

HARD STRAITS.

"Nine o'clock, sor, an' the hot wather; an' is it the rest of the bacon ye'd be afther havin' for breakfast?"

"Will it not be too much, Bridget?"

"Sorra a bit, sor."

"Very well."

And, with a half groan, I, Basil Hathaway, sprang out of bed, and proceeded to array myself in unexceptionable costume—trousers, vest, frock-coat. My only ones, alas! An accommodating relative some twenty doors off had taken charge of shabbier garments one by one, kindly advancing sundry moneys thereon.

Three of us were in the same plight—old school-fellows, and old chums now thrown together in manhood by the caprice of Dame Fortune, and fighting shoulder to shoulder the battle of life in the great city.

As I dressed, one of the trio, Hal Trevor, came bounding three at a time up the worm-eaten stairs. He was fresh from morning lecture at Charing Cross Hospital, and hungry as a hunter, I thought with a shudder. I heard his cheerful greeting of Jack Hornsey, hard at work since daylight on "Coke upon Littleton."

"Well, old bookworm, ready for breakfast? Where is the Captain?"

"The Captain!" How the old title, bestowed still in honour of my three years' seniority, set me dreaming of the great Winchester cricket-ground. I was aroused by dull thuds of a poker hammering violently at the intervening wall.

"All right!" I shouted. "Ring for the bacon."

In another minute there were three of us gazing with rueful looks at the breakfast arrangements. A loaf of stale bread, a piece of butter the size of a walnut, and three tiny rashers, that either could have put out of sight with ease.

"Is that all, Bridget?"

Every line of the girl's honest Irish face was eloquent with sympathy.

"Not a bit more, sor."

Hal laughed.

"Turn out your pockets, lads. There's my last coin."

And he produced an exceedingly shiny sixpence.

Jack, after much rummaging, showed a quantity of fluff and a brace button. I had three-pence halfpenny in coppers.

"Odd man out for the bacon," quoth Hal.

"No; divide it between you," said I. "A man has been rash enough to invite me to dinner. Hand over the loaf."

Jack gave me one keen glance. I think he suspected the pious falsehood. Hal, bless the boy! was quite unconscious, as happy as though he had not a care. The frugal meal was just disposed of when we heard a great puffing and blowing below on the third floor. That had but one possible meaning—a creditor.

"Whose turn?" asked Jack, laconically.

It was an ancient arrangement now that on the advent of a dun only one of us should receive him, the others being in the city—that is, the adjacent bedroom.

"Your own," cried Hal, as we decamped, leaving the door ajar to watch the course of events. "I wish you joy; it is old Blunder-son, snorting like a grampus, as usual."

Old Blunder-son was a general provision merchant, who had let himself be beguiled into supplying miscellaneous goods until his bill really frightened me. He was the exception that proved that old rule, "Laugh and grow fat," as crusty, ill-conditioned a wretch as ever read one particular portion of the Lord's Prayer backwards. A modern Falstaff, minus the wit, he always ascended slowly, resting on each stair.

We were safe for about five minutes. Jack employed them in preparing for his reception, and we watched proceedings with amused curiosity.

The first was to produce a huge tobacco pouch, taking from it about half an ounce of tobacco. From this he filled a long clay pipe—Jack's meerschaum had preceded our clothes to the pawnbroker's—depositing the remainder carefully on the table.

"An alarming sacrifice!" murmured Jack, shaking his head over it with a regretful sigh. The next step was to grasp the fire-shovel and tongs.

"Weapons of offence," whispered Harry.

"He meditates assault and bat—"

He stopped abruptly in sheer amazement. Jack was deliberately removing live coals from the fire to the shovel, and upon these he swept his cherished tobacco. Then he placed the shovel upon the bottom ledges of two chairs at the farther corner of the room, threw himself into the one nearest the fire, and complacently lighted his long clay.

Of course the room filled fast with smoke and a most pungent odour.

"Old Blunder-son hates tobacco as a certain personage does holy water!" grinned Hal.

"Bad policy, though, to irritate him!" grumbled I.

By this time our enemy was in the doorway, gasping for breath, and shaking a great hairy fist at Jack by way of filling the interval till speech returned.

"You—abandoned—young profligate!"

Jack removed his pipe, nodded, and quietly resumed it.

"Where—are—the other—scamps?"

"One gone for the doctor; the other—"

And a jerk of the speaker's thumb towards the

door behind which we stood completed the sentence.

