

but that was an impossibility—rather less red than usual ere he replied:—

"I beg pardon, Mr. Fairleigh, but I'd forgotten you, sir; 'pon my conscience I had. Ah, that was a foolish piece of business, sir; but Mr. Cumberland, he always was a bad 'un."

"The man who encouraged and assisted him, not to mention working on his fears, and goading him to desperation, is scarcely the person to blame him," replied I sternly.

"Ah! you don't know all, sir; he was a precious sight worse than you're awake to yet, Mr. Fairleigh. I could tell you things that would surprise you; and if I thought that you would save yourself the trouble of taking me any further than M——, which is, I believe, the nearest place where I can pick up a coach to London, I don't know that I should mind explaining matters a bit. What do you say, sir? you are lawyer enough to know that you can't do anything to me for this morning's work, I dare say."

"I am not so certain of that," replied I; "abduction and manslaughter are legal offences, I believe."

"I had nothing to do with the last job," was the reply; "I could not have prevented Cumberland's shooting the mare if my own brother had been riding her."

This I believed to be true, and I was far from certain that, although morally guilty, Captain Spicer had committed any offence for which he could be punished by law; moreover, as he had been a good deal knocked about in his conflict with the turnpike-man, and I had more than half strangled him with my own hands, I felt leniently disposed towards him. I therefore replied:—

"Tell me, truly and honestly, supposing you can for once contrive to do so, all you know about this business; and if, as I imagine, you have only been the tool of others in the affair, it is possible my friend, Mr. Frampton, may be induced to let you off."

Upon this hint, the Captain having prevailed upon me to remove his extempore handcuffs, and passed his word not to attempt to escape, proceeded to give me the following particulars:—

About a year or so before he had acted in some mysterious capacity at a gambling house, of which Cumberland was part proprietor, and which was one of Wilford's favourite resorts. The debts which, as a boy, Cumberland had begun to contract, had increased till he became deeply involved; and after availing himself of every kind of subterfuge to postpone the evil day, he was on the point of being arrested by his principal creditor, a money-lender, to whom he owed £750. Shortly before the day on which he had promised to meet the demand, Spicer, getting a cheque cashed at a banker's in the city, was present when an agent of Wilford's paid in to his account £2000, which circumstance he mentioned to Cumberland. That evening Cumberland induced Wilford to play piquet; they played high, but fortune varied, and at the end of the game Cumberland rose a winner of eighty pounds, for which Wilford wrote him a cheque. On exam-