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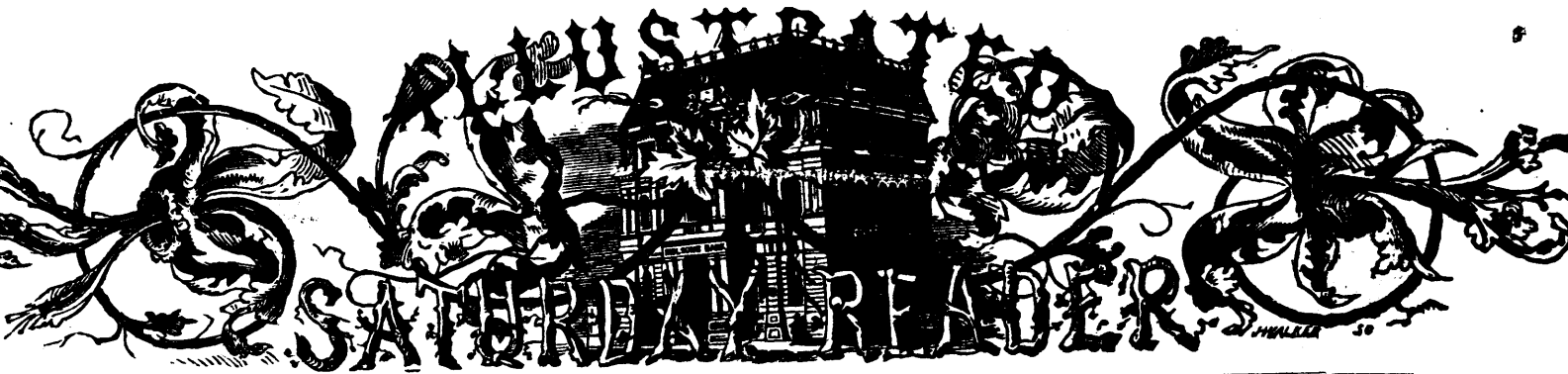
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## THE LION IN THE PATH

(From the Publisher's advanced sheets.)

### CHAPTER XLII.—GOING HOME.

Down a Lancashire road, bright with October yellow, there rattled merrily, 'midst clashing of loose chains and jingle of bells, a miller's van. The curtains were looped back at the front and rear, and thus left a double oval frame, which filled the harvest pictures, mellow and warm, and changing incessantly as the van sped on.

The front figures in the picture—the inmates of the van—of course remained the same; and these were, the red haired miller himself, who drove, sitting sideways and winking his powdered eye-lashes in the sun; a young woman, blue-eyed and sunburnt, sitting on a heap of sacks and looking onwards in an idle reverie, with her snowy teeth half buried in a scarlet streaked apple; and lastly a lazy fellow, stretched at full length at the bottom of the van, with his head on her knees.

With these two in the foreground, the picture through the curtains of the van was always pleasant, whether it had for a background a hill of standing sheaves, touched with the fire of the sunset, or clump of oaks reddening to gold, or cottage with a lithe, bold-eyed girl clinging to its eaves, and, heedless of her mother's shaking fist, plucking and flinging down the ripe grapes to the children swarming round the gate.

The chains clattered, the curtains flapped in the mellow breeze, the great horses shook their great manes and showed their great bright shoes with a good will; sometimes the miller sang, and sometimes the girl, and sometimes they all three sang together, and were assisted in their chorus by a tramp at the tail-board, who, to have escaped the miller's whip, should have held his peace.

But mirth is contagious, and that merry, noisy van infected all the roads with it, from the ragged children gleaning in the fields, who shaded their eyes with their handful of corn, and stared and shouted after it, to the very dust that whirled behind it, round and round and over

and over, as if every grain were inspired with boisterous life.

Suddenly the girl stopped in the midst of the old song, "The Cruelty of Barbara Allen," which had sent the lazy fellow, whose head lay on her knee, fast asleep. She stopped; and with her lips still apart, as when the song flowed through them, and with kindling eyes, touched the miller's arm, and pointed to where stood against the horizon, like a grey, uneven fringe, a cluster of house-roofs.

"Master," she said to the miller, "you told me 'twas the next town we should see, but—but is that—"

"Ay, Bolton, sure," said the miller.

"It is?" cried the girl, and at the same time her hand, which was held by her sleepy companion, clasped his so tightly that he woke, turned his head, and looked up at her. She was looking right on, her eyes growing tearful, her lips beginning to quiver.

"Why, Joan, what is to do? What dost see?" asked he, in tender surprise.

"My home, sweetheart, my home!" she said;



The Miller's Van.

and the gathered tears ran down, and she smiled upon him with all the sweetness that had been deepening and mellowing in her face, like the colour on the corn, the bloom upon the fruit, all their long journey through.

The rich browned face on her knee looked troubled for an instant, then the great limbs were drawn up, and sitting beside her on the sacks, the young man put an arm round her, and would have taken her hand, but that both her hands were clasped, while her face bent over them. Soon she looked up, and took his hand.

"Do you know, Humphrey," said she, "they have a custom in that part my mother came from that I never heard of elsewhere, and yet I can but think it good. 'Tis that a wife, at first sight of her new home, should kneel and ask a blessing on it, and on her ingoing. Dear heart! such have I now done. Will you not say 'amen' to my prayer?"

"God bless thee, lass! I'll say amen to that. I would to the other too, but that it rather goes against a strong fellow like me to acknowledge you sorry hole as a home at all. To me, my Joan, 'tis but a workshop wherein I am making the foundations of that home I have told thee of; and, indeed, I would have thee ask blessings upon that, and look on this but as a sort of tarrying place on the road, for only as such dare I ask thy patience with it a little while."

Joan shook her head, and looked on with a yearning smile to the housetops coming nearer.

"Ah," she said, "it will never be with any other as with this. In this I shall know if I am to be happy or miserable all my life long. In 'yon sorry hole,' as you call it, shall I have for the first time the happiness I have so often longed for, of saying, 'This is mine.' Nay, Humphrey, tell me for the present of this home, where to-night I shall sit down with you and your child, and be happier than I have ever been in my life; tell me of this and no other, for I am like Legbin Grimthorne's, bride. Do you know how the song goes?" And she sung in a low voice:

"An' there, where she had come a bride,  
Wi' heart sae leal and lovin',  
She prayed she might till death abide,  
An' know nor change nor rovin'."

It chanced that the miller knew Joan's song, which, indeed, belonged rather to his part of the country than to hers, and while Humphrey whispered, "God forbid, lass, thee should'st abide there long," the miller, taking up the song at the last verse, droned out, in a deep, sonorous voice—

"Alack, the bride, the bonny bride,  
That death should be her dowry!  
She roved no more till forth they bore  
The fairest coorse in Gorthrie!"

Joan, always on the look-out for omens and portents, shivered, but laughed merrily when Humphrey said—

"Come, come, Mr. Miller, prithee give us a livelier ditty, or folks will swear we are from a burial."

The miller, in return for the rebuff, made Joan uncomfortable by throwing ominous glances at her baggage, which occupied a good part of the van.

"We must have our wits about us, for I am certain he means to ask more than we bargained for," whispered she.

"Well, take it all in all, it has been a cheap journey for me, sweetheart," answered Arkdale, "and I cannot but feel a little rueful that it will so soon come to an end."

And then they sat quiet, hand in hand, thinking, Arkdale regretfully of the long, happy journey, Joan of that journey's end.

The journey, indeed, had been one of unbroken pleasure. No coachdriver or waggoner had over-looked them or maltreated Joan's baggage, now safely stowed in the van of the Bolton miller. It is true, they were both so well pleased with each stage of their journey that they would hardly have considered any price within their means too dear to pay for it. Joan was as delighted with all she saw as a woman, who had scarcely before set foot out of her own county, well could be; and Arkdale had so much pleasure in her delight and wonder, as to be con-

stantly going out of his way to show her such famous places they might be passing near to.

At Huntingdon he had taken her to see the birthplace of Cromwell. They stayed at Oakham, in the midst of the lovely valley of Catmose, for half a day, and Joan thought she had never seen such harvest fields. They tasted the renowned Nottingham ale, visited the caves at Matlock, saw Mary Queen of Scots' prison at Buxton, and enjoyed a day's sight-seeing at Manchester, where they were a good deal stared at.—Joan fancied on account of her countrified dress, but it is more probable to have been the hale, sunburnt, and comely appearance of the young couple that drew on them the attention of the pale-faced mechanics and weavers of the great town.

But by day they had warm, dry weather, by night deep skies crowded with stars, and below them heavy dews, that made the distant valleys like sheets of water.

Arkdale looked back on these things as a school-boy looks back on a long, delicious holiday as it draws to a close. He thought of his wedding morning, of Joan, looking so bright and sweet in her wedding bravery—the gown of French cambric, sprigged with scarlet, he had given her, and the scarlet rose wreath he had seen Margery and Joan sitting on the old wall by five in the morning to make. He thought of Farmer Bristow's surly generosity, of the kindness of Joan's neighbours, of Joan's quiet conquering of her grief at leaving the old home—a grief which was only shown at the latest minute, when with a rush of tears, she suddenly slipped on her knees and kissed the old door-stone.

There had been no weeping, no regretting since; nothing but sunshine and buoyant hope and holiday-making. Sometimes, indeed, Arkdale thought, with a little wonder, that she had been over quick in forgetting what she had seemed to hold so dear; but, as the thought was flattering to himself, he only loved her the better for it, and his content with his hasty bargain was great.

But Joan, as the miller's great horses bore her merrily into Bolton, knew her own heart better than Arkdale did. She knew her love of home had not lessened one whit, but that, instead of lingering behind, it had gone before, to the home where Arkdale's little one awaited her, and there had clung, with a blind passion that would see no defect Arkdale tried to prepare her for.

She could not turn her thoughts with any pleasure to that home of the future of which he talked so much, and which was to possess such wondrous perfection. With such ideas as he had of what a house should be, she could not be surprised at the contempt he expressed for that to which he was now taking her, and which Joan had no doubt was a straight town house, with perhaps as many as four windows in the front—proper town windows, which Joan would have rival in brightness all the windows of the street. She could see it in her mind's eye quite plainly, as she would have it, even to the bit of stone-crop on the roof, to guard against lightning. She was delighted to think how long it was since any woman had meddled there—how it was reserved for her to bring havoc to order, to wipe the dust from Arkdale's household gods, and set them up in freshened beauty. She was prepared to touch them with tender reverence, as things an angel's hand had lain down unwillingly, for it pleased her now to think the former mistress of that house an angel. Since Arkdale would not own her less worthy than Joan, Joan would have her something infinitely beyond all women.

It was now dark. The horses fell into a slow, heavy walk; the miller tugged, and swore, and glanced vindictively at Joan's baggage. Now and then a light from a solitary house would flicker across the road.

Joan, with her arm clasped in Arkdale's, peered out at the front of the van with impatient, longing eyes.

"How strange," said she. "This is the first starless night we have had since we set forth."

"It matters little," answered Arkdale; "we are within a stone's throw of home."

"And our fireside will only seem the brighter," said Joan, softly.

As they came into the town with great noise and ado, many persons ran out of their houses and beset the miller with questions concerning parcels or messages with which he had been entrusted; and, as he often had to stop in the flare of some shop light, Arkdale was soon recognised by innumerable friends and neighbours, some of whom would run along by the van and shout out scraps of news in a dialect by which Joan was completely puzzled.

She drew away from Arkdale's side, whilst he leant forwards, shaking hands and exchanging hearty greetings all the way.

The news of his wedding had been carried into Bolton by a Manchester weaver, and Joan could see many an inquisitive face trying to look past Arkdale's broad shoulders into the van, and could hear many a sly inquiry as to what he had brought from the fair.

Arkdale parried these questions by asking questions himself. Had Jenkyns—Arkdale's apprentice—given satisfaction in his absence? And had he still the honour of being the cheapest barber in Bolton? and of serving the most respected of its townspeople?

Before he could be answered he was told that Jenkyns had just heard of his arrival, and was flying down the street, razor in hand, having left Simon Blutcher, of the "Royal George," with his beard half off and half on.

Then Joan, who was sure this apprentice of Humphrey's would be a thorn in her side, heard a panting, and saw a thin, pale face, with bright eyes and long untied hair thrust in at the front of the van.

"Well, Jenkyns," shouted Arkdale, as the van went on and Jenkyns ran, "how are you, and how's the boy?"

"Oh, aint he well!" answered Jenkyns between his panting. "And don't he eat; and aint he as good as gold; and don't he keep the money!"

"Does he?" said Arkdale, in a half-pleased, half-perplexed voice.

The van was going at a quicker pace now, and no one keeping up with it but Jenkyns.

"Keeps the money, does he?" said Arkdale, taking Joan's hand.

"Just don't he; and don't he laugh and skirl when he hears it a-jingling in the box!"

"I hope there's plenty there, Jenkyns," cried Arkdale, his paternal pride suddenly giving place to business anxiety. "What art doing—shaking your head? Do you mean to say, sir, business is going badly?"

"Oh, aint it, that's all!" answered Jenkyns, who seemed always to make his replies interrogatively.

"The deuce it is!" shouted Arkdale, letting go Joan's arm and leaning out, anxiously.

"Just aint it!" said Jenkins.

"Then you've been muddling, or has Pritchard been at it again?" cried Arkdale.

"Been at it!" said Jenkyns, getting more and more shrill as he got more and more short of breath. "Aint he been at it!"

"Has he?" asked Arkdale.

"Aint he got a board out large as life," gasped Jenkyns—"Why go over the way, when you can be shaved here for one penny? And aint I a'most learned Dick his letters off it, for want of nothing else to do; for, says I to the child, 'If it gets your father's customs out of us, we'll get your eddication out of it.'"

"A nice expensive education, upon my word," muttered Arkdale.

The van now stopped. Jenkyns disappeared, and, as Arkdale was assisting Joan down, came running back to say that Simon Blutcher was going over to Pritchard's, with the cloths about his neck, swearing frightfully.

"Then you've lost me the custom of the 'Royal George,' from landlord to boots," exclaimed Arkdale, angrily. "Joan, lass, I must go after the fellow. Get thee in with Jenkyns. And, Jenkyns, we must bestir us. Hang me if I don't have a board out to-night—'A clean shave for a halfpenny.' And you let it come to Pritchard's ears, lad, that if he tries that, I'll go to a farthing. Miller, do you help my 'prentice with

the baggage, and we'll have our reckoning in half-an-hour's time at the 'George,' over a glass at my damage. Now get thee in, sweetheart. I trust Jenkyns has it all ship-shape, such as it is, and a good supper."

"Ship-shape! A good supper!" Jenkyns echoed, staring after his master as he hurried away. "Well, master's a cool one. Ship-shape, too! Why he knows as the chimley fell in o' one side o' the Friday fore he went, and Dick an' me's bin black with smoke ever since. Ship-shape, eh! and Dick's pulled the bucket o' water I just drew all over him, and the bantam a-moultn' his feathers all over the place. We're nice uns to be ship-shape, we are. Well, mistress, it's no good standin' here. Give us hold o' your hand, for the steps is roughish to a stranger. I fell into the place head forrads when I first come from London. I s'pose master told yer I was from London, didn't he?"

"No," answered Joan, meekly, taking his hand and being led by him like a passive child.

She had a strange feeling that she was seeing and listening, walking and speaking in a dream.

The house up to which Jenkyns led her—the dreary house, all dark but where the light was flaring from a window in the area—looked more like a house in a dream than a real house.

"'Tis a large house," said she, in a whisper, as Jenkyns led her down the steps into the area.

"Yes, large enough," answered Jenkyns; "but that aint nothing to us, you know."

"Oh," said Joan, dreamily.

"Of course not; we only lives in the cellar, you know that, I s'pose? Now, hold hard, and look out for that twist, cos there's only one step there where there ought to be two. Now what's the matter? it's all right; you're in the light, now; what are yer stoppin' for?"

"We—live—in—the cellar?"

"Why, didn't you know that?"

"No."

"What! not as master was the subteranum barber?" asked Jenkyns, looking quite shocked at her ignorance.

"No," murmured Joan.

"Well, here we are now, and there's Dick, a young Turk! Aint he been and picked the gallon loaf I give him to keep him quiet right in two! Well, go in and make yourself at home, while I see about the baggage. And I say" (turning back), "just get things there or thereabouts by the time master comes in, will you?"

And with this introduction, Jenkyns left his master's wife alone on the threshold.

The door was open. Joan stood and looked, and did not move a step. Befor her was a cellar, lighted by two flaring candles placed near the window, that was shut in by the area walls. Round about the window and door the place was furnished as a barber's shop, and wigs, brushes, combs, soapballs, and cloths were strewed over chairs, floor, and table. The far end of the cellar, where a fire burnt gloomily, was fitted up with a rude attempt at domestic comfort. There was a table, a couple of broken wooden chairs, and a swing book-shelf, full of books.

Joan saw something shining on the floor before the fire. It was the contents of the bucket Jenkyns had just taken in, and in the midst of the pool, with his little night-shirt rolled up round his neck, sat a child like an infant Hercules, with large, dimpled limbs, and glittering hair. He was leaning against the overturned bucket, and was smiling with eyes full of love, at a wretched, ragged-looking hen, who had gone to roost on a chair-rail near him, and with outstretched hand and soft, cooing voice, the child was trying to lure it into his bath. This was Humphrey Arkdale's son and heir.

