ALICE FOR SHORT

A DICHRONISM

WILLIAM DE MORGAN

Alice-for-Short

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A Dichronism

By

William De Morgan

Author of "Joseph Vance"

44497

Toronto
Henry Frowde
1907

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ALICE-FOR-SHORT

CHAPTER I

OF NEAR FIFTY YEARS AGO, AND OF ALICE AND HER BEER-JUG; AND HOW THE LATTER WAS MENDED

In the January in which this story begins there was a dense fog in London, and a hard frost. And there was also a little girl of six in a street in Soho, where the fog was as thick and the frost as hard as anywhere else in the metropolis. The little girl was bringing home the beer from the Duke of Clarence's Head at the corner to an old house that had been built in the days of her great-great-grandfathers. She did not like bringing it; and though her eyes were blue and she was a nice little girl, she could almost have found it in her heart to stop and drink some of it on the way. But she was afraid of her mother. So she staggered on with her large jug, and nobody offered to help her.

Her great-great-grandfathers had been better off than she was. At any rate in their days, however cold it was, there was no fog to speak of; certainly not one like this. In those days she might not have been choked with coughing in addition to frozen finger tips. She might have had chilblains, but her eyes would not have smarted as they did now. She might have been able to see more than her own small length in front of her; and then perhaps she would have detected in good time a boy with a red nose and a red comforter to console it who was making a slide on the pavement, and would not have been run into by that boy and his circle of friends who were assisting him in making that slide.

Would these boys' great-great-grandfathers have behaved as ill as their great-great-grandsons did when they had overwhelmed a defenceless little girl six years old, and knocked her over and rolled upon her, and smashed her glorious jug in three pieces, and spilt her precious nectar in the gutter? I hope not. I trust they would have helped her tenderly to her feet, and subscribed among themselves to make good the damage.

These boys did no such thing. On the contrary they appeared

to rejoice at the mishap, and to look forward with satisfaction to further misfortune for its victim. "You tike the 'andle and the pieces home," they said; "won't you cotch it 'ot neither!" And then one or two of them desisted from a dance of joy at the prospect, to collect the fragments of the jug and unreasoningly advocate their careful preservation. "You kitch tight holt, and don't let go." But no sooner had they by vigorous and confident repetitions produced conviction, and the little maiden was really satisfied that the proper course in such a case would be to carry home the pieces of the jug, for reasons unexplained, than one of them detected a sound through the fog as of Law and Order approaching and slapping their representative's hands across his chest to keep out the cold. On which account, he, being Policeman P 21, found no boys on the scene—only the little maiden. To whom his first words were not encouraging. For they were identically the very words the boys had used. "You'll catch it hot, little missy," said he, as though a universal understanding existed among persons out in the street, from which little girls were excluded. No wonder this little girl sobbed the more. And the Policeman made matters no better by adding: "Sooner you're 'ome, sooner it'll be done with!"—a ghastly speech, with its reference to an undefined SOMETHING—the same that was going to be caught hot.

"What's all that you've got in there—pudd'n'?" said the Policeman. This was an absurd question, and only asked to show the speaker's contempt for his subject. It didn't matter whether he was right or wrong; he was so great, and the little girl was so insignificant!

"Pieces, please! The boys said I was to."

"The boys said you was to! Next time, you tell 'em to mind their own consarns, or *I'll* let 'em know!"

"Please, Sir, you won't be there." This is what the little girl wanted to say, but speech failed half-way; sobs had the best of it. It was an additional horror that there was going to be a next time. Would things never cease getting worse and worse?

"You may chuck 'em down here—*I* give leave, bein' on duty. Some of our division wouldn't. Chuck 'em down! I'll take my chance of being reported." And the little girl was reflecting whether she ought to chuck them down, with further breakage, or lay them carefully in the gutter without, when another passer-by came out of the fog. He was acquainted with the Policeman.

"What's this young culprit after, Mr. Officer? Bad case?" said he. The reply was substantially that it was a very bad one, and that that quart would never be drunk by them as paid for it.

"Unless the child's parents comes afore it freezes. She'd better run and tell them to come quick," said the Policeman. And the young man in spectacles, whom he addressed, confirmed him with such gravity, and his brown beard looked so convincing, that the little thing really seemed to accept the suggestion. It may be Hope had revived, with a vision of her parents on their knees by the beer puddle, drinking deep. But she did not start, because the spectacles looked enquiringly at her, and their owner's mouth asked her name. This put matters on a human footing, and the sobs subsided. But they only gave place to inconsecutiveness, apparently.

"Blow your nose and speak up, little missy," said the Policeman. "Don't you hear the gentleman's asking your name?" And the child repeated her half-heard words more audibly, and less timidly.

"Please, you're the gentleman on the first floor——"

"Oh, am I? Then you're the little girl in the extensive basement with cellarage. Come along! Don't cry." And after a word with the Policeman about new-born babies being sent to fetch beer, the small delinquent accepted the protection of the young man without question, and walked off clinging to his hand.

But they had not gone many steps when she asked, "Please was she to keep the pieces or not?" This required consideration.

"That depends, Miss Extensive Basement, with Cellarage, on the quality and number of the pieces. Let's have a look."

The child detached her hand from her protector's, and extended her pinafore and its contents. He picked up the handle bit, and contemplated it.

"As an example of the Ceramic Art, Miss Basement, or Miss Cellarage—which do you prefer?"—

"Please, Sir, I'm Alicia, or Alice, for short."

"Well, Alicia, or Alice-for-short, provided that the whole of the fragments of this jug can be recovered from the pavement, I will go so far as to offer to acquire it for the sum of two shillings nett. Let us return to the scene of the accident, and endeavour to recover the missing fragments. It may be an example without interest for the collector, or it may be otherwise. Here we are on the scene of the tragedy, and there are two pieces!" There were, and apparently there were no others. These were recovered, and carried away with the rest in the pinafore.

The young gentleman in the spectacles did not offer to carry any of the pieces. He appeared to draw the line at that, on the score of dignity. Something of this appeared also, in a certain sententiousness and pomposity of speech, as a protest to empty space

against its possible misinterpretation of a good-natured action. He felt pleasure in being kind to the small six-year-old in her desolation; but was not above being glad it was a thick fog, and that the house was not far off. He hoped he would not meet a friend, especially a waggish friend. And his evil star saw its opportunity, and disappointed him on both heads by contriving that the artist on the top floor should cut him off on the doorstep.

This young gentleman had been endowed (or visited) by Providence with one of the most singular surnames that ever fell to the lot of man. It was Jerrythought. His full name was actually Jeffery Saunders Jerrythought. But then all his friends called him "Jeff." So it didn't much matter! Mr. Jerrythought was, or pretended to be, very vulgar, and was never without a pipe in his mouth.

"At it agin, 'Eath?" said he, shaking a reproachful head and closing an astute eye. "No use denyin' of it! Good job I noticed you!" And Mr. Jerrythought continued shaking his head and grinning offensively, and Alice couldn't for the life of her see why. Mr. Heath replied with an intensification of his dignified manner.

"If I understand your insinuations rightly, Mr. Jeffery Saunders Jerrythought, I may say your most offensive and unfounded insinuations——"

"Member of the Corps de Bally, 'Eath?" But Mr. Heath ignored the interruption.

"I presume you allude to this young lady, whose character, I beg to inform you, and whose reputation (I may add) are above aspersion. Her residence is in the spacious basement of this mansion, and I believe she constitutes the sole incumbrance of the worthy couple——"

"I know—Mother Gingham—looks blotchy—smells of three pennyworth of rum shrub. What's the kid been at?"

"Your description of the mother," said Mr. Heath, "appears to me to convey a correct impression." And then dropping his artificial manner he went on: "The poor little party had smashed the beer-jug and I rescued her. I suppose I shall have to see her through it. *You* know about Bristol and Crown Derby and that sort of thing? Look at the bits of the beer-jug."

Mr. Jerrythought did so, and became suddenly serious—he was never known to be really serious except about Ceramics or Chippendale furniture. He almost gave a cry of pain. "My heart alive!" said he, "I wish I'd seen this before it was smashed."

"Thought you'd say so, Jeff! But it's spilled milk now, as well as spilled beer. Fancy the female mother of this small kid

sending her out with it! Fancy her sending her out to the Pub at all, for that matter!"

"She never knew its value. Stole it probably, and considered it caretaking! Why, it's a Robert Sproddle! Look here—I tell you what! You let me have these pieces—I'll stick them together. Needn't say anything about it to Goody Peppermint." And Alice, the little girl, thought Goody Peppermint certainly need know nothing about it, as she was a stranger quite outside her circle. But Mr. Heath perceived that this was only another name for Alice's mother. He saw this because he was grown up, and he and Mr. Jeff had secret reciprocal understandings to the exclusion of a very little blue-eyed girl of six. She, however, was not too small to discern protection for herself in the tone of the conversation, although she could not analyse its components. She yielded the precious fragments of the beer-jug to Mr. Jeff, who had not improved his appearance by griping an eyeglass in one eye, which seemed to hold it so tight, Alice thought, that she could not have pulled it out if she had tried ever so. Also, she could not understand why he didn't shut his other eye. One of the teachers at the Board School had an eyeglass, and always did. She thought of this as Mr. Jerrythought went away upstairs with the precious fragments. They had been promoted to a Ceramic position in life, and were no longer a common jug.

"Now, where," said Mr. Heath, addressing Alice, "where is your excellent mother? Be good enough, Alicia, or Alice-for-short, to conduct me to your respected mother."

It was not necessary for Alice to understand, and probably she didn't. Mr. Heath knew his way down into the basement, because he was grown up, and knew things. Alice took his hand and held it tight like a little girl who didn't want to let go. Neither did she—at any rate till her respected mother had had time for an outbreak of drunken anger and its abatement. Then she would substitute maudlin admonition for castigation or threats thereof. Alice thought that if her protector could shelter her through the storm, she could deal with the admonition stage by herself.

"This is a rum place, Alice-for-short," said Mr. Heath, who seemed to talk to himself for the pleasure of doing so, without waiting for people to answer. Alice considered she was people. She was framing a question in reply to this last remark of Mr. Heath, to find out how he came to know it was rum, and not gin. For she at once connected his adjective with a pervading bottle. But he went on too quickly for her to organise speech.

"Blackbeetles probably abound. Mice are no doubt of frequent

occurrence. I hear a cat, with which something appears to have disagreed. If I might suggest, Alice-for-short, you had better recommend your cat to eschew blackbeetles and addict herself solely to mouse. I should like to live down here if I was a mouse."

Alice wished to point out that he wasn't one. But she also wanted to say what for? So she missed saying either, and only stared, while the speaker continued:

"I should frequent that safe, which appears to consist almost entirely of means of ingress for persons anxious for the remains of a cold dumpling, and a most discouraging rib of beef. That safe's mission would seem to be to supply a stimulus to larceny by suggestions of insecurity. I trust I make myself fully understood."

Not fully, apparently. But it didn't seem important to either. Alice's next remark was to the effect that she could hear mother, in there. Mother wasn't a complicated noise of water beginning to come in and losing its temper—that was clear! So she was some lesser noise, veiled and hidden, but audible by members of her family.

"Mother's in there, asleep. Please can't you hear her?"

"Perhaps she had better be waked?"

"Please I'm frightened." But there was no need; for the sleeper, whose snores had been the subject of this conversation, woke with a jerk and came out in response to a tap at the door, which Mr. Heath had thought his best way to announce himself. The small hand that held his tightened with apprehension and the little thing clung to him for safety, as her unsavoury parent stood revealed. She suggested, but came short of, the Seven Dials, old St. Giles' type—the sort that used to wear a red handkerchief round its neck and no head covering. She addressed her daughter as a little Devil, and wanted to know where she had been idling and prancing round.

It certainly was singular, thought Mr. Heath to himself, that any premises whatever should have got entrusted to such a caretaker. Was this the person who had been mentioned to him when the last downstairs tenants cleared out and carried with them a housekeeper whom he had allowed to undertake his attendance (outside her normal sphere), as a worthy successor who it was desirable on all accounts that Mr. 'Eath should be properly seen to? This is literal reporting. And this housekeeper, by whom this mother of the blue-eyed little girl had been recommended, had described her as decent and sober, and had dwelt upon the good-

ness of her 'art. She had stood at the fount with six of her thirteen children, and had helped bury three. "It sounded," said Mr. Heath to his sister Peggy, when he told her of the interview, "exactly as if she was making a merit of burying three of the children alive, in order to reduce their number." Anyhow, she must have seen a good deal of the family, and may have had some means of knowing of a decency and sobriety which certainly did not speak for itself to the passer-by, as the mother paused in a pounce of vengeance on her small daughter. "It was the glare of my spectacles brought her up short," said Heath to Mr. Jerrythought afterwards. "Spectacles have a strong moral influence. That lens you pretend to use and can't really see through, is a fund of Immorality in itself. Your appearance, Mr. Jerrythought, is dissolute."

"And what did the hag do then?" said Mr. Jerrythought, who didn't seem dissatisfied with his friend's account of him.

"She climbed down and cringed and snivelled and abased herself. But I saw Alice would catch it after I was gone if I didn't soften matters down with cash. So I brought remuneration in cleverly, by a side-wind." This was the case, for the alleged hag having taken up the position that Hallice never was sent for the beer (except this once) and only now because she was that anxious to be allowed to it, that her mother's tender heart had softened, and she had allowed its weakness to overcome her better judgment.

"And somethin' within me," said the good woman, "seemed to murmur in my ear that that child was too young to be trusted. But I give way, bein' that easy-goin' and indulgent." And Alice detected another something in her mother's eye which she interpreted as, "Confirm me and I will make concessions. Suggest doubts and you shall be maltreated." So she struck in, in a small tremulous voice, "Please it was me asted."

"In course you asted. Likewise the expression you says was 'Marmy dear,' you says, quite out and courageous like, 'Marmy dear, you let your little Hallice go and fetch father's beer, and save you trapesin'.' And Mr. Kavanagh is that particular about the child that I will tell you, Sir, and concealing nothing give my honest word, I had my doubts at the time, and said so to the milk, where we have an account and settle weekly. But Mr. Kavanagh I kept in ignorance, which he remains."

"I suppose you're Mrs. Kavanagh then," said Mr. Heath, with incredulity in his thoughtful countenance. He spoke in the tone of one who selects a truth from a heap of falsehoods, but isn't concerned with the quality of the residuum.

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"Hannah Kavanagh, Sir, by your leave, and christened accordingly. And I was just tiding round to get a little order like, when on the sudden it came upon me, what an easy two minutes it was to the Clarence's Head, and Hallice gone a quarter of an hour. And I do assure you, Sir, my 'art sank within me to think what might happen to that child and remain unknown. And I had just took hold of my bonnet and shawl, when I caught the sound of some one knocking at the door. And it was yourself, Sir." Mrs. Kavanagh ended up with an implication of successful dramatic climax.

"Well, Mrs. Kavanagh, Alice has had a mishap and broken the beer-jug. It wasn't her fault, but mine. And I consider compensation due, and shall be inclined to be liberal on two conditions."

"Which were, Sir?" And Mrs. Kavanagh indulged in an intentional cough behind her hand, which conveyed an idea of prospective bargaining—of seeing how the land lay, at any rate.

"One," said Mr. Heath, taking his hand from Alice to use its forefinger as an indicator of numbers on the forefinger of his other hand. Alice transferred her grasp to his coat-pocket flap. "One that Alice shall remain unspanked—if I may use an expression familiar to my infancy." Mrs. Kavanagh exploded.

"Well, of all the artful little hussies, I never! To say such a thing of her own mother!"—

"And," said Mr. Heath afterwards to Mr. Jerrythought, "I had my hands full to quiet down the old cat. However, we did get on to the second condition, which was that this jug or its remnants should become my property on payment of the sum of three and tenpence-halfpenny."

"How did you arrive at it, 'Eath?"

"Three and sixpence for the jug, and fourpence-halfpenny for the spillings. It appeared that a person of condition—who was held up as a real gentleman in contrast to myself—had offered three shillings. So I went sixpence better, and overlooked its present condition."

"It's worth all of a guinea, smashed as it is." And Mr. Jeff gloated over the dismembered pieces as they lay on his studio table. "Why, it's a Sproddle—a Robert Sproddle too. Don't think much of Ebenezer Sproddle. You'll find him—ah! and signed examples, too!—in any bric-a-brac shop. But Robert!"—And speechlessness alone coped with the value of a Robert Sproddle. Mr. Heath stretched out his hand. "Where's the guinea, Jeff?" said he.

"I'll put it down to the account, Charley," replied Mr. Jeff, insolently. "It'll go to your credit. An item of one pound will appear simultaneously to *my* credit—for jining up. Nothing but the best Diamond Cement will be employed. Which of course is dear, owing to the price of diamonds."

"You're a swindler, Mr. Jerrythought. That's like you and the Latakia. 'To Latakia one and fourpence' on one side; and on the other, 'To purchasing and paying for Latakia one and fourpence. Total, two and eightpence.' "

"That's all fair. It's double entry. You make your accounts balance, and then you add 'em all together, and charge up the total."

"But I don't see why I shouldn't pay you half and you pay me half."

"Because I got it on tick from the scrumptious girl at the 'baccy shop."

"Yes, because she knew I should pay for it."

"No, Charles! Because she is in love with your humble but deserving servant, whose attractions for the only sex which differs are a bye-word with the aristocracy." . . .

And with conversation of this sort, *ad infinitum,* these young men beguiled the time! For the fog, which of course continued—fogs do—made work quite impossible, and there was nothing for it but to chatter, as above, and smoke the Latakia.

If you should have an impression that the first-floor Studio with a high north light, arbitrarily forced up as an addition to the middle window, and the sky-lighted room in the attics, where Mr. Jeff was mending his jug, and the above conversation took place—if, I say, you have an impression that the apartments were not bee-hives, in respect of the work done therein, you will not be far wrong. In fact, a sense of impatience at the impossibility of work was one of the few tributes to the Goddess of Industry our young friends ever paid her. During a thick fog, they were quite convinced of the work they would have done had there been no fog. And the work they hadn't done when there was none assumed an impressive actuality to their imaginations which increased with its density. By the time there was a halo round the gas-jets, and the confirmed Londoner, with a voice like a mad dog's choking bark, was beginning to think it time to justify fog on the score of its antiseptic qualities, each of these youths was picturing himself in his own mind as a monumental example of thwarted enthusiasm, a potential Van Eyck or Memling straining at the leash in the pursuit of elaborations, cruelly hindered from assidu-

ous and determined effort by a *force-majeure* trying to the temper but heroically endured. This hallucination disappeared with the return of daylight; and the only consolation was that it was too late now, and you couldn't do any real work in a couple of hours, and for your part you might just as well shut up! And you did so accordingly.

But it was a jolly life for two young men in the early twenties, and they enjoyed it thoroughly and called it Bohemian. Very likely it was, but of course if one hasn't lived in Bohemia, one doesn't know what amount of satisfaction the inhabitants of that country get from buying rolls and butter and herrings and chestnuts and sardines and other small cookabilities, and carrying them home oneself to irregular meals, and giving most of them away in the end to Italian models. Or from sleeping at their Studio when (as in Mr. Heath's case) a home awaits them which they spend every alternate evening or more at. One has to accept the character given of that province by those who profess to know, and hope that all its inhabitants are under five-and-twenty and full of hope and buoyancy like the two young men of this narrative; and not like ourselves, who take this opportunity of recording, as the view of an old fogy, that we personally much prefer the comforts of a home, and that nothing would induce us now to be a Bohemian on any human consideration.

Anyhow, there they are in the story, for better or worse as may be. And one is the occupant of the old state drawing-room of this old Soho house in a thick fog, and the other in a thick fog and the garrets. And so far as the outsider can see, neither does anything except laugh and sing and smoke, and sometimes, when there is no fog, pretend to do a little work. Perhaps they will improve as time goes on. If so, the story will show it.

CHAPTER II

OF ALICE'S BELONGINGS AND HOW THEY FELL OUT. ALSO HOW THE FIRST-FLOOR CAME DOWNSTAIRS

ALICIA KAVANAGH, who was Alice or Hallice for short, was what Mr. Jeff called her, a few days after the incident of the broken jug. He said she was a new 'un, and was more your sort, Charley, than his. This was true, as his sort was considerably older, usually, than himself—generally taller—always of a particular type of which the young tobacco lady he had mentioned was a sample. It may be remarked here that he seemed to take a sort of pride in, as it were, tuning down his pronunciation and phraseology to the key of a Society he himself had selected. It was sometimes a little difficult to make out whether he was playing with his h's in order to offend the fastidious, or whether he couldn't aspirate them if he chose. His comment on Hallice, with an ostentatious stress on the initial, was in reply to his friend's remark that we mustn't lose sight of Miss Kavanagh.

Miss Kavanagh was new enough as to years, but her experience was old enough and sad enough to make her feel, when she let go Mr. Heath's hand, that she was slipping back into a pit that a beneficent being in spectacles had kept her out of, or out of the worst of, for a few minutes. It was a short interlude, but long enough to make her think how nice it would be if there was always the gentleman on the first floor, and not quite so much of mother. But time passed, and Hallice sat small and forlorn, and wept when not at school, or sent on an errand, in the gruesome basement with extensive cellarage. It was difficult to define where the cellarage ended and the basement that was other than cellarage began; both were so dark and damp and smelt so of varieties of decay. There was more fungus, no doubt, in the coal-cellar and the dust-'ole than in the pantry or the 'ousekeeper's room, but even that was rather a matter of guesswork, and you couldn't really tell without a light. And there was none—at least, it was only when mother lighted the Paraffin lamp you could see anything at all. For Hallice had so far had no experience of what sunshine could reveal in the basement of number forty, as she and her father and mother had only took the place in November; the late tenants who were a Danc-

ing-School having cleared out in the middle of the quarter, on the chance of new parties wanting to come in before quarter-day, and its being possible to exact a fraction of rent from them. On which accounts the Dancing-School had sanctioned bills in the window, though six weeks unexpired; and Mr. Kavanagh, a most respectable journeyman tailor, but working at home at present, with his wife and one daughter, were lending plausibility to the statement that particulars could be had of Messrs. Lettsom & Tennant, the Agents, and also of the Caretaker on the premises. So poor Miss Kavanagh passed her small new life, mostly weeping, in the darkness and the fungus growths, cut off from upstairs by a swing-door at the top of the kitchen flight, and unsuspected by the world above.

This was a cruel door and made a great difference to Hallice. For it was very heavy, and she couldn't push it open to come back if she went out without leave, at least without great danger of tumbling suddenly downstairs. So she dared not go out when she did not see security of official recognition on her return. Few of us, it is to be hoped, know exactly what it feels like to call timidly for admission to a mother who will slap us when admitted, for being out of bounds without a passport. If Hallice could have made her father hear, he would have come to let her in with no worse Nemesis for her than a half-heard whimper as he shuffled back to the only light room in the basement—where, however, there wasn't light enough to fine-draw, even at its best, at this time of year. But this room was far away, at the end of Heaven knows what stone-paved passages, and mysterious recesses and strange bulkheads with no assignable purpose, and at least one black entry unexplored by man from which spectres might be anticipated. Besides there was always water coming in and making noise enough to drown your voice,—so Goody Peppermint said,—and if it wasn't coming in the Company suffered frightfully from moist râles and wheezing in its pipes, which was nearly as bad. So that, what with one thing and what with another, Hallice passed most of her time underground. There was the Infant School of course, but Schools don't count. What one would like, at six, when one is getting quite a great girl, would be to get out and see the world. Especially, in Hallice's case, the great big upstairs room where the Dancing-School had been. She had just peeped in there, and seen that there were the remains of paintings on the walls, and it seemed to her a palace of delights. So, though she was new, she felt old. And she felt older still after the beer-jug adventure, and at the end of three days had quite made up her mind the gentleman on

the first floor would go, and she would never see him again. She felt that she and the old house were about the same age, and that one was as forgotten and deserted as the other.

But Hallice was, as I have said, six, and the house was two hundred, or thereabouts. Now, Hallice's kitten was really young; say five weeks. It was very intelligent for all that, and could sympathise with all her troubles; at least, with a little interpretation. Its owner was very liberal on this point.

"To hear that child a-telling to that cat," said her mother. "As if she was a 'Eathen, *I* say."

This remark about Hallice's profane communications was made by the mother to the father of the latter while waiting for the completion of the cooking of a Finnan haddock for supper. For even Mr. Kavanagh stopped waxing thread, and sticking on trouser-buttons, and putting on a patch very nearly of one colour, so that you could really hardly tell, when there was any dinner or supper going. Sometimes there was none, for all he had given his wife the money for it. This time there was some, and Hallice was going to be giv' some if she was good.

"Don't see what harm it does *you*," said Mr. Kavanagh in reply to his wife. And then, having found an idea to harp upon, he was able to do so, and did it in a peevish, complaining minor key. "*You* ain't bound to listen. You've got your own business to mind, I suppose. Ain't there nothing else wants attending to? Supposing I was to cut in and listen to what folks was saying, who'd do my work for me? My hands are full enough without that." And so on, until his wife pulled him up abruptly.

"Now! I don't want a jawbation," said the pleasant lady. "Take and eat your supper, and be thankful." But Mr. Kavanagh, to his credit, before flying at his food, made a double motion of his head and thumb towards Hallice and said, "The child——"

"The child's plenty greedy enough, without *you!*" This rejoinder came very tartly. But her father's appeal led to Hallice getting her allowance of the kippered haddock while it was hot. Also to a fair share of a new half-quartern loaf, very black on the under-crust; though her mother scraped the salt butter over it much too thin for Alice's expectations. If her father hadn't given her some off of his own slice, it wouldn't have been no butter at all in the manner of speaking. Goody Peppermint did not contest the point. She was turning her attention to a means at her disposal, afforded by supper, of affirming indirectly her habitual abstention from spirits, and at the same time resorting to them under public sanction.

You know the illusion habitual tipplers are subject to, that each appeal to the bottle is an exceptional occurrence, and a departure from sobriety? They admit the departure, but affirm the sobriety. Mrs. Kavanagh's life was made up of such departures, and by forgetting all the previous ones and ignoring all those to come, she honestly achieved a belief in her own practical abstention from liquor. She really hardly left herself interims to abstain in. There were, however, special opportunities that she cherished of affirming her normal self-restraint by a parade of their exceptional character. Breakfast, dinner, and supper yielded the luxury of a clear conscience, coupled with the public exhibition of the rum-bottle; and as she sat watching her husband correcting the shortcomings of Alice's piece of bread-and-butter, her mind was gradually approaching a bottle of rum in the corner cupboard, whose door stood suggestively on the jar, almost within reach of her hand.

To broach a topic of this sort, you affect faintness, smile in a sickly way, and sigh as one accustomed to conceal suffering. By doing so you provoke enquiry, and procure a fulcrum. In response to her husband's "Why don't you take your supper?" Goody Peppermint, who had done all these things with a view to this question, replied, "No airpetite!" She emphasised this by laying her hand across the outside of her interior, on which her husband began a groan, and cut it off short in the middle.

"Get your mother out the bottle out o' the cupboard, and let's 'a' done with it," said he. He was familiar with her treatment of this subject, and resented its hypocrisy. He knew the rum-bottle would come out of that cupboard sooner or later. This time it came out sooner, and there was no humbugging round over it. Then Goody Peppermint felt better, and could touch a little supper. Hallice felt no objection to anything that produced family good-humour. Presently her mother went back to the pre-prandial topic.

"You don't need to be that tempersome about it, Kairv'nagh, and me to be took up sharp before the child. Cats is cats. And when cats is talked to about Princes and sim'lar, a child's mother has a right to ask, and ask I do, accordin'. Who was it I heard you tellin' about, child? Prince Summun. You speak up and tell your father, afore I get up and shake you."

"Prince Spectacles," said Hallice, timidly. "Poothy knows." Her father, who at his best had never had a romantic turn, and had now no mind for anything outside piece-work, and his natural desire to murder the persons who employed him on it, did

not rise to enquiring what Pussy knew, but only looked at his daughter in a weak-eyed manner, and said, "Ho—ho!" He seemed a good deal more interested in the haddock than in Prince Spectacles, whoever he was, and did not pursue the subject of his wife's supper, or absence of it. It had taken the form of rum, and adhered to it. Conversation remained dormant until supper was finished—which meant in this case until everything on the table was eaten, a very different thing sometimes from the disappearance of inclination for more. Alice's father then turned down the gas, which was flaring, and pulled out a cherry-wood pipe, which he cleaned into his plate, and subjected to perforation with a wire, to make it draw. But long as was the pause, and much as was the rum her mother consumed in it, Alice knew the talk would go on from where it had stopped. And in fact it was resumed exactly as if only a few seconds had passed.

"You don't jine in, seemin'ly," said her mother. "Then Hallice can hardly be expected." The bottle was by now beginning to tell on Goody Peppermint, as Hallice saw by a moist gleam in the eye that rolled round towards her as its owner drank her tea and rum, or rather rum and tea; and she anticipated an affectionate stage, which would have been welcome in itself but for an anticipation of other stages that would probably follow. Indeed had Hallice been asked when she was fondest of her mother, she would probably have said when she was snoring. There was security in her snore.

"She'll tell her own mother. Won't she, ducky?" This was accompanied with an alluring smile, which Hallice seemed shy of rising to. "Come and tell Mammy about Prince—Prince——"

"She *said* Spectacles," said her father briefly. "It ain't a name." Alice had been resolving to take her parents into her confidence, but this was so unsympathetic a way of treating the subject that she changed her mind and retired into her own soul. Never mind! She would tell Pussy all this too; only let her wait till mother was asleep, and father at work.

"Which leads to suppose," said the former to the latter, in reply to his comment, "that the first-floor front is the child's illusion." This was a vaguely selected word; of serviceable ambiguity, it seemed, for the speaker explained, "It illudes to Mr. 'Eath, on the first floor; I'll thank him not to put such ideas in the child's 'ead. A-stuffin' of her young mind with a lot of noospaper nonsense!"—

A sudden aggressive tone, not warranted by what had gone before, belonged to the growing influence of rum.

"There's worse nonsense than Princes," said Mr. Kavanagh. And Alice thought so too. But her mother, after her very short stage of good-humour, was feeling round towards a quarrelsome one. "She's *my* child, anyhow, Mr. K.," said she, with abrupt hostility in her voice. It was thickening, for in order to put an exact quantity of rum in her tea (in accordance with the advice of a doctor, whom Alice had never seen), she had poured too much into a tumbler, to be above the cuts and see the quantity plain, and had then, after supplying the tea, forgotten herself and swallowed the remainder raw.

"Never mind!" she had said, "a drop in season is worth a Dook's ransom."

Alice's father, who, it may be, was getting more talkative after a corresponding allowance of beer, appeared irritated at his wife's claim to property in Alice. "I don't see how you bring that in," said he. "Who said she wasn't?" And Alice thereon interpreted her mother's statement as meaning that she was her mother's child but not her father's—regarded as personal property of course; for no other relation of child to parent came into her small calculations. She ascribed her father's irritation, and all that followed, to his resentment at being so excluded from rights in herself; also she was entirely in sympathy with him—in fact, considered she was much more his child than her mother's. But she foresaw there would be a bad evening about it; for she divided her evenings into bad and good, and always knew which was coming.

"Who said she wasn't?" Mr. Kavanagh repeated, with growing asperity in his voice. And as no one had said that Alice was not her child, Goody Peppermint, who was perfectly ready for war, and did not care what *casus belli* was agreed upon, sought for it in another quarter.

"If they had 'a' said so, you'd 'a' sat still and listened to 'em!" No response came; the pipe had to be carefully filled with some strong tobacco—Negro-head or Cavendish—and this absorbed attention. The woman kept silence till it was being puffed at, and then resumed the attack. She seemed to have been laying in ammunition.

"Sittin' blinkin' at the fire, like a howl! And as to raisin' a finger to protect your own wife, not you! If I'd 'a' married elsewhere, he'd 'a' stood between me and insult." Her husband was sucking in satisfaction with his first whiffs, and it produced good-humour.

"Who's he?" said he with so much of jocularity in his voice that Alice felt hope dawn. But alas! It only made Goody Pepper-

mint worse. Alice couldn't for the life of her see why the next attack should be so much more vigorous. After all, her father had only asked a reasonable question. She herself wanted to know who "elsewhere" was. Her mother's reply came like a suddenly unmasked battery.

"*Not* a cowardly grinnin' hape, sitting sniggerin' at the fire. Yes! *I* know you, Samuel Kairv'nagh. I knew you when I married you, the worse the luck. And it's been kep' up to, all along. And thirteen children I've brought you, and any one of them (barring five dead) you might sit by and hear your own wife and their mother put upon, and you not have the courage to so much as exporstulate!" This was a lucky word, and saved an appearance of weakness from defective syntax. But the speaker lost ground through its discovery gratifying her vanity. She paused to enjoy the rhetorical triumph, and the pause called attention to the fact that it received no reply. For Alice's father was pretty well used to this sort of thing at this particular stage of his wife's intoxication. He had now settled down to smoke, and intended to smoke. His wife for her part had determined to irritate him, and the more he said nothing, the more she persisted in her efforts. It was a trial of strength between his patience, and her power of postponing the maudlin stage which was sure to come next. He knew she would reach it and subside into stupefaction if only he could hold out long enough. But the enemy had got some terrible repeating guns; particularly the reiteration of his full name, and the allusion to his nervous affection of the eyes, no doubt the result of too much small stitching in a bad light.

"Ho yes—Samuel Kairv'nagh! You can smoke and sit a-blinkin' at the fire. There's no amount of proarvocation touches you, Mr. K. Nothin' won't never spirit you up! A poor, mean, spirited man from the beginnin'!"—

Alice had a sort of hope at this point that if it was carried *nem.-con.* her mother would begin to die down. Her father kept obdurately silent, and the hope increased. But there is no steadiness in drink, and after a moment's concession to the coming drowsiness, the flame broke out afresh; to die altogether next time, said Hope. Besides, no doubt Kavanagh, though silent, grinned perceptibly. Absolute torpidity gives no vantage ground, but a grin was not safe. The weak point was seized in a moment.

"Yes—Mr. K.! That was what I said. A cowardly grinnin' hape, not a man! Thankful I'd have been never to come acrost you. I'd have been another woman. I say nothin' about who! But your brother Jonathan, though one leg shorter than the other, had

a good 'art—and if I'd 'a' married him, I say it would have been a long time before he'd set on one side of the fire and snigger at his own lawful wife afore their child, like a baboon would in a menargerie."

"You go to bed, Alice. Hook it!" said her father. But Alice hesitated before her mother's threatening eye and raised finger.

"You dare to go to bed afore I tell you! *You* go obeying your father and disregardin' your mother, and a nice basting you'll get to-morrow when you come back from school——"

"No, you won't; I'll see square. You hook it!" And Alice hooked it, her hopes for the morrow resting on the probability of getting away to her father's workroom when she came back from school at midday.

The gas-lamp at the street corner was bright enough to shine into Alice's sleeping-den against the front hairey. It was a pantry undefined, that looked as if it would have liked to be a cellar, but couldn't quite recollect how. It was close to a rich preserve of cats; a cul-de-sac which must have been contrived for their special use by the Architect, as no one else's interest had been studied, and indeed access was forbidden by a strong gateway placed arbitrarily across the hairey, and crowned with a cheval-de-frise that a sparrow could not have perched on with comfort. There was on the other side a cellar-door visible from Alice's window when you spitted on the bottom pane and rubbed the grime off with your frock. And this cellar was not the coal-cellar nor the dust-hole, nor yet the wine-cellar because that was in the house, to be dry; nor was it in any way reconcilable with human purpose. It was a subterranean nameless horror; a place your imagination shrank from doing justice to in respect of cobwebs and fungi. It was an object of interest to Alice nevertheless, because wondering what there was in it supplied food to fancy, and was an inexhaustible resource. Just think! It must have been almost for ever since it was closed, and what might not come to light in the way of buried treasure, if it was opened now. But then, of course, there was the other side to the picture. Who could say how many goblins or hideous vampires might not be kept under restraint by that thick-rusted chain and padlock, which no key could open; even if one could be found—and this was impossible in the nature of things. On the whole it was safer it should remain shut, and no risks should be run in search of diamond carcanets that had got overlooked by their owners, or secret passages communicating with the cellars of the Bank of England. Alice was not altogether a

stranger to Romance and its possibilities in this direction; for, though she had not read the Arabian Nights, she had had read to her, at the Sunday School, a beautiful Tract called the 'Buried Treasure,' which was fascinating in spite of the mean way in which its Moral was sprung on the unsuspecting reader, and utilised for his confusion. There might be, so Alice thought this evening as she hung over the window-sill to get a look at the gas-lamp before going to bed, some such Buried Treasure in that vault, which would turn out a substantial reality; and not a corrective medicine for one's natural profanity, the incurability of which may be said to have been announced by the label on the bottle.

Poor little Miss Kavanagh! She needed something to dry her eyes this evening. She couldn't even dwell upon the gas-lamp and the sunny side of the mysterious door's possibilities, because of the cold. So she got to bed as quick as ever she could—and it really was very quick—to get the advantage of all the heat she had brought away from that beautiful fire that her parents were still in full enjoyment of. If it was possible to enjoy anything during a heavy mitraille of angry recrimination and reproach! For Alice could hear, all through the time it took to get the bed lukewarm enough to go to asleep, an almost continuous current of abuse from her mother, and an occasional interjection from her father, rendered less articulate each time by the growing influence of a whole quart. The storm rose and fell, and rose and fell, for what seemed hours, and Alice lay and listened for a lull. Then one came, and the hiss and gurgle of a waterpipe burst in the frost got the upper hand, and Alice thought a calm was impending. . . . Alas!—not this time.

But the bed was beginning to get warmer, and as it warmed Alice's sobs slowed down and she went into an uneasy half-sleep, penetrated by a sense of her mother's volubility afar, and an increasing consciousness of emphasis in her father's thickened speech. She could not distinguish words, but was aware of a certain phrase by its accents in constant repetition. It was one she had before heard her mother use to her father. Nine of him went to a man it seemed; and she did not understand it. But he seemed to accept it as having a meaning, and an irritating one. Alice was in terror lest she should hear a blow. For she remembered how once he had struck her mother when stung to ferocity by this very same unexplained expression. To be sure on that occasion her mother had snapped her fingers close in his face; and also being very drunk had called him a sniffing fish, with an adjective prefixed which did not seem to go well with fishes. Perhaps

she wouldn't this time. Perhaps they would make it up and go to bed.

Sleep overcame Alice, and the voices ceased or were merged in a dream—a dream in which there was something that had to be grappled with, and Alice had to do it. But the difficulty was that no one knew whether it had to be stopped, or turned in another direction, or cleaned up, or took off of the hob, or read aloud to the Teacher at Sunday School without being silly and giggling—for no one knew in the dream what it was. All that was certain was that it went on and on, and was bad. And it went on for hours and hours, until quite suddenly (without changing its nature in the least) it became a voice speaking down the area. It was Alice that had changed, and become a frightened little girl sitting up in bed in the dark, waked abruptly by the airey-bell, which had been pulled harder and rung louder than any bell within human experience.

"What's all this here row at this time o' night?" said the voice without. And Alice jumped out of the bed—it was so nice and warm, and such a pity to!—and pulled a rag-stopper out of a broken pane of glass to answer through. And what she said was that please it was f-father and m-mother. She almost always said please. But she could not hear any row.

"Well—please you come up and open this here street door!"

Alice was too frightened to obey, not because she heard her parents quarrelling, but because she could hear no noise at all—only a cat! Was it a cat? No—it wasn't. What was it? Was it mother? A sort of moaning—she was afraid it was mother. She was so terrified she jumped back into bed again, and drove her fingers tight into her ears. Then she wanted to hear if the moaning was still there—or perhaps, after all, it *was* a cat. She uncorked her ears, keeping her fingers just outside, to put back at a moment's notice. But a new voice came in the street from overhead, and she settled not to put them back.

"Good-evening, Officer," said Mr. Heath. He had opened his front window and looked out. It was only the kitchen windows that were stuck to, or had no sashes. "Do I understand," he continued, "that that was a client of yours shouting 'murder' just now?"

"Can't say yet awhile, Sir. It's in the house. It 'ud be as well seen to. P'r'aps you'll step down and open the door?"

Alice heard the first-floor shut his window down, while the policeman slapped his gloves to keep warm. She was conscious that one or more passers-by stopped from curiosity, and that the police-

man told at least one enquirer that it warn't any concern of his. One seemed offensively inquisitive, for the policeman said to him, "I'd move you on, young feller, if there warn't any other job on hand." Then she heard the street-door open, and the policeman come in, and then only comparison of notes by outsiders. They accepted the account of the first man up, who knew no more than any one else about the matter, that it was a burglar in hidin', beyont the chimley-stack on the roof, and all crossed the way to see as much of the capture as possible.

Alice slipped out of her den with the silence of bare feet. She slipped past the room where she had left her parents quarrelling, past the moaning unexplained, past its cause she dared not guess at, and up the kitchen stairs. She passed the policeman, who flashed his searchlight on her without comment, and went straight, as to a haven of protection, to the hand of the young artist who followed him.

"My word!" said he; "it's poor little Miss Kavanagh. Come up off the cold stone." And Alice felt her small self picked up by a strong arm and carried down behind the policeman, whose mysterious bull's-eye light sent a long ray ahead in search of tricks of ground and human ambushes, if such existed. They were approaching the moaning. It was not a cat. Alice could not speak. She could only hold tight to her protector. She and Pussy knew how good he was.

"You can look in and report, Officer," said he; "I'll keep the kid back a minute."

"Quite right you are, Sir," said the policeman, and walked straight along the passage, flashing his light as he went. Alice turned quite sick with terror. Mr. Heath put her down on the ground, and then, taking off his loose smoking-coat, wrapped her in it, and picked her up again as before. Alice's father was not bad to her, like her mother, but he did not know how to do this sort of thing. Evidently it was an attribute of first-floors and spectacles. Oh dear! How long the policeman was!

"Sh—sh—sh—sh—sh! Miss Kavanagh dear. Don't you make a noise. I want to hear."—And Alice made the bravest of efforts, and choked back her sobs. Mr. Heath listened. When would the policeman come back? At last he came.—"Drink!" said he, briefly. —"I don't recommend taking the child into the room, but do as you think." Mr. Heath asked a question under his breath. The reply was: "Can't say, I'm sure, Sir. You can't tell which is drink, and which is the effect of the injury—bad scalp wound on the head. Surgeon must have the case at once. Perhaps you'll be

so good as to remain here and see the man doesn't go off. It's a pity our surgeon's no nearer."

"There's a surgeon two doors off."

"I believe so, Sir. But I might be exceeding my instructions. My Divisional will be round in less than a quarter of an hour——"

"I'll be responsible. Cut along to Dr. Taylor at No. 37, and say it's from me—Mr. Charles Heath——"

"Quite right you are again, Sir." And off went the officer, much relieved.

"Oh, you poor little kid, how you do shake!" said Mr. Heath, and Alice replied, as he pulled the coat closer round her, "I'm not c-cold," and then followed on with explanation—"It's because of m-mother. May I please go?"—

There was a footstep behind them on the stone stair. It was the top attics; that is to say, Mr. Jeff. He had on a Turkish fez, with a tassel; and Alice, in all her acute misery, was still able to wonder why this was right and reasonable. For, as he was a grown-up gentleman, and a friend of Mr. Heath, it never occurred to her to doubt it. He had come down, hearing an imbroglio seething below stairs, to see what the matter was. Mr. Heath managed to tell him ever so quick, without Alice hearing exactly what was said, and finished up with, "What should you say?"

Mr. Jeff decided that a minute had better be waited, while he went in and had a look, himself. This showed Alice that it was under consideration whether she should be taken into the room, where the moaning went on just the same. And Alice ascribed to him mere curiosity on his own account, and thought him selfish. In a moment or two he came back, looking pale in the light of a gas-jet, at the stair-foot, the policeman had lighted just before he left. He came back shaking his head, all the length of the passage. He didn't speak. Mr. Heath spoke first.

"What's the man about?" said he.

"Kneeling down beside her. Seems in a great taking. Says God forgive him, and all that sort of thing."

"Did you speak to him?"

"I said he should have thought of all that before. Do you think the child understands?" And Alice heard a reply in a half-whisper which she thought was, "Don't let's frighten her." Suddenly she broke out and began to struggle to get away into the room.

"Oh, poor father—oh, poor father!" It came out mixed with despairing sobs. "Oh, please, Sir, let me down to go to father."

"Poor little Alice-for-short!" said Mr. Heath. "You promise not to be frightened, chick, and we'll go to father."

"Please, I'm not frightened," said Alice. And Mr. Jeff said, "P'r'aps you're right, 'Eath. Cut on!" and followed them into the kitchen.

Heath saw what he had been led to anticipate. On the ground kneeling was the man; in front of him on her back with her head in a pool of blood, the woman, known to the two young men as Goody Peppermint. Once—twice—the man stretched out his hand and touched the prostrate mass before him. There was no response or movement. Was she still moaning? Even that was doubtful. Then presently the man turned round to the two spectators, and said in a collected voice, apparently under the impression that some question had been asked: "Yes—gentlemen—my wife." Neither said a word. Then he said, in exactly the same tone: "Is my little girl there?" and Mr. Heath said, "Yes, Alice is here," and let Alice go down and run to her father. "Ought she to kiss me?" said he.

The two young men glanced at each other. Heath caught the drift of his question. "Why, God bless me, my good fellow," said he, "you haven't killed your wife."

"You think not, Sir?" said Kavanagh—not as an enquiry, but as a statement of fact. "May I go to the bell?" For at this moment the wire of the street-door bell was heard trying to rouse it to action, and after a pause succeeded so effectually that it seemed as if it would never leave off, having been started contrary to its wishes.

"It's the officer back, with the surgeon," said Mr. Heath. "Just you trickle upstairs, Jeff, and open the door to 'em."

And Mr. Jeff departed to do so. Mr. Heath's courageous voice and odd phrases were a great comfort to Alice.

"Your wife's all right, man alive!" said he. "Wait till the doctor's put on a plaster, and she's had time to get sober, and she'll be as right as a trivet."

"That is how it is, Sir," said Alice's father in the same mechanical way. He left his hand in Alice's and she felt how cold it was as she kissed it. "Time for her to get sober. That's how it is." Then he said, dropping his voice, "They'll take me. May I get to my room a minute—only just down the passage—afore they come?" It seemed such a reasonable request, and after all it was addressed to a very young man. One with more experience would have accompanied him. Heath reflected that the applicant could not get out without repassing the door, and decided that he would be safe enough. No other contingencies crossed his mind.

"You come here to the fire, Miss Kavanagh," said he, and raked together its remains for Alice to sit by.

Then a grisly dream, to be remembered for life, passed before the eyes of the frightened child. There seemed to be a great deal of policeman in the room; more than was at all necessary, Alice thought. One of them came and drew water from the boiler close to her, and she remembered how she had stood there to turn off the tap the minute the kettle was full up, and how that kettle supplied the tea her mother put her rum in, or put into her rum. Meanwhile the other policemen and the doctor gentleman who came back with them, carrying a leather case, got her mother up on a chair; and then the latter got a pair of scissors out of the case and began cutting her mother's hair. She did not groan at any rate—only breathed heavily; that was good, so far! Then the doctor began washing her head, and then cut her hair again. Mr. Heath was holding her head up.

"A little more over this way," said the doctor. "Thank you very much." And went on cutting the hair. Alice looked away, feeling sick. When she mustered courage to look round again, she wondered what on earth the doctor could be about. It looked as if he was sewing up her mother's head, like father did coats and trousers. Could she hear what he was saying to Mr. Heath?