Old Blunder-son made two unwieldy steps towards us.

"Better not!" said Jack.

"Eh?"

"Typhoid fever—bad case—contagious!" fibbed Jack, between his puffs.

We saw old Blunder-son's face turn a ghastly green with fear. Still, he looked incredulous; we had played so many tricks before.

"Gammon!" he gasped, at length.

Jack rose slowly, walked to the corner, and produced the shovel.

"Fumigating the room," said he; "better have a pipe!" And old Blunder-son fairly turned and fled with such celerity, he gained the next floor in seconds instead of minutes.

We were laughing over his discomfiture, when Bridget's head appeared at the door.

"I thought I'd tell ye, gentlemen, the mistress is just comin'. The saints purtect ye, for she has been rampagin' like a haythen all this blessed mornin'!"

Our faces fell. Mrs. Callaghan, our worthy landlady, was not a foe to be so readily dislodged, and her powers of invective were simply unrivalled. Hal was the only one who could soothe her, and he came to the rescue.

"My turn," he said, with a look of comic disgust. "You fellows get into my room, and clear out of the house as soon as she is seated."

As we did, seeing Hal hand a chair (as we glided by) with the deepest of mock reverences, and an expression of extreme devotion on his handsome features. "Making violent love to the old beast!" as he would have elegantly expressed it.

It was evening of the same day—a dull November evening, much in harmony with my thoughts, as I leaned against the doorpost of our house, and recalled the good old times when life was a merry farce for all of us.

I had no heart to work. All that day I had hawked my manuscripts from one publisher to another, vainly hoping to get a loan upon them. My three-pence-halfpenny had been carefully invested at a dirty cook-shop, and I was glad to think there must have been just enough cold meat to satisfy the boys at dinner and tea.

Presently I would go in and hunt for any fragments that might remain, for I felt desperately hungry.

Through the fog came a slender female figure, disguised in a waterproof. She did not notice me until quite abreast, when the light fell full upon her face. Then, as she gave one frightened glance, I saw two things—how pale and beautiful it was, and what a depth of misery lay in the startled eyes.

It was a low neighbourhood in which we lived, though separated by but a long alley from a fashionable West End street—a dangerous locality for a young girl at that hour. I crossed the road, to accompany her unobserved, and had hardly done so ere I saw her brought up by some man, looming unsteadily through the mist.

"Come here, my pretty dear!" said he.

She gave a faint scream, and tried to slip by him, but the drunken wretch caught her by the loose waterproof. In another second he measured his length on the pavement; but, strange to say, the girl sank down also insensible, dropping something that looked like a jewel-case. My prostrate friend was relieving his feelings by a round volley of obscene abuse. Not caring to await the arrival of a policeman, I caught up his victim and her case, and retreated. At the foot of the dilapidated stairs I hesitated. Should I carry my fair burden into Mrs. Callaghan's little parlour? The sight of Bridget in full flight, pursued by shrill invective and a hand-brush, decided the point.

"Bridget," said I, "this lady has fainted. Come and help me."

"Ah, sure, sor! Poor dear!"

We carried the stranger to the common sitting room, and essayed to bring her round. Presently she opened her eyes, and began to speak incoherently.

"Delirious!" said I. It was a great relief to hear Hal's springing step. He gave a low whistle of astonishment as he entered, and felt the patient's pulse, whilst I gave a brief explanation.

"Feverish—very. She must be got to bed at once. Where does she live?"

"I have not an idea. Search her pockets."

But the search was fruitless.

"Call a cab, and I will take her to the hospital," suggested Harry.

I looked at the flushed face and the bright, beautiful eyes, and my heart gave a great, senseless throb of disapproval.

"No; we cannot turn her away. Fetch a nurse, Hal, and she shall have my room. You will take me in for a night or two?"

"Of course, old man!" and Hal flew off.

Then I thought of our landlady.

"Bridget," said I, "how about Mrs. Callaghan?"

"Is it the mistress, sor? Sure I'll tell her ye've got the faver, an' divil a bit will she come nigh ye."

One more problem remained, and that the greatest—the money problem. Well, my coat and vest might go.

So for three days I pattered about the apartment in an old, tattered dressing-gown, being supposed to be down with fever; meanwhile the real patient had careful attention and strengthening nourishment.

The third day a notable event happened. A high-class monthly sent me a guinea for a con-

tribution, and requested a similar one. I worked cheerfully after that till the crisis came, and the nurse gleefully reported that the young lady was conscious, and asking for her father.

