

vering applicants had at length the satisfaction of seeing the first-floor window, open, and a shaggy, grey head appear, while a husky voice inquired, angrily—

"Who's there?"

"Lavinia."

"Livy! Why, what's up now?"

"Let me in; I'm perishing."

"The more fool you," growled the man, as shutting the window and getting a light, he came down-stairs, with heavy tread and muttered grumbings.

The door was opened, and the woman, with an hysterical sob, made her way through a door off the passage into a little front room, dingy at all times, but now looking perfectly desolate by the feeble light of the tallow candle.

"I'm burnt out, Major."

To Norman's surprise, the man burst into a loud laugh, saying—

"And how could that hurt you, Livy? You do look queer." Observing her drapery of patchwork quilt, he touched it, and said, "You're that bit of property the richer, I should suppose."

He was about to add something more, when he caught the astonished and indignant expression of Norman's face, and restrained himself exclaiming—

"Burnt out, Mrs. Fitzwalter! Indeed! I'm so glad you're safe that I don't know what I'm saying."

Norman set the desk down on the table, and the book slipped from his weary arm on to the floor.

"I'll pick up the Bible," exclaimed the youth, recovering it, and laying it on the desk.

"The Bible! eh, Livy?" inquired the man.

Mrs. Fitzwalter laid her hand on the cover of the book, and with a peculiar look, said—

"This young gentleman has rescued me. Major, for dear life, let's have a bit of fire; I can't keep a limb of me still."

At that instant Norman startled them by uttering a sharp cry. They both looked at him. He was drawing his hand out of his pocket, and, with pallid lips, as if speaking in a dream, he said—

"It's gone!"

"What?"

"My purse."

He sat down, sick and giddy from exhaustion; and as the room swam round, closed his eyes a minute. They thought he had fainted, but he never lost consciousness. He heard the interchange of inquiries; he even felt the hands of the two making casual search in his pockets, as they unbuttoned his collar and raised his head. In a few minutes, he started to his feet, and began to apologize, with a sort of angry shame, for his weakness. One thing struck him as strange: Mrs. Fitzwalter, on throwing off her patchwork outer garment, was by no means uncomfortably clad, though in rather shabby black. Indeed, her appearance was a contrast to the litter of pipes, newspapers, slippers, that were spread over and under the rickety chairs of the room; the crustaceous remains of a supper of oysters forming a kind of rockery on the table.

Civily asking him to sit down, which, despite his assurances that "nothing ailed him," Norman was fain to do, the two left him alone, the woman carrying her desk and book with her. He heard them calling Susan; and in a short time one of the scraggiest and briskest of little London servants entered, her hair bristling with dirt and hurry, and her keen eyes, furtively glancing at him, as she raked the ashes hastily and made the fire. How quick and how dirty the little frame of bones was! How she swept away the oyster shells, wiped down the table with her smutty apron, and, returning in an instant brought back a tray with an extraordinary variety of cracked cups and saucers, a pungent odour of spirits meanwhile prevailing the house, to the instant perception of Norman's olfactory, rendered acute by hunger! He watched the girl, gloomily thinking of his lost purse and bundle. He had now nothing but what he stood upright in, and not a penny in the world.

That wonderful half-crown which figures so conspicuously as the commencement of the fortunes of many millionaires, and is, consequently, so much an article of belief in the creed of

inexperience—neither that coin or any other was Norman's. He was all at once a beggar. He raised his head, and his nostrils quivered a moment, as he muttered to himself—

"I'm no beggar—unless I beg. I shall not do that! I'll die first!" A little piece of youthful heroics that by no means stilled the hungry craving that clutched his vitals. "I'll tell these people," he said, "that I am destitute."

The entrance of a curious combination of viands red herrings, fried bacon, and a smoking loaf, just obtained from an early bakehouse—put a stop to the youth's meditations. He was asked to partake of their fare. With his head erect he sat down with them, and learned from their conversation that Mrs. Fitzwalter's loss that might had been terrific—"a great quantity of most beautiful and valuable household furniture—trinkets that she had kept through all her troubles—and not a penny of insurance to cover the loss." As they were so communicative to him, and he felt so sorry for the distress that Mrs. Fitzwalter suffered, he was led to reply frankly to their questions about himself and his loss. The sum in his purse was so small, that his host said—

"Oh, it's well it's no worse. Your friends will make that trifle up."

"It was my all, and I—I have no friends—that is, none I can trouble just now."

"Then, where do you live?"

"Oh, I'm in search of some employment."

His entertainers exchanged glances, and "Livy," as the Major called her, said, putting her head aside in a most sympathetic attitude—

"Oh, my young friend, my preserver, say—have you now—have you clandestinely left the parental roof? Confide in us—pray!"

"I have no parents. I can't tell you anything more than this—I have to get my own living, and I want work."

"What work have you been used to?"

"Oh, writing; I could be a clerk."

"Writing!" they both said in a breath, and then were silent.

