

sympathised with his ailments; everybody wished him good out of the waters. But while these comments were passing, an odd incident occurred up-stairs: the strange gentleman was lying as if in a fit, with his head just at the top of the stairs.

He had not fallen, for if he had he would have been heard. He did not call for succour, and yet he was by no means incapable of raising an alarm, for when he heard the voice of his hostess say something that interested him, he half rose on his arm, listened intently, smiled, got up, and went to bed.

Altogether a strange and unaccountable proceeding on the part of the gentleman in violet.

What was it the woman had said to interest him? Merely this: that the gentleman didn't seem so old after all as she first fancied him. His voice was so cheery when he joked, and his eye so bright when he laughed; but there! some men always do look youthful: her grandfather's eye, everybody used to say, looked as roguish at seventy as most men's at twenty-five.

Next morning the gentleman was offered his meals in his bed-room if he liked.

"Oh, no," said he; "it will be a comfort to me to see what's going on—in a family way like."

"Isn't he affable?" said the wife to her husband.

"Don't much like the looks on 'un," growled the husband in answer, who, when he spoke, was rather afraid his own home comforts would be sacrificed by extra care for the stranger.

But when the man—who was one of the principal workmen in the mill—found the stranger after breakfast produce a lot of good tobacco and offer him some, and when he found that the stranger told capital stories, and didn't seem too proud to eat just what they ate, and chat just as they chatted, he began to like him immensely; and before that day closed the gentleman in violet was on the fair way to as decisive a popularity among the artisans of the mill, as among the artisans' wives and daughters.

When the sun came out a bit towards noon, the invalid ventured out to look at him and whatever else there might be to see at the same time.

Coombe Valley, though pretty enough on account of its grassy slopes and its mill pond for the use of the factory, had but one single object of sufficient importance to arrest the eye of a gentleman and a traveller—namely, the mill itself. Of course, therefore, he went to look at and to walk round it, and once or twice he made himself uncomfortable by fancying he was trespassing, though nobody met him to say so.

When he went back to dinner the man said to him quietly enough—

"Didn't I see you moving about between those two walls?"

"Really I don't know; but I thought once I was getting too near the buildings, and tried to make a short cut, and I found it was a short cut right into them, so I retreated."

"Ah! that's right. I ought to have told you, sir, that our masters are very jealous about strangers. One of them came to me just now and asked me who my new lodger was, and I told him, and he said he should give you a call."

"Very happy to see him, I'm sure," said the gentleman in violet. "Did you tell him my name?"

"Not exactly, seeing as I don't know it myself," said the man, with a grin.

"Oh, indeed! Faithful—George Faithful; or, I suppose I should say, Mr. George Faithful; though, if letters come to me addressed George Faithful, Esq., you will understand they are for me."

"Yes, sir; we'll take care of 'em."

Richard Coombe did not make his threatened visit after all, to the great disappointment of Mr. Faithful, who could not help dropping a sort of bitter sarcasm as to his being too poor, he supposed, for such visitors.

Day after day passed on, and while nothing occurred to injure the popularity of the new comer, something did happen that greatly in-

creased it. One evening he said to his host and hostess—

"Are you fond of music? Would you like me to play to you?" and with the words he produced from his pocket a flageolet.

Of course the answer was a delighted, "Oh, yes!" And the stranger began.

His listeners were no very good judges, perhaps, though the husband believed he was rather a 'cute critic in such things. But, however that might be, nothing so ravishing had ever before been heard in Coombe Valley.

He played melancholy tunes, and they were so full of pathos that the tears stood in the eyes of the handsome wife. He played spirit-stirring ones, and the man "couldn't stand it," meaning he couldn't sit still, so rose from his chair and strode about, feeling as if he—a militia man, and proud of his training—was ready to fight any number of French or rebels.

He played dance-tunes, and lo! there was heard outside the house the shuffling of many feet followed by loud, happy laughter; and then only did the musician know what an audience he had collected outside.

It was wonderful how this new incident affected the dwellers in Coombe Valley. They had so few amusements, that when one like this came in their way, they looked upon the musician with almost as much of respect, and wonder, and admiration, as the peasantry of Greece in the old fabulous days looked upon Orpheus and his doings.

The strange gentleman was very fond of wandering about, particularly in the very early mornings—for the sake of the healthy air, he said—and also in the late evenings, because, as he said, he then grew contemplative.

He thus became familiar with every lane, and field, and gate, and cottage, and could find his way, as he said, blindfold.

But his wanderings disturbed no one, for his flageolet was his constant companion. People heard its soft, sweet tones now borne down from the hill, now ascending from the hollows—heard it at all times and seasons. Even the Brothers Coombe began to take an interest in this melancholy invalid, and discuss the advisability of sending him an invitation. Obviously, this was no conspirator against their commercial peace.