While his step-mother stood looking at him, there came a puff of black smoke down the chimney and hid him; and when it cleared away and she saw him again, he was taking his arms from before his face, and gazing up at the chimney shadows with mock awe, while he said, in a voice of the freshest, clearest music Joan had ever heard—

"Boo, boggarts! Boo!"

The beauty of the child, his fearlessness at being alone in this strange place, made Joan more

than ever sure she was under the influence of a dream. She seemed to feel herself moving to and fro with the jolting of the van; to feel Arkdale's arm round her, and to be sure his voice would soon awaken her and dispel that hideous picture—that wretched den-like chamber, the black walls, the flaring light, and the shadows that seemed to beckon her and give her mocking welcomes.

While she stood thus there came the miller and Jenkyns, blundering down the steps with her spinning-wheel. At that she put her hands up to her eyes, and said, shudderingly—

"'Tis getting too real. Let me wake—let me wake!"

At that moment the sound she had longed for met her ear. She heard Arkdale's voice saying—

"Gently, miller. Mind, Jenkyns, mind; we shall have the mistress about our ears."

Then, when she had heard his voice, and it did not wake her to the van and the green roads—when she had heard it, and found herself still there on the threshold of that place—she knew that all was indeed real, and no dream; she had come home.

The cheery voices and steps came nearer. There was no room to step aside. Joan shivered, and fled in. She had seen a door open at the far end of the cellar. She went to this door; entered, and closed it, and in the darkness found a low bed, on which she sat down. The room was cold. She sat and shivered, as if chilled to the very heart.

Joan was not imaginative. She was not used to picture to herself what a place or person unseen might be like. As a rule, unseen things had no place in her mind. She was not used to wonder about them. Yet she was a thoughtful woman; but her thoughts dwelt only on what was certain. Not narrow-minded, for many great things were certain to her, and made ample food for both sweet and bitter reflection. The sufferings of the poor, love, death, God—all these were certainties to Joan. Her mother had been a deeply religious woman, and had given Joan a better heritage than simple faith in God—for, from her earliest years, Joan thought she *knew* there was a God; that the knowledge—not the faith, but the actual knowledge—had been born with her. She believed every one must be the same as herself, and had no pity for those who fell in darkness of soul. To her all sin was infamous, and virtue was only sense.

But when into this matter-of-fact mind an impression of an unseen thing was once received, it was accepted as a sort of divine vision of the truth. As such had Joan accepted the idea of Arkdale's home—the idea which his sunny, genial nature had forced into her mind, in spite of all he said in its dispraise; and now, as she sat alone in the darkness and squalor of her little bed-chamber, with the picture of that outer chamber in her mind, the parting with her cherished idea cost her a pain as great as parting with a real thing could have done.

She could not accuse Arkdale of deception, yet she felt a passionate resentment against him, that made her look up with flashing eyes every time his footsteps passed near the door.

At last, after much noise and talking and laughter, the departure of the miller, and the barring of the outer door, the door of the little room where Joan sat opened, and Arkdale stood before her. He had come to bring her his boy, and he stood before her, holding a light that showed the child's great sleepy eyes, flashing at her like diamonds.

"Joan," said he, in those low, rich tones that seemed to come from depths Joan had not yet fathomed—"Joan," said he, "in giving thee this little one, I feel most as a mother feels when giving her first-born into her husband's arms. I have bought him, dear; I have bought him with a life more precious to me than mine own; yet, sweetheart, if thee wilt take him to thyself, and he can make amends to thee for the poverty and short-comings of his dad, I am blest indeed in having him to give."

Joan had looked forward to this receiving of Arkdale's little child as one of the greatest events of her life. When she looked on the child's

beauty, and into Arkdale's proud, fond eyes, the thought of what this moment might have been to both came over her, and made her heartache as if it would burst.

She got up; Arkdale moved as if to place the child in her arms. Joan half-extended them, then, let them fall. Tender, longing, and bitter disappointment clashed in her bosom, and wrung from her a cry—a sudden, shrill cry.

Arkdale's very lips whitened; he looked round fearfully at the little bed. The last time such a cry had been heard in this room it had been a death cry.

Joan saw his look, guessed his thought, and leaned her head against the door, to which she had gone faint with shame.

"Good God! Joan, was that you?" he said hoarsely.

"Forgive me; I did not mean—I could not help it—I am ill—ill."

"Ill! In truth thou art I see it."

In an instant little Dick was thrown on the bed, and his father's arm round Joan. Yet in that instant the truth had flashed into Arkdale's mind.

"Joan, Joan! I see how it is with thee. Fool that I was, I sent thee in alone with that jabber-jaw Jenkyns. Thou'rt shocked at the place—heartbroken. My poor lass! what shall I do?"

Joan turned her head away. She felt as if all the kindness he could show her would not make up for the bitter heartache the sight of the place gave her.

"I did prepare thee, my Joan, all thee would'st let me, for what thee wast to see, did I not?" asked he.

"Yes," said Joan, in a dry, bitter voice.

"'Twas I who was the cheat."

She put his arm from her and turned away her head with a look of stubborn pain. He gazed at her with eyes full of distress and perplexity.

"Thee know'st, sweetheart," said he, "I could na journey back when I had won thee to make ready another home; but thee know'st, too, I will labour hard till I see thee in a home worthy of thee. I trust that will be at no such distant day; and I do pray you to comfort yourself during our short sojourn here with looking forward to that home which shall be such a home as—"

"What!" said Joan, interrupting him suddenly, and in a sharp, low tone, "look forward again to what is not? Never, Humphrey Arkdale—never I can bear the natural troubles of life as they are sent me as well as most o' the world, but disappointment I cannot bear—it kills me. Disappointment I will not risk."

"Thou'rt ill, my Joan; we will talk of these things another time," Arkdale said, gently. "For the present, tell me that thee dost not blame me—that thou art not disappointed in thine husband, as in thine home."

Joan knew her disappointment and wretchedness would rest long upon her, and for the moment, she felt too bitter in heart to give comfort to Arkdale while she must still keep miserable; so she said, as if an evil spirit moved her tongue—

"My home was in all to me."

Arkdale looked at her for a moment or two in silence. Then he drew a deep breath, and said, slowly and hesitatingly, as if every word had terrible meaning for him.

"Did Joan Merryweather marry me for—a home?"

Joan held her breath. She remembered how solemn a moment it had seemed to her when she gave him her troth that morning in the ruined garden—how far from her any thought but love had been. Her heart cried to her to throw herself at his feet and tell him this; but Joan was a woman who could not suffer without having a passionate thirst to have those nearest and dearest to her suffer with her. She knew she must suffer for some time before her disappointment wore away. Why should Humphrey be made glad?

"Did Joan Merryweather marry me for—a home?" said he. And Joan, after a fierce struggle with herself, answered—

"For what else should she marry you—you, a stranger?"

Arkdale remained looking on the floor in silence. It seemed to Joan he stood there many

minutes; perhaps it was but one. Then he went quietly to the door. Dick called after him. Arkdale turned back, took the child up, and carried him out with him.

Joan tottered to the door, and fell on her knees by it, shaking all over with great, silent sobs. There was a wide crack in the middle of the door, through which she saw the firelight. Her eyes sought this, and she saw Arkdale standing by the chimney-place, with his child in his arms and his back towards her. Presently Jenkyns came with a spoon to stir Dick's porridge, that was boiling on the fire.

"Jenkyns," said Arkdale, and Joan took away her eyes and put a burning ear to the crack.

"Ay," answered Jenkyns.

"What dost think of thy mistress, Jenkyns?"

"She aint give me much time to think of anythink," replied the prentice, "what with the place being flooded, and her not putting her hands to nothink."

"Dost think her fair?"

"'Ansome is as 'ansome does," said Jenkyns.

"Hark ye, my lad," said his master. "I have made much of you, and let you go on pretty well as you like. Seeing that all your kin have died off since you have been in my service, I have been more of a father than a master to you; but I tell you plainly, lad, if you do not use a civil tongue to your mistress, and serve her diligently in all you can, I will give you such a drubbing as you won't forget this side o' Christmas. So look to it. Poor soul, poor soul, away from all she cares for! Coming away with a stranger for the sake of a home, and finding this!"

As Jenkyns took away the boy to feed him, his master sat down on the chimney seat, and buried his face in his hands.

"Thee't mind what I say to thee, Jenkyns?" he said, presently.

"Yes," answered Jenkyns. "I don't want my bones broke for no woman."

"But thee't serve her for love, lad, and not for fear?"

"Whichever you likes to call it, master," said Jenkyns, "love or fear—fear o' your drubbing or love o' my bones; it comes to much about the same thing. Will madam take her supper?"

"Ay, lad, well thought of; she must be faint for want. We have not broken our fast since morning. Give me that porringer."

"Nay, that's yours," said Jenkyns, gruffly.

"Give it me, I say; and Dick shall come and help to carry it."

"Not fore he's had his own," averred Jenkyns, who had no notion of any human creature being served before his two masters. "He's only jest this moment got off the wilence of his hunger, and begun to eat for pleasure."

So Arkdale took the plate, and went alone to the room where Joan was.

She had risen to her feet, and he found her standing just within the door, very pale, and breathing quickly.

"I have brought thee thy supper, Joan. Art not sore in need of it?"

Joan looked at it with great wistful eyes.

Was this the meal—the first meal at home—the sort of holy consecration feast she had in her thoughts prepared so many times so deftly, so lovingly? Was this it?—brought to her in her chamber like a prisoner's dole to his cell?

She looked at it, and at Arkdale's kind, grieved face, and burst out crying.

"Come, Joan," said Arkdale, in the voice of one almost broken-hearted "'tis a poor supper, but better food for thee than thy tears. Eat, lass, and may God give thee patience in thy cruel disappointment. He knows I feel for thee."

"Take it away; I cannot eat."

"Then lay thee down and rest, and maybe thee'll take it in a little while."

"I cannot rest; I cannot eat. Oh, let me breathe one breath out of this place, or I shall die."

The shrill wail in which she spoke made Jenkyns rise to his feet and stare round with face aghast.

"Joan, listen to me," said Arkdale. "This place, such as it is, is your husband's home. I am ashamed of it, grieved to bring you into it, sorely grieved to see you sorrow at it; yet let me tell

you that, as honest labour is done here, and honest bread is broken, the air is good enough for you or any woman living to breathe."

"One throvs so well upon it, did she not?" said Joan, with terrible quietness.

He answered not a word, but went away, and left her alone.

He sent Jenkyns away to his bed at the cobbler's hard by, bolted and barred the place, then sat down by the fire with Dick in his arms.

"My boy," Joan heard him say, "thou'rt more precious to me than I thought."

And thus passed the first night of Joan's entrance into Humphrey Arkdale's household.

#### CHAPTER XLIII.—AN EMBARRASSING INTERVIEW.

When Paul Arkdale had obtained from his brother a new incentive to life and exertion, in the idea of the silk machine, one particular wish seemed to haunt him during the days of preparation for his task, and that was the wish to see Christina before he departed.

Whether it was that he had caught vaguely, and almost unconsciously, a glimpse of her anguished and sympathetic face in his garret chamber, or whether it was mere remembrance of looks and tones of kindness in past days that had long haunted him, till driven out by the belief that the mercer would never sanction any kind of love-making between them and by his own not very scrupulous habits of life—whatever the motive, Paul felt so strong a desire to see her before beginning his venturesome undertaking, that he suddenly caught up a letter from the counter that had been just brought in, and, pretending or believing that it was important, set off with it to Blackheath, to deliver personally to the mercer, amid the outcries of his companions, who stared at his impudence, and told him they were sure Sir Richard was then in London.

Paul laughed at the surprise he was giving them; for how could they know that he was really at that moment leaving the mercer, and could therefore afford to be as independent as he pleased?

But the laugh died out as he drew near to Sir Richard's handsome mansion, for he had now to face Christina, and to wonder whether she knew he had been a thief!

He felt assured she did not, or he could not possibly have ventured now to see her. But, having so satisfied himself, the fear of seeing his shame reflected in her eyes preyed on him not the less keenly.

Another odd fancy struck him. Had Christina noticed Mistress Preston that night of the play? Had she recognised her beauty, and suspected Paul's devotion to her? And, if so, might not those things cause her to turn from him with a natural repugnance? And then, if he were not warned in time, he might attribute to her disgust with his crime what would really be due to his connection with the beautiful spy.

That idea, though embarrassing, was still a pleasanter one to reflect upon than the other. He might brazen out the one, when he would be overwhelmed with the slightest possible reference to the other.

The mercer was not at home, the servants said.

"Was Mistress Christina?"

"Yes."

He was told to go into the room where she was. He knocked gently at the door, and, receiving no answer, entered.

He saw no one there, and advanced, with a momentary sense of relief, towards the window at the far end of the room, meaning to be there when Christina should enter, so that he might cover the embarrassment of his face by having the light behind him.

Suddenly he stands as one transfixed. Christina is there, asleep, in a corner formed by the end of a magnificent Louis Quatorze couch; there, sitting on a very low stool, she has dropped asleep, her head reclining back upon the roll of the couch.

Paul was so near at the moment he first perceived her, that he could see the glittering drops that hung at the end of her soft, long eyelashes, as well as the sad languor of her whole face.

What a child she looked in her beauty and

grief, and rest and helplessness! How unfit, Paul fancied, to contend with the rule buffetings of the world!

He didn't know what to do; whether to retreat and come in again, or to stay where he was, and give himself seeming occupation with a book. If he retreated, he feared the noise would waken her.

He could not help, also, taking a great pleasure in watching even thus—by casual glances and uninterruptedly—the sweet maiden form and face he had never before thus seen.

While still hesitating, in his desire to do the right thing—glide out noiselessly—Christina woke—saw him. Her eyes expanded to almost supernatural width, as if she saw him in a dream. Then her face flushed, then paled; and then she rose slowly, and, with calm demeanour, advanced and smiled, saying—

"Paul—you here?"

"Yes," said he, showing a letter. "This came for master, and, as I wanted to come to Blackheath, I made an excuse of it, and—"

"We are glad to see you, Paul," said Christina; and she rang the bell for refreshments, in spite of Paul's protestations that it was impossible for him to eat just now.

"Why just now?" she asked, sitting down opposite him, at the other end of a large table, richly inlaid with coloured woods.

"Because I—I am come to wish Sir Richard and you farewell."

"Indeed! You do leave my father, then, after all?"

"Yes."

"And do you really consider that necessary?"

Christina shaded her brow with her hand from the light as she put this question, which caused Paul to rack his brains in anguish for a reply. It seemed to mean so much.

"Yes," he said, abruptly, almost rudely.

Christina looked at him; then her eyes dropped, and there was on both sides a most embarrassing silence. Paul at last broke it manfully.

"Mistress Christina, do you, or do you not, know what I have done?"

Christina might have easily fenced with this question; and a true answer involved so much of pain for her, that she might excusably have done so. She did not.

"What did she do?"

She rose, came to where Paul sat, now with his head bending in deep shame over the table; and Paul knew, by her tones, how full of emotion her face must be.

"Paul, I do know, and I am very, very glad you asked me the question, because I can answer it so clearly to my own feeling—my own conscience. Yes, I do know; and if you wish to know what I, or any other true-hearted woman thinks of the whole business, I will tell you."

It was impossible for Paul to help lifting his face up to look at her as she spoke. She was clearly not going to humiliate him farther.

"Paul," said she, "what my father says is doubtless right: it would have been better if it had never happened; but, having happened, I think any—any friend of yours may glory in the manliness that so redeemed all."

"Ah, did I—could I redeem all?"

"You could—you did! At least, I think so; and ever shall think so."

"Oh, Mistress Christina, you do indeed speak to me as an angel of mercy."

Christina seemed at this moment to feel the heightened colour in her cheek, the vivid sparkle in her eyes, for she added—

"Paul, you do not mistake this. I have spoken to you as I might speak to a brother, and because I thought it but right, and because you have been so unhappy—ought I not to say, so wicked to God, who, even at the critical moment, saved you."

"Yes, you are right. Suicide is, I think, about one of the most contemptible things a man can do; but I—I was sorely tried. But all that is over. I came now to tell you that, though I leave under such discreditable circumstances, I hope to come back ere long. I am about to try something that is almost like leading a forlorn hope."

"Not so dangerous, I hope?" said Christina, smiling.

"Well, there's enough of that to make the thing pleasant. I want a little bitter medicine just now; and I'm going to try for some that shall be kill or cure!"

"Paul," said Christina, "have you consulted my father? He would so gladly advise with you."

"I'd rather not, if you please," said Paul, with obvious resentment; and then Christina, hurt at the tone as well as the injustice, was silent.

Again a most embarrassing pause.

It was broken by Paul's jumping up, extending his hand, and saying—

"Will you thus honour me?"

She put her delicate tiny hand in his, and Paul, holding it, said, in deep manly tones—

"Mistress Christina, you have done me, just now, a priceless service. If I live, I will repay you. How, I know not, but I will. Give me, I entreat you, your last farewell prayers for my success in my new undertaking; for it is an eventful one."

"I do, Paul; I do, indeed!"

Paul kissed the beautiful hand, which trembled a little, as if it had been intended to be withdrawn but it was not; a moment more, and they were gone.