Meanwhile, Norman, as breakfast was over, rose, and, thanking them, was about to leave, but his youthful strength had been sorely over-tasked; he was drowsy, chilly, and ill. His teeth chattered as if he was stricken with an ague fit as he was bidding them farewell; and their offer that he should lie down and rest, he was powerless to refuse. He was shown up-stairs to a little nook of a room in the roof, where, on a dirtier mattress and a more grimy floor than he had ever seen, he was fain to lie down. For one whole week after, he did not rise from that bed, or take anything but some weak tea, or black barley water that Susan made him.

But he got better, after the rigour of the attack had spent itself, and that quickly.

One most perplexing trouble awaited his recovery—he had no clothes to wear! Susan came to him with a note from Mrs. Fitzwalter, neatly written, in which she eloquently deplored "the great misfortune that had befallen her at the fire, and stated that the deep distress consequent thereon had made her so destitute that she had been obliged to raise money on his garments to procure him medicine and necessaries; but that her brother, Major Sutcliffe, would cheerfully lend him what clothes he could spare." She added, "that, as she had a large circle of connections to whom she required to make known her trouble, and as her health had been dreadfully shaken, so soon as her young friend felt able to use a pen, she would be obliged by his doing some writing for her—it would save her having to employ a stranger." There was something that touched Norry's lonely heart in not being considered a stranger. He had yearned, in that short, sharp illness, for the dear ones he had left, with an intensity of love and grief he had never known before; and it seemed as if he was not utterly adrift when this spar was thrown out to him; it was something to lay hold of.

So, in a day or two afterwards, the youth was in a costume that had the most comical effect. A tattered, flowered dressing-gown, whose original yellow and crimson was diversified with some green patches, and a tarnished buff waistcoat, and rusty black continuations, in which

garb he was so swaddled by their all being three or four times too wide for him, that his gaunt limbs looked like a pair of cross sticks in an old clothes shop, used to exhibit tatterdemalion garments. His hair had (very unnecessarily, as he secretly thought) been cut close while he was ill, and he could not forbear starting back with vexation and amazement when he surveyed himself in a bit of cracked looking-glass, after making his grotesque toilet. A more miserable, and, at the same time, ludicrous object was never seen. He was so ashamed to show himself, that he sat down, utterly disconsolate, on the mattress. However, he had to bear his humiliation; and it was certainly some consolation that neither Mrs. Fitzwalter nor her brother seemed inclined to laugh at him. He tottered down to a chair, had a desk—the very desk rescued from the fire—put before him, and was required to copy certain long letters to Mrs. Fitzwalter's friends, containing, as he thought, rather florid descriptions of the fire, and the loss it had inflicted.

He seemed to have been away many years from the cottage at Kensington. He was at work, it is true—doing something for the bread he ate, and the trouble he had given; but wrapped up so grotesquely, that he seemed, in losing his clothes and his money, to have lost his identity.

"Can it really be only ten days since I left them? Am I not in a dream?" he asked himself. No, it was all real: and he began, in a few days, to be rather curious about his employers; he caught himself thinking "Is that low man really a major?"

"Is the man really a major?" was a very natural question, for Norman was not ignorant of the gradations of rank in the army. He had known an old sea captain at Kensington, a very rough specimen of humanity; but in all the roughness of the veteran there was the unmistakable trace of gentlemanly manners and feeling. But this major was vulgar—a coarse dictatorial, gormandizing creature, given up to low pleasures. The postman was a very frequent visitor at the house; and Mrs. Fitzwalter seemed to have no small amount of care or business, or both, on her shoulders. It rather surprised Norman to find that she had so many liabilities to meet, and that she had to make such frequent and pathetic appeals for money. However, he was well content that he could do her bidding, as far as writing was concerned; and when she told him that she was also assisting many poor families by the statements she drew up of their various troubles, there were some days when the boy congratulated himself on being in any way, however, humble, the means of assisting the afflicted. But it must be owned that his own wretched plight, rolled up like an untidy bundle in the Major's dressing-gown, fretted him continually, made him a close prisoner, and he pined for the open air with the intense longing of youth and convalescence. Indeed, he was quite right in believing that the remains of weakness that hung about him were the consequence of breathing the close air of the dingy room to which he was confined. He was so conscious that his illness must have caused trouble and expense, that he felt reluctant to complain of this strangu garb; but as day after day passed, and he pondered his condition, he at length grew desperate, and when, after a long day's writing, Mrs. Fitzwalter came in, much better dressed than ever Norman had seen her, he ventured to say—

"Do not think me ungrateful, but I would live on bread and water rather than continue to wear these clothes."

"Ah! you're getting tired, young sir. It's all very fine your talk while you were ill about wanting work, and being willing to do it; and now, though we've given you of our crust and our cup, you're discontented."

"No, no, don't say so!—clothes are a necessary of life—something that I could show myself out of this room in, however bad, if they were only the shape of a decent suit, I'd work night and day to get."

He had a hard struggle to keep the tears that sprang in his eyes from welling over as he spoke; and Susan the little slavey, who was crawling with a broom and dust-pan over the room, turned