"Probably saved her life; that is, if her life *is* saved," said he; "I can't say about that just yet. But the hammer struck aslant and the scalp gave, and took off the force of the blow. If it had come straight it would have killed on the spot. A little more this way. Thank you very much. That's how such a great piece of scalp was lying free." Of course Alice did not understand most of this; but she understood some.

The first policeman came back into the kitchen from somewhere. He spoke to Mr. Heath.

"He's quiet enough in there," said he. "He ain't going to make a bolt. Besides, there's nowhere to get out at. And if there was, there's one of our men outside."

But he wasn't going to make a bolt.

Mr. Heath looked very pale, and very sorry, thought Alice. Mr. Jeff stood by, and was of no use. But he showed his good will by jerks of incipient action, indicating readiness to help, and having his good intentions always disappointed by some one else anticipating him and doing what was wanted instead. However, he got an opportunity in time, as the doctor presently said, "I wonder if it's come. This is just finished." And he ran upstairs to see.

"There's none too much life in her," said the doctor, with his

finger on her mother's pulse. "But of course she'll be better in the Infirmary than here." And then Mr. Jeff came back, having gained status, Alice thought, by his decisive action in running upstairs to see. It, whatever it was, had come; and her mother was to be carried up to it. She was in the chair with arms, that she used to spend so much of her time in a half-drunken sleep in when at home, and was half-held up in it, half slipping down in a bundle when the doctor finished his mysterious tailor's work. "We could pretty well carry her up in the chair as she sits," said Mr. Heath. But it was the suggestion of inexperience, and the maturer view of the Inspector of Police was that we could go one better than that. "There's a movable stretcher in the ambulance," said the doctor. And a moment after something that bumped was being brought down the kitchen stairs. Alice was getting very incapable of distinguishing things, and could not quite make out how it was managed, but she saw ultimately that mother was strapped on a flat thing with handles like she was took to the station once on, and carried away upstairs. Oh, how awfully white she looked!

"We must go down now and see to that poor kiddy," said Mr. Heath to his friend when the consignment to the interior of the ambulance had been safely effected, and the inexplicable units that always coagulate round a centre of excitement in London—whatever the time of night may be—were left to discuss whether the chief item of the entertainment was alive or dead. It was a very uncertain point, and the doctor, when asked, was evasive.—"She'll be alive when she gets to the Infirmary," said he. "You had better see to the child. I don't know that I'm wanted any more. Good-night!"—and departed with his case of instruments, which he had put up while the stretcher was travelling upstairs. "You'll find the child asleep," he added, as he walked away.

He paused a moment with his latch-key in the lock, then withdrew it, and turned as if to go back, then stood indecisive.—"Perhaps it isn't necessary," said he.—"No, I suppose it's all right."—And this time he let himself in and was lighting a candle lamp to go upstairs with when he heard feet running on the pavement outside, and a man shouting. . . .

That was Mr. Heath's voice. What was it he said—"Stomach-pump, doctor! Stomach-pump!"—He shouted it before he reached the door.

The doctor did not wait to let him in. Upstairs he went, two steps at a time, and disregarding the "What is it, James?" of his wife in a dressing gown on the landing above, made for a shelf in

his consulting room, and fled with a second leather case. All the while Mr. Heath was knocking at the door and pulling madly at the night-bell.—"Stomach-*pump!*" he shouted again from the outside as he heard the doctor coming, and again as he opened the door, "*Stomach*-pump." The doctor showed the leather case, and both ran. Mr. Jeff had come half-way, as a sort of connecting link to lubricate events—scarcely with any idea of showing the way back.

But the stomach-pump was too late for use, except as a retrospective pump. For the journeyman tailor whom the two policemen, left behind, were endeavouring to rouse—anxiously enough, for in fact they never ought to have lost sight of him—was past rousing. "It's really only a matter of form," said the doctor, "to use the pump in such a case. However, we may as well know for certain what poisoned him."

"Is it perfectly certain he's dead?" said Heath.

"Stone-dead. Cyanide. Here's the bottle. Here's the glass he drank from. Dead an hour, I should say. However——" And the pump was called into council, and supplied some particulars for the Coroner.

"That poor little kid, Jeff!" said Heath. "We must do what we can for her." And they walked away to the kitchen, one as pale as the other.

Poor Alice! Nature had asserted herself, and she was in a deep sleep with her head on a stool.

"We can't leave her here," said Heath. "Is there no woman in the house?"

"Nobody at all, barring ourselves. Ground-floor's vacant. Second-floor's vacant. Only me in the attics. Third-floor goes with second-floor——"

"We'd better put her back in her own bed, and then talk about it." Which was done, and a police officer being officially in charge of the premises under the circumstances, Mr. Heath left his *protégée* with an easy conscience and went to bed.

And Alice slept, without a dream, the intense sleep of overstrung nature. The noises of burst water-pipes, the discord of cats, the clamour of a passing row outside disturbed her no more than they disturbed the other sleeper in father's work-room at the end of the long stone passage. And when Charles Heath waked up suddenly at half-past eight, and hurried on his clothes to run downstairs and see to the child, she was as sound asleep as ever, and it seemed a pity to disturb her.

CHAPTER III

OF THE ANTECEDENTS OF ALICE'S BELONGINGS

TWENTY years before his mortal remains were left in charge of that impassive police officer in that extensive basement with cellarage, Samuel Kavanagh had been as prosperous and hopeful a young tailor as ever rejoiced in a new wife and a new shop in what was then the suburban district of Camden Town. Such a handsome young couple as he and the former, when they were married at Trinity Church opposite the burying ground, in Upper Camden Street, were enough to make that dull structure interesting for the moment, and even to soften the heart of its pew-opener into concession of their right to compete with bygone records. While, as for the latter, it went without saying that there never was such a shop. In after years, when Samuel had been obliged to give up this shop and hadn't taken another yet-a-while, and when he was working for hard taskmasters to keep his much too large family alive, his mind was still able to dwell with satisfaction on the beauty of the cataracts of superb trouserings that flowed in the window to fascinate the passer-by; of the convincing twills that only needed inspection of a corner for you to see at once that they would wear, and wouldn't show dust; of the numerous portraits of the same young gentleman of property, as he appeared in the whole of his wardrobe, including several uniforms and hunting and shooting costumes; and the masterly inscription over all that declared that Kavanagh, in Roman type, was a tailor and professed trousers maker, in Italian lettering, though whether the last was effrontery or modesty was a mystery. All these things were so beautiful and so new, and the paint smelt so fresh, and Samuel was so well able to say to himself that he had got value for his money, that his regret for what he had lost never quite destroyed the pleasure he derived from contemplation of its details. This was not equally true of his memory of his young wife as he looked back on those days. That would not bear thinking of now. But at that happy time she was as beautiful and new as the shop, or more so.

The shop was chosen from its proximity to the public-house

kept by her father in King Street, Camden Town, from behind the bar of which her fascinations had entangled the affections of the young tailor. It would be unfair to Samuel to say that the young lady's *dot* had influenced him; but, as he was no capitalist himself, it certainly came in very conveniently, and made it possible to start in business on a much better footing than any he could have achieved out of his own resources. In other respects, the match was considered by gossips to be rather a rise in life for the girl, and likely to withdraw her from her low associations. For whereas Samuel was the great-grandson of a baronet (illegitimate certainly—but a baronet is a baronet) his wife had reg'lar rose up from the dregs as you might say. And it was freely remarked that the reason Hannah would not touch a drop herself, and wanted to be Band of 'Ope only her father wouldn't let her, was that she knew her mother died of drinking, and she was afraid she would do the same if she admitted the thin end of the wedge. No doubt also her father was not sorry she should rise above a barmaid. So long as the rest of Europe drank itself to death, and paid sharp, he had no wish that she should follow her mother's example. Besides, young women were not scarce, and—only mind you! he did not say this to Samuel—Hannah had a short temper. And as for his future son-in-law, he seemed a likely sort of young fellow, and if he did fancy a glarst of beer now and then, why shouldn't he? He, John Sharman of the Cock and Bottle, was not the man to find fault with him for that. He wasn't, certainly! In fact, all that could be said of Hannah's extraction on both sides, was that the more thoroughly she had been extracted the better. Whereas on Samuel's side the reverse was the case, and it was felt that, in spite of an education and early associations little better than his wife's, an outcrop of Baronetcy might reach the surface if not in him, at least in one of his children.

But no drawback of inheritance showed itself in those days, in Mrs. Kavanagh at any rate. Her husband was what her father described him, and their acquaintance had begun in the course of a succession of transactions across a metal counter, at intervals which were now and then at first, and soon became very frequently. He explained to the lady that he came for her only, and not for half-and-half; though a construction of that expression was possible which might have an application to themselves. And when they married, the liquor-clouds which may be said to have enveloped their courtship vanished, and left a clear sky of voluntary renunciation and respectability. And if you had seen them at this time, you never could have anticipated the change that was to

come over them when the clouds re-gathered. Even a knowledge of the possibilities of drink could hardly have foreseen a revival of racial characteristics so marked as Goody Peppermint's; though a certain amount of degenerate speech and manner, such as her husband showed, might have seemed possible and reasonable.

If in its first years of prosperity you had been attracted by this modest and highly-respectable tailor's shop (for Samuel had resisted the importunity of his scribe, who wished to write Emporium and other stuck-up expressions over the door), and if you had been tempted by it to entrust your legs to its proprietor that he might show the value of his professions; and further, if, while you were being measured, the young wife of that good-looking young tailor had appeared bearing in her arms a very fine baby, probably you would have come away with a pleasant impression, and would have said that that young man and his young wife were having a good time. So they were, but that was twenty years ago.

If at some time later on, having employed Kavanagh ever since, and recommended him to several friends, you had gone to his shop to try on, because (for instance) as you passed the shop every day and Mr. Kavanagh was so busy there really was no reason for his coming all the way (say) to Highgate, you might have noticed, as you tried on, that the earth was getting rapidly replenished with little Kavanaghs, and that none of these little parties was more than one year older than its successor, while some were less. And you would have come away shaking your head, and saying that poor Mrs. Kavanagh must have her hands full, but that she must be a good sort, to keep all those children looking so nice. But if you saw her on that visit, you would probably have remarked that she was looking worried. Still, you would have reflected that all families were cares and burdens, and that at any rate Kavanagh and his wife seemed happy and contented. So they were, but that was (maybe) fifteen years ago.

At the end of another few years you would have seen a very decided change. Mrs. Kavanagh would have begun—more than begun—to look like a woman who must have been good-looking once. Before she had all that swarm of children, your penetration would probably add. One thing would have been clear—that the tailor's wife had lost all her looks, but that she was a nice respectable person for all that; and if she did say a sharp word to those tiresome children, what could you expect with eight already and another very soon? And if asked why you thought it necessary to feel quite certain she did not smell of spirits, you would have referred this certainty to the fact that she didn't. And you would

have been uncandid in doing so, because your reasons for discussing the point cannot have been entirely inside your inner consciousness, without suggestion from without.

But it was a dozen years ago, anyhow. And perhaps it was not more than ten years ago that you saw Mrs. Kavanagh again, and were impelled to think and say that it was shocking to see how that dreadful habit was growing on Kavanagh's wife, and that you had always seen what would happen. And this was uncandid too, for you wouldn't have, or didn't.

Neither did you predict then or at any time that in a year or two Kavanagh would be sold up at the suit of a cloth merchant. But he was, and then you and many others were found to have concealed with difficulty your gloomy anticipations of the tailor's future. And when he called upon you to explain the temporary nature of his embarrassments, you felt it your duty to dwell upon the evils of drink, and their invariable consequences. For by that time you were in a position to feel convinced, not only that his wife was given to spirits, but that he himself was too fond of beer. In fact, there was too much liquor going in that house, and you were not surprised.

Not having been surprised then, nothing that followed in the next seven or eight years can have astonished you very much. An intermediate stage, in a down-hill course, a foreman's situation at a first-class shop, did not last a year, and would not have lasted so long if a family of thirteen children had not been regarded by his employers as an arbitrary whim of Providence; a very unfair load, which it was the obvious duty of all kind-hearted folk to lighten. And how could you wonder at any man for drinking, with a wife like that? What can you expect when the woman sets the example? But we (the first-class shop in question) couldn't stand this sort of thing, and we had to look out for a new foreman. Of course we could give poor Sam Kavanagh plenty to do, and we did. For we were a very good-natured firm. And we got places for his elder sons and daughters—removing them from their parents as far as possible—and five of the younger ones were so kind as to die. So that, by the time Mrs. Kavanagh had taken to coming drunk to our West End establishment and threatening the cashier, and making police-removal necessary, there was only the little girl Alice left. She was then a baby of two. And the firm would not have lost sight of her at all, only our own affairs at that time were giving a great deal of anxiety, and the partner died who had known most of the family. And also we were influenced by the fact that Kavanagh obstinately refused to get rid

of his wife, although we were legally advised that he might have done so if he had chosen. So what could we do? Not very much, certainly! And the Coroner at the inquest admitted this to be the case, when we gave our account of Kavanagh from which the above facts are cited.

The last few years of miserable *dégringolade* are easily imagined. Alice had scarcely known her parents in any character other than the one they have appeared in, in this story. Nothing but drink—unqualified drink—could have brought about the change in so short a time. There were stages in the downward course at the end, as there were at the beginning; but they followed each other more quickly. The last had begun when the scraps of furniture and belongings bought by friends at the auction when the shop was sold up, and given to the then homeless couple, were packed off from the lodging that was the last fixed residence they had of their own, to go to play its part in the inauguration of their career as caretakers. This trek was Alice's earliest recollection. It was responsible for an idea in her small mind that her parents had once lived in a palace—a home of privilege and delights now unknown. "Our shop" was known to her only as a tradition of former greatness that she was too young, recent, and inexperienced even to presume to think about. But she could remember, or could remember remembering, when her father and mother dwelt above ground; if not exactly in a 'ouse of their own, at any rate in a portion of one. And it had a real front parlour too, what the coffin was stood in when Alice's sister 'Arriet was buried that died with the fever. Of course it had; and what's more she was buried in a carriage that came up to the front door and knocked. All which Alice must have recollected quite plain, or she never could have said so to Polly Hawkins at Sunday School. For she was a very truthful little girl.

But the departure of these Israelites into the wilderness of caretaking occurred when she was so small that she now scarcely knew herself in any other character than a dweller in basements—a kind of human rabbit, travelling from burrow to burrow. When a move was in contemplation the question uppermost in Alice's mind was, was there a front airey, and what were its qualities? Just as the sons of Opulence that hire a property for the season are anxious to know what the extent of the shooting is, and if there is a pack of hounds in the neighbourhood—so Alice would timidly ask her father (never her mother) about the extent of this airey, and even if there was a pack of cats. In the last of their encampments, the Soho house of our story, the airey was of the greatest import-

ance because of the door at the top of the kitching stairs so you couldn't easy get in and out. When you could get out on the stairs, it didn't so much matter if the rooms *were* locked up. Though Alice would have felt far more grateful to the proprietors if they had left one door unlocked, and the shutters stood open. Still, there was always the great event when people came to see over the premises, and Alice was able to follow unobserved. On such occasions she would be aghast at the low opinion the investigators would have of the space available, the number of rooms, their state of repair, their ventilation and sanitation; and would marvel why they didn't go away at once, especially as they always treated the rent with indignant derision. Also why her mother should join chorus, when she ought to have argued gently but firmly against each censure, and pointed out its fallacy. Instead of this she denounced the house as a plague-centre in a region of epidemics; a structure so ruinous as to defy repair and call for reconstruction on different lines, and preferably somewhere else; and a blot on the character of the metropolis that "the Authorities" ought to condemn in the interest of the public safety. It never occurred to Alice that these views were other than philosophical opinion. She did not analyse her mother's veracity, or any of her qualities. She accepted her blindly and without question as an example of a Mother, and perceived in every quality that was repugnant to her an essential feature in that relationship. So far as she noted that other little girls' mothers took less rum, were less incoherent, less somnolent, more peaceable than hers, she decided that they came short of the correct standard of Motherhood. They were pleasanter certainly, but were they not poaching on the domains of Fathers? Were they not non-conformists, dissenters, innovators on a grand old tradition?

She had once been greatly puzzled by a conversation she overheard between her eldest brother, a young fellow of nineteen, who had been got a very good place over Peckham way, in a 'olesale Clothier's, and her father. The latter had said to his son: "It wasn't always like this, Fred—not when you was a little chap—why, you can recollect——?" And the son replied that he could recollect, fast enough. And added: "It's your own fault, father, for letting her have the liquor." And his father had not resented this, as Alice thought he would, but had dropped his head in his hands, and she thought he was crying, and went to him. And on that he took her up on his knee, and said: "Good girl—good girl—good little Alice." And then, turning to her brother, said: "I've no fault to find with you for speaking, my boy, but it's not easy,

like you think." But this had not softened his son, who repeated that it was the liquor, and nothing but the liquor, and all that was wanted was a little decision and a better example. And Alice didn't know what a decision was, little or big, and wondered whether it was an instrument, or a drug, or an animal; but inclined to the first, on account of scissors. Her father's reply threw no light on this point. "You settle it off mighty easy," said he, "but you're not the first young jackanapes that ever was born." And Alice wondered who was. And then Fred said there was mother coming and he should cut it. With whom mother had words in the passage, and then quarrelled with her father for setting her own son against her. So Alice's mind was left hazy about what it was her brother could recollect fast enough; she puzzled over it for all that, and would have liked him to tell her. But she knew it was no use to ask him. He would only say she was a girl, and had better shut up. His demeanour was always haughty, as it was such a very large 'olesale Clothier's he had a place at. Alice conceived of that Clothier as a sort of Pope of Peckham, and her brother Fred as a confidential Cardinal.

It may be imagined that this son and her other brother "held off" from their reprobate parents during the latter days—the days when caretaking had been accepted as a permanent condition, and the notion of a domicile of any sort had gone the way of all dreams. Not that the new shop that was to replace the lost one could be said to have ever been definitely given up by Samuel Kavanagh. On the contrary it always presented itself to him as a coming event, the certainty of whose ultimate existence justified a nomadic life, and emphasised its temporary character. During the days that followed on the disappearance of the old shop, he would apologise for every domestic shortcoming, every chaotic *dérèglement,* by referring it to the almost momentary nature of his encampment.—"We'll ha' done with all this mess, and get some real order," he would say, "so soon as I ever get my new shop."—And he held on to a vague belief in it, even when Alice was growing quite big, and old enough to talk to.

It must be admitted that the change in twenty years,—from the prosperous and good-looking young couple, in their well-filled and orderly shop, to the very doubtful journeyman tailor and his drunken wife, in the basement of No. 40,—seems almost incredible. But ask any physician of the right experience—I don't mean ask him if he ever knew of a woman in Hannah Kavanagh's circumstances taking to drink and going to the Devil—that would be a coarse and unfeeling way of putting it—but just give him full

particulars and ask him if he ever knew of a case of Alcoholism in the like plight, and see what he says. And as for beeriness—well, if poor Kavanagh had some tendency that way, it was no great wonder. It was a very modest and unpretentious achievement compared with Alcoholism, but it has its efficiencies as an agent of the Devil. And the Coroner I have mentioned before, with the whole of whose inquest the reader need not be troubled, ascribed the blow that killed his wife to the insobriety of Kavanagh, not to any bad disposition on his part. He added, as his own private opinion, that the more beer a man could take without showing it, the more liable he would be to sudden outbreaks of uncontrollable ill-temper, amounting to fury under provocation. And of the provocation in this case there could be no doubt.

CHAPTER IV

OF ALICE'S RIDE IN A CAB WITH THE FIRST-FLOOR. OF THE FIRST-FLOOR'S BEAUTIFUL SISTER, AND HER PARROT

Mr. Charles Heath's family resided in Hyde Park Gardens and were very late for breakfast. This is all we want to know about them for the moment; which is, or was, given accurately, a quarter past nine on the morning following the events of the last chapter but one. There was nothing singular in either fact, for Mr. Andrew Heath, Charles's father, was a partner in Heath & Pollexfen, of London and Hong Kong, silk merchants; and, besides, it was a very rich connection. If you know about silk merchants and very rich connections, you will see that not only do they account for people living in Hyde Park Gardens, but for their coming down late for breakfast, even when breakfast is at nine. They fully account for Charles Heath finding nobody down when he arrived at nine-thirteen by the hall clock. But not for the expression of dumbfounded amazement on the face of the young woman who opened the door. Neither was this due to Mr. Charles coming from his Studio at that time in the morning: that was common enough. In fact, Mr. Charles very often went home to breakfast. As he seldom got to what he called work before half-past ten or eleven, and it was only a twenty-minutes 'bus journey from door to door, there did not seem any reason (as has been before hinted) why he should not have always slept and breakfasted at home. But then he would not have felt like an Artist. Art is a vocation that must be prosecuted in earnest. It doesn't do to play fast and loose with it. The Artist has to live with his work, and throw his whole soul into it. So Charles Heath had decided when he adopted the profession; and being supported by his mother as to the necessity for four hundred feet super of studio and a top light, he had succeeded in getting subsidised. For, the moment she found his father inclined to dispute it, on the ground that the artist had not painted a single picture, much less exhibited one, she threw her whole weight into her son's side of the scale, and other members of the family followed her. Her husband gave way, but then he didn't pretend to understand this kind of thing, don't you

see? And of course his wife and his son, and all the rest of his family for that matter, naturally understood all about it. People understand the Fine Arts when they have a firm conviction that they do. If this were not true what would become of Art-Criticism? However, it will never do to be led off into discussion of so knotty a point while the second housemaid at eighty-nine Hyde Park Gardens is waiting (as she is in this history) to have a fixed and stupefied glare of astonishment accounted for. She remained petrified until Mr. Charles, having dismissed his cabman, turned to her and asked if Miss Peggy was up. To which she was able to gasp that she believed Miss Peggy was up, but not down. Further, she just found voice to ask—should she run up and tell her? And Mr. Charles he had the face to say to her—so she reported afterwards—"Tell her what?"

"And there was that child hold of his hand all the while! Anything to come anigh Mr. Charles, I never, Cook! Nor yet you, I lay. And then he says to her, 'You come along, Miss Kavanagh, and don't you be frightened!'"

For Mr. Charles, sorely perplexed at the situation, and longing to get his poor little *protégée* out of the ghastly basement, with its closed room under police guardianship, the contents of which he would have to explain to Alice, and which would either be the scene of an inquest, or give up its tenant to one elsewhere—which, he did not know—and also longing to get as soon as possible to his invariable confidante and counsellor, his sister Peggy—Mr. Charles had decided on giving Alice as few opportunities of asking questions as possible, and had simply told her when she waked that she was to get up and come. Alice's faith in him had been so great that even his "Never mind father, now," when she put some question about father, had been accepted as containing a sufficient assurance; and as for her mother, she was being taken good care of, and that was plenty, no doubt, for a little girl to know. Little girls' positions had been too frequently defined for Alice to push enquiry on any subject in the case of a reluctant informant. So, when told to do so she got up and came. Mr. Heath was on tenter-hooks all the while lest she should demand explanations, and even speculated whether it would not be well to suggest that she should bring Pussy, as being likely to divert conversation and help through the cab-ride. But then it crossed his mind that removal of Pussy might suggest not coming back and her inclusion in the party might defeat its own object. So he had limited his precautions to asking the policeman on guard to keep out of the way, and his request was, so to speak, greedily complied with as savouring of

schemes and secrecy, and being professional. It may be said to have given Zed-one-thousand passive employment—something to turn his mind to.

Alice having been once told to "never mind father, now," was content to wait for the *then* when she would be at liberty to mind him; and this all the more readily because of the glorious novelty of riding up in a cab, on the seat, beside a gentleman who seemed to have a mysterious power of making Hansoms gallop. It was very funny this one should go so fast, for Mr. Heath had only mentioned to the driver that he wished to get to Hyde Park Gardens before midnight, and he hoped the horse was fresh. And the cabman had said Hyde Park Gardens was a long way, and the road was bad, but he would try what he could do, to oblige. So Alice was astonished when they stopped in about twelve minutes, and was told by Mr. Heath that there they were. But then she didn't understand the cynical tone of inversion in which the conversation had been conducted.

She had misgivings that she did understand the expression of Caroline the second housemaid's face. She had seen it on other faces elsewhere, and it had led up to monosyllables, such as brat, or chit; and when it appeared on her mother's had preceded slaps, spanks, or boxes on the ear. It could not lead to them here, because had she not a protector; who would be as good as father, quite, on that point? But she quailed a little before the second housemaid, and held on tighter than before to Mr. Charles's hand.

"You come along, Miss Kavanagh, and don't you be frightened," said he. And they went into the house. Oh, it *was* big! It was clearly the largest house in the world.

Mr. Charles wasn't the least frightened himself. On the contrary, Alice had the impression that so far from being afraid of the gentleman with a tray whom they met on the way, that gentleman was afraid of him: as he called him Sir whenever he spoke, and she knew from Teacher at Sunday School that you ought always to say Sir. Not to every one of course, but when addressing Olympus. This must be a case of Olympus.

"Nobody down now of course, Phillimore," said Mr. Charles.

"Well, no, Sir! At least not at present——" And Phillimore coughed respectfully, to apologise for presumption in seeming to defend the Family. His defence seemed to be that though nobody was down now, at present, many would be down now, very soon, if you would only give them time. "I think that's Miss Margaret's door," he continued, and his words received a meaning they would else have lacked, from implication of sound noted afar.

"You toddle in there, Miss Kavanagh. Nobody 'll bite you." And Alice toddled into a front parlour with a pane of glass in a frame on the rug before a beautiful fire, and a parrot walking about on the ceiling of his cage, upside down. Alice felt glad that nobody would bite, but for all that she wouldn't have trusted that parrot.

"Minute anybody comes," said he, with perfect distinctness, "he stops talking." And then he shrieked worse than the railway, and afterwards said it again. Alice suspected him of not being in earnest, from something in his manner. Then, she knew nothing of parrots.

A dress that came down the stairs, and that would have rustled if it had been silk, made a warm, soft sound instead, owing to its material. It stopped, and whoever was in it appeared to kiss Mr. Charles.

"What's the row?" said he. This couldn't be because he was kissed, and it wasn't.

"Why, just look at you!" said a warm soft voice, like the dress—only, for all that, it filled the whole place so that you could hear it quite plain when the parrot was quiet. He wasn't though, this time, and said twice over: "The minute anybody comes, he stops talking," and shrieked each time. So Alice didn't catch the rest of the speech, but she began loving Mr. Charles's sister (which of course it was) from the sound, before ever she set eyes on her.

"You shut up and I'll tell about it, Peg," said he. And then he dropped his voice down low, and went on talking ever so long. But when his sister's exclamations came in, Alice could hear them quite plain—"Oh, Charley how terrible!"—"Oh, you good boy!"—"But is the mother killed?—Tell me all the ends first, that's a dear!" Then Mr. Charles said something she would have heard only for the parrot. Then came more exclamations at intervals. "In the Infirmary?"—"What was it—a hammer?"—and then after a good deal of very earnest underspeech from her brother—"Oh, Charley, how awful! And he was actually poi——" And then Mr. Charles said hush, "because of her"—and they were quiet a few seconds. And then the sister said suddenly, "Poor little thing!—Where is she?"

"In here," said Mr. Charles, coming in. And oh how beautiful his sister was, and how Alice did love her!

"Why, you poor little white, desolate baby," said she, stooping to her and kissing her cheek, and then put her hair back off her forehead, because it was so rough and untidy. And Alice was afraid it might be a mistake, and when she saw quite plain she

might find out, and be sorry she had kissed her. But it was all right; and actually, she kissed her again. "Afterwards will do," said she, inexplicably. And the parrot said again as before, "Minute anybody comes, he stops talking," but this time laughed "Ho, ho, ho—ho," and ended with a shriek.

"Isn't he a funny Polly, Alice?" said Mr. Charles. But before she could answer, Polly said with great force and distinctness, "Better cover him up or we shall get no peace." On which both the brother and sister said in the same breath that that was Mamma all over. But Mr. Charles, being told perhaps he had better cover him up, did so. And Alice could hear Polly talking to himself in an undertone—a soliloquy which seemed to contain pathos, humour, and expression, but no words. He was a funny parrot, there was no doubt of that!

"Well—what's to be done, Peg?" said Mr. Charles when Polly was settled.—Alice was getting very uneasy about she could not exactly say what, and was beginning to feel for speech with her lips, when the young lady, who of course knew what was right, struck in with "Suppose we were to have some nice breakfast first, and talk about it afterwards." This seemed to leave so many openings, to deny so few anticipations, to be so replete with latitudes and golden bridges of all sorts, that Alice's judgment applauded the verdict, which came naturally to an ill-fed infant. Suppose we were!

Practical politics of the household dictated that on the whole the safest course would be to call in assistance from another sphere. "We'd better get Partridge, and explain," said Miss Peggy Heath. And Partridge was got, was explained to out of Alice's hearing, and was first revealed to Alice as her young mistress had been, as a sort of Greek chorus to a narrative she wished she could hear herself. There was something in it unknown to her that came in at the end, and intensified—"My goodness me!"—"Well, now, I declare!"—"Well, I never!"—"Only think!"—into—"Lord, have mercy on us!"—and "Gracious Heaven!"—And this something unknown was always told in a dropped voice that she could not have heard in a colloquy outside the door even if Mr. Charles, who remained in the room with Alice, had not said, "Let's talk to Polly," and taken Polly's covering off. Polly was a great egotist, and when he broached himself as a topic, there was but little chance for anything else. He showed, however, a kind of modesty in a new remark he made very frequently, "Such a noise you can't hear yourself speak," said he, and then laughed cheerfully.

Mrs. Partridge was the housekeeper, and was a comfortable body—a great consolation and resource in all kinds of difficulties. Alice didn't see her way to declining to breakfast with her, perceiving in the arrangement a recognition of the distinction between breakfasts and breakfasts. She didn't feel quite sure how she *could* breakfast with Olympus, whether she would know how to set about it. She thought difficulties might be overcome if it was only Mrs. Partridge.

And thus it comes about that at the end of this chapter Alice is enjoying unheard-of luxuries in the way of breakfast in the housekeeper's room at 89 Hyde Park Gardens, but is wondering all the while what she is going to know about after. And she does not know it is Death, which her experience, so far, has never introduced her to in the case of grown-up people. Her sister that was buried had died, certainly; but then she was a child, and didn't know how to take care of herself, like father and mother. Also, it was a very long time ago!

CHAPTER V

OF THE FIRST-FLOOR'S FAMILY, AND OF HOW HIS MOTHER SHOULD HAVE BEEN TOLD

THE sudden springing of Alice in person on members of the family less to be relied on than his sister would have been an embarrassment to Charles Heath. So her provisional disappearance into the housekeeper's room was welcome. Altogether things had gone well with him, so far. But he began to see into the difficulties of the position. However, so long as Peggy backed him up—that was the chief point. If a doubt had crossed his mind in the cab about this, his sister's attitude about the child had dissipated it.

"Oh, dear, Charley!" said she, as they began waiting for the rest of the family to come to breakfast, "what a perfectly awful business! We've never had a Murder before. And do you know, now I come to think of it, I don't know anybody that has."

"We mustn't let it make us vain. But, Peggy dear, what's to be done with the poor kid?"

"She's the same you told us about that broke the beer-jug, and had the awful mother?"—The question seemed to imply that there might be other quixotisms afoot on Mr. Charles's part, elsewhere.

"Goody Peppermint. That's what we called her, Jeff and I——"

"Oh yes—Mr. Jerrythought." Peggy seemed inclined to laugh at her brother's friend.

"——and as for the father (poor beggar) he wasn't very much better." This was nearly said without the parenthesis; but the recollection of the dead body in the grimy basement room, with, on the bench near it, the last unfinished job of the tailor it had been—the poison-bottle and the whole horror—shot across the speaker's mind, and procured a passing acknowledgment.

"What can one expect with a woman like that? At least, that's what people always say." Peggy made the meekest of protests against vernacular currencies of speech. "Did you find out any more about them after the beer-jug business?"

"Very little. I had a talk with the man one day. As for the woman, I let her do the Studio out because there was no one else—

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but she was *awful!* Quite unsteady. And the smell of spirits enough to make one sick! She told me a great many times that she had had thirteen children——"

"Oh," said Peggy. "Thirteen!"

"——and that she and her husband had been unfortunate, and come down in life. I thought she was lying, and that neither she nor he could ever have been respectable tradespeople. But I suppose some of it was true because the man told the same story."

"What did *he* say?"

"Said they had had a very good shop—a good long while back—in Camden Town, and that her father had been very well off—a licensed victualler, which I suppose is a public-house keeper——"

"I suppose so. Perhaps that would account for it."

"For what?"

"For the woman being such an awful drunken wretch as you describe. Because it seems so odd that any woman who had been the least respectable, or able to read and write, should slip down to the level of a St. Giles's drunkard. However, I suppose drink is enough to account for anything." Mr. Charles seemed to accept this with reservation.

"There was a good deal wanted accounting for in this case," he said after a pause. "Because her language didn't suggest a respectable tradesman's wife, drunk or sober. However, they told me the same tale at the big Clothier's shop where they knew him—he told me and I asked. Their Mr. Abraham would have done anything to help the man, and in fact had got places for his sons—only it wasn't any use—really they were best off, when they were out of cash, and couldn't spend it on drink. Here's the Governor, coming at last! I can hear him humming on the landing."

Mr. Charles was reclining in an Austrian bent-wood chair on one side of the fire, with his sister's arms fitted round his neck from behind as she leaned on the chair-back. "The little thing seems rather a poppet," said she. "Only *so* silent!"

"*You'd* be silent, Peg, if the Governor had smashed your mother's head and pizoned himself, overnight."

"I don't know! It might make me loquacious. But you're a dear boy—only always doing mad things. There's the earthquake."

The earthquake was the Governor coming downstairs. His sixteen stone, or thereabouts, didn't prevent an almost brisk descent; and, though slippers only were involved, it shook the house, and seemed to lead up naturally to acres of broadcloth, pounds of gold watch-tackle, old-fashioned seals thereon that seemed to murmur responsibility, and a powerful nose-bridge made for a powerful

gold-rimmed double eyeglass that called aloud for a substantial hair-chain as a birthright, and would have scorned anything sleezy. It made you think, as you looked at it, of its owner's balance at the Bank—with its extra bit on the left, the same in both! This weapon, a formidable one for use on Boards of Directors and Committees, was in its scabbard as the earthquake entered the room and caught up the last word of the conversation with the express view of taking no notice of it. He always did this, Peggy said, and prefixed it with the word Hey!—from three to five times. This time it was the latter.

"Hey—hey! Hey—hey—hey!!—Always doing mad things?—Hey!—Who's been doing mad things? What's this under here? Kidneys, hm! hm! *And* poached eggs. *And*—— Don't care for any of 'em! Phillimore!" (this was the respectable man Alice saw in the passage), "get me a savoury omelette, and tell cook to look sharp. I can't wait. Got to be in Lothbury by five minutes to eleven." And Mr. Heath Senior having gone through an episode of salutation from his son and daughter (not without detection of a flaw by the latter, "Shaving-soap, as usual, Pappy dear"), began his breakfast on a large stack of letters that awaited him. Most of these he pushed unread into pockets that had a mysterious absorbent power, some he merely flung towards the fireplace, and took no further interest in. Phillimore picked them up and placed them respectfully on the sideboard. Miss Ellen wished all circulars kept, was his explanation. But after elimination of superfluities, there still remained letters enough to last through breakfast, and Mr. Heath's thumb paused in the envelope of the first of these, as soon as it felt confident of its rip, in order that its owner might make a remark.

"Shouldn't kiss upside down, Peg! It's unlucky. Hey, what?—Pour me out my coffee, my child—not too much milk—yes, large lumps. Where's all the rest of them?" But he ripped up his letter, and didn't wait for an answer to the question. The first part of his speech will be explained to a shrewd reader by a reference to particulars in the narrative at the moment Mr. Charles heard his father on the landing. Miss Peggy didn't know it was unlucky: so she said.

"Hey to be sure! Of course it's unlucky. Everybody knows that.—Well, Charley boy, how's the Fine Arts?" And then without waiting for an answer, "How's the Royal Academy?—how's the moist water-colours in tubes?—how's the lay-figures?—how's the easels?—how's the Landscapes with Cattle?—how's the Portraits of Her Majesty walkin' on the slopes?" But these enquiries were

not questions in the ordinary sense, being only intended to show the disparaging attitude of a superficial observer who accepted his own exclusion from the Communion of Paints willingly, on the score of more important engagements in other freemasonries. They appeared to lay stress on an implication that shallow information was its owner's choice; pre-omniscience having decided that enlightenment would not be worth having.

"Well!" said Charles. "The Landscapes with Cattle haven't got on much this last day or two, and the Portrait of Her Majesty's behindhand." But if he meant by this to suggest further enquiry to his father, and to provoke his interest in the recent events, he was mistaken. For the latter only said three times: "Her—Majesty! Her—Majesty! Her—Majesty!" And then added reflectively: "Ah—well! We're all very fine people. Aren't we, Pussy-Cat?" So Charles got no chance that time of disburdening himself of his secret.

Then followed an irruption of the remainder of the family, every one of whom insolently included his predecessors in a remark which each made on coming in—"I say, how awfully late we are!" The only exception was Miss Ellen, the youngest, who said instead, "Are the advertisements kept? Are you quite sure these are all, Phillimore? Yes—Mamma's coming down. I'll have tea and put the sugar in myself."—If you think a minute you will probably recollect having heard equally fragmentary conversation from young ladies even more than thirteen years old.

A certain enthusiasm about breakfast, and an indisposition of the breakers to be in too great a hurry to decide what form it was to take, combined with reviews on the part of each of all the courses open to them, made the introduction of Charles and Peggy's *dénouement* difficult. Besides, the younger members of the family and the Governess, Miss Petherington, had been at the play last night, and a fierce discussion ensued about the heroine. However, there was Mamma coming down. An opening was sure to occur now for the natural introduction of Alice.

Were you ever in a situation in which, while you wished particularly to speak of something that interested you greatly, you were made to feel the full force of other people's preoccupation? Charles Heath almost wished he had come seldomer to breakfast with his family. If he had been a rarer occurrence some one would have been sure to say, "What brings you here this time?" It had been so easy to give the whole story to Peggy on the stairs, and to secure her immediate sympathy, but how on earth to set about it now? What could be done, with his father well behind the

Times newspaper, buried in the Money Column, and only making concessions to slight recrudescences of breakfast, such as, "Only half a cup, mind! And not too much sugar"; and all this while the fast and furious discussion of Cannibalism, on which the interest of the Problem Play of the evening before had turned.

However, the majestic rustle of an approaching Mamma climaxed, and Charles felt, as he kissed her, and she said, "Why, Charles! When did you come?" that Hope was on the horizon.

"But I do *not* see"—this with denunciatory emphasis from Ellen the youngest—"I do *not* see, and I never shall see, why a Cannibal should not marry his Deceased Wife's Sister provided he hasn't eaten his first wife." For no less difficult and intricate a question than this had arisen from the discussion of the previous evening's entertainment.

"My dear Ellen," says her mother, in tones of dignified reproach, "*what* is all this noise?"

"Well, Mamma, it's all very well, but——"

But her mother threw so decided a tone of moral influence into her next "My dear!" that Ellen subsided. She left an impression on her brother's mind that she recorded somehow that there was a row if she so much as spoke. It may have been said *sotto-voce*. A lull ensued, and Charles began to see his way to possibilities.

"There's been a very bad job down at the Studio——" he began. But he got no further.

"One moment, my dear," said his mother. "I'll hear you directly. I am obliged to speak to Phillimore."

But before Phillimore could be assuaged, Mr. Heath Senior suddenly decided that he had now seen the *Times* this morning, and need see them no more. So he folded his newspaper with a mighty rustling on to the top of a cold tongue, and looked resolutely at his watch. But even as he kept his eye firmly fixed on it, as though he suspected it of meaning to go wrong at that particular moment, he showed that he had been keeping his eye also on the conversation, with a view to ignoring it in detail later on.

"Hey?" said he. "*What's* it-all-about? Why-y-y-y shouldn't a Cannibal marry his Deceased Wife's Sister?"

"Provided he hasn't eaten his first wife," cuts in Ellen.—"Now *do* say I'm right, Papa!"

"Why-y-y shouldn't a Cannibal marry his Deceased Wife's Sister? Provided he hasn't eaten his first wife. Hey? That's it, is it? Why-y shouldn't . . . " And so on *da capo*, with an air of judicial weight. And Ellen made helpless appeal to the Public. "Oh dear! Isn't Papa aggravating?" Which he certainly was.

And none the less so because he continued to keep his eye fixed on his watch, as the lion-tamer on a possibly rebellious lion. It was a gold hunting-watch with a lid, and as soon as its owner considered it would go along safely, he shut this down with a snap. "I must be *off*," said he, with the trenchant decision of one who has made up his mind. But he was intercepted and outflanked at the door.

"I only want just one word with you before you go, my dear," said his wife, meekly. Mrs. Heath's deadliest weapons were meekness and patience. She wielded them with diabolical dexterity; and showed, in advance and retreat, the activity of a Cossack. Her husband made a weak protest on this occasion; but the fact that Mrs. Heath should have spoken before seemed a mere moral maxim when confronted with the practical truth that she could not make herself heard, backed by a certain assumption of failure of voice after stentorian efforts. "I *cannot* get quiet," said the good lady. "And I get *no* help——" Mr. Heath knew perfectly well when his wife's manner portended heart-failure; so he surrendered at discretion. Especially as an attempt on his part to get the communication made under pressure, by hinting that she must look alive, as the City was yawning for him, ended in her taking a chair to draw breath on.

"Very well now, that's enough!" was Mr. Heath Senior's final conclusion as he escaped after the just one word had spun out to a hundred, or even a thousand. Charles Heath and his sister exchanged looks, to the effect that communications to that quarter must stand over. However, the more important parent, the really influential executive, remained. She re-entered the breakfast scene with the comment, "I always know it's that, when your father's attention goes wandering and I can't get him to listen for one moment."

"Always know it's what, Mammy dear?" asked her son. And she replied, briefly, "Liver." Charles thought he had got his opportunity.

"I've been wanting to tell you about this awful business last night at the Studio——"

"Another time, my dear Charles. Because that *can* wait. I *must* write now to Lady Wycherly Watkins to say your father can't make it the twenty-fourth. And it's the second time we've put them off. And you can see what difficulties I have with your father." A murmur that followed gave Charles the impression that his mother had said, "Four grains of Blue Pill," in apposition to nothing whatever. He suggested that Peggy could write to Lady Wycherly Watkins, and Peggy said, "Of course I can. It's only

to say you can't go on the twenty-fourth—*I* know——" But her mother dropped her hands on her lap with patient despair. "My dear!" she said, in a voice that harmonised with the action, "oh, if you would only be quiet *one* moment and let me arrange.—It's always hurry, hurry, hurry!" After suggestions of amended style Peggy adjourned to write the letter, followed by her mother's meekly triumphant "You see I can *per*fectly well arrange, if you'll only let me." Then Charles, being also encouraged by a lull in breakfast, which though reinforced by very late stragglers was now drawing to a close, thought he would try again:

"I really should like, Mother dear, to tell you about this dreadful affair at the Studio. You know those two people who were caretaking at the bottom of the house—who had the little girl that broke the jug——?"

"Yes—my dear Charles. Go on—I'm listening. I can do this too, while I listen. Little girl that broke the jug——" And Mrs. Heath marks off items in a list, and now and then murmurs to herself, "Yes—that's right." "No—that ought to be a six." "I must ask Partridge about the pillow-cases"—and so on.

"They seem to have had a drunken quarrel, and the man struck his wife on her head with a big hammer that had been used to break the coal with——" But Charles's method was not dexterous. He should have said, "I want to tell you about the murder and suicide last night," and then he might have procured a hearing. As it was, his mother crossed the current of his story with a demand for Phillimore, whose "Yes, Madam," in response, was met with, "No, it's nothing! I can do," followed by, "Yes, my dear, I heard you:—Big hammer that was used to break the coal with.—What is it, Partridge?" For Partridge was engineering approaches in a tentative way.

"All right, Mother!" said Charles, hauling down his flag. "It'll do another time just as well!" And his mother replied with resignation, "Well—perhaps it *would* be better, my dear. Presently. Yes, Partridge?"—And Charles departed to capture his sister, that they might go together to have a look at Alice, whom this history supposes at this moment to have been continually eating breakfast in Mrs. Partridge's room.

Partridge, the gag being removed, says she "wished to speak about the little girl." And then repeats, "The little girl, Ma'am." "*What* little girl, Partridge?" asked her mistress.

"Mr. Charles's little girl, Ma'am."—This is in an of-course-you-know kind of voice—and Partridge went on—"I thought, Ma'am, I ought to mention to you that the child seems far from well, and

has eaten almost nothing. Not that I suppose it to be anything infectious—but even measles——" Partridge interrupted herself to say, "However, I have not allowed any one else in the room. I thought you would wish it." And then hesitates, in growing doubt, at an expression in Mrs. Heath's face, which increases as its proprietor sits more and more majestically upright.

"Pray explain, Partridge! Mr.—Charles's—little—girl——" The last four words come in instalments, with an accent on the first syllables of the first three.

"I beg your pardon, Ma'am, I thought you knew." And then Mrs. Partridge, being a shrewd woman, perceives that the first essential of her own position is that the little girl shall be talked about between her mistress and herself, with a view to a sound footing of confidence in which even a temporary ostracism of Mr. Charles or Miss Heath might be warrantable, for purposes of stability. So she forthwith gives all particulars of the case as known to herself; and they are listened to with an expression of mute self-command, righteously dumbfounded, but reserving severe comment for judicial maturity. When Partridge has waded through her prose epic—which she prolongs as much as possible from the feeling (shared by almost all of us, perhaps) that any circumstantial narrative of events apologises for the share we have had in them—she is still conscious of not having quite succeeded in reaching a sound footing, and adds after a moment's silence—"I should have come at once to you, Ma'am, only I supposed——" and stops.

"I am *not* surprised that *you* should not have told me, Partridge. But I *am* surprised that I was not told—I *ought* to have been told."

And Mrs. Heath entrenches herself in a dignified reserve, which elicits a hesitating "I'm sure, Ma'am——" from Partridge; who, however, not having quite made up her mind what she was sure of, was not very sorry to have her speech amputated.

"I am not attaching any blame to you, Partridge, in any sense—but I feel that I *ought* to have been told."

Whereupon Partridge coughs expressively and sympathetically behind her hand. She endeavours to make this cough say, "I feel that your son and daughter do not recognise to the full your position in the house, nor the weight of cares and responsibilities that beset you, nor the administrative skill of your domestic economy; but I perceive that they are guileless, owing to the purity of their extraction; and while willingly admitting that you ought to have been told, venture to hope that a *modus vivendi* may be discover-

able, and above all that I may be recognised as blameless, and remain always your obedient humble servant." Perhaps she hardly succeeds in making the cough say all that, but she feels it was a good and useful cough, as far as it went.

And her mistress gathers up some *débris* connected with responsibilities, and goes majestically upstairs.

CHAPTER VI

OF HOW ALICE COULD NOT GO BACK TO FATHER, AND WHY. OF HOW THE DOCTOR CAME TO ALICE, AND ALICE DIDN'T GO TO AN INQUEST. AND OF HOW IT CAME TO PASS THAT ALICE WAS NOT TO GO BACK TO MOTHER

"WELL, Charley," said his sister when he arrived in the back drawing-room to look for her, "I hope you've got Mamma told?"—But Charley shook his head ruefully. And Peggy continued: "Then, as soon as I have finished Lady Wycherly Watkins, we had better go down and see after Miss Alice—she'll be getting alarmed, and think we've deserted her."