Christina sat down in the chair where Paul had sat, dropped her head on the table, and gave way to a long fit of weeping.

Then she rose, went to her chamber, washed and dressed for dinner, came down again, and sat by the fire, waiting the return of her father.

The fire was large, and a superb mantlepiece, of the most beautiful and costly grey marble, was reflecting like a mirror the opposite window, the waving trees outside, the glade of the park—a small one, but still a park that surrounded the mansion—the half-dozen head of deer, and, beyond all, the eminence known as Shooter's Hill, across which lay Sir Richard's way home.

She sat thus a long while; her remembrances of Paul, and especially of the interview just over, mingling with the sight of the objects she saw thus reflected in the marble mirror.

Yes, there is his coach toiling slowly up the ascent. And there is a man advancing as if to meet it; another man is just behind him, and then another. What can possibly make Christina fancy these men are meaning mischief?

She does think so. She starts to her feet; then, remembering her distance and helplessness, she gazes fixedly on the mirror.

One man runs to the door of the carriage, the others run to the horses.

The coachman whips violently, rising on his foot-board, and exerting his utmost energy.

He is dragged down, is struck, is jumped upon, Christina screams, and strives to shut out the horrible picture.

But her father! No longer pausing, she rings the bell with frantic energy, sends off the servants to help, and again returns, drawn, as by a sort of awful attraction, to look again at the fire-side mirror.

Again her screams rend the air. Sir Richard has jumped out of the carriage, and the ruffians are striking at him.

"Oh, Father of mercies!" she murmurs, "yes, it is—it is Paul!"

Ay, Paul has come up, and, feeling the chance to be one so precious that heaven itself must have sent it for his especial benefit—for, of course, he instantly recognised carriage and owner—he rushes in among them like a whirlwind, and they being occupied with the struggles of the horses to get away, and with the struggles of the mercer and the coachman for their lives, were taken at a disadvantage. He knocked one down by a blow that would have almost felled an ox, tripped up the heels of another and jumped upon him, and then faced the third, who was holding the horses, who, not liking the altered look of things—two men—turned and fled.

"Noble—noble Paul!" murmurs Christina, and then flies forth to meet the returning party. She finds them at the lodge, where the mercer is having his head dressed.

"All right, Teena," he cried, as he saw her. "They didn't know how hard an alderman's

head could be, so I am spared. But where's Paul—where's my gallant 'prentice lad?"

Where, indeed? He was nowhere visible. He had gone, with no farewell to the mercer, and the party went back sadly to dinner in consequence.

To be continued.

## The Saturday Reader.

WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 22, 1866.

The large amount of space we have given to Dickens's Christmas Story has compelled us to omit one or two illustrations we have prepared for this number.

### RUSSIA AND CHINA.

AMONG the memorable events of the present age, the progress of Russia in Central Asia is eminently noteworthy, as destined to influence the future fortunes of no inconsiderable portion of the human family. There can be little doubt that the mission of Russia is eastward; in that direction she carries civilization in the train of her conquests, while her acquisitions in Europe have been attended with the opposite result. It does not follow that, because her sway has been a curse to Poland, it should not be a benefit to the barbarous hordes of the East, to whom she imparts knowledge that they do not possess, and to whom her government, absolute though it be, is an improvement of the condition in which they have long existed. It is only by slow degrees, and imperfectly, that we gather information of what Russia is doing in Asia, for her traditional policy is to work in the dark, and the world only becomes acquainted with her proceedings when her object has been gained, and there is no farther occasion for secrecy. In her old wars against Turkey and Persia, she assiduously spread reports of imaginary obstacles that her armies had to encounter, and even of reverses which they never suffered; thus lulling the apprehensions of the other European powers, and preventing their interference between her and her enemy, or victim, as the case might be. The policy of the Czars has always been more or less Asiatic, and characterised by subterfuge and cunning. The Northern Bear has all the qualities of the fox in his nature.

Not finding it easy to wrest more provinces from the Ottoman Empire, Russian ambition has, for some time, been directed towards the steppes of Tartary, and with the success which has generally attended Muscovite efforts to acquire territory, since the days of Peter the Great. By the latest advices that have reached us, we learn that a Russian army had gained a victory over the Emir or Sultan of Bokhara; and the news, we perceive, has not created the slightest sensation even in England, while twenty years ago it would have been received with dismay as the forerunner of an immediate invasion of India by the Russians, and the probable downfall of English domination in Hindostan. In 1839, the attempted invasion by the same power of Khiva, the neighbouring state to Bokhara, set the whole United Kingdom in a flame, and led chiefly to the march of a British army on Afghanistan and to the terrible results of that unwise step. Yet the Russian outposts in Asia are more than a thousand miles nearer the Indian frontier now than they were then. Then, they were on the Ural River, to the north of the Caspian Sea; now they are on the Jaxartes, and probably on the Oxus, in independent Turkestan, as it used to be, but can no longer be called. At the former period half the continent of Asia divided the two empires; at this moment, only a few hundred miles intervene between them; and what the end will be, time alone can tell.

Central Asia is a phrase of undefined mean-

ing; but applying it to the country in which Russia is now operating, and to which we have alluded, it may be thus described. It extends in one direction from the Caspian Sea to Chinese Turkistan; and on the other, from Siberia to Persia and Afghanistan. It contains two great rivers, the Jaxartes and the Oxus, which fall into the Aral Sea, also within its limits. The inhabitants are loosely computed at from four to six million of souls; the soil, in part, is rich, producing corn, cotton, rice, *tol acco*, and many other articles; cattle and oxen of all kinds abound; but there are many tracts of vast deserts unfit for cultivation. In ancient times the valley of the Jaxartes was styled the garden of Asia; it contains several small states, the chief of which are Bokhara, Khiva, and Koondooz. We cannot help thinking that the occupation by Russia of this region is ominous of danger to England. The route from the Jaxartes to the Hindoo Koosh, the western barrier of India, is, in one direction, only about four hundred miles. The means of communication between Turkestan and the heart of the Russian Empire, are now comparatively easy; there are railroads all the way from St. Petersburg to Novgorod on the Volga; that river and the Caspian, into which it discharges itself, are swarming with steamers, of which there are also several on the Aral Lake; and it is likely that we shall soon hear of the Russian frontier being extended to the Oxus, another stride on the road to Hindostan. The past history, and the present course of the great northern power, afford sufficient evidence of the Muscovite lust for empire; and the dominions of Britain in the East were a prize worth contending for. It may be said that there are many difficulties to overcome before an invading army can reach India. True; but they have been overcome by Greeks, Persians and Moguls; and what these did, the Russians may do. We should remember that there is one route that has been frequently proved in recent times to be practicable to a certain point—that from Persia to Herat, and a Russian army has not now to convince us it can find its way into Persia. Then, the chief gate of India is in the hands of the Afghans, a fickle and treacherous race, who hate the English name. Suppose, further, an outbreak of the native population in rear of the British force assembled along the line of the Indus to meet the invader, and we can imagine how desirable it is that the Russians should be at a distance from the British possessions in India. In fact, their central position in Turkestan is perilous to more than one neighbouring country. India, Persia and China are alike open to attack by them; but it is not unlikely that Chinese Turkestan, which is in a state of confusion and rebellion, will be the earliest addition to the Czar's wide domain. If, indeed, the Russians were satisfied with such acquisitions, there would be little reason to regret their rapacity; but all is fish that comes to their net—Swedes, Poles, Turks or Persians, Christians, Jews, or Pagans, are alike dragged into the Muscovite fold. It must be admitted, nevertheless, that their mode of settling the conquered countries of the East is most admirable. As they advance, they erect forts, make roads, dig wells, build factories, and plant military colonies in the places best calculated for agriculture, trade and defence. But all this, however praiseworthy in itself, makes them but the more dangerous neighbors; and if England desires to retain Hindostan in peace, she must watch the Russian progress in Turkestan with a caution proportionate to the cunning and sagacity which the other has always displayed throughout her whole course in Europe and Asia. The warning is to be found in every page of Muscovite history.

THE Hon. Grantley Berkeley's talents as a novelist have been enlisted in a new and hitherto uncultivated field. An enterprising perfumer announces that in his "Perfumed Almanac" for 1867, price 6d. (by post seven stamps), will appear "A Tale of the House of Commons" by that distinguished writer.

## PANOPE AND GALENE.

(FROM *Lucian's Dialogues.*)

[THE following conversation is supposed to have taken place between the Nereids, Panope and Galene, on the day after a banquet given on the occasion of the marriage of Peleus, king of Thessaly and the Seagoddess, Thetis, at which all the gods were present. Eris (i. e. Strife), who had received no invitation, out of spite, threw a golden apple into the banquetting-room, with the inscription, "Let the fairest take it." Juno, Minerva, and Venus each claimed this apple, but Jupiter referred the decision to Paris, son of Priam, who was at this time tending flocks on Mount Ida. The immediate sequel is beautifully embodied in Tennyson's little poem, *Æneid*.]

I.

"Thou didst not see what Eris did, Galene,  
At the Thessalian Banquet, yester even,  
Feeling, as is her wont, a little spleeny,  
Because no invitation had been given?"

II.

"I was not there, for Neptune gave me orders  
To keep the Ocean waveless;—but, this Eris,  
How did she get beyond the social borders?"  
"Listen! I'll tell thee how the whole affair is;—"

III.

"Peleus and Thetis had gone off a-courting,  
(An oddish match, that!) whom our lord and lady,  
Out of respect to Thetis, were escorting,  
When Eris, who had all her mischief ready,

IV.

"Got in, unknown to all—that was no wonder,  
The gods by this time were not over-steady.—  
And then, the singing brought such plausive  
thunder—  
(I always thought those Muses so old-maidy),

V.

"Got in, Galene, and right in among them  
Threw such an apple, beautiful, all golden;—  
There was a start, as if a wasp had stung them,  
Or—the three heads of Cerberus had rolled in!

VI.

"And this was written on it 'For the Fairest.'  
Mercury read it; how we, Nereids, listened!—  
But oh! if you had seen, Galene dearest,  
Those three, how greedily their proud eyes  
glistened!—"

VII.

"While Juno said 'Tis mine,' and Pallas  
'Tis n't,'  
And Venus smiled so winningly malicious;—  
And, had not Jupiter himself been present,  
There should have been a quarrel, most flagitious.

VIII.

"But he, to quiet them, says wisely, 'I am  
No judge of beauty, though you please to flatter;  
But—go to Ida, to the son of Priam,  
And he will settle this important matter.' "

IX.

"And what, then, Panope?" "They're off to Paris,  
Each one quite sure of conquest.—but, between us,  
If I'm a Nereid, and men know what 'fair' is,  
The golden apple must belong to Venus."

J. READE.

## BIRDS OF PREY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," ETC.

Book the First.

## FATAL FRIENDSHIP.

Continued from page 201.

The fire had burnt low again, and Mr. Sheldon sat staring gloomily at the blackening coals. Things were very bad with him—he had not cared to confess how bad they were, when he had discussed his affairs with his brother. Those neighbours and passers-by who admired the trim brightness of the dentist's abode had no suspicion that the master of that respectable house was in the hands of the Jews, and that the hearthstone which whitened his door-step was paid out of Israelitish coffers. The dentist's philosophy was all of this world, and he knew

that the soldier of fortune, who would fain be a conqueror in the great battle, must needs keep his plumage undrabbled and the golden facings of his uniform untarnished, let his wounds be never so desperate.

Having found his attempt to establish a practice in Fitzgeorge-street a failure, the only course open to Mr. Sheldon, as a man of the world, was to transfer his failure to somebody else, with more or less profit to himself. To this end he preserved the spotless purity of his muslin curtains, though the starch that stiffened them and the bleaching-powder that whitened them were bought with money for which he was to pay sixty per cent. To this end he nursed that wan shadow of a practice, and sustained that appearance of respectability which, in a world where appearance stands for so much, is in itself a kind of capital. It certainly was dull dreary work to hold the citadel of No. 14 Fitzgeorge-street against the besieger Poverty; but the dentist stood his ground pertinaciously, knowing that if he only waited long enough, the dupe who was to be his victim would come, and knowing also that there might arrive a day when it would be very useful for him to be able to refer to four years' unblemished respectability as a Bloomsbury householder. He had his lines set in several shady places for that unhappy fish with a small capital, and he had been tantalised by more than one nibble; but he made no open show of his desire to sell his business—since a business that is obviously in the market seems scarcely worth any man's purchase.

Things had of late grown worse with him every day; for every interval of twenty-four hours sinks a man so much the deeper in the mire when renewed accommodation-bills with his name upon them are ripening in the iron safes of Judah. Philip Sheldon found himself sinking gradually and almost imperceptibly into that bottomless pit of difficulty in whose black depths the demon Insolvency holds his dreary court. While his little capital lasted he had kept himself clear of debt, but that being exhausted, and his practice growing worse day by day, he had been fain to seek assistance from money-lenders; and now even the money-lenders were tired of him. The chair in which he sat, the poker which he swung slowly to and fro, as he bent over his hearth, were not his own. One of his Jewish creditors had a bill of sale on his furniture, and he might come home any day to find the auctioneer's bills plastered against the wall of his house, and the auctioneer's clerk busy with the catalogue of his possessions. If the expected victim came now to buy his practice, the sacrifice would be made too late to serve his interest. The men who had lent him money would be the sole gainers by the bargain.

Seldom does a man find himself face to face with a blacker prospect than that which lay before Philip Sheldon; and yet his manner to-night was not the dull blank apathy of despair. It was the manner of a man whose brain is occupied with busy thoughts; who has some elaborate scheme to map out and arrange before he is called upon to carry his plans into action. "It would be a good business for me," he muttered, "if I had pluck enough to carry it through."

The fire went quite out as he sat swinging the poker backwards and forwards. The clocks of Bloomsbury and St. Pancras struck twelve, and still Philip Sheldon pondered and plotted by that dreary hearth. The servants had retired at eleven, after a good deal of blundering with bars and shutters, and unnecessary banging of doors. That unearthly silence peculiar to houses after midnight reigned in Mr. Sheldon's domicile, and he could hear the voices of distant roysterers, and the miauling of neighbouring cats, with a painful distinctness, as he sat brooding in his silent room. The fact that a mahogany cheffonier in a corner gave utterance to a faint groan occasionally, as of some feeble creature in pain, afforded him no annoyance. He was superior to superstitious fancies, and all the rappings and scratchings of spirit-land would have failed to disturb his equanimity. He was a strictly practical man—one of those men who are always ready, with a stump of lead-pencil

and the back of a letter, to reduce everything in creation to figures.

"I had better read-up that business before they come," he said, when he had to all appearance "thought out" the subject of his reverie. "No time so good as this for doing it quietly. One never knows who is spying about in the daytime."

He looked at his watch, and then went to a cupboard, where there were bundles of wood and matches and old newspapers,—for it was his habit to light his own fire occasionally when he worked unusually late at night or early in the morning. He relighted his fire now as cleverly as any housemaid in Bloomsbury, and stood watching it till it burned briskly. Then he lit a taper, and went downstairs to the professional torture-chamber. The tall horsehair chair looked unutterably awful in the dim glimmer of the taper, and a nervous person could almost have fancied it occupied by the ghost of some patient who had expired under the agony of the forceps. Mr. Sheldon lighted the gas in a moveable branch which he was in the habit of turning almost into the mouths of the patients who consulted him at night. There was a cupboard on each side of the mantelpiece, and it was in these two cupboards that the dentist kept his professional library. His books did not form a very valuable collection, but he kept the cupboards constantly locked nevertheless.

He took the key from his waistcoat-pocket, opened one of the cupboards, and took out a pile of heavy books. They were bound volumes of *The Lancet*, and they were almost as much as he could carry. But he managed to pack them in his arms, and conveyed them safely to the room above, where he seated himself under the gas with the volumes before him. He sat looking through these volumes, stopping now and then to read an article with studious attention, and making numerous notes in a thick little oblong memorandum-book, until the Bloomsbury clock struck three.

## CHAPTER III.—MR. AND MRS. HALLIDAY.

Mr. Sheldon's visitors arrived in due course. They were provincial people of the middle-class, accounted monstrosly genteel in their own neighbourhood, but in no wise resembling Londoners of the same rank.

Mr. Thomas Halliday was a big-loud-spoken, good-tempered Yorkshireman, who had inherited a comfortable little estate from a plodding, money-making father, and for whom life had been very easy. He was a farmer, and nothing but a farmer; a man for whom the supreme pleasure of existence was a cattle-show or a country horse-fair. The farm upon which he had been born and brought up was situated about six miles from Barlingford, and all the delights of his boyhood and youth were associated with that small market-town. He and the two Sheldons had been schoolfellows, and afterwards boon companions, taking such pleasure as was obtainable in Barlingford together; flirting with the same provincial beauties at prim tea-parties in the winter, and getting up friendly picnics in the summer,—picnics at which eating and drinking were the leading features of the day's entertainment. Mr. Halliday had always regarded George and Philip Sheldon with that reverential admiration which a stupid man, who is conscious of his own mental inferiority, generally feels for a clever friend and companion. But he was also fully aware of the advantage which a rich man possesses over a poor one, and would not have exchanged the fertile acres of Hyley for the intellectual gifts of his schoolfellows. He had found the substantial value of his handsomely-furnished house and well-stocked farm when he and his friend Philip Sheldon became suitors for the hand of Georgina Cradock, youngest daughter of a Barlingford attorney, who lived next door to the Barlingford dentist, Philip Sheldon's father. Philip and the girl had been playfellows in the long walled gardens behind the two houses, and there had been a brotherly and sisterly intimacy between the juvenile mem-

bers of the two families. But when Philip and Georgina met at the Barlingford tea-parties in later years, the parental powers frowned upon any renewal of that childish friendship. Miss Cradock had no portion, and the worthy solicitor her father was a prudent man, who was apt to look for the promise of domestic happiness in the plate-basket and the linen-press, rather than for such superficial qualifications as black whiskers and white teeth. So poor Philip was "thrown over the bridge," as he said himself, and Georgy Cradock married Mr. Halliday, with all attendant ceremony and splendour, according to the "lights" of Barlingford gentry.

