

Great Heart of England subscribes : what a noble thing this is ! Bodkin, secretary of a BUBBLE Society, take heed of these words. Deserving objects are founded by properly-paid agents. It is then only a question of subscription : we provide the money, and, by a beautiful arrangement, all the objects of philanthropy are attained without disagreeable contact with actual suffering."

Bodkin was crushed, but he was still present, and even a worm will sometimes turn—he turned.

"The good Samaritan," he said, "pays somebody else to hire the ass, and carry off the wounded man."

"Eh—h ?" asked Sir Jacob.

"And the glow of virtue is just the same," said Bodkin.

"Come, Bodkin," said Reuben, "you have got rid of a bubble. Well, never mind, have done with bubbles. Work !"

"I can't," Bodkin replied ; "I don't know the spoke of a wheel from the axle. 'These little hands,' he spread out his enormous red palms, "'These little hands,' as the poet says, 'were never made to dabble in the iron trade.' I will find another bubble. I will invent a new society, start a club, run a show, do something."

"Try," said Reuben, "to be a workman among the rest, Bodkin ; leave bubbles for rogues."

"I have already, Mr. Bodkin," said Sir Jacob pointedly, "more than hinted that the word 'bubble' is personally offensive to me. Let me repeat that nothing but your own assurance that the society was established on the firmest basis would have induced me to become a member of its committee."

"And nothing—nothing, Henry" (Mrs. Sampson pulled out her pocket-handkerchief), "would have persuaded me to listen to your proposals, had I not thought that your schemes had the firmest financial support."

"Be consoled, madam," said Sir Jacob, taking her hand, which he held.

At sight of this last outrage, Mr. Bodkin lost command of himself. He turned pale, he straightened himself, he held his hat in one hand and his gloves in the other, and, with head erect, quite as a man might do who had not been concerned in bubble societies, he made a little speech.

"Sir Jacob Escomb," he said, beginning in a very low voice, but gradually warming

as he went along, "you, who know how to conduct the worship of God and Mammon, are sure to command respect. Go on doing good. As for poor Lord Addlehed, he was a fool if you like ; but he was a gentleman, and he tried his best to alleviate the misery of the world. He took his lead from such men as you. You subscribe to everybody's charity that men like me start. You set us agoing. You like to see your name, with half a dozen lords, on a committee list, and the lords think, because they are gentlemen, and therefore easily deluded, that it is out of pure philanthropy. You round on me because my scheme has failed ; you welcomed me when you thought it might end in a friendship with Lord Addlehed. Did you inquire into the society, Sir Jacob ? Did you ascertain that it rested on a sound financial basis ? Not at all. You asked who was president, and you consented to become vice-president. Poor Lord Addlehed ! They have locked him up, and I daresay it was quite time. He was not so clever as you, but up to his lights he was an honourable gentleman, sincere and loyal. Your income, Sir Jacob, may be as sound as the Bank of England, but your charity is a bubble. Do you hear the truth for once ? It is a bubble. I am a humbug because I am poor ; you, Sir Jacob, because you are rich.—Lavinia, a long farewell."

He escaped in the confusion which his declamation created around. When the people felt that they were recovering a little, he was gone.

"Forget his words, Sir Jacob." It was Mrs. Sampson who spoke. "You, at least, can afford to forget and forgive."

He might forgive and forget, but he would still fume, and did fume, walking about, swinging his arms, gesticulating.

Presently, however, no one interfering, he grew calm. Reuben Gower was very silent. He had sat quite still, making no sign, while Bodkin made his oration. His son, John, on the other hand, made no disguise of the boredom of the whole thing. What did it matter to him, the practical engineer, whether Sir Jacob was a humbug philanthropist or not ? It had nothing to do with him. His head was full of other things. But Reuben looked sad.

Sir Jacob laughed—the laugh which the discomfited adopt—an unreal, hollow sort of laugh.