

man departed. "A thousand fortunes gone at a single blow."

"Ay, and the poor people it has ruined," returned the other; "that is still worse to think about! The widows and the unconscious orphans, on some of whom, perhaps, it were better that the house itself had fallen, like the walls of Jericho, and spared them the ills to come."

No wonder the crowd was sad and silent. It was looking upon the ruin of a hundred happy households, and on what would for the future be but a splendid monument to commemorate the "better days" that they had known. The very sight of it seemed to decide some who were debating about the propriety of letting their money lie where it was, for they walked hastily away to join the crowd that was bewieging the neighbouring bank. Lombard Street itself was well-nigh impassable; not, indeed, from the Panic, so much as from the throng who, like myself, had come to look at it; and ever and anon, as some quiet brougham, with steady country coachman, drove up to the bank door, with a frightened-looking lady for its occupant, nervously clutching her cheque-book, the crowd would give a great cheer to reassure her, and another when she came out with her money and a beaming face. Once, too, a tremendous shout rang forth as a cab, guarded by policemen, drove slowly up, and certain heavy packages were carried into the threatened house, for we all knew that it was gold. That was what all such houses prayed for on that day. How the poor old lady in Threadneedle Street was importuned and worried for those four-and-twenty hours by her prodigal children! How they begged of her autograph and miniature, and the water-mark that never fails to cool the fever of impatient Demand; how they went down on their knees, and offered promises to pay—securities to which nobody would have had a word of objection two days ago—but at which she now shook her head, and wiping her spectacles, declined to have anything to do with, or, if consenting, tendered them but nine-tenths of what they asked, keeping the rest for usury; and even for that they were grateful, waiting in her parlour with beating heart—for even now the help might come too late—while she descended into her ample vaults and brought up, like Aladdin of old, her bags of treasure, and bade them make the most of it, for that she had not much more left than what she wanted for her own use. "A pretty thing," said the old lady, "if people should come to my door, and make a racket as they do at yours, asking for their own, and should find that it was not here. For my promises are not like pie-crust, I would have you know."

There was nothing in the least like pie-crust to be seen in Lombard Street, nor anything eatable whatever. Even the London Tavern, which is said to be open to rich and poor alike, might just as well have been closed, for I found nothing in it but auctions. Everything was "going going" in the City on that fatal day. There were some oyster-shops, it is true, but who eats oysters in the month of May? And there were a good many public-houses with swing-doors, upon which was written Luncheon Bar; but I cannot feed standing like a stalled ox. Then I suddenly remembered that I had once met a merchant-prince, who had impressed me favourably with his class by hinting, that if ever I came by his little place in the City, I would look in and lunch. If it had not been for the Panic, I should certainly never have reaped any benefit from the invitation; but he had given it in all good faith. The wing of a chicken, and a tumbler of iced hock and Seitzer water, was all that I meant to trouble him for, and then I would light my cigar, and go home in a Hansom. I had no difficulty in finding the establishment over which Fortunatus Fipps presided—he was called Fortunatus because, although he had been connected with trade on a large scale for more than a quarter of a century, he had only been twice in the Gazette—but it was not so easy to find the gentleman himself. On my first arrival, there was quite a commotion among his clerks, who were all looking very white and idle, and one of them was running off with my card into the private sanctum of his proprietor;

but upon my letting them know, in answer to inquiries, that I was *not* the accommodating gentleman momentarily expected from the Bank of England, he said he didn't think Mr Fipps could see me that day, unless I came by special appointment.

"That is just my case," said I decisively: "my compliments to Fortu—Mr Fipps, I mean—and I am come to lunch."

The card was accordingly taken in, and after a little delay I was admitted into the sanctuary.

Fipps was not looking by any means so brilliant as when I had seen him last, which was in the smoking-room of a great ex-minister: his hair was dishevelled, as though recently combed with the fingers; his face was very pale, and he wore an anxious and distracted air, as though he were listening for something—such as the fall in the Bank rate of discount; but I was so full of my luncheon, or rather of the want of it, that I failed to notice little peculiarities, although I remembered them afterwards.

"Well, Mr Fipps," said I with gaiety, "you see I am come for my bond."

"I am not aware, sir, that we have anything of yours," replied Fortunatus tartly, who was evidently in total ignorance as to my identity.

"My very dear sir," said I in soothing tones, "I do not refer to any business transaction. When I say my bond, I mean my pound of flesh (if cold chicken can be so denominated), the luncheon you promised me, when I had the pleasure of meeting you at Lord Tadpole's."

"Yes, yes," returned Fortunatus, forcing a smile; "I remember now quite well: a charming dinner; no such thing as tightness anywhere; no symptom of a crisis. But I beg your pardon. Lunch, lunch. What will you have for lunch? [He was talking like a man in a dream.] We have got some first-rate bills on Liverpool; names you can have no possible objection to."

"Ahem," said I, purposely sneezing with great violence, for I did not want to hear about Fipps's financial position. "If you'd only give me a glass of sherry; but don't let me hurry you, pray."