Lady Wycherly Watkins's letter will go by post of its own accord, as propitiatory offerings to brownies vanish in the night when no one is looking. So it is left to itself, and Charles follows Peggy downstairs.

When the brother and sister arrived in Mrs. Partridge's room, they found Alice close to the door as they entered, probably because Mrs. Partridge had gone out at it, rather than with any idea of going out herself. She was very unsettled and could not be comfortable anywhere, so the exit of her last protector seemed as good as the hearth-rug, in spite of the warmth of the fire. When she saw who it was, she made for Charles's hand first, and then for Peggy's. But she didn't find her tongue.

"What a funny little old-fashioned thing she is, Charley," said his sister. "She never speaks, but she looks intelligent. Kiss me, Alice dear; that's right. She's a soft little puss, but she might be thicker."

"You can talk fast enough, Alice-for-short, can't you?" suggested Charles. He was conscious that he should like his *protégée* to justify him. The only apologies he could find for himself all turned on the fact (or the assumption) that no other course was open to him. So vivacity on Alice's part would not have been unwelcome.

"What's that the little chick says? Say it again, Alice-for-short?"—And both brother and sister stooped down to hear. Peggy's arm had gone back round Charles's neck after being used to kiss Alice—"Say it again, dear," said she.

"Mustn't I go back to father?"

Charles was beginning to embark on some vague course of evasion, with—"Not just yet, Alice dear"—when his sister, seeing with clearer vision the many rocks ahead, stopped him.—"You'll only make matters worse, Charley darling," she said. And then added, "I can do it best alone if you go. But he'll come back again, Alice dear. Don't be frightened!"—For Alice had shuddered tighter on to the hand she held. She wasn't—couldn't be—frightened of being left alone with the beautiful sister with the soft golden hair and all her warmth and light; but then the gentleman in spectacles was her original protector, and her connecting link with father. But if he was coming back, that was all right, and of course the lady knew.—"You'll come and sit on my knee by the fire till he comes back, won't you, Alice? What's that, dear?" And then the lady stooped down again to get at Alice's remark.—"You're too big? No, dear! You're not a bit too big. Cut along, Charley. Come back as soon as you think."—Which appeared to be intelligible, as Charley accepted it and cut along.

Alice wasn't too big by any means—in fact when her mother had once called her a great hulking girl of six, she was only correct about the numeral. The lady didn't seem to find any difficulty about taking her on her knee—in fact her action seemed to Alice to suggest her kinship with the strong arm that had picked her up off the cold stones—only last night, and it did seem such a long time! When she had Alice on her knee she felt her forehead and her hands, and then said: "My child—I'm afraid you're feverish."—As Alice didn't know what this meant, she didn't feel responsible.

"When must I go back to father?" said she.

"You *can't* go back to father, Alice dear," said the lady, with a change of manner. Alice knew it was something new and strange, but the words did not carry their meaning. The only plausible explanations were that the road was stopped, or that the way would be too difficult to find by herself and no one could come with her. Her little hot hands pulled uneasily at the hand they held, and she tried to prosecute enquiry, wondering all the while why the lady's eyes were fixed on her so pityingly, and surely—yes! she was sure of it—the lady was crying.

"Mustn't the gentleman with spectacles take me back to father?"

"Mustn't the gentleman tate you back?" said Peggy, imitating her childish accent.—"No—dear child! The gentleman can't take you back. Listen, dear Alice, and I'll tell you. If the gentleman took you back, you wouldn't find father."

"Have they took father away to the station?"

"No—dear—no! Father's not gone to the stytion,"—echoing her accent again. And a variety of difficulties presented themselves to Peggy. Going to Heaven was obviously the standard resource. But it was perhaps presumptuous to vouch for it. Then, a weak-kneed testimony would introduce discussion of another place that he might have gone to. Without Purgatory to make matters easy, it would be much safer to shut the door on the lion of Hell-fire than to let him in to see if we could turn him out again. It was no use; Peggy saw that in the end she would have either to give her personal voucher for Mr. Kavanagh's salvation, or to fall back on plain death, with extinction. She could not look a live child in the face and affirm the latter, which even a person who knows absolutely nothing about the matter hesitates to swear to.

There was nothing for it but a frontal attack. She had time to organise her forces—for Alice sat gazing at her, still pulling restlessly at her hand. She was trying hard to think where it was they said mother was to be took to. And she was getting very near the Infirmary by remembering how like she had thought it to a word she had heard Mr. Jerrythought use on the beer-jug occasion. It was, he said, infernally cold. If Alice could have thought of this word she would have asked if father had gone to the Infirmary as well as mother. But the lady took her attention off.

"Dear Alice, I am going to tell you where father has gone as well as I can. Try and think what I mean. Father has gone to Heaven."—Alice only looked at her with large puzzled blue eyes, and kept pulling uneasily at her hand. She was thinking to herself, Alice was, what a strange thing father should be able to go to Heaven before he was dead. Teacher at Sunday School had distinctly told her *that* was impossible. And even if you were dead, you didn't go there in any hurry. Father wasn't dead, of course! The lady would have told her, or Mr. Heath with the spectacles.

Alice, you see, was perfectly familiar with the fact of Death, only she did not grasp its application to particular cases. She knew that an elder sister of hers had died and had a funeral; but she regarded her parents as entrenched in maturity, and certainly safe for extreme old age. Owing to her early experience, her mind could accommodate a huge infant mortality, but would have demanded strong proof of the death of a real grown-up person. Consequently, it never occurred to her that if such an improbable event as her father's death were to take place, there would be any hesitation about telling her. She could not presume to set up

Teacher's testimony against this beautiful lady's authority, but she could raise collateral issues, and perhaps get a side-light on her meaning.

"Must mother go there too?" she asked. And Peggy, having committed herself to the salvation of one perfect stranger, not favourably known by report, thought she might indulge in another. After all, it was no falser to say fifty people hadn't gone to Hell than to say it of one. No number of empty purses will make up a sovereign.

"Not yet, Alice dear. Mother isn't dead. We hope to hear that mother is getting quite well at the Infirmary."—Did we? Well!—we were not enthusiastic; but we would hope a little, grudgingly.

"Then father *is* dead," said Alice, with a rapidity of syllogism that took Peggy aback. As she folded the child in her arms, and kissed her, she felt how the little thing trembled and shook.—"Yes," she said. "Poor little Alice! Father is dead."—But she could not see her way to verbal solace. She said to her brother after: "At any rate I didn't talk consolatory to her. I squeezed the poor baby up close and let her cry quietly."—

A human poultice is the best cure for a broken heart. Alice clung tightly to hers, and felt that it was good. But poor father!

As Peggy sat counting Alice's sobs, which came at regular intervals, and wondering when Charley would reappear, she noticed that breakfast-samples, at choice, seemed to have been submitted to Alice, and not appreciated. She reflected that six years old, however much it may be harassed, generally has an appetite, and felt also that her lapful was very hot and had a high pulse. She was not sorry when she heard from afar a sound like Convocation coming downstairs, and was conscious that it was accompanied by an Archbishop, in the person of her mother. This might be troublesome, but after all the position required clearing up.

"Yes, my dear Charles," thus the voice of the Archbishop, "I entirely understand all that. But what I say is, and I say it again,—is, that I *ought* to have been *told*. Had I been told, I could have arranged. As it is, I am sorry. But you must yourself see, it has been *impossible* for me to arrange. If you doubt what *I* say, ask Partridge. Partridge knows what a house like this is, and the difficulty of arranging——"

Peggy cannot hear Partridge's *sotto-voce,* but appreciates its value as a reinforcement to her Principal. She guesses that it turns on the incompetence of youth, especially when male, to form any opinion whatever about the burdens and responsibilities that

fall to the lot of Archbishops; and that it glances slightly at the readiness with which Master Charles and his like would acknowledge themselves mistaken about everything if they suddenly changed identity with their mother, or her housekeeper, and had to form square to receive the Wash, and the Tradespeople, and Cook. Peggy's imagination filled this in speculatively, but her ears heard only a truncated peroration, of which the maturity might have taken the form of a testimonial to the goodness of Master Charles's heart. It related to something impressive that Partridge always did say, and always would say, but which on this particular occasion she failed to say, its relevance not sustaining itself after the entry of the conclave into the room where Miss Peggy sat with Alice on her lap.

"I'm sure this poor little thing is very ill, Mamma," Peggy said, with perfect confidence in her mother's kindness of heart, even when her individualities were most conspicuous. That lady, however, was not inclined to give up her strong point, and placed it on record again as she stooped over the child and felt her hands and forehead.

"That, my dear, is only the more reason why I should have been told. I could have arranged. As it is now, we must have Dr. Payne to see her—or if he isn't there we must have Dr. Herz."—And Charley says he'll go and see about it at once, and leaves the room.

When he had gone, the asperities of the situation acknowledged the force of a living patient, and allowed themselves to be smoothed over. Alice was evidently on the edge of a high fever, or something very like it. With her antecedents, it might be anything infectious and terrifying. Mrs. Partridge and her mistress thought of all the worst things they could think of. Lung and throat complaints were ineligible for want of symptoms; but sickening for smallpox and scarlet-fever were very popular—and brain-fever came in a good third. It was rather disappointing after piling up the agony to this point to have Dr. Payne come in and say, "Smallpox and scarlet-fever—stuff and nonsense! Child's a bit feverish—been over-excited. Brain-fever? Children never have brain-fever—not when the brain's healthy. No such thing as brain-fever! All imagination of scribblers. No—no!—give her something quiet and cooling, and make her sleep. She'll be all right in twenty-four hours."

"How about the inquest, doctor?" says Charles. For it appeared that not only himself and Jeff, but even Alice, was wanted to testify.—"Surely she oughtn't to go out."

"Oh no!—oh no!—of course not. Child like that! There's no doubt about the facts, I suppose?"

"Not the slightest."

"Then I don't see what they want with witnesses." And then the doctor, who had been talking exactly like a human creature, suddenly became professional again—"No! Quite impossible to pronounce—case of this sort—symptoms haven't declared themselves—case for caution—I for one wouldn't take the responsibility of sanctioning etcetera."—And what Dr. Payne would not sanction seemed to be anything and everything that was not welcome to Hyde Park Gardens. Anyhow, the result was that Alice was put into a bed as beautiful as anything you can see through plate glass in Tottenham Court Road, and a feather mattress you squashed down into so that the phrase to lie *on* it seemed inapplicable altogether. But the child was too bewildered and unhappy, apart from the number of degrees of fever, whatever they were, to be able to enjoy it properly. She acquiesced in everything and held tight on to Miss Peggy whenever possible. Recognition of what had happened to father was getting less and less, as her power of making head or tail of anything diminished.

She was, however, equal to observing one or two things of interest before a disagreeable period came on in which it would have been difficult to say which was Teacher and which was Miss Peggy, which was Pussy and which was that funny Parrot in the parlour. She was alive to the fact that Mr. Charles Heath either had gone, or was to go, to a thing called The Inquest, and that his sister was sorry for him. That some news of an unfavourable sort came about her mother, and that the doctor, who came again in the evening, referred to this when he paused in some writing to reply to a remark of Mr. Charles—"Very doubtful, I should say—constitution undermined by drink—blood in a bad state";—but that what he added—"Give her this last thing, and she'll sleep. She'll be all right,"—had reference to herself. The last event she was sanely conscious of was that a very important mass of something human stood by her bedside and said in a prodigious voice, "Hey then! *That's* where we are. *And* we're going on well—*that's* right!"—and then seemed embarrassed by its position, and glad to go. It might be absurd to say that Alice was aware of a certain air of forgiveness towards Mr. Charles for importing her, which was almost as effectual as condemnation where no penalty attached, keeping him as it were constantly at the bar of public opinion. She may not have defined this; but nevertheless have taken note of a sort of rapport, of which she was the substratum, between

Mr. Charles and all the family except his sister, who refused to be sucked into it, and excused Charley through thick and thin.

She and her brother made up their minds, with the unreasoning alacrity of youth, that Alice was to be retained. By the time it came to the final benediction of the little patient, who was enjoined to be a good girl and go to sleep, it had been privately settled by both that Alice had come to stay—in some capacity to be fixed afterwards perhaps, but certainly to stay. Neither would have assented to the departure of a stray puppy or kitten. As for possible expenses or responsibilities involved—dear me!—surely Heath & Pollexfen's shoulders were broad enough for anything. Their respective views became a conspiracy, by mutual confession, in an interview, by the back drawing-room fire before dinner, both having come down before everybody else.

"She's such a dear little thing," said Peggy, with her foot on the fender, and an animated face in the firelight. For candles in here had been averted by special appeal, as nobody wanted lights to wait for dinner by, and we hated them, and the second gong was directly, and if people wanted light they could go in the front drawing-room. So Peggy and her brother were roasting themselves before a steel fender and grate, with a monstrous piece of best Wallsend in it, which would last all the evening if you would only put that poker down and let it alone.

"Yes—she's an engaging sort of little—cuss," said Charles, conceding the point about the poker, and putting it down. Because he didn't really want to break the coal at all. Neither did he mean to say "cuss"—when he began to speak. But some mysterious influence unexplained made him put it in that form. It detached him from human weaknesses and motives, and harmonised with a ten-guinea dress-suit, which he had succeeded in getting into without losing a shirt-stud, or splashing soap in his eye, or soiling his shirt-front, or dropping his watch and he couldn't hear it going. Any of these events would have taken his edge off. But nothing of the sort having happened, Charley felt serene and lofty, ordered Phillimore about, and called Alice a little cuss.

"She's a dear little thing," resumed Peggy, not noticing the substituted expression. "I do hope it's nothing serious. Brain-fever or something of that sort——"

"Doctor says not, anyhow. She'll be all right, Peg!"—Charles felt it his duty, as a Man, to reassure his weaker sister, and accordingly vouched for everything, whether or no.

"Well! Let's be hopeful then! I wish I could feel comfortable

about what's to become of her when she goes home again. The idea of her being left alone with that mother——"

"Oh Lord!" says Charles. And he looked very uncomfortable.

"It's very easy to say, 'Oh Lord,' Charley dear, but what's to be done to avoid it?"

"The Governor wouldn't stand it. Perfectly ridiculous."

"But you heard what Papa said—proper enquiry must be made—child's relatives must be found—and all that kind of thing."

"Well—that was the Governor, all over!"

"You mean you think he'll come round, and let her stop here."

"Of course he will, if it comes to her going back to that old cat. But the good woman won't recover. Look what they say at the Hospital—I saw the House Physician myself—said she might possible get through, if Pyæmia didn't set in. I hope Pyæmia means to look alive——"

"Oh, Charley! What a horrible thing to say! You know you don't mean it——"

"Don't I?"—Charley nods truculently, as one who knows himself an Iroquois or Cherokee.—"Besides, Poggy, you know perfectly well you'd be as glad as me, if Pyæmia did set in."—Peggy, or Poggy, as Charles sometimes called her, said nothing in reply; it is just possible she had misgivings herself. When she spoke again, after a little more animated contemplation of the fire-flicker, she went off to another point.

"What other relatives has she?"

"Nothing but brothers," said Charles, with a suggestion that that is the same as nothing at all. Only his sister was inclined to allow exceptions.—"What sort of brothers?" she asked.

"Oh—regular brothers. One's in a first-class Clothing Establishment, another in a first-class Ironmongery; another mongers or mungs cheese, and another drysalts. Goody Peppermint told me about them when she was doing out the Studio. Some more are at sea or in the colonies—there's such a lot of 'em I can't recollect. The oldest in the Clothier's shop is only twenty. Then there was a brood of daughters next to the youngest, who is twelve, and drysalts. This poor little devil—as I remember her excellent mother called her when first I made her acquaintance—came in last."

"It's a queer story! Such a huge family, and this poor child seeming to be left stranded in this way. What's become of all the daughters?"

"All dead—five of them, I understand. But there must be other relations, because the drysalter, she said, lived at an aunt's, at

Rotherhithe, and the cheesemonger has been boarded out at a cousin's, at Stoke-Newington."

"What a lot you have managed to recollect!"

"I've had it all twice over, and should have had it three times if the woman had cleaned me out again. My own theory is that every effort has been made to get the children away from their parents, owing to their drunken habits, and that this one got overlooked, being a small fag-end. There's dinner!"—And they joined the party in the front drawing-room, everybody else having been slowly accumulating during this conversation. But not before Peggy had removed any veil there may have been over her actual wishes about Alice, by saying to her brother, "Well—Charley dear—I, for one, hope she won't be allowed out of this house until we know she'll be properly seen to and not neglected."—And he had replied, "Exactly my idea!" Each spoke with very little confidence in any haven awaiting Alice at any of her relations, or elsewhere.

It requires great experience of the world, and a profound insight into its manners and customs, to know what is, and what is not, a dinner party. For the assembly of fourteen persons of both sexes that were gathered on this occasion in Mr. Heath's front drawing-room could not have been a party, as the six persons outside the family who had been invited that evening had been asked to come and dine quite quietly, and the invitation had had "No party" written carelessly in after the writer had begun to remain the reader's sincerely, and was supposed to be panting for a reply. One lady, an invited one, was even accused of "dressing" contrary to instructions; and to the male mind she appeared to differ from her friends in no respect whatever. She hadn't even got less clothes on, which we believe to be a recognised form of dressing more.

As Charles and his sister entered the front room the last obstacle to pairing off was removed by the announcement of the invariable late guest, whom you won't wait for any longer: but you do. In this case he was a friend of Charles's, whom we have seen before, and who caused him to remark as he entered the room, flanked by the reproachful countenances of Phillimore and an accomplice, that there was Jeff in white kids, which was absurd! Poor Jeff! He was destined to a disappointment. For Mrs. Heath addressed him thus: "Will *you* take Miss Petherington, Mr. Jerrythought?" And when she got to the first two letters of the lady's name he thought she was going to say the rest of Peggy, and she said "-therington" instead, and it was the governess! For,

you see, Mr. Jeff didn't know enough of Society to know for certain (as we do) that no lady would ever speak of her daughter as Miss Peggy.

But an exaltation was awaiting him. The great theme of the evening was of course the incident of the previous day, and it had to be told over and over again, none of the six new-comers arriving exactly on the beginning of a repeat. So a partial assimilation of the last half was always followed by a new recital, subject to a good deal of interruption from its audience, which took exception to the accuracy of the second narrative, and even laid claim to a sort of independent knowledge of the facts. Mr. Kerr-Kerr, the gentleman who was going to be responsible for Peggy's safe arrival in her family's dining-room, was so convinced of his powers as an interpreter, that he got on an explanatory platform, and constituted himself an official news-purveyor. As thus: "*What* an extraordinary and shocking affair this was yesterday at Mr. Charles Heath's studio, etc., etc.," and was then plunging steadily on into narrative, when Peggy interrupted him with "This is Mr. Jerrythought, who was there all the while——" and then, feeling that so cruel a communication required softening, added, "like the man who was at the Battle of the Nile." Mr. Kerr-Kerr meanly endeavoured to make the laugh that was due on this account into the end of a chapter of the conversation; and began the next chapter with an unfounded statement that he had met Mr. Jerrythought at the Rumford Punches. But he hadn't! Peggy was not sorry when dinner was really ready, this time, and we could go down at last. And Miss Petherington, who had remained in abeyance, got taken a little notice of.

Papa was in his best form, genially patronising to the half-dozen outsiders, for even Sir Walker Kerr-Kerr, Mr. Kerr-Kerr's father, who was to take Mamma, of course, because of his Sir, was open to patronage; it appeared in fact that he was nothing particular. Papa pursued his usual method of social intercourse, picking up fragments of other folk's talk, repeating them once or twice weightily, and then neglecting them, always with a certain implication that he was conferring a boon on Society by considering them at all. He was not even to be trusted not to reproduce fragments of long past conversation in this way, giving an impression that he must have been thinking profoundly. But he never disclosed the fruits of his reflections, and his hidden treasure of thought seemed all the more valuable on that account.

The banquet was far advanced, and Peggy was quite unaware that her father had taken any notice of her words, when he sud-

denly resuscitated her illustration about the Battle of the Nile; which came from a rhyme she had heard, but of which she knew neither the authorship nor the meaning, if it had any.

"Hey? What was that? *At* the Battle. *Of* the Nile. *Who* was *at* the Battle, *of* the Nile? Hey?"

"Papa! Don't you know?" said Peggy—"Oh yes—of course you know that! At the Battle of the Nile I was there all the while, at the Siege of Quebec I had like broke my neck." . . .

"Hey, what a rate! Now let's have it again, easy! *At* the Battle. *Of* the Nile. Hey?" And Peggy is under the necessity of repeating it again all through, much slower, with repetitions and corrections. After which Mr. Heath repeats it all once more in a confirmatory tone, and ends up with—"That's it, is it? Well—we're all, very, fine, people!"—Peggy knows perfectly well that her father may go on repeating it indefinitely; and what does happen is nearly as bad. For the old boy has a desire to say something, when he really has nothing to say, and propounds in his most extensive way the enquiry:

"But what I want to know is—who *was* it who was there all the while?"

And then Charles, who was more than half-way down the table on the other side, thinking that his enquiry referred to the previous conversation in the drawing-room, which he had overheard, said "Jeff," meaning that Mr. Jerrythought had been a witness of all the tragedies of yesterday. That gentleman, thinking himself spoken to by name, replied, "Yes, 'Eath." And Charles replied, "Shut up, Jeff! I didn't mean you. At least, I did mean you. I meant you were in the house all along, and saw the doctor patch her head up."

What an amazing capacity for confusion there is in a large party of persons, all talking at once, down each side of a long table! On this occasion, and at this moment, it chanced that Mr. Jerrythought, after a triumphant time at the beginning of dinner, owing to his connection with the current tragedy, had been temporarily thrown into abeyance by Materialisations, which were being exposed by Sir Walker, established beyond question by a gentleman at a great distance off, and investigated by scattered units in the spaces between them; all of whose shoutings from afar intersected reasonable conversation at reasonable distances, and qualified valuable remarks by the introduction of foreign matter, before they could reach their hearers. A political sub-section also was, in serious undertones, hinting at the triviality of all else, but occasionally getting overheard and misinterpreted in the next

compartment. Mr. Jerrythought, however, when Charles made his last remark, as above, discerned in it opportunities for resurrection. A modest disclaimer, in a raised voice, of his share in the matter seemed the surest road to a permanency in public opinion.

"Stood lookin' on! Couldn't be any use. *You* made yourself useful, 'Eath."—This has two effects. The speaker's generous altruism procures popularity, but brings down a shower of testimonials on his friend; this is a sort of Nemesis of establishing a claim on Europe, and it makes him very uncomfortable.

"Charley ain't bad at that sort of thing," says a younger brother whom we have had no occasion to notice. His name was Robert, and he was called Robin or Bob, at choice. He was not a brilliant genius, and generally clothed his thoughts, when he had any, with some one else's ready-made remarks. In this case he was quite vague about what his brother had or had not done. But he suspected his comment might be plausible, and risked it. It had the very painful effect of causing a chubby genial little Mr. Batley, one of the six outsiders, who had come to dinner to make himself pleasant, to go so far as to drum applause on the table with his knuckles, and say, "Bravo, very good, Mr. Charles!"—And his example was followed by other outsiders, who had no idea whatever what they were applauding. This was agreeable for Charles.

But perhaps he would be allowed to lapse?—Yes!—The discussion of Materialisations, which had flagged for two seconds while its Pros and Cons contributed plaudits in absolute ignorance of their object, revived with savage energy, as though Time had been called.

"I tell you, I had *tight* hold of both her hands, and the Judge had *tight* hold of both her ankles, and Lady Penthesilea had both her arms *tight* round her waist."—This was very loud, from the representative of Belief. Impartiality followed, with—"And, if I understand you rightly, Mr. Kettlewell, the Materialisation was all this while scattering flowers out of season about the room——" But was interrupted by Incredulity in the person of the brother, Robin or Bob, who said that was nothing to Maskelyne and Cooke.

Then the conversation got very broken, and it was difficult to make out who said what. It will, therefore, be no more than a healthy realism to omit the speakers' names in the text.

"Hey, *what's* it all about? Hey—Peggy? You make 'em tell us at this end." . . . "My dear Madam, Mr. Heath's a practical man, and I'm sure he'll agree with me that when a Judge has hold of a

little slight woman by the ankles . . . " "Oh dear, Papa, please don't; it does bother poor Charley so." . . . "Don't think anything of her putting the red-hot poker down her back. Maskelyne and Cooke 'll sit on a blazin' coal fire . . . " "Reaction, of course, is what we have to fear. Look at that increased majority at Greenwich." . . . "But *I* want to hear *what* the rumpus is *all about.*" . . . "I am sure your father would agree with me (you ask him, Peggy) that where we have to find fault with Charley is not . . . " "We must rely on Gladstone." . . . "Poor Charley! *Do* let him alone, Mamma!" . . . "As for Lady Penthesilea's—Well! *things* then—being found on the medium, that's nothing at all! Maskelyne and Cooke will . . . " "My dear, I *wish* to speak, but I cannot be heard. All I was saying was that it is Charley's *judgment* that is in fault." . . . "And then we have Tammany at once." . . . "But his feeling is always the right one—I am sure your father . . . " "How do *I* think they do it?—why, by 'ocussing the sitters, of course. I know a gurl," etc., etc., etc.

Our reason for putting the foregoing on record is that it was a matrix from which emerged a conversation of great moment to our little Alice, who remained unconscious in Mrs. Partridge's room, sleeping off the feverish attack, which was at any rate to have one good result, in preventing her going as a witness to the inquest next day to testify about her father's death.

For as soon as the talk turned on Alice's affairs and Charles's judgment, the excellence of his heart and so forth, it became a battledore-and-shuttlecock business between the host and hostess, and gradually abated, by its strong moral force, the Materialisations and the Politics. The last went on in a steady undertone, as a theme of moment that could make no concession, but the former was weakened by the defection of Sir Walker, who plunged, so to speak, at the passing shuttlecock, and stopped it flying, with the question: "What do you propose to do with the child, Heath?" and without waiting for an answer, fixed that gentleman with his eye, and proceeded to sketch out the principal courses that were not open to him, while his hostess on his left made the responses, *sotto-voce*:

"You can't turn her out in the street."

"*That* is what *I* say, Sir Walker——"

"You can't let her go back to her drunken mother."

"And you are most unreasonable to propose to do so."

"You can't hand her over to the Authorities."

"And however you can entertain such an idea for a moment I cannot imagine."

"And you cannot be expected to provide for the child permanently. What course shall you adopt then?"

Whereupon Mr. Heath, feeling that his position as Jupiter was at stake, balanced his Banker's account over his nose, and leaned back in his chair with his thumbs in his waistcoat. He closed his lips tight first, and frowned, to forestall the great decision of his speech, and then published an edict:

"Proper enquiry must be made into the character and circumstances of the family. But (speaking as one of her Majesty's Justices of the Peace) I may say that nothing would warrant the detention of the child against its parent's consent—unless, indeed, that parent stood convicted of a criminal offence. I may be mistaken, Sir Walker, and no doubt you will correct me if I am wrong" —this with ponderous deference—"but I am not aware, at present, that drunkenness is in itself a statutory offence. How is that?"

Sir Walker does not get the opportunity to show his knowledge, if he has it. For the lady of the house becomes clothed with a halo of superior sanctity, without provocation.

"I am a mere weak woman, my dear, and far from a Justice of the Peace. But I am sure Sir Walker will agree with me, that even a Justice of the Peace may always remember that he is a Christian." . . .

Poor Mr. Heath was too dumbfounded with the suddenness of this attack—the more because he had rather than otherwise supposed that his wife would be no readier than himself to incur new responsibilities—that he was not able to *riposte* with alacrity. The consequence of this was that his defence was taken up all along the table with such vigour that he was hardly able to contribute to it.

"Come, I say, Mother, draw it mild! Fancy saying the Governor's not a Christian."

"No—Mamma—you shouldn't! If Papa isn't a Christian, I should like to know who is."

"Dear me! What's that—what's that? Who is saying Mr. Heath isn't a Christian?"—This last comes from one of the politicians, suddenly roused from a pleasant dream of hexagonal electoral districts, and Saturday plebiscites, or something of the sort. The rest of the table joins chorus on the same line.

"I trust," says Mrs. Heath, whose meekness at this juncture passes description, "that nothing I have said, or could say, would ever bear such an interpretation. Sir Walker will tell you I am sure, although my children attack me all at once, what it was I really did say."—And Sir Walker testifies that her remark was to

the effect that Christianity was compatible with being on the Commission of the Peace. Nobody notes the fact that there was no obvious connection between this truth and anything else in the conversation.

Mrs. Heath probably feels that in spite of Sir Walker being nothing particular, she has scored; and begins pulling on her gloves, and ripening for an exodus. Perhaps, also, she is conscious that if this diversion is effected before her husband has time to recover and protest, he will be at a disadvantage later on. So she gets away with her flock, and leaves Man at liberty to throw away his serviette, and sit sideways on his chair, or change across to some one else's, or anyhow.

As soon as Man is left alone, sudden reason dawns on the conversation, and does much to explain its precursor.

"Sorry your mother's so hard on me, Charley boy," says the old gentleman, who is a kind-hearted being, if he *is* a bit pompous. "I'm sure *I* should be glad enough for the poor child not to go back to that awful mother of hers. But I really thought it would be a great trouble to your mother to know how to dispose of her—she's got her hands pretty full as it is."

"I hope, father," says Charles, seriously, "you don't blame me very much—think me a great fool, I mean—for bringing the poor little party home here. She hooked on to me and held on like a limpet, and I really didn't see what else I could do. I didn't feel like leaving her to the Police——"

"No, my boy, *I* don't see what else you could have done. What are you drinking, Sir Walker? That's Port—that's Claret. What are you drinking, Mr. Batley? . . . If you want a mild one, try one of the short ones. They're the mildest. . . . When's that coffee coming?" And so on; until, being satisfied that every one is being properly pampered, he feels he may talk to his son, yet not be rude to his guests. In fact, they are ignoring and neglecting him. Sir Walker, after throwing confidential money-market murmurs across the table to Mr. Batley, has walked round to him, and said he wouldn't mind saying eleven and three-quarters *ex div.*, and Mr. Batley has said that we might be able to get you that. Mr. Kettlewell, having lost his politician, who was a lady, is morose and reserved. Mr. Kerr-Kerr has been forgiven by Mr. Jerry-thought for his mistake in the drawing-room, and they are talking about early Bristol in what may be called a ceramicable manner. Robin and somebody else are talking about the Drama, and making a great noise.

"No—*I* don't see what else you could have done, Charley. If you

had come home here and told us all about it, without her, your mother would have been shocked at you. *I* shouldn't have been allowed a word. Hey?——" But Charles wasn't going to take any exception to what his father said. He was contemplating a mean and cowardly use of Peggy's name to advance the scheme for the retention of Alice, in some capacity. The fact is, a general disposition to this end existed in all quarters, but every one of these quarters wanted somehow to make a scapegoat of some other quarter. Mrs. Heath wouldn't say honestly what she really favoured, but was ready to bring it about, if she could utilise a latent irreligion she ascribed to her husband, and hold him up to public reproof. He for his part wished to capture the position of having given way to a whim of his wife—a benevolent one, but still a whim. Charles felt sore, on reflection, at his own Quixotism—and tried to put it on his sister. After all, she was a woman, and need not feel awkward and *gauche* about doing a kind-hearted action. He had to remember his dignity as a man. Young men approve and disapprove of themselves for the oddest reasons, and they are all tarred with the same feather.

"Oh no! That's just what I thought myself. She never would have stood my leaving the child to the Police. And now neither she nor Peggy will at all like her to go back to that wretched sot of a mother of hers."—Observe the meanness of both these gentlemen, sitting there smoking cigars, and trying to shift off responsibilities on their womankind. They smoke through a short spell of silence.

"Try a glass of Benedettino, Jeff. Didn't you ever have any?" For Mr. Jeff had lost his presence of mind at so long a word, and refused to partake, and was sorry. "Take the liqueur back to Mr. Jerrythought, Phillimore."

"Suppose this terrible old mother goes to a better—hey, Charley? What then? However, we shall have to think it over and talk about it." Whereupon Charles in the most casual way makes his insinuation about his sister:—"Peggy's quite taken a fancy to the child!" he says. And his father replies (slightly varying his previous remark) that they will have to talk it over and think about it.

It's pretty clear the chances are against Alice being handed back to Goody Peppermint, even if Pyæmia doesn't set in.

. . . . . .

The sequel of the foregoing, so far as it concerns this story, may be summed up as follows:

Charles, accompanied by his friend Jeff, attended the inquest on

Samuel Kavanagh, and was censured by the Coroner for allowing the deceased to go out of his sight. "As if," said he afterwards to Peggy, indignantly, "everybody ought to be able to guess that a man who breaks his wife's head has a bottle of Cyanide of Potassium in the next room!" His laxity would evidently have been prevented if Mr. Jerrythought, who contrived to figure as his guardian genius, had not gone upstairs (though most praiseworthily) to open the street-door to the doctor. The Coroner spoke highly of Mr. Jerrythought's presence of mind throughout. But he was rather indignant at the absence of Alice, under the shield of a medical certificate to the effect that she was quite unfit to give evidence, even if he himself came to the house to take it. However, inasmuch as it was not clear that a little girl of six, who saw no more than she was known to have seen, could add any force to the inference that her father died of the Cyanide that was found in his stomach, Alice was left in peace.—"The Jury wanted to get home, and found accordingly," was Charles's report of the verdict.

And with that verdict Alice's father vanishes, leaving to his child the only memory of her babyhood she can look back to with happiness: but a memory destined very soon to become dim in the dazzling surroundings she has been translated to by the merest accident. For had Charles Heath failed to hear the disturbance that night; or, hearing it, concluded that it was some family matter outside his personal range, Alice would probably have been transferred to some relation after a temporary sojourn with the police. As it was, he—luckily for her as it turned out—came to the conclusion that the person who was calling "Murder!" might not be doing so for fun; and then, hearing the policeman's knock and voice down the area, decided on enquiry. Now, suppose he had been sound asleep!

CHAPTER VII

OF PUSSY'S MILK, AND OF THE LADY WITH THE BLACK SPOTS

THUS it came about that Alice Kavanagh, who made her appearance in this story less than a month since as a small waif carrying home a beer-jug through a London fog, became an object of concern and sympathy to very opulent friends. You will be quite right if you infer that she must have been a pretty and attractive little girl. She certainly was that, with her clear blue eyes and pale brown hair, and her appearance of observation and reserve—of keeping silence about something she was all the while making mental notes on. For you may have noticed that Alice has so far said very little to any one. If you are an imaginative person you may have heard, at the suggestion of this narrative, a small voice by itself, in the dreary basement of No. 40, communing with a small kitten, which is held out at arm's length—two arms' lengths—by the stomach, to be talked to, and now and then throws in a woe-begone squeak, which Miss Alice interprets in any sense that suits her best. But she has said very little since she last spoke to Pussy—did in fact say almost nothing at the Heath mansion; until, a day or two after her arrival there, during which her silence was accepted as natural in a timid child under her circumstances, she suddenly petitioned to be allowed to go home to Pussy, and likewise to take some milk in a bottle to give to Pussy and her family.

"I declare I never thought of Pussy, Partridge!" said Peggy, to whom this application was made. "I hope she won't starve." Partridge didn't seem the least concerned. Perhaps she knew more than her young mistress about the resources of a London cat. And perhaps didn't care.

"Poothy had a thawther of milk quite full up," said Alice. She lisped a good deal, and Peggy repeated "saucer" after her and laughed.—"Does she mean to have a full saucer every day?"—Partridge really had no special insight into Alice's meaning, but she had arrogated to herself powers of interpretation, partly because the child was sleeping in her room; partly because of the position she occupied, half-way in the social gap between Alice and Peggy, which enabled her to understand both. She vouched for

Alice's meaning, this time, a saucer of milk every day. But Alice shook her head with continuous emphasis, and appeared to be formulating a report in silence.

"Wasn't it that, Alice?" said Peggy. "What was it then?" And when Alice stopped shaking her head (which wasn't immediately) she drew the longest possible breath, and started the following speech on the top of it:

"Poothy had a thawther of milk quite full up becawth father thaid Poothy should have another thawther of milk vethy thoon becawth I froed it over and mother thaid no——" And by this time Alice had got to the end of the breath supply, and paused to take in a new one. Partridge stepped in to assist the communication:

"And mother punished you for spilling the milk?" But Alice evidently had some other tale to tell, for she entrenched herself behind a long head-shake of denial to prepare and concentrate it.

"Didn't mother punish you, Alice dear?" said Peggy. And Alice, in whom there was a trace of reserve towards Partridge, as compared with her bearing towards Peggy, immediately paused in the head-shake, and said without stopping to draw in the requisite air-supply—"Mother never beated me only when I was naughty."

"Then didn't mother think you naughty for spilling the milk?" asked Peggy. Alice shook her head.

"Mother didn't beated me," said she. And that was clear proof that she couldn't have been naughty. For a mother has to work hard indeed to destroy a young child's belief in her infallibility and truthfulness. Goody Peppermint had assured her daughter that she never beat her unless she was naughty; item, that she should always beat her if she were; ergo, not having been beaten, she couldn't have been naughty. The logic was irresistible, but on the other hand the *prima-facie* naughtiness of spilling milk was obvious. Peggy suspected some other reason for Alice's immunity. "How did you spill the milk, Alice?" she asked. Alice's answer provoked still further enquiry: "Becoth of the lidy," said she.

"But why did you spill the milk because of the lidy?" Alice became communicative.

"Becoth the lidy had black spots. I could thee them. And the whilst I was theeing them, I putted my foot down on Poothy—and Poothy went in the milk. But Poothy got the milk—motht of it, off of the pivement. Only the thawther was broken in pieces—free pieces. And mother come out of the kitchen——"

"But, Alice dear, who was the lidy who had black spots? Lidies don't have black spots——"

"On her veil, Miss Peggy, no doubt," says Partridge, the interpreter. But Alice is too sharp for her.

"She hadn't got no vile. Teacher has a vile——"

But Alice stops in her narrative and becomes reserved. Perhaps she is feeling exhausted after such a prolonged effort. Peggy resumes her enquiry.

"Tell us, Alice, who the lidy was—won't you?" But Alice only shakes a speechless head, and looks puzzled.

"Law, Miss Peggy!" says Partridge. "The child's romancin'. Don't you listen to her stories!"

"No, Partridge, be quiet! I want to know about the lidy with the black spots. Come and sit on my knee and tell me—that's right!" Alice complies with a readiness that suggests that misgivings about Partridge's powers of belief, or proneness to disbelief, may have had something to do with her reticence. Once established on Alice's knee, she becomes loquacious again, but with a slight tendency to saw backwards and forwards in harmony with the rhythm of her narrative.

"The lidy hadn't got no vile. She come down the stairs, but not froo the door. Becoth the door *thqueakth*."

This is a difficult word, calling for emphasis and a species of pounce, as well as the incorporation of the sound of a door's hinges. Peggy relinquishes the door for the present, as too difficult, and recurs to the spots.

"But tell me more about the lidy's spots, Alice. What were they made of?" An ill-framed question; that makes Alice speechless again. She puzzles about in her mind for an answer, and none comes. Then she sees her way plainer, and introduces a new element.

"One of 'em was *here*—and one was *here*—and one was *here*."

"Take care of my eyes," says Peggy, laughing. "Ridiculous little finger!"—For Alice has been indicating the exact whereabouts of each spot on Peggy's face, with great decision.

"How many were there altogether, Alice? Three?"

"There wath thix—free on one side, two on the other——"

"That makes five." From Partridge, with didactic severity. But Alice repulses her, with loss.

"And one in the middle of the thin." She places the ridiculous little finger accurately under Peggy's dimple. Who says—"Oh, you funny little thing, how you tickle! Now do sit still, dear, and tell us more about the lidy."—For Alice's successful arithmetic has produced a sort of discharge of fireworks on her part.

"Where did the lidy go?" continued Peggy. "Into the kitchen?" Alice's reply is almost reproachful.

"*Mother* was in the kitchen!"

"But didn't mother see the lidy?"—Apparently no! Alice was again distinguishing herself as a logician. If the lidy had gone into the kitchen, mother would have seen her. But mother had never seen her. Therefore she went somewhere else.

"Where did she go then, Alice dear? Do try and tell us! Don't you know where she went?" For Alice merely shakes her head and closes her lips.

"Where did you see her last?" Peggy varies the question and elicits a statement.

"I thee her go *froo* the airey door—*out* in the airey—*past* the coalth—*past* the dutht——"

"Yes, dear, and then?" says Peggy, who is feeling very curious. But Alice entrenches herself in mystery, or can tell nothing more.

"Law, Miss Peggy," says Partridge. "What did I tell you? The child's only romancin'!" And adds to herself that Alice may only turn out a story-telling little hussy, after all! However, there is no public speculation on this point, for the door opens, and Charles appears. He has been to the Hospital to see about Goody Peppermint. And reports, rather ruefully, that she is going on well. In fact if Pyæmia doesn't set in, there doesn't seem much chance of our being delivered from her—so, we will dissimulate, and appear to rejoice.

"That's nice," says Peggy, courageously. "Mother's going to be quite quite well again, Alice." But Alice looks doubtful. Charles meanly leaves the rejoicing to Peggy—is even not ashamed to murmur something to himself about where his sister expects to go to. But he reaps the advantage of a relief from embarrassment, and shelves the topic.

"Well, that is a smart new frock, and no mistake, Alice-for-short!" says he. Alice deserts her patroness's knee and makes for Charles's hand; his claim of priority is growing fainter, but has not died out yet; perhaps it won't. She recites the deed of transfer of the new frock, that she may not seem oblivious. "I wasn't to spill anyfing over it," she says. And Peggy explains it still further—"One of poor little Trix's—that hadn't been given away."—Trix was a sister next above Ellen, who had died eight years since. Charles's face pays a tribute to her memory—he has a flexible and expressive face—and needn't say everything. "Then, when we want something to spill anything over, what's to be done? Eh, Miss Kavanagh?" says he. Partridge sees her way to a moral lesson.

"That's what I've been saying to her, haven't I, Alice? If she wants to make a mess, she'll have to have her old frock on again." Partridge requires small certificates to her position at intervals, and writes them for herself.

"I must have my old flock on when I'm took back to——" and Alice comes to a standstill. She began her speech heedlessly—forgot that she couldn't end up with "father" now, and had only a qualified enthusiasm about mother. Peggy heads the subject off, and supersedes it with a suggestion she might not have made at all if it had not seemed to her likely to act as a lubricant.

"Alice is to go home first before mother comes, Charley. Pussy hasn't had any milk, so Alice and I are going to take her some in a bottle. Aren't we, Alice?"

"If you pleathe, Mith," says Alice, and turns her head to the commissariat.—"Poothy never has more than a farvingsworf at a time."

"I may come too, I suppose, Miss Kavanagh?" says Charles. To this there appears to be no objection. So an expedition is arranged for next day to No. 40, as all seem to agree to call the house.

The remainder of this conversation was a *résumé* of the story of the lady with the spots, for Mr. Charley's benefit. Alice stuck tight to her tale, including the sudden appearance and mysterious disappearance of the lady. She added to it that after the lady was gone she felt frightened, and mother came out, and then father, and both said there hadn't been no lidy. And then all went out in the airey, and Alice showed her father where she saw the lidy last "by the grite big iron gite in the airey." Mr. Charles said that *was* a funny story, but evidently only half believed in it, and Alice felt mortified; however, she resolved to prove it all true by showing the gate in the area, so that there should be no doubt on the matter. Then the brother and sister had to go, but Alice would see them again to-morrow, quite for certain. And when they had left the room Mrs. Partridge said Alice was a funny little pitcher for sure, if ever there was one, and took her down into the kitchen, where she found many things of surpassing interest.

"Only one thing I do stipulate for," said Peggy to her brother as they went upstairs together. "No Mr. Jerrythought."

"Poor Jeff! Why mustn't he come? He'll be awfully cut up if he hears we explored the basement and him upstairs all the time——"

"Then he'll have to be cut up," said the young lady, unfeelingly. "Because I draw the line at Mr. Jerrythought."

CHAPTER VIII

OF THE PSYCHICAL RESEARCH INTO THE LADY WITH THE SPOTS. OF A CERTAIN TABLE. AND OF HOW ALICE CRIED IN THE DARK. HOW MR. HEATH CALLED HIS SISTER TO SEE MR. JOHNSON. HOW ALICE WAS TOLD THAT THAT WAS MOTHER. HOW MR. HEATH'S SISTER KISSED MOTHER, AND WHY. OF A PAWN-TICKET, AND HOW DR. JOHNSON WROTE A PRESCRIPTION WRONG

A NEW caretaker had been discovered to live in the basement of No. 40 and show the extensive premises. She was Mrs. Twills, and gave the spectator an impression that she was all on one side. A very long tooth seemed to start somehow from the root of her nose and support her upper lip. It made attempts at speech ineffectual, and appeared in fact to transfer the seat of articulation to the right-hand upper molar, if any. She was also so deaf as to be unable to receive communications except by conjecture; and so ill-informed or reticent as to be unable to impart them under any circumstances. Her redeeming features were her temporariness, and an alacrity in the distribution of cataracts, while insulated on pattens, that was inconsiderate to bystanders perhaps, but serviceable to cleanliness. It would have been beneficial in every way if it had not envenomed the nature of its promoter, and made her look upon her fellow-creatures as incarnate fiends for dirtying her steps.

Mrs. Twills, having been installed as a substitute for Goody Peppermint, had instinctively proceeded to do out the first floor, unopposed. Whether any intelligible instruction had reached her mind, Charles certainly did not know; but he had accepted Mrs. Twills as his lot, considered as a first-floor. It was part of her nature to pay no attention to humanity as such, and to ignore its wants. But considered as first-floors, second-floors, or offices, she did it out. And this official position of Mrs. Twills made it easy and natural for Peggy and Alice, accompanied by Charles, to penetrate the subterranean regions, without explaining to her that the nicely dressed little girl that came with the first-floor's sister in a carriage was the child of the previous caretaker, now in the Hospital, and a father who had poisoned himself on the premises. In fact nothing that occurred during the visit threw any light on

what Mrs. Twills knew either of the tragic story of her predecessors, or of anything else.

Peggy felt as they drove up to the door how ghastly were the whole of the circumstances, but was glad of one thing at any rate—that the child could only have the vaguest notions of the cause of her father's death. She could not quite make out how much, and was afraid to talk about it to her. She had assured her that her mother was going on well in the Hospital, and that she should soon go and see her. The assurance was not welcomed with rapture, and the subject had dropped naturally. She was relieved, on getting to the house, where her brother came down to meet them, at Alice making no reference to her parents, but going straight to the consideration of Pussy and the milk. This was of course the ostensible cause of the excursion—the real one, as far as Peggy was concerned, being to get a repetition on the spot of the story of the mysterious lady.

So, as soon as Pussy, who certainly was the most uncomely, woebegone, and green-eyed little black thing ever seen by man, had been introduced and provided with the farthing's worth of milk stipulated for, Peggy revived the subject of the lady. But indirectly, having had some experience of the upsetting effects of direct examination on Alice.

"We shan't break the saucer this time, Alice, shall we? Because this time there's no lady with spots coming downstairs."

"There was, *before*," said Alice, with emphasis. She was rather up in arms to protect her story from doubts that might be cast on it; perhaps seeing through a certain amount of pretence in the general acceptance it had received, and suspecting, without putting the suspicion into words, that she was being treated like a child. Of course she really was a great, grown-up girl of six.

