uttering many ejaculations-and with a confused notion that if she were not quick enough, the man in the parlor would come and

hold a pistol to her head while she did it. 'I shall let it fall, miss, I'm sure I shall,' she ready to drop."

'Come, Jemima,' said Miss Penelope, rising to the occasion; it must be done, you know; and with you.

The supper, as may be supposed, was not a to his hostess.

'This is a fine old place, I should think,' said This was a posing question.

It I say 'No,' he will offer to stay till he spoke with evident admiration. It was a room as one sometimes meets with in the better for it at all events. class of old-fashioned country houses, and no-

> place in summer; but this is the oldest room in lost to the four pair of ears that had been any the house. The others are mostly new or mo- lously listening for it ever since he had been left

'I should have thought it a pity to alter them,' he said. Then, after a pause, Does your brother think of living here?

'No, he is preparing to let this house, and return to London."

Mr. Sowier looked thoughtful.

'Is it a large farm?' he asked.

About three hundred acres. 'Ah. a nice size,' was the reply, and then there was another pause.

Can be be speculating how much he is likely

'It is very lonely, is it not? I don't think we passed a single bouse for the last mile or two,' was the stranger's next observation.

'Yes, it is rather lonely,' admitted Miss Penelone; 'but some of the men live close to the back of the house.'

This was an allowable fiction, founded on the fact of Tacob's one cottage being within a mile.

There was a more awkward pause than ever after this, broken at last by a tap at the door, and Jemuna's voice, 'Please, miss, you're. self at all out of the way-I am used to rough- wanted,' followed up, the mement her mistress bad joined her, with 'Oh. miss, I'm so glad !'

What is it, Jemma? ' Jacob's come.'

Miss Penelope was glad, 'oo. It was a load off her mind to know that they were no longer

Following Jemma into the kitchen, she found Jacob, a stout laboring man, who had been in the late Mr. Oldburgh's service from his youth, and Isaac, his son a newer edition of his father. They had brought in an enormous yile log for learning the cause? - he glunced at her black the fire, no doubt in the expectation of a glass or dress- I made up my mind to follow him. As two of spiced ale, and a Christmas box, as in former years. Having already heard from Jemma a detailed account of the visitor's arrival -and the tale had lost nothing in the telling-Jacob had ready his opinion, expressed with all the emphasis of dogged conviction.

'You may tak' my word for it, miss, the man's imposter.

A consultation was now held as to what should be done, and it was decided, on Miss Penelo: e representing that the gentleman's story might possibly be true, that no steps should be taken likely to give him an impression that he was suspected, but they would be in readiness to frustfate his base designs whenever he attempted to put them into execution. Jicob and Isaac would sit up all night by the kitchen fire, whilst Jemima should have a shake-down in her mistrees's room, and they would retire at the usual hour.

'His object is, miss,' said Jacob, who prided himself on his renutation as the cutest man in the village, 'to wait until all is quiet this night, and then to let in his 'complices-it may be seven others wass than himself-to plunder

To guard against this possibility, Ranger, the same roof, with her own consent-nay, even at big dog, was turned loose, and then the stranger ves shown to his room, and Miss Penelope and was loud and somewhat harsh, and he wore a never before seen or heard of, preparing to spend Jemma, much reassured by the unexpected ad-

Mernwhile, the innocent, but not altogether unconscious, object of so much anxiety had 'Oh, miss,' cried Jemima, seeing her white lasked, and of course obtained, permission to smoke a pipe in the parlor before retiring. His meditations, as he sat by himself in the old-Jemima soon knew all her mistress could tell her, fashioned room, were not altogether unpleasant; and was requested to take in a tray with some indeed, there was something comecal in the idea cold beef and pastry for the stranger's supper. I that after fire years of incessant activity in many a foreign land, he should come to spend his second night in England, in this secluded village, and under encounstances the thoughts of which

more than once brought a smile to his lips. How Joe will laugh to morrow when I tell that his women folk took me for a housebreaker !? said he to lumself. 'And this demure little restid, when her task was completed, and with her lative of his wiff own her mistake, and be better hands again pressed to ber stays. 'I'm just friends with me on Christman day than she has been on Christmas Eve, I'll warrant. The prospect was agreeable, and another idea that had come into his head whilst talking to Miss ed at him, standing with his back to her, and lif he really means harm to us, our only chance of Penelope was now lo ked at more closely. He escape is to be civil and not vex him. I will go had realized a small capital in New Zealand. with the intention of settling at home -on a farm, of course; and it seemed to him that very social meal, though Mr. Sowler seemed | Chadleigh Manor was just the place he wanted; beet on doing justice to the viands; and, to the and he should cement still closer his friendship best of his ability, on making himself agreeable with the owner by becoming his tenant, and farming his paternal acres. It is possible that he pursued the idea appropriating his friend's he, I like the room we are in exceedingly—it household goods a little farther, in a direction is so thoroughly English. He glanced round as and to an extent of which Miss Penelope was happily unconscious; for, after pulling away for comes; and if I tell the truth, it is admitting at large, low roofed room, with an oak wainscoting some time in silence- Pshaw? he muttered. round three sides of it, and a handsome stone 'what a fool I am! But if I like the place as mulli ned window filling up the fourth; such a well by daylight as I do now, I will make a bid

Having arrived at this conclusion, he laid his pipe on the table, and went in search of his 'Yes,' said Miss Penelope, 'it is a pretty apartment. Of course, this movement was not

> 'He's going upstairs,' whispered Jacob to Isaac, over the kitchen fire.

> 'He's coming l' gasped Jemima from her shakedown, where she sat bold-upright, sleep having forsaken her eyes.

> They heard his uncertain steps along the landing. He stopped at the door and tried it. Miss Penelope sprang to the bell.

Confound it? muttered a voice at the door. and the step passed on. 'He's only mistaken the room,' said Miss

Penelope, with a sigh of relief.