

THE HEARTHSTONE.

him, and abandoning at the same time his half formed design of taking a last look at Mrs. Tremaine, a thought prompted entirely by scientific curiosity as to whether her countenance would exhibit certain characteristics he had noted on that of another fever patient, who had expired that morning just as he had entered the house. Solitude for the little Margaret, however, occupied with the recollection of urgent professional calls, decided him on abandoning his purpose, and drawing her with him to the verandah, he kindly said:

"Margaret must not cry so bitterly because God has taken her dear mamma to heaven. Run, little one, into the garden; the air of the house is not good for you. Quick! Miss Radway, while I think of it may as well give you a certificate of death. It will save time."

"Certainly, sir. Here is paper and pen. Will it be better to bury the poor lady soon?"

"Of course; to-morrow morning at latest. The danger from contagion is great. How is Mr. Tremaine?"

"Very much cast down, sir, and quite worn out. I shouldn't wonder if he would be sick on his hands next."

"Quite possible," philosophically rejoined the doctor, with whom Mr. Tremaine was no favorite. "Well, make him take care of himself, for we have too many sick as it is. You are a capital nurse, Miss Radway, worth a dozen of the usual run; and your frame and constitution seem cast in bronze. Do no account let the child enter that infected room. I suppose you have sent for help? That's right. It is very difficult to procure just now. Good morning."

"The great danger the least," she muttered with long-drawn breath. "Now for a visit to the vault. She may yet be induced to sign the paper."

"Putting some jelly and light refreshments suitable for an invalid into a basket, with a flask of wine and water, and providing herself with a lamp, as well as the lantern she carried for her own use, she made her way unobserved through the comparatively deserted house to her destination.

As she turned the key in the lock a terrible awe crept over her. "What would she see in the life or death? The inmate of that dismal abode still lived, though pallid and cold as death itself; but the clasped hands, the fixed, but gaze raised heavenward told where heart and thoughts were.

"Mrs. Tremaine, I have brought you a lamp, as well as food and drink. Will you take anything?" and the housekeeper placed her burden on the stone floor.

"A drink," answered the poor sufferer, whose lips and throat were parched.

"Sign the will then, first."

A negative movement of the head, slight, yet containing a volume of quiet determination, and the prisoner uncontentiously resumed the devotions interrupted for a moment.

Allowing Mrs. Tremaine to die of actual starvation coincided neither with the housekeeper's own intentions nor with the instructions received from the master of the house; so, pouring out a goblet of wine and water, she handed it to her hapless mistress. The latter drank it eagerly, mutely, however, refusing all the nourishment.

"Have you any message, any word, to send your husband, Mrs. Tremaine?"

"None, save that when we meet before the bar of God's justice, I hope I may not be compelled to bear testimony against him."

The words, so awfully solemn in their purport, were spoken softly, as if involuntarily; and Miss Radway, placing the basket close to the captive's hand, hastily went out. She reached the upper part of the house just in time for the coffin, with its shining metallic surface and silver mountings, was arriving.

It was deposited in the hall, the housekeeper having first unlocked the closed door as if with the intention of having it carried in there immediately; but then, sympathetically noticing the white, frightened faces of the ladies who bore it, she said:

"You seem very much afraid of contagion. Leave the coffin then in the hall here."

The messengers thankfully obeyed and retreated, holding in their breath till they were in the open air for the smell of Miss Radway's disinfectant was so powerful that it conveyed involuntarily a supposition that the odor of death and disease lurked amid their fumes.

With some difficulty she prevailed on Mr. Tremaine to assist her in carrying the coffin into the bed-room, and placing it in, carefully surrounded by cloths to keep it in position, the heavy mahogany gun-case she had chosen for the purpose. Then the lids were screwed down, a crown of immortelles laid on it, lighted wax tapers placed at the head and foot of the coffin; and Miss Radway, for the first time, breathed freely within the last twenty-four hours.

Whilst she was in the midst of some instructions regarding the funeral, her master retreated precipitately to his room and bolted himself in. He found the breakfast tray which the cook had brought up in desperation, seeing that no one entered the dining-room, where the table had long previously been prepared.