"And she came right through that door at the top of the stairs, that swings both ways?"—Peggy remembered perfectly that the contrary was stated, but thought this a good way of getting a repeat. She was right. Alice shook her head a long time, and then discharged a denial, like a gun.

"I—thed—NO! Becoth the door—becoth the door—becoth the door——"

"Yes, dear, because the door what?"

"Becoth the door *thqueakth!*"

"I see! Of course it always squeaks when it's opened. And this time it didn't squeak, so it wasn't opened?" Alice nodded a great many times to this, rather as approving its clearness of statement, as well as confirming its truth.

"Poothy didn't hear it, neever," said she. And Charley burst out laughing.—"What a funny little tot it is!" he cried. "As grave as a judge!"

"Hush, Charley, don't!" said his sister. "Do be discreet, or we shan't get any more——"

"*She* doesn't understand——"

"Oh—*doesn't* she?—she's as sharp as a razor——" And then addressing Alice—"Never mind him and his nonsense, poppet—he's only laughing at us. You'll tell me another time how the lady came downstairs, won't you?" Alice nodded. "And how she went out into the area——?" More nods. "And how she went right up the area steps and out into the street?"

The vigour with which Alice shook her head threatened dislocation. She drew a tremendous breath to supply her denial with force.

"I thed—the lidy went past the coal-thellar, and I thed—the lidy went to the grite iron gite acrost the airey and I thed——" here some confusion came in—"No! I didn't thed—there wathn't no lidy—— And Poothy *theed* there wathn't no lidy—— And father came out——"

The slight inflection of the child's voice as she said "father" contained its tribute to his memory—and was more expressive than an epitaph. Had her brother not been there probably Peggy would have made her talk about father, and she could have had a good cry. But in such a connection the old "Two is company and three is none" is more than ever true. So it was best to turn the conversation.

"Why, Alice, I thought you said the lady went up the area-steps——?"

"There *wath* no lidy"—this very emphatically. "Poothy theed there wath no lidy——"

"You mean she disappeared?" Alice wouldn't commit herself to hard words, but was inclined to invest in this one on speculation. She sanctioned it with a short nod, and her two hearers glanced at each other.

"*Are* there any area steps?" said Peggy. "I didn't see any——" And this was true, only Peggy hadn't looked. Alice's blue eyes opened wide and indignant at the suggestion that there were no area steps. "Come out and thee them," said she.

"It's horribly dirty out there," said Charles.

"This old rag of a thing won't hurt," said Peggy. "I put it on on purpose." And Alice wondered about the "old rag." She had been thinking how beautiful it was, all the way in the carriage.

But the area outside was a grizzly and a filthy place, and we shuddered at its damp and drip and mouldy slime. The coterie of cats that exploded and fled as we emerged into their disagreeable perfume were uncanny and monstrous cats, unfit to live and almost incapable of death. Surely witches—the worst witches—had been changed into them a hundred years ago; and now, when Peggy in all her youth and beauty, and the old rag that wouldn't hurt, stepped out into their preserve and sent them flying, may not one of them have said, as she flung a curse back at her—"I too was young and beautiful once, like you! But I gave myself to the Devil, and this is his gratitude!"—You may feel inclined to exclaim: "This is an entirely unwarrantable speculation, based upon no data; a neotheosophical reincarnationism without so much as a single Himalayan Brother to back you up! Justify your absurd imagination by the production of adequate and substantial evidence, or proceed with your story without raising irrelevant issues, and giving your reader the trouble of finding out how much he may skip with safety"—that is to say, if you are in the habit of indulging in long exclamations. Should you do so our reply is:—if you think our surmise about London cats so very absurd, study them more, and note the effect on your opinion.

However, it won't do to leave Peggy standing in that grimy doorway, in that filthy area, while we sift this question to the bottom. She didn't stand there more than just long enough for the cats to disperse; and then emerged guided by Alice, who kept tight hold of her hand. "The coalth ith in there," said she, "and the dutht in there"—and pointed to two vaults in which only persons of iron constitution could have enjoyed a long imprisonment for life. "Theethe ith the area steps," Alice explained, touching one to make quite sure.

"Then," said Peggy, "where is the great gate, or grite gite?"

"That's round the corner," said Charley, who was following in the rear. "Miss Kavanagh must have seen the lidy through the window——"

"Froo my bedroom window," says Miss Kavanagh. "And mother come out—and father come out. And there wathn't no lidy——" and Alice goes on shaking her head with a wistful expression, dramatically indicative of fruitless search. They went round the corner to the great gate. Peggy and Charley looked at one another. "You go inside, Charley," said she. "See if you can see me here from the passage—I'll stop outside the window——" He went inside and presently returned. "Miss Kavanagh's all right," he

said. "You can see quite plain from where Pussy was drinking the milk." "And Poothy could thee too," said Alice, who seemed to appreciate the testimonial to her accuracy.

"Well—it's a funny story!" said Peggy, and both gave it up as a bad job, and turned to go indoors.

"But I *did* thee the lidy!" cries Alice, appealingly.

"Of course you did, dear! By the by, you've never told us what father and mother said. What did father say?"

"Thaid I was deamin'. But I wasn't deamin'. I was awike——"

"And what did mother say?"

"Thaid I wath a little liar!——" And Peggy felt that her wishes for that good woman's recovery became more difficult. She changed the subject. "I wish," she said, "Mrs. Twills—is she?—would leave the boys alone. They weren't doing us any harm." For the party had not been twenty seconds in the area before Ishmaelites began agglomerating against the airey-palins above them, offering their services with confidence, and volunteering useless information. They also threw each other's hats down through the palins, and then denied having done so. Mrs. Twills's attempts to disperse them were well-intentioned, but ineffectual. It was time we went in, clearly. So we did so, and perhaps the boys went away. And probably the cats came back.

"It wouldn't be such a dreadful place if it were clean," said Peggy. And Charles mentioned that Mrs. Twills meant to do it out as soon as there was Time. But there was a note of uncertainty in his voice, and both appeared cautious about going into details. After all, it was the landlord's business. Where was it "it" happened?—This was Peggy's question to her brother, at a moment when Alice appeared absorbed in Pussy. They passed through into the kitchen.

Mrs. Twills was always a phase, and never a permanency; and she had left behind, at her own 'ouse, a superior class of furniture to that she found on the premises. So the Kavanaghs' goods remained for the time being undisturbed. Until it was certain that the woman was not going to recover, action was paralysed—or rather action didn't want to be bothered, having plenty to see to elsewhere. So the House Agents who had charge, and who represented action in this case, availed themselves of the fleeting nature of Mrs. Twills as a stop-gap, and stood it over for a week or so, till we could see our way. Mrs. Twills's attitude, so far as it could be understood, seemed to be that of premature resentment against assumed allegations of interference on her part. It was surmised that she said that everything was left just as it was—

she wasn't going to meddle with anything. She left an impression of having censured the human race for a vice of interposition in each other's affairs that she was nobly exempt from. She can hardly be said to have spoken on the subject. She withdrew after producing an effect of having done so, and went upstairs with a pail.

"It was in here," said Charles. "No!—not the poisoning—the row. Here's the hammer." Peggy shuddered. It was an awful, large cast-iron hammer, with a sharp corner on the square front. It had come out somehow on the Inquest that it had been used by some previous tenants to break coal, and had been forgotten and found in the cellar.—"No wonder it took the scalp nearly off," said Charles. "Poor fellow!"

"Poor woman, *I* should say!" said Peggy.

"Poor woman of course, but poor fellow too!" But both were really most sorry for him—there was no doubt of it!

"I wonder what's in here," said Peggy, prying into the drawers of a table that had a strong appearance of having seen better days. It had been a wedding present, twenty-odd years ago, and was one of the two or three things the couple had held on to. Charles remarked on his sister's invasion of sacred privacy; and she said she didn't care, and it couldn't do any harm. She pulled out a portfolio, or what seemed like one. But it wasn't a portfolio. It was a series of pictures on millboard flaps, folding like a screen—it was the young gentleman of property who had adorned the glorious shop-window in the years of hope and youth long gone. He had been carefully preserved, and was still smiling cheerfully and immovably in all his costumes. But could he have appeared now in the flesh, it never would have done to clothe it in coats and trousers of that cut. Pall-Mall would have disowned him, and Piccadilly would have cast him forth. But his portraits had been treasured by their owner, in whose heart hope had never quite died out that they should one day reappear in their splendour, before it was quite too late for them to be the fashion. Of course poor Kavanagh knew latterly they were as extinct as the Pharaohs, but he clung to them mechanically, and kept them clean. To throw them away or burn them would have been to admit that there never—no! never—would be a new shop again!

Of course Peggy and Charles did not grasp this relation of the coloured prints to the ruined life of their late possessor. They only said "Some of his tailors' costumes," and how funny they looked nowadays!—"Only look at his tight trousers and his absurd

stick-up collars," said Peggy, and pushed them back in the drawer and shut it.

"And then," said she, "he went away and swallowed the poison in the other room——?"

"Quite away at the end of the passage," said Charles. "We can go there, but it's very dark."—For the afternoon was becoming the evening, and February can be very dark at half-past four in a London basement. Mrs. Twills had lighted the gas in the kitchen. Charles secured the box whose matches, when they decided to ignite, didn't care what they did it on, and led the way out. Peggy called Alice, but got no answer.

"Where *is* that young person?" said she.

"Most likely along there—the room she slept in," said her brother. So they passed along the dark passage, past the inexplicable bulkheads and cisterns and pipe-agglomerations, leaving Alice, as they thought, behind. Charles lighted a match or two on the way to help them forward. "Here's the room," said he.

"What's that?" said Peggy. And what was what?—asked Charles in return. "It's the child crying," she continued. "I'm sure it is!" And so it was, for when they went into the room, there was poor Alice, who had found her way there in the dark, to cry by herself in the room where father died. "Oh, you poor little forsaken scrap!" said Peggy, picking her up and giving her a good long kiss. Alice indeed needed consolation. "Was—father—really—died—here?" she said between her sobs. She hadn't been frightened of the darkness; in fact she seemed to have thought it was still light. In a true Londoner this singular belief in daylight after the fact is not uncommon; and leads to refusals to light the gas, in deference to ipse-dixits to the effect that we can see to read. And we can't, and we know we are putting our eyes out. If such things be in upper stories, what can we expect in basements? Perhaps too Alice had lived so much in the dark that it didn't terrify her as it did us in our childhood.

"May I have Poothy to tike to the big house?" said Alice. Children of six don't cry for ever, and the recurrence of Pussy, a good deal too full of milk, and quite hard like a bullet, supplied the context for a new paragraph in Alice's life. Yes! She might bring Pussy, but Pussy was not to be allowed on the cushions of the carriage.

When Mr. Charles and Miss Peggy and Pussy and Alice reached Hyde Park Gardens (about which journey we may remark, in the form of a conundrum, that our first and our second execrated our

third, who was not allowed on the lap of our fourth), they found a visitor awaiting them, who was Dr. Johnson, Sir.—"It's not the Lexicographer, Pog," said Charles. "So you needn't look so frightened!"—It was, in fact, a young doctor from the Hospital, whom Charles had made some acquaintance with on his recent visits. He was passing quite close, he said, and had called to tell Mr. Heath that the patient he was interested in was a good deal better, and if Pyæmia didn't set in, etc. But the said patient was fidgeting about the little girl. She had been told about her husband—well! it couldn't be helped—of course her deposition had been taken as soon as she was fit to make one—you see she might have gone delirious, and died, any time—first interval was taken. Dr. Johnson thought it might be well for her to see the little girl.

Mr. Heath thought not. He did not like to set up his judgment in opposition to that of others better qualified to judge. "But really, my dear Sir, the woman was such an awful woman——"

"A—what sort of an awful woman? What did she seem like to you? How should you describe her?"

"A regular Jezebel—a drunken virago just on the edge of delirium tremens. A horrible hag!"

"Curious! Still, one does meet with these cases."

"But why curious? Doesn't she seem like that to you now?"

"Not the least. I believe she was different when she first came in. *I* didn't see her. The House-Surgeon and the Nurse had your impression of her though——"

"Do you mind my calling my sister? I should like her to hear your account herself."

"Not at all." And really when we come to think of it, there was no reason whatever why Dr. Johnson should object to Mr. Heath calling his sister. Especially as he thereon heard her say in the distance, "Yes please, I should like to if I may." If he had made any objections perhaps he would have withdrawn them on hearing Mr. Heath's sister's voice. It was one that caused immediate curiosity to see its owner.

"Very well, then! I shall expect to see you to-morrow at half-past ten at the Hospital." It is Dr. Johnson who speaks, and we have skipped a great deal of unnecessary interview. "I anticipate from what Mr. Heath has been telling me that you will be rather surprised. Dear me, is that seven o'clock? I must hurry. But really you are so awfully jolly, and your hair is so beautiful and

soft, and your nose is such a perfectly satisfactory nose, and your mouth is so absolutely right in all respects whether it speaks or is silent, while as for your voice——! Really I must run——! Good-night, Miss Heath! Good-night, Mr. Heath! To-morrow at the Hospital at half-past ten——"

And that young doctor runs and catches a cab, and tells it to get along sharp. He does not know—yet—that his life has just been sliced into two distinct halves, like B C and A D, by his chance visit at the great big house where he left the first gong ringing for dinner; and where the girl he had been talking with said to her brother as she went away to dress—"What very nice-looking young doctors they have at that Hospital! Can't you fetch me a few more, Charley?" And Charley replied that one was enough.

Perhaps I ought to mention that the portion of what the nice-looking young doctor said between the words *hurry* and *really I must run* was not said audibly, nor in fact said at all. But he thought it just the same for all that.

At half-past ten next morning Alice found herself standing by something on a bed in an enormous roomful of beds, with Miss Peggy beside her, telling her that that was mother. For Alice found it hard to make out what was that colourless figure with the head bound up in bandages, like a sort of mummy, that lay so still and spoke so low. And then presently she saw that it was mother sure enough, though she spoke unlike her, and very slowly, and never moved her head, only her eyes.

"Is that Alice?"

"Please, Mother, yes," said Alice, and was frightened at the sound of her own voice.

"It was drink——" The woman got thus far—then seemed to stop less for want of something to say than from not knowing exactly to whom she was speaking. Peggy detected this, and sitting down by the bed placed her hand on the colourless hand that lay outside the coverlid. It moved slightly towards her in response—and her eyes followed the movement.

"I don't know, Ma'am, who——" she began, and Peggy supplied the information she was framing her speech to ask.

"Mr. Heath's sister, on the first floor——" Peggy was colloquial, but people are, in real speech. It is only in books they talk like books.

"Mr. Heath in the spectacles—kind to Alice—I was not."

"Alice hasn't said so, Mrs. Kavanagh. Alice says you were

often very kind." This was quite unwarranted, but Alice confirmed it with nods.

"Mr. Heath was kind," says her mother, avoiding the point. "He was kind when Alice broke the jug—the jug we found in the little cellar—is that him?"

"No. This is Dr. Johnson." For it had been decided Peggy and Alice should go alone. Too many would do no good. Peggy thinks it would be best to let her talk of easy things, and rather welcomes this jug. She wants to avoid the husband and the poison. "Where did you find the jug, Mrs. Kavanagh?"

"There was a kind of place in the wall, a sort of hole going low down. Samuel—that was my husband, Miss—cleared it out. It was clay and sand like, and the jug buried in it, stood right in under the pavement and covered over."

"Wasn't it broken?"

"Not broke—oh no! We thought to keep it for the beer. It was wrote over with verses—morals and pictures."

"Was there nothing there but the jug?"

"Just the jug." But a moment after she continued: "No—Miss. I won't tell any untruth. When we come to look, there was a ring. In the jug."

"Did you keep the ring?"

"Took it to the pawnshop." Peggy, glancing round for grown-up sympathy, meets the eyes of the young doctor, who elevates his eyebrows with a slight "Of course" nod. "You don't know about pawnshops, Miss?"

"Oh dear, yes, I do!"

"I'm fearing the ticket may be lost. Out of my dress-pocket. This gentleman——"

"I see, Mrs. Kavanagh. You mean it was in the dress you had on. Will you enquire, Dr. Johnson?"—No doubt about that, anyhow! Dr. Johnson goes away to enquire. The voice of the woman drops, and Peggy stoops to catch what she is saying. She speaks with much effort, but clearly and consecutively:

"You will wonder, Miss, but I would like to tell you."—Peggy nods go on.—"It was the drink—it was *all* the drink. My mother was good, but she died of it. It was one story alike—for her and for me." She paused a second. Best not to hurry her, thought Peggy. "She'd had six," she went on. "And she wasn't the strong woman I was, at the first go off."

Peggy felt the whole tale was told, for both, but she let her finish it her own way.

"I had been a total abstainer, Miss, from fear of it. And

Samuel, I made of him a total too, or near upon it. It made him some happy days, and made me."

"But what was it made you give it up?"

"What can a woman do, Miss, when her strength is not enough? And when the doctor comes and says, 'You must drink stout'—'You must take port'——? It began so with her—it began so with me! And what could you hope from a man, but follow on——?"

"Oh, Mrs. Kavanagh! I am so sorry for you. I see it all—so plain!" The woman dropped her voice to a whisper. "Does the child know? Does Alice know?"

"About her father? I don't know. She knows he is dead."

"When she is old enough to understand, will you tell her all?"

"You mustn't talk like that, Mrs. Kavanagh. The doctors say you will get up, and be yourself again."

"Not to trust to, Miss. Much best the other way. Much best." Dr. Johnson returns. He has found the pawn-ticket. The patient understands and says: "Give it to the lady to keep for Alice." Peggy hesitates a minute, then puts it in her purse. The doctor goes away to another bed.

A nursing sister comes up, and thinks the patient has talked enough. Her temperature will go up if she talks any more. Peggy says "Kiss your mother, Alice," and facilitates her doing so. And mother feels like a bit of cold wood to Alice. And then Alice thinks she must be dreaming. For the beautiful young lady, the incredible being who has come like a strange revelation into Alice's life, herself stoops and kisses the cold wooden image, and says, "Good-bye, Mrs. Kavanagh, God bless you!" And the image repeats, "God bless *you,* Miss. Tell Alice." And then they go away.

They are met by the young doctor, and Alice's dream continues. In it she and he and Miss Peggy are driven to a strange street, not very far off, and there he gets down and is a long time in a curious shop. He brings with him when he comes out a little packet which he hands to Miss Peggy. "I'm not at all sure," he says, "that you have any legal right to it," and she replies, "It was given to me, anyhow, and I shall keep it for Alice until its rightful owner claims it."

That sums up all Alice saw. But we, who know all things, can assure you that that young doctor went away in a turmoil of conflicting emotions, and had a narrow escape of killing a patient that afternoon by writing a prescription wrong!

CHAPTER IX

OF THE NEW TENANTS AT NO. 40, AND HOW MR. HEATH MADE THEIR ACQUAINTANCE. OF THE CATS' BONES, AND OF DR. JOHNSON'S INFATUATION.

THE ground floor and basement at No. 40 did not find occupants very quickly. The landlord was able to wait for his money, and naturally preferred waiting for a large sum to waiting for a small one. A trait of this sort makes us feel that landlords are human too, as well as tenants. For no doubt the latter, if they could sleep with comfort in the gutter, would wait for small rents, by choice.

Pope & Chappell, the stained-glass window makers in the next street were able to wait until midsummer, when they had received notice to quit, as the house was coming down. But they were not prepared to go to a hundred and twenty for the premises at No. 40. Chappell was of a weak and timorous nature, and in view of the exact suitability of those premises, would fain have hurried matters and at once secured them. But Pope, who was astute and far-sighted and wiry, and had a wall-eye, refused to listen to the whisperings of pusillanimity, and pointed out his reasons to Chappell, whom he called too cautious a bird by half.

"I took stock of 'im," said he, referring to the landlord of No. 40, after an interview in which he had offered £60 a year, on condition that he, the landlord, should put everything into startling order, reconstruct most things, and paint all surfaces except the window-panes with four coats of good oil paint, two flat and two round.

"I took stock of 'im, Mr. Chappell, and you mark my words! We shall get those premises for three, five, or seven at ninety-five, lawful wear and tear dooly permitted, and knock 'em about just as we like."

And Mr. Pope went on touching up a head with tar-oil and a stippling brush, while his partner (who couldn't paint) busied himself on a working drawing of lead-lines. The advantage of having something to do while you talk is that you take time to think of what you are going to say, and pretend it is because you

are grappling with a crisis. Mr. Chappell took so much time that Mr. Pope, who was able to paint the right-hand thief in a three-light crucifixion and talk at the same moment, spoke again before he found anything to say:

"This landlord chap he wasn't born yesterday. I as good as heard him say to 'imself, 'These two Johnnies 'll come back a week before Lady-Day and make me a 'andsome offer.' Do you suppose he don't see we want the place? Of course he does! *I* took stock of 'im."—Mr. P pe, like Mr. Jerrythought, dropped his aspirates. But never as if he did it in fun. It was always plain that he couldn't help it. Jeff, on the contrary, seemed to think it humorous.

Mr. Chappell pretended the leads were easy, just this minute, and asked his partner what he made of that?

"Only this:—he thinks he can rely on us for one-twenty. So the next Johnny who comes for the crib he'll say one-thirty to. Twig? Safe for one-twenty; try for one-thirty, says he!"

"But suppose his new man takes them at one-thirty?"

"Naw feeah!"—Mr. Pope gained force for this expression of faith in the next Johnny's worldly prudence by speaking through his nose, which he placed slightly on one side for the purpose.

"But why let this landlord chap see we want the place? Where's the sense of being so transparent?"

"To advantage it, Mr. Chappell. Have you got the idear?"

"No, I haven't."

"Well, but it's like so much daylight. Just you go on (in your innocence and simplicity) *meaning* to give one-twenty, and last minute change your mind. Just the end of the quarter—you see! Only mind you—you must play fair, and really *mean* it—because folk are that cunning and suspicious, you can't foxy 'em without resortin' to honesty."

"Well, Mr. Pope, we must hope you're right. But you're headstrong—you're headstrong! I should have said—close with one-twenty, with immediate possession, and get out of this as fast as we can. We shall have it down on our heads——"

"Not we," said the astute one. "Spring Gardens ain't condemning these premises because they're ruinous, but because they can compel to set back, and get the line of the street, on rebuilding. Spring Gardens ain't so green as you'd think—judging from the name!"

Whether Mr. Pope was right or wrong in his views about Municipal Government at that date is no concern of ours. We merely record what he said. Our reasons for giving the conversation at all are not quite clear to ourselves, because all we want is to know

that Pope & Chappell took the basement and ground floor of No. 40 on a lease at a rental of £110 annually, and that the workmen came in at Lady-Day to do it up, Messrs. P. & C. having undertaken to put the place in thorough repair, and keep it so, in return for a year rent-free.

But having written out this conversation, it may stand. For you may be interested in observing that had it not been for Mr. Pope's far-sighted policy just after Christmas, when due notice came to clear out at Midsummer, the stained-glass firm might have taken possession forthwith, and Alice might never have gone for the beer—from that house at least—and then Hyde Park Gardens would have known nothing about her. See how this thing hangs on that, and that on t'other; and then moralise if you think you will be any the wiser for doing so. We don't!

Pope & Chappell stipulated to be allowed to place a furnace for glass-firing in the vaults, wherever convenient, and to utilise an external flue on the side of the house. This was not done without the sanction of the Insurance Office, who sent a guileless and inexperienced youth, who evidently knew nothing about fire, and little about other subjects, to inspect and report. They departed from the wholesome practice of declining to insure unless there was no risk of fire—but then the landlord of the premises was a Director. So in the early days of April after the January in which we began, Charles Heath and his friend Jeff found ingress and egress difficult owing to agglomerations of planks and pails and trestles in the entrance-hall of the house. Positive assurances that they wouldn't be in *your* way didn't carry conviction to a mind involved in a forest of trestle-legs, solicitous for the preservation of its owner's clothes from a cataract of whitewash, and apprehensive of the worst consequences to his hat from the selfish preoccupation of persons overhead. It was small consolation to know that stripping and clear-coating would be done by Thursday, when our natural satisfaction at seeing the last of such cheerless operations was to be blighted by a revelation of the time the painting itself was going to take afterwards.

"It's all very fine, Jeff," said Charles, after eliciting figures from the builders' foreman—"but you look in Vasari. I'm sure Michael Angelo didn't take as long as that over the Sistine Chapel."

"You ain't countin' for the difference between oil-paint and fresco, 'Eath. Only one coat in fresco." But this was only Mr. Jeff's pleasantry.

When Pope & Chappell came, in earnest, they burst out on the

front door as an eruption of black letters on a brass plate. It was splendid, and you could find out what it spelled by asking the name of the Firm at the Office on the ground floor. But it was as difficult to read as Oscan.

A rubric in the Vulgate was legible, and said Office-Bell, in a corner at the bottom. For a fiction existed that trade was not tolerated in that house, based on some clause in the lease. This could only be known to people great enough to communicate with the Estate—an Isis behind a veil, to whom she of Sais was publicity itself. Even the Landlord's eye had not seen her, nor his ear heard, and he could only communicate with her through her solicitor, who would give you a receipt for money, but would reveal nothing.

Mr. Jeff, being a free and easy sort of fellow, soon picked up acquaintance with the Firm. Charles Heath showed reserve, and was condemned by Mr. Pope as stand-offish. Perhaps he was. But then when you have an impression that a person is a howling cad—whatever the exact meaning of that expression may be—and say so, no one will be surprised that you do not court his society.

"He ain't exactly that, 'Eath," said Jeff, the tolerant—"His game isn't your game—but he ain't a bad chap."—Jeff levelled everybody up and down, and was secretly of opinion that his friend Heath was given to riding the 'igh 'orse. Possibly he was. He didn't dismount on this occasion though.

"What *is* his little game, Jeff? Have you made that out?" said he. Whereupon Jeff took time to consider, and didn't seem to consider quickly. And Charles repeated—"What *is* his game? That's what I want to know."

Jeff evaded the point—"Of course he's not a Royal Academy Artist. Moddles and 'og's-hair brushes and screw-up easels and things. It's a sort of trade—kind of Drapery business. I say, 'Eath, such a rummy start!"—And Charles relinquished his enquiring about Mr. Pope's game, to hear about the rummy start.—"What is, Jeff?" said he.

"Pope's a Protestant and Chappell's a Catholic!"

"Well, of course it ought to be the other way round—Pope ought to be a Catholic and Chappell ought to be a Protestant——" But Jeff didn't understand points of this sort.

"I found out why and all about it," said he. "It's because of the trade. According to the shop the order comes from. When it's a Catholic, Pope turns Chappell on. When it's a Protestant, versy vicer!"

"I see! It's so much more conscientious for both." But Jeff couldn't understand it on those lines.

"It's like the 'Appy Family in a cage in Endell Street," he said. "I should have thought they would burn each other alive, like Guy Foxes!"

"Why don't you write a short comprehensive History of England, Jeff?"

"Well—you know they used to cook each other, like steaks, once."—And Charles thought he could see in this a memory of Mr. Jeff's childhood, with a detail misunderstood. The latter continued: "Chappell receives the Catholic customers. Pope does all the other sorts."

"Have they got plenty of work on hand?"

"Heaps and heaps! Don't know which way to turn! Didn't you see that window-light stuck up outside last week?"

"Yes, I thought it looked as if *it* didn't know which way to turn! Staring straight at you, like Electro-biology. What about it?"

"Well! That was for her Majesty."

"I wish her joy of it, I'm sure." But for all Charles was so high and mighty and scornful, he felt a sort of curiosity about the stained-glassmongers.

Jeff's account of them was correct as far as it related to their division of labour. The fact is that the Dissensions of the Churches among themselves, and the further dissensions of Dissenters, are an embarrassment to the Ecclesiastical decorative artist, who is reluctantly forced to take the numerous creeds of his clients into consideration. If it were not for the Variety of Treatment for which they afford openings he would wish them all at Jericho—the creeds, not the clients.

Mr. Jeff's having made acquaintance with the ground-floor and basement tended to bring the first floor also in contact with them. But as time went on another attractive force presented itself, in Alice's associations with this scene of her early childhood. At Hyde Park Gardens the child became more and more a favourite with the household; which, without definitely announcing its intentions, made up its mind not to part with her. A vague purpose of sending her to some sort of school, not yet discovered, hung about the responsible seniors, but seemed capable of indefinite procrastination. Peggy took her education in hand, and the household generally considered it had a mission to make her make herself useful. She was very apt and clever, and we may assure readers that in this story there is no fear of Alice suffering from mental or moral neglect. It may even be questioned whether her

moral culture might not have been allowed to lapse at intervals—the whole household having combined (so it seemed to Alice) in bringing to bear on her a heavy fire of maxims—a phrase which strikes one somehow as familiar. But these were the old-fashioned sort, such as—"Little girls should be seen, not heard."—"Speak when you're spoken to—do as you're bid."—" 'Waste not, want not,' was the title of the book."—And so forth. Peggy had no gun, or never fired it. Therefore she was the natural recipient of confidences which of course never would have been given to Partridge, who was very good and kind, but for all that never to be relied on not to improve you. Now Alice could always talk to Peggy without fear of amelioration. Consequently she told a great deal of her old life at No. 40, and at previous domiciles. And however nonsensical or fictitious her narratives seemed, Peggy always listened to them patiently, rather hoping she would hear something further about the lidy with the spots. But this story seemed to have been told complete, the first time she heard it, and no new light came.

There was, however, a frequent reference to the cellar-door beyond the grite iron gite. It was Alice's first experience of the grisly mystery of the subterranean—of the sort of romance that belongs to the Catacombs of Paris and the dark arches of the Adelphi, and (with less of soil and horror) to the crypt of St. Paul's or any great Cathedral; to rock sepulchres or the heart of the Pyramids, even to the endless cavern that swallows Alph the sacred river and leads to a sunless sea. All of us have felt the fascination of the underground, and Alice's imagination went back and back to this dirty door in the back area.—"But I never theed anything come out," she said, in reply to a question asked—"they all thtopped inthide. Yeth!"—And Alice nodded impressively to her questioners, who were Charles and Peggy.—"Well, Miss Kavanagh," said the former—"one of these days we'll have 'em all out, and get a good look at 'em."—Alice thought him rash, but courageous.

This was before Pope & Chappell came on the scene. When they first took possession it looked as if the idea of exploring this repulsive cavern must be given up. But when Charles, glancing one summer morning down into the area, saw workmen actually going in and out of this very vault, of which they had daringly broken through the barriers, he resolved in spite of his dislike for the howling cad, and his not too favourable impression of the new tenants, to court their acquaintance to the extent of obtaining an ingress into the basement, and to remount the high horse afterwards if it seemed necessary to do so.

"Goin' in for bein' forgivin', are we, 'Eath?" said Mr. Jeff, when one day Charles expressed an interest in stained-glass windows, and said he shouldn't mind seeing what those chaps downstairs were doing.

"You'll have to explain, Jeff, that I don't want to put up a memorial window, and that I know no one that does. Make 'em understand that I and all my family circle wish to be forgotten, if possible."—Mr. Jerrythought gave a knowing introspective nod.—"I'll attend to it," said he.

"And I say, Jeff, look here. I think you might give them a hint that what interests me is the firing—and the sticking together, and all that. Because I don't want to have to admire their blessed designs!"

"You let me alone—I'll fix you up, 'Eath."—And Charles had to be contented with that much safeguard.

When Mr. Jeff introduced his friend to the partnership below, he did it with perspicuous candour, and no small amount of what may have been tact, as it seemed to work very well. Whatever it was, there was plenty of it.

"'Here's my friend 'Eath—first floor! *He* don't want to put up a memorial window, *he* don't! He's a reg'lar artist, color-tubes, tones, middle-distances, light and shade—that's his gag! Royal Academy Artist. Now you two customers, I take it, are quite another pair of shoes. Dim religious light—dignity—simplicity—avoidance of vulgarity—devotional feeling—that's *your* gag! Ali right, old cock! I know. I got it out of the noospaper you lent me. It's all right, I know."—And Mr. Jeff felt that he was doing justice alike to pictorial and monumental Art.

"'Appy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Heath!" said Mr. Pope. "Our friend is pokin' his fun! I don't mind him, if you don't."—And Mr. Chappell observed that everybody knew Mr. Jeff—! But there was a trace of dignity in his tone.

"Mustn't let me disturb you, Mr. Chappell," said Charles—addressing Pope by his partner's name; Jeff's correction—"*This* is Mr. Chappell"—cutting across his error. We daresay this seems to you almost too trivial a thing to notice in a narrative. But you are mistaken if you think so—for it made a considerable difference in Charles's attitude to Mr. Pope. His chivalrous nature felt that compensation was due to that gentleman for calling him out of his name, and he became proportionately civil to him. We believe there are stolid philosophical lives that are quite uninfluenced by minutiæ of this sort—but we have not had the luck to lead one of them ourselves. Charles was really intensely suscepti-

ble on such points, although for working purposes he always affected a Spartan fortitude. In this case the result was the disappearance from his next speech of a faint trace of loftiness and condescension shown in his first.

"It's rather a shame of me and Jeff to come and break into your daylight. But then I thought we shouldn't see well later, and Jeff said you had a big bit of work completing, so we came down." —The concession made here was that Charles had contemplated bald indifference to the hierarchy, and had schemed to get to the cellar as soon as possible under pretext of yearning for technical information. Now that he had put himself in Mr. Pope's debt, he would liquidate it by deference to the æsthetic side of decoration. Pope and Chappell mused a moment before either replied—reflecting as a Firm reflects when its counsels are harmonious. "Canon Shuter's window, I suppose."—"More likely Dr. Creed's."—"Which is Dr. Creed's?"—"That three-light lancet, for Bishopskerswell."

"One I saw was for her Majesty," struck in Mr. Jeff.—Mr. Pope smiled benignly.

"We don't aspire to that heikth," said he.—"What you gentlemen saw on the staircase was what we professionally term *a* Majesty—not *her* Majesty, you see, like Mr. Jerrythought misunderstood it. We were referrin' to the figure itself—not the client. Oh, I assure you, Mr. 'Eath, the difficulties of dealin' with this class of subject, especially in telegrams——" Chappell interrupted Pope at this point.

"I've got to go downstairs," said he—"I'll tell Joe to bring all three lights up. Oh yes, they're ready! He was just sawdusting off the face of the middle one when I was down an hour ago," and Chappell departed, and in due course Joe's footsteps came outside, and segments of window were introduced and deposited to wait for more.

"My partner he's particular," said Pope, to explain Chappell, as he seemed to think he needed it.—"And yet he ain't a family man like me."—And went on to narrate how difficult he found it to explain sacred symbolic imagery to his little boy Kit, four years old, who asked questions. And presently when the great work was being held up, Charles perceived the drift of this conversation, as no doubt you have done. But he wondered at the humility of Mr. Pope's tone, about his range of patronage, as contrasted with his range of portraiture!

A certain amount of inspection of results was unavoidable, to pave the way for an approach to the interesting means by which they were attained. In all the technical or applied Arts it is neces-

sary (or at any rate politic) to affect a satisfaction we do not feel, and don't believe the Artist feels either, at the final outcome of so much patience and effort. If some pretence of this sort were not kept up where would be the *raison d'être* of all our cottage industries; all our art needleworks, and ceramics; all our unmitigated training-schools, and disgraceful exhibitions? Unless somebody sometimes did the enjoyment, how could the rapid conversion of the whole population into Art-Students, Art-Teachers, Art-Artists generally be justified? If it were to be candidly admitted that nobody cares twopence about Art-Arteries when they *are* completed, yet boldly affirmed that everybody wants to have a hand in making some more, how would it be possible to convince spare cash that it ought to purchase Art-Objects? Would it not snap its fingers at Art-Apologists, and turn its attention to the prosaic realities of life—motor-cars or beef-extract, tenement-dwellings or chemical food, dynamite or two-hundred-ton guns? Something really useful?

Whether Charles dissected his own mind when he affected raptures at Pope & Chappell's windows, who shall say? He may have said to himself that it would be illogical to wish to examine a kiln in the contents of which he felt no interest whatever, unless he first contrived an atmosphere of justification for them, a sanction of factitious enthusiasm. Or it may have been simply the generous impulse of youth to admire, that is so apt to develop when the producer of an achievement is actually in the room with it, and can be talked to. We rather think it was this, ourselves, and that Charles was (not to be too philosophical) a good-natured chap who saw it gave pleasure to the perpetrators thereof when he admired the beastly rot of Messrs. Pope & Chappell. For that was what he called it in confidence afterwards to Mr. Jeff.

However, he no doubt succeeded in giving full satisfaction, for he and his friend went downstairs into the old basement to investigate the mysteries. Limewash, paint, and window-cleaning had done wonders; so had new sashes where necessary; so had new woodwork where not necessary, but only costin' a few shillins more, as the sayin' (unknown) was, than breakin' up and puttin' together:—sim'lar, you had to take account of carriage. Sim'lar, you take an old bench with nails drove in, and spile a plane, and there you are! You don't save nothin' in the end. So, as in this case, you decide on many squares of yellow deal, and unlimited carpenter; and whatever your bill is, you smell delightful, and feel antiseptic.

The great gate, or grite gite, had been ruthlessly opened, and

been done Brunswick black, cheval-de-frise and all. The mysterious door was off its hinges, which were rusted through, long ages ago; as were the bolts and chain that had curbed the liberty and baffled the evil desires of so many fiends and goblins, and kept them for so many years from getting at inoffensive persons' toes in ill-tucked-up beds. Who could be safe, now they were gone? The vault inside was spacious; had been some sort of wash-house or laundry, and had for some reason had its window built up. The windows had been replaced, but it was a glorious greenish window now, filled with what some called bottle-ends, and others German rounds, in those days; so that you expected a profile of Elaine or Enid, and didn't get it. There had been a stove or furnace of some kind in former years, as a flue crossed the area to the house. This was being utilised for the temporary small kiln that had come from the old shop. But a much larger one was coming, and the floor was taken up in one corner to make a foundation and get a clear start.

"I suppose you found plenty of cats in here," said Charles to Pope and Chappell. The latter had come with them into the vault, and then had to attend to something. Pope, though he had been so hard at work as to be unable to relinquish his mahl-stick, and had come away with a brush in his mouth, seemed to have indefinite leisure at his disposal. He took the brush out to answer Charles's cat-remark.

"Rather!" said he, sardonically.—"But you should ask 'Aycroft. Eh!—'Aycroft? This gentleman was asking if you'd 'appened to see any cats?"—

Haycroft was the bricklayer, who was busy with his footings. He cast about for some form of speech which would allow of the development of a grievance, as is the manner of his kind. He considered and spoke:

"I don't know what you call *cats*. *I* should have called 'em cats, myself; but there's no tellin', nowadays!"

"How many were there, Mr. Haycroft?"

"Wot—the number of them? Well, Sir, as to countin' of 'em, I left that to them as can find time for countin'. I've got *my* 'ands pretty full here, I can tell you. It wouldn't do for me to stand still, to be countin' cats. All I see of 'em I tell you. And *I* should have called 'em cats myself. But as I say, there's no knowin'!"—Charles's innocent attempt to make conversation had been misinterpreted, and he felt hurt. His friend Jeff, with more insight into bricklayers, pursued the subject:

"Two 'undred, 'Aycroft? Will you let 'em go at that?"—He

dropped his h's ostentatiously to get on a sympathetic level with Mr. Haycroft.

"Couldn't say, Sir. Near about, I should think. How many should you reckon run out, Greasy, when we broke open the door?"—As the labourer addressed did not look like an Italian, the natural conclusion was that his name was as we have spelled it. He gave his mind to a conscientious reckoning.

"Rather better than half-a-dozen, Mr. Haycroft. I should say seven, but I might have said eight. Likewise there was a tabby hid in the copper 'ole, and a black tom went away up the flue and never come down——"

"Wot did I tell you?" said Mr. Haycroft, triumphantly. "*Any* number of 'em! And the whole place as full of dead 'uns as ever it'll hold."

"I don't see any dead cats."—But Mr. Haycroft scorned to reply directly to this remark of Mr. Pope. He turned to Greasy.—"Where have you put all them cats' bones?" said he.

"On that ledge behind your elber," said Greasy.—"No! Higher up! Right you are."—And Mr. Haycroft, with a passing comment on the ledge, as a specially ill-chosen place to put away cats' bones on—"Where any one might chance to knock 'em down, any minute"—held them out in the palm of his hand as a conclusive proof of accuracy wrongly impeached. "Cats' bones—like what I said!"—And turned again to measurement as one who had testified truly, and was now called away to other duties.

The positiveness of Mr. Haycroft's tone, and his contradictious attitude, cast a glamour of controversy over the conversation which Charles had not had any intention of provoking. He now felt himself so entangled in cats as to be somehow bound to examine the bones held out to him by the bricklayer. He held them in his hand looking at them longer than Mr. Jeff thought the occasion required. Possibly it was the doubt whether he should hand the bones back, which seemed ridiculous; or throw them away, which seemed contemptuous. Mr. Jeff did not guess at any other reason.

But, Mr. Chappell returning at this point, the talk turned away to other matters, such as the structure of kilns, the relative advantages of coke and gas, and so forth. Presently Charles recurred quite suddenly to the cats' bones, as if he had been thinking of them.—"*Where* did you say you found the bones, Mr. Haycroft?" he asked. And so much did he seem to ask as though he really had some motive, that his question absolutely received a direct answer. The bones had come out of the ground when it was opened.—"Just

under where I'm standing," said Greasy, the labourer—"as if the cats had been a-burying of 'em," he added.

"This brick floor's been took up, one time," said Haycroft.—"And it ain't maiden ground underneath. It's made ground. It's been took up and filled in. Whoever filled it in might have thrown in a dead cat, as easy as not."—Having committed himself to the view that the bones were cats', it was necessary to fit all other facts to the theory; and, although cats, if they did inter their relatives, might not remove a brick floor to do it, that could never be allowed to stand in the way. Mr. Haycroft, having inferred the dead cat from the live cats, had to imagine some means of getting it through the pavement, and did it accordingly. Mr. Pope perceived a difficulty, and advanced a new theory to meet it.

"Dogs' bones, Mr. 'Aycroft! That's what they are, clear enough! Lady's pet dog. Wanted it buried in the 'ouse. No yard nor garden. Gave it to the butler to bury, and he put in here. Little King Charles span'l, with long flop ears. Nothin' more likely."—And the details of this groundless romance recommended it strongly. But expert testimony from the bricklayer came to shake public opinion.

"If you was to ask me," he said, "I could tell you—and mind you! I ain't talking about what I don't understand. Well! If you was to ask me, I should say no man in his senses—I don't care if he was a butler or the master of the 'ouse!—would go to take up a 'erring-boned brick floor when he could raise a stone in the airey with a 'arf the labour; and it would just put itself back again, as you might say. Instead of which, you're askin' him to 'amper himself with packin' a small barrer of brick, 'arf of 'em broke gettin' of 'em out, and makin' good breakage, and gettin' well shet o' bats and closures—all what's come out this time's 'ole bricks, and so I tell you——" And so forth, until Mr. Chappell, who at first had welcomed the lap-dog theory, rounded on Mr. Pope, and relieved the butler from the troublesome job he had assigned him. His inventor wouldn't give him up, though!

"I stick to dogs' bones," said he; then feeling that a compromise might be possible—"Perhaps it wasn't the butler. They could have had somebody in. Odd-job man! Stableboy! Anythin'!"—Mr. Pope's imagination faltered at the coachman. He was too majestic.

Mr. Chappell had a theory, but it was a weak one and soon rejected. He suggested as sufficient that the bones were accidental bones, out of the kitchen or anywhere, that had got dug in accidentally. He went back to the workshop—the kitchen where

Kavanagh had struck his wife—and Charles went with him. It was used now for cutting glass and leading up lights. A mishap had occurred that took attention from the bones, which Charles had slipped into his pocket. A diamond had been lost, having flown from its setting, and a search was on foot for it. When this occurs in a glazing shop everything is swept up and sifted through a mesh large enough to let the diamond through. The product is again sifted through a mesh large enough to retain the diamond, and then evidently what comes off the last sieve must contain it, and sometimes it is so small a quantity that an hour or so with a microscope will recover the lost sheep. This amused Charles and took his attention off the bones for the time being. But when he went back to his room to change his coat to go home to dinner (for it had got very late) he remembered to wrap them in paper and put them in his other pocket to take with him.

When Charles, six months before, decided on what seems to us the very needless and premature step of taking a large expensive Studio that would have suited a fashionable portrait-painter in full practice, he was not an absolute beginner in the literal sense of the words. He had been an Academy student for a couple of years, and had very nearly got a medal. He had attended the painting schools and learned a new system of painting flesh every month, as each new visitor came. Whatever innate ideas on the subject of oil-painting he possessed, had been disorganised and carefully thrown out of gear by the want of unanimity, or presence of pluranimity, in his instructors. But he had been an attentive student according to his lights, and one department of his education had "caught on." He had profited by his anatomical lectures and demonstrations on dead and live corpses—perhaps because he really had more turn for such studies than for the Arts, for which his capacity was doubtful, and his bias probably imaginary.

Therefore, when Mr. Haycroft produced the alleged bones of cats, he at once detected the mistake. He was perfectly familiar with the human skeleton, and at once saw that if these were not man's bones, they were monkeys'. Probably the latter, thought Charles. Because people don't bury deceased persons under floors in laundries. Perhaps the recent occurrence at No. 40 made it seem unlikely that a murder should have taken place there and been concealed. Didn't seem likely, did it, that anything of that sort should occur twice in the same house? So Charles decided on the monkey. However, he would be seeing Johnson, and would

ask him. He felt pretty certain he would soon see Johnson, and he was right.

When he got home he found that his mother had tickets for an interesting Lecture. The subject was (as reported by himself to Peggy) "Anticipation in its Relation to Realisation." But then he was not always to be trusted. Peggy had a slight face-ache and the night-air might do harm, so she thought she wouldn't come. Charles remarked that she didn't look very bad, but perhaps it was as well to be on the safe side. He would take his mother to the Lecture. For he was always a good son, was Charles. Now on this same evening his father (according to him) had to dine with the Cashmongers' Company, and Robin and Ellen were going to help at a big children's party with Miss Petherington the governess. "You'll be very dull all by yourself," said Charles to his sister, as he and his mother departed.—"No—I shan't," said she, "I've got to finish 'The Mill on the Floss.' "—

When Charles and his mother got home again, at about eleven o'clock, none of the absentees had returned, and there was a gentleman in the drawing-room with Miss Heath. Thus Phillimore believed; he was reluctant to admit knowledge of the gentleman's identity—Thomas had shown him up. But the drawing-room was empty. Phillimore then confided to his mistress that he thought it possible that Miss Heath and the gentleman had stepped out into the garden.—"It must be your cousin Frank, Charley," said Mrs. Heath, and opened a letter and read it, and then went on, some time after—"Hadn't you better get them in? She'll make her face worse"—and then opened another letter and said—oh dear! the Selvidges couldn't come. Phillimore's back, as he manipulated blinds and shutters, was fraught with reticence and discretion. But, for all that, he had just said to himself, as so old a retainer could speak freely and confidingly to so respectable a butler: "Cousin Frank, indeed!"—

Charles walked out into the big garden that is neither at the back nor the front of the big houses, but is a typical nondescript, common to all of them. It was a glorious July night with a nearly full moon, conscious of a flaw from London smoke, for which one might, if one chose, have imagined the murmur of the traffic to be a long-sustained apology. An insufficient apology—but any contrition is better than none. So thought Charles as he lighted a cigar and sauntered along in what he thought the best direction to take. He came upon Dr. Johnson and Peggy in a quiet part of the garden, and was no more surprised at finding who the gentleman was than you will be at his sudden appearance in the narra-

tive, if you have been keeping an observant eye upon it. He, however, was surprised—but it was a very flaccid form of surprise—that Peggy and her companion were walking towards him apparently saying nothing. Also that the young doctor seemed grave—downcast perhaps? Peggy seemed to think her brother wanted an explanation of something, which was not the case. What she said was, "I had something I wanted to say to Dr. Johnson, so we came out here."—But her manner distinctly added, "I don't want to be asked questions now—I will tell you some time." Charles did not see what the saying could have been that could make the coming out necessary, but he held his peace, and behaved discreetly.

