

At last he stands up, wipes the dew from his brow and from his hands, and murmurs only—

"What folly! What weakness! As if I feared myself now!"

Then there was a laugh, half bitter, half cheery, and then—why, then, in another half minute he had forgotten all about the gold, and was hunting for the drawings of the machine.

He soon found them. How eagerly he pounced upon them! And yet how cautiously and tenderly he then handled them, one at a time!

The first he came to he seemed to understand at a glance, and put down, saying—

"I know all about you. Don't want you."

The next engaged him a little longer. He took out his memoranda, and after some moments' comparison, added something to his notes, observing—

"Hardly necessary, I think, but it's as well to err on the safe side."

But when he came to the third, his eyes blazed out so vividly upon it, as if they would of themselves give additional light for the study.

But he put it aside with a kind of loving, fond look, while he examined the others, and then it was not long before he came back to that one, with the feeling his work was done when that was mastered.

"Ah, yes," he inly murmured, after a prolonged examination; "I was right, more was needed, and here is the more. They would never have understood me; I should never have understood myself without this."

Closing the cabinet and putting the drawing down, he walked softly to the door in order to listen outside. He came back in a minute looking content with the state of things, and began to work.

Smiling a grim smile as he looked at his bandaged and swollen right hand, he said—

"It must be done; I can't lose this, not at any price; least of all at the price of a little more suffering of flesh and blood—a little more trivial pain."

He drew from his pocket tracing-paper and pencil, fetched himself a chair, and began, laughing, and then almost crying at his first effort to trace the drawing with that most unartistic-looking hand. But he did it, and did it with wonderful coolness and presence of mind.

No magic, thought he, like success.

He was succeeding; and he felt he could bear anything while that was the case.

Suddenly his pencil stops. What was that noise?

He cannot tell. It was so strange—so indistinctly heard.

He must not pause! Nay, that noise may be a warning how brief his moments are.

Again he hears it! It—must be the dogs whining in anguish.

Cursed fate! They will waken Mr. Coombe!

Within five minutes more he can finish. The most intricate—the most valuable portions, are precisely those he has yet to do—the very heart of the machine, as they are the very centre of the drawing.

With heroic courage he goes on, after just one hurried gliding to the door again to listen outside.

"Whew! What horrible howl was that?" he cries.

It penetrates to George Faithful's marrow, for he knows where else it must penetrate—into Mr. Coombe's ears, unless he is, indeed, a heavy sleeper.

He has done. Joy! Joy!

Now he has only to escape, and fortune does, indeed, for him culminate.

He restores the copied drawing, doubles lightly the tracing, and puts it inside his shirt against his breast, darkens his lantern, and prepares to go.

Ah! a heavy footstep descends the stairs.

The click of a fire-arm—pistol, gun, or blunderbuss—as being cocked, is also heard.

Away through the passages, where every step is a dread lest he should meet some one, away into the corridor, away through the kennel where the dogs are panting and groaning, and where they make a sort of expiring effort to rush at him, away into the machine-room, where

he locks the door behind him, and feels he has then just an instant for reflection.

Quick as lightning he now caught at an idea that promised salvation, and, armed with it, he re-opened the door leading to the kennel, and began to speak loudly to the dogs.

"Poor fellows! What's the matter? Soh! soh!" Then, in an altered voice full of agitation, yet loud enough to be heard by the now swiftly advancing Mr. Richard Coombe, who came on light and pistol in hand, he called out—

"Good heavens! Will they never come from the house! There must be thieves. I must shout again. I dare not go between those dreadful dogs."

Then, putting his hand to his mouth, as for a view-halloo, he shouted—"Mr. Coombe!"

"Hollo!" was the prompt reply.

"Oh, master! master!" he suddenly and joyfully called out, "is that you?"

"Ay! What's the matter?" demanded Mr. Coombe.

"Why I have seen lights in your room, sir, and I have been trying to find out what ails the dogs—I fear they've been poisoned—and I have been trying to venture between them, to come and alarm you."

"Thieves! do you say? Not in the mill?"

"Oh, dear, no! everything here's perfectly quiet! I have taken care of that!"

"It must be that gold that has got to be known about."

"I shouldn't wonder, sir," responded Faithful.

"Where's Marks?" demanded the master.

"Asleep. It's my watch to-night."

Stop you here, and keep guard. If they have poisoned the dogs—and they are certainly ill—they may try to escape this way; if they haven't yet got out, I can manage to stop them in the other direction."

"Shall I get one of the fire-arms?"

"Do."

Away went Mr. George Faithful in one direction, and away went Mr. Coombe in another.

Two minutes later Mr. Coombe was standing before his broken cabinet, looking with astonishment on his apparently untouched gold, which convinced him that the robbers had been interrupted, and were still in the house.

But while he calls noisily for the servants to get up with the warning of "Thieves! thieves!" and while he is keeping guard lest they break in upon him and overpower him, a new thought strikes him as he notices the strange silence of the supposed thieves at such a moment.

"Is it—is it the machine they're after?"

He runs to the cabinet, sees at a glance his drawings have been disturbed; he hunts wildly for the particular one, which he cannot for the moment find, fearing it is gone, but no, there it is!

Ay! but what is the bit of paper tacked to it? The manufacturer cannot for the life of him remember putting that bit of paper there, and his misgivings (for a moment) of a terrible discovery and loss cause him to delay bringing it to the light.

When he does, this is what he reads:—

Sir Moses Major, Mr. George Faithful, and plain Paul Arkdale, all present their most respectful compliments to Mr. George Coombe, and beg to thank him for his boundless hospitality. Never, surely, before were such guests so received, or sent away with hands so full! Sir Moses has got an ugly bite on his thigh; Mr. Faithful has been impaled, though, thank goodness, not through his body; and Paul Arkdale somehow so sympathises with his friends that he really feels their hurts as if they were his own.

But never mind, my noble-dog fancier! my patron of all sorts of devilries they call science! The three gentlemen I for the nonce represent are all merciful gentlemen, and all forgive most heartily their kind, ferocious, and most unintentional of benefactors!

PAUL ARKDALE:
who may be heard of any day within the sound of Bow bells.

"Ring the alarm bell!" shouts the maddened manufacturer, understanding too well what had happened.

And Paul Arkdale, as he fled along, heard that tremendous bell clanging as if for a fire, and met people leaving their houses and cottages, and he hid till they passed, then again swept along, ever and anon shouting to himself, with boyish delight at the uses to which he had been able to put his talent for mimicry and acting—

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!"

CHAPTER LXIII.—AN IMPUDENT SPECULATOR.

Sir Richard is decidedly in an ill temper. Twice this morning he has been told by customers of distinction that his British made silks are decidedly inferior in quality, as well as dearer in price, than they can get elsewhere.

The aristocratic beauties who have thus offended him are in a patriotic mood, for reasons of state suggested by their husbands, and patriotism suggests "Buy the silks made by your own countrymen!"

Very well; the ladies in question are quite willing, but, of course, patriotism demands that they should encourage articles of the best manufacture, and they tell the knight to his face that his are not of that stamp.

He bows, and smiles, and apologises, but dares not deny. No, he knows well enough the secret—it is those Coombe Brothers, with their confounded machine, that is carrying all before it, and ruining the general trade of those who have no such machine.

"Oh, that there were but a man bold enough to ferret out their secret!" groans Sir Richard, as he returns from seeing the two dissatisfied ladies to their chair.

When he returned he found the shop in a commotion, through the odd conduct of a stranger—a man apparently about fifty years of age, very staid and respectable in his aspect and dress, but very noisy, and troublesome to the shopmen.

First he demanded to see one article, then another, and scarcely were they brought then he threw them contemptuously aside, and demanded better.

By some unfortunate coincidence, the articles he asked for were only to be brought forth at the expense of time and trouble. If he had known where a good deal of the articles least in demand had been stowed away and forgotten, he could not have kept the shopmen in a greater flutter—running up and down stairs, and quite unable to please this fastidious gentleman, who seemed to grow angry at the trouble they gave him, and then broke out now and then in a short laugh, as if of contempt for the arrangement of the business.

The mercer grew nettled, but thinking the gentleman was likely to be a good customer, remained silent, till the British silks were again produced, and dismissed with even more superb contempt.

"Why don't you get a machine like that of the Coombe Brothers?" he demanded.

"That is not so easy, sir, allow me to observe," said the angry mercer, still struggling to keep quiet.

"Pooh, pooh, nonsense! It's very easy!"

"I really think, sir, you are the most sensible man I ever met with in all my life, or the most impudent, and I incline to think the latter."

"Do you! Who are you?"

"Who am I? Who am I?" Sir Richard's indignation now absolutely overpowered all prudential thoughts, and he became as red as a turkey-cock.

"Who am I? Who are you, sir, that dare thus to come into a respectable tradesman's shop, bully his people, waste their time, and insult their master—Sir Richard Constable, knight and alderman of London?"

"Really! Are you all that, and yet can't get hold of this paltry machine. But come, what will you give me, if I show you the machine?"

"You do not seriously mean you can do that?"

"I swear to you I have here in my pocket a drawing, with full descriptions of all that is novel in the machine that is now making the fortune of Coombe Brothers."

The mercer looked hard at the gentleman in violet, began to fancy there was method in all this madness, and asked his name.