Besides, their thoughts were turned in quite other directions about this time.

#### CHAPTER LIII.—SIR MOSES MAJOR.

One day a handsome hired chariot drove up to the mill, and the servant brought a card to the manager, bearing the name of Sir Moses Major, and politely asking if Sir Moses might see the mill.

"Certainly," was the reply of the manager.

Sir Moses—an extremely aged, tottering person, but with a vivacious eye, and intelligent, though furrowed-looking face, and wearing a sky-blue coat and dark wig—was conducted through the mill. In doing so, he noticed that twice the manager passed a certain door that was iron-plated, and he heard machinery in motion inside.

"What have you there?" Sir Moses asked, carelessly.

"That's a part never shown to strangers."

"Aha! Secret, eh?" laughed Sir Moses.

"What! Do you find people try to discover them, eh?"

"We did, Sir Moses, some years ago, when we introduced certain improvements. We were never safe for a week without finding something or somebody suspicious. Now it was a vagabond lurking in an outhouse, or secreted in the chimney. One poor wretch was nearly killed in this way before he could be extricated from the heat and smoke, for a fire was lighted while he was in it."

"Then we had hawkers trying to sell things to our men, but always wanting to do their bargains within the works. We had clever artisans suddenly knocking up while on the tramp, and in our valley wanting jobs. We had one impudent rascal—and he looked, Sir Moses, almost as much a gentleman as you do—caught trying

skeleton keys on our locks while somebody had gone to fetch him a glass of water!"

"Really! He was like me! Flattering!" said Sir Moses, laughing heartily. Then he added:

"And how did you stop the nuisance at last?"

"I will show you, Sir Moses. You see those fire-arms?"

The manager was pointing to a range of three tremendous blunderbusses hung up in the ante-room over a fire-place, and flanked on each side by a long row of leathern buckets.

"Yes," responded Sir Moses.

"They were our safeguards for a time, and did no good whatever. We don't pretend anything by them now; but at first we fancied they would deter. They didn't. Allow me now to show you what we did!"

He led the way along a narrow passage, then opened a door, and the two men stood in a kind of long kennel made of high stone walls covered over, so that nothing could reach the inside from without. There, one at each end, Sir Moses saw two of the most ferocious-looking dogs he had ever seen in his life. They had just been fed, and the mouth of one was dripping with blood. Their very eyes seemed to be constituted of blood. Sir Moses could not resist a shudder as he asked—

"And how do you use these?"

"They are never loosed except at nightfall, when I myself see them unchained. I don't do it myself—in fact, I couldn't. They are such brutes that only human brutes, bad or worse than themselves, can manage them. We have a man of that kind—offspring, I sometimes say, of monstrous parents. And even that fellow, whose fist strikes like an iron bar, and who uses it upon them pretty freely, even he gets an ugly grip every now and then."

"Pretty creatures! I'd like to get outside, if you please!" said Sir Moses.

As they went back into the mill, the manager continued—

"Yes, Sir Moses! As I was telling you, we turn them loose into the mill at night—that is, we just open this door, and the whole range of the place is open to them."

"But surely they don't trouble, night after night, to go hunting about! Depend upon it, they just lie down after a growl or two—perhaps, after a bite or two exchanged between 'em, to keep up a good feeling—and then wait till morning."

"Well, even then, they'd be alive at the slightest noise, and then they'd be lively enough, I promise you. But we don't trust to that," said the manager, with a knowing look.

"Really! How interesting, all this! Good as a play! And what do you trust to?"

"Hunger! We make 'em so hungry before they get loose at night, that they go about like mad things, exploring everywhere for the chance of picking up a scrap of bread, or meat, or cheese, or bone, left by a workman in some old corner. One poor fellow had got drunk on one occasion, been up all night, and in consequence was so sleepy all day that towards evening he got into a waste closet, and dropped off asleep."

"I shall never forget my horror to hear that poor creature's screams! What made it more horrible was the devilish silence of the dogs. We saved him—just saved him—but he's a cripple for life, and he's allowed eightpence a day by the firm as pension money!"

"So you see, Sir Moses, they are not at all untrustworthy. Ever since that incident, which soon spread abroad, we have had no night visitors—and as to day visitors—why we care little about them. Even if they got in—which they never did—they wouldn't have time to do harm. Our machinery is so complicated that I would defy a man to understand it without a good many hours of quiet and uninterrupted study, and then he'd have to make careful drawings of it; so you may judge what reason we have to fear from a mere casual inspection."

"No doubt! And that remark emboldens me to ask you, Don't you think Messrs. Coombe would let me have a peep if you were to tell them; I once went over the very mill in Italy from which some people say they got their valuable knowledge?"