They rejoined Mrs. Heath in the drawing-room. That lady's demeanour, on seeing that it wasn't Cousin Frank, was one of forebearance under suppressed astonishment. She could wait. Meanwhile, courtesy! But of course without a suggestion that there was any reason why Peggy should not take Dr. Johnson for a walk in the garden. Nevertheless, her daughter understood something from her way of not suggesting it that made her say, at a moment when Charles was taking the doctor's attention off—"I know, Mamma; I wanted to talk to Dr. Johnson, so I took him in the garden. . . . Oh, my face-ache? That's gone."

"What do you make of 'em, Johnson?" said Charles. "What's the verdict?" He was showing the bones from No. 40.

"Are they off your skeleton?"—for Charles had an articulated one, at the studio.

"Never you mind what they're off! What do you make of them?"

"I want to know where you got them."

"Shan't tell! I want to know what they are."

"The bones of a woman's or a boy's instep—hardly large enough for a full-grown man's. I should say a woman's."

"Metatarsals—that's right, isn't it?" Charles trots out his little bit of scientific nomenclature—is even inclined to cavil a little at his friend for calling them loosely bones of the instep. What *is* an instep, exactly? However, Charles tells the whole story.

"That is a most extraordinary and ill-fated house," says the doctor. "What o'clock shall you be there—to-morrow?"

"Why? Do you think it's a murder?"—The attention of the two ladies is caught by the word, and they have to be taken into counsel. But the doctor isn't inclined to jump at murder. "More likely," says he, "medical students' or artists' skeletons. These alarms are very common. But if the floor is an old floor—hm! What o'clock shall you be there, Heath?"—And ten o'clock is fixed

for next day—the objective of the movement being a further examination of the ground in the vault—possibly not easy of attainment, as it will involve undoing some bricklayers' work, always a troublesome affair, requiring tact and force of authority combined.

As Dr. Johnson said good-night to Peggy, Charles caught some words that made him say to himself: "Oh, well! I suppose I shall hear all about it some of these days——" He was a little inquisitive, but could quite well wait, as brothers can wait, and do, when their sisters' affairs are concerned. It isn't that they are really indifferent about their welfare, so much as that it is impossible for us men to take these things *au grand sérieux*. However, even if Charles had heard every word, he wouldn't have been much the wiser. This was the conversation:

"Now, Dr. Johnson, you'll have to forgive me! You must forgive me! I said it all for your own good——"

"What can I do to show that I forgive you?"

"Be a reasonable man. Go on coming to see us—to see me, if you like to put it so. Be my friend. Only do be sensible, and put nonsensical ideas out of your head about——"

"I understand. I can't. Good-night."

This was every word, and Charles would not have been much the wiser for hearing it. Of course *he* knew that, during the past four months, the young medico had been a very frequent visitor at the house. We know this now, and being much more sagacious than Charles was in matters of this sort, we infer a great deal about that interval. We see in it a young man of good abilities and faultless antecedents, decidedly handsome and a great favourite with his friends—but, if you please, in a high fever; to all intents and purposes, mad. Like so many lunatics he is singularly able to counterfeit sanity—indeed if it were not for an occasional preoccupation you would notice nothing in the least abnormal. But could you see into his mind you would be struck first by an extraordinary rapport that seems to exist between him and Hyde Park Gardens. To you, no doubt, as to ourselves, these Gardens are a splendid residential property overlooking Hyde Park, a few minutes' walk from the Marble Arch, and so forth. To this young doctor they are the Hub of the Universe—the centre pivot on which all other created things revolve. Streets that lead neither to nor from Hyde Park Gardens are stale, flat, unprofitable thoroughfares; those that lead there are glorified, considered as approaches to Hyde Park Gardens, but sinister in so far as they go in the opposite direction. You would find that whatever he may be

employed on,—whether he is writing a prescription or using a stethoscope,—he always has in his own mind an image of himself in his relation to Hyde Park Gardens. He always locates himself mentally as east, west, north, or south of Hyde Park Gardens. He appears to himself to be mysteriously connected with it by a wireless current, but he is not able to express it so, as such currents are not yet discovered or invented. If you add to this that he sleeps badly, owing to the influence of this current; that he has an almost idiotic habit of re-reading a few notes Peggy has written him, relating to coming to dinner, and so forth; and that when he comes, as may happen, on the word Margaret, or the word Heath, in print, in any connection, he becomes as it were transfixed and remains gazing at the magic letters until workaday life jogs him and reminds him that really this won't do—if you ascribe to him all these qualities and attributes, you will not have an unduly exaggerated picture in your mind of what he had become through not refusing to see Charles Heath's sister when Charles proposed to bring her in to talk about Alice's mother. Of course had he been a prophet, and a prudent one, he would have asked Charles to keep her out of the room; or, when she came in, would have shut his eyes tight and stopped his ears. It was too late now. The face of her had come into his heart, and her voice into his ears, and both had come to stay.

CHAPTER X

OF THE DISTRICT SURVEYOR. OF THE NEW KILN-FOUNDATION AND WHAT WAS FOUND IN IT. OF ALICE'S FATHER'S DREAM. HOW ABOUT THE LADY WITH THE SPOTS? OF MISS PEGGY'S ADORERS

WHEN Dr. Johnson arrived at No. 40 at ten o'clock next morning, excitement was already turbulent in the ground floor and basement. He went straight to the Studio, where Charles and Jeff were reviewing the position, and heard from them that Pope & Chappell were bristling with indignation at the idea of having to move a single footing in order to dig up a mine of dog's bones, just on the word of mere anatomists! Haycroft was furious, especially as he had liberally surrendered cat's bones, for strategical purposes, and adopted the King Charles Spaniel; and then, here you were, asking him to change again, and make it man's bones! He hated being minced about; and as for undoin' finished brickwork, it went against him. "Take it all down of course, if you like!" he said, "but not if you listen to me you won't do any such thing!" And went on to point out that if we gave way to the weakness of paying attention to persons, circumstances, or things, there never wouldn't anything get done. However, we were to go our own way—HE wouldn't say anything!

"They are all in a fine stew downstairs, I can tell you," said Charles. "Haycroft, I believe, is laying bricks at a reckless rate in order to make it more difficult to decide on undoing it. Pope is in favour of consulting a lawyer—goodness knows on what line! Chappell, as far as I understand him, thinks the bones are too small to be worth making a fuss about. Besides, if it was a murder, it must have been such a long time ago! He seems to believe in some Statute of Limitations. If you kill a sufficiently small person, and then wait long enough, it don't count!"

"I see," said the doctor, "but shall we go down and talk to them?" Accordingly, down they went; but into the office, not feeling they would be welcome, necessarily, elsewhere.

In the office, prolonged discussion. The attitude of Pope, that meddlin' was contrary to his own nature, that his ancestors had been strangers to it, and that he never could abide it in others.

Of Chappell, that we had very little to go on, as really the bones were quite insignificant; not as though it had been a whole foot, in which case he would at once have advocated a further search. But he thought a line should be drawn. These bones might have got there by the merest accident. And it was not only the cost of taking down and rebuilding, but the delay in the completion of the kiln. The castings were invoiced from the foundry—in fact were on the way now—and we were losing money every day from the delay in the construction of this kiln. Surely Mr. Heath and Dr. Johnson would not think us bound to throw our work back on the strength of these miserable little bones! Chappell's contempt for the bones was beyond his powers of language.

Charles was most contrite about his own share in the matter, as far as it occasioned disturbance and trouble to the Firm. He could not allow them to be put to any cost, as really had it not been for him, the question would not have been raised—he would willingly cover the expenses involved. This conciliated Pope. As for Mr. Jeff he chorused approval of everything that sounded plausible, and said that that was *his* idea!

Dr. Johnson's contribution to the discussion was the important one. He couldn't say for certain what the legal obligation was on a medical man (or any one else) to whose knowledge the discovery of a human bone came. If a complete skeleton were found buried from which the integuments had evidently fallen away by decay, the duty of immediately communicating with the authorities was obvious. But if the police were sent for every time a human bone turned up, life wouldn't be worth living in lodgings which medical students or artists had occupied. It must depend on circumstances. Perhaps this time it was all a fuss about nothing. (Chappell looked consoled. Pope nodded the nod that has said so all along.) After all, we really didn't know who had lived in the house—an Egyptologist perhaps, and some bits of mummies had got mislaid. (This theory was almost noisily welcomed, and every one laid claim to having thought of it.) Might we go down and look at the place? But it seemed it was all covered in now, and we shouldn't be any the wiser. Well then, might Dr. Johnson personally hear the account of the first finding of the bones from the bricklayers? Certainly.

Mr. Haycroft's account amounted to a denial of having seen anything whatever himself, the bones having been picked up out of the hole by the young man, known as Greasy; but really Todhunter, if you came to that. He had gone off the job yesterday evening, owing to words. Could he be got at? Well—of course it

would be easy enough to send for him, provided you knew his address—nothing easier! But Mr. Haycroft didn't know his address, unfortunately. "There's his family," he added, "only, of course, *they* live down in Worcestershire." In short, Mr. Haycroft had made up his mind to obstruction, and we really had to choose between going to the authorities with a tale of suspected foul play, on the strength of two detached metatarsal bones, or letting the matter alone.

"I should think twice about it before making a rumpus, Heath," said Johnson. "We shall look very foolish if the story falls through, for any reason. Besides, they wouldn't turn the Coroner on again (to the best of my belief) about an affair that might easily belong to last century."

"Well then," said Charles, "I vote we let it alone." And Haycroft went back to work triumphant, and in a few days was ready to connect his new block of brickwork with the flue the tom-cat had run up and never come down.

But, alas, for the uncertainty of things! Tribulation, as Uncle Remus says, is waiting round the corner for all of us, and in this case sad trouble awaited Pope & Chappell. For there is in London an awful Functionary, called the District Surveyor, and it is written that without his sanction no brick shall be laid. No matter whether it is a portion of a building in the ordinary sense of the word or not, a notice has to be given to him, and then he will inspect you, and finally measure up your premises, and charge a fee according to their area. Pope & Chappell had not, sad to say, made any communication about their new kiln—with their motives we have nothing to do. They were legally in the wrong in this omission, though of course a cube of solid brickwork six feet high is not a building at all, and therefore ought to be free of the Building Act.

Now had it not been for the incident of the bones, Mr. Haycroft would not have had words with Greasy and sacked him off the job. For that was what had happened. And these "words" had been artificially fostered with a view to the sacking of Greasy, which had actually been determined on by Mr. Haycroft the moment he suspected that a search might be instituted for more bones, under his footings. After all, the evidence turned on his testimony, and Greasy's. Left to himself, he could lie as he liked. There was security in loneliness. Therefore, Greasy was sacked, on pretence of words, and another young man put on the job.

Greasy got another job, on a chimney-stack at No. 26. This job was at loggerheads with the Surveyor; and acting from informa-

tion brought by Greasy, twitted the Surveyor with unfairly winking at serious irregularity at No. 40, and bearing hard on mere errors of form at No. 26. "*What* job at No. 40?" said the Surveyor, in the person of his clerk. "We've no job going on at 40, up at the office."—"Ask him!" said the job at 26, nodding over its shoulder at Greasy. And so it fell out that a few days after Charles and Johnson had the interview we have recorded above, the Surveyor, *in propria persona,* descended in wrath on No. 40, and walked straight into the vault without so much as asking leave.

The remainder of the story is sad. Let us shorten it. Pope & Chappell were summoned before the magistrate for contravention of the Building Act. They were fined and admonished, and the structure itself condemned as irregular, having two courses of footings instead of three. Its owners were in despair; but there was nothing for it. Down it had to come and down it came. Haycroft said it was enough to make a man take pison, but he only took an extra pint of beer, which he did not account as poisonous, but the reverse.

"Think of all them bats cut to waste!" he said. Because whenever he wanted a bat or closure he always cut a whole brick, and therefore regarded them as waste when once thrown aside. But what must be must, and—however reluctantly—Mr. Haycroft started on the afternoon of the magisterial decision to undo all his work, and clean off the bricks for a fresh start.

"I'm sure," said Charles, an hour or so later, to Pope and Chappell, "no one can be more sorry than I am for whatever share I had in it. And you really must allow me to do what I can to make up for it——" And was going on to propose that he should contribute, in a princely fashion (as one does when one's father is a reckless cheque-writer), to the expenses incurred, when Chappell interposed (rather to Pope's disgust, Charles thought) and said, with more vitality than he usually showed, that that wouldn't be at all fair, as really the bone business had nothing to do with the number of footings.

"On the other 'and, Mr. Chappell," said Pope, "the number of footins had nothin' to do with the slatin' we've got over it. What this Official 'Umbug really objected to was that he was losin' a fifteen-shillin' fee. Do you suppose he'd not have passed those footins if he'd had notice? He's been slatin' us to keep up his salary. That's what *we've* been slated for! And do you suppose that magistrate feller won't get *his* commission off the job? Of course he will! I know 'em. They're all alike. 'Appen to know the expression 'fishy,' Mr. 'Eath? Meanin' untrustworthy, doubt-

ful, unreliable. Well—of course you do! But you don't know the entomology of it? It's short for *official,* that's what *it* is."—Charles hadn't known this; and Mr. Pope continued, as a relief to his feelings: "But I'm havin' my revenge on him! See this 'ead I'm paintin'? Well—I'm makin' it as like that District Surveyor as ever I can get it." Charles said he'd been looking at it, and wondering who it was so like, and now he saw, and it was quite wonderful!

"'Ead of Judas Iscariot. I like the idear!"—And Mr. Pope was evidently very happy about it.—"Come in!"

"Beggin' your pardon for knockin'——" It was Haycroft who had done so, seeking an interview. "Excusin' the interruption. Along of that heikth I mentioned to you, Mr. Chappell——"

"Oh yes!" said Chappell, "Haycroft thinks the kiln would have been such a lot better with a few inches more clear of the ceiling, on account of the flue——"

"And it ain't for me to say anything," interposed the bricklayer, "but now the work's all down to the footings again we could get the heikth by taking out a bit more ground."

Pope assented. "Do just as you like, Mr. Chappell," said he, and went on with Judas Iscariot. Chappell said, "I'll come down and have a look, Haycroft," and said good-day to Charles, and they went away together.

Charles remained a short time chatting and then returned to his Studio, a thing he was always doing with a fierce resolve to make up for lost time. He passed a pleasant hour or so walking to and from touching distance, and looking alternately at a suit of stage armour and its replica in his picture, and messing the paint about indecisively—toning, he called it, and getting quality. He was beginning to feel quite meritorious over his industry, and when he recognised the footstep of Jeff descending the stairs, which was the harbinger of tea (a truly Bohemian meal when it is near six o'clock) he had the effrontery to pretend to himself that he was sorry; and that it must be early, and that he'd no idea it was so late.

The nine days' wonder of the kiln had been exhausted, and Jeff and Charles had talked it over, and in and out, and up and down. So the conversation turned on the Fine Arts. The two young men were of different schools. Charles classified Jeff as a clever chap at a small water-colour sketch, and decidedly good in black and white—got a very good quality in some of his work—shouldn't wonder if he turned out some good *eaux-fortes,* if he stuck to it—and so on. His friend on the other hand per-

ceived in Charles, with some admiration, a high-flyer—Royally Academical—'Is'try—Mythology—fine bold treatment of the human figure, and so on. They had, however, a common interest—the permanency of pigments. But the topic, which lasted through the second cup of tea, was not to be exhausted this time. For a hurried footstep ran upstairs and a hurried tap came at the door.

"May I come in?" It was Chappell, perturbed. "Excuse my running in in this way. I want to ask—I thought you two gentlemen had better step down—if you don't mind."—Oh no, we would come by all means! What was it? But Mr. Chappell is out of breath from running upstairs, and also has to collect himself.

"Mr. Pope thought you had better come down too—while it's only just uncovered."

"While what's?"—Both ask the question at once. But then, oddly enough, don't wait for any answer, and all go down together, Mr. Pope calling out from below to ask are they coming.

They make straight for the vault, excited. Outside the door, in the area, stands the bricklayer, watching for his employer's return. "I've not uncovered any more," he says, and Chappell replies, "Yes, quite right!"—And then they all go into the vault.

It has been one of those strange summer days one gets, now and again, in London that make one feel what a beautiful city it might be if it were not for the filth of the atmosphere, and its deposits on the buildings. A wondrous afterglow is going to come in the west, when the sun, now on its way to setting, has ceased to bathe the world in a stupendous glory of golden flame; and against that afterglow the street-lamps mean, when they are lighted, to show as emerald stars. And, though the sunlight cannot reach the vault at No. 40 itself, it has a strange power and faculty for negotiating reflections and gleams into all dark corners and hidden ways; and such a gleam strikes in through the window made of German rounds; and as the party pass inside, it illuminates for a moment the spot where the ground is being taken out afresh. And we see at once that what it shines on—the thing of which Haycroft has not uncovered any more—is a thing that sun shone on once to its delight, and has never reached till now for it may be a hundred years, when this reflected ray caught upon it and showed us the shadow that is left of the flowered silk dress it once wore; and the substance, such as it is, of the woman who once wore it. Something is left, be sure, over and above mere bone, inside that stocking and that one shoe that still keeps its form. And when we have carefully removed the ground that hides the face on a body that seems to have been pitched headlong into

an ill-dug grave, so that the feet at first sloped up and projected at the ground level, we may find, as we think with shuddering curiosity, some trace of that face, some record, some one little thing at least that will show us what this woman was that was forgotten so many years before we were born, even the oldest of us.

"They chucked her in here in a 'urry," says Haycroft in a voice fallen to the occasion, "and they never dug deep enough. That's how that shoe come off. After they'd covered her in, she stuck out. So they pulled off the shoe, and 'ammered the toes down, for to get the bricks flush. That's how them cats'-bones we found come off separate."—Charles can hardly help smiling, through the grisliness of the whole thing, at the sort of claim (in defence of his infallibility) made by Haycroft that the bones were intrinsically cats', though occurring on a human skeleton.

"Go on getting away the ground—gently—gently," says Chappell. And is so solicitous for gentleness as hardly to allow of any removal at all. Haycroft kneels down and slowly clears with his fingers round the head, or where we expect to find the head. "There's something covering over it," he says. It appears to have been a lappet of the flowered silk dress, thrown back over the face to hide it. Pope cannot resist the temptation to exhibitions of shrewdness and insight. "You mark my words!" says he, "the murderer he couldn't abide to look at it. So he just chucked up the skirt to 'ide the face. Force of conscience!" And he gives short nods, of superhuman sagacity. Public opinion thinks his theory on the whole plausible, though premature.

"The hair's all clogged up, a sort of pickle," says Haycroft. "There's a rare lot of it though. It's all in a sort of white muck." —Jeff suggests hair-powder. Probably right.

"Are you coming to the face, Haycroft?"—It is Chappell who asks the question. He is feverishly excited to see what is coming; but also bursting with caution about the means taken to arrive at it.—"Easy does it, Sir," says Haycroft, and goes on at his own rate.

And now it is all clear, so far as it is safe to touch it; and Haycroft, assuming always a rather superior tone, as one professionally intimate with the bowels of the earth, and not easily surprised at anything that comes out of it, remarks: "It won't look so well as it does now, to-morrow morning, anything like."—And we others accept this—not because we think the speaker knows, but because we have no knowledge to contradict him on.

"Are you sure there's no ring on the fingers?" asks Charles. "Quite sure," is the verdict. "See 'em at once if there were. But stop a bit! There was a necklace, sure enough. And the beads

are off the string, and all fell down underneath."—"Don't you touch 'em, on any account," says Pope, and Haycroft answers that *he* ain't a-touchin' of 'em. Pearls is what *they* are! He can see that pretty plain.

How about leaving "it" for the night? A hazy impression hangs about that some one ought to stay to watch "it." This is not reasonable, considering all the long years that "it" has been unseen and forgotten. Some earth has been removed—that is all the difference. Speculation is afoot about possible molestations during the night. How about cats? Haycroft renounces his previous position about cats, and only allows that one exists—the one up the flue that never come down. He can be stuffed in with a sack, and that'll keep *him* quiet enough. Rats? There ain't any, in the manner of speaking. Been too many cats about! Boys? Well! —of course you can't do anything against boys—they are all-powerful and all-destructive. But then—they don't know! Besides, they'll soon be in bed—Haycroft will rig up the door tempory on its 'inges, and he can get a small pad that'll do for a shift, and see it all fast afore he goes. So all disperse, and carry away, each one according to his susceptibility, more or less of horror. Haycroft is probably at one end of the scale, Charles at the other. The former in fact has a strong set off, in a kind of sense that he has distinguished himself, though it is not so clear why. It is true that he assumed the position, so to speak, of Master of the Ceremonies, as soon as ever "it" made a recognisable appearance above ground. But then, on the other hand, he had done his best to keep it under, and would have succeeded but for a succession of accidents. He was, however, one of those strong characters that go steadfastly on their way, however much they are in the wrong, and snap their fingers at confutation.

Charles was, as may be imagined by whoever has read his character rightly in this narrative, very much *impressionné*, even more so than with the recent suicide. In that, the whole of that occurrence had been explicable and free from mystery. It was Drink, and that settled the matter. It was shocking and repulsive, but it was vulgar and degraded—a thing to be forgotten, not speculated on or analysed. In this, the gruesome silence of a century, more or less, since the murdered woman was thrust under ground and covered in, to be seen no more—the thought of the body lying there unsuspected while the living world passed incessantly to and fro above it—the slightness of the chain of events that had led to its discovery, any failure in a link of which would have left the secret still unrevealed—all these appealed both to feeling and

imagination. And Charles was so harrowed that he felt he would really be glad when he got home, altogether clear of No. 40, and could relieve his mind. He could tell the story to Peggy. He was so sorry for Jeff for having to stop in the place that he invited him home. But Jeff didn't mind, Lord bless you! Besides, he was going to the Gaiety to see Nellie Farren, with old Gorman, and Charles (he pointed out) had better come too. He would be too late to dress, and it would be very uncomfortable not to have a good wash and a clean shirt after all that corpse. So the two young men set off to meet old Gorman at Cremoncini's; and then after a merry repast, Charles cried off the play and started to walk home. But he thought better of it. It was so late. He signalled to a cab—and as the doors shut his legs in of their own accord, he thought of how he had ridden home with Alice. Rum little Alice! thought he. And what a nice little party she was getting to be—and how she would stare at the story of the la——

Charles's thought stopped with a jerk! It stopped exactly where we have stopped it, in print. And it left him with a puzzled face all the way from Wardour Street to Bond Street. Then he appeared to pass through a phase of relief, and to breathe more freely, after remarking to himself that probably it was only a coincidence.

For the thing that Charles had recollected, that this time-honoured panacea for all the Unaccountable had been invoked to counteract, was Alice's story of the lidy with the black spots. But of course—it *was* a coincidence! How could he be so foolish as to connect the two things together? This frame of mind lasted all the way to Hyde Park Street. Then it gave way to a compromise: "An awfully queer coincidence, for all that!" But he wouldn't make any suggestions when he told Peggy the story—he would be good and Scientific and Philosophical, and research psychically. He should like to see how it struck Peggy when no hints were given.

He was just in time to join his father and brothers on their way up from the smoking-room, but he did not begin his story until his audience was complete. It took some time in the telling. When he had got quite to the end he was a little disconcerted at the perfect calmness with which Peggy said, "Of course it's Alice's lidy with the black spots."

Charles wasn't going to be caught out. *Amour propre* stepped in.—"Of course!" said he. But a trifling indecision in his voice betrayed him.

"There now!" exclaimed Ellen the youngest, who was dining down

as there was no company, "I don't believe Charley thought of it till just this minute. I *don't!* That I don't!"

"Not a bad shot for a thirteener," said Charles, who was truthfulness itself. "But I *had* thought of it—I thought of it in the cab."

"One often thinks of things in cabs," said Archibald, the eldest brother. He was not considered a genius, so he had been assigned a position of responsibility in his father's business. Mrs. Heath always bore in mind that Archibald had been her first achievement in the way of a human boy, and she felt that his intelligence ought to do her credit. But when he failed to bring his ideas up to concert-pitch, the end had to be attained by interpretation. On this occasion she leaned back in her chair with her eyes closed, and spake as one who reflects on Philosophy internally: "I do feel that is *so* true—what Archie says"—and proceeded to show grounds for a belief that the human intelligence, in cabs, is enlarged and expanded. She got through this without more interruption than a *sotto-voce* from Ellen—"What stuff Mamma's talking. *I* shan't listen"—and a remark from Robin that little girls should be seen, not heard, followed by a *riposte* from Ellen—"Just as if I was Alice!" This is interesting, as showing that Alice was an established institution.

When Mrs. Heath had done, Peggy resumed—"What do you really think, Charley?" said she.

"About the ghost? Of, of course, that's an accidental coincidence—at least, I don't know what to think——"

"Make your mind up!" thus Peggy, ruthlessly.

"Well—really—Pog!—you know that kid has told us a whole budget of stories about No. 40. Just look at those romances about her father and the man in a wig that was in the kitchen—well! yes, of course the father may have had a touch of D. T., and that story *might* be true. But think of that one about how the lidy with the spots was dressed in the drawing-room window curtains!"

Peggy didn't look less thoughtful over this—rather the contrary. But she put off what she had to say; Mr. Heath, according to his usual practice, having cut into the conversation with revival of a retrospective arrear. He had heard Archie's remark about the cab; and he, also, had a joint interest in the justification of that young man's intelligence:

"Hey! What's that Archie says? Thinking in cabs, hey! Why, I do all my thinking in cabs. No time anywhere else, hey! Who's been thinking in a cab?" But his wife was not properly grateful for this rally on her behalf.

"It's all this nonsensical story of Charley's—about something they've dug up, and a ghost—oh dear! Tell your father—I can't raise my voice——" And Mrs. Heath shows symptoms of syncope, in an indecisive way. So the tale, which the august head of the house had thought fit to pay no attention to when it was first told, has to be gone through again, subject to jocular interruption on his part, and a sense of sympathetic incredulity rising to applause among the other members of the conclave.

"Hey! Well—we're all mighty fine people!" Thus Mr. Heath when a confused joint-stock repetition of the story comes to an end, and is believed to have been heard. He goes on, with an aspect of tense judicial insight, a shaken forefinger enjoining careful attention. "Now, I should like to ask you just, this, one, question: What was to prevent this tailor man and his wife, who don't seem to have been the best of characters, from taking some of the bones off your skeleton in the Studio, and burying them in the vault? Hey? What do we say to that?" Whereon Robin lets loose a sly perspicuous "Aha!"—and the world feels that Nemesis is overtaking Superstition apace. But that she is nipped in the bud when Charles attests that his skeleton is a man's, and this is a woman's. He cites this as the nearest conclusive plea to hand, but doesn't contribute much more to the debate. What on earth could be the use of such chatter?

Peggy said nothing whatever. She and her brother got a good long talk on the terrace in the evening later, of which follow extracts. Peggy resumed the ghost-story first, all the previous matter having related to the disinterment, the chance of public enquiry throwing more light on the story, and so forth. "Well, now, Charley dear," she said, "what do we really think about Alice's lidy? Both of us, you know."

"Poggy dear—I don't even know what I think myself!"

"Nor I, either! We neither of us know. But tell me more about the dress. Can you see the pattern?"

"Yes—just the remains of it. Colour all gone, of course—but you can see that it was silk, and worked with a sort of Chinese flowers——"

"And *was* it like the Cretonne chintzes in the drawing-room?"

"Why——? Oh yes, of course; but I see! Well now, that is very queer. I didn't think of it when you spoke at dinner."

"Charley Slowboy! What a silly old man you are, Charley dear! I tell you what though! We must make Alice-for-short tell us again about the man in a wig——"

"It wasn't a thing that happened, you know. It was what her

father deamed. He *deamed* he deamed it, don't you remember?" Charles mimicked Alice's expression, and both laughed.

"I recollect. He deamed he deamed it, and when he wiked up, he told Alice. At least, when he wiked up (her pronunciation's getting better now, and I'm glad) he was shiking, and he said "Dood Dod, what a deam!"

"Yes—and then Alice asked him——"

"Alice asked him what it was, and he told her he deamed that an old man in a wig had come and spoked a long, *long* sword—*ever* so long—right froo mother. And then he gave father over the long, long sword, and said father to spoke it froo too. Oh dear, how funny she was! nodding it into us, don't you know?"

"But first she said an old man, and then a young one—and then contradicted herself and got quite confused——"

"Well! We must make her tell it again quietly, and not upset her with too many questions. She *is* small, you know. Besides, it struck me afterwards that she didn't mean an old man at all, but an old-fashioned man—and couldn't find the words——"

"What was the other word she used? An old grandfather man—did she mean an ancestral bloke? I say, Poggy!"

"You say what?"

"Well—it's another subject. But I *should* like to know——"

"What would you like to know, dear silly old boy?" At this point of the conversation, figure to yourself that Charles is smoking on a divided garden seat in the waning moonlight (for the moon is still there that saw the first discovery of the bones), while Peggy leans over from the other half to ruffle his hair for him, by request. He likes it. "You really must get a sweetheart to ruffle your hair for you, you old goose," says she, and the conversation continues.

"What should I like to know? Why—what did you say to poor Johnson that he got so upset about—that evening about a fortnight—ten days back? He didn't make you an offer, did he?"

"Oh, no!" Peggy is a little *agacée*. Her brother feels it in the hand that is ruffling his hair for him.

"Oh dear, no! He would have gone on for months—for years perhaps, without doing that. But——"

"Yes—but——?"

"But he *would* have gone on."

"But *gone on* how? It always seems to me he's such a very good sort of chap at behaving—steady sort of cuss. How do you mean *gone on?*"

"Oh, Charley boy! You *are* an old stupid. Gone on adoring, of course! But I believe you're only pretending——"

"I was half-pretending. I wanted to put it on a footing. Don't you see you might have been refusing to take peptone, or let him listen to your chest, or something of that sort?"

"I've got nothing the matter, and I wouldn't let *him* doctor me, if I had. I should like a much more callous physician—a cold-blooded card."

"Keep to the point, Poggy-Woggy! What did you say to him that upset him so?"

"What many girls would like to say to many men—only they dare not, in case they should find themselves mistaken and look foolish. Exactly what I wanted to say to him was, 'Don't get too fond of me, because I won't marry you!' only I couldn't put it that way, now, could I, Goosey?"

"I don't know——"

"Well—anyhow, I *didn't!* I'll tell you all about it, and then you'll know. I walked him out in the garden here, and we chatted about Alice and her mother. Then the conversation got round, as it does sometimes. You don't want it to, but it does——"

"Got round to what?"

"To that sort of thing I was speaking of. I think it was my saying what a terrible thing it was to think that this man who killed her *must* once have loved her, and what an awful thing the slow death of love was. Of course I was thinking of *real* love. Affection-love—not Falling-in-love love——"

"What the dooce is the difference?" Charles burst out laughing.

"There is a difference. Well—he *wouldn't* understand, and twisted the conversation round. I don't think it was fair."

"What did he say?"

"Well—perhaps it was my fault, partly. I said I supposed his affection for her died a natural death as soon as she got old and ugly, and was half driven mad with all those children. And that I supposed it was the usual thing—that while she was young and pretty he was fond of her, and then as soon as she got disagreeable he hated her. Then I think he should have let me change the conversation, as I wanted to, instead of——"

"Instead of what?"

"Instead of getting very much in earnest about how Love that could change wasn't Love at all, and that sort of nonsense——"

"Poor Johnson!"

"That was just what I felt. Because I like him so much that I

can't bear the idea of his being miserable—through me. So what could I do, when he began going on like that?"

"There was nothing so very much in that. Miss Petherington said the same last night."

"Bother Miss Petherington! There was lots more."

"What sort?"

"I suppose I shall have to tell you to make it understood. He said, 'I know a man, Miss Heath—and I know him well, so I cannot be mistaken—whose feelings towards a particular woman seem to him so fixed and unchangeable that he cannot conceive change as a possibility, nor see by what means change could come about. But I have no right to talk about him.'"

"How did you know he didn't mean somebody else?"

"I didn't—for a moment: he spoke in such a third-personish sort of way. But a moment after I saw, I can't tell you how, that he was speaking of himself and me. And I *was* so sorry for him."

"But what was it you said to him? That's what I want to come at——"

"Why—as soon as I could screw myself up to sticking point, I said: 'Dr. Johnson, I know a woman—and I know her well, so I cannot be mistaken—who suspects a man, a friend she likes very much, of feeling towards her exactly what you describe, but she knows she cannot return it—cannot be his wife, in short. But she does wish she could speak plainly to him, and beg him, pray him, for her sake and his own, to put all such ideas aside——' and find somebody else, in short; only that wasn't how I worded it."

"Poor Johnson! How did he take it?"

"Very well indeed—but very gravely. Stuck to the allegorical treatment."—Peggy was half-laughing, half-crying at this point.—"'Did she know some one else she cared more for?'—that was his next question.—'Not that I know of,' said I. 'But you seem to think I know a mighty lot about her.'—'I think you do,' said he. 'At any rate, I'll take your word for her'——"

"Was that all?"

"No—we turned to go back to the house, and just then I got an attack of courage, and stopped. 'Come, Dr. Johnson,' said I 'don't let's have any more mystifications. You meant me and I meant you. We meant each other. And remember that what I said about myself, sideways, I really was in earnest about.'—He said, 'Do you wish me to say good-bye?' and held out his hand. And I called out, 'No—certainly not!' so loud that a policeman looked over the railings. Then we said no more and walked up to the house. And when he went away I told him I had said it all

for his sake, and he mustn't miff off, like Captain Bradley and that silly boy—what was his name?——"

"Robert Forrest? I hope he won't. Was Johnson good? Did he promise not to do so any more?"—Peggy gave her beautiful head a long lugubrious shake, imitating Alice, with her eyebrows up and eyelids dropped.

"No! Very bad," said she. "Said he *couldn't* change. Stuff and nonsense!"

It was getting late and the moon was thinking about retiring. Charles got up off the seat and tapped the tobacco out of his meerschaum on it, and Peggy blew the ash away, for tidiness. "Poor Johnson?" said he, "I'm sorry for Johnson. But I say, Peggy——"

"What, dear boy?"

"Are you quite sure——?"

"Oh yes! Quite, quite sure. I'm very fond of him all the same, but that's nothing to do with it."

"You fancy you'll miss him if he shies off?"

Peggy half assented. "Well—I do—but perhaps in a day or two——"

"——you might think differently. Do you ever miss Captain Bradley?"

"*Captain Bradley!* The idea!!"

CHAPTER XI

OF THE STORY OF THE BONES. A POSSIBLE CLUE. MR. VERRINDER. MR. HEATH GOES TO SEE HIM. CONCERNING BEDLAM

Mr. Pope and Mr. Chappell next day, as well as all the other witnesses of the excavation, stood awaiting the arrival of "the Authorities," to whom notice had been duly given of the discovery of the remains. "I'm thinkin'," said Pope, "that this little affair won't work so badly as a set off against the slatin' we've 'ad over this kiln." He had a habit, when he got a new word, of making it go a long way.

"How do you make that out?" asked his partner.

"You ask Mr. 'Eath his opinion. According to my idea we shall have a reg'lar benefit. Sparrowgraphs in the Press—S'ciety of Antiquaries—Archæologists—interestin' particulars—sing'lar discovery—gharstly details of sing'lar discovery—identification of remains—'cos somebody's sure to find out they're Nell Gwynne."

"She wasn't murdered——"

"Well then—some immoral historical female that *was* murdered. Sure to somebody turn up!"

However, nobody did turn up. Not for want of immoral historical females, but because none could be found to have lived in the house who had also vanished and left no trace. Mr. Pope was indignant with one or two dead Sirens who were said to have enjoyed a doubtful reputation—a curious taste on their part surely!—and to have earned it in that house, for not having been murdered there. One especially would have done beautifully—but alas, instead of getting murdered she had married the Duke of ———, and had sneaked out of all responsibility for authenticating these remains, leaving that task to some obscure person who had possibly been moral, and certainly historical, but had been ignominiously lost sight of.

All that was quite clear was that these were the mortal remains of a woman, probably about five-and-twenty years of age, with dark hair and a great deal of it; who, being completely dressed as for a ball in a flowered silk dress (whose pattern was still traceable), had been stabbed through the heart with a tremendous thrust, and then hastily buried, but afterwards carefully covered

in by replacing the brickwork floor. The manner of the death was inferred from a fracture of a rib behind the heart—struck, it was supposed, with great force by the point of the rapier that had already passed through the body. Some of those who examined it professed to see the indentation of the point upon the bone—but this was disputed.

What had been a letter was still identifiable in what had been the bosom of the dress—but it was impossible to decipher a legible word now. It had been a love-letter once perhaps—who could say? Think of the clear bright ink—of the scratching quill—of the absorbed successful face of the writer—a hundred years ago!—as he thought to himself how well he had said that, and wondered what manner of answer he was going to get. But perhaps it was only a receipt for cookery, or an invitation to tea. Now, the blood-stain had usurped the ink, and there was an end of it!

The jewels had all been removed, except the pearl necklace, which was claimed partly by the landlord of the estate, and partly by the Crown as treasure trove. The last claim failed on some technical count, and half the pearls were adjudged to the finder. It being impossible to determine who he was, the proceeds of its sale were by common consent given to a Hospital.

The ground surrounding what had been taken out was all virgin soil, and was identified by Haycroft as similar to some he had cleared out of an arched recess near the staircase. Some of this had been scraped out recently, he thought, as there was the matter of a few shovelfuls under the stairs. He pointed out that probably the murderer, feeling uneasy about the thrown-up soil in the vault, had removed it to this recess, and packed it in flush with a sort of parapet across the lower part:—"There was a beer-cask stood in there," said this theorist. "Leanin' it was on the parapet in front like—and he could shovel in the sile and flush it off underneath so nobody'd ever notice it hadn't always been there." And the theory was accepted and adopted to the great gratification of its author.

Neither Charles nor Jeff felt the least bound to volunteer information about the jug, being asked no questions. Besides it wasn't clear it had anything to do with the matter. They brought it down (it was beautifully mended) into Charles's Studio to smoke over it, and reflect and speculate.

"You see how it was, Jeff?" said Charles. "It was the beer-jug, and was placed inside the safe recess by somebody and lost sight of. Then this murdering character came, and chucked in all that loam, or sand, as Haycroft said, and covered it in——"

"But, I say, Charley! What set Goody Peppermint and her husband to grobble up that stuff? They didn't know there was a jug there."

"Of course they didn't, stoopid! But they were caretakers. The first instinct of a caretaker is the appropriation of the uninventoried. The second is its realisation, so called, at the pawnshop. They kept the jug in this case, because they thought it of no value."

"That *was* a mistake! Just look at it!——"

"They got a good haul out of it, though. I expect that ring's worth money." For Charles had told Jeff all about the ring. "It's to be kept for the kid. But why it should be in the jug beats me. I give it up!"

And everybody gave it up. Many made rash starts in conversational efforts to clear up this mystery, but had always to climb down in the end. Perhaps the weak theories were more interesting than the sounder ones, as showing the effect on feeble minds of attempts to grapple with the insoluble. As, for instance, that the ring had fallen into the beer. This was Archibald's, but he declined to enlarge upon it, feeling no doubt that it was safest in its unadorned simplicity. Then there was Partridge's, who ascribed it to the "goings-on" of the "girls" and their young men, but also cautiously avoided detail. Robin reduced speculation to its most elementary form, by merely shutting one eye, and saying that we should see we should find that there was some very queer story attached to it. Mrs. Heath preferred to indicate, by subtleties of manner, that she could see through the whole thing, quite easily, but that it would not admit of general discussion, especially among young persons. "I'll tell you after" describes her attitude. Her husband suggested ponderous and exhaustive conclusion, retained from motives of a magisterial nature; but only committed himself so far as to say that, if the affair were put in the hands of the Criminal Investigation Department, he had no doubt the heads thereof would give a good account of the matter.

Charles and Peggy both thought the only surmise worth a straw was Ellen's; that there was a magpie in the house. This acquired so definite a status, as to be spoken of as "the Magpie theory." It might have been the true one, but it wasn't.

How often a clue to an old-world story must be lost sight of through its never coming to those who seek it that some survivor could supply the link that is wanted! Often and often there must linger in some brain, near a century old, of some forgotten human relic—some tenant of an Almshouse or Workhouse, or maybe Mad-

house or Gaol—some memory of earliest childhood, some spoken word from lips, as old as his or hers are now, that would throw a light on what must remain in darkness for all time, except that word be uttered again to ears that will listen, and minds that will record. What may not be lost, now and again, in the garrulities of extreme old age, shouted down by the vigorous surrounding life, that only cares for *now*? We slight and discard the recollections of the Rip Van Vinkles we have about us, every day, because the Kaatskill Mountain into which they disappeared from the village of Childhood was the World of active life itself? They have come back now, and Hendrick Hudson and his game of bowls is vanishing from them; and the village street comes back. And they see again the old old folk that were there—that are long gone now—and can maybe hear what they say! And when they try to tell, we say—"Oh, bother!"

Well! That's the sort of answer they get very often. And we lose a great deal by it.

No centenarian turned up to throw a light on the mystery of No. 40. But a good deal of tradition is to be got from lesser veterans. The Chelsea Pensioner who wasn't at Chillianwallah himself can find you names on its monumental column of those who were comrades in arms of old friends now dead who were there, and told him all about it. And the Art-Student of sixty-odd, whom Charles made acquaintance with at the Royal Academy schools, was a lesser veteran of this sort. He was a strange connecting link with the past, a life-student of the schools, dating back almost if not quite to the days of Fuseli. His name occurs at the corner of copperplate illustrations of the days of our Grandmothers—the grandmothers I mean of us old ones—your great-grandmothers, dear boys and girls! Instances of female beauty called variably Belinda, Zoe, Fanny, and Gaiety, Tenderness, Coyness, and so forth, show the signature J. W. Verrinder, and one or two illustrated works of the time of the Peninsular War were contributed to by the same hand. By what slow decadence the unhappy artist had dwindled to his present position, Heaven only knew! But there he was, a perpetual life-student, who so far as Charles could ascertain had never completed a drawing or a study since the one that had won him his medal and gained him his position, early in the century. Since then—so it was said among the students—old Verrinder had pursued exactly the same course in the painting school. As soon as the sitting of each model came to an end he would wipe out the work he had done with turpentine and begin another on the same canvas. The polished condition

of that canvas may be imagined. But Charles felt that most probably the man, as he now saw him, was at the end of a slow *dégringolade,* and that thirty years ago things were different. He had always (and had always had, said tradition) the same clothes, and the same indifference to soap and water. An impudent youth once said to him, "Why do you never wash yourself?" and he replied, "Why should I?" and then added, "If you were me, *you* wouldn't." But he used to shave, or be shaved. It was alleged that he had never had any lunch since he gave up making chalk drawings, when he used to eat the crust of a twopenny loaf, preserving the crumb for erasure. He must have bought new tubes of colour sometimes, as he couldn't use them twice over: but no one had ever seen a new colour-tube nor a new brush in his possession. He was always at the end of his tubes, but always able to get a very little more out of them. However, he supplied himself by borrowings. He used to retreat rapidly from his picture as though to get its effect from afar, and then suddenly swinging round, pounce on a neighbour with—"Half-a-squeeze of Indian Red!" or whatever colour he wanted—always too sudden an appeal to be resisted.

Charles, always reckless about his colourman's bills, had, at this time, just laid in a huge stock. So magnificent a collection of material as his box contained was rarely to be seen in the painting school, and of course it attracted attention. This took the form of examination and condemnation of its contents, on the ground of the superfluity of each to any reasonable artist.

"What do you want with Chrome, No. 2?"

"What do you want with Malachite Green?"

"What do you want with Cologne Earth?"

And so on through some three dozen tubes, of which not one received unanimous sanction, except Raw Umber and Flake White. Each was condemned in turn as unnecessary to a serious artist, and most were censured as not being permanent. Among these, Asphaltum came in for universal condemnation. Just as it was under review, Verrinder charged backwards the whole width of the room, and arrived at the group round Charles's box in time to overhear some scathing remark about it. He caught at it.

"Asphaltum not permanent? Ho! Ho!—Wish I was as permanent as Asphaltum——"

"Field says frequent destruction awaits the work on which it is much employed——"

"All humbug!"

"——owing to its disposition to contract and crack by changes of temperature——"

"Got any there? Three tubes? Take 'em all and pay you next week——"

But Charles was much too princely for this sort of thing. He immediately pressed the three tubes on Mr. Verrinder, whose eyes gleamed with joy as he grasped them. "*You're* a gentleman," said he, and then rushed back to his picture. Charles had no further conversation with him then, but some weeks after when he was painting close to him from a Turk who had been captured and brought in to sit as a model, Verrinder turned round and said abruptly:

"I haven't forgotten you gave me three tubes of Asphaltum. *You're* a gentleman!" And then showed signs of another long retirement. But after he appeared to have gone for good, he suddenly came back and exclaimed: "Three tubes of Asphaltum! My God!"

"I've got more colours than I want," said Charles; "isn't there some other you could use?" But Verrinder shut his lips tight and glared, and shook his head with extreme rapidity.

"No-no-no-no-no-no-no!" said he, almost in one word. "I'm not that sort! But you're a gentleman. There's but a very few left, nowadays. They're all Feejee Injuns." His mispronouncing of a word or two did not seem to be from want of education. "Injuns" might have been jocularity—a word spoken quotation-wise.

Charles was getting his own canvas into a terrible mess, owing to the Visitor suggesting he should use Prussian Blue in the flesh, so he made no answer, hoping Verrinder would die down. But he didn't.

"Feejee Injuns, all of 'em! The profession's gone to the Devil. But don't you give away your colours too freely. Maybe there'll come a time when you'll wish you'd kept some of 'em." This attitude took the edge off his reluctance to accept a further donation—in fact, seemed to make it difficult not to offer more. Charles did so, and said he really had too many.

"No-no-no-no-no!" said Verrinder again. "I'm not that sort. But look at my box! I'll tell you something——" Charles looked at the cumbrous contrivance of trays and recesses, so blotched and hidden with colour-squeezes and coagulated oil and varnish that it was hard to say if it was wood or metal. He decided it was metal, not japanned. Verrinder contined: "That's my *new* box! You wouldn't think it, but it is! My old box is at home—forty-five years!" He made a periodical retreat, knocking down an easel by the way, and setting it up again as he returned.

"My old box was Reeves & Inwood, Cheapside. It hadn't tubes in it. Little bladders of colour——"

"I suppose you bought it second-hand?"

"I didn't buy it. It was given to me. Ah deary me, yes! It was given to me." And he became silent just as Charles was beginning to feel an interest. He tried to make him begin again, by little hints and suggestions, but these failed. He remained silent; but next time the model was sitting, he addressed Charles suddenly, "You're the young man that's taken the big Studio," and then went on to give the street and the number of the house. He ended with an inflexible laugh—"Ho! Ho!"—and was rather an annoyance to Charles, who, to say the truth, now wished he had provided himself with a humbler workshop. He said something in that sense to Verrinder, and added, "I daresay you were laughing at me for taking a great big place out of all proportion to my abilities to use it."