But this provincial bride's story was no passionate record of anguish and tears. The Barlingford Juliet had liked Romeo as much as she was capable of liking any one; but when Papa Capulet insisted on her union with Paris, she accepted her destiny with decent resignation, and, in the absence of any sympathetic father confessor, was fain to seek consolation from a more mundane individual in the person of the Barlingford milliner. Nor did Philip Sheldon give evidence of any extravagant despair. His father was something of a doctor as well as a dentist; and there was plenty of dark little phisais lurking on the shelves of his surgery in which the young man could have found "mortal drugs," without the aid of the apothecary had he been so minded. Happily no such desperate idea ever occurred to him in connection with his grief. He held himself sulkily aloof from Mr. and Mrs. Halliday for some time after their marriage, and allowed people to see that he considered himself very hardly used; but prudence, which had always been Philip Sheldon's counsellor, proved herself also his consoler in this crisis of his life. A careful consideration of his own interests led him to perceive that the successful result of his love-suit would have been about the worst thing that could have happened to him.

Georgina had no money. All was said in that. As the young dentist's philosophy of this world ripened under the influence of experience, he discovered that the worldly ease of the best man in Barlingford was something like that of a canary-bird who inhabits a clean cage and is supplied with abundant seed and water. The cage is eminently comfortable, and the sleepy, respectable, elderly bird sighs for no better abiding-place, no wider prospect than that patch of the universe which he sees between the bars. But now and then there is hatched a wild young fledgling, which beats its wings against the inexorable wires, and would fain soar away into that wide outer world, to prosper or perish in its freedom.

Before Georgy had been married a year, her sometime lover had fully resigned himself to the existing state of things, and was on the best possible terms with his friend Tom. He could eat his dinner in the comfortable house at Hyley with an excellent appetite; for there was a gulf between him and his old love far wider than any that had been dug by that ceremonial in the parish-church of Barlingford. Philip Sheldon had awakened to the consciousness that life in his native town was little more than a kind of an animal vegetation—the life of some pulpy invertebrate creature, which sprawls helplessly upon the sands whereon the wave has deposited it, and may be cloven in half without feeling itself noticeably worse for the operation. He had awakened to the knowledge that there was a wider and more agreeable world beyond that little provincial borough, and that a handsome face and figure and a vigorous intellect were commodities for which there must be some kind of market.

Once convinced of the utter worthlessness of his prospects in Barlingford, Mr. Sheldon turned his eyes Londonwards; and his father happening at this time very conveniently to depart this life, Philip, the son and heir, disposed of the business to an aspiring young practitioner, and came to the metropolis, where he made that futile attempt to establish himself which has been described.

The dentist had wasted four years in London, and nine years had gone by since Georgy's wedding; and now for the first time he had an op-

portunity of witnessing the domestic happiness or the domestic misery of the woman who had jilted him, and the man who had been his successful rival. He set himself to watch them with the cool deliberation of a social anatomist, and he experienced very little difficulty in the performance of this moral dissection. They were established under his roof, his companions at every meal; and they were the kind of people who discuss their grievances and indulge in their "little differences" with perfect freedom in the presence of a third, or a fourth, or even a fifth party.

Mr. Sheldon was wise enough to preserve a strict neutrality. He would take up a newspaper at the beginning of a little difference, and lay it down when the little difference was finished, with the most perfect assumption of unconcernness; but it is doubtful whether the matrimonial disputes were sufficiently appreciative of this good breeding. They would have liked to have had Mr. Sheldon for a court of appeal; and a little interference from him would have given zest to their quarrels. Meanwhile Philip watched them slyly from the covert of his newspaper, and formed his own conclusions about them. If he was pleased to see that his false love's path was not entirely rose-beaten, or if he rejoiced at beholding the occasional annoyance of his rival, he allowed no evidence of his pleasure to appear in his face or manner.

Georgina Cradock's rather insipid prettiness had developed into matronly comeliness. Her fair complexion and pink cheeks had lost none of their freshness. Her smooth auburn hair was as soft and bright as it had been when she had braided it preparatory to a Barlingford tea-party in the days of her spinsterhood. She was a pretty, weak little woman, whose education had never gone beyond the routine of a provincial boarding school, and who thought that she had attained all necessary wisdom in having mastered Pinnock's abridgments of Goldsmith's histories and the rudiments of the French language. She was a woman who thought that the perfection of feminine costume was a moire-antique dress and a conspicuous gold-chain. She was a woman who considered a well-furnished house and a horse and gig the highest form of earthly splendour or prosperity.

This was the shallow commonplace creature whom Philip Sheldon had once admired and wooed. He looked at her now, and wondered how he could ever have felt even as much as he had felt on her account. But he had little leisure to devote to any such abstract and useless consideration. He had his own affairs to think, and they were very desperate.

In the mean time Mr. and Mrs. Halliday occupied themselves in the pursuit of pleasure or business, as the case might be. They were eager for amusement: went to exhibitions in the day and to theatres at night, and came home to cozy little suppers in Fitzgeorge-street, after which Mr. Halliday was wont to waste the small hours in friendly conversation with his quondam companion, and in the consumption of much brandy-and-water.

Unhappily for poor Georgy, these halcyon days were broken by intervals of storm and cloud. The weak little woman was afflicted with that intermittent fever called jealousy; and the stalwart Thomas was one of those kind of men who can scarcely give the time of day to a feminine acquaintance without some ornate and loud-spoken gallantry. Having no intellectual resources wherewith to beguile the tedium of his idle prosperous life, he was fain to seek pleasure in the companionship of other men; and had thus become a haunter of tavern-parlours and small race-courses, being always ready for any amusement his friends proposed to him. It followed, therefore, that he was very often absent from his commonplace, substantial home and his pretty weak-minded wife. And poor Georgy had ample food for her jealous fears and suspicions; for where might a man not be who was so seldom at home? She had never been particularly fond of her husband, but that was no reason why she should not be particularly jealous about him; and her jealousy betrayed itself in a peevish worrying fashion,

which was harder to bear than the vengeful ferocity of a Clytemnestra. It was in vain that Thomas Halliday and those jolly good fellows his friends and companions attested the Arcadian innocence of race-courses, and the perfect purity of that smoky atmosphere peculiar to tavern-parlours. Georgy's suspicions were too vague for refutation; but they were nevertheless sufficient ground for all the alternations of temper—from stolid sulkiness to peevish whining, from murmured lamentations to loud hysterics—to which the female temperament is liable.

In the mean time poor honest, loud-spoken Tom did all in his power to demonstrate his truth and devotion. He brought his wife as many stiff silk-gowns and gaudy Barlingford bonnets as she chose to sigh for. He made a will, in which she was sole legatee, and insured his life in different offices to the amount of five thousand pounds.

"I'm the sort of fellow that's likely to go off the hooks suddenly, you know, Georgy," he said, "and your poor dad was always anxious I should make things square for you. I don't suppose you're likely to marry again, my lass, so I've no need to tie up Lottie's little fortune. I must trust some one, and I'd better confide in my own little wife than in some canting methodical fellow of a trustee, who would speculate my daughter's money upon some Stock-Exchange hazard, and levant to Australia when it was all swamped. If you can't trust me, Georgy, I'll let you see that I can trust you," added Tom, reproachfully.

Whereupon poor weak little Mrs. Halliday murmured plaintively that she did not want fortunes or life-insurances, but that she wanted her husband to stay at home, content with the calm and rather sleepy delights of his own fireside. Poor Tom was wont to promise amendment, and would keep his promise faithfully so long as no supreme temptation, in the shape of a visit from some friend of the jolly-good-fellow species, arose to vanquish his good resolutions. But a good-tempered, generous-hearted young man who farms his own land, has three or four good horses in his stable, a decent cellar of honest port and sherry,—none of your wiskey-washy stuff in the way of hock or claret,—and a very comfortable balance at his banker's, finds it no easy matter to shake off friends of the jolly-good-fellow fraternity. Is it not the speciality of "jolly dogs" to be "here again," whether you will or no?

To be continued.

## NORTH BRITISH AND MERCANTILE INSURANCE COMPANY'S OFFICES.

OUR engraving represents a view of the new edifice, now in course of completion, by the "North British and Mercantile Insurance Company." This building, of which almost the entire ground floor will be occupied by the Company's offices, is situated at the corner of St. François Xavier and Hospital streets. It has a frontage of 45 feet 6 inches on the former, and of 114 feet 6 inches on the latter street. The piece of ground on which it is erected is of a very peculiar form, being wedge-shaped; having what would have been an exceedingly acute angle, at the junction of the two streets, had it not been decided to cut off the apex, and, by making a splay, which has been taken advantage of, to form the principal entrance to the Insurance Offices, and thus do away with a very objectionable feature in the site. In addition to this peculiarity, the ground tapers away from 43 feet 6 inches on St. François Xavier street to a width of not more than 23 feet in rear; again increasing the difficulty of laying out the ground to advantage. All these, however, appear to have been judiciously overcome by Mr. Hopkins, the architect for the building. The architectural design of the building is sufficiently explained by a glance at our illustration. Upon a handsomely modelled and rusticated limestone base-course, of about 6 feet in height, the superstruc-





NORTH BRITISH AND MERCANTILE INSURANCE COMPANY'S NEW BUILDING.—(See preceding page.)

tone is executed in the finest quality of Ohio stone, from this level to the cornice. The whole of the carved enrichments, and foliage, over doors, windows, in cornice, frieze, &c., are in singularly good taste, and executed in the very best style. The roof is of that form borrowed from the Louvre at Paris, which has lately come into vogue for many of our public buildings, and which presents, we believe, some important practical advantages. It will be sur-

mounted with an ornamental iron railing, with bannerets at the angles. The height of the building, from the footwalk to the top of the cornice, is 53 feet 6 inches, and the total, to flat portion of roof, 65 feet 6 inches. The main entrance, as we have before remarked, is at the corner of the two streets, giving access to the Company's general offices, Board rooms, &c.; but they may likewise be entered from the doorway on Hospital street, opposite the "Exchange Court,"

From this latter entrance, a handsome staircase leads to the different suites of offices on the several floors. The latter, as well as the ground floor offices, have fire-proof safes of the best construction, and are provided with wash-basins and all other conveniences. In the basements are fuel and furnace rooms, keepers' apartments &c. The whole of the offices, corridors, &c. will be heated by steam on "Golds' patent" principle.

## DICKENS'S CHRISTMAS STORY. MUGBY JUNCTION.

(Continued from page 240)

They were regular and symmetrical in their arrangement, and not without beauty—the beauty of exceeding refinement and delicacy. Force there was none, and perhaps it was to the want of this that the faults—perhaps the crime—which had made the man's life so miserable were to be attributed. Perhaps the crime? Yes; it was not likely that an affliction, life-long and terrible, such as this he had endured, would come upon him unless some misdeed had provoked the punishment. What misdeed we were soon to know.

It sometimes—I think generally—happens that the presence of any one who stands and watches beside a sleeping man will wake him, unless his slumbers are unusually heavy. It was so now. While we looked at him, the sleeper awoke very suddenly, and fixed his eyes upon us. He put out his hand and took the doctor's in its feeble grasp. "Who is that?" he asked next, pointing towards me.

"Do you wish him to go? The gentleman knows something of your sufferings, and is powerfully interested in your case; but he will leave us, if you wish it," the doctor said.

"No. Let him stay."

Seating myself out of sight, but where I could both see and hear what passed I waited for what should follow. Dr. Garden and John Masey stood beside the bed. There was a moment's pause.

"I want a looking-glass," said Strange, without a word of preface.

We all started to hear him say those words.

"I am dying," said Strange: "will you not grant me my request?"

Doctor Garden whispered to old Masey; and the latter left the room. He was not absent long, having gone no further than the next house. He held an oval-framed mirror in his hand when he returned. A shudder passed through the body of the sick man as he saw it.

"Put it down," he said, faintly,— "anywhere—for the present."

No one of us spoke. I do not think, in that moment of suspense, that we could, any of us, have spoken if we had tried.

The sick man tried to raise himself a little. "Prop me up," he said. "I speak with difficulty. I have something to say."

They put pillows behind him, so as to raise his head and body.

"I have presently a use for it," he said, indicating the mirror. "I want to see—" He stopped, and seemed to change his mind. He was sparing of his words. "I want to tell you—all about it." Again he was silent. Then he seemed to make a great effort and spoke once more, beginning very abruptly.

"I loved my wife fondly. I loved her—her name was Lucy. She was English; but, after we were married, we lived long abroad.—In Italy. She liked the country, and I liked what she liked. She liked to draw, too, and I got her a master. He was an Italian. I will not give his name. We always called him 'the Master.' A treacherous, insidious man this was, and, under cover of his profession, took advantage of his opportunities, and taught my wife to love him—to love him.

"I am short of breath. I need not enter into details as to how I found them out; but I did find them out. We were away on a sketching expedition when I made my discovery. My rage maddened me, and there was one at hand who fomented my madness. My wife had a maid, who, it seemed, had also loved this man,—the Master—and had been ill treated and deserted by him. She told me all. She had played the part of go-between,—had carried letters. When she told me these things, it was night, in a solitary Italian town, among the mountains. 'He is in his room now,' she said, writing to her."

"A frenzy took possession of me as I listened to those words. I am naturally vindictive,

—remember that,—and now my longing for revenge was like a thirst. Travelling in those lonely regions, I was armed; and when the woman said, 'He is writing to your wife,' I laid hold of my pistols, as by an instinct. It has been some comfort to me since, that I took them both. Perhaps, at that moment, I may have meant fairly by him,—meant that we should fight. I don't know what I meant, quite. The woman's words, 'He is in his own room now, writing to her,' rung in my ears."

The sick man stopped to take breath. It seemed an hour, though it was probably not more than two minutes before he spoke again.

"I managed to get into his room unobserved. Indeed, he was altogether absorbed in what he was doing. He was sitting at the only table in the room, writing at a travelling-desk, by the light of a single candle. It was a rude dressing-table, and—before him—exactly before him—there was—there was a looking-glass.

"I stole up behind him as he sat and wrote by the light of the candle. I looked over his shoulder at the letter, and I read, 'Dearest Lucy, my love, my darling.' As I read the words, I pulled the trigger of the pistol I held in my right hand, and killed him,—killed him,—but, before he died, he looked up once,—not at me, but at my image, before him in the glass, and his face—such a face—has been there—ever since—and mine—my face—is gone!"

He fell back exhausted, and we all pressed forward thinking that he must be dead, he lay so still.

But he had not yet passed away. He revived under the influence of stimulants. He tried to speak, and muttered indistinctly from time to time words of which we could sometimes make no sense. We understood, however, that he had been tried by an Italian tribunal, and had been found guilty, but with such extenuating circumstances that his sentence was commuted to imprisonment, during, we thought we made out, two years. But we could not understand what he said about his wife, though we gathered that she was still alive, from something he whispered to the doctor of there being provision made for her in his will.

He lay in a doze for something more than an hour after he had told his tale, and then he woke up quite suddenly, as he had done when we had first entered the room. He looked round uneasily in all directions, until his eye fell on the looking-glass.

"I want it," he said hastily; but I noticed that he did not shudder now, as it was brought near. When old Masey approached, holding it in his hand, and crying like a child, Dr. Garden came forward and stood between him and his master, taking the hand of poor Strange in his.

"Is this wise?" he asked. "Is it good, do you think, to revive this misery of your life now, when it is so near its close? The chastisement of your crime," he added, solemnly, "has been a terrible one. Let us hope in God's mercy that your punishment is over."

The dying man raised himself with a last great effort, and looked up at the doctor with such an expression on his face as none of us had seen on any face before.

"I do hope so," he said faintly; "but you must let me have my way in this,—for if, now, when I look, I see aright—once more—I shall then hope yet more strongly—for I shall take it as a sign."

The doctor stood aside without another word when he heard the dying man speak thus; and the old servant drew near, and, stooping over softly, held the looking-glass before his master. Presently, afterwards, we, who stood around looking breathlessly at him, saw such a rapture upon his face as left no doubt upon our minds that the face which had haunted him so long had, in his last hour, disappeared.

