

## CHAPTER LII.

## ESTATE OF THE LATE J. P. SOLOMONS.

FOR the next week all Hillborough was agog with the fallen tunnel. So great an event had never yet diversified the history of the parish. The little town woke up and found itself famous. The even tenor of local life was disturbed by a strange incursion of noisy navvies. Central Southern went down like lead to ninety, as Mr. Solomons had shrewdly anticipated. The manager and the chief engineer of the line paid many visits to the spot to inspect the scene of the averted catastrophe. Hundreds of hands were engaged at once with feverish haste to begin excavations, and to clear the line of the accumulated *débris*. But six months at least must elapse, so everybody said, before traffic was restored to the *status quo*, and the Central Southern was once more in working order. A parallel calamity was unknown in the company's history: it was only by the greatest good luck in the world, the directors remarked ruefully at their next meeting, that they had escaped the onus and odium of what the newspapers called a good first-class murderous selling railway accident.

On one point, indeed, all the London press was agreed on the Friday morning, that the highest praise was due to the heroic conduct of Mr. Solomons, a Jewish gentleman resident at Hillborough, who was the first to perceive the subsidence of the ground on the Knoll, and who, rightly conjecturing the nature of the disaster, hurried—unhappily, at the cost of his own life—to warn the station-masters at either end of the danger that blocked the way in the buried tunnel. As he reached his goal he breathed his last, pouring forth his message of mercy to the startled engine-driver.