"Laughing at you!" was his reply. "No—no! I wouldn't do that!—not the man to. Didn't you give me three tubes of Asphaltum? No—no! I was laughing to think how near fifty years it is since I was last in that Studio."—An inflection towards seriousness came in the voice, but vanished immediately.—"It wasn't a Studio then—only a room. The high window was carried up a bit later."

"Who was it occupied it then, if one may ask?" Charles was getting very curious, but was afraid he might by some blunder check the flow of information. Verrinder seemed to be ready enough to talk though, having once begun. He mentioned the name of a well-known portrait painter of the beginning of the century—and added, "It was he put in the high window. But that was after he turned me out."

"Had you half the Studio then?" Charles was puzzled.

"No—it wasn't that way at all. I was his assistant—sort of pupil—used to paint on backgrounds—curtains—bits of furniture—pedestals with urns on 'em. He gave me my old box. Some of the bladders in it were very old, and had been given him by, who do you think?——" Charles gave it up.

"Joshua Reynolds himself! There now!" And Verrinder, having successfully surprised his hearer, went on one of his backward voyages. When he returned Charles asked him why his master, or employer, had turned him out.

"Too much company!" said he. "Ask me that when the Feejee Injuns have gone."

In the course of time the Indians dispersed, leaving only Charles and Verrinder and a negative young man touching up his

Turk. It was a few days before the closing of the Academy Exhibition, and the place was the dome of the Trafalgar Square Building, where the Academy still lived, in those days, though the time for its departure to Burlington House was approaching. The Exhibition was open, the antique school broken up; and the painting school and Life school proper had gone upstairs into what the derision of that date (which we ourselves have never felt in harmony with) thought proper to call Wilkins's Pepper-Castor. As soon as the place was quiet, and the enemy had trooped downstairs, Verrinder resumed, still painting. Charles also went on painting, as he wanted to hear. But he pretended to want to paint.

"Why did ———* turn me out? Well!—it was his own house, held on a lease, and he had a right to. Of course he had a reason—thought it a good one, no doubt. I didn't. Would you like to know what it was?" Charles fully expected if he gave an affirmative answer to be met with "Then I shan't tell you!" But he risked it, saying simply, "Yes—I should—very much," and was quite taken aback by the directness of the reply he got.

"I made love to his daughter. That was the reason. Yes! he turned me out o' the house. Forty-five years ago! Rather more!"

Was that going to be the end of the story? thought Charles. No, not quite yet. He would talk more if you let him alone. No hurry! Presently, he went on, dropping his voice, and dropping what had been almost a sort of buffo manner with it.

"Yes—that was over forty-five years ago! And I've never set foot in that house since. Once I was passing, when the bills were up; and I half thought of going in. But I thought better of it. So might you have——"

Charles said something about how it was always painful to go back to old times, and then felt that he at his time of life had no right to moralise to this man, speaking to him now of twenty years before his birth. He was a dirty and poverty-stricken old figure of fun to be sure, and a great laughing-stock to the thoughtless boys whose last footstep had just died on the stairs. He was grotesque in manner, though not so in speech—or very slightly. He had a habit of puffing out his cheeks and throwing up his eyelids; but it did not seem to express any definite phase of mind, as it would come at any time, or in any speech, and only had the effect of making the speaker seem not in earnest. As he referred to his past, and made his hearer feel it as a reality, he became

*** This name is omitted for obvious reasons. It is that of a portrait painter well known at the time.**

more and more a strange possible connecting link with a still older bygone time. Who could say what was known of the house by its occupant of fifty years ago, and of its traditions now long forgotten? Charles thought it better to talk about the house itself as the most likely course to bring about revelations. He sketched the present occupants, and ended up, "Of course you saw about the find of bones in the vault—three or four weeks ago?"

"I see nothing nowadays. What bones? Mutton-bones?" This and his puffing out his cheeks at this moment gave an appearance of incredulity or ridicule.

"No. Human bones—a whole skeleton. It was in all the papers——"

"I never see the papers. I never see anything. Man's bones or woman's bones?"

"Woman's bones."

"Was it Phyllis Cartwright?"

"How can I tell? Nobody knows who it was. All the antiquarians are trying to hunt her up, and are not getting at anything, so far. Who *was* Phyllis Cartwright?"

"Haven't the slightest idea!" This was puzzling.

"*Why* Phyllis Cartwright then?" asked Charles. He was beginning to think the man was not taking his words *au sérieux;* the more so because of his way of puffing his cheeks out, and raising his eyelids.

"I couldn't say."

"Something must have made you think of Phyllis Cartwright——"

"Something—yes! Can't say what." And nothing more could be got from Mr. Verrinder. But it seemed as if what he said was true, and that the name Phyllis Cartwright had really suddenly come into his head; he couldn't tell why! He became silent and preoccupied for a time, and then suddenly saying—"*Why* Phyllis Cartwright?" as if he had been trying for a clue to her, packed up his tubes, wiped his palette, and rinsed his brushes in turpentine. The final cleaning with soap was in a washhouse below, and Charles carried his own brushes down also. Both cleaned simultaneously, Verrinder sucking his brushes to shape them off, and spitting out the soapy water. "*Why* Phyllis Cartwright?" said he again, and glared round at Charles to emphasise enquiry, with a brush in his mouth like a flageolet. Charles could throw no light of course, and went away to lunch thinking Verrinder more than merely queer, possibly crazy. Still, he *had* known something about the house, from forty to fifty years ago.

SCARBOROUGH TOWNSHIP
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Charles had spoiled his study of the Turk, whom he was beginning to paint in Prussian Blue. He decided not to go back till there was another Visitor, even if he was only old ———,* who always wanted flesh painted Indian Red and black. He reappeared in the School at the next scene-shifting, and gave away his Turk canvas to Verrinder, who cleaned the Prussian Blue beginning off and started straightway on a study of a young woman with a good deal of confidence in her own appearance. Charles was not fortunate in his place, perhaps because he came in late. He was some distance off, and just in the line of Verrinder's backward rushes. He squared in an ambiguity with charcoal, with the splendid independence of a true Academy student, and was beginning to squeeze out wormcasts at random on his palette, when Verrinder backed on to him, and begged pardon. He had inadvertently blocked the road. Now, he wanted to talk more to Verrinder; and what after all was an outline? He could just as well do here, three feet off. Indeed the outline didn't signify really, being a matter of form in the non-artistic sense of that phrase; in the artistic one it was a matter of amorphousness. Charles shifted his easel, and Verrinder expressed his gratitude, repeating his conviction that Charles was a gentleman. Presently he charged back again, and threw a remark to Charles *en passant*. "I've found Phyllis Cartwright," said he. And a bystander immediately asked what sort of feet had she, imagining she was a Model. For Art seeks for ever to find good feet on Models, and finds them not. When Verrinder next came back, he had another communication to make. "Found her on a picture back—show it you!"—and returned to his easel before Charles could reply.

As soon as time came for the Model to rest, it transpired that the name was on the back of the frame of a portrait in Mr. Verrinder's possession. He had seen it there on some previous occasion; and had retained the name, though he had forgotten when and where he had seen it. "If you don't mind climbing up, I'll show it you," said he. Charles got the impression that Verrinder lived at the top of somewhere.

When the sitting was over, he spoke to Verrinder again about Phyllis Cartwright. What had made him suppose she had anything to do with the house?

"Aha!" replied he, "I didn't see that. But you're a gentleman. You won't ask questions. So I'll tell you this much. The portrait came from that house—I'll show it you——" He looked up at Charles as if he thought he had spoken. "Eh? There was noth-

* Name omitted for same reason.

ing wrong. But you won't ask questions. It was all forty—near on fifty—years ago." His voice had been as prosaic, as matter-of-fact over his recollection of the house, even when he told how he had shrunk from going over it again, as it was when he talked of the Asphaltum tubes. The only sign he showed of being affected by his own references to the past was that he did not speak again until after the usual brush-cleaning had been gone through, and he and Charles were going out. Then he said suddenly, "If you like to come along now, I'll show it you. But mind you, I wouldn't have done it only you gave me those tubes. It's a fine colour—a fine colour!—And I can feel you'll ask no questions." He lived, he said, out Lambeth way, and walked. Charles suggested a cab, and Verrinder said—"Certainly. You pay."—And a hansom was enlisted, and given an address "over beyond the Hospital."

"Some people never come across the river," said he to Charles; and Charles had to confess that he had very seldom done so; also that he had never been in the streets they were passing through at all, and didn't know their names.

Verrinder lived in an attic at the top of a high house certainly—but an inhabitant of any continental town would have made light of it. It was roomy enough; but was choked up with furniture, old and mouldy, and many pictures with the faces turned to the walls. The window of the only room not so choked up opened out on a small square of leads, sunk in the roof and having a railing outside. It looked out over pleasant enough semi-suburban gardens, now lamenting their surrender of spring green to the London smoke. Beyond these was a dome that seemed to belong to a building of importance, and Charles was surprised that there should be in London so large a structure and that he should be unable to recognise it. He felt he ought to know, and was almost ashamed to ask. Curiosity won the day.

"Is that building over there, with the dome——?" he began; and then hesitated. Verrinder cut him short, and spared him confession of complete ignorance.

"The Asylum. Yes! Bedlam, if you want to know." His manner was half curt and forbidding, half subdued. "Here's the picture!" said he, abruptly. He opened the door into the next room, which seemed to serve as his bedroom, though visibly half-full of lumber, and immediately returned with a canvas. "And here's the name. Phyllis Cartwright. It might be by Romney. Very inferior to Reynolds, Romney!"

"It ought to be valuable," said Charles, and was thinking of saying he wondered its owner had never sold it, as it didn't seem to be a

family portrait. Verrinder's answer anticipated something of the sort. "Valuable—yes! But I shan't sell it. Shan't sell any of them! They used to hang in our house. They came straight here. They've never been moved——" and then he stopped short, and turned another picture round from the wall—"Man with a big name," said he; "don't think much of him! Turner——" and put it back where it was before. Charles stood looking at Phyllis Cartwright, and wishing he was at liberty to ask questions. After all, he wasn't a penny the wiser for seeing a picture, merely because it had been in the house in old times. If it had been known to have been painted in the house, or that its subject had lived in the house, that would have been quite another thing. At present, Phyllis Cartwright was a name, and her portrait an oil-picture—obscured, as is the manner of oil-pictures, by a long life in the dark—so obscured in fact that it would have been hard to say if she was dark or fair. However, Charles had promised to ask no questions, or considered that he had. So he held his tongue resolutely. Presently he had his reward.

"You're a gentleman!" said Verrinder. "You promised and held to it—I can tell you some more, but no more than I want to tell." He spoke as if afraid of being catechised.

"I will ask nothing," said Charles. "You may trust me——"

"The picture and all these others came out of that house you are at now—came out long before you were born. They belonged to ———, who turned me out of the house. I told you?" Charles nodded. "He bought them at the sale—the Family was sold up—name was Luttrell—been there a long time—since the house was built——" He made a short pause, then said abruptly, "Well!—That's pretty well all I can tell you!" It was disappointing. It was also most difficult, Charles found, to make any comment that would not seem like a question. But he found something to say.

"At any rate that is something to know—I have not been able to find any of the previous history of the house. But the names Luttrell and Cartwright may give us a clue to follow."

"Luttrell may—I'm not clear about Cartwright—my memory's bad—I know they were a very fast lot—cards and dice—that sort of thing. I suppose ——— must have told me about them often—or else——" And he stopped again with a deadlock. But he presently resumed: "As for why your story of the bones made me think of Phyllis Cartwright, I can tell no more than Adam. I must have seen the name on the picture, and let it alone. Stupid way one has!"

"It was a good job for me," said Charles, "that you happened to

look at the picture-back just when you did, or I shouldn't have known about Luttrell——"

"I didn't look at it. I was dozin' up here—well on midnight it was—and it crossed my mind. Crossed my mind where it was! And then I pulled out this frame from behind the others, and there it was sure enough. I must have seen it, years agone! And it had slipped my memory. Some things don't! Some things do!——"

Charles felt that if he stopped much longer he should forget his promise and ask questions. So he made a pretence of being due somewhere, and said he must run. But he had profited by so much as the name of the old holders of No. 40 amounted to. And there might be any amount of connecting link among all these dingy canvases. He credited himself with a wise discretion though in not trying to get at too much. He was sure to see Verrinder again.

Charles was, no doubt, what Peggy had called him—"Charley Slowboy"—in some respects. As he rode away to a very late lunch in his hansom, a number of speculations crossed his mind about Verrinder that Peggy would have thought of at once. Was he mad? His manner was very odd, certainly. But surely, if he was mad, he never would go to live in sight of Bedlam. Of course *unless* he was mad, added Charles to himself, absurdly. But then suppose his only symptom of insanity was that he went to live in sight of Bedlam, being mad. That's a very circular conundrum, thought Charles, and gave it up. He went on to another; why did Verrinder live in apparently such poverty when he had pictures in his possession visibly of great value? The portrait was a Reynolds or a Romney at the least. Nobody could say what the value of the Turner might be. If all the rest were like the sample, there might be thousands of pounds' worth of pictures in that attic. And there was their owner, dirty and neglected, in a very old black suit that glittered with polish on the joints, in boots with patched upper leathers, in a coloured shirt with a traditionally white collar, held only by a front button, and trying to climb over the back of his head—altogether a miserable waif, such as one may see munching sandwiches furtively in corners in public museums and galleries. There had been no appearance of anything that could be called lunch or dinner that Charles could recollect—stay! was there not the combination known as "the tray" in household experience, but lacking components? Charles felt as if he had seen a Dutch cheese near a vertical beer-jug with a cracked lip; but he wasn't sure; it was more a sentiment than an image that was left in his mind.

Another speculation was: Was Verrinder a miser? No—that wouldn't do! No miser in his senses would keep such valuable pictures. If he was very clever he might, with a view to a rise in price. But that is hardly the miser character. The miser longs for specie, and goes for realisation. The dealer has far sight and fortitude; in the miser both are merged in cupidity—so much so that he could not bear the idea of the real gold a picture was worth being in another's pocket if he could get it into his own. Oh no! There was no secret hoard in this case. He was really as poor as a rat, but had some hidden reason for holding on to the pictures.

CHAPTER XII

OF A VISIT OF ALICE TO NO. 40, AND OF THE RED MAN WITH THE KNIFE

When Charles told Peggy (some days after, she having been away at a friend's) about his expedition to Lambeth with Verrinder, she said he should have asked more questions. After all, we were none the wiser! Mr. Verrinder remembered the house a very long time ago: but so might many people. Of course it was curious that all those pictures should once have been in that house; but then if we were not to ask questions what use was that? Couldn't Mr. Verrinder be persuaded to come to dinner at Hyde Park Gardens? Peggy would soon find out a lot about it if she could get at him. Charles burst out laughing. "Well!" said Peggy, "I don't see anything so very absurd in that! Why *shouldn't* Mr. Verrinder come to dinner at Hyde Park Gardens?" The reason she spoke of her family residence by its name, instead of saying, "here," was that she and Charles were at his Studio when this conversation took place.

"Why shouldn't Mr. Verrinder come to dinner at Hyde Park Gardens?" repeated Charles, and laughed again. "I'll be hanged if I know, Poggy—only I can't help laughing for all that! However, I don't believe he would come, if I asked him ever so. But I should somehow as soon think of sending Mother in the carriage to leave cards on Mrs. Verrinder. It's not because he's poor and shabby, poor devil, but because of his line of rumness—he would be out of his element—as much so as a Trappist monk—more so!"

"I didn't know there was any Mrs. Verrinder——"

"Nor yet I didn't, myself, Poggy-Woggy, till the other day. I don't know that I do now, because she may be as dead as a doornail. But there either is, or was, a Mrs. V.—I say! what a difficult Art painting is!"—Peggy assented, and he went on: "I'm sick of painting this beastly armour, and it won't come. I vote I have a pipe, and you may ruffle my hair for me. As soon as Partridge and Alice come, we'll have tea. I've bought a lot of cakes and they're in that parcel."

"I'll ruffle your hair. But you must blow the smoke the other way." Charles agreed, and the weary artist, who had worked with-

out intermission for quite two hours, settled down to his pipe on the floor, with his head in his indulgent sister's lap. They were very handsome young people, certainly, both of them.

The reason they were there at this particular moment was that an arrangement had been made that Alice (as a kind of native) should show Mrs. Partridge the house, for a treat. Peggy had been deposited by her mother from the carriage, while Partridge and Alice were to walk through the Park.

"What did he tell you about Mrs. Verrinder?" said Peggy, falling back on the conversation.

"He's never mentioned her himself. It was the Curator of the Schools, who has known him for forty years past. He was very taciturn, but was curious to hear all I had to tell him about Verrinder's housekeeping. Said he went to see him there once—thirty years ago! Asked me if I had 'made out anything' about his wife."

"What did you say?"

"Oh, of course I said he hadn't mentioned her to me, and I didn't know he had a wife. He replied that he had a wife, unless she had died without his hearing of it. 'Not very likely,' he said. I told him I had seen no sign of any lady in the place. 'Oh,' said he, 'that would make no difference.' And then he shut up. There's something rum about it."

"I tell you what, Charley. I've got an idea! Mr. Verrinder must have married the girl he was turned out of this house for making love to, in the end—because if he didn't, how came he into possession of her father's property? Don't you see? Look here, silly boy—and blow the smoke the other way. Now listen to me! First of all Mr. Thingummy R. A. turns him out of the house for making up to his daughter. Very well then!"

"I don't see that you're getting any nearer."

"Yes—I am. Don't be in a hurry! Next they make a runaway match of it—the young people do; of course!"

"That was all right and natural, when the parents objected. But you don't understand! Verrinder distinctly said he hadn't set foot in that house since its owner turned him out of it. That was the first thing he said."

"Yes—but one can suppose all sorts of things. He may have remained obdurate—hardened his heart and died unrepentant."

"No—*that* won't do! Verrinder would have been sure to go into the house again if he and his wife inherited the things."

"Perhaps he left the house and went somewhere else before he died?" Charles reflected, and blew the smoke the other way. "That

seems possible and reasonable," said he. "We'll let it go at that."

"Who are the people who have come into the big back room downstairs?" asked Peggy.

"Picture dealers, I believe. They want to alter the little oval skylight—say there's no light. Jeff is very indignant. Says its Vandalism——"

"Oh!—Mr. Jerrythought. But *is* there no light?"

"Jeff says it's a glorious old Queen Anne house, and it's wicked to alter it."

"I shouldn't pay any attention to Mr. Jerrythought if I was the picture dealer. It was a ballroom, wasn't it?"

"Jeff says so. He's in Queen Anne's confidence——"

"Isn't that Alice's voice?" Yes, it is. And in comes Alice, much excited at her position as show-woman, or patroness, of the house, Mrs. Partridge never having been there before. Alice's speech and appearance have improved enormously. Really if we had not had our eyes on her for the past few months, unknown to our readers, we should not have recognised her, and then perhaps we should have written that a pretty blue-eyed maiden with mouse-coloured hair, nicely dressed in a Japanese blue-print frock and a cap of the same colour, came running rather flushed into the room, and that we did not recollect having seen her before. As it is we are in a position to assure them that this little girl was the very selfsame Alice that was knocked down by those naughty little boys in the fog, and saved from a whipping by Charles Heath. And those little boys were no doubt still pursuing their career of insubordination and depravity, while Alice had by the merest accident been lifted high above them in the social scale, and had not, so far, done anything to disappoint her patrons.

Eight months is a good long period in the life of a child of six—over ten per cent. of the whole, we believe—and Alice had the impression that she had lived a very *very* long time at Hyde Park Gardens under the chronic control and government of Mrs. Partridge, subject to occasional interventions from the higher regions. Indeed, as a matter of fact, the occasions were frequent; and a whole day rarely passed in which Alice did not find her way into the drawing-room on some pretext or other; while Peggy for her part, and Charles on his intermittent visits at home, were frequent visitors in the housekeeper's room. But by this time Alice has come into the room, and she is so anxious to speak, we must not keep her waiting. She was too full of her mission to allow of any observance of mere artificial forms, and plunged at once *in medias*

res. Her pronunciation was still far from perfect, but much improved. An altering phase of teeth had made her lisp take another form, and great efforts had got rid of both *lidy* and *loydy,* and obtained in exchange an approach to *lady.* We shall very soon be able to print Alice without her pronunciation; it will be so normal.

"Mustn't I sow Mrs. Parkridge downstairs, all where Pussy was, and Mr. Charley came down ever so long ago——" and here Alice's voice got a kind of puzzled ruefulness as she added: "and where there used-ed to be father and mother?"

Partridge, feeling it due to her dignity to dissociate herself from the thoughtless enthusiasm of childhood, remarked in confidence to the grown-up world that we were quite wild with excitement; and then remained aloft. Charles gave the authorisation asked for.

"Of course you shall, Alice-for-short! That's what you've come for. Now listen! You go downstairs into the office—no! stop! wait till I tell you what to say—and ask the gentleman there to allow you to show Mrs. Partridge all through the shops. Say you're Miss Kavanagh that used to live here." Perhaps the last instruction didn't reach, as Alice was off, after repeating, to show her clear understanding: "Mrs. Parkridge all froo the sops." For *th* and *f* were still ambiguous, in unstudied speech.

"We won't go down, Peggy, it makes such a lot of us—too great a visitation!" And Partridge follows Alice under assumption of guardianship, but really very curious to see where the bones were found. Peggy and Charles can always go on chatting.

"How are you and the Doctor getting along, Poggy?"

"What a silly boy you are! Why should the Doctor (as you call him) and I 'get along'——"

"What do you want me to call him? Why shouldn't you get along——?"

"I don't see that any get-alonging comes into the matter. Dr. Johnson and I are very good friends and always shall be—if I have my way. As to what I want you to call him—of course one would naturally *prefer* to call him Rupert—it's such a pretty name! Only when a man's inclined to behave like that, you can't call him by his Christian name, nor he yours——" You see, when a young lady is talking to her brother, she needn't construct her sentences carefully. Charles quite understood.

"You like Johnson a deal better than Captain Bradley?"

"Captain Bradley! Better than an omnibus-full of Captain Bradleys. Ugh!—what a horrible idea!"

"I suppos, Robin's told you about the Captain?"

"No! Has he consoled himself?" (Roused curiosity!)

"Yes—a Miss Callender—Edith Callender." Peggy appeared to know the lady, but not to admire her extravagantly. "The idea!" said she. "Edith Callender!!! Well—he *is* easily consoled. However, I suppose it's all right!——" Are we, we wonder, altogether wrong in surmising that Peggy was human enough to feel *almost no* pique, instead of *quite* none, at the man she wouldn't have married (so she said) with a pair of tongs, and at an omnibus-full of whom she fairly shuddered, having given up wearing the willow on her account, and consoled himself with inferiority? No! Peggy was quite distinctly human, for all her philosophy. Charles evidently thought so, for he said, "Don't be jealous, Poggy-Woggy! You wouldn't have the Captain yourself. You didn't expect him to ask your leave to marry Miss Callender, did you?"

"He'd got it already. I wonder if he told Miss Callender about —all his previous offers!"

"Particularly his last one. I wonder if the Doctor means to tell the next he offers to about Miss Peggy Heath——"

"Oh no! Rupert Johnson's—quite a different sort! Quite! I wish he would though—but he won't——"

"How do you know that?"

"I *know* he won't——"

"You seem to know a lot about him. I tell you what, Peg; I don't believe you would be glad if another girl accepted Johnson—you'd be sorry. At least, you'd be glad if she rejected him——"

"Rejected Rupert Johnson! I should like to see a girl reject him. The minx!" And Peggy seems genuinely indignant with this shadowy damsel.

"You did it yourself, Pog, anyhow!"

"No—Charley dear—be fair! I never rejected the poor dear fellow. I only warned, cautioned, and earnestly entreated him, like the passengers' heads out of the carriage windows. It wouldn't have been right not to, when I'd made up my mind. I think I shall make the tea now. They can't be much longer."

A step was heard outside, and Peggy said: "There they are——" But Charles said: "No, that's Jeff. We must let him come in—he always comes to tea. Well! you know, I couldn't tell him you were coming and hated him, and so he must keep out. Could I?——" Peggy laughed aloud: "I DON'T hate Mr. Jerrythought," said she.

He was admitted, to make the tea. It was his prerogative on ordinary occasions, and he knew where things were. When you don't know where things are you cannot make tea. He set him-

self to the making of the tea with a fervid intensity that perhaps went beyond the scope of his subject. No amount of concentration will enable you to make tea well beyond a certain point. Jeff was destined to overshoot his mark, and make the tea too strong. It had to be weakened after pouring out; and, as we all know, it's not the same thing.

"Never mind, Mr. Jerrythought!" said Peggy, "it's a fault on the right side. If it had been too weak we should never have forgiven you. Should we, Alice?" For Alice and Mrs. Partridge had returned from their subterranean expedition, but Alice had been so silent that we have had nothing to report of her, and the story has been silent too. Peggy put it down to her recollections of her parents having come upon her and made her thoughtful. But then, wasn't Partridge also a little *distraite*? *She* had no associations.

Alice replied briefly to Peggy's question: "No—we never sould have forgiven Mr. Jellyfork"; but the subject didn't seem to command her attention. Neither did the cakes Charles had so sedulously provided. Alice was quite another Alice from the little girl who had rushed tumultuously downstairs to show Partridge over the estate, only half-an-hour ago. The latter, in reply to an undertoned enquiry from Peggy, disclaimed stomach-ache on Alice's behalf. The child was fanciful, that was all! She would tell Peggy as soon as—presently!—the obstacle to immediate revelation being Mr. Jerrythought. This naturally added to Peggy's desire that that young gentleman should discontinue his review of the London Stage, and go. He for his part became aware that something was amiss, but of course pitched on the wrong thing. He thought it was the tea, and strove to make up for it by brilliant anecdotes of Carlotta Leclerq, and even what a chap he knew had told him about Madame Vestris, and so forth. And the more Peggy wanted him to go, the more he strove to compensate for the strong tea. So that no one was any the wiser when Mrs. Heath and Ellen, in the carriage on the way back from a call in Russell-square, came to pick up Alice and Peggy by appointment. Partridge would take the 'bus, and Charles was going to dress at the Studio, and go out to dinner.

"Queer little cuss, your *protégée!*" said Jeff, when the party had dispersed. "She ain't a chatterbox."

"She didn't seem like herself," said Charles. "Perhaps it was finding the whole place so changed."

When Charles walked into his Studio on his return from his dining out, he found a hand-delivered note on his easel, and saw

it was from Peggy. Alice was in a very queer state—seemed to have had a fright. Peggy would wait up till twelve in case he was early enough to come on. She would like to see him as soon as possible. Charles secured his Hyde Park Gardens latch-key from another pocket, and got a hansom. He would be there by eleven-thirty; for had not the Brown-Smiths bored him, and caused him to have important work to-morrow, which a long night's rest was essential to? In about twenty minutes the latch-key had fulfilled its function, and was back in his pocket.

Peggy's voice came down the stairs to him: "Is that you, Charley? I'm so glad you're come. Alice has quite frightened us. Really one gets afraid about her poor little head." Charles went upstairs, reflecting on the best phrases in which to pooh-pooh nervous females.

"Of course it's no use for me to say anything."—It is Mrs. Heath that speaks, on the point of majestic retirement to the upper regions.—"But if I were at liberty to say *exactly* what I thought, it would be——"

"Yes—Mamma dear—what would it be?"—for Mamma had not provided herself with her opinion when she began, her attention being concentrated on her status as an authority. She required two or three seconds to think of one, and meanwhile had to fill in with collateral matter.

"My dear, you know I always *am* silenced, so I hold my tongue! But I *think,* all the same!—as for the little girl, you know what I think, because I have said it several times already. She is full of fancies, and if you listen to her, you will only make her worse. She ought to have a good dose of Dover's powder, and have no attention paid to her, and she would soon be set right. However, don't pay any attention to *me!*" And Mrs. Heath went upstairs like the only person in sight in a procession.

Charles and Peggy sought the drawing-room, and said they would turn the gas off, and Phillimore might go to bed. "The others" were not home, and Papa was in "the Library"—a place where some titles of books were sometimes perused through plate glass. Peggy hushed down a burner or two (not to have her eyes glared) and said she supposed she had better begin and tell it all from the beginning.

"You know," she continued, "we both thought Alice very silent at tea. Well! She didn't say a word all the way home, and only cuddled up to me in the carriage. Of course we got here an immense long time before Partridge. When we got in, I kissed the child and said here we were back again, and I hoped she'd enjoyed

herself. Do you know she only shook her head in that comic rueful way she has, and didn't speak a word."

"Was she crying? Had she been crying?"

"Not a bit of it! Let me go on telling. I said, 'What is it, Alice dear? What's the matter? You'll tell me what's the matter—won't you?'—But she only shook her head and kept her mouth shut, till I said to her seriously—'You know, Alice, Mr. Charley will be afraid to have you at his Studio unless you enjoy going—he'll think you're frightened of the lady with the spots——' And what do you think she answered?—'I sould be frightened to go once more—only NOT the lady——'—'What would you be frightened of, Alice dear?' said I—and she answered, 'I sould be frightened of the man downstairs—the man with the knife——'"

"Oh, of course!" said Charles. "I understand it all. It was Pope's man, Buttivant, who lead-lines up the windows. The man of light and *lead*ing, we wittily call him, Jeff and I. He makes horrible grimaces——"

"He hasn't any knife——"

"Oh yes, he has! A putty-knife to jam in all along the leads, and then wipe them sharp along the flange to close it down. He does a good deal of work with the knife. Depend on it that was it!"

"Well! Wait till you've heard it all, and *then* explain. I thought it was Mr. Pope, or one of his men; and I said, 'You mustn't be frightened of Mr. Pope, nor any of his workmen, Alice. They won't hurt you!' And then she said, oh no! it wasn't Mr. Pope at all. Mr. Pope was a very *nice—good*—man, and showed her blue things and green things and red things, and tooked her hand downstairs. And then I made her tell about the men in the shop, and the man you describe must be the one she called Mr. Puttyknife—it was natural. So then I pressed to find out who the man was, and it seemed he was a bad man in a red dress, with a long long straight knife, so long as that! It was a red knife, and the man was red, and he came along by the door where mother came when the jug broke——"

"The door of the kitchen, where they do the leading up now——"

"Yes—because they went in and found Mr. Puttyknife. And he smelt of ile-paint, only very strong. But Alice must have been completely upset by the red man with the knife; and when Partridge came in an hour later (she stopped in Oxford Circus to buy me something) she gave me her version of the story. I'm afraid she's gone to bed."

"Never mind—tell me what she said——"

"That Alice was in the best of spirits till they went downstairs. She had made great friends with Mr. Pope, looking at the coloured glasses—and went downstairs—'hold of his hand.' Then when they got to the foot of the stairs, Alice 'gave a shrink, and caught up to Mr. Pope.' I'm giving you Partridge's words. Mr. Pope asked if she was afraid he was going to run away, and she answered something Partridge thought was nonsense about where had the man with the knife gone. Mr. Pope said what man, and she answered the red man. And then Mr. Pope thought she meant a figure in red in the glasses, Saint Somebody, and said of course he'd gone to Heaven, because he was a Saint. Whereupon Alice said (it really was very funny, and I can't help laughing at it) that she hoped he hadn't gone to Heaven, because father was there; and Miss Peggy, that she belonged to, had said so! But after that she never said a word, and seemed, said Partridge, quite out of it."

"Well," said Charles, "that *is* a funny story!" And not a single correct accredited way of dealing with a tale of this sort could he think of, better than that the child must have been feverish, and had eaten too much pudding. "But did she stop out of it after that altogether?"

"It looks like it," said Peggy. "Well! You know how she was when she came upstairs—and all your beautiful cakes were left! But she seemed very well in herself till about an hour later, when Partridge came to me and told me she'd got very hot and feverish, and it was then I wrote the note off to you, because I was frightened about her head: however, she went to sleep all right after. It was no use sending another note to you, not to come."

"Oh no! I can sleep here now I've come." Only, Charles wasn't going to retire with that object until he had made some little stand on behalf of the attitude of mind towards the Intrinsically Improbable that is sanctioned by Common Sense; with which also rests the function of grouping the Impossible, the Probable, and the Actual, with good sharp boundary lines between the groups.

"I'm pretty clear about what it really was, Peg," said he. "The fever was really the cause, not the effect, of the hallucination. It was a case of suppressed fever."

"Case of suppressed fiddlesticks' ends!" said Peggy. "Go to bed!"

CHAPTER XIII

OF SHELLACOMBE SANDS, AND WHAT PEGGY THOUGHT THERE. AND WHOM SHE MET THERE

If the bones of the murdered woman were flattering themselves that Psychical Research was going to throw a light on their history and identity, they were destined to disappointment. For the period of London's annual flight to the country had come, and the Heath family were off. In fact, they were overdue in the country already, for most of London that was worth the name had gone some weeks back, at the time of the events of last chapter. A good hundred thousand probably had been deducted from the four millions odd that made up the metropolis, and now there was nobody left. Almost! If Parliament hadn't been sitting so late it would have been quite.

Psychical Research requires at least one votary of diabolical tenacity of purpose to keep the life in it. Almost every living human creature has some measure of interest in Ghosts and Bogies, but it is a measure that is very apt to run out after say twenty minutes sitting at an unresponsive table, with your little fingers in contact with your neighbours' "to keep up the current"; or after maybe sleeping one night in a haunted house and not seeing a grey woman; or covering a quire of foolscap with planchette writing from your co-querist's first husband and then finding that she is *Miss* (whereas you thought for certain she was *Mrs.*) Smith; or being told that young Blank had confessed that it was he pushed the table, just to show what awful asses the Company (including yourself) were. It is true the interest will revive sooner or later; but it is an intermittent one, and requires philosophical thought and temper to do it full justice. In the commonplace mind it is apt to lapse unless kept up to the mark by the stimulus of a neighbouring philosopher. Let us all do honour to those who (according to the testimony of their scientific opponents) have passed through long periods of patient research watching for spectres that never come; weighing mediums *in vacuo* and finding they weigh exactly what you would expect; grappling with other mediums who worm their way out of the

cabinet in the dark; and getting smudged by materialisations with vermillion and lamp-black superposed on the medium for test-purposes. Never mind if I put some of these points wrongly: join me in admiration of the persistent philosophy that recognises the fact that no amount of negative evidence absolutely proves that anything whatever isn't due to any cause we choose to invent a name for.

Charles and Peggy were under no obligation to invent new names for the spectral appearance that had terrified Alice. Supernatural; hallucination of the senses; idea with the force of a sensation; subliminal consciousness, stimulated by unconscious hypnotic suggestions from bystanders (Is that right? We have misgivings.); purely subjective phenomenon; all these were ready to hand, and you could take which you liked; or different ones at different times. Charles was in favour of *No. 2;* for after all, did not both parents drink? You couldn't get over that.

One thing was quite certain—that when Peggy, who inclined to *No. 1* was away at Shellacombe, and Charles was left to himself and his incredulities, nothing further would be done in the way of investigation. Alice of course went to the seaside. Charles began to be aware that his *protégée,* whom he had carried off to his father's house without asking himself where she was to go next if she was not welcome, was becoming a member of the family. He saw that this was because she was such a dear little thing, and got hold of everybody, as well as himself and Peggy. He was grateful to her for being one. A nice fix it would have been, said he to himself, if Alice-for-short had turned out a little beast!

Alice-for-short seemed likely to prove Alice-for-long, or Alice-for-good; probably the latter. None the less because of her aptitude for instruction, and greed for information in the glorious new world in which she found herself. It was little wonder that the dreadful past was getting dimmer and dimmer—rapidly becoming a dream.

But Peggy, noting this, noted also that of this dream there was a survival—an idealised memory—that seemed to her an injustice, but always inevitable. For Alice treasured the recollection of her father as a good and glorious being, constantly adding to his imaginary perfections as time went on. But of her mother no memories were pleasant. She spoke without resentment of the punishments she had so often received at her mother's hands; but she clearly thought justice, or vengeance, was her mother's function; and love was her father's. Peggy fretted under what seemed to her the unfairness of it all. If (which was conceivably possible,

however improbable) the child's mother could see from some other state of existence (or of something equivalent in its degree to what we call existence) the child's memories respectively of her husband and herself, she must needs feel the exquisite cruelty of the order of creation that had warped her life: except indeed some higher wisdom had come to show her that wrong was really right—but in a sense that our finite intelligences cannot grasp.

Peggy would say to herself at this stage of her mental review of the subject, "But then my intelligence *is* finite, and *can* only perceive the cruelty and the wrong. I refuse to tell any lies about what I think and feel now, because one day I may think otherwise." And she would always wind up with "At any rate *I* won't marry and bring children into such a world—and any child that wants to be born must find another mother than I, finite intelligence or no!"

She had almost attempted, once or twice, to procure an affectionate leniency towards her dead mother from Alice, and had felt the hopelessness of the attempt. The mother's excuse had turned on the fact that she had led a poisoned life—that she was always drugged, and that her personal identity had no chance against the drug. And Alice was far too young to understand the course of events that had vitiated her blood and made her to all intents and purposes some one else. For the creature that Charles had seen on that occasion of the broken jug was much more Alcohol than a woman. When Peggy spoke with her at the Hospital, on her deathbed, the obsession had been removed and the woman had come again, just as truly as the demoniac's sane soul returned to him when the Gadarene swine rushed to the lake and bore his curse away for ever. She had come back, and knew and could tell her own story. How hard it seemed that no road to the same end could have been found, short of a deathbed in a Hospital, brought about by a murderous blow that was itself a chord in the long symphony of Drink that sounded through the last years of her life! If she could only have been convicted of a theft, and sent to prison, she might have been redeemed. But where was the use of saying any of this to a child? Some day, perhaps, Alice would be able to understand her mother's life, and see that she alone was not to blame.

Alice's rescue from the slime and the mire was to be a remunerative one to her rescuers, and no disappointment. It might easily have been otherwise. It may be that two-thirds of the human saplings that plead for space and light and culture in the great

hells of civilisation would give very little joy to the gardener's heart, and very much work to his hand. But that is just as true of many who claim them as a birthright. And how about the odd third that would pay so well for transplanting? Peggy used to turn this over and over in her mind as she watched her little *protégée* careering bare-legged over the sands at Shellacombe, or in her first glorious experiences of being bowled over by the sunlit ripple of the little breakers. Think of the contrast! Think of the sordid and haggard life of the class she came from—even of the best of it. Think of that area, and the cats thereof! Think, if you dare, of the still lower depths of stuffiness and foulness—so ran on Peggy's thoughts to herself—of the air of the rooms whole families sleep in; of the dreadful world in which the threshold of the gaslit filth-house is the stepping-stone to the only gleam of Heaven it can ever know on this side of the grave! And yet (even as Peggy quoted Browning to herself) God has not said one word! And all the others are there—are there—are there still! All the others, so many of whom might have been Alice, and were not! Peggy felt half-mad with the horror of it all, there on the Shellacombe beach, with the blue sea at her feet, and out above it an incredible colossus of climbing cloud; an infinity of piled white vapours bent on touching the zenith, and seeming like to succeed. She felt it almost a pain to hear, across the sands, the voices of the children in the water, and Alice's among them, plain enough—yes!—that was her voice, no doubt of it! And there were the cries of the gulls, as musical as when we were here last year—and they have gone on ever since, all the while we were in our hapless, fog-bound centre of civilisation; and Alice was where we shudder to think of her now, in that appalling underground darkness with her mother snoring in a drunken sleep, and the bones of the murdered woman waiting to be an interesting discovery. But the other children—the other children—they are all there still! And Peggy quoted her Browning again, and added blasphemously that perhaps it was because He was ashamed of His handiwork. Don't be angry with her, Mrs. or Mr. Grundy! She is only grappling, with rough candour, with the terrible problem that has perplexed and oppressed us all, except you.

What would not Peggy do, if she was a millionaire. She would soon have them all out—all the children—into the sunlight. She would pitch them, by swarms, into the glorious water. She would dress them in all sorts of nice little costumes such as Alice had—none of your workhouse grey! She would feed them, and teach them (only she wouldn't have them taught any falsehoods), and

turn them into sober, useful, honest members of the commonwealth. And as for their parents, *they* wouldn't make any difficulties—they would let her do as she liked. Of course they would, Peggy dear, with your beautiful hair, and your beautiful eyes, and the nearest approach to a wrinkle that thought about a very devil of a world can make in your beautiful brow—of course they would let you have them. No difficulty about it! In fact, they will make none, neither, about getting you plenty more where those came from, if you want them—or if you don't!

Poor Peggy! She was imaging such a sweet Garden of Eden, all full of hundreds of happy little people like those over there (really it's time for that child to come out!), and the last turn of her dream struck a discord—it was just as though the Serpent had rung at the bell, and sent in word that if he wasn't admitted at the front gate he could find no end of ways of slipping in. And why (ran the current of Peggy's thoughts)—why do we blame him, when his chiefest function, his most effectual *modus operandi,* is to instigate a blind obedience to the very first instruction God gave to Man, when He placed him in the garden? Has he not a claim to an almost official position, with a right to millions of promotion money, for his exertions (in conjunction with two other members of a great Syndicate) towards the increase and multiplication of man and the replenishment of the Earth? He may be the Father of Lies, but is he not also the Father of London and Liverpool? Is he not perhaps a faithful serpent, a well-intentioned Agency, who has a little exceeded his instructions, which ought to have been clearer, and contained clauses dealing with congested districts, cubic feet per adult, accessibility of markets, and so forth? Or are we to suppose that the primordial instincts of Nature are due to an oversight of the Almighty?—that if he had only thought a little longer, and not been in such a hurry, he would have turned out a very different Creation; and poor Mrs. Kavanagh, Alice's mother, never would have gone to the Devil, and her husband wouldn't have hammered her scalp off, nor provided himself with an emergency bottle of Cyanide?

Peggy wasn't a Freethinker, not she! But she was rather a free Thinker; and we perceive, dear Mrs. Grundy, that you are right, and that such Doctrines are Dangerous, and that Peggy was in need of Guidance. Perhaps we all are, when we move in the dark. Better to sit still, and shun speculation, whether the Scripture moveth us to it in sundry places or not. But she wasn't that sort; she must needs be a-thinking. And she sat there on the sands (letting Alice, I am sure, stop in a great deal too long) wonder-

ing at the great cloud-mountain that slept or soared, or both, above its image in the sea. How little it cared for the smoke trail of an ocean tramp, Bristol-bound, that could do no more than just defile the horizon a little at its base, out eastwards. Up it climbed—up, up!—for ever, into the unfathomable blue—you only needed to watch it for a space to imagine its endless leagues of mountain and valley, of precipice and plain; to discover its caverns that you did not see at first; and then to populate them all, plain, precipice, and cavern, with countless myriads of winged things, each one a little joy-spot to itself, and all the legions of them rising still higher and higher to the high heaven, and rejoicing in the sun.

"Yes, that's all very fine," said Peggy in answer to her own thought. "Of course if one could be a little Blakey sort of spirit, swimming in the blue! But one isn't. And suppose one is Sally in our alley, and our alley is a stench-hole, with no more joy in it than can be got from an ill-intentioned Public-House and a well-intentioned Parson! What do you make of that?"

Nothing. Neither you nor I nor any one else can make anything of it. It remains the unanswered and unanswerable conundrum of the inscrutable Sphinx, Nature.

Peggy was obliged to leave the Origin of Evil, and the Omnipotent Omnibenevolence of its Creator, no clearer than she found it, in order to get Alice out of the water. How to do this was nearly as difficult a problem, for Alice had the coign of vantage, and knew quite well that neither Miss Peggy nor Mrs. Parkridge could conveniently come into the water to fetch her out. Her position was not one of resistance, but of postponement and supplication. Its power lay in an infinitely large number of infinitely small breaches of faith. To refuse flatly to come out of the water is one thing; to promise to come out in a minute—only one minute more!—and always get the promissory note renewed at its expiration, is another.

In the end Alice was fetched out; and, being absolutely cold like a fish, and having pale blue finger-tips and chattering teeth, she had to run about ever so long in the sun to get warm. . . . Still more food for reflection! Just to think of what and where that child would have been—but for the merest chance! The harder Peggy found it to grasp the difference, the more hideous was the thought—*the other children are there still!*

Though Peggy had never been wanting in readiness to join in charitable work, or in sorrow for misfortune and poverty, she had never suffered from the nightmare of our great and prosperous

civilisation until the horror of the lives of tens of thousands was brought home to her by this chance emancipation of one. She got no forwarder towards a conclusion, even by the time all the sand was got off Alice's feet; which was a long time, but not Mrs. Parkridge's estimate of six weeks. She only went back to her old conclusion, that Population was the root of all evil, and that the world might be a good and happy world if only the propensities of the Patriarchs could be kept under. "Make yourselves scarce!" would have been her advice to the Human Race—"Make yourselves scarce, and we'll do the rest!"—*we* being Representative Government, or Education, or the Churches, or Endowed Charities, or Society, or Co-operative Effort—one or other of them! Anyhow some agency which knows how to! Meanwhile it was clear that Marriage, under whatever form it presented itself, was the Old Serpent's trump-card—and oh what a faculty he has for putting a miserable two or three on the top of our best Kings and Aces and taking the trick! However, it was in Peggy's power to set a good example and she was going to do it.

But the Serpent is the subtlest eft of all the field—at least so says Wiclif's version—and even at this very moment he was scheming the frustration of a million resolutions just as determined as Peggy's. He doesn't go to work in identically the same way with all people. If he did he wouldn't be a subtle eft at all. On the contrary he has a different bait for every fish. He throws his hook to the shark and dog-fish with a huge coarse piece of flesh on it, tainted as often as not. And they bolt it at once and are captured, and are usually landed and carried away by him. Sometimes they run away with the bait, and the angler is disappointed. But when the fish is a shy fish, and will only jump at the most delicately made fly, with the most beautiful colours, then the world's great mischief-maker has plenty in stock and knows how to use them. In the case before us his immediate motive is only to ruin a castle in the air of an enthusiastic young lady. He is much too clever to try to shake her resolves, by offering her any of the baits supplied by the other two members of his Syndicate of three. But he will look in his wallet and find something.

Peggy sent Alice and Mrs. Partridge home, and set out to meet her mother and sister and Miss Petherington, who had gone for a walk along the sands. Then it proved so tremendously hot walking, that she gave it up, and turned to go slowly home, pursuing her meditations.

"If only one could get any one to talk to about one's ideas,

how nice it would be! I'm sure it ought to be possible to do something—if it was ever so little. But people are such fools and so unpractical. Papa, for instance!

"Only Papa isn't quite a fool, because look what he said once when I *did* get him to be serious for a minute—about not being able to reform the World until we'd reformed the Flesh and the Devil." No doubt this did Mr. Heath credit, though we fancy the remark had been made before. But let Peggy go on with her reflections.

"It it so annoying, when you think what swarms of friends and acquaintances you've got, that you can't find one you can speak to about a thing you are always thinking of. I really do think, of all the lot, there isn't a living soul I can exchange an idea with. Except Rupert Johnson, and Le's quite out of the question. It's dangerous to mention anything to him now."

The sun had gone for a moment behind a solid cloud, and Peggy was standing in a purple island—only it didn't seem purple where she was. She half-closed her sunshade, and stood scratching the sand with its point, making letters. We really don't think it was anything but the merest accident that one of these letters was an R. Indeed there was nothing to distinguish it from the others she traced except that she rubbed it out with her foot. If it stood for Rupert (which I see is the surmise in your mind), it did not do so long, for she had rubbed it out almost as soon as she had written it.