### NO. 4 BRANCH LINE. THE TRAVELLING POST-OFFICE.

Many years ago, and before this Line was so much as projected, I was engaged as a clerk in a Travelling Post-office running along the line

of railway from London to a town in the Midland Counties, which we will call Fazeley. My duties were to accompany the mail-train, which left Fazeley at 8.15 P.M., and arrived in London about midnight, and to return by the day mail leaving London at 10.30 the following morning; after which I had an unbroken night at Fazeley, while another clerk discharged the same round of work; and in this way each alternate evening I was on duty in the railway post-office van. At first I suffered a little from a hurry and tremor of nerve in pursuing my occupation while the train was crashing along under bridges and through tunnels at a speed which was then thought marvellous and perilous; but it was not long before my hands and eyes became accustomed to the motion of the carriage, and I could go through my business with the same despatch and ease as in the post-office of the country town where I had learned it, and from which I had been promoted by the influence of the surveyor of the district, Mr. Huntingdon. In fact, the work soon fell into a monotonous routine, which night after night, was pursued in an unbroken course by myself and the junior clerk, who was my only assistant; the railway post-office work not having then attained the importance and magnitude it now possesses.

Our route lay through an agricultural district containing many small towns, which made up two or three bags only; one for London; another perhaps for the county town; a third for the railway post-office, to be opened by us, and the enclosures to be distributed according to their various addresses. The clerks in many of these small offices were women, as is very generally the case still, being the daughters and female relatives of the nominal post-master, who transact most of the business of the office, and whose names are most frequently signed upon the bills accompanying the bag. I was a young man, and somewhat more curious in feminine handwriting than I am now. There was one family in particular whom I had never seen, but with whose signature I was perfectly familiar,—clear, delicate, and educated, very unlike the miserable scrawl upon other letter bills. One New Year's eve, in a moment of sentiment, I tied a slip of paper among a bundle of letters for their offices, upon which I had written "A happy New Year to you all." The next evening brought me a return of my good wishes signed, as I guessed by three sisters of the name of Clifton. From that day, every now and then, a sentence or two as brief as the one above passed between us, and the feeling of acquaintance and friendship grew upon me, though I had never yet had an opportunity of seeing my fair unknown friends.

It was towards the close of the following October that it came under my notice that the then Premier of the ministry was paying an autumn visit to a nobleman, whose country seat was situated near a small village on our line of rail. The Premier's despatch-box, containing, of course, all the despatches which it was necessary to send down to him, passed between him and the Secretary of State, and was, as usual, intrusted to the care of the post-office. The Continent was just then in a more than ordinarily critical state; we were thought to be upon the verge of an European war; and there were murmurs floating about, at the dispersion of the ministry, up and down the country. These circumstances made the charge of the despatch-box the more interesting to me. It was very similar in size and shape to the old-fashioned work-boxes used by ladies before boxes of polished and ornamental wood came into vogue, and, like them, it was covered with red morocco leather, and it fastened with a lock and key. The first time it came into my hands, I took such special notice of it as might be expected. Upon one corner of the lid I detected a peculiar device scratched slightly upon it, most probably with the sharp point of a steel pen, in such a moment of preoccupation of mind as causes most of us to draw odd lines and caricatured faces upon any piece of paper which may lie under our hand. It was the old revolutionary device of a heart with a dagger pierc-

ing it; and I wondered whether it could be the Premier, or one of his secretaries, who had traced it upon the morocco.

This box had been travelling up and down for about ten days, and, as the village did not make up a bag for London, there being very few letters excepting those from the great house, the letter-bag from the house, and the despatch-box, were handed direct into our travelling post-office. But, in compliment to the presence of the Premier in the neighbourhood, the train, instead of slackening speed only, stopped altogether, in order that the Premier's trusty and confidential messenger might deliver the important box into my own hands, that its perfect safety might be insured. I had an undefined suspicion that some person was also employed to accompany the train up to London, for three or four times I had met with a foreign-looking gentleman at Euston-square, standing at the door of the carriage nearest the post-office van, and eyeing the heavy bags as they were transferred from my care to the custody of the officials from the General Post-office. But though I felt amused and somewhat nettled at this needless precaution, I took no further notice of the man, except to observe that he had the swarthy aspect of a foreigner, and that he kept his face well away from the light of the lamps. Except for these things, and after the first time or two, the Premier's despatch-box interested me no more than any other part of my charge. My work had been doubly monotonous for some time past, and I began to think it time to get up some little entertainment with my unknown friends, the Cliftons. I was just thinking of it as the train stopped at the station about a mile from the town where they lived, and their postman, a gruff, matter-of-fact fellow,—you could see it in every line of his face,—put in the letter bags, and with them a letter addressed to me. It was in an official envelope, "On Her Majesty's Service," and the seal was an official seal. On the folded paper inside it (folded officially also) I read the following order: "Mr. Wilcox is requested to permit the bearer, the daughter of the postmaster at Eaton, to see the working of the railway post-office during the up-journey." The writing I knew well as being that of one of the surveyor's clerks, and the signature was Mr. Huntingdon's. The bearer of the order presented herself at the door, the snorting of the engine gave notice of the instant departure of the train, I held out my hand, the young lady sprang lightly and deftly into the van, and we were off again on our midnight journey.

She was a small, slight creature, one of those slender little girls one never thinks of as being a woman, dressed neatly and plainly in a bark dress, with a veil hanging a little over her face and tied under her chin; the most noticeable thing about her appearance being a great mass of light hair, almost yellow, which had got loose in some way, and fell down her neck in thick, wavy tresses. She had a free, pleasant way about her, not in the least bold or forward, which in a minute or two made her presence seem the most natural thing in the world. As she stood beside me before the row of boxes into which I was sorting my letters, she asked questions, and I answered as if it were quite an every-day occurrence for us to be travelling up together in the night mail to Euston-square station. I blamed myself for an idiot that I had not sooner made an opportunity for visiting my unknown friends at Eaton.

"Then," I said, putting down the letter-bill from their own office before her, "may I ask which of the signatures I know so well is yours? Is it A. Clifton, or M. Clifton, or S. Clifton?" She hesitated a little, and blushed, and lifted up her frank, child-like eyes to mine.

"I am A. Clifton," she answered.

"And your name?" I said.

"Anne." Then, as if anxious to give some explanation to me of her present position, she added, "I was going up to London on a visit, and I thought it would be so nice to travel in the post-office to see how the work was done,

and Mr. Huntingdon came to survey our office, and he said he would send me an order."

I felt somewhat surprised, for a stricter martinet than Mr. Huntingdon did not breathe; but I glanced down at the small, innocent face at my side, and cordially approved of his departure from ordinary rules.

"Did you know you would travel with me?" I asked, in a lower voice; for Tom Morville, my junior, was at my other elbow.

"I know I should travel with Mr. Wilcox," she answered with a smile that made all my nerves tingle.

"You have not written me a word for ages," said I reproachfully.

"You had better not talk, or you'll be making mistakes," she replied, in an arch tone. It was quite true; for, a sudden confusion coming over me, I was sorting the letters at random.

We were just then approaching the small station where the letter-bag from the great house was taken up. The engine was slackening speed. Miss Clifton manifested some natural and becoming diffidence.

"It would look so odd," she said, "to any one on the platform, to see a girl in the post-office van! And they could not know I was a postmaster's daughter, and had an order from Mr. Huntingdon. Is there no dark corner to shelter me?"

I must explain to you in a word or two the construction of the van, which was much less efficiently fitted up than the travelling post-offices of the present day. It was a reversible van, with a door at each right-hand corner. At each door the letter-boxes were so arranged as to form a kind of screen about two feet in width, which prevented people from seeing all over the carriage at once. Thus the door at the far end of the van, the one not in use at the time, was thrown into deep shadow, and the screen before it turned into a small niche, where a slight little person like Miss Clifton was very well concealed from curious eyes. Before the train came within the light from the lamps on the platform, she esconced herself in this shelter. No one but I could see her laughing face, as she stood there leaning cautiously forward, with her finger pressed upon her rosy lips, peeping at the messenger who delivered into my own hands the Premier's despatch-box, while Tom Morville received the letter-bag of the great house.

"See," I said, when we were again in motion, and she had emerged from her concealment, "this is the Premier's despatch box, going back to the Secretary of State. There are some state secrets for you, and ladies are fond of secrets."

"O, I know nothing about politics," she answered, indifferently, "and we have had that box through our office a time or two."

"Did you ever notice this mark upon it," I asked,—a heart with a dagger through it?—and, bending down my face to hers, I added a certain spooney remark, which I do not care to repeat. Miss Clifton tossed her little head, and pouted her lips; but she took the box out of my hands, and carried it to the lamp nearest the further end of the van, after which she put it down upon the counter close beside the screen, and I thought no more about it. The midnight ride was entertaining in the extreme, for the girl was full of young life and sauciness and merry humor. I can safely aver that I have never been to an evening's so-called entertainment, which, to me, was half so enjoyable. It added also to the zest and keen edge of the enjoyment to see her hasten to hide herself whenever I told her we were going to take up the mails.

We had passed Watford, the last station at which we stopped, before I came alive to the recollection that our work was terribly behind-hand. Miss Clifton also became grave, and sat at the end of the counter very quiet and subdued, as if her frolic were over, and it was possible she might find something to repent of in it. I had told her we should stop no more until we reached Euston-square station; but to my surprise I felt our speed decreasing, and

our train coming to a stand-still. I looked out and called to the guard in the van behind, who told me he supposed there was something on the line before us, and that we should go on in a minute or two. I turned my head, and gave this information to my fellow-clerk and Miss Clifton.

"Do you know where we are?" she asked, in a frightened tone.

"At Camden-town," I replied. She sprang hastily from her seat, and came towards me.

"I am close to my friend's house, here," she said, "so it's a lucky thing for me. It is not five minutes' walk from the station. I will say good-bye to you now, Mr. Wilcox, and I thank you a thousand times for your kindness."

She seemed flurried, and she held out both her little hands to me in an appealing kind of way, as if she were afraid of my detaining her against her will. I took them both into mine, pressing them with rather more ardour than was rather quite necessary.

"I do not like you to go alone at this hour," I said, "but there is no help for it. It has been a delightful time to me. Will you allow me to call upon you to-morrow morning early, for I leave London at 10.30; or on Wednesday, when I shall be in town again?"

"O," she answered, hanging her head, "I don't know. I'll write and tell mamma how kind you have been, and, and—but I must go, Mr. Wilcox."

"I don't like your going alone," I repeated.

"O, I know the way perfectly," she said, in the same flurried manner, "perfectly, thank you. And it is close at hand. Good bye!"

She jumped lightly out of the carriage, and the train started on again at the same instant. We were busy enough, as you may suppose. In five minutes more we should be in Euston-square, and there was nearly fifteen minutes' work still to be done. Spite of the enjoyment he had afforded me, I mentally anathematized Mr. Huntingdon and his departure from ordinary rules, and thrusting Miss Clifton forcibly out of my thoughts, I set to work with a will, gathered up the registered letters for London, tied them in a bundle with the paper bill, and then turned to the corner of the counter for the despatch-box.

You have guessed already my cursed misfortune. The Premier's despatch-box was not there. For the first minute or so I was in nowise alarmed, and merely looked round, upon the floor, under the bags, into the boxes, into any place into which it could have fallen or been deposited. We reached Euston-square while I was still searching, and losing more and more of my composure every instant. Tom Morville joined me in my quest, and felt every bag which had been made up and sealed. The box was no small article which could go into little compass; it was certainly twelve inches long, and more than that in girth. But it turned up nowhere. I never felt nearer fainting than at that moment.

"Could Miss Clifton have carried it off?" suggested Tom Morville.

"No," I said indignantly but thoughtfully, she could not have carried off such a bulky thing as that, without our seeing it. It would not go into one of our pockets, Tom, and she wore a tight-fitting jacket that would not conceal anything."

"No, she can't have it," assented Tom; "then it must be somewhere about." We searched again and again, turning over everything in the van, but without success. The Premier's despatch-box was gone; and all we could do at first was to stand and stare at one another. Our trances of blank dismay was of short duration, for the van was assailed by the postmen from St. Martin's-le-Grand, who were waiting for our charge. In a stupor of bewilderment we completed our work, and delivered up the mails; then once more we confronted one another with pale faces, frightened out of our seven senses. All the scrapes we had ever been in (and we had had our usual share of errors and blunders) faded into utter insignificance compared with this. My eye fell upon Mr. Huntingdon's order lying among some

scraps of waste paper on the floor, and I picked it up, and put it carefully, with its official envelope, into my pocket.

"We can't stay here," said Tom. The porters were looking in inquisitively: we were seldom so long in quitting our empty van.

"No," I replied, a sudden gleam of sense darting across the blank bewilderment of my brain; "no, we must go to head-quarters at once, and make a clean breast of it. This is no private business, Tom."

We made one more ineffectual search, and then we hailed a cab and drove as hard as we could to the General Post-office. The secretary of the Post-office was not there, of course, but we obtained the address of his residence in one of the suburbs, four or five miles from the city, and we told no one of our misfortune, my idea being that the fewer who were made acquainted with the loss the better. My judgment was in the right there.

We had to knock up the household of the secretary,—a formidable personage with whom I had never been brought into contact before,—and in a short time we were holding a strictly private and confidential interview with him, by the glimmer of a solitary candle, just serving to light up his severe face, which changed its expression several times as I narrated the calamity. It was too stupendous for rebuke, and I fancied his eyes softened with something like commiseration as he gazed upon us. After a short interval of deliberation, he announced his intention of accompanying us to the residence of the Secretary of State; and in a few minutes we were driving back again to the opposite extremity of London. It was not far off the hour for the morning delivery of letters when we reached our destination; but the atmosphere was yellow with fog, and we could see nothing as we passed along in almost utter silence, for neither of us ventured to speak, and the secretary only made a brief remark now and then. We drove up to some dwelling enveloped in fog, and we were left in the cab for nearly half an hour, while our secretary went in. At the end of that time we were summoned to an apartment where there was seated at a large desk a small spare man, with a great head, and eyes deeply sunk under the brows. There was no form of introduction, of course, and we could only guess who he might be; but we were requested to repeat our statement, and a few shrewd questions were put to us by the stranger. We were eager to put him in possession of every thing we knew; but that little was beyond the fact that the despatch-box was lost.

"That young person must have taken it," he said.

"She could not, sir," I answered, positively, but deferentially. "She wore the tightest-fitting pelisse I ever saw, and she gave me both her hands when she said good by. She could not possibly have it, concealed about her. It would not go into my pocket."

"How did she come to travel up with you in the van, sir?" he asked severely.

I gave him for answer the order signed by Mr. Huntingdon. He and our secretary scanned it closely.

"It is Huntingdon's signature without doubt," said the latter. "I could swear to it anywhere. This is an extraordinary circumstance!"

It was an extraordinary circumstance. The two retired into an adjoining room, where they stayed for another half-hour, and when they returned to us their faces still bore an aspect of grave perplexity.

Mr. Wilcox and Mr. Morville," said our secretary, "it is expedient that this affair should be kept inviolably secret. You must even be careful not to hint that you hold any secret. You did well not to announce your loss at the Post-office; and I shall cause it to be understood that you had instructions to take the despatch box direct to its destination. Your business now is to find the young woman, and return with her not later than six o'clock this afternoon to my office at the General Post-office. What other steps we think it requisite to take,

you need know nothing about. The less you know, the better for yourselves."

Another gleam of commiseration in his official eye made our hearts sink within us. We departed promptly, and, with that instinct of wisdom, which at times dictates infallibly what course we should pursue, we decided our line of action. Tom Morville was to go down to Camden-town, and inquire at every house for Miss Clifton, while I—there would be just time for it—was to run down to Eaton by train, and obtain her exact address from her parents. We agreed to meet at the General Post-office at half past five, if I could possibly reach it by that time; but in any case Tom was to report himself to the secretary, and account for my absence.

When I arrived at the station at Eaton, I found that I had only forty-five minutes before the up-train went by. The town was nearly a mile away, but I made all the haste I could to reach it. I was not surprised to find the post-office in connection with a bookseller's shop and I saw a pleasant, elderly lady seated behind the counter, while a tall, dark-haired girl was sitting at some work a little out of sight. I introduced myself at once.

"I am Frank Wilcox, of the railway post-office, and I have just run down to Eaton to obtain some information from you."

"Certainly. We know you well by name," was the reply, given in a cordial manner, which was particularly pleasant to me.

"Will you be so good as give me the address of Miss Anne Clifton in Camden-town?" I said.

"Miss Anne Clifton?" ejaculated the lady.

"Yes. Your daughter, I presume. Who went up to London last night?"

"I have no daughter Anne," she said. "I am Anne Clifton; and my daughters are named Mary and Susan. This is my daughter Mary."

The tall dark-haired girl had left her seat, and now stood beside her mother. Certainly she was very unlike the small golden-haired coquette who had travelled up to London with me as Anne Clifton.

"Madam," I said, scarcely able to speak, "is your other daughter a slender little creature, exactly the reverse of this young lady?"

"No," she answered laughing; "Susan is both taller and darker than Mary. Call Susan, my dear."

In a few seconds Miss Susan made her appearance, and I had the three before me,—A. Clifton, S. Clifton, and M. Clifton. There was no other girl in the family; and when I described the young lady who had travelled under their name, they could not think of any one in the town—it was a small one—who answered my description, or who had gone on a visit to London. I had no time to spare, and I hurried back to the station, just catching the train as it left the platform. At the appointed hour I met Morville at the General Post-office; and, threading the long passages of the secretary's offices, we at length found ourselves anxiously waiting in an ante-room, until we were called into his presence. Morville had discovered nothing, except that the porters and policemen at Camden-town station had seen a young lady pass out last night, attended by a swarthy man who looked like a foreigner, and carried a small black portmanteau.

I scarcely know how long we waited. It might have been years; for I was conscious of an ever-increasing difficulty in commanding my thoughts, or fixing them upon the subject which had engrossed them all day. I had not tasted food for twenty-four hours, nor closed my eyes for thirty-six, while, during the whole of the time, my nervous system had been on full strain.

Presently the summons came, and I was ushered, first, into the inner apartment. There sat five gentlemen round a table, which was strewn with a number of documents. There were the Secretary of State, whom we had seen in the morning, our Secretary of State, and Mr. Huntingdon; the fourth was a fine-looking man, whom I afterwards knew to be the Premier; the fifth I recognized as our great chief, the Postmaster-General. It was an

august assemblage to me, and I bowed low; but my head was dizzy, and my throat parched.

"Mr. Wilcox," said our secretary, "you will tell these gentlemen again the circumstances of the loss you reported to me this morning."

I laid my hand upon the back of a chair to steady myself, and went through the narration for the third time, passing over sundry remarks made by myself to the young lady. That done, I added the account of my expedition to Eaton, and the certainty at which I had arrived that my fellow-traveller was not the person she represented herself to be. After which, I inquired with indescribable anxiety if Mr. Huntingdon's order were a forgery?

"I cannot tell, Mr. Wilcox," said that gentleman, taking the order into his hands, and regarding it with an air of extreme perplexity. "I could have sworn it was mine, had it been attached to any other document. I think Forbes' handwriting is not so well imitated. But it is the very ink I use, and mine is a peculiar signature."

It was a very peculiar and old-fashioned signature, with a flourish underneath it not unlike a whip-handle, with the lash caught round it in the middle; but that did not make it the more difficult to forge, as I humbly suggested. Mr. Huntingdon wrote a name upon a paper, and two or three of the gentlemen tried to imitate the flourish, but vainly. They gave it up with a smile upon their grave faces.

"You have been careful not to let a hint of this matter drop from you, Mr. Wilcox?" said the Postmaster-General.

"Not a syllable, my lord," I answered.

"It is imperatively necessary that the secret should be kept. You would be removed from the temptation of telling it, if you had an appointment in some office abroad. The packet-agency at Alexandria is vacant, and I will have you appointed to it at once."

It would be a good advance from my present situation, and would doubtless prove a stepping-stone to other and better appointments; but I had a mother living at Fazeley, bedridden and paralytic, who had no pleasure in existence, except having me to dwell under the same roof with her. My head was growing more and more dizzy, and a strange vagueness was creeping over me.

"Gentlemen," I muttered, "I have a bedridden mother whom I cannot leave. I was not to blame, gentlemen." I fancied there was a stir and movement at the table, but my eyes were dim, and in another second I had lost my consciousness.

When I came to myself, in two or three minutes, I found that Mr. Huntingdon was kneeling on the floor beside me, supporting my head, while our secretary held a glass of wine to my lips. I rallied as quick as possible, and staggered to my feet; but the two gentlemen placed me in the chair against which I had been leaning, and insisted upon my finishing the wine before I tried to speak.

"I have not tasted food all day," I said, faintly.

"Then, my good fellow, you shall go home immediately," said the Postmaster-General; "but be on your guard! Not a word of this must escape you. Are you a married man?"

"No, my lord," I answered.

"So much the better," he added, smiling. "You can keep a secret from your mother, I dare say. We rely upon your honor."

The secretary then rang a bell, and I was committed to the charge of the messenger who answered it; and in a few minutes I was being conveyed in a cab to my London lodgings. A week afterwards, Tom Morville was sent out to a post-office in Canada, where he settled down, married, and is still living, perfectly satisfied with his position, as he occasionally informed me by letter. For myself, I remained, as I desired, in my old post as travelling-clerk until the death of my mother, which occurred some ten or twelve months afterwards. I was then promoted to an appointment as a clerk in charge, upon the first vacancy.

The business of the clerks in charge is to take possession of any post-office in the

kingdom, upon the death or resignation of the post-master, or when circumstances of suspicion cause his suspension from office. My new duties carried me three or four times, into Mr. Huntingdon's district. Though that gentleman and I never exchanged a word with regard to the mysterious loss in which we had both had an innocent share, he distinguished me with peculiar favour, and more than once invited me to visit him at his own house. He lived alone, having but one daughter, who had married, somewhat against his will, one of his clerks,—the Mr. Forbes whose handwriting had been so successfully imitated in the official order presented to me by the self-styled Miss Anne Clifton. (By the way, I may here mention, though it has nothing to do with my story, that my acquaintance with the Cliftons had ripened into an intimacy, which resulted in my engagement and marriage to Mary.)

It would be beside my purpose to specify the precise number of years which elapsed before I was once again summoned to the secretary's private apartment, where I found him closeted with Mr. Huntingdon. Mr. Huntingdon shook hands with unofficial cordiality; and then the secretary proceeded to state the business on hand.

"Mr. Wilcox, you remember our offer to place you in office in Alexandria?" he said.

"Certainly, sir," I answered.

"It has been a troublesome office," he continued, almost pettishly. "We sent out Mr. Forbes only six months ago, on account of his health, which required a warmer climate, and now his medical man reports that his life is not worth three weeks' purchase."

Upon Mr. Huntingdon's face there rested an expression of profound anxiety; and as the secretary paused he addressed himself to me.

"Mr. Wilcox," he said, "I have been soliciting, as a personal favour, that you should be sent out to take charge of the packet agency, in order that my daughter may have some one at hand to befriend her, and manage her business affairs for her. You are not personally acquainted with her, but I know I can trust her with you."

"You may, Mr. Huntingdon," I said, warmly. "I will do anything I can to aid Mrs. Forbes. When do you wish me to start?"

"How soon can you be ready?" was the rejoinder.

"To-morrow morning."

I was not married then, and I anticipated no delay in setting off. Nor was there any. I travelled with the overland mail through France to Marseilles, embarked in a vessel for Alexandria, and in a few days from the time I first heard of my destination set foot in the office there. All the postal arrangements had fallen into considerable irregularity and confusion; for, as I was informed immediately on my arrival, Mr. Forbes had been in a dying condition for the last week, and of course the absence of a master had borne the usual results. I took formal possession of the office, and then, conducted by one of the clerks, I proceeded to the dwelling of the unfortunate postmaster and his no less unfortunate wife.

It would be out of place in this narrative to indulge in any traveller's tales about the strange place where I was so unexpectedly located. Suffice it to say, that the darkened, sultry room into which I was shown, on inquiring for Mrs. Forbes, was bare of furniture, and destitute of all those little tokens of refinement and taste which make our English parlours so pleasant to the eye. There was, however, a piano in one of the dark corners of the room open, and with a sheet of music on it. While I waited for Mrs. Forbes's appearance, I strolled idly up to the piano to see what music it might be. The next moment my eye fell upon an antique red morocco work-box standing on the top of the piano—a work-box evidently, for the lid was not closely shut, and a few threads of silk and cotton were hanging out of it. In a kind of dream—for it was difficult to believe that the occurrence was a fact—I carried the box to the darkened window, and there, plain in my sight, was the

device scratched upon the leather: the revolutionary symbol of a heart with a dagger through it. I had found the Premier's despatch-box in the parlour of the packet-agent of Alexandria!

I stood for some minutes with that dream-like feeling upon me, gazing at the box in the dim obscure light. It could not be real! My fancy must be playing a trick upon me! But the sound of a light step—for, light as it was, I heard it distinctly as it approached the room—broke my trance, and hastened to replace the box on the piano, and to stoop down as if examining the music, before the door opened. I had not sent in my name to Mrs. Forbes, for I did not suppose that she was acquainted with it, nor could she see distinctly, as I stood in the gloom. But I could see her. She had the slight slender figure, the childlike face, and fair hair of Miss Anne Clifton. She came quickly across the room, holding out both her hands in a childish appealing manner.

"Oh!" she wailed, in a tone that went straight to my heart, "he is dead! He has just died!"

It was no time then to speak about the red morocco work-box. This little childish creature, who did not look a day older than when I had last seen her in my travelling post-office, was a widow in a strange land, far away from any friend save myself. I had brought her a letter from her father. The first duties that devolved upon me were those of her husband's interment, which had to take place immediately. Three or four weeks elapsed before I could, with any humanity, enter upon the investigation of her mysterious complicity in the daring theft practised on the government and the post-office.

I did not see the despatch-box again. In the midst of her new and vehement grief, Mrs. Forbes had the precaution to remove it before I was ushered again into the room where I had discovered it. I was at some trouble to hit upon any plan by which to gain a second sight of it; but I was resolved that Mrs. Forbes should not leave Alexandria without giving me a full explanation. We were waiting for remittances and instructions from England, and in the mean time the violence of her grief abated, and she recovered a good share of her old buoyancy and loveliness, which had so delighted me on my first acquaintance with her. As her demands upon my sympathy weakened, my curiosity grew stronger, and at last mastered me. I carried with me a netted purse which required mending, and I asked her to catch up the broken meshes while I waited for it.

"I will tell your maid to bring your work-box," I said, going to the door and calling the servant. "Your mistress has a red morocco work-box," I said to her, as she answered my summons.

"Yes, sir," she replied.

"Where is it?"

"In her bedroom," she said.

"Mrs. Forbes wishes it brought here." I returned back into the room. Mrs. Forbes had gone deadly pale, but her eyes looked sullen, and her teeth were clenched under her lips with an expression of stubbornness. The maid brought the work-box. I walked, with it in my hands, up to the sofa where she was seated.

"You remember this mark?" I asked. "I think neither of us can ever forget it."

She did not answer by word, but there was a very intelligent gleam in her blue eyes.

"Now," I continued, softly, "I promised your father to befriend you, and I am not a man to forget a promise. But you must tell me the whole simple truth."

I was compelled to reason with her, and to urge her for some time. I confess I went so far as to remind her that there was an English consul at Alexandria, to whom I could resort. At last she opened her stubborn lips, and the whole story came out, mingled with sobs and showers of tears.

She had been in love with Alfred, she said, and they were too poor to marry, and papa would not hear of such a thing. She was

always in want of money, she was kept so short; and they promised to give her such a great sum—a vast sum—five hundred pounds.

"But who bribed you?" I inquired.

A foreign gentleman whom she had met in London, called Monsieur Bonnard. It was a French name, but she was not sure that he was a Frenchman. He talked to her about her father being a surveyor in the post-office, and asked her a great number of questions. A few weeks after, she met him in their own town by accident,—she and Mr. Forbes; and Alfred had a long private talk with him, and they came to her, and told her she could help them very much. They asked her if she could be brave enough to carry off a little red box out of the travelling post-office, containing nothing but papers. After a while she consented. When she had confessed so much under compulsion, Mrs. Forbes seemed to take a pleasure in the narrative, and went on fluently.

"We required papa's signature to the order, and we did not know how to get it. Luckily he had a fit of the gout, and was very peevish; and I had to read over a lot of official papers to him, and then he signed them. One of the papers I read twice, and slipped the order into its place after the second reading. I thought I should have died with fright; but just then he was in great pain, and glad to get his work over. I made an excuse that I was going to visit my aunt at Beckly, but, instead of going there direct, we contrived to be at the station at Eaton a minute or two before the mail-train came up. I kept outside the station door till we heard the whistle, and just then the postman came running down the road, and I followed him straight through the booking-office, and asked him to give you the order, which I put into his hand. He scarcely saw me. I just caught a glimpse of Monsieur Bonnard's face through the window of the compartment next the van, when Alfred had gone. They had promised me that the train should stop at Camden-town if I could only keep your attention engaged until then. You know how I succeeded."

"But how did you dispose of the box?" I asked. "You could not have concealed it about you; that I am sure of."

"Ah!" she said, "nothing was easier.

Monsieur Bonnard had described the van to me, and you remember I put the box down at the end of the counter, close to the corner where I hid myself at every station. There was a door with a window in it, and I asked if I might have the window open, as the van was too warm for me. I believe Monsieur Bonnard could have taken it from me by only leaning through his window, but he preferred stepping out, and taking it from my hand, just as the train was leaving Watford,—on the far side of the carriages, you understand. It was the last station, and the train came to a stand at Camden-town. After all, the box was not out of your sight more than twenty minutes before you missed it. Monsieur Bonnard and I hurried out of the station, and Alfred followed us. The box was forced open,—the lock has never been mended, for it was a peculiar one,—and Monsieur Bonnard took possession of the papers. He left the box with me, after putting inside it a roll of notes. Alfred and I were married next morning, and I went back to my aunt's; but we did not tell papa of our marriage for three or four months. That is the story of my red morocco work-box."

She smiled with the provoking mirthfulness of a mischievous child. There was one point still, on which my curiosity was unsatisfied.

"Did you know what the despatches were about?" I asked.

"O no!" she answered; "I never understood politics in the least. I knew nothing about them. Monsieur did not say a word; he did not even look at the papers while we were by. I would never, never, have taken a registered letter, or anything with money in it, you know. But all those papers could be written again quite easily. You must not think me a thief, Mr. Wilcox; there was nothing worth money among the papers."

"They were worth five hundred pounds to you," I said. "Did you ever see Bonnard again?"

"Never again," she replied. "He said he was going to return to his native country. I don't think Bonnard was his real name."

Most likely not, I thought; but I said no more to Mrs. Forbes. Once again I was involved in a great perplexity about this affair. It was clearly my duty to report the discovery at head-quarters, but I shrank from doing so. One of the chief culprits was already gone to another judgment than that of man; several years had obliterated all traces of Monsieur Bonnard; and the only victim of justice would be this poor little dupe of the two greater criminals. At last I came to the conclusion to send the whole of the particulars to Mr. Huntingdon himself; and I wrote them to him, without remark or comment.

The answer that came to Mrs. Forbes and me in Alexandria was the announcement of Mr. Huntingdon's sudden death of some disease of the heart, on the day which I calculated would put him in possession of my communication. Mrs. Forbes was again overwhelmed with apparently heart-rending sorrow and remorse. The income left to her was something less than one hundred pounds a year. The secretary of the post-office, who had been a personal friend of the deceased gentleman, was his sole executor; and I received a letter from him, containing one for Mrs. Forbes, which recommended her, in terms not to be misunderstood, to fix upon some residence abroad, and not to return to England. She fancied she would like the seclusion and quiet of a convent; and I made arrangements for her to enter one in Malta, where she would still be under British protection. I left Alexandria myself on the arrival of another packet-agent; and on my return to London I had a private interview with the secretary. I found that there was no need to inform him of the circumstances I have related to you, as he had taken possession of all of Mr. Huntingdon's papers. In consideration of his ancient friendship, and of the escape of those who most merited punishment, he had come to the conclusion that it was quite as well to let bygones be bygones.

At the conclusion of the interview, I delivered a message which Mrs. Forbes had emphatically entrusted to me.

"Mrs. Forbes wished me to impress upon your mind," I said, "that neither she nor Mr. Forbes would have been guilty of this misdemeanor if they had not been very much in love with one another, and very much in want of money."

"Ah!" replied the secretary, with a smile, "if Cleopatra's nose had been shorter, the fate of the world would have been different!"

#### NO. 5 BRANCH LINE—THE ENGINEER.

His name, sir, was Matthew Price: mine is Benjamin Hardy. We were born within a few days of each other; bred up in the same village; taught at the same school. I cannot remember the time when we were not close friends. Even as boys, we never knew what it was to quarrel. We had not a thought, we had not a possession, that was not in common. We would have stood by each other, fearlessly, to the death. It was such a friendship as one reads about sometimes in books; fast and firm as the great Tors upon our native moorlands, true as the sun in the heavens.

The name of our village was Chadleigh. Lifted high above the pasture flats which stretched away at our feet like a measure-green lake, and melted into mist on the farthest horizon, it nestled, a tiny stone-built hamlet, in a sheltered hollow about mid-way between the plain and the plateau. Above us, rising ridge beyond ridge, slope beyond slope, spread the mountainous moor country, bare and bleak, for the most part, with here and there a patch of cultivated field, or hardy plantation, and crowned highest of all with masses of huge gray crag, abrupt, isolated, hoary, and older than the deluge. Those

were the Tors—Druids Tor, King's Tor, Castle Tor, and the like; sacred places, as I have heard, in the ancient time, where crownings, burnings, human sacrifices, and all kinds of bloody heathen rites were performed. Bones, too, had been found there, and arrow-heads and ornaments of gold and glass. I had a vague awe of the Tors in those boyish days, and would not have gone near them after dark for the heaviest bribe.

I have said that we were born in the same village. He was the son of a small farmer, named William Price, and the eldest of a family of seven; I was the only child of Ephraim Hardy, the Chadleigh blacksmith—a well known man in those parts, whose memory is not forgotten to this day. Just so far as a farmer is supposed to be a bigger man than a blacksmith, Mat's father might be said to have a better standing than mine; but William Price, with his small holding and his seven boys, was, in fact, as poor as any day labourer; whilst the blacksmith, well-to-do bustling, popular, and open-handed, was a person of some importance in the place. All this, however, had nothing to do with Mat and myself. It never occurred to either of us that his jacket was out at elbows, or that our mutual funds came altogether from my pocket. It was enough for us that we sat on the same school-bench, conned our tasks from the same primer, fought each other's battles, screened each other's faults, fished, nipped, played truant, robbed orchards and birds' nests together, and spent every other half hour, authorized or stolen, in each other's society. It was a happy time; but it could not go on for ever. My father, being prosperous, resolved to put me forward in the world. I must know more, and do better, than himself. The forge was not good enough, the little world of Chadleigh not wide enough for me. Thus it happened that I was still swinging the satchel when Mat was whistling at the plough, and that at last, when my future course was shaped out, we were separated, as it then seemed to us, for life. For, blacksmith's son as I was, furnace and forge, in some form or other, pleased me best, and I chose to be a working engineer. So my father by-and-by apprenticed me to a Birmingham iron master; and, having bidden farewell to Mat and Chadleigh, and the gray old Tors in the shadow of which I had spent all the days of my life, I turned my face northward, and went over into "the Black Country."

I am not going to dwell on this part of my story. How I worked out the term of my apprenticeship; how, when I had served my full time and become a skilled workman, I took Mat from the plough and brought him over to the Black Country, sharing with him lodging, wages, experience,—all, in short, that I had to give; how he, naturally quick to learn and brimful of quiet energy, worked his way up a step at a time, and came by and by to be a "first hand" in his own department; how, during all these years of change, and trial, and effort, the old boyish affection never wavered or weakened, but went on, growing with our growth and strengthening with our strength—are facts which I need do no more than outline in this place.

About this time—it will be remembered that I speak of the days when Mat and I were on the bright side of thirty—it happened that our firm contracted to supply six first-class locomotives to run on the new line, then in process of construction, between Turin and Genoa. It was the first Italian order we had taken. We had dealings with France, Holland, Belgium, Germany; but never with Italy. The connection, therefore, was new and valuable,—all the more valuable because our Transalpine neighbours had but lately begun to lay down the iron roads, and would be safe to need more of our good English work as they went on. So the Birmingham firm set themselves to the contract with a will, lengthened our working hours, increased our wages, took on fresh hands, and determined, if energy and promptitude could do it, to place themselves at the head of the Italian labour-market, and stay there. They

deserved and achieved success. The six locomotives were not only turned out to time, but were shipped, despatched, and delivered with a promptitude that fairly amazed our Piedmontese consignee. I was not a little proud, you may be sure, when I found myself appointed to superintend the transport of the engines. Being allowed a couple of assistants, I contrived that Mat should be one of them; and thus we enjoyed together the first great holiday of our lives.

It was a wonderful change for two Birmingham operatives fresh from the Black Country. The fairy city, with its crescent background of Alps; the port crowded with strange shipping; the marvellous blue sky and bluer sea; the painted houses on the quays; the quaint cathedral, faced with black and white marble; the street of jewellers, like an Arabian Nights' bazaar; the street of palaces, with its Moorish court-yards, its fountains and orange-trees; the women veiled like brides; the galley-slaves chained two and two; the processions of priests and friars; the everlasting clangor of bells; the babble of a strange tongue; the singular lightness and brightness of the climate,—made, altogether, such a combination of wonders that we wandered about, the first day, in a kind of bewildered dream, like children at a fair. Before that week was ended, being tempted by the beauty of the place and the liberality of the pay, we had agreed to take service with the Turin and Genoa Railway Company, and to turn our backs upon Birmingham forever.

Then began a new life,—a life so active and healthy, so steeped in fresh air and sunshine, that we sometimes marvelled how we could have endured the gloom of the Black Country. We were constantly up and down the line: now at Genoa, now at Turin, taking trial trips with the locomotives, and placing our old experiences at the service of our new employers.

In the mean while we made Genoa our headquarters, and hired a couple of rooms over a small shop in a by-street sloping down to the quays. Such a busy little street,—so steep and winding that no vehicles could pass through it, and so narrow that the sky looked like a mere strip of deep-blue ribbon overhead! Every house in it, however, was a shop, where the goods encroached on the footway, or were piled about the door, or hung like tapestry from the balconies; and all day long, from dawn to dusk, an incessant stream of passers-by poured up and down between the port and the upper quarter of the city.

Our landlady was the widow of a silver-worker, and lived by the sale of filigree ornaments, cheap jewelry, combs, fans, and toys in ivory and jet. She had an only daughter named Gianetta, who served in the shop, and was simply the most beautiful woman I ever beheld. Looking back across this weary chasm of years, and bringing her image before me (as I can and do) with all the vividness of life, I am unable, even now, to detect a flaw in her beauty. I do not attempt to describe her. I do not believe there is a poet living who could find the words to do it; but I once saw a picture that was somewhat like her (not half so lovely, but still like her), and, for aught I know, that picture is still hanging where I last looked at it,—upon the walls of the Louvre. It represented a woman with brown eyes and golden hair, looking over her shoulder into a circular mirror held by a bearded man in the background. In this man, as I then understood, the artist had painted his own portrait; in her, the portrait of the woman he loved. No picture that I ever saw was half so beautiful, and yet it was not worthy to be named in the same breath with Gianetta Coneglia.

You may be certain the widow's shop did not want for customers. All Genoa knew how fair a face was to be seen behind that dingy little counter; and Gianetta, flirt as she was, had more lovers than she cared to remember, even by name. Gentle and simple, rich and poor, from the red-capped sailor buying his earrings or his amulet, to the nobleman carelessly purchasing half the filigrees in the window, she treated them all alike,—encouraged them, laughed at them, led them on and turned

them off at her pleasure. She had no more heart than a marble statue, as Mat and I discovered by and by, to our bitter cost.

I cannot tell to this day how it came about, or what first led me to suspect how things were going with us both; but long before the waning of that autumn a coldness had sprung up between my friend and myself. It was nothing that could have been put into words. It was nothing that either of us could have explained or justified, to save his life. We lodged together, ate together, worked together, exactly as before; we even took our long evening's walk together, when the day's labour was ended; and except, perhaps, that we were more silent than of old, no mere looker-on could have detected a shadow of change. Yet there it was, silent and subtle, widening the gulf between us every day.

It was not his fault. He was too true and gentle-hearted to have willingly brought about such a state of things between us. Neither do I believe—fiery as my nature is—that it was mine. It was all hers—hers from first to last—the sin, and the shame, and the sorrow.

If she had shown a fair and open preference for either of us, no real harm could have come of it, I would have put any constraint upon myself, and, Heaven knows! have borne any suffering, to see Mat really happy. I know that he would have done the same, and more if he could, for me. But Gianetta cared not one sou for either. She never meant to choose between us. It gratified her vanity to divide us; it amused her to play with us. It would pass my power to tell how, by a thousand imperceptible shades of coquetry,—by the lingering of a glance, the substitution of a word, the fitting of a smile,—she contrived to turn our heads, and torture our hearts, and lead us on to love her. She deceived us both. She buoyed us both up with hope; she maddened us with jealousy; she crushed us with despair. For my part, when I seemed to wake to a sudden sense of the ruin that was about our path, and I saw how the truest friendship that ever bound two lives together was drifting on to wreck and ruin, I asked myself whether any woman in the world was worth what Mat had been to me and I to him. But this was not often. I was readier to shut my eyes upon the truth than to face it; and so lived on, wilfully, in a dream.

Thus the autumn passed away, and winter came,—the strange, treacherous Genoese winter, green with olive and ilex, brilliant with sunshine, and bitter with storm. Still, rivals at heart and friends on the surface, Mat and I lingered on in our longing in the *Vicolo Balba*. Still Gianetta held us with her fatal smiles and her still more fatal beauty. At length there came a day when I felt I could bear the horrible misery and suspense of it no longer. The sun, I vowed, should not go down before I knew my sentence. She must choose between us. She must either take me or let me go. I was reckless, I was desperate. I was determined to know the worst, or the best. If the worst, I would at once turn my back upon Genoa, upon her, upon all the pursuits and purposes of my past life, and begin the world anew. This I told her, passionately and sternly, standing before her in the little parlour at the back of the shop, one bleak December morning.

"If it's Mat whom you care for most," I said, "tell me so in one word, and I will never trouble you again. He is better worth your love. I am jealous and exacting; he is as trusting and unselfish as a woman. Speak, Gianetta: am I to bid you good bye for ever and ever, or am I to write home to my mother in England, bidding her pray to God to bless the woman who has promised to be my wife?"

"You plead your friend's cause well, she replied haughtily. Matteo ought to be grateful. This is more than he ever did for you."

"Give me my answer, for pity's sake," I exclaimed, "and let me go!"

"You are free to go or stay, Signor Inglese," she replied. "I am not your jailer."

"Do you bid me leave you?"

"Beata Madre! not I."

"Will you marry me if I stay?"

She laughed aloud,—such a merry, mocking, musical laugh, like a chime of silver bells!

"You ask too much," she said.

"Only what you have led me to hope these five or six months past!"

"That is just what Matteo says. How tiresome you both are!"

"O Gianetta," I said, passionately, "be serious for one moment! I am a rough fellow, it is true,—not half good enough or clever for you; but I love you with my whole heart, and an Emperor could do no more."

"I am glad of it," she replied; "I do not want you to love me less."

"Then you cannot wish to make me wretched; will you promise me?"

"I promise nothing," said she, with another burst of laughter. "except that I will not marry Matteo!"

Except that she would not marry Matteo! Only that. Not a word of hope for myself. Nothing but my friend's condemnation. I might get comfort, and selfish triumph, and some sort of base assurance out of that, if I could. And so, to my shame, I did. I grasped at the vain encouragement, and, fool that I was! let her put me off again unanswered. From that day, I gave up all effort at self-control, and let myself drift blindly on—to destruction.

At length things became so bad between Mat and myself that it seemed as if an open rupture must be at hand. We avoided each other, scarcely exchanged a dozen sentences in a day, and fell away from our old familiar habits. At this time—I shudder to remember it!—there were moments when I felt that I hated him.

Thus, with the trouble deepening and widening between us day by day, another month or five weeks went by; and February came; and, with February, the Carnival. They said in Genoa that it was a particularly dull carnival; and so it must have been; for save a flag or two hung out in some of the principal streets, and a sort of festa look about the women, there were no special indications of the season. It was, I think, the second day, when, having been on the line all the morning, I returned to Genoa at dusk, and, to my surprise, found Mat Price on the platform. He came up to me, and laid his hand on my arm.

"You are in late," he said. "I have been waiting for you three quarters of an hour. Shall we dine together to-day?"

Impulsive as I am, this evidence of returning good will at once called up my better feelings.

"With all my heart, Mat," I replied; "shall we go to Gozzoli's?"

"No, no," he said, hurriedly. "Some quieter place,—some place where we can talk. I have something to say to you."

I noticed now that he looked pale and agitated, and an uneasy sense of apprehension stole upon me. We decided on the "Pescatore," a little out-of-the-way trattoria, down near the *Molo Vecchio*. There, in a dingy salon, frequented chiefly by seamen, and redolent of tobacco, we ordered our simple dinner. Mat scarcely swallowed a morsel, but calling presently for a bottle of Sicilian wine, drank eagerly.

"Well, Mat," I said, as the last dish was placed on the table, "what news have you?"

"Bad."

"I guessed that from your face."

"Bad for you,—bad for me. Gianetta."

"What of Gianetta?"

He passed his hand nervously across his lips.

"Gianetta is false,—worse than false," he said, in a hoarse voice. "She values an honest man's heart just as she values a flower for her hair,—wears it for a day, then throws it aside forever. She has cruelly wronged us both."

"In what way? Good Heavens, speak out!"

"In the worst way that a woman can wrong those who love her. She has sold herself to the Marchese Loredano."

The blood rushed to my head and face in a burning torrent. I could scarcely see, and dared not trust myself to speak.

"I saw her going towards the cathedral," he went on, hurriedly. "It was about three hours ago. I thought she might be going to confession, so I hung back and followed her at a distance. When she got inside, however, she went straight to the back of the pulpit, where this man was waiting for her. You remember him,—an old man who used to haunt the shop a month or two back. Well, seeing how deep in conversation they were, and how they stood close under the pulpit with their backs towards the church, I fell into a passion of anger and went straight up the aisle, intending to say or do something, I scarcely knew what, but, at all events, to draw her arm through mine, and take her home; when I came within a few feet, however, and found only a big pillar between myself and them, I paused. They could not see me, nor I them; but I could hear their voices distinctly, and—and I listened."

"Well, and you heard—"

"The terms of a shameful bargain—beauty on the one side, gold on the other; so many thousand francs a year; a villa near Naples—Pah! it makes me sick to repeat it."

And, with a shudder, he poured out another glass of wine and drank it at a draught.

"After that," he said, presently, "I made no effort to bring her away. The whole thing was so cold-blooded, so deliberate, so shameful, that I felt I had only to wipe her out of my memory, and leave her to her fate. I stole out of the cathedral, and walked about here by the sea for ever so long, trying to get my thoughts straight. Then I remembered you, Ben; and the recollection of how this wanton had come between us and broken up our lives—drove me wild. So I went up to the station and waited for you. I felt you ought to know it all; and—and I thought, perhaps, that we might go back to England together."

"The Marchese Loredano?"

It was all that I could say; all that I could think. As Mat had just said of himself, I felt "like one stunned."

"There is one other thing I may as well tell you," he added reluctantly, "if only to show you how false a woman can be. We—we were to have been married next month."

"We? Who? What do you mean?"

"I mean that we were to have been married,—Gianetta and I."

A sudden storm of rage, of scorn, of incredulity, swept me over me at this, and seemed to carry my senses away.

"You!" I cried. "Gianetta marry you! I don't believe it."

"I wish I had not believed it," he replied, looking up as if puzzled with my vehemence. "But she promised me; and I thought, when she promised it, she meant it."

"She told me, weeks ago, that she would never be your wife!"

His colour rose, his brow darkened; but when his answer came, it was as calm as the last.

"Indeed!" he said. "Then it is only one baseness more. She told me that she had refused you; and that was why we had kept our engagement secret."

"Tell the truth, Mat Price," I said, well nigh beside myself with suspicion. "Confess that every word of this is false! Confess that Gianetta will not listen to you, and that you are afraid I may succeed where you have failed. As perhaps I shall,—as perhaps I shall after all!"

"Are you mad?" he exclaimed. "What do you mean?"

"That I believe it's just a trick to get me away to England,—that I don't credit a syllable of your story. You're a liar, and I hate you!"

He rose, and, lying one hand on the back of his chair, looked me sternly in the face.

"If you were not Benjamin Hardy," he said, deliberately, "I would thrash you within an inch of your life."

The words had no sooner passed his lips than I sprang at him. I have never been able distinctly to remember what followed. A curse,—a blow,—a struggle,—a moment of blind

fury,—a cry,—a confusion of tongues,—a circle of strange faces. Then I see Mat lying back in the arms of a bystander; myself trembling and bewildered,—the knife dropped from my grasp; blood upon the floor; blood upon my hands; blood upon his shirt. And then I hear those dreadful words,—

"O Ben, you have murdered me!"  
He did not die,—at least, not there and then. He was carried to the nearest hospital, and lay for some weeks between life and death. His case, they said, was difficult and dangerous. The knife had gone in just below the collar-bone, and pierced down into the lungs. He was not allowed to speak or turn,—scarcely to breathe with freedom. He might not even lift his head to drink. I sat by him day and night all through that sorrowful time. I gave up my situation on the railway; I quitted my lodging in the Vicolo Balba; I tried to forget that such a woman as Gianetta Coneglia had ever drawn breath. I lived only for Mat; and he tried to live more, I believe, for my sake than his own. Thus, in the bitter silent hours of pain and penitence, when no hand but mine approached his lips or smoothed his pillow, the old friendship came back with even more than its old trust and faithfulness. He forgave me, fully and freely; and I would thankfully have given my life for him.

At length there came one bright spring morning, when dismissed as convalescent, he tottered out through the hospital gates, leaning on my arm, and feeble as an infant. He was not cured; neither, as I then learned to my horror and anguish, was it possible that he ever could be cured. He might live, with care, for some years; but the lungs were injured beyond hope of remedy, and a strong or healthy man he could never be again. These, spoken aside to me, were the parting words of the chief physician, who advised me to take him farther south without delay.

I took him to a little coast-town called Rocca, some thirty miles beyond Genoa,—a sheltered lonely place along the Riviera, where the sea was even bluer than the sky, and the cliffs were green with strange tropical plants,—cacti and aloes, and Egyptian palms. Here we lodged in the house of a small tradesman; and Mat, to use his own words, "set to work at getting well in good earnest." But, alas! it was a work which no earnestness could forward. Day after day he went down to the beach, and sat for hours drinking the sea air and watching the sails that came and went in the offing. By and by he could go no farther than the garden of the house in which he lived. A little later and he spent his days on a couch beside the open window, waiting patiently for the end. Ay, for the end! It had come to that. He was fading fast, waning with the waning summer, and conscious that the Reaper was at hand. His whole aim now was to soften the agony of my remorse, and prepare me for what must shortly come.

"I would not live longer, if I could," he said, lying on his couch one summer evening, and looking up to the stars. "If I had my choice at this moment, I would ask to go. I should like Gianetta to know that I forgave her."

"She shall know it," I said, trembling suddenly from head to foot.

He pressed my hand.  
"And you'll write to father?"  
"I will."

I had drawn a little back, that he might not see the tears raining down my cheeks; but he raised himself on his elbow, and looked round.  
"Don't fret, Ben," he whispered, laid his head back wearily upon the pillow,—and so died.

And this was the end of it. This was the end of all that made life to me. I buried him there, in hearing of the wash of a strange shore. I stayed by the grave till the priest and the bystanders were gone. I saw the earth filled in to the last sod, and the gravedigger stamp it down with his feet. Then, and not till then, I felt that I had lost him forever,—the friend I had loved, and hated, and slain. Then, and not till then, I knew that all rest, and joy, and

hope were over for me. From that moment my heart hardened within me, and my life was filled with loathing. Day and night, land and sea, labour and rest, food and sleep, were alike hateful to me. It was the curse of Cain, and that my brother had pardoned me made it lie none the lighter. Peace on earth was for me no more, and good-will towards men was dead in my heart forever. Remorse softens some natures; but it poisoned mine. I hated all mankind; but above all mankind I hated the woman who had come between us two, and ruined both our lives.

He had bidden me seek her out, and be the messenger of his forgiveness. I had sooner have gone down to the port of Genoa and taken upon me the serge cap and shotted chain of any galley-slave at his toil in the public works; but, for all that, I did my best to obey him. I went back, alone and on foot. I went back, intending to say to her, "Gianetta Coneglia, he forgave you; but God never will." But she was gone. The little shop was let to a fresh occupant; and the neighbours only knew that mother and daughter had left the place quite suddenly, and that Gianetta was supposed to be under the "protection" of the Marchese Loredano. How I made inquiries here and there,—how I heard that they had gone to Naples,—and how, being restless and reckless of my time, I worked my passage in a French steamer, and followed her,—how, having found the sumptuous villa that was now hers, I learned that she had left there some ten days and gone to Paris, where the Marchese was ambassador for the Two Sicilies,—how, working my passage back again to Marseilles, and thence, in part by the river and in part by the rail, I made my way to Paris,—how, day after day I paced the streets and the parks, watched at the ambassador's gates, followed his carriage, and, at last, after weeks of waiting, discovered her address,—how, having written to request an interview, her servants spurned me from her door and flung my letter in my face,—how, looking up at her windows, I then, instead of forgiving, solemnly cursed her with the bitterest curses my tongue could devise,—and how, this done, I shook the dust of Paris from my feet, and became a wanderer upon the face of the earth,—are facts which I have now no space to tell.

The next six or eight years of my life were shifting and unsettled enough. A morose and restless man, I took employment here and there, as opportunity offered, turning my hand to many things, and caring little what I earned, so long as the work was hard and the change incessant. First of all, I engaged myself as chief engineer in one of the French steamers plying between Marseilles and Constantinople. At Constantinople I changed to one of the Austrian Lloyd's boats, and worked for some time to and from Alexandria, Jaffa, and those parts. After that, I fell in with a party of Mr. Layard's men at Cairo, and so went up the Nile and took a turn at the excavations of the mound of Nimroud. Then I became a working engineer on the new desert line between Alexandria and Suez; and by and by I worked my passage out to Bombay, and took service as an engine-fitter on one of the great Indian railways. I stayed a long time in India; that is to say, I stayed nearly two years, which was a long time for me; and I might not even have left so soon, but for the war that was declared just then with Russia. That tempted me. For I loved danger and hardship as other men love safety and ease; and as for my life, I had sooner have parted from it than kept it, any day. So I came straight back to England; betook myself to Portsmouth, where my testimonials at once procured me the sort of berth I wanted. I went out to the Crimea in the engine-room of one of her Majesty's war steamers.

I served with the fleet, of course, while the war lasted, and when it was over, went wandering off again, rejoicing in my liberty. This time I went to Canada, and, after working on a railway then in progress near the American frontier, I presently passed over into the States; journeyed from north to south; crossed the

Rocky Mountains; tried a month or two of life in the gold country; and then, being seized with a sudden, aching, unaccountable longing to revisit that solitary grave so far away on the Italian coast, I turned my face once more towards Europe.

Poor little grave! I found it rank with weeds, the cross half shattered, the inscription half-effaced. It was as if no one loved him or remembered him. I went back to the house in which we had lodged together. The same people were still living there, and made me kindly welcome. I stayed with them for some weeks. I weeded, planted, and trimmed the grave with my own hands, and set up a fresh cross in pure white marble. It was the first season of rest that I had known since I had laid him there; and when at last I shouldered my knapsack and set forth again to battle with the world, I promised myself that, God willing, I would creep back to Rocca, when my days drew near to ending, and be buried by his side.

From hence, being, perhaps, a little less inclined than formerly for very distant parts, and willing to keep within the reach of that grave, I went no farther than Mantua, where I engaged myself as an engine-driver on the line, then not long completed, between the city and Venice. Somehow, although I had been trained to the working engineering, I preferred in these days to earn my bread by driving. I liked the excitement of it, the sense and power, the rush of the air, the roar of the fire, the fitting of the landscape. Above all, I enjoyed to drive a night-express. The worse the weather, the better it suited with my sullen temper. For I was as hard, and harder than ever. The years had done nothing to soften me. They had only confirmed all that was blackest and bitterest in my heart.

I continued pretty faithful to the Mantua line, and had been working steadily on it for more than seven months, when that which I am about to relate took place.

It was in the month of March. The weather had been unsettled for some days past, and the nights stormy; and at one point along the line, near Ponte di Brenta, the waters had risen and swept away some seventy yards of embankment. Since this accident, the trains had all been obliged to stop at a certain spot between Padua and Ponte di Brenta, and the passengers, with the luggage, and thence to be transported in all kinds of vehicles, by a circuitous country road, to the nearest station on the other side of the gap, where another train and engine awaited them.

This, of course, caused great confusion and annoyance, put all our time-tables wrong, and subjected the public to a large amount of inconvenience. In the meanwhile an army of navvies was drafted to the spot, and worked day and night to repair the damage. At this time I was driving two through trains each day; namely, one from Mantua to Venice in the early morning, and a return train from Venice to Mantua in the afternoon,—a tolerably full day's work, covering about one hundred and ninety miles of ground, and occupying between ten and eleven hours. I was therefore not best pleased, when, on the third or fourth day after the accident, I was informed, that, in addition to my regular allowance of work, I should that evening be required to drive a special train to Venice. This special train, consisting of an engine, a single carriage, and a break-van, was to leave the Mantua platform at eleven; at Padua the passengers were to alight and find post-chaises waiting to convey them to Ponte di Brenta; at Ponte di Brenta another engine, carriage, and break-van were to be in readiness. I was charged to accompany them throughout.

"Corpo di Bacco," said the clerk who gave me my orders, "you need not look so black, man. You are certain of a handsome gratuity. Do you know who goes with you?"

"Not I."

"Not you indeed! Why, it's the Duca Loredano, the Neapolitan ambassador."

"Loredano!" I stammered. "What Loredano? There was a Marchese—"

"Certo. He was the Marchese Loredano



some years ago; but he has come into his dukedom since then."

"He must be a very old man by this time."

"Yes, he is old; but what of that? He is as hale, and bright, and stately as ever. You have seen him before?"

"Yes," I said, turning away; "I have seen him,—years ago."

"You have heard of his marriage?"

I shook my head.

The clerk chuckled, rubbed his hands, and shrugged his shoulders.

"An extraordinary affair," he said. "Made a tremendous escauldre at the time. He married his mistress—quite a common, vulgar girl—a Genoese—very handsome; but not received, of course. Nobody visits her."

"Married her!" I exclaimed. "Impossible."

"True, I assure you."

I put my hand to my head. I felt as if I had had a fall or a blow.

"Does she—does she go to-night?" I faltered.

"O dear, yes—goes everywhere with him—never lets him out of her sight. You'll see her—la bella Duchessa!"

With this my informant laughed, and rubbed his hands again, and went back to his office.

The day went by, I scarcely know how, except that my whole soul was in a tumult of rage and bitterness. I returned from my afternoon's work about 7.25, and at 10.30 I was once again at the station. I had examined the engine; given instructions to the Fochista, or stoker, about the fire; seen to the supply of oil; and got all in readiness, when, just as I was about to compare my watch with the clock in the ticket-office, a hand was laid upon my arm, and a voice in my ear said,—

"Are you the engine-driver who is going on with this special train?"

I had never seen the speaker before. He was a small, dark man, muffled up about the throat, with blue glasses, a large black beard, and his hat drawn down upon his eyes.

"You are a poor man, I suppose," he said, in a quick, eager whisper, "and, like other poor men, would not object to be better off. Would you like to earn a couple of thousand florins?"

"In what way?"

"Hush! You are to stop at Padua, are you not, and to go on again at Ponte di Brenta?" I nodded.

"Suppose you did nothing of the kind. Suppose instead of turning off the steam, you jump off the engine, and let the train run on?"

"Impossible. There are seventy yards of embankment gone, and—"

"Basta! I know that. It would be nothing but an accident."

I turned hot and cold; I trembled; my heart beat fast, and my breath failed.

"Why do you tempt me?" I faltered.

"For Italy's sake," he whispered; "for liberty's sake. I know you are no Italian; but, for all that, you may be a friend. The Loredano is one of his country's bitterest enemies. Stay, here are two thousand florins."

I thrust his hand back fiercely.

"No—no!" I said. "No blood-money. If I do it, I do it neither for Italy nor for money; but for vengeance."

"For vengeance!" he repeated.

At this moment the signal was given for backing up to the platform. I sprang to my place upon the engine without another word. When I again looked towards the spot where he had been standing, the stranger was gone.

I saw them take their places—duke and duchess, secretary and priest, valet and maid. I saw the station-master bow them into the carriage, and stand, bareheaded, beside the door.

I could not distinguish their faces; the platform was too dark, and the glare from the engine-fire too strong; but I recognized her stately figure and the poise of her head. Had I not been told who she was, I should have known her by those traits alone. Then the guard's whistle shrilled out, and the station-master made his last bow; I turned the steam on, and we started.

My blood was on fire. I no longer trembled

or hesitated. I felt as if every nerve was iron, and every pulse instinct with deadly purpose. She was in my power, and I would be revenged. She should die,—she, for whom I had stained my soul with my friend's blood! She should die, in the plenitude of her wealth and beauty, and no power upon earth should save her.

The stations flew past. I put on more steam; I bade the fireman heap in the coke, and stir the blazing mass. I would have outstripped the wind, had it been possible. Faster and faster—hedges and trees, bridges and stations, flashing past—villages no sooner seen than gone—telegraph wires twisting, and dipping, and twining themselves in one, with the awful swiftness of our pace! Faster and faster, till the fireman at my side looks white and scared, and refuses to add more fuel to the furnace. Faster and faster, till the wind rushes in our faces and drives the breath back upon our lips.

I would have scorned to save myself. I meant to die with the rest. Mad as I was,—and I believe from my very soul that I was utterly mad for the time,—I felt a passing pang of pity for the old man and his suite. I would have spared the poor fellow at my side, too, if I could; but the pace at which we were going made escape impossible.

Vicenza was passed—a mere confused vision of lights. Pojana flew by. At Padua, but nine miles distant, our passengers were to alight. I saw the fireman's face turned upon me in remonstrance; I saw his lips move, though I could not hear a word; I saw his expression change suddenly from remonstrance to a deadly terror, and then—merciful Heaven! then, for the first time, I saw that he and I were no longer alone upon the engine.

There was a third man,—a third man standing on my right hand, as the fireman was standing on my left,—a tall, stalwart man, with short curling hair, and a flat Scotch cap upon his head. As I fell back in the first shock of surprise, he stepped nearer, took my place at the engine, and turned the steam off. I opened my lips to speak to him; he turned his head slowly, and looked me in the face.

Matthew Price!

I uttered one long wild cry, flung my arms wildly up above my head, and fell as if I had been smitten by an axe.

I am prepared for the objections that may be made to my story. I expect, as a matter of course, to be told that this was an optical illusion, or that I was suffering from pressure on the brain, or even that I laboured under a temporary attack of insanity. I have heard all these arguments before, and, if I may be forgiven for saying so, I have no desire to hear them again. My own mind has been made up on the subject for many a year. All that I can say—all that I know is—that Matthew Price came back from the dead to save my soul and the lives of those whom I, in my guilty rage, would have hurried to destruction. I believe this as I believe in the mercy of Heaven and the forgiveness of repentant sinners.

WITTY AND WHIMSICAL.

THE PROPER DAY FOR MARRIAGES.—Wedd'ns-day.

HOW TO MAKE A LITTLE GO A GREAT WAY—Send it by rail.

WHY can't the captain of a vessel keep a memorandum of the weight of his anchor, instead of weighing it every time he leaves port?

A WESTERN editor, in noticing a new and splendid hearse, says he has no doubt that it will afford much satisfaction to those who use it.

"PLEASE, Mr. Smith, papa wants to know if you won't lend him the model of your hat?" "Certainly, my son, what for?" "He wants to make a scare-crow."

RECKLESS DRIVING.—A cabman has lately driven his own mother out of her mind.

NO MAN generally needs so much money as he who despises it.

SAM, why am de hogs de most intelligent folks in de world?—Because dey nose eberyting.

An Irish witness in a court of justice, being asked what kind of "ear-marks" the hog in question had, replied, "He had no particular ear-marks except a very short tail."

"THAT man is a thief," said a wag, pointing to a reporter in a court of justice. "Why so?" inquired his friend. "Why," cried he, "do you not see he is taking notes?"

WHEN Lord Eldon resigned the Great Seal, a small barrister said, "To me his loss is irreparable. He always behaved to me like a father." "Yes," remarked Henry Brougham, "I understand he always treated you as a child."

"WELL, Sambo, how do you like your new place?" "Oh, very well, massa." "What did you have for breakfast this morning?" "Why, you see, missus biled three eggs for herself, and gib me de brof."

WHAT is the most sensational periodical of the day?—The Powder Magazine.

In what key would a lover write a proposal of marriage? *Be mine, ah!* (B. minor).

CHESS.

SOLUTION OF PROBLEM, NO. 44

- |   |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| WHITE.  | BLACK.               |
| 1. B to Q 4 (dis. ch.)  | K takes P or (a.)    |
| 2. Q to K 4 (ch.)   | K takes Q or (a. b.) |
| 3. B to B 5 (ch.)   | K takes B.           |
| 4. Kt to Kt 3 Mate.   |                      |
| (If Black plays 3, K to B 6, White mates by 4, Kt to Kt sq. or, if 3, K to Q 4, then follows 4. Kt takes P Mate.)   |                      |
| (a.) 2. _____   | K to B 5.            |
| 3. B to B 5 (dis. ch.)  | K to Kt 6.           |
| 4. Kt to B sq. Mate.  |                      |
| (If he play 3, K to Kt 4, White mates by 4, Q to Kt 4.)   |                      |
| (b.) 2. _____   | K to Q 7.            |
| 3. B to B 3 (ch.)   | K to Q 8.            |
| 4. Kt to Kt 2 Mate.   |                      |
| (c.) 1. _____   | K to Q 7 (a.)        |
| 2. Q to B sq (ch)   | K takes Kt or (d.)   |
| 3. Kt to Kt 2.  | K to B 6.            |
| 4. Q to K B sq Mate.  |                      |
| (If 3 R to R 8, White replies with 4. B to Kt 4 Mate; if 3, R to Kt takes B, then follows 4. Q to Q sq Mate; if 3 Kt to K 6, mate is given by 4, Q takes Kt.) |                      |
| (d.) 2. _____   | K takes P.           |
| 3. R to Kt 3 (ch.)  | K takes Kt.          |
| 4. Kt Mates.  |                      |
| (If 3, K to K 5, or 3. Kt interposes, Kt or B mates.)   |                      |
| (e.) 1. _____   | Any other move.      |
| 2. White mates in 2 moves.  |                      |

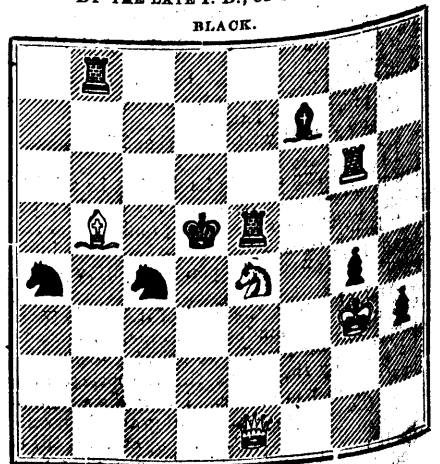
SOLUTION OF SECOND STIPULATION.

- |                            |                   |
|----------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. B to K Kt sq (dis. ch.) | K takes P or (a.) |
| 2. Kt to B sq (ch.)        | K to Q 7.         |
| 3. Q to B 3 (ch.)          | K to Q 8.         |
| 4. Kt Mates.               |                   |
| (a.) 1. _____              | K to Q 7.         |
| 2. Q to B sq (ch.)         | K takes Kt (b.)   |
| 3. B to Kt 4 (ch.)         | K takes P.        |
| 4. Kt to B 5 Mate.         |                   |
| (b.) 2. _____              | K takes P.        |
| 3. Kt to B 5 (ch.)         | K takes Kt.       |
| 4. B Mates.                |                   |

PROBLEM No. 47.

BY THE LATE I. B., OF BRIDPORT.

BLACK.



WHITE.

White to play and mate in three moves.