The day lagged on wearily to the restless woman, who flitted from room to room like some perturbed spirit, now shuddering as if some dark presentiment had suddenly pressed itself upon her mind, and now suddenly gazing at the wall as she saw herself already, in fancy, Mrs. Roger Tremaine.

The morning of the funeral was ushered in by dark, lowering skies and a sharp east wind, and the attendance, in consequence, was small.

As the procession slowly wound from the hall door the housekeeper, concealed behind a curtain, looked on with eager eyes. How cloverly she had planned and carried it out. How everything seemed to have worked for her and her hopes. Little assistance or encouragement, indeed, had she from Tremaine himself; but would not the title of his wife, which would so soon be hers, indemnify her amply for all how handsome, how elegant he looked, in his perfectly fitting suit of newables. Ah! the funeral once over, Mrs. Tremaine really dead—a thing which could not but soon happen, for the sick woman's hold on life was frail as could well be imagined—he would be his olden self again.

Time passed. The servants returned from the funeral; but the master did not. What could be detaining him? How this neglect chafed the haughty spirit of the woman who paced up and down the wide hall, her cheeks blazing, her lips parched, her eyes lurid with excitement. Summoning the porter to her presence, she despatched him to Brompton to see if he could procure any information concerning his master. The long shadows were falling across sward and meadow when Brooks returned; and Miss Radway, who was watching for him with intense anxiety, saw that he held a letter in his hand. Meeting him at the door, she snatched it from him, glanced over its contents, and then sank into a chair white to her very lips. The message was short, and ran thus:

MY DEAR MISS RADWAY,—You can easily understand that after all that has happened, Tremaine Court will be insupportable to me for long years to come, so I leave this very day for abroad. I have made all necessary arrangements with Mr. Black, the notary, who will pay you every quarter a sum sufficient for the main-

tenance of yourself and my children. It is my wish that you should all continue to reside at Tremaine Court, though, of course, if this should not prove agreeable to you, I retract the desire at once. Trusting that repose and quiet will restore your strength, that has of late been so cruelly tried, over, with friendly regard,

Yours,
ROGER TREMAINE.

"Oh, ingrate! villain!" she hissed between her clenched teeth. "I, who have perilled soul and body for your sake, to be thus contemptuously waltz aside the instant my terrible task was accomplished! Margaret Tremaine, already you are avenged, for the rage and despair of hell seem burning within my heart."

After an interval spent in fierce paroxysms of alternate fury and despair, she entered round the dog-cart, and getting in, bade the man drive to Brompton. The information obtainable there was of the most meagre kind. The notary had nothing to tell beyond that Mr. Tremaine had called in at the office and made some arrangements with regard to Tremaine Court in his absence, which arrangements he was ready to communicate at once to her. They proved to be the same in substance as those mentioned in the letter written to herself, the pecuniary provision being of a very liberal nature. He had effected for her a sale of some valuable property, which he had parted with at a very low price, for a cash payment. Then he had driven to the nearest railway station, dismissed the driver and his vehicle, and embarked on some train; but no one knew whether it was bound north or south.

Burning with wrath, she at length decided on returning to Tremaine Court, and when she came in sight of its ivy-grown gables and towers, her indignation increased, if possible, in violence, especially as she glanced towards the east wing and remembered the terrible secret laid away among its foundations.

"To think that he should have abandoned me at such a critical time, when I wanted from him that help of brain and arm which I dare ask from no one else! Roger Tremaine, absent son of a false pier, thou wilt never prosper henceforth; and if curses were of any avail I would sink thee to the bottomless pit with mine!"

The doors and windows of Tremaine Court were all thrown open when she returned, and on entering and looking round her, the neat housewifely instincts which she really possessed made her resolve, despite the moral tempest that raged within her, on seeking to reduce that scene of household chaos to order. She never enquired, never even thought of the hapless orphaned child who was hid away in some nook of the garden, tasting already the bitterness of that neglect and isolation destined to be her portion through so many long years of a shadowed life.

After some time spent in giving directions to the maids who had returned to their posts on hearing that the funeral was over, Miss Radway entered Mrs. Tremaine's room, and, locking herself in, indulged her curiosity and cupidity by a protracted examination of the wardrobe, dressing bureau and jewel case, secreting about her person the larger and most valuable part of the gems, leaving, indeed, only those whose intrinsic value was trifling.

That night, when the household had retired to rest, she took her lantern, refilled her flask, and then descended to the vault. Ah, she felt like now that Margaret Tremaine would live, if the knowledge of the circumstance could overcome the life of the man who had so cruelly repaid her devotion; but when she entered and glanced at the white, rigid form still reclining against the wall, with fixed staring eyes that saw not, she knew all such plans or hopes were at an end, and that the soul of her victim had escaped for ever from life's bonds. A shudder shook her from head to foot.

What was she to do with this tell-tale evidence of crime; this ghastly corpse, sitting there, staring, it seemed, rigidly at her, and waiting to mutely denounce her guilt if human eye should ever look into that vault. A sudden thought struck her. Would it not be best to place it in the long oak chest, there to remain till a time would offer for more effectual concealment of it, or till Tremaine should return. In the meantime chest and vault could be carefully locked, and the keys kept in her own possession. But how address herself to her awful task? Alone she must do it, and, surely, whilst the villain who had shared in her guilt and reaped most benefit from it was already miles away, enjoying, probably, his new-found liberty, without giving a thought to her.

Bitter and deep was the anger that welled up from her heart at the thought, but that feeling and all others must give way before the pressing necessity of the stern duty that awaited her.

With rapid, breathless haste she seized the corpse and laid it full length on the ground; then tossed out the contents of the chest, which consisted chiefly of many documents and business papers, and piled them carelessly in a corner of the vault. After that she turned to the white figure lying there so still and silent. Were not those rayless, distended eyes rigidly fixed on her, with a dull menace in their depths? How could she brave their awful stare; how could she touch that rigid form with her arms, feel its icy touch on her cheek, as it would, perhaps, fall forward on her shoulder during her endeavors to place it in its unhalloved tomb? Surely, surely, if ever there were an instance in which motion or consciousness could be momentarily restored to the dead this was it.

But Miss Radway was not a woman of any nature, and resolutely raising the corpse she placed it within the now empty chest. Remembering that she had seen some unlabeled lime lying in an adjoining cellar, left there by masons who had been closing some opening in the wall, she proceeded thither and filled her apron with it. "Now, this will render the task of opening the chest again safer and easier," she thought, emptying her burden into the dread receptacle. "I shouldn't bring more, but I feel all at once unusually faint. I must leave this at once." Closing down the lid, she seized the key which stood in the chest, looked it, caught up basket and lantern and turned from the vault, drawing a long breath of relief when she had also looked the heavy door behind her.

The next morning the housekeeper went about her household tasks as usual, but the livid pallor of her cheek seemed to indicate that her sleep had not proved either sound or refreshing. It was a singular existence of which that gull-stained, hardened woman now entered. To a certain extent the dream of her later life was realized, and she really was in truth, if not in name, Mistress of Tremaine Court; but oh, how barren, how empty that position proved. Haunted incessantly by the remembrance of Tremaine's base ingratitude; harassed by plans and wishes for revenge; tortured by fears that he would sooner or later arrive with some lovely patrician bride who would rule in Tremaine Court as the first wife had never done; then stung by sudden vague fears that her crime might yet come to light to be explained, perhaps, on a scaffold. Surely, surely, her sin had wrought her, as yet, nothing but wretchedness.

As time rolled on, without bringing any tidings of the absent master of the house, sudden and desperate resolves at times seized her to

put an end to her life of isolation and solitude becoming daily more insupportable.

Among the few visitors who had ever ventured to approach her was a young, good-looking and tolerably educated man, named Stukely, a sort of sub-agent, employed on a neighbouring estate. Tempted by rumours of the comfortable sum the house-keeper had already accumulated in bank; dazzled by the position he would hold as temporary master of Tremaine Court; and, willing to ensure his livelihood without the penalty of working for it, he assiduously pressed his suit, and the woman, to whom life was growing each day more intolerably dreary, began to listen to him at times with something like patience.

News came just about this period through some fox hunting friend of Tremaine's who had met him abroad, that the latter was on the eve of being married to a young heiress with whose family he had been travelling in Italy. The affair was settled beyond a doubt, so, at least, testified Mr. Rokeby, the bearer of the intelligence.

The following day Christopher Stukely's suit was accepted, and a week after the ill-matched couple were united. Both parties had made a wretched mistake and both soon bitterly regretted it, despite that the new-made bridegroom lived now in Tremaine Court, occupying its best rooms as if he had been the master of it himself. The east wing had been entirely shut up after Mr. Tremaine's departure and his wife's death, out of regard, the housekeeper said, to the superstitious fears of the servants and the diminished numbers of the household. The harsh, repellent nature of the woman Stukely had married, and her importunate arrogant attitude rendered the stately abode of Tremaine Court as hateful to him as it had once been desirable. More and more frequently he escaped from its precincts, seeking comfort and quiet at the village inn, and mortifying his wife's overweening pride to the very quick; whilst she who had resolved that he should be named Roger Tremaine's sole agent as soon as the latter returned from abroad, felt that such a course would do anything but tend towards ensuring him the desired post.

Two children were born to the Stukelys within the first four years of their married life, and a week after the second child had seen the light Christopher Stukely absconded from home, taking with him all the money he could raise, and a portion of his wife's jewels, or rather the jewels she had abstracted from the wardrobe of the late Mrs. Tremaine.

The blow pierced that callous heart to the inmost core, and humbled in the dust the head that had carried itself so haughtily. What she suffered as she lay there helpless and abandoned on a sick bed—her nature untamed and in any degree by the sickness and suffering she had undergone no tongue could tell; but when she at length rose from it, sterner, more fringed than ever, silvery threads mingled, for the first time, with her heavy black tresses. To no one did she complain; to no one open her heart, and that concentrated intense grief and wrath would have gone far towards destroying either life or reason had she not found a counteracting and softening influence in the deep love she bore her children. There were three now in Tremaine Court, her own two and the eldest daughter of the house, Margaret. The latter still continued fragile and sickly, but the precious lessons of piety and christian resignation inculcated by her mother from the earliest dawn of reason bore precious fruit, and enabled her to bear, in meek and patient spirit, not only bodily illness but the harsh sway of the stranger who ruled supreme in her father's household.

Ellen, the baby daughter, born shortly before Mrs. Tremaine's death, had been put out to nurse at once, and her foster-mother, a respectable farmer's wife, had become so much attached to the child that she refused to part with it. Mrs. Stukely willingly consented to the woman's proposal that she should keep her charge till Mr. Tremaine's return, and satisfied all scruples by paying a small sum monthly for the little Lillian's maintenance.

The house-keeper's eldest daughter, Ellen, was a pretty pink and white creature, excessively vain of her good looks, but gentle and affectionate to the extreme; and her foster-mother, a source of constant grief to her mother's heart. As if the cry of innocent blood had gone up from the subterranean recesses of Tremaine Court bringing down on that gaily woman's head the vengeance of Him who has threatened to visit the sins of the parents on their children, Dorothy Stukely was from her birth a hopeless idiot, comparatively harmless, but devoid of any ray of intellect.

The cross was a fearful one to the mother's undisciplined spirit, and as the conviction of her daughter's imbecility forced itself day by day on her fully, she grew more and more stern and misanthropic, till even the solitary servant whom she had retained when the other domestics had all been paid off after Mr. Tremaine's departure, found her harsh rule intolerable.

The lapse of years brought no softening influences with them to that granite heart, nor did they bring tidings either of her absent husband or her absent master.

One chilly windy March evening that she and the children were taking their evening meal in gloomy silence, the house-keeper feeling unusually dull and sullen, it being the anniversary of her luckless marriage, a heavy step strode up the stairs—the door was swung flung back, and a man entered, announced, Roger Tremaine stood in their midst.

Throwing himself on a chair he moodily surveyed the group, whilst Mrs. Stukely recovering from her first overwhelming surprise rose to her feet and somewhat faltering said:

"You are welcome home Mr. Tremaine."

"Thank you, Mrs.—Mrs.—they told me your new name at the village as I came along, but I have forgotten it."

"Stukely sir."

"Ah well, Mrs. Stukely"—a strong ironical emphasis laid on the name—"please get a treading mangle or a cup of tea? Who are these young people may I ask? I think the eldest—a he indicated Margaret with outstretched fingers, mine, but I do not feel inclined to acknowledge the other two."

"They are mine," replied the housekeeper with a vivid red overpowering her sallow cheek.

"You are richly endowed, I see!" was the sneering reply. "What is your name?" he asked of Mrs. Stukely's eldest daughter.

"Ellen, sir."

"Your little one?" and whilst he spoke his keen gaze sharply scrutinized the youngest.

An idiotic grin and stare followed by some uncouth attempt at speech was the only rejoinder.

With a slight look of disgust he turned from the child and said: "But it seems to me I had another daughter, a mere infant when I left. Where is she?"

"With her foster mother who could not consent to part with her, alleging that you had placed the child in her keeping and that she would not give her up till your return."

"Well, Mrs. Stukely, you will please despatch that eldest girl of yours to a boarding school where youngsters of her age are taken, and the youngest to an asylum. In both cases I will pay expenses. Send also for your youngest child

to-morrow and let her be kept in future here in her own home. She will be a companion for her sister there who looks as if she wanted amusement of some sort, and seems to be it possible more sickly and ailing than she ever was."

The housekeeper merely bowed her head in assent to all this, and taking the children with her left the room; notwithstanding her apparent outward calmness considerably agitated.

What did this sudden unannounced return of the master of Tremaine Court mean? Had he come back as he went, or was there a proud stately wife waiting in Brompton village till the notice of her arrival had been given to the inmates of her future home, so as to have things prepared for her reception?

Hastily putting the children to bed, she then assisted in preparing a dainty supper and carried it up herself to the dining room. Mr. Tremaine was buried in deep thought, his eyes fixed gloomily on the floor when she entered, whilst his travel-stained habiliments and mud-covered boots announced that he had as yet taken no steps towards removing the tokens of his long journey.

Whilst the housekeeper poured the tea into the delicate china taken out in honor of the master's return, the latter sarcastically asked:

"May I enquire how is that fortunate individual Mr. Stukely?"

"I know nothing of him, Mr. Tremaine, since he left me whilst I was on a bed of sickness, taking with him all my money or jewels of mine that he could get possession of. You will confer a great favor to me by never mentioning his name to me again. And now can I enquire after the health of the present Mrs. Tremaine?"

"No by—there is no such person. I went more than once for an address whilst I was abroad, but signally failed. At one time it was all settled, the girl, young—well born,—very wealthy, but my ill luck clung to me, and I was jilted by the jade. I have returned free as a lark, but ruined in pocket, poor—aye poorer than I was the day I married Margaret O'Halloran."

"What is all the money that was forwarded you at different times from the sales of thine and property gone?"

"Every shilling."

"How?" she questioned in a low tone.

"At the range of tables of Baden-Baden, and other gambling resorts on the continent. I tell you I've led a fast life and a merry one since I left here, and am now come back bankrupt in health and fortune, to do penance in sack cloth and ashes for the remainder of my days."

"Ah how indeed would have been my time!" thought Mrs. Stukely with a mental pang whose sharpness amounted to agony. "Now indeed, but for the link that binds me, miserable woman that I am to a low ruffian, I might have seen the one sole bright dream of my life realized. Well I acted like a fool and most a fool's punishment!"

Mr. Tremaine now addressed himself to his supper but ate sparingly and at intervals, like a man pre-occupied by some weighty thought. Twice he looked up as if about to ask a question, then each time subsided into silence. At length, with evident difficulty he pronounced the words:

"My wife—what of her?"

The housekeeper's eyes flashed as the remembrance of all that she had suffered after Tremaine's departure rose upon her recollection and she retorted in an angry though cautious whisper:

"As to time for you to ask. She died the very day you left home, and I placed the corpse in the oak chest where it will remain till you remove it to some surer spot, or dig a grave for it in the adjoining cellar. Ah, Roger Tremaine! you played a low game, seeking safety at one's flight, and leaving me to contend alone with the dangers and difficulties that followed on her death."

"You were fully equal to the task, Hannah, but let us have done, now and for ever, with recriminations of all sorts. I have returned to Tremaine Court, beggared not only in purse, but in hope, health and all things else. I hate society—I hate my kind. No illusion is left me, nothing to look forward to—nothing to hope for. All I can expect now is perfect, stagnant quiet, and that at least I must have—it will cost nothing to the visitors who may come say I am from home, to those who refuse to be put off thus, plainly answer that Mr. Tremaine never receives calls or visits. You will make all purchases necessary for the household to save me as much as possible from going abroad, whilst you will also remember that pecuniarily crippled as I am, rigid economy is absolutely necessary."

The plan of life thus laid down was rigidly carried out from the day of Mr. Tremaine's return to that on which we introduced his two daughters to the reader, only that Mrs. Stukely's never becoming ill, and absolute and tyrannical with time her injustice to the children of the house more flagrant, and the system of penance she indulged in more daring and unscrupulous.

She undertook to bestow on Lillian and Margaret the elements of a sound English education, a task to which she was fully competent, and both girls, intelligent and quick, profited to a remarkable degree of her instructions. When the time came that these latter ceased, Margaret naturally studious continued to educate herself by a course of reading, judicious and well-chosen, commencing at the same time, in great part, her literary tastes to her younger sister. The library of Tremaine Court was about the most complete department of that strangely ordered household, so that the sisters had always within their reach the works of the best authors, and with these latter they spent many a pleasant hour, shut out as they were from society and the usual amusements of their sex. Deficient in accomplishments, they were certainly far richer in point of mental culture than most girls of their own age.

Now for Mrs. Stukely's daughters. The eldest left the boarding school in which she had passed so many years of her life, a pretty, vain and thoughtless girl. At the early age of sixteen just one month after the close of her school life, and whilst she was still on a visit with a relative of her father's, she contracted a stolen marriage with a handsome dissipated fellow residing in Brompton, a mill wright by trade. Almost from the first days of their union he gave up work and lived on the money with which Mrs. Stukely liberally furnished them. The other girl, Dorothy, remained in the asylum to which she had been sent after Mr. Tremaine's return, her mental malady unabated, but all inducements that money could procure were at her disposal.

One evil habit that the master of Tremaine Court had contracted during his sojourn abroad was that of indulging occasionally in stimulants to excess. During the day time such a thing never happened. On Mrs. Stukely's energetic remonstrating with him against this vice, and declaring that he was able to control himself at night as well as he did during the day, he was early answered:

"If the presence that haunts me at night and the thoughts that oppress and torture me like furies as soon as darkness sets in, visited you also, you might perhaps be driven to the same remedy, or to some other equally desperate."

What amount of remorse troubled Mrs. Stukely no human being ever knew, and she went

about her daily duties with the apparent calmness and self-confidence of one whose conscience was entirely at ease.

(To be continued.)

STRIKE THROUGH THE KNOT.

I well remember, years ago,
How I, a little lad,
To split a knotty stick essayed
With all the strength I had.
I vainly lugged about that knot,
And chips flew round the floor;
And, wearied, I laid down the axe,
And thought I'd try no more.

Just then, an old man passing by,
Who chanced to see my plight,
Cried out aloud, "Hold, hold, my boy!
You have not tried aright!
The hacking splinters will not gain
The object you have sought;
But split it through the knot, my boy,
Directly through the knot."

I tried once more, and on the knot
Struck hard to make it twain;
Once, twice, thrice, and the stick was split:
I dropped my axe again.
"And now," quoth he, "by this you see
Just how it is in life:
All the way through, you'll find hard knots,
And sorrows, care, and strife.

"And, should you only huck at them,
You'll find but sorry success;
But, if you strike them manfully,
You surely will succeed.
The lives of great men always lead
Through many a troubled way;
And would you walk therein, my boy,
Remember what I say."

Thus he spoke; and, over since,
I've found his words so true,
That I will give, as I received,
The same advice to you.
And, if you heed it, you'll find that,
As where there is a will,
Is striking through the knot.

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TO THE BITTER END.

By Miss M. E. Braddon.

AUTHOR OF 'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET,' ETC.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HUSBANDS AND WIVES.

Sir Francis and Lady Clevedon left the Swiss mountains and valleys early in August, and came to their Kentish home, deservingly in love with each other, and altogether a most foolishly devoted couple, as Sibyl Clevedon informed them after a day or two spent in their society.

"You really do flirt abominably," she said, "and I don't think I shall be able stand it, if things are always to go on in this way. My existence here will be a perpetual state of doing gooseberry. Don't you think you might find some eligible person to fall in love with me, Frank; so that I may set up a rival business?"

The present state of affairs is awfully slow."

Not slow for the principals, however to whom life just now seemed a summer holiday. The young couple certainly made the most of that happy week of perfect liberty which preceded the arrival of their visitors. They wandered in the park all through the sultry summer morning, exploring their territory like a married Robinson Crusoe and his wife, "running about," as Percy Shelley's wife, called it, when she spoke of herself and her boy-husband in their Welsh cottage. They rode about the surrounding villages, made themselves familiar with the boundaries of the estate, and formed the acquaintance of numerous small tenants and farm labourers, all of whom wanted something done, and took advantage of Sir Francis Clevedon's defenceless state in a ruthless manner. John Wort rated his master soundly for such folly.

"If you go, giving 'em everything they ask," he said, "you may as well divide your estate among 'em at once, and go and be a Plymouth Brother. Lett come to the same thing; for I'm blest if ever you'll get sixpence a year of the property, if you listen to your tenants' whims and fancies. I never give 'em anything; that's my rule. Don't you like that place?"

"I ask, if you come whining to me. Because if you don't, you've got your remedy next quarter-day. There isn't an acre of land or a house on the estate that I couldn't let over your heads three deep; so if you want to better yourselves in some other direction, pray don't stop out of politeness to me." That generally brings them to their senses. But of course, if the proprietor goes tampering with the tenants, I'm done. Once given 'em anything, and they'll never leave off asking; and if you begin by giving inches, you'll find yourself let in for all before you know where you are."

Sir Francis looked penitent, and referred to a dainty little note-book of George's with a gruesome countenance.

"I'm afraid I committed myself to a new chimney or two, and a little improvement in the way of drain pipes, where I found the cottages hardly as sweet as Breidenbach's shop; and here's a case where I think something inexpensive in the shape of a stable would be an actual charity, for the family have a donkey which lives with them in their common sitting-room—uncomfortable for the donkey, which must find himself hustled about when the family are busy, and perhaps a check on the freedom of conversation; for who can tell what a donkey may or may not understand? My wife pleaded piteously for the brute. I'm afraid her compassion went to the donkey rather than to the family who were compelled to have him in their parlour. Here's an oven, I see, to which I certainly did pledge myself, at the request of a woman whose cottage was a perfect model of cleanliness. And if she had an oven she could give her old man a bit of pie for his supper, or a toad-in-the-hole for his dinner. What is a toad-in-the-hole, by the bye? I've heard of viper broth being given by the Italians to people in extremity, but a toad is a new idea. Come, Wort, be philanthropic, and rudder all my promises without any more grumbling. I daresay I've been a fool, but you see a man does not get married many times in his life, and may be excused a little weakness on such an occasion."

"Of course, if you say I'm to do these things, Sir Francis, I must do them," replied John