"Yes—*that's* what I shall do—the very next opportunity. Of course it will never do to have this sort of thing going on—oh!——" This interjection, which we cannot write in the text so as to do it justice, was due to the first perception of a young man approaching, with intent. A handsome sort of fellow certainly, in a very sea-side costume. He might be a yachtsman. We did not catch what he said to Peggy, but can record her answer.

"Well—how can you expect any one to know you in those flannelly things? You don't look the least like a doctor! When did you come?——"

"Late last night. Went to see a friend at Barnstaple——"

"You knew we were here?"

"Of course I did. That's why I went to see my friend at Barnstaple——"

"Good, truthful, honest young man! But I never told you you might come——"

"Shall I go away again?"

"To your friend at Barnstaple? He can wait."

"It's not a he—it's a she! No—you needn't look so—it's not that sort of she. She's ninety-seven next month——"

"Well now, Master Rupert! What a shame? You really made me think it was Something. I *should* have been so glad." We can't stop in the middle of a conversation to analyse a feeling of such a subtle character as Peggy's alleged exultation, present or future, at Dr. Johnson having set himself up with a new She, and given up his nonsense. "I really *should* have been glad of that!" she repeated. She rubbed it well in, so that there should be no mistake. "But do tell me about the old lady of ninety-seven——"

"She's a wonderful old lady—was about seventy when she first made my acquaintance, and has known me all my life. She has a twin sister who is even more active than herself. One of them must live to be a hundred. She's had four husbands——"

"Bless us and save us! And how many descendants? . . . Fancy!—four families, each with a name to itself! Tell me the names of all the old lady's husbands."

"I never recollect them twice alike," said Dr. Johnson. "But I think they were Spackman, Gale, Lecheminant, and Barrett. She's Mrs. Barrett now, and lives in a cottage at Barnstaple. She was my nurse when I was a baby. She is so well known to me as Anne, that I have in practice a kind of disbelief in her ever having been Mrs. Spackman or Lecheminant. I make a concession to Barrett, but grudgingly. Haven't you ever felt the same about some nurse with a Christian name?"

"No—I never had a chance! Because Partridge is my only experience. It seems to me that she is Partridge, in the nature of things, and nothing could ever have altered it. I'm not quite certain what her Christian name is. Here we are at the house. Of course you'll come in and have lunch?——" Of course, but with slight shams of reserve. "That hat looks as if they were come back——" They had, and lunch was waiting, and Ellen rushed downstairs like the Falls of Niagara. Her mother followed in a more self-contained way like the water in a turbine-tube, and coupled an expression of well-controlled pleasure at seeing Dr. Johnson with an enquiry how long he was going to stay.

Mrs. Heath didn't like "the way things were going" with her daughter and the Doctor; but, being wise enough to know that any interference on her part would defeat its own object, she raised no objection to Dr. Johnson taking up his quarters at Shellacombe Hotel, with freedom of the foreshores of Shellacombe. Nothing was said about restrictions on visiting at Sea View, which was the residence taken bodily by the Heath family; who had come with

a cook, and more servants than could find employment, to stay till the end of the season, a period fixed at discretion. Shellacombe consisted of this house and the Hotel, one or two more houses, the butcher's, and the Post Office. It was only by consummate strategy that any one coming out of doors could avoid any one coming out of any other doors; so reservations made with a view of limiting Dr. Johnson, or any other Hotel resident, would only have betrayed weakness of jurisdiction, and Mrs. Heath felt that submission was the better part of valour, and submitted. Perhaps the Doctor would really believe Peggy's resolutions were valid, and would sheer off. So she kept sincerely neutral, prompted by her own version of her daughter's best interests.

Now Master Rupert (as Peggy had thought fit to christen him) had never made a formal suit to the object of his adoration—*that* he would never have done without consulting her family! She had informed him that nothing would induce her to marry even the man she liked best in the world, and as she really didn't at present know any one she liked better (as a friend of course) she was very anxious he should dismiss nonsensical ideas from his mind and be reasonable and sensible. He had assured her that in his wildest dreams he never should have presumed to think of offering her his worthless self, but that it was quite inevitable in the Nature of Things that she should never be absent from his thoughts, sleeping or waking. Surely it was his own look out if he lost his reason and went into a madhouse through indulging this prepossession. She had given him plain warning what he had to expect from her. Very good! It was all fair on both sides, *bien entendu*. And we could walk over to Surge Point, and take Alice with us this afternoon. Oh yes!—Alice could go quite as far as that—if she did knock up, Dr. Johnson would have to carry her.

CHAPTER XIV

OF BOHEMIA, AND HOW THE MISS PRYNNES APPEARED THERE. OF THE FINE ARTS AND THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY. OF TERPSICHORE, AND A GHOST THAT MR. HEATH SAW

CHARLES had a subcutaneous consciousness that he was not doing full justice to the Fine Arts; and when he resolved to remain in town for the present and get a little change of air "later on," he felt that he was really working hard—striving ever upwards, and that Life was real, Life was earnest. Besides, when everybody was gone away it was so jolly in London. There was next to no smoke, and you felt you could turn round. The openings given to the Bohemian for asserting his nationality in the season were as moonlight unto sunlight, were as water unto wine, compared to his possibilities in this dull and flat recess. He could dress as he pleased, and even go without a waistcoat. He could sit up all night if he liked, and lie in bed till goodness knew when! And then, when goodness knew, he really didn't see why a dressing-gown and slippers wouldn't do; and, accordingly, they did. We really believe that a multiplication of items of this sort would give a true view of Bohemianism as practised by Charles. There are, we believe, other national characteristics; but, so far as we have been able to learn, they lack local colour and individuality—and do not seem to differ materially from those of the great nation of reprobates all the world over. Charles was not of this class. His easy good-nature and readiness with cash made him popular in Bohemian circles, especially with models; so much so that he never sat down to work without a knock coming at the door, which when partly opened let in the thin end of a Model. Of course this happened exactly as he made his good resolution to stick to work—and the thick end showed no disposition to go unless he promised it sittings. But as Charles didn't want it then and there (and it was rather indignant when not wanted), he had to stand holding the door partly open while he conversed about its family connection with it, for a long time before it would depart. He was disturbed again in another five minutes by an indigent meek middle-aged man with mutton-chop whiskers, who had no means of

livelihood except as an artist's model; and for whose death by starvation, as he was too proud to come on the Parish, Charles was clearly responsible if he did not forthwith paint him at seven shillings a day and his lunch. Of course he got half-a-crown from Charles as a gratuity, and went away thinking how soon he could come again. Visitors of this sort were trying enough at all times, but when all the other artists were out of town they were at their worst.

Mr. Jeff was, though scarcely a reprobate, probably a much truer Bohemian than Charles. The first instance utilised above, when it went upstairs to call on the artist in the attics might have been heard for a very long time afterwards having a pleasant but noisy interview with him and a couple of fellow-artists. Mr. Jeff was at work—was in fact putting in an 'ead from one of his friends. How the work throve we cannot say; the impression outside the door was one of Chaos, accompanied by imitations of popular actors. The reason we come to know anything about it is that Miss Prynne and her sister, the two lady water-colour artists who had taken the second floor, told Charles about it.

"It sounded as if they were racing round and round the room, and shouting and shrieking all the time." This was the account given, and Charles felt he could identify it.

"Old maids call anythin' a noise. You can't move." Thus Mr. Jerrythought in extenuation afterwards to Charles. "It was only Joe Scratchly and old Gorman. Teachin' him a new dance, she was—no 'arm in that, Charley?"

"Not a bit! Perhaps it was only the Misses Prynne were jealous. No doubt you were as quiet as mice."

"None of your chaff, Charley!" And then a spirit of concession showed itself:—"P'r'aps she was rather obstropulous! 'Igh-spirited gurl in her teens!"

"She hasn't been in her teens this five years past. She's four and twenty at least!"

"She's younger than the Misses Prynnes, anyhow!" and Mr. Jerrythought considers he has made a point.

"So are a good many people, my dear Jeff! But there's a *tertium quid*—a good many *tertium quids!*"

Mr. Jeff seems vague about the meaning of this phrase, and not quite clear that it is not an imputation on character; for he says ambiguously that Miss Lucretia lives with her mother, and if that isn't enough, what is? Charles explains the expression, and Jeff says oh, he sees! But he is a poor Latinist, and does not feel the ground firm under his feet.

What Mr. Jeff did feel clear about was that it was rather sickenin' to have those two old drumsticks (the Miss Prynnes) come in and spoil the place. Just as we were all so jolly! He should go next quarter. Turnin' the whole place into a Dissentin' Chapel! Quakers' Meetin'-house, he called it. Where was the use of payin' such a high rent when you couldn't call your soul your own?

"The Misses Prynnes won't do you any harm, Jeff," said his friend, "if you leave them alone. Don't you make love to them and they won't make love to you."

"Won't they? I'm not so sure of that. One of them—the least skinny of the two—was tryin' it on yesterday. Did I know if there was a trap-door anywhere to get on the leads? Wanted to make a study of chimney-pots in water-colour."

"How did you come to be talking to her?"

"I didn't—she talked to me. I heard a sound like a single middle-aged female's 'oofs in that queer little crib that's neither a room nor a landing—right up at the top of that last little staircase. And I caught her there——"

"*Flagrante delicto,*" said Charles. And this time Jeff agreed, without hesitation. It sounded bad, and felt like a safe investment.

"That's what I thought, myself," said he, "only I couldn't say so to her. I asked her if I could do anythin' of a civil sort. She wanted to know if the place was staircase or premises; and supposing premises, which did it go with? Of course I said it was part of my diggings, but I shouldn't be using it till to-morrow——"

"But it doesn't belong to your Studio at all."

"I know that—but premises are not like property. You get in, and other people have to pick you out like a winkle. I've christened the place mine now, and 'ung up a pair of old check trousers on a 'ook to 'orrify the Misses Prynnes. Well! if I don't they'll be swarmin' upstairs with bandboxes——"

"I don't believe it. But how did you settle about the roof?——"

"Told her there was a trap-door through, out of my bedroom; but it had been tried to be opened, and wouldn't. Besides, I was always in bed. Said I read in bed a good deal——"

"You never read, Jeff! What a story-teller you are! I say, I had breakfast very early. I vote we go and lunch at Cremoncini's. It'll be one o'clock before we get it." From which it is clear that this chat took place in working hours; and, whichever Studio it was in, the occupant of the other had no business to be idling and talking there.

So completely is the image of what constitutes "an Artist" fixed in the mind of Everyman that as soon as he knows that the stock qualifications of the profession are complied with, he makes little enquiry about what the outcome of it all is. That is the affair of Critics, Purchasers, and Dealers. All that he, Everyman, has to do is to get an affirmative answer to one or more of the following questions, and then he will know that this man is an Artist—to wit: Has this man a Studio? Has he one or more easels? Does he buy large quantities of colours, and get professional discount? Does he employ real live Models? Does he send to the Academy? If he does no one of these things, he evidently isn't an Artist—if he does them all or any fair proportion of them, he evidently is. Everyman is satisfied, and no man looks at the results or cares twopence about them. Maybe this was truer in the sixties than it is now, when very few people are not Artists, and speculative builders are running up barracks of Studios in every suburb; when Artists' Colourmen are as numerous as milk-shops, and every post brings a new little book of canvas samples; when most of the *Times* newspaper is taken up with One Man Exhibitions, which Everyman is expected to go to, and we never go to unless we have a free pass. In the sixties it was not at all uncommon to hear of a picture sale; in the case of big swells coronetted supplicants were humbly competing with Calicottonopolis for the privilege of possessing their great works as soon as they should deign to finish them. It is all changed now, as far as the buyers go, and Everyman is really weary of Exhibitions. We, ourselves, feel we might pay a shilling of gate-money if only all the Pictures in an Exhibition were hung with their faces to the wall. Not seeing so many pictures all at once would give a sense of rest, and allow us to recruit and become able to rejoice in Treatment and Quality and Due Subordination as of old, and to recognise Values and all that sort of thing instead of thinking it must be getting on for Tea-time.

But we have digressed, and we really have forgotten why. It has nothing to do with what we wanted to say, which was that the outcome of Charles did not seem proportionate to his expenditure, effort, or material. He was an Artist—no doubt of that—for did he not comply with all the requisitions?—no, not quite all! He had never sent anything to the Royal Academy, his connection therewith being only through his studentship, which he reverted to in a purposeless way at intervals, sometimes not going there for months together. But on all other points his claim to being an Artist was indisputable. Scarcely a week passed without a very elaborate and expensive new canvas coming to No. 40, and being subjected

to a most searching examination of its merits. If there was a flaw on its surface, it clearly wasn't fit to paint on. Of if it was too smooth. Or too rough. Or too absorbent. Or too non-absorbent. Or one-sixteenth of an inch out of true. Or many other things. It always had to have a second expensive canvas at its back "to keep out the wet," and great circumspection was necessary in knocking in the wedges to tighten it up, lest one of them should be the least tighter than the other. But after paroxysms of System, eruptions of Method, epidemics of Organisation, the Artist would "rough in" a first idea with a nonchalance due to the sudden substitution of inspiration for mere artisanship, to which all these precautions more properly belonged. Putting it in broadly, as you felt it, was your first Artistic impulse. Getting it into a horrible mess, destroying the quality of the ground, and losing all the outline, was the second. Wiping a great deal of it out with Benzoline was the third, and consoling yourself with the reflection that it would be all right when you came to moddle it up was the fourth. After that you smoked and looked at it wistfully a good deal, and said what a pity it was you hadn't let it alone. And then you (or Charles, as may be) would order another canvas.

Mr. Jeff was of another sort—but still an Artist. To him, a canvas was a canvas, and what more could you want? It was a thing that he flew at for an hour or so, with masterly touches; at the end of which period he wrote "Jerrythought" very large across one corner of it. Then it was a Jerrythought. He had many admirers, and owing to the way he wrote his name got the credit of having profited by a year or so in Paris, and knowing the secret of *chic*. He was quoted as an authority by some of his contemporaries, as for instance: "Jeff says it's no use looking at the Model"—"Jeff says it's no use looking at your picture"—"Jeff says retouching's a mistake"—and so forth. He was true to this last dictum, and let his first painting alone religiously. He certainly was encouraged in this by his friends, who, when they saw any of his work showing any additions to their first fine careless rapture, would collapse with moans in front of it. "My dear boy, why did you touch it again?" they would say tearfully; "all the charm is gone—all the freshness!" And Jeff would agree with them most cordially, and say he couldn't think what the dooce he was about, to go retouchin'! For our own part we have always regarded him as the forerunner of a great Modern School of Art, and consider him entitled to honour on that account. This is because we shrink from the attitude of mind of the person who, being told that a certain picture conveyed the same impression of

an Aspect of Nature as that of the Artist at his first moment of perceiving it, remarked that then it was a bad job he'd noticed it! Fortunately for Jeff there was even in those early days a public that did not belong to this person's school, and it soon came to consider itself incomplete without a Jerrythought, and fortunate to possess an exceptionally good example of him.

Disturbing reflections may have occurred to outsiders who witnessed the operations of either of these young artists, and may have been emphasised by their results. Did Memling go to work in that way? Did John of Bruges? Did Titian and Velasquez spoil their first painting when they did their second? Did the Florentines of the Renaissance run up such bills with their colourmen, and have in new panels as recklessly as Charles had in new canvases? Charles's justification in reply to hints of this sort was, substantially, that of course they did things a lot better in those days; but then they were Old Masters and didn't scruple to take advantage of that fact. Strange mysteries of process were known to them; they ground their own colours—prepared their own canvases—made their own brushes. Everything was different! For one thing, it was the Middle Ages, or at any rate only a minute or two later. It was a pity that we lived in such a spell-bound Era as the present, when of course the Arts couldn't be expected to flourish, but we had to make the best of a bad job, and be Artists up to our natural capacity. For, in spite of the chilling influence of the Present Tense, it would only make matters ten times worse for us to be disheartened by the disqualifications of our contemporaneousness, and begin not being Artists at all. It was no use giving in, because we couldn't paint. Let us be Artists, whatever else we were; and console ourselves for our insufficiency by the reflection that an Age like the present deserved nothing better.

Charles's ideas, which we indicate, may have been exaggerated through his not liking to admit that he really didn't know how to paint by instinct, and had been able to find no one to teach him; but they were a good deal in sympathy with the current practice of our own time, so far as we ourselves have observed it. Have we not gone on creating shoals of artists, on the distinct understanding that compliance with canons is the whole duty of man, in Art; and that the hypothesis of their existence now is that they shall be overwhelmed by their antecedents? But he had to find excuses for not being able to get along, and it satisfied him to think that he was struggling after a vague ideal, which for some unexplained reason had gone away out of reach of the human race. It was

pleasant to him to reflect that though Smith and Brown painted better than he, they were all so far behind Titian that it really didn't matter. Jeff was quite in sympathy with him on the general ground of the indisputable inferiority of new work to old, with this difference: that Charles made use of the Italian Renaissance, while he himself appealed to the eighteenth century in England, with excursions to Holland a little earlier. Certain forms of ugliness seemed to have a charm for him; but if he couldn't get them, he would make a shift to put up with absolute insipidity of an authentic date. A Queen-Anne teaspoon, without more ado—that is to say, about which nothing further could be said than that it *was* a Queen-Anne teaspoon—would warm his blood, and cause him to rejoice by its divine simplicity and entire rightness. As his work began to be appreciated and paid for, he squandered a good deal of the proceeds in curio-shops in Wardour Street, and would often get Charles to come upstairs, and not lose a minute, to see some piece of furniture by Chippendale or Sheraton, whose qualities Charles had to accept on the assurance of its possessor.

"The man that made that was an Artist, Mr. Charles 'Eath, whatever you may say!" This was about a chair the enthusiast was gloating over. "Look at the design! Look at the finish! There's a corner! Ever see anythin' finer than that corner?"

"It's only a corner like any other corner. It's a decent serviceable chair though. What did you give for it? Seven bob?"—Jeff disdained to reply, and Charles went on: "It's a mere chair, with nothing to be said about it. It isn't large, and it isn't small, and it has a back, and it's stuffed with horsehair. Can't see where the Art comes in!"

"It ain't in your line, my boy! It's not mediæval." This was spoken with compassion. "Pretty thing that coloured mezzotint—picked it up to-day in Leicester Square—fifteen shillins!" It was a lady—such a lady!—As far as her head and arms went she was inoffensive, if elegant, and seemed more than contented with herself. But when she got to her waist, which she did very quick, as it was tucked under her chin, she began to boom, and only subsided during her stockings. However, elegance resumed its sway at her feet; although they certainly would have been larger had we been consulted. For some reason known only to the publishers and their confederates, an appearance of sickly red and green and blue had been produced, suggesting to Charles his earliest experiences of the Fine Arts when he was allowed to paint the *Illustrated London News* out of his new colour-box, on condition that he didn't put the brush in his mouth. This suggestion was the more forcible

because the confederates seemed to have practised the system enjoined on Charles, the suppression of Colour, on some high moral ground little appreciated by one ambitious of a Venetian Secret of mixing Gum-water with Vermilion, and laying it on thick.

"I suppose you'll say *that* isn't mediæval either," continued Mr. Jerrythought. "You are the most narrow-minded beggar I ever came across." We may apologise for his way of using the word mediæval as an adjective of Art pure and simple; whereas, when you come to think of it, it really refers to History and that sort of thing. Charles often did the same. Jeff would have pointed out, if challenged, that epochs and periods were not his game; and Charles would have agreed. *Style* was the game of both.

"It's rubbish, anyhow!" said Charles. "I'd sooner have the Ebenezer Sproddle, any day of the week."

Jeff appeared shocked; though he would have been more so if it *had* been Ebenezer, as alleged. But it was really Robert, and there you saw the value of a name. Why, if that jug, broken as it was, was put up at Christie's, etc., etc., etc.

Colloquies of this sort were frequent, and sometimes led to warmth of expression on both sides—not directed by either against the other, but against the respective *bêtes-noires* of the speakers. Charles hadn't much patience with the seventeenth century, but he forgave it a little at times. Against the eighteenth his feelings were those of the Cherokee towards the Choctaw. If it had been possible to scalp a Century, he certainly would have done it. But though you may seize Time himself by the forelock, metaphorically, he is indivisible, and cannot be taken a clause at a time like a Bill in Committee. Jeff's task of overwhelming the Middle Ages with sarcasm and invective was a harder one, owing to the vastness of the area to be traversed and the comparative uncertainty of information. But young men of imperfect education will rush in where Philologists and Archæologists fear to tread, and Jeff pluckily included the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, and Art of the Mediæval period (dating, say, from the dawn of Byzantine Art to the decoration of the Sistine Chapel) in the broad and comprehensive category of Rot.

Charles, who really had some education of a sort, over and above a public-school smattering of the Classics, was much more detailed in his indictments against his particular aversion. The discovery in the cellar of the bones of the murdered woman, and the little he had been able to gather about the old house itself, had set him a-thinking about toupees and patches, and sedan chairs, and Wits and Beaux and Beauties in the old ballroom the Vandal picture-

dealer was defiling. And when he recalled what little he had read of the days when the old house was new and clean and smelt of recent plaster, and the fields were fields along the Oxford Road, and the cattle from the country stopped to drink at Bayes' Water, near Hyde Park Gardens, and the air was fresher in the spring-time, and the summer breeze more richly laden with the scent of hay, and the town cleaner and smaller—still, in spite of all this, he thought of the days when the old house was building, and of those that followed, with shrinking and aversion. For they seemed to him to bristle with cards, and to rattle with dice, and to echo with blasphemies, and to reek of corks. All the flashing of all the diamonds, all the beauty of the women, or as much of it as one could see through the powder and the patches; all the wit and all the repartee, or as much of it as would bear repetition; all the spirited bloodshed in the name of honour; all the Courts of all the Georges and one of the Annes, whoever the other may be—all the eighteenth century in a word—was for Charles so flavoured with the atmosphere of wine-cellars, so resonant of dicers' oaths, so foul with its apotheosis of its own sensualism, that even the respectable survivals of its upholsteries seemed to him tainted, and he could not look on a creditably executed mahogany sideboard in one of Jeff's favourite bric-à-brac shops without a suspicion that in the good old time when it was new, its good old owners, if male, finished the day in a state of good old intoxication. Of course this was an entirely false impression of a very deserving Era, produced by imperfect study which had lighted on one or two doubtful passages in the plays of Congreve and Wycherley, and a dull chapter in *Rasselas*.

For present purposes it really matters very little if Charles did think of the age of his English great-grandfathers as a slough—a dreary morass with Handel shining above it like a glorious star, and the terrible eloquence of Swift denouncing its slime from a puddle in its midst, and Blake ignoring it and getting out of it unsullied at the end. Let Charles think what he likes! We know that it really was a brilliant century, and that Literature and the Arts flourished. Perhaps if the latter had flourished a little less and taken more pains, we should have been in a better position to share Mr. Jeff's indignation against the Vandal dealer when he heard that it was absolutely proposed to repaint and decorate the ceiling of the ballroom as soon as the new skylight was completed.

This reminds us that it was when the two went away to lunch at Cremoncini's after the conversation about the Misses Prynne that Jeff told Charles of this atrocity. We were just going to tell

about this when we got led away into a discussion on the Fine Arts, which has lasted till now. If you will forgive us, we will promise not to do so any more.

"I suppose *you* think it right to paint over the ceilin' and rub out Terpsichore?" Thus Jeff at cigarette time after lunch at Cremoncini's.

"Bother Terpsichore!" said Charles. "She's nearly rubbed out as it is! Why don't you ask Bauerstein—that's his name, isn't it?—to let you remove her from the wall for yourself—you could add her to your collection of Art-Treasures."

"I say—Charley! I wish you'd come with me to see the feller and talk to him about it. He can't understand me, and of course I can't speak German. The builders are comin' in on Monday, and they'll make such a hash of the ceilin' there won't be any chance——"

"Can't Bauerstein understand English?"

"Not so much as you'd think. Or perhaps he pretends he don't. But I offered him a sov. to let me try to get Terpsichore off the wall; so he had a reason for understanding. I say, Charley!"

"What do you say, Jeff?"

"Don't be spiteful about the eighteenth century, but come along and tackle Bauerstein. He'd listen to *you*. You see if he don't!"

We need hardly say that Charles, thus appealed to, consented. And when the two returned to No. 40 they rang Mr. Bauerstein's bell, and explained their visit. Charles was able to clear up a misunderstanding. The German had imagined Mr. Jerrythought to be an Artist anxious to compete for the redecoration of the room; and, supposing himself to have been mistaken by that gentleman for a confidential employee instead of the principal of the concern, had interpreted Jeff's sov. as a *douceur* to procure his influence at headquarters. He had neither shown nor felt any indignation at this, but taken it as a matter of course. Oh dear, no! he said; he had no objection to the removal of the picture, which was of absolutely no value. Only Mr. Jerrythought must make haste, as the builders were coming on Monday. "You'll have to come and help, Charley," said Jeff. And Charles found himself engaged, somewhat under protest, in rescuing with assiduous care a most miserable daub (in his opinion) from the hand of the destroyer.

But the whole of the work connected with the preservation, removing, relining, renewing of any picture already in existence is so fascinating as compared with the onerous task of original composition, in which we are never certain we are doing right, that Charles soon became absorbed in it. No matter how execrable

the object of antiquity may be, we become blind to its defects the moment we have to do anything to arrest its decay. It is this very enthusiasm that makes the Restorer the deadliest of Destroyers, for nothing can ever make him see that the first step towards ensuring the continued existence of anything is to let it alone. The natural instinct of the picture-restorer is to take steps for the preservation of every picture before it is dry. But he likes a little real antiquity to give him a start.

There was very little Terpsichore left to conserve. So much the better, considered as an object of enthusiasm. Her smirk was still there, like the celebrated grin of the Cheshire Cat in Wonderland, and the grace of the design was thereby manifest. The enthusiasm became infectious, and Mr. Bauerstein got involved in it and gave some very good recommendations. It spread to the region of Stained Glass, and Pope & Chappell came to see what was going on.

A fierce controversy raged at the outset. What gum or glue should be used to attach thin tissue paper to the face of the precious work? Common glue, fish-glue, isinglass, gum tragacanth, gum arabic, flour paste—all had their advocates. We believe the last was decided on and left till the next day to get quite dry.

Next day every one rose feverishly early, and went to see how Terpsichore was. She could have been nothing but a piece of wall-plaster with some paper pasted on it, but she was examined and reported on as if she had been a successful operation for appendicitis. "In a very good state," was the verdict.

The next step was to attach coarser paper and then follow with a succession of canvases, each coarser than its predecessor, until at last came the moment to decide whether we would simply rip Terpsichore off by main force or whether we would chip continually behind her with flat knives until she came away of her own accord. The last seemed best, and Charles and Jeff spent a day cautiously worming palette-knives behind Terpsichore, and fearing the said knives might at any moment inflict irreparable injury.

They were deeply engaged in this way, and the German had departed, leaving them in possession, when Charles, who was working on a ladder to the right of Terpsichore, took off his spectacles to wipe them, and accidentally dropped them on the floor. He had thought they were alone in the room, and that Bauerstein when he went out had closed his door, leaving them sole occupants. This could not be the case clearly, for there stood a lady, who certainly was not in the room when he went away, and who could not have dropped through the skylight. She had noticed evidently that

Charles had dropped his spectacles, and very obligingly stooped down as though to find them and hand them to him. Charles caught sight of the glasses under the ladder and stooped to pick them up.

"Who did you say thank-you to?" said Jeff, turning round from his chipping on the ladder.

"That lady," said Charles.

"I saw no lady."

"She was here just now, anyhow," said Charles.

"Somebody for Bauerstein, I suppose. But he must have left the door open. Better shut it."

Charles went out to do so, but in a moment came back, puzzled. "I say, Jeff!" said he. "This is queer. The door's shut!"

"I suppose she shut it," said Jeff, prosaically unconcerned, and chipping.

Charles said nothing, but went out. Jeff heard him open and try to close the door gently, then with added force; then finally pull it or push it to with a loud slam. Then came a violent ring at the bell. Clearly Charles had shut himself out. Jeff got deliberately down the ladder and went to the door. "What's up?" said he as he let Charles in.

"You go outside and try to pull that door to quietly." Jeff did as directed, and made a succession of ineffectual trials, increasing in force, till the door hasped to, with a bang that echoed through the house.

"The door *was* shut," said Charles. "That woman's somewhere inside still." Jeff suggested waiting a minute to see if she reappeared of her own accord, but she didn't! And the closest search only showed that the two young men were alone in that part of the house.

"There's only the skylight—and the chimney—and the drains—to get out at," said Jeff. "Of course she slammed the door and you didn't notice it."

"Did you?"

"Oh no! *I* didn't. But then I wasn't in it. It was all you and her. *I* don't come in."

"Gammon, Jeff! You couldn't be off hearing the door slam. She could have shut herself *in* quietly, but she couldn't shut herself *out*."

They made feeble experiments of getting the hasp to hold back so as to allow of gentle closing, but without result. The door had been readjusted to separate the dealer's sublet from the remainder of Pope & Chappell's holding, and the lock was venomously self-

assertive. It would perform its proper function, but would do nothing else—not if it knew it! They closed the door and went back through the lobby to the now darkening room. They laughed uneasily, and essayed some feeble mutual chaff about the lady having come for one of them. But it didn't work. They lit the gas, and this seemed to inaugurate a new condition of things, and to enable them to take up the attitude that the door "must have" closed without their hearing it. They adduced strange instances of people who had slept through discharges of cannon close to their ears. The improbability *per se* of the door closing inaudibly was made use of to cover the additional stumbling-block of its occurring to two persons at once. It was such a rum start its happening at all, that the coincidence didn't add to its rumness. "Just as like as not to happen to both at once, *I* should say," was Jeff's verdict. He implied that once such high-class rumness was afoot, we might expect consistency in the start it was connected with; it would work out alike all through.

When Man has to account for an unaccountable phenomenon, he goes through the most violent mental gymnastics before he acknowledges himself beaten. Charles and Jeff decided that if they went away to dinner now at the Cock and then to see the new melodrama, they would have time to talk it over. And they talked it all over through dinner and through the blanks in the performance—but didn't get any forwarder.

"It must have been a ghost!" said Charles as they let themselves in at No. 40.

"Must have been a ghost!" repeated Jeff. "I say, Charley!——"

"Continue your remark, Mr. Jerrythought."

"How about that ghost the little card saw—Alice the kid? Ghost of a woman!" Both had thought of this, but Jeff had the courage to mention it first. Perhaps he felt he had a less dignified character to lose.

"I shall go to bed," said Charles, abruptly. "Just the child's fancy!" he added, reflectively, as he lighted his bedroom candle. "Good-night, Jeff! Don't see any more Ghosts!"—

But he thought a good deal about it all the same, till he went to sleep.

CHAPTER XV

OF ALICE'S WALK TO SURGE POINT AND HOW SHE WENT OVER THE CLIFF. OF A DECLARATION AT A CRISIS

ALICE repudiated with scorn the idea that she should ever get tired, and as for being carried by Dr. Johnson—a great big girl like her!—she was such a weight, dignity apart, as to put it quite out of the question. Dr. Johnson's reply to this was to catch her and put her on his shoulder. "Pleathe, I am tho *vethy* big!" was the protest, or was contained in the confusion of exultation and protest, that was sandwiched between bursts of happy laughter in a short interlude on the lawn in front of the house, where nothing would grow but tamarisk and hydrangeas, with a concession to hart's-tongue fern in the buttress-wall that made it a terrace, because of the water trickling through from the cliff behind.

"What a silly man you are to waste your strength so!" says Peggy, coming out to join them. "Do put the child down immediately. When she's tired she'll be glad of a lift. Now, Alice dear! You take hold of me on this side, and Dr. Johnson on that—and there we are!"

But the trio had not gone very far when they were called back; that is to say, they were called to and didn't go back, but called in return, and neither caller could hear the other. So Alice went back to glean particulars, while Peggy and the Doctor went slowly on.

In the course of time the small emissary overtook them bubbling over with entrusted communication. Minus a great amount of stammering, lisping, and panting, for the messenger was out of breath, the actual substance was as follows: Miss Ellen says Mrs. Heath says the Coastguardsman said it wasn't safe along the Undercliff pathway and to keep along the hill-top and not go near the edge, and it was written up no public road but never mind! This was given fairly correctly—only the negotiation of the words Coastguardsman and Undercliff was difficult, and early associations crept in in the rendering of public road as public-house. Peggy shuddered at the expert articulation of the word. "We'll try to do without the public-house this time, anyhow!" said Dr. Johnson, cheerfully. And the party set off.

First they had a long spell of sand, sometimes ribbed, sometimes smooth; sometimes giving way and revealing undersludge; sometimes intersected by rivers which looked like nothing till you were close up, but had to be walked along the edge of, and which in the end deflected the traveller towards America one way, and the other way towards the point he started from.

Alice wished very much to stop and dig for worms—a fascinating and absorbing employment; but for its full enjoyment a fork is necessary. Practised with a spade, especially a wooden one, it is painful to the worms; and also, except he be hard of heart, to the digger. If a vivisector by profession, and prone to scientific observation, he may derive instruction from the way in which, when a worm is halved, its intellectual end wriggles: but no one, scientific or otherwise, can pretend to be satisfied with an amputation by a blunt spade. And the inconvenience to the worm of being forced through the sand when the spade is too blunt to cut it, is, we hope, obvious. A parasol, or sunshade, though it may spare the worm, is apt to be fruitless and platonic. Therefore, when the party arrived at an expanse of half-dry sand on which the worm-casts were so clean and beautiful that they made one wish one was small enough to be among them, as among hills on a plain, and enjoy the landscape, no doubt Peggy was right to answer Alice's appeal—"Only just one worm, Miss Peggy—*pleathe*, only one"—with—"Nonsense, child! We shall never get to Surge Point. Besides, it spoils my sunshade, if one digs in far enough." However, Alice was consoled by being allowed to have her shoes off and run in the water, some weight being allowed to short cuts that were open to her, barefoot. But when one wishes to play at being a pony on the sands, all the edge is taken off short-cuts.

Rupert Johnson was quite distinctly on honour, this walk, not to! Not to what? Don't ask impertinent questions. Let it suffice that his being so on honour, made Peggy's mind easy about allowing Alice to go free on the sands, whether as a pony or a seeker of short-cuts. It would perhaps have been kinder of Peggy to make herself as ugly as possible, under the circumstances, instead of putting on her blue muslin with sprigs, and her hat with the white ribbons. They suited her exactly, and you would have been in love with her yourself, if you had seen her. We had very nearly written that the blue muslin was a new rivet in the attachment of her victim to his idol—but really he was all over rivets, and there was no room left now for another. As he walked beside her there on the sands—keeping a respectful distance (eighteen inches or thereabouts), on honour!—he was simply in a state of wild intoxi-

cation. He saw nothing but Peggy—cared nothing for the jasper sea that was now a moveless mirror for the same great white cloud as before, which itself had never moved all day; for the little rippling wave that for some unknown reason decided to rise and come a little way towards the shore and die, with a short memory of floating foam above its tomb; for the myriads of little stiff gulls, each standing on its own inverted image in the wet sand, and making us wonder where he can have packed away the wings that gleamed so large just now in the sun, as he floated to a rather better place in front of his friends with a musical cry, and settled down to a rather nearer view of what they were all looking at in the same direction. He had no eyes for the great headland, sleeping in the sun, that they were soon going to climb, nor for the white sails, full-set, of the motionless sloops that had tried to creep round it all day, and failed. Even the crab that ran out sideways, from under the stone he kicked, and defied him with outspread claws to mortal combat, could not make him withdraw his eyes from Peggy. Peggy was his universe, and except when she herself called his attention to incidents in the other universe—the other people's universe—the infatuated young man took no more notice of it than he did of the crab. But he was an honourable young man; and as he was not to, he didn't.

"How that young person has changed, since that day you came to the Hospital—eight months ago!" He said this just as it became clear that the short-cut programme would be superseded by the pony, and Alice careered away in that character over a favourable surface with no ribs on it.

"Is it really eight months? I had no idea. How the time does run away!"

"Quite eight months—no! almost quite. Her accent's so improved. And do you know she was telling me all about Hubert and Prince Arthur and his cruel uncle in the garden just now—before we had that scrimmage about whether I was to carry her."

"How did you come to Prince Arthur?"

"Because she said she called me King Johnson. That led to Prince Arthur naturally. And she was so funny about Charley. 'Do you know,' said she, 'when I was a vethy vethy *vethy* little girl, and told Pussy stories—I told and I told—and I told Pussy O such a long story about Prince Spectacles.' 'Who was he,' I asked?' 'I fink,' she said, 'Mr. Charley was Prince Spectacles—I *fink* so. But O, it was such a vethy *vethy* long time ago!'" And Johnson imitates Alice's manner, not inadequately.

"As soon as we catch the pony," says Peggy, "we'll make her

tell us more about Prince Spectacles. I wonder when that dear silly boy means to come down here. Did he tell you?"

"He said he was coming. What that meant I can't say! He and his friend, Mr. Jerrythought——"

"Oh yes! Mr. Jerrythought?" Peggy represses a disposition to laugh.

"——were much exercised about a ghost they had seen."

"That's interesting! But what ghost? You know Alice saw a ghost on the stairs——"

"Of course she did! I remember all about it. And we said it must be the ghost of the bones—in the cellar——"

"How could it have been any other ghost? No doubt at all about it, I should say."

"Are you in earnest? Do you believe it was a ghost?"

"I don't think I do. I don't think I quite know what to believe. But if it was a ghost, it was the ghost of those bones—of their owner, that is! But what was Charley's new ghost—and Mr. Jerrythought's?" With the same disposition to laugh; but we would not leave him out in the cold.

"Charley said he would write you a long letter about it. What he told me was that he and his friend saw a lady in the picture-dealer's room, and they didn't know how she got in, or got out."

"Come now, Master Rupert! There must have been more than that. I suppose every lady one sees in a picture-dealer's room isn't to be a ghost, because one doesn't know how she got in, or got out?"

"I don't know. Very likely I got it wrong. You'll get his letter——"

"Why shouldn't the lady have come in at the door like everybody else? As they did themselves? Because if the door wasn't open how did *they* get in? It wasn't *their* room."

"I don't know. Don't ask *me*. That's about all Charley told me. I only saw him a few minutes." But Peggy persisted in analysing the story, in spite of deficient particulars.

"What did he mean about not knowing how she got out? Anybody can get out of anywhere—only they can't get in when the door's locked."

"He said something about how they hadn't heard the door shut. But really it's no use asking *me*. I only got half the story."

"Hadn't heard the door shut! Why, of course she didn't shut it. A couple of geese!"

The conversation was momentarily interrupted by an application from the pony for Dr. Johnson's stick, to throw into the water for

a friend, a collie-dog, who seemed to live on the shore, waiting for sticks. Was he sure to bring it out? The pony guaranteed it—and went away with the stick. Peggy went on demolishing the evidence she had not heard. She was only following time-honoured precedents in her treatment of the miraculous or supernatural. A few of these, taken at random, are, judgment first, data afterwards; supply of data, at choice, from one's own stock; an unfair bias against other people's spooks; an ascription, by implication, of Cretinism to previous investigators, and so on. However, one generally makes up for one's behaviour towards the Psychical Researches of others by the excessive impartiality, amounting sometimes to onesidedness, with which one treats one's own. But we have no time now to do justice to this interesting subject.

By the time Peggy had got her brother and his friend properly classified—given them a very low degree, or plucked them outright as Ghostleaders—they were drawing near the place for leaving the shore and mounting the cliff. The pony was a very minute spot almost out of hearing; but was recovered, none the dryer for its adventures, after shouting. Also, the collie-dog had swum out to the stick; but after examining it, had decided it was the wrong stick, and had come back without it for another, and had barked as a dog barks who is surprised and hurt, but not angry. The stick had gone for an Atlantic voyage; there was no help for it! Then followed incident connected with getting the pony's stockings on. And then a pause on the shingly beach for rest, the party being hot with walking in the sun. Peggy seemed to think she owed something to Psychical Research, after her recent treatment of it, and catechised Alice about her experience with the spotted lady.

"I sawed her coming *straight* down the stairs," recapitulated Alice, "and go froo the airey-door out—right out—into the airey—all by herself."

"Did she look glad or sorry, Alice?" asked Johnson.

"Oh! *Sorry!!*" very emphatically.

"Poor spotted lady! Somebody must have hurted her—who was it, I wonder?"

"Really, Master Rupert, I can't have you making Alice use wrong words. She's getting an accomplished historian, but she's a bad linguist."

"I apologise. It's hurt—it's not hurted. Somebody must have hurt her—eh! Alice?"

"Somebody—must—have—*hurt* her!" says Alice, by instalments, to be prepared for *hurt,* which is fired off correctly. Peggy feels

she has done her duty by Lindley Murray, but rather at the expense of the conversation. She wishes to make amends. There is a flight of steps cut in the rock just above where they are sitting, and an idea occurs to her.

"You go up those steps and come down like the lady did—pretend you're the lady! Stop a minute—we'll put the spots on." And Peggy proceeds to decorate Alice's face with little patches of sea-weed. "Two here—two here—one here—and one here! Is that right?"

Yes—that's right! And off goes Alice. But she returns halfway, because one of the spots has come off and flowed away. She enters into the part, feeling it intensely, and must have everything right. The second time, the performance comes off. Peggy cannot help thinking to herself, how strange it would have been, if the story had been real (which of course it wasn't), and the murdered woman could have foreseen that a hundred years later a child would be pretending to be her, in the sun, on Shellacombe beach.

"Why did you catch hold of yourself by the tummy, you funny child?" says Peggy, when Alice returns amidst the applause of the audience. The piece has been most successful, but the incident of the actress holding her left side with both hands was not known to be in the text.

"Because the lady come *down* the stairs—and froo the airey—with bofe hands like that." And Alice encores the action described and continues: "The spots never stickeded on, only just till the bottom step. Then they flowed away." She has an Artist's pleasure at this not having occurred earlier, and impaired the climax.

Johnson looks puzzled, interested, excited—a little uncomfortable. But no further speculations can be indulged in—because we shall never get to Surge Point, at this rate. Peggy quite agreed to this, and the party started on their upward path. Alice was allowed to go on in front, under a guarantee that she would not go near the edge and look over.

"Why didn't Alice tell about the hands before?" said Johnson.

"Do you think that looks as if she was romancing, as Partridge calls it? I don't. To me it goes all the other way. If I had to tell an incident in words, I should be sure to leave something undescribed, that I should be equally sure to act, if I did like Alice did, and put it on the stage. There's the Undercliff path—we're not to go along there. Straight on—Alice! No—not that way! Straight on!"

Alice ran on in front, talking and singing to herself. She seemed to Peggy to have changed completely from the subdued and ill-nourished morsel of humanity that Charles had brought home in the cab, eight months ago—as completely as her mother had changed when the Alcohol demon flew, and left her to die in decency. One thing is very certain, that Miss Alice was now having a high old time, as the phrase is; and that, child-like, she accepted her happiness without wonder or speculation, as she had accepted her misery without complaint.

Oh dear, how hot it was to be sure, climbing up that hill-side under the afternoon sun! It had been hotter certainly at mid-day, if that was any extenuation. But it was hot enough still to justify Alice in saying that a half-way-up rest on a stone ledge was like sitting on the hob. However, there is an end to all things; and it was all the pleasanter when the smooth round sweeps of downland were reached, and the party was working along the path that was not a public road, enjoying the freshness of the sea-wind and the chorus of the innumerable gulls below. They met no living creature except one sheep, who seemed to have missed her party, and who would bleat and stop, and wait for answer and get none, and then start running again and be heard bleating plaintively elsewhere. Alice was much concerned and wanted to offer sympathy and assistance; but there were difficulties about this, and the idea had to be given up.

The day was getting on (for they were much behind their intended time) when they came within what seemed a short distance of the great lighthouse, very white and very clean like a well-made model popped down on a smooth carpet of down, with the sweet immeasurable blue beyond. They were on the highest point of the down, and they bivouacked a little to enjoy the view, before descending to the lighthouse. The wind was repenting of its apathy all day, and was making up its mind that those sloops and that brigantine should get round the point at last, and not lie becalmed all night. They could see the wind-sweep spreading on the water, and watched for the flap of the white sails as they greeted its arrival; and saw them stir, then vacillate, then take the wind and start—but oh, so slowly! It looked to Alice as if so little wind as that could never do them any good. Why couldn't that great huge steamer out there, whose engines we could hear so plainly up here at this height, just turn a little out of her course and pick them all up and take them, free of charge, to Bristol or Cardiff? Why not, indeed?

Alice, interested in the ships and the steamer, went away a short

distance from her companions, replying, to Peggy's frequent cautions not to go near the edge, that there was no edge, only smoove, smoove, smoove fields—like this; and Alice patted the sheep-cropped down to show how smooth it was. Peggy called her back, and she came. But Alice was a good obedient child only in a partial or limited sense. When she obeyed you once, she considered that that was enough, and that it was no business of hers to consider the spirit of your instructions. Having once come back she had done her duty, and might go away again. It was not her business to take note that Miss Peggy and King Jomson, as she called him, had accidently become much absorbed in something they had to talk about, and were not aware she had gone away again, to get a rather nearer view of the ships. On the contrary she regarded this absorption as favourable to her own freedom of action. She would have come back in an instant if either had called; but as it chanced neither did so. We need not suppose that Master Rupert was forgetting his compact, though for anything we know, he might have been. He was lying on the turf at Peggy's feet, with his chin on his hands, and his feet towards the sea. So, even if he had had eyes for anything but Peggy's face against the blue, he could not see Alice, and no doubt fancied Peggy was keeping *her* eyes on her. So she thought she was herself; but you can't *possibly,* always, don't you know. If you happen to be talking seriously to a friend, and she (or he) is saying something that engrosses you, entertains you, pleases or displeases you very much—well! every now and then you're sure to flag in your attention; and then Alice dances away out of range, or the equivalent thing, whatever it may be in your case, happens. And then you start, as Peggy did, and come back into the world of consciousness and action, from—whatever other world you may happen to have been in, Metaphysics, Cookery, Political Economy, anything!

"Oh dear! I wish the child wouldn't go out of our sight," said she as Alice vanished, evidently walking, beyond an outline of the hill against the sea. Peggy got up to follow her, and so did Johnson.

"She's all right there," said he. "It's not a precipice when you get there—these places are so deceptive. But I'll go after her and fetch her back." Peggy waited where she stood, on the main pathway to the lighthouse, with the little heaps of stones along it, kept fresh-painted white to show the road on dark winter nights. *She* was not anxious; she knew the ways of these cliff-sides too well. If you were to be anxious every time any one went out of sight, there would never be an end to it. They would be back directly.

Besides, Master Rupert could see her now—he was out of sight himself. They would be back directly. . . .

How funnily the bleat of that sheep sounded! How it ran about too! It was over there just now, and that last time it sounded as if it was down the hill-side towards the sea, where Alice was. Surely that foolish little monkey had not gone running down to the cliff to see the sheep. She must have gone on a long way though! But there could be nothing wrong, or Master Rupert would have shouted back. There was the sheep again—poor thing! it sounds quite in despair—stop!

"It isn't the sheep at all—it's Alice!"

Peggy neither says nor hears these words. As she looked back after to that terrible moment, they seemed to come into her memory with the rest of the scene—with the glorious sea and all Heaven above it, with the land under enchantment from the first lengthening of the shadows, with the endless music of the sea-birds below—even the mysterious note of the wind on the telegraph wire that warns the life-boat of ships sighted in distress, or wrecks so near that the rocket apparatus is the only chance of rescue. They would all come back vividly to her recollection, and with them, just as vividly, the words she neither spoke nor heard, but that filled the place just the same. "It isn't the sheep at all—it's Alice!"

