

There was no dog to be heard, and the old man and his niece were still within the house, so the "poor-traveller" proceeded on tiptoe to the arbour. There was a dram of spirits still left in the rum bottle which looked very enticing, but he resisted the temptation, and eagerly snatching up the letter, held it before his eyes in the glowing twilight.

"What a blessing it is to be able to read and write!" he said. "How thankful I ought to feel to my parents for having given me a decent education. Lucky the letter's short. All I want is the main facts. Matthew Sparkes, *Marco Polo*, West India Docks. "I wish," said the poor traveller, as he slunk back to his haystack, "he had mentioned his brother's Christian name; and if he'd had the civility to tell his own age, height, and general appearance, why, I should have taken it as a personal kindness. Never mind, I'll risk it."

"Well, Molly, here are the five pounds," said Captain Blenkinsop, as he came out of the house with his niece. "Let me know when Mat arrives, and I'll hobble down into town on purpose to welcome him. And you may as well leave me that letter, Molly. I should like to spell it over with my glasses on, at my leisure."

"Oh! I left it on the arbour table!" exclaimed Molly.

"Ay! here it is," said her uncle, looking into the summer-house. "Good night, Molly. Tell Dick I hope to see him at work next Monday."

"Good night, uncle Jonathan."

#### CHAPTER IV.—THE CRIPPLE'S ADVENTURE.

WILLIE SPARKES, the cripple, was a thoroughly good-tempered, kind-hearted soul, besides being very fond of his little cousin Emily, so that when she asked him to accompany her home, he went with her cheerfully. But the journey up and down that steep hill was a severe undertaking for a poor fellow who was entirely dependent upon his crutches for support, especially on the return trip, when he had no cheerful companion prattling at his side, and when the twilight had faded away into comparative darkness. Old Blenkinsop was very hard upon cripples, holding that their crutches gave them a positive advantage over other persons; but in spite of his ingenious theories, poor Willie felt very much exhausted, and as he came down Bleberry Hill, he stumbled several times, and almost fell.

Presently one of his crutches got entangled in a crevice between two pieces of rock at the roadside, and he stumbled forward heavily. But before he had touched the ground, a pair of benevolent arms had seized him—one by the collar of his coat, and the other in front across his breast—and restored him to an upright position.

"Pardon me, sir, for lending you a hand," said a voice, "but it's an orkard road for a gentleman to travel situated as you be."

"I'm much obliged to you," exclaimed Willie, fervently, as soon as he had recovered his breath. "I was getting tired and nervous. Would you mind seeing me safely down this steep bit?"

"I shall feel a pleasure in doing it, sir. To help the distressed was a maxim always impressed on me by my good old father. Might I ask a small favour in return?"

Willie was a tailor by trade, and he had felt that the sleeve of his companion's coat was threadbare and shining with age and wear. He guessed, therefore, that his preserver was about to ask an alms, and said—

"Well, I am but a poor man myself, still——"

"Nothing of the sort, sir," returned the other, haughtily. "I simply want to know where Mr. Sparkes lives."

"Sparkes!" cried Willie, "what Sparkes? Sparkes, the grocer, in Broad Street?"

"Why couldn't the writer of that letter have been a little more circumstantial?" thought the poor traveller. "He's putting me to a deal of inconvenience. I must make a bold guess. I fancy that the Sparkes I want is a party of humbler position."

"Mayhap you mean my brother, Richard Sparkes, the carpenter?" said Willie, who, re-

membering the letter received that morning, was beginning to feel strangely excited.

At these words the long, lean figure at his side uttered a shout of joy, and pitching a crooked stick and small bundle into the road, rushed forward with uplifted arms. The next moment the cripple found himself encircled in a very fusty-smelling embrace, while a voice, strongly flavoured with onions, exclaimed—

"I am Matthew Sparkes, your long-lost brother! Never mind the crutches. If you want to faint, I'll hold you up."

Poor Willie was quite overcome with fatigue and excitement, and was forced to sit down at the road-side.

"This is indeed a surprise," said Brother Matthew, seating himself at the cripple's side, and wiping his eyes with his coat-cuff. "I'm all of a maze. I scarcely know who I am, or where I am. How long have I been away?"

"Nineteen years, so they tell me," answered Willie. "I was but a baby when you ran away to sea."

"Nineteen years—ran away to sea. Thank you; yes, I'm much obliged to you. Ah! too true—you were but a baby when I ran away to sea; but such a fine baby, such a chubby-faced baby. But, dear brother, how came you to lose the use of your limbs?"

"I fell down-stairs."

"Ah! so you did—at least, I mean, so you say. That must have been after you were christened. My memory's gone to that extent, owing to hot climates, that I don't recollect what you were christened."

"William."

"Ay, so you were. And now tell me whose alive at home. Break it gently and slowly, because, though nineteen years absent, my feelings are still as tender as a chicken's."

Hereupon simple-hearted Willie Sparkes entered into sundry details, which lasted till the two wayfarers arrived in Tytherby. They were now among the brilliant gas-lights, and he could not help feeling surprised when he saw what a shabby, woe-begone looking wight his wealthy brother was. He ventured to say—

"Brother Matthew, I suppose you've got better clothes than these in your boxes?"

"Heaps of 'em, my boy, but I dressed shabby o' purpose. I thought I'd astonish you all."

"This is our street," observed Willie, "and yonder, beyond the second gas-lamp, is our cottage."

"Be firm and confident," muttered his companion, tapping himself on the chest. "I only wish I knew how old I ought to be."

#### CHAPTER V.—AT SUPPER.

Brother Matthew stated that he had left all his luggage in London to be forwarded by goods train. He had brought nothing with him but a crooked stick, a diminutive bundle done up in a red cotton handkerchief, and a wonderful appetite. The effects of Uncle Jonathan's timely loan were presently visible on Mary Sparkes' board. A dish of mutton chops, a pound of the best fresh butter, with plenty of milky and sugary tea, made their appearance. It was a sight to see Brother Matthew eat. He had a wide mouth, and a pair of lantern jaws. Chop after chop disappeared down his throat; hunch after hunch of bread, bountifully plastered with butter followed; and the whole was washed down with half-a-dozen cups of scalding hot tea, sweetened to the utmost pitch. When the children's appetites had been satisfied, they stood in a circle around him, gazing at him with admiring eyes. At last he pushed away his plate with a gentle sigh of satisfaction, and began to talk.

"I wouldn't disturb my dear brother to night, Mrs. Sparkes," he said, addressing Mary, "not for the world. You say he's in a nice, quiet sleep; let him lie till morning, poor fellow!"

"But your mother, Mr. Matthew," began Mary. "Let her rest, also, poor old lady; you tell me she's in the habit of going to bed early. The effect of excitement on her aged nerves might be——"

"Please, uncle Mat," said little Alice, "grannie knows you've come. She's getting up."

Presently the door opened, and old Mrs. Sparkes appeared. "Where is my dear runaway son?" she exclaimed. "Let me hold him in my arms!"

At these words the new comer arose solemnly from his seat, and embraced the ancient dame. She fainted away.

"A small drop of spirits is advisable in these cases," he said, gravely. "My poor dear mother! to think I behold thee once again! Just run round the corner, somebody, and fetch a mouthful of gin."

The restorative was soon brought. Brother Matthew took a hearty sip, probably to test the quality, and then applied the glass to Mrs. Sparkes' lips. She began to recover her senses.

"And be this my boy Mat?" she murmured, staring about her with dazed eyes. "I wouldn't ha' known thee, my son. Thou wast a short, chubby lad when thou run away."

"Ah, mother!" said Brother Matthew, "I've gone through a deal of mangling processes since then. Trouble and sorrow has rolled me out long and thin!"

"And how old thou lookest! Thou wast but seventeen when thou wentest to sea, and——"

"And I'm six-and-thirty, now," answered Brother Matthew, boldly; "but I look five-and-forty. I know it. Think what I've gone through. 'I have been East and I have been West,' as the song says. Brother William," he continued, "I'm beginning to feel faint and weak; I'm an excitable subject. Let me go to bed; I'm nowadays particular where you put me. Good night, dear mother, and sister, and nephews and nieces. Wait till my boxes come, children, and then you'll see toys and presents enough to make the house look like a booth at the fair. William," he added, confidentially, when they were out in the passage, "lend me a suit of your customer's clothes in the morning. I think I've overdone it a little, dressing so uncommon shabby."

#### CHAPTER VI. A COUPLE OF ANECDOTES.

It was eleven o'clock on the following morning, when a stout old gentleman, wearing a broad-brimmed Manilla hat, and leaning on a bamboo cane, arrived at the carpenter's door.

"Why Uncle Jonathan," cried Mary Sparkes, "who'd ha' thought of seeing you at this time of day! And I'm so ashamed, the place is in such a litter; for we'd gay doings last night."

"I heard of it," replied Captain Blenkinsop. "I know that nephew Mat's arrived."

"Who told you?"

"One of the postmen. He's a new hand in Tytherby, and was hunting about for a house on Bleberry Hill. I set him right, and then we got yarning together. He says, 'Postmen see strange things. I called yesterday morning at a house where they all looked 'clemmed' with hunger, and couldn't raise twopence for the price of a letter; and last night I peeped into the same house as I passed by, and they were all feasting and carousing.' 'Name?' says I. 'Sparkes,' says he. 'Then, depend upon it,' says I, 'my nephew's come; and with that I piped for breakfast, got under weigh, crowded all sail, and here I am. Where is Mat, now?'"

"Gone with Willie, uncle, to the railway station to get his boxes."

"Here they come!" exclaimed Captain Blenkinsop. "But is it my old eyes that deceive me, or does Mat really look such a figure of fun?"

Brother Matthew did, indeed, look like a figure of fun, rigged out as he was in sundry garments entrusted to Willie by his customers for repairing purposes. He wore a bottle-green dress coat, with brass buttons, very short in the waist; a pair of corduroy trousers, fashionably loose in the leg; a red plush waistcoat, and Richard Sparkes' Sunday hat, which, being three sizes too large for his head, was perpetually falling over his eyes.

The following conversation ensued between the brothers as they entered the gate.

"They'll come by the next train, depend on it William," said Brother Matthew; "and perhaps you wouldn't mind going to fetch 'em. Recollect, there's three sea-chests, two portmanteaus, four