"Sherry?" echoed he gravely, "and don't let me hurry you, pray. Spanish Passives. No. East del Rey—the sacrifice is enormous."

"Then let me have some cheaper wine," replied I, cheerfully.

"It's all locked up," returned he in mysterious tones. "Four hundred and eighty-five thousand"—

"Dozen?" cried I, making a rapid estimate of the possible extent of cellarage under the establishment. "I don't believe it."

"Hush," said he, mysteriously, "nobody does: but for Heaven's sake don't talk so loud."

"Chicken!" ejaculated I, with resolution.

"No, sir," returned Fipps, simply; "I have no apprehension of the result, I do assure you—that is, of the eventual result. In that iron chest"—

"Ay, the Refrigerator!" exclaimed I; "why the deuce did you not mention that at first?" and I chapped my hands together for very joy. The unaccustomed noise seemed to awake Fortunatus from his lethargy.

"I beg your pardon," said he, frankly, and passing his hand across his forehead; "but I have been immersed in calculations all the morning; and I thought I was talking to—a gentleman connected with another banking establishment with which we are—or at least hope to be—connected. Lunch! certainly; the hospitalities of the City must be dispensed with—I mean must be dispensed. You have no shares in any joint-stock bank, I presume."

"Not that I know of," replied I; "oh no, I'm sure I'm not—that is, so sure as a man can be who has got no head for business. No; I've nothing but a running account with the north-west branch of the Imperial Adamantine."

"What!" exclaimed Fortunatus, in alarm.

"Have you money in that bank?"

"Yes," said I, "I think I've got one hundred and twenty pounds in it: that's all."

"My dear sir," returned Mr Fipps, with solemnity, and laying his hand upon my arm; "that is one of the banks that people are talking about: it is true," added he hastily, "that all of us—

even the most solvent firms—are subject, upon occasions of this kind, to groundless suspicion; but the Imperial Adamantine—I suppose you have your chequebook with you."

"Gracious goodness!" replied I, "should just as soon think of coming out with my boot-jack: it's in my desk, of course."

"Then take my advice, and go home at once and draw the money. Not a moment is to be lost; your bank will be closed at four, perhaps for ever. The nearest Metropolitan station is the fourth turning on the left. I am so glad to have had this opportunity of—of—giving you this timely warning—if indeed you are so fortunate as to be in time. This is your umbrella, I think"—

I didn't know whether it was or not, but I snatched up the one that happened to be the nearest, and ran out of the house with a speed that astonished myself almost as much as it seemed to surprise other people. "He's a-running on his bank!" cried one of those unfeeling crossing sweepers, who, in my judgment, since they have no property qualification, should not be permitted to express their opinions, even though they chance to be correct.

In the very nick of time I caught a train—though not, of course, in motion—and arrived at my own lodgings at 3.10, or, in other words, with fifty minutes to spare. But it was not that which caused me to hesitate in my proposed financial operation. I had met an old gentleman in the train, to whom I had confided the cause of my excitement, and not only had he greatly reassured me in the matter of the Imperial Adamantine, but he had informed me that it was thoughtless people like myself who caused the Panic. To think that I, who had gone into the City merely to look at it, should be accused of such a terrible thing! At the same time, if everybody drew their money out, as I was about to do, he proved to me that every bank in the country must needs collapse. Altogether I was so ashamed of my intention—it seemed such an ungentlemanly sort of thing to do—that I determined to send my landlady to transact the matter instead of myself. Moreover, since even then I had my scruples, I only drew the cheque for a hundred and fifteen guineas, leaving the Imperial Adamantine Banking Company exactly four pounds five to break upon, if they were resolutely determined so to do. Never, surely, were generosity and security more happily combined than by this ingenious device. But the Imperial Adamantine did not break after all; nor, according to the Commercial Intelligence (which, now that I know what a panic is, I peruse with avidity), has it been in the least danger of breaking. I read, however, that there was a severe run on that Friday afternoon upon the great house of Fipps and Company; and I have my suspicions that, Fortunatus's mind being a little preoccupied, he may have inoculated me with his own panic, simply and solely for the purpose of getting me out of the way.

In the French Minister's Report upon the Universal Exhibition which it is proposed to hold in Paris in the year 1867, there occurs the following sentence: "International Exhibitions promise to become perfect representations of modern society, in its various forms of activity." And an intention is announced of causing various historical reports to be compiled in France showing its present state of progress. In order that the principle thus set forth may be illustrated as far as England is concerned, the Committee of Council on Education have determined to exhibit a collection of the periodical literature of the day, containing one specimen which may be of any date in the year 1866, of each newspaper, review, literary, artistic, or scientific journal, magazine, tract, or pamphlet, play, &c, street-ballad, and the like, published in the kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, or in any of the British colonies, in the course of the year 1866. It is proposed to send this collection, when completed, to the Paris Exhibition of 1867, with the view of conveying to foreign nations some idea of the enormous amount of periodical literature for which there is a demand in England and its dependencies.