How quickly one can think when thought is driven, forced, stung into the brain. As Peggy ran (and she ran hard too) to the point at which Johnson had disappeared the thought had time to form in her mind: *I shall lose them both!* That Alice had slipped down some awful precipice, and that Johnson was after her—that was clear as noonday to her almost before she started. But then, all in a few seconds, followed a hideous vision!—she would go home alone—*alone!* The intensity of the horror of her coming to the house to tell of it—even worse, the telling of her brother afterwards—all crowded into that little span of time between the moment when she heard the sheep cry last, and when she saw, still some little way below her, the figure of Rupert Johnson, who must surely have gone mad, as he was to all seeming pulling off his boots and stockings.

Peggy ran! Oh, how she ran! And so running she suddenly grasped the explanation—Alice had slid down the rounding curve of slippery down, growing steeper and steeper, till even the sheep that cropped the short herbage had no foothold on the grass itself, and could only reach it from the tiny roads they themselves had made in countless ages. If Johnson went down *there* after her she

would to a certainty lose them both. Even barefoot, as she saw he meant to try it, he would never keep his feet. And then she knew she was blocking her mind against the thought of what losing Johnson meant. It was sounding its summons at the door, but she refused to admit it.

She seized Johnson's arm when she reached him. You will see how quickly all this passed from the fact that it was while he took off two lace-up boots, and an ordinary pair of socks—not stockings.

"Not both! Not both!! Oh, Alice, my darling, forgive me!" The despairing cry had no expectation that Alice could hear—it was just the form a pang took. Johnson hesitated—barely a second. Would she not release his arm?

"Margaret Heath, I love you more than all else there is for me in Heaven or Earth—but let me go!—I ask it." His voice fell as he repeated again, "I ask it." But Margaret clung to his arm—"I cannot bear to lose you both," she said, quite rapidly, under her breath.

And in that moment, this man knew what he would have to live for, if he lived. But he knew he would not be worthy of it, if he allowed the excuse that he could not release himself without violence. It was true, for Peggy was no chicken; a great, strong, splendid girl—more than a match for many a man of small strength. Johnson was distinctly a powerful man, but Peggy gripped him firmly, and it would have to be violence or submission.

"Oh, Rupert Johnson—I cannot bear to lose you. Not both! Not both!"

It was a hard trial. But the cry Peggy had thought was the sheep came again. He hesitated no more. "Forgive me," said he, "for I love you."

He shook her off suddenly with force; it was needed. In fact, she staggered and fell. She loved him for his strength, and immediately picking herself up, ran, barely glancing round to see him as he went cautiously barefoot down the awful curve, and ran, ran, ran till she reached the lighthouse.

As far as Peggy could remember, after, what happened when she got there, screaming—"They're over the cliff—they're over the cliff!"—it was in this wise: She ran, crying out continually, through a backyard devoted to the cultivation of fuchsias, and the washing of rather clean clothes, and was met by their laundress, who was large and trustworthy—of that there could

be no doubt!—and who instantly called out Phaylim. Something whistled and said, "Pst—quick!" Then she was aware of one—two—three men in navy blue—one with a great bare throat, with a long coil of rope on his shoulder. And although she had the dimmest impression of the number and personality of these men, a long scar on the throat of the rope-man that began under the ear and ended on a massive clavicle was as clear to her as if she had not been fainting away. Then things disappeared, scar and all; but not before she caught an Irish question from the Coast-guard laundress—"Me dyurr—will ye thry thin and till us where your frinds are?" She struggled hard to get words out—she knew what to say could she have spoken, as she had arranged it all before—but it was useless. Everything vanished as a man's voice said—"No good! Search!"—and was followed by rapid exit and running on the turf outside. Then all became a blank until she found herself again in the same place supported by a powerful soapy arm. She was being criticised.

"She's a darrlin', shure! She'll spake directly!"

"She *has* got hair, tu!" This was a Devonshire accent.

"Ye're an imperrtinent maiden! Lave the locks alone——" The Irishwoman had accepted some Devonshire phrases evidently. "Will ye thry her again with the glass to her lips, Phaylim? Thry one little sip, me dyurr! There's a warrld of good in it. Just to put the hearrt in ye! *That's* right!——" And Peggy, more to oblige than with any hope of benefit, swallowed the nasty stuff. But the Irishwoman was right—within two minutes, she drew a long breath, and the world came back in intelligible form. She sat up and spoke.

"Oh, how good you are! But they are killed. I know it!" And Peggy sat on, dumb, with the weight of all lost upon her.

"Is it your frinds thin, that wint over the cliff? You be asy, me dyurr! Lave thim to the bhoys——"

"I want to show you where they *are,*" said Peggy, suddenly awaking to the position and struggling up to her feet. She staggered and collapsed again on a wooden settee. "Oh, in a minute," she said.

"It's a chance the young men have found them by now. You've little call to be anxious, Miss——" But this sort of consolation, quavering and conscientious, does not suit Phelim's wife, in whom Hope seems as strong as her brogue: her husband's is very slight.

"You lave thim to the bhoys, me darrlin'! Shure I hear them coming on the harrd sod. Listen to the fate of 'em." But this was

only a pious fiction. Peggy heard no feet, and wanted to go to meet them.

"Not yet, me dyurr!—Ye'll wait here with me, and Phaylim 'll go. Go and mate the boys, Phaylim. And when ye know, whistle! . . . " Peggy heard these last words somewhat undertoned, and fancied she had not been meant to hear them. They made her shudder, though they were but little in themselves. "It's yoursilf will stay here with me, quiet like; and the bhoys 'll be here within tin minutes."

Whether it was ten minutes, or ten hours, Peggy could not have guessed from anything in the context, but in the end a whistle sounded—"Will ye belave me another time, whin I say it's all right?" said the Irishwoman. "Twiced whistlin' manes all right; wanst is for a casualty," she went on explanatorily. Then both ran out reassured. There they were coming! But Peggy was hysterical and could see nothing, for tears and the dazzle of the westering sun, which was just in a line with the coming group.

"Oh—tell me—tell me!" she cried, "is it a gentleman and a little girl? Is it both?" She caught the soapy arm, and detained it.

"Well now, I fale for ye as if it was mesilf!" says the kind-hearted creature. "He's comin' down the hill with your little girl on his showlthers, pig-a-back." Whereon Peggy, quite upset, could do no otherwise than burst into a torrent of tears of joy, and fairly throw herself in her gratitude on the ample bosom of the Coast-guard's lady. "Oh, you *are* so good!" she cried. But they seemed to take ever so long coming. *What* a distance she must have run!

If you feel a little ashamed of Peggy for collapsing in this absurd way, be good enough to remember what she had gone through. It seems to us that to see the man whom in her own mind and heart she had just made the most of that any woman can make of any man—to see him disappear over that awful vanishing curve to what seemed certain death, and then to master the point that she *could* not help, and that the nearest soonest help *must* be got; and then to run as she ran—it was a good half-mile as it proved;—it certainly seems to us that all this made up about as severe a trial as yourself or we could get through unmoved. And Peggy, for all her Philosophy, and her great resolutions, had many characteristics in common with other human women. However, she's all right again now, in the story, and Johnson is coming down the hill with Alice on his shoulders; and she is even turning over in her mind—will you believe it?—whether she won't do a little dignity on the subject of her surrender. It's so awkward!—she can't even remember exactly what she said. . . .

As for Alice, she—poor child!—is simply in a dumbfounded haze, not by any means clear about what has happened. Master Rupert alone is unmoved. He has got his boots on again, but is hatless. Traces of scrapings can be detected on his waistcoat, and is there not some blood on his hand? "Yes—but I didn't get that on the grass," says he. "That was an independent affair altogether."

They pass through the garden and into the lighthouse room where Peggy fainted. Johnson speaks first:

"You must forgive me, for the reason I said."

"Forgive you, Master Rupert? What for?"

"For knocking you down, of course!"

"Did you knock me down? Alice dear, go with this lady, and she'll let you wash your hands and face in nice warm water. You're all grubbied and dusted all over——"

"Shure and I will! And will ye take tay?" Thus the Irishwoman—who is the mother, it seems, of the massive collarbone, who is not a resident, but a young man-of-war's man over from Plymouth, on a visit. We certainly will take tay although it's past six o'clock. And the Devonshire girl disperses, to prepare it. Phelim and the three young men, all mysteriously known to Johnson already by their Christian names, also disperse, perhaps from an instinct. Johnson and Peggy are left alone.

Peggy wanted in her inmost heart to fling dignity to the winds—but she was, as we have lately said, a woman. Johnson did not feel quite sure he would not be presuming too much if he took her for granted in consequence of a few chance words under tension of such excitement. There were the materials for a minute or two of stiffness. But it could not and did not last long. As you can guess at the sort of way in which it ceased, there can be no need to tell you.

"There's Alice coming now," said Peggy. "Yes—you may call me anything you like. It's one comfort I can call you Rupert instead of Dr. Johnson, which I hate. It's like Boswell!—Take care, or you'll scratch your hand again." For it appeared that the blood on Dr. Johnson's hand was made by Peggy's ring, when he dragged his own out of her grasp, and as he said, "knocked her down." It was Alice's ring, or what was to be hers one day, and Peggy was wearing it, as she alleged, to keep it aired for her.

Alice's account of the accident was that she didn't go near the edge, but had done religiously as she was told. But the ground was so greathy, that she went like boys on a thlide. And she

imitated the way in which she began to slide, and finally went down on her hands and knees. But then it was too late to save herself, and she went on and on, until at last she crossed over a little ledge of sheep track. She gave the idea that she missed it with her feet, but partly stopped herself by catching at it with her hands—perhaps straightening herself on the line of the slope and thereby favouring a lower ledge, on which her feet caught and stopped. Poor Alice! The position was awful. She might even have died of terror could she have conceived the precipice below. But luckily for her, she did not realise anything worse than that there was water there, and she might fall in. A sheer fall of two hundred feet did not come into her calculations.

"Oh, I *was* frightened!" said she. "I tried to squeam and I squeamed—but I couldn't squeam well because I went fump, fump, fump—oh, so hard! You never, never, *never* would have *fought* it was me, to hear it! But it *was* me."

"And what happened next, Alice?"

"Oh, then Dr. Jomson said hold tight and call out again Alice—and I said please I was down here. Then I saw Dr. Jomson digging in his knife into the ground."

"I was obliged to make one or two holes in the ground to get a foothold," said he, explanatorily. Alice went on:

"Then Dr. Jomson turned upside down, and came down with his hands, and catched me round here"—grasping her wrists alternately. "And Dr. Jomson said me to keep quite quite still, and we sould do nithely for half-an-hour."

"Yes! And Alice said she should like to go home please, didn't you, Alice?" Alice nodded, with feeling.

"But I can't understand!" said Peggy. "How did you manage to hold on?"

"Why—don't you see? I dug out these holes to catch my toes in, and went down head foremost."

"How awful!"

"Not a bit of it! There was a nasty moment before I knew it would hold—but as soon as it felt firm I knew it was all right——"

"Wasn't it awful when you went down head first?"

"Yes—till my toes caught the holes——"

"I don't understand—didn't you put your toes in the holes first?——"

"I wanted to—but it wouldn't work. If I had put my toes in and kneeled forward on the slope—don't you see?—I was afraid I should pitch forward. And then Alice and I shouldn't have been

here. We should have been bathing." He illustrated the kneeling difficulty with his knuckles. Peggy shuddered.

"But how *did* you do then?"

"Oh—of course I lay down flat on my face and wiggled round and slid forward—it *was* rather nasty till I caught my toes in the holes. If I hadn't, Alice and I shouldn't have had our teas. Eh, Alice?"

Peggy is conscious of a feeling of suppressed applause among the coastguard folk. "It was a bad place," says the young sailor. "If the gentleman and the young lady had come with a run, they'd have overshot the ledge I was on, and after that it was straight as a lead-line down to the sea——"

"It was a rare good job you sighted 'em so soon as you did, Andrew," says one of the other rescuers. Then he went on with fuller explanation to Peggy. "You see, Ma'am—it was in this wise: We knew what sort of place it was like to be in—knowing the rocks well. So Andrew he went along the cliff face, and Revett here and I we took the tackle along on the hill-top. And when we sighted them, Andrew he got to a ledge just under the little lady to make a sort of stand if they was to come free. And Andrew he made the line fast to the little lady, and she came up easy. Then we were getting afraid there might be a casualty, for the gentleman was too stiff to move, and we couldn't spare one of us from above to go down and attach the line, and we had to send the line down to Andrew and he couldn't make it fast to himself for want of turning room—well, yes!" (this is in answer to a remark of Andrew's)—"you might have come up belike! But maybe it was best to do as you did."

"What *did* you do?" said Peggy.

"Andrew he suggested the gentleman might slack out his toes and drop down easy, and he'd catch him. And then he made all fast and we got your husband up, Ma'am—and if you ask me I say it's God's mercy you've got him back." Peggy felt this was no doubt true in the abstract, but that Andrew and the speaker were entitled to acknowledgment. "What became of Andrew?" said she. For she felt he was left on a rock-ledge.

"Oh—Andrew? He went back the way he came."

Peggy and Alice were both very hazy by now—but tea, which seemed to abound, with all its contingencies, in that lighthouse, had a very reviving effect, and Peggy felt fit to start for home. It was time! Alice fell into a sound sleep, but this didn't matter, because Andrew came back with them, to show a short-cut, and carried her the whole way. Just as they were starting Peggy

overheard their hostess speaking to the coastguard who had given the narrative of the rescue:

"Pater! You're no better than a borrn fool! Can't ye say with your eyesight to discriminate when payple are swatehearting? Husband indade! Not yet awhile!"

CHAPTER XVI

OF HOW BROTHERS ARE FOOLS, AND HOW PEGGY WASN'T EXACTLY ENGAGED. OF ALICE'S FAMILY, BUT NOT MUCH

CHARLES'S letter to Peggy, with all about the ghost in it, came late enough to cross hers with all about the rescue in it. Neither letter was quite bona-fide, but each writer supposed the receiver would read between the lines. Charles wrote in the tone of one who pooh-poohs superstition; yet knew that Peggy understood him, and would see that he was really puzzled, and did attach some importance to the story. Peggy wrote a full account of the cliff misadventure, but did *not* include a definite statement of her relations with Dr. Johnson. She apologised to herself for doing this by referring to the fact that, after all, she was not "engaged" to Master Rupert. Who ever heard of a girl being engaged to a man without her father being consulted—or for that matter, her brother? It wasn't even certain that Rupert would ever be able to afford to marry. But of course Charley would guess all about it! Her letter had too many hints of the status-quo in it for him not to see what was in the wind.

But Peggy was quite mistaken. Charles read her letter through several times, and was greatly excited over the story of the rescue. But he quite missed seeing that the circumstances thereof had been accompanied by any unusual effervescence or incandescence of feeling in two of the actors. Of course Peggy did not write, "Dr. Johnson said that he loved me passionately. Then he knocked me down, and went over the cliff with his boots off," but she did infuse an amount of suggestion which would have been enough for any but a brother. She wanted Charley to see and understand, without having to make a formal statement. That he did not may have been partly due to the prominence his mind gave to Alice and her safety. In fact he thought so much about this that when he wrote in reply he forgot all about his gratitude to Johnson till he came to a postscript. He was eloquent enough as soon as he reached the topic—in fact there was as much post-script as præ-script, nearly. But at the beginning he was too full of his little *protégée* to find a word for his friend or his sister.

"Well—I don't know!" said he to Jeff, in the course of a con-

versation shortly after, "perhaps there may be something in it. Only don't you go and say anything about it, old chap!" For he had read some portions of Peggy's letter to Jeff, with blanks of omission, and reserves; and had thereby caused him to close one eye with superhuman insight, and say: "It's the Doctor!" "*What* is?" asked Charles.

"I say, Charley! Draw it mild. Pretendin' you don't know!—Happy couple—Hanover Square—Holy Matrimony! You mark my words, it's the Doctor!" And while Jeff added confirmatory nods, and new sagacities of expression, Charles went over his letter again, thoughtfully. But, that time, he only said he was sure there was nothing in it, and one was always suspecting things. Mr. Jerrythought said they would see, and for his part he should order a button-'ole, to be beforehand, if he was going to be asked to the wedding. "Consider yourself asked already, my dear boy!" said Charles; "but it won't come off." For Charles had really believed Peggy had meant all she said. However, he made some concession afterwards, as above recorded.

"I shall have to ram it home to Charley," said Peggy to her lover, when she had read through her brother's letter to him. And she deliberately concluded her next letter with, "Rupert says he must be back at the Hospital on Tuesday." Charley was then alleviating the hardships of Bohemianism by dining at home to keep his father company, on the pretext that the old boy must be feeling lonesome. That evening it occurred to him that he might establish a character for perspicuity and experience in matters of this sort by broaching the topic. But, obviously, the proper course would be to check the impulse of responsibility until conversation-time proper. As soon as his meerschaum was lighted would be time enough. Till then, he would be content with feeling that matters of this sort were serious, and not to be trifled with, and did so accordingly. But his father took all the edge off his scheme, by anticipating his disclosure:

"Hey—what was it, Charley boy?" said he, "what your sister says? 'We're not going to marry, whoever else does. Because we're not going to preach what we don't practise!' We're mighty fine people, we are! And then we go and fall in love with a doctor!"—

Charles's mortification at having his beginning spoiled was not of a serious sort—but he would console himself a little, and show his experience of mankind, especially womankind. "That's just like a girl, all over!" said he. "But I suppose we've all been expecting it?"

"We shall all *say* we have, anyhow!" said his father. "Never mind, Charley! I daresay we have." Charles felt transparent. His father continued: "What's the Doctor?—what's he like?" Whereon Charley, whose trifling egotisms never peeped out of doors except when his generosity, chivalry, or benevolence were asleep or at meals, broke into a heart-whole panegyric of Johnson. He was the finest fellow that ever breathed, in himself; the ablest in medicine and surgery; the most self-sacrificing etcetera within Charles's experience. But he was too honest to get on in his profession—not half-humbug enough! And his mother and sisters were dependent on him, and he would always be as poor as a rat.

"Very good testimonials, anyhow," said his father. "I've got some more in here." And he produced letters written from Shellacombe by "the boys"—whom, by the way, owing to the cumbrous extent of this large family we have not been able to mention, so far. They were respectively Robert, fifteen, and Dan, ten; and Ellen came between them. They had come to Shellacombe on the very day of the cliff accident, with their tutor, Mr. Capel Wright. All the party had gone next day to inspect the scene of the accident, and to hunt at the foot of the cliff for Dr. Johnson's hat; and these letters contained full, if obscure, particulars, interlaced with panegyric of Dr. Johnson; and ending up with how he and Peggy got left behind and cut off by the tide, and would have had to wade through the water and spoil their things only luckily there was a boat.

"May I see Peggy's own letter?" said Charles when he had run his eye through his younger brothers'.

"Peggy's own letter? What letter? Oh—Peggy hasn't written to me—not she! I'm supposed to know nothing about it. It's not supposed to exist, I believe. I've your mother's letter"—which he handed over to his son.

Considered as a report of what was occurring at Shellacombe, Mrs. Heath's letter was unsatisfactory. Considered as an indictment of her husband for not interposing to prevent a variety of things which she did not describe, it was masterly. "I am sure I was right in saying to Margaret" (so ran the letter) "that you would not approve of what is going on; but that I could say nothing. My children must go their own way. I have no authority with them. But I have nothing to say against Dr. Johnson personally. He appears to be without family connection or means, beyond his prospects in his profession. In addition to this they have only known each other eight months. But of course if you approve of it, I have nothing to say. I am merely their mother.

I have told Margaret that I have no means of knowing what your wishes are, but that for my own part I cannot sanction *anything rash.* And this I have said, that I think it my duty to speak plainly as a mother (however much I may be blamed for it) and to say that I am not able to form any opinion whatever of the desirability or otherwise of Dr. Johnson, as I have not been consulted; but that a daughter's first duty, before allowing herself to form an attachment to any man, is to obtain the consent of her parents. But that if my husband thinks otherwise, it is my part to defer to him——" Charles stopped reading.

"I think I must have begun in the middle," said he. "Isn't there a sheet before this?"

The old gentleman, evidently much amused, sat polishing his eyeglasses. "Not a bit of it!" said he. "That's your mother all over. The best of living women, my dear boy; the very best! But she ain't by way of being consecutive. That's the beginning—where you started."

"I don't think," said Charles, meditatively, "that I should like to marry a girl who asked her parents' leave to fall in love. She would be such a very cool customer. I wonder if Mamma did so herself?"

"I happen to be able to tell you," said his father, who was chuckling to himself so that his speech came by instalments. "Your mother refused to introduce me to her parents until she had quite made up her own mind. I shall tell her I've told you that." And Mr. Heath laughed till he was obliged to lay down his cigar, and pull out his silk handkerchief to wipe his eyes. As soon as he had recovered, he puffed again peacefully. "The best of living women, my dear boy," said he again, "only not exactly a born logician."

"Here's Peggy's own letter to me," said Charles, producing it. His father settled down to read it comfortably, through the newly polished eyeglasses, while Charles sucked at his meerschaum in silence. He folded it up when he had finished, and handed it back. "Yes!" he said, "that seems to me pretty clear. I shall have an official visit from the Doctor. And a long letter from the Minx."

"What shall you say to him?"

"Oh—of course I shall refer him to your mother. The women settle all these things. Your mother wants to put it off on me, that she may wig me afterwards. But I won't be let in to saying anything; besides, the young people wouldn't pay the slightest attention if I did. You can't control a young couple, any more than you can a mad bull."

Charles saw that between the two stools the young couple

wouldn't fall to the ground, but would go to the altar. He relinquished the rôle of the far-sighted man of the world, which was rather artificial; and he was all the nicer as absolute truthfulness dawned, with a smile, on his countenance. "I really was telling fibs," said he, "when I said I'd been expecting it. In fact, Jeff found it out before I did.—Oh no!—I didn't read the whole of the letter to Jeff."

And when he got back that evening to the Bohemian home, he found Peggy's letter that *Ruperted* her lover without scruple, and felt the whole affair was settled.

It must be much easier to write fiction than History—to put in and leave out incidents at pleasure. There are so many things that happened to the people we are writing about that have no real connection with what (in fiction) would be the *plot,* so called, of the story; but that lay claim to short paragraphs on the score of their actuality, and threaten the conscience of the chronicler if omitted. Ought he not to record this, or that?

For instance, the incident of Mr. Capel Wright, the tutor. Peggy was *very* sorry for it. She had *really* been perfectly unconscious. "There must be *some* man—*some*where—that isn't in love with one!" said she, piteously, when Ellen descended on her with the news that Mr. Wright had written to beg off completing his engagement on the score of a family distraction. *"You* know what *that's* all about—with your Captain Bradleys and your Robert Forrests and your Mr. Jerrythoughts"; which last accusation provoked the nearest approach to indignation any one so comic could warrant, followed by the despairing expression of conviction recorded above. Ellen pounced upon it as so much vanity on the part of her sister; and exhibited her to Europe, so to speak, as a jay in peacock's feathers—which was unfair, after the form her reproaches had taken. What amount of truth there was in her suggestion about our friend Jeff we cannot say. He certainly was not so sensitive as Mr. Capel Wright, whose defection was universally laid at Peggy's door. She was very unpopular with the boys after the disappearance of their tutor and master, and had to pass a life of penitence and apology. Her mother discerned in the number of Peggy's admirers a repetition of her own experience, but without the same excuses. Her father said they were six of one and half-a-dozen of the other.

There was a certain amount of occurrence also connected with Alice's family. Her father the tailor had a half-brother named Jonathan, supposed by Alice to be called so not only because he

was stinted in quantity, but because whatever was the natural length of his limbs they had not been made in pairs—one leg being very much shorter than the other, and one arm perceptibly so. Alice in her own mind imagined that Jonathan, when at home or in society, would mention Samuel as his whole brother. She had scarcely seen him at any time, and had only one clear memory of him—when he came one day (before No. 40) to quarrel with her father, apparently about something that was spoken of by both as "the document," and understood by her from its sound to be something each said the other meant, while he himself meant something else. It was a dock or a dog; or both, if they were referring to different things. Alice inclined to the latter: the first being unfamiliar.

This Jonathan Kavanagh (he was the son of Alice's grandfather) was identified as her uncle after the inquest as soon as her mother was fit to make an intelligible statement about her belongings. It was not thought well at first to press her for more than particulars of the quarrel. After her death he came by appointment to see Charles at the Studio with reference to Alice. He abandoned his claim to guardianship with alacrity. Trade, he said, was very bad—hadn't ever been so bad to his knowledge. He wasn't called on to take another inmate. He might have done otherwise had trade been good.

"He's an undertaker, it seems," said Charles to Peggy, reporting the visit. "If people would die a little faster, he would talk to Mrs. Jonathan, and see what could be done. But with this ruinous epidemic of immortality going on, where are you?"

"I suppose," said Peggy, "there are too many undertakers, just as there are too many everything elses." Here followed a slight spasm of what has been called Population-on-the-Brain; but her immediate interest in Alice quieted it.

"Oh no!" replied Charles, "the human race is boycotting the undertakers out of spite. Only it must have been going on a long time. They said at the shop that their Mr. Abraham had called on this man to see if he would do anything for his half-brethren—a long time ago—and he excused himself in the same way." This was at the clothier's in Oxford Street, where it may be remembered Charles went to get information about the Kavanaghs.

"I suppose," Peggy then said, "that if this man, or any other relations that can be found, refuse to do anything for the child, they will forego all claim upon her?"

"They could have no real claim, as a matter of right and wrong

—but of course Law wouldn't bother about that. We had better let it alone. They won't trouble us!"

So after calling at Hyde Park Gardens at Charles's suggestion "to satisfy himself" that Alice was in good hands, and at the suggestion of his inner soul that he might leave a card and perhaps ultimately bury the family, Mr. Jonathan Kavanagh retired to devote himself to the relatives of established corpses, and to hope that they would soon follow the good example set by the latter. After this Alice's communications with her scarcely known family were of the slightest. The brother at the Peckham clothier's certainly appeared, but it was to point out that he was shortly going to set up for himself and that it wouldn't be "fair upon him" that Alice should "stand in his way." Charles extinguished him rapidly, to his great relief, as a selfish young beggar. The drysalter of Rotherhithe came also; he rested his inability to contribute to his sister's support on the fact that he was only in the yard. Whereas had he been in the Orfice it would have been another pair of shoes. "He didn't give me the idea," said Charles, "that drysalting stimulated the understanding. I endeavoured to find from him what the difference was between drysalting and wetsalting, and he repeated that he was only in the yard, but they could tell me in the Orfice. So neither of us having any more to say, we parted on good terms."

The cheesemonger never put in an appearance. This was so much the better! He was only twelve years old, and would have excited commiseration, and called for succour. The only one Alice seemed to entertain as real flesh and blood was a young sailor, the next in age to the drysalter, who was nineteen; he was a hero in her eyes, who having departed on his last voyage for Singapore was identified in her mind with that port, which was consequently rather laid claim to as an appanage of her family when it accrued under Miss Petherington. She felt quite at home, did Alice, when Singapore appeared as Geography; she having only known of it as a real place people's brothers could go to.

That exhausts all that came to light about Alice's belongings. Charles's impression was that they generally felt that Alice was quite too small to bother about. They had other fish to fry, and she was a tittlebat. Also they were not going to give the parties that had took her up any excuse for putting her down. They kept out of the way. The eldest brother laid claim to the scraps of furniture, and Charles purchased of him the table in which he and Peggy had found the pictures of the young nobleman. It was a

good substantial table with drawers, and would be useful in the Studio.

Well! All these little matters, or nearly all, belong to the class of incident that are not necessary to the story, but that seem to claim a passing word. The claim being now satisfied, the story may go on from where we left it.

CHAPTER XVII

BOTHER LAVINIA STRAKER! OF MISS THISELTON'S PROFILE. HOW CHARLES HAD BETTER GO TO SHELLACOMBE. OF REGENTS PARK AND A GIRL HE SAW THERE

WHEN Charles, returning to his Studio that night (or morning, for it was well past midnight), read that conclusive letter of his sister's, he experienced a sense of laceration which may be familiar to many who have been in like case. Quite suddenly, and just as though it was all a matter of course, a very dear sister is to be taken from us. She was with us in the nursery—has been with us ever since; she has shared all the burdens, all the sorrows, all the joys, of our babyhood and boyhood; and if the chances of the current of life have drifted us more apart as boyhood changed to manhood, and the girl became a woman, still we have floated down in midstream together and never quite lost touch. And then, all in a moment, the old epoch has ended and a new one has begun. The foot of a stranger is in the home of our fathers. We may love him, admire and respect him: it does not matter! This was a little sacred corner—a side chapel in the Temple of Life, and was so bespoken by us for a private refuge, a secure haven from storm and wreck, that the incoming of any other has little less than the force of an eviction to ourselves. We need not wonder that Charles felt raw and rebellious, as he went to bed; nor that he paid very little attention to a letter containing a pathetic request for ten pounds. "*I* know," said he, partly interpolating, partly reading, the actual text, "it's going to save the writer and her widowed mother from an execution at the hands of a cruel creditor, whose demand for twenty-seven pounds thirteen and sixpence has been scraped together, all but nine pounds nineteen and threepence, by hard work and strict economy—but which has to be satisfied without fail by the day after to-morrow at mid-day. Just the usual thing! Bother Lavinia Straker!" said he. "I know no Lavinia Straker," that being the signature of the applicant.

Next morning he felt chilly and grown old. He said to himself (probably with truth) that if he had not been expecting a Model to sit for the head of Regan in his picture of Lear and

Cordelia, he would certainly have "chucked" work, and gone for a walk to Hampstead Heath. It was so jolly this time of year with the leaves drifting about and nobody in town.

Charles was really fonder of dreaming than action. His mind was always at work, but the vividness with which images presented themselves to him was misleading; and he—poor fellow!—had had the misfortune to construct a vivid image of himself as an Artist, which it was quite beyond his powers to interpret into action. His guardian Angel was not on the alert, or had lost touch with him for a moment, when he selected his profession. He had deceived others, as well as himself. For though he was defective in mechanical aptitude, he had, as a boy, sufficient to make drawings which showed individuality and power in the mind of their author of a certain sort. Was it any wonder that his family and his friends thought they could foresee a future for him in Art? If only he could acquire the mere technical facility—anybody can do that with perseverance! What makes the Artist *par excellence* is not vulgar accuracy of eye and dexterity of hand; it is the mind that lies behind vision and manipulation. These latter can be trained. But the Promethean fire, or Inspiration, or whatever you like to call it, that distinguishes Phidias from Fiddlesticks (we know we are safe in that selection of a name—there is no such sculptor)—this quality is inborn; and when you suspect its existence the best thing you can do is to develop its indispensable concomitants, and give it a chance to assert itself.

Very much the best! But do you do it by courses of chalk drawing from the Antique (a singular name for all that is, in plaster) with a plumb-bob to show you what is exactly above what, and a conviction that if a drawing cannot be saved exactly by bread alone, it can, at any rate, by bread (not too new) in combination with stippling? Or will the end be attained by study in a School, where there are as many different systems as there are teachers, of which systems the total, minus one, must needs be misleading systems? We are only asking these questions apropos of the ways in which we know Charles studied the Fine Arts—of the better systems that have superseded them we know nothing whatever. All our data are of bygone ages, and no doubt we should be pleasantly surprised if we could see and know what is being done in the Arts, nowadays.

If Charles could have had half-a-dozen lessons in the use of colour from—whom shall we say?—Quentin Matsys will do as well as another—so as to grasp the necessity for care and method—for

scheming each day's work as the precursor of the next, he might at least have learned how to learn, if the Antwerp blacksmith hadn't been able to give him another six lessons. But his course of study contained nothing that forced the needs of his work upon him, and it was not in him to find them out for himself, as great artists whose studentship was half-a-century ago had to do. So he never really learned his trade at all! He revelled in the contemplation of the great works he was going to paint, and the ordering of unlimited materials from fascinating Artists' Colour Shops; and he spanged and slammed about royally with the colours, used anyhow, when he got them. But he never organised anything, nor perceived that he was only making preliminary messes on canvas with a view to converting them to something else, later on.

He had, ready for total modification, a preliminary mess of this sort in the head of Regan in the picture of Lear and Cordelia above mentioned; and on this morning, when he felt so chilly and grown old, he was expecting a certain Miss Thiselton to come and be painted as Regan. Miss Thiselton was that very common occurrence—a young woman in reduced circumstances, who would be thankful for sittings if it was quite clearly understood that she wasn't a Model. She drew a sharp line at her neck and wrists and required a certificate of character from Artists before she sat for them.

Real Models are prone to begin talking in an imbecile way the moment they enter the Studio, and continue until they depart. Miss Thiselton, not being a real Model, held her tongue at first. So an opportunity is given of describing her when her face is at rest, which is her best aspect. As she is sitting for Regan, the reader may like to form a judgment of Charles's insight into Shakespeare.

You know those heads that charm and fascinate when the face is turned full on, and disappoint when the side-views are revealed later? And also those whose profiles are full of glorious promise, with O such a dreary come-down to follow when you get at both eyes at once? It would be unfair to place Miss Thiselton's in the latter class, without reserves. But though she owned two beautiful side-faces, one on either side, they marred her full face, when submitted to the same spectator, by their difference of opinion about what it was to be. She did not squint—*absit omen!*—but both her fine eyes could hardly rest upon your face at once, as long as she continued a mere acquaintance. Focus forbade it. The interesting ripple on her interesting hair consoled one for this defect, and in fact was one of Miss Thiselton's chief claims to

beauty—and was always busy correcting mistaken impressions. It was helped by a particularly pretty pair of soft white hands with filbert nails, and an implication of a very good trying-on figure for a mantle department.

Regan was sticking her chin out apparently, at the moment chosen by the artist. Miss Thiselton therefore is doing so too, about half-an-hour after her arrival, Charles having taken all that time mixing up flesh-tints; which he won't be able to use, because he can't use any tints at all; but which no artist could possibly use, except on the hypothesis that Correggio (for instance) couldn't see. We all know how our chins get the best of us and protrude while the doctor is feeling our pulse, in anticipation of the word of command to put our tongues out. Even so Regan, as interpreted. But in order to do absolute justice to the conception, and achieve the niceties of a close rendering, it is necessary that Regan should stand up. It is not clear why, for the artist appears to be working quite independently of the model; and, to our thinking, the girl might just as well have sat down. But she didn't, and the consequence was—an occurrence not at all infrequent under the circumstances—that she became dizzy and ultimately pitched headlong down off the "throne" she was standing on. Charles was just in time to catch her, and save her from a bad fall. To his great embarrassment, instead of pulling herself together, and saying she would be all right directly as a sensible young person would have done, she remained on his hands; either really inanimate, or pretending to be so for some purpose best known to herself. Our own opinion is that there is no necessity to suppose the latter. The faint may have been genuine enough. No suspicion to the contrary crossed Charles's mind, but he was mightily embarrassed. He didn't understand this sort of thing at all, and was in two minds whether he should not summon help. There were no women within call except the two lady-artists upstairs, and somehow he didn't think he should improve matters by going to them. He was saved from further speculation by the young woman coming to her senses. She would be all right soon if she sat still and rested for a few minutes. Charles would have been much better satisfied that she should depart, and suggested a cab home. But he could not say he couldn't work, if she felt able to resume sitting; and he could do no less than be amiable, under the circumstances. So he lit a pipe and went on with Regan, unassisted by Nature. Nature sat on and rested, but this permitted much more *causerie intime* than is possible when Nature's face has to keep still or some terrible mishap, undefined, will occur in the subtle and

delicate operations of the canvas. Charles felt that if speech was only silver in this case, silence was copper, and decided on general conversation, with a sort of flavour in it of his being quite accustomed to this sort of thing and being, as it were, a married man with several grown-up daughters.

"Getting right again, Miss Thiselton? *That's* right! Now you had much better take my word for it, and have a little brandy in that cold water. Do try it!" This with an affectation of great responsibility about something in Regan's nose, and without looking round to see if Nature would take the brandy. Charles honestly wished his relations with his female Models to remain impersonal; as impersonal at any rate as they would permit. He wasn't at all indigenous in Bohemia, and was much less popular with them than his friend upstairs.

"Oh no!" replied Nature, "do please take it away, Mr. Heath. It makes me ill again only to look at it! Are you a good sailor?" Charles removed the brandy-bottle without replying to the question; but presently said, as though it had taken a long time to reach him—"No, very bad—that is, pretty good! I suppose the brandy made you think of that?"—Because his not having answered made him seem to himself needlessly distant, almost uncivil. After all, there *was* a half-way between being grumpy with Nature, without which your work lacked an indescribable something, and taking it to Cremorne or Rosherville.

"I did think of the Channel boat," said Miss Thiselton. But she was not a real professional Model; so she seized the occasion for a certain amount of reserve, and remained silent accordingly. The effect of this on Charles was that he decided that she was quite safe to be at ease with, and that he had been a donkey for being so stiff. He would talk a little. What should he talk about? Suppose he tried the acquaintance who had sent this Miss Thiselton to him. There could be no pitfalls and snares there. He was a man he had met once at an Arts Club he had joined some time since, of whom he knew as little as the circumstances allowed.

"What sort of work does Mr. Galsworthy do?" He asked it in the tone of one who has selected a topic of conversation—you know how one speaks when one has selected a topic?

"Do you mean Mr. Calthorpe?"

"Ah—to be sure—Calthorpe! What sort of pictures does he paint?"

"Oh dear! Poor Mr. Calthorpe!" This with a smile of commiseration. Charles immediately felt ashamed of not having known Calthorpe was a duffer, and threw a slight claim to having really

concealed that knowledge into an "ah!" of assent. The young lady accepted this as valid, and proceeded to intensify disparagement of Mr. Calthorpe's pictures by concessions in the way of consolation. The pictures couldn't be helped; but we could exaggerate personal testimonials, as a set-off.

"I really ought not to say so though; he's been so very kind to me. He really is the kindest hearted man, Mr. Heath——"

"No doubt he isn't."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I mean he is—of course he is! I used the wrong word." Charles wasn't paying attention.

"Yes—he's been very kind to me. And of course I should be sitting for him still, but——"

Charles wasn't on the alert. He ought to have broken in and asked if Nature felt equal to standing up with its chin out again. Miss Thiselton, not being opposed, went on after a slight hesitation: "But my mother wished me not to sit for him any more—I daresay it was all right!" She made a pretence of clearing away this section of the conversation to make room for something entirely new.

"Do *you* know Mrs. Calthorpe, Mr. Heath?"

"Not the least! Never seen her!" He was so absent, or Regan so engrossing, that he quite failed to see that the clearing up movement had not been bona-fide. It wasn't!

"Ah—then you wouldn't know—of course you wouldn't——?"

"Know what?"

"I oughtn't to ask. Never mind!" It was obvious at this point that pressure for information ought to follow; otherwise relations might become strained. Charles acquiesced, but without interest.

"Oh—but I do mind! What wouldn't I know?"

"I know I may trust you not to repeat anything I say. Whether Mrs. Calthorpe is—is considered—is at all a jealous person?"—

Let no male human creature—even though he be an Archbishop!—imagine he can restrain a live female Model who has made up her mind to talk about ladies and gentlemen. Further, let him not suppose that when once she has succeeded in giving the conversation a foothold in the departments of human life that range from Arcadia to the Divorce Court, he or any one else will succeed in preventing her from bringing herself in, either as part of the cast or as an example to her species. Miss Thiselton had made up her mind that she wasn't going to talk Theology (suppose we put it that way), and she wasn't going to let Charles off.

"*Do* you think she's jealous, Mr. Heath?" she repeated. "But you don't know her, of course——"

"How should I know anything about her? I've only seen him at the Club."

"I wish you *had* seen her, because you could have told me, and I should have trusted *you*." This placed the speaker—as one of the lonely and defenceless, who in a world of treachery had lighted on a sterling soul akin to her own—in the ranks of friendship at least. Whereas Charles had bargained only for the privilege of contemplating a good-looking head, for purely technical purposes, at the rate of one shilling per hour, and refreshments if its owner sat on into the afternoon.

"I'm a very bad judge of character," said he, endeavouring to extricate himself.

"Oh, do you think so? But you could have told me if it was true about the likeness——"

"What likeness?"

"The likeness to me. Mr. Calthorpe said his wife was an ugly likeness of me! At least, the profile was——" Charles looked round to see what Mrs. Calthorpe was like. Verdict, he should draw Miss Thiselton's side-face as soon as he had got rid of Regan. It really was lovely, now he came to look at it. You didn't see the slight defect in the eyes in this view, and the large dropped eyelid was very good, with just a trace of blue vein visible. It is the artist's misfortune that however much pains he takes to fix up his model, Nature (when it gets down to rest) always contrives to evolve something better. For the moment, Charles judged it safest to get Nature re-established as Regan, because he was becoming slowly conscious that Miss Thiselton, anchored in an armchair, and giving way to a form of tittle-tattle uncongenial to him, was not business. However, Regan did not last very long, turning visibly blue again after standing for a few minutes. "Perhaps it *would* be better not to try any longer," said she. "I am so very sorry, Mr. Heath, but I didn't sleep last night——" Charles said never mind—come again on Thursday. Or on Friday, same time? Yes, she could come on Friday, unless—"Unless what?" asked Charles. Unless nothing, apparently.

Just as Miss Thiselton was on the point of withdrawing finally, she turned round to Charles unexpectedly—"I hope you are not angry with me about that letter," she said. Charles was completely puzzled—a little afraid the young woman's head was unsound. "What letter?" he asked.

"A letter I wrote asking you to lend me money. I am so ashamed

and sorry now. I know I ought not to have done it. But you are so kind——"

"I have never had any letter."—Charles pulled out one or two papers from his pocket, to see if he had overlooked or absorbed something without knowing it. But there was nothing, to all seeming. Miss Thiselton, however, pointed, and said, "That one there—there it is!"

"But this isn't you, Miss Thiselton. This is—what's her name?—Lavinia Straker. You're not Lavinia Straker——"

"Oh dear—how stupid of me! I signed my own name, and I ought to have signed the name you know me by. Do you know, Mr. Heath, I quite lost my head yesterday! You would forgive me if you knew—I think I have not got quite right yet—talking as I did just now about that Mrs. Calthorpe. But you do forgive me?" This as if that was the really important point.

Charles's recent dose of this young woman's profile and transparent eyelid just stopped his saying to himself that she was an outsider of his soul, and he really hadn't leisure either for blame or forgiveness. They certainly could not have come into court earlier, even after the young lady had pitched herself into his arms off the throne. For though no doubt what we have heard from a heroine of a stage love-story is true, that if you can once make "him" carry you across the street, or upstairs or down, or sustain you when insensible—it will give you an immense advantage later in engaging his affections, even if they are not entangled right off: though we quite admit this, there is a difference when it's elbows—pardon our homely way of putting it! We mean that Charles's chief experience of the tumble was a severe elbow-thrust on the stiff-neck place in his shoulder, and it was still hurting him. It exonerated its inflictor, perhaps, from any suspicion of guile—but it also may have left him rather impatient of either blame or forgiveness, as applied to Miss Thiselton. The recipe of the foregoing actress got no chance of working. But the profile and the drooping eyelid secured an expression of readiness to forgive, which was distinctly an advance on what might have been, "Oh—bother!" Besides it made Charles ask what the trouble was.

It was a brother—a younger brother, who had run into debt to save a friend. He was quite young—only just twenty-one—and she and her mother had just managed to clear the poor boy, and get him out of his scrape. But then a tenant, who occupied a small freehold house belonging to her mother, had disappeared with his furniture, leaving rent owing; and the house was mortgaged, and the interest was due to-morrow, and it was no use asking

for an extension, and so on, and so on. Charles felt it was all as usual, even to the fact that if he would lend Miss Thiselton, or Straker, ten pounds its repayment could be assured by securities almost too good to be true in an imperfect world like ours. He did not allow to himself that he was conscious the profile and the eyelid had anything to do with his consenting to advance the money, which he was just able to do. He considered himself an independent agent—rather too good-natured perhaps! He wouldn't say anything to the Governor or anybody else about it though. He would send Miss Straker the money in the course of the afternoon, or to-morrow morning by first post. She took her departure, and after lunch he put two five-pound notes in an envelope and sent them off by post to her, registered.

Our own opinion is that it would have been well for Charles, at this moment in his life, to go away at once to Peggy at Shellacombe. Had it not been for the feeling we have referred to about his sister, and the change this love affair of hers was sure to make in their lives, he would certainly have done so. He would probably have very soon forgotten the profile and the eyelid; or Peggy would have suspected them, and then her quick healthy insight, and her knowledge of her brother, would have pushed them away. But Charles felt certain (although he had no official information as yet) that things would change, and would never be so jolly again as they had been. He was glad it was Johnson, certainly; but then, wasn't he sorry it was anybody? No! he wouldn't go to Shellacombe. He would go and walk about Regents Park. Hampstead was too far off now, and he might meet somebody in Kensington Gardens. He felt internally scarified, and disposed to be sentimental. He was in an unsafe mood to be by himself, and when he went out for his walk he was mysteriously accompanied by a profile and an eyelid, which were much too clever to force themselves on his notice, and floated away, like *muscæ volitantes* in the eye, when an attempt was made to pursue and convict them. He was under the impression that his mind was full of his sister and Johnson, and he was quite mistaken. It would have been well for him that he should have had Jeff in to tea, as usual, but ill-luck would have it that that artist had gone away to paint a portrait. It was in the nature of things that everything Jeff did should have something laughable about it, and in this case it was that he had gone to paint his aunt's portrait at Upper Clapton. It must have been laughable, or Charles wouldn't have laughed when he told a friend who was going to call on Jeff (with a remarkable soup-ladle he had picked up for an old song)

about the reason he wouldn't find him upstairs, and the friend (who was Mr. Kerr-Kerr, if you wish to know) wouldn't have laughed back. It made them very cheerful that Jeff should have gone to Upper Clapton to paint his aunt. But Charles's melancholy came back on him, in company with the profile and eyelid, as soon as Mr. Kerr-Kerr departed, leaving the precious soup-ladle in his charge; and Charles took them all three, melancholy, profile, and eyelid, to Regents Park with him; and stood on the suspension bridge over the Canal and nursed the first, never having the candour to acknowledge the other two.

It contributed to the melancholy and fostered it to dream of the days when those May trees over there were in Marylebone Fields, and the real Dr. Johnson and Oliver Goldsmith used to walk out and about among them, with Bozzy, perhaps, taking notes, either mentally or graphically. Those were the days, or none so long after, of No. 40 in its prime; of games of quadrille or faro, till near on to daylight, in the Studio Charles occupied; of orgies of gormandising and drink in the ground-floor front with the columned recess at one end for the buffet; of stately minuets and gavottes in the old ballroom the picture-dealer had defiled. Those were the days of that foul murder-story we should never know the rights of—all, all forgotten now!—not a clue to guide us. A newspaper paragraph about it had moralised, and pointed out the lesson it taught us, that sooner or later murder would out. And Peggy had remarked that the moral seemed to her to be that murder sometimes didn't out, until it might almost as well have stopped in. "What a many murders do stop in, most likely!" said Charles to himself, on the canal-bridge in Regents Park.

"Would it be any use, I wonder," he continued, "to look up that queer old fish Parminter—no! Verrinder—again and try to get some more out of him. One hasn't any time—that's the worst! I shall think about it though."

"You're such a lazy chap!" said Conscience—a companion who never leaves us, and who gets so familiar that she breeds contempt for her own counsