

A WOMAN.

Her shape from air its lightness seemed to take;
With quiet robed, in her serious mien;
But fell her steps in haste like flake on flake
With graceful speed alighting on the green.

Not a wild rose-cup's newly-opened curve
Could match the perfect outline of her cheek;
Nor the smooth blendings of its colour serve
That fair complexion's unstained bloom to speak.

The rich soft brown of her luxuriant hair
In orbs of light her eyes again expressed;
The smile of her sweet mouth outsmiled compare,
Moving to speech, or closed in dimpled rest.

Words were her life that cooled with pleasant breath
The angriest cheek, and actions strown around
Of delicate design, like bells of heath
Whose thousands give its colour to the ground.

Her fine perception pierced the roughest act,
When it encrusted gems of kindness,
Could rein her wild-wild spirits, and with tact
Approach the leaves of sensitive distress.

Guilt's pupil checked his words in their career,
With crimsoned awe, before her bended brow,
Which like a rain's bright evening would appear,
When sorrow prayed her with a purer show.

Stern to herself, no primrose pressed so light
The ground beneath, as she an erring soul;
And, sin abhorring, from Compassion's height
Shone upon those who mourned in its control.

HALF A MILLION OF MONEY

WRITTEN BY THE AUTHOR OF "BARBARA'S HISTORY,"
FOR "ALL THE YEAR ROUND," EDITED BY
CHARLES DICKENS.

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CHAPTER IV. THE CHATEAU ROTZBERG

AMID the many hundred miles which it traverses from its source in the glacier-land to its dispersion among the border flats of the Zuyder Zee, the great Rhine river flows through no district so full of strange interest, so wild, so primitive, so untrodden, as that deep and lonely valley that lies between Sur and Thusis in the Canton Grisons. The passing traveller hastening on to the Splügen, the wandering artist eager for Italy, alike hurry past with scarce a glance or a thought for the grey peaks above, or the stony river-bed below, the beaten highway. They little guess what green delicious valleys, what winding ravines, what legend-haunted ruins, and fragrant uplands jewelled with Alp-roses and purple gentian-blossoms, lie all unsought among the slopes and passes of the mountains round about. Still less do they dream that to some of those crumbling towers from which the very Ivy has long since withered away, there cling traditions many centuries older than Christ; or that in yonder scattered chalets, some of which cluster like swallows, nests on shelves of granite six or eight hundred feet above the level of the valley, there is yet spoken a language unknown to the rest of Europe. Only the historian and archaeologist care to remember how there lie imbedded in that tongue the last fragments of a forgotten language; and how in the veins of the simple mountaineers who speak it, there yet linger some drops of the blood of a lost, a mighty, and a mysterious people.

Thus it happened that William Trefalden, who was neither an archaeologist nor an historian, but only a brilliant, unscrupulous man of the world, every fibre of whose active brain was busy just then with a thousand projects, neither knew, nor cared to know, any of these things, but took his way up the valley of Domleschg without bestowing a thought upon its people or traditions.

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon of the fourth day from that on which he left London. He had been on the road two nights out of three; and yet his eye looked none the less bright, and his cheek none the paler. As he strode along in the deep shade, glancing up from time to time at the sunny heights above his head, his step grew freer, and his bearing more assured than usual. There was not a soil of travel on his garments. The shabby office coat so inseparably associated with its wearer in the minds of his clerks, was discarded for a suit of fashionable cut

and indefinite hue, such as the British tourist delights to honour. His gloves and linen were faultless. Even his boots, although he was on foot, were almost free from dust. He looked, in short, so well dressed, and so unlike his daily self, that it may be doubted whether even Mr. Abel Keckwisch would have recognized his employer at the first glance, if that astute head-clerk could by any possibility have met him on the way.

Absorbed in thought as he was, however, Mr. Trefalden paused every now and then to reconnoitre the principal features of the valley, and make certain of his landmarks. The village from which he had started was already left two miles behind; and, save a ruined watch-tower on a pedestal of rock some eighty feet above the level of the road, there was no accessible building in sight. The Hunter Rhine, with its grey waters still dull from the glacier, ran brawling past him all the way. There were pine forests climbing up the spurs of the mountains; and flocks of brown goats, with little tinkling bells about their necks, browsing over the green slopes lower down. Far above the sound of these little bells, uplifted, as it were, upon gigantic precipices of bare granite, rose, terrace beyond terrace, a whole upper world of rich pasture lands, cultivated fields, mossy orchards, and tiny hamlets, which, seen from the valley, looked like carved toys scattered over the velvet sward. Higher still, came barren plateaus, groups of stunted firs, and rugged crags among which the unmelted snow lay in broad, irregular patches, while far away to the right, where another valley seemed to open westward, rose a mountain loftier than all the rest, from the summit of which a vast glacier hung over in icy folds that glittered to the sun, like sculptured drapery depending from the shoulder of some colossal statue.

But William Trefalden had no eyes for this grand scene. To him, at that moment, the mountains were but sign-posts, and the sun a lamp to light him on his way. He was seeking for a certain roadside shrine behind which, he had been told, he should find a path leading to the Chateau Rotzberg. He knew that he had not yet passed the shrine, and that by this time he must be near it. Presently a chapel-bell chimed from the heights, clear, and sweet, and very distant. He paused to glance at his watch, and then pressed forward more rapidly. It was already a quarter to five, and he was anxious to reach his destination before the afternoon should grow much later. There was an abrupt curve in the road a few yards further on. He had been looking forward to this point for some minutes, and felt so sure that it must bring him in sight of the path, that when it actually did so, he struck up at once through the scattered pines that fringed the waste ground to the left of the road, and trod the beaten track as confidently as if he were familiar with every foot of the way.

As he went on, the sound of the hurrying river died away, and the scattered pines became a thick plantation, fragrant and dusky. Then the ground grew hilly, and was broken up here and there by mossy boulders; and then came open daylight again, and a space of smooth sward, and a steep pathway leading up to another belt of pines. This second plantation was so precipitous that the path had in some places been laid down with blocks of rough stone and short lengths of pine trunks, so as to form a kind of primitive staircase up the mountain-side. The ascent, however, was short, though steep, and Mr. Trefalden had not been climbing it for many minutes before he saw a bright shaft of sunlight piercing the fringed boughs some few yards in advance. Then the moss became suddenly golden beneath his feet, and he found himself on the verge of an open plateau, with the valley lying in deep shade some four hundred feet below, and the warm sun glowing on his face. There ran the steel-grey river, eddying but inaudible; there opened the broad Rhine, leading away mile after mile into the dim distance, with glimpses of white Alps on the horizon; while close by, within fifty yards of the spot on which he was standing, rose the ivied walls of the Chateau Rotzberg.

This, then, was the home to which his great-grandfather's eldest son had emigrated one hundred years before—this, the birthplace of the heir-at-law! William Trefalden smiled somewhat bitterly as he paused and looked upon it.

It was a thorough Swiss mediæval dwelling, utterly irregular, and consisting apparently of a cluster of some five or six square turrets, no two of which were of the same size or height. They were surmounted alike by steep slated roof and grotesque weathercocks;

and the largest, which had been suffered to fall to ruin, was green with Ivy from top to bottom. The rest of the chateau gave signs of only partial habitation. Many of the narrow windows were boarded up, while others showed a scrap of chintz on the inner side, or a flower-pot on the sill. A low wall, enclosing a small court-yard, lay to the south of the building, and was approached by a quaint old gateway supporting a sculptured scutcheon, close above which a stork had built his nest.

None of these details escaped the practised eye of William Trefalden. He saw all in a moment—poverty, picturesqueness, and neglect. As he crossed the open sward, and came in sight of a steep road winding up from the valley on the other side, he remarked that there were no tracks of wheels upon it. Passing under the gateway, he observed how the heraldic bearings were effaced upon the shield, and how those fractures were such as could only have been dealt by the hand of man. Not even the grass that had sprung up amid the paving in the court-yard, nor the mossy penthouse over the well, nor the empty kennel in the corner, remained unnoticed as he went up to the door of the chateau.

It was standing partly open—a massy oaken portal, studded with iron stanchions, and protected only by a heavy latch. William Trefalden looked round for a bell, but there was none. Then he knocked with his clenched hand, but no one came. He called aloud, but no one answered. At last he went in.

The door opened into a stone hall of irregular shape, with a cavernous fireplace at one end, and a large modern window at the other. The ceiling was low, and the rafters were black with smoke. An old carved press, a screen, some chairs and settees of antique form, a great oak table on which lay a newspaper and a pair of clumsy silver spectacles, a curious Swiss clock with a toy skeleton standing in a little scutry-box just over the dial, a spinning-wheel and a linen-press, were all the furniture that it contained. A couple of heavy Tyrolean rifles, with curved stocks to fit to the shoulder, were standing behind the door, and an old sabre, a pair of antlers, and a yellow parcel in a black frame, hung over the mantelpiece. A second door, also partly open, stood nearly opposite the first, and led into a garden.

Having surveyed this modest interior from the threshold, and found himself alone there, Mr. Trefalden crossed over to the fireplace and examined the parchment at his leisure. It was Captain Jacob's commission, signed and sealed by His Most Gracious Majesty King George the Second, Anno Domini seventeen hundred and forty-eight. Turning from this to the newspaper on the table, he saw that it was printed in some language with which he was not acquainted—a language that was neither French, nor Italian, nor Spanish, but which seemed to bear a vague resemblance to all three. It was entitled "Anuity del Pie. el." Having lingered over this journal with some curiosity, he laid it down again, and passed out through the second door into the garden.

Here, at least, he had expected to find some one belonging to the place; but it was a mere kitchen garden and contained nothing higher in the scale of creation than cabbages and potatoes, gooseberry-bushes, and beds of early salad. Mr. Trefalden began to ask himself whether his Swiss kindred had deserted the Chateau Rotzberg altogether.

Strolling slowly along a side-path sheltered by a high privet hedge, and glancing back every now and then at the queer little turreted building with all its weathercocks glittering in the sun, he suddenly became aware of voices not far distant. He stopped—listened—went on a few steps further—and found that they proceeded from some lower level than that on which he stood. Having once ascertained the direction of the sounds, he followed them rapidly enough. His quick eye detected a gap in the hedge at the upper end of the garden. From this gap, a flight of rough steps led down to a little orchard some eighteen or twenty feet below—a mere shelf of verdure on the face of the precipice, commanding a glorious view all over the valley, and lying full to the sunset. It was planted thickly with fruit-trees, and protected at the verge of the cliff by a fragile rail. At the further end, built up in an angle of the rock, stood a rustic summer-house newly thatched with Indian corn-straw. Towards this point William Trefalden made his way through the deep grass and the wild flowers.

As he drew nearer, he heard the sounds again. There was but one voice now—a man's—and he was reading. What was he reading? Not German. Not