



VOL. III.—No. 73. FOR WEEK ENDING JANUARY 26, 1867. 4D OR SEVEN CENTS.

THE LION IN THE PATH

(From the Publisher's advanced sheets.)
Continued from page 310.

CHAPTER LXI.

The unfortunate man was two or three times on the point of fainting, for his hand was in such a position with regard to some projecting portion of the machine that it seemed to him he could not even withdraw it from the spike without moving the handle a little way back.

And that he could only do with his left hand, which must be exerted in a position most unfavourable for the end in view. He could not shift his right arm even a hair's breadth without the most exquisite torture, and fresh alarms of faintness.

What minutes of misery those were! Is it to be wondered if he wished now over and over again he had never undertaken such a job?

He had, even in that frightful state, to pause just for an instant—just for one instant only—to feel sure he could summon up strength enough to turn back that handle with his left hand, without having to try it a second time.

With a half-murmured prayer to God, he made one desperate effort, fixed his teeth hard, got back the handle, and then, with a steady but excruciating effort of will, raised his impaled hand from the bed of torture, and then he dropped, sick as death, on the machine, careless of any injury he might do, overborne by the pain and the shock.

This, then, was the last bit of devilry the Brothers Coombe had provided.

The last! If it were the last, what more had he to fear?

And that very thought gave new life and energy. It was the last, he had no doubt of that.

He took the trouble to penetrate the mystery of that spike.

He turned back the machine, and he saw then that at a certain period of its revolution the spike was withdrawn till it altogether disappeared; so that he would have been relieved if he had kept his hand still, and merely turned the handle. He wished he had known that at the time.

He understood, too, that the handle of the machine was not intended for ordinary use, as the moving power was connected with the water-

wheel outside, but only for special purposes—to try experiments, make repairs in it more easy, and so on. And he saw, too, a place for the insertion of a key over the spot where the spike lay concealed, so that, no doubt, during the daytime that formidable weapon of offence was kept from doing any mischief.

How painful that hand was! He looked at it, it was swelling fast!

There was water in the place. He steeped a handkerchief in it, and bound his hand up.

And then it seemed to him that it must be utterly impossible for him to sketch any more for some time, perhaps many days! And worse still—if his hand inflamed and grew worse, there would be inquiry, suspicion, discovery!

In an almost passionately despairing mood, putting both hands to the handle, he set the machine going—slowly, then faster, then very fast, till he thought he could let the handle go, and watch its method by the aid of the impetus thus given.

How intently he studied it, with both elbows resting on a projection of wood-work! but the very knowledge that it would so soon come to rest disturbed his powers of self-concentration,



Suddenly his pencil stops. What was that noise!