"May I see her?" said I, eagerly.

"Dear, dear—no, sir. The excitement would throw her back. Besides, she must not talk. Her father is Mr. Bullion, of Lombard street."

Bullion, the great foreign banker! What brought his daughter, unattended, into this vile side-street? Time would explain, perhaps. Meanwhile, Jack put on his hat, and departed in quest of the great man. In an hour he was with us, his usual imposing air and magisterial demeanour lost in the agitation of the moment. He shook me warmly by the hand.

"Your friend has explained all, Mr. Hathaway. I am deeply grateful to you. Where is my child?"

The most renowned physician in London was quickly summoned, but in vain Mr. Bullion begged him to devise means to remove his daughter. At present she must not leave her bed. In a few days, perhaps, with returning strength, she might lie for two or three hours at a time on a sofa in our sitting-room. Farther change was imperatively forbidden.

So Mr. Bullion, with many apologies, begged that some of his daughter's favourite pictures, and a few chairs, &c., from her boudoir, might be brought; and we could not refuse. A few hours transformed our bachelor den into a kind of fairy palace.

Mr. Bullion was naturally a constant visitor, and I had to receive him in the tattered dressing-gown. Twice he found me writing, with manuscripts littered around.

"You are an author?" he queried, with a smile.

"A would-be one."

"Pray do not desist from writing on my account. May I amuse myself with your papers for a time?"

He borrowed a bulky one at leaving—to submit it, he said, to a publisher he knew. Next day I received a letter from a well-known firm, offering fifty pounds for the copyright, and an additional fifty pounds if a second edition were called for. In my youth and inexperience, it did not occur to me for months that the money came from the banker's pocket.

Of course I eagerly assented, and took my coat and vest out of pawn—not a day too soon, for Miss Bullion was pronounced convalescent, and that afternoon her father's strong arms conveyed her from one room to another.

I lived in fairy-land for a week, till our guest departed. She explained the visit to our obscure street—it was to pawn jewellery for her brother's benefit, a wild lad, whose excesses had driven him from home, and who had recently been writing her letter after letter, hinting at frightful consequences if she could not furnish him with money. "Mr. Hathaway," she said, "will you be my friend, and try to reclaim him?"

She put a transparent little hand in mine as she spoke, and I promised. Her "friend,"—I would have promised anything for such a title.

Then an eventful conversation took place between me and the banker.

"You have abandoned the idea of becoming a barrister, Mr. Hathaway, and the profession of author is a precarious one; unite it with another pursuit. You are a good linguist, and I badly need a foreign correspondent. The hours and the duties will be light enough; cast in your lot with me—I will take care you have no cause to regret it."

I thought of my "friend," and assented.

The firm is Bullion and Hathaway now, the junior partner having married the senior's daughter. John Hornsey, Esquire, is their solicitor, a man much respected in the profession. Hal Trevor is just beginning to make a stir as a fashionable physician.

VARIETIES.

CYPRUS.—Cyprus was the first country of the world that had a Christian ruler. Sergius-Paulus was pro-Consul of Cyprus. It was the place where the name of Saul was changed to Paul, possibly for some reason connected with his conversion. The history of his conversion is narrated in Acts xiii., where we read how the superstition which was so rife at that period of the Roman Empire yielded in his case to the enlightening influence of Christianity. Cyprus was the country of Barnabas, the son of consolation, and the estates which Barnabas sold to assist in the propagation of Christianity were lands of Cyprus. Cyprus at that period must have been a populous and important place. It was largely inhabited by Jews, and scarcely any locality could have been more adapted as a meeting-place for East and West.

ANCIENT GREATNESS OF CYPRUS.—This island was, it is probable, the Chittim of the Old Testament, and at the eastern extremity, just north of Famagosta, was the mercantile port of Salamis, with a population at one time of a quarter of a million of souls. Here, in the beginning of the Christian era, there were several synagogues, and a considerable population of wealthy Jews was attracted by the large trade in flax, wine, and fruit, and the produce of the copper mines. At this time there were several ports in the island, protected by moles or breakwaters. The remains of some can now be seen at low water, notably at Baffo, the ancient Paphos, at the western end of the island, the harbour of which is now nearly blocked up, and affords shelter only for boats. The nearest ports of har-

bours on the mainland are Seleucia, in the Bay of Antioch, at the mouth of the Orontes river, that flows past the town of Antioch; Alexandretta or Scanderoon, about forty miles to the north of Seleucia, and Mersine, the port of Tarsus, in Cilicia.

A TALK WITH TOM THUMB.—Tom Thumb is rather fat, bearded and looks his age of forty years, according to a correspondent of the Boston Herald, who visited him a few days ago at his home in Middleboro, Mass. His mother and his married brother and sister live in the neighborhood. He showed a tiny coat that he wore over thirty years ago when first exhibited, and said: "I used to slip into this easily enough but now, why I don't believe an ordinary sized man could more than squeeze two of his fingers into that sleeve. Those were the days when I was a little chap and no mistake. I used to weigh only about twenty pounds, and measured an even eighteen inches high; but now," slapping his thigh, "I'm a portly old fellow of seventy pounds, and I guess I'm a little rising forty inches. I stopped growing tall—queer to speak about my being tall, isn't it?—when I was about twenty-two years old. Since then I have been maturing and getting stout." Tom denied Barnum's story about a rivalry between him and Commodore Nutt for the hand of Lavinia Warren. "Vina never looked on him except as a boy," he said, "he was so much younger than she."

BEACONSFIELD'S WIFE.—A London correspondent, describing Lord Beaconsfield as he entered the House of Lords after his return from Berlin, writes: "His face has been well described as a mask. That is a common smile, which finds pictorial expression in the sphinx. But there is a soul behind it. I fancy that 'vacant look' is the result of practised disguise of feeling. A face that tells no secrets, eyes that can look unconcerned on all occasions, a mouth with lips that never tremble, must be useful to great politicians and diplomatists. Depend upon it, many a time the fierce fires of passion burned red and hot behind that human mask. But everything comes by practice, and Disraeli is an actor who can control the expressions of his features and administer in his strongest feelings with the discreet management of a great histrionic artist. The common people look at him wonderingly: his peers don't understand him; only Montagu Corry, I suspect, knows him thoroughly, now that his wife is no more. How much in the past he owed to the patient devotion of that good woman, the Premier touchingly made known during her lifetime; and there must be something good in a man to whom a true, noble woman is devotedly attached when they tread the down hill of life together as she in the heyday of their ambitious hopes."

WASTE OF NATURAL FORCES.—In a lecture recently delivered by Dr. Siemens on the utilization of heat and other natural forces, some very suggestive facts were stated. He showed, among other things, how heat can be made to do a greater amount of work than ever by means of electricity. One hundred horse-power of either steam or water may be used, for instance, at a central or convenient place to drive dynamo-electric machines. The current there produced could by pipes, be conducted to halls or factories and then converted into light or mechanical power. If light were required, the equivalent to 125,000 candles would be given at an expenditure of three and three-fourths hundred-weights of coal, instead of three and three-fourth tons. The amount of force lost to man from not utilizing the Falls of Niagara is enormous. Every hour 100,000,000 tons of water descend; there a height of 150 feet is equal to 16,800,000 horse-power. To pump that water back, estimating the consumption of coal at four pounds per horse-power per hour, would require 266,000,000 tons of coal a year or a quantity equal to the total coal consumption of the world. Evidently the best means of employing the available forces for work have not yet been put into use, and the neglect of wind, water and tide power is surprising when the whole subject is considered.

QUEEN AND KING.—The King of Spain has decided on having an immense basilica raised over the remains of Queen Mercedes. A sum of 1,000,000 reals will annually be deducted from the Civil List for its construction till the building is complete. The Duc de Montpensier and the Princess of the Asturias have promised to furnish yearly 200,000 reals in aid of the work. Lastly, the Duc de Montpensier has brought to Paris with him a letter from the King to Queen Isabella asking her to join in the project by handing over for the purpose the diamonds and jewels deposited in the Cathedral of Atocha which belong to her, and represent a sum of 15,000,000 reals—more than 3,000,000*l.* The Queen at once telegraphed as follows in reply: "My son, the Duc de Montpensier has just brought me your letter. I see that, like a Catholic King and a gentleman, you seek consolation in God, and think of Mercedes in doing good to the Capital. You are going to place her beloved remains at the feet of the Virgin beneath a magnificent temple. Your mother, my child, not only permits the jewels of Atocha to be sold, but she blesses you and joins in your project—a project worthy of a King, a Christian, and a good husband. For this and everything count always, Alphonso, on the immense love, the support, and co-operation of your mother, who wishes it to be known that, although at a distance, she is and always will be the same for Madrid, for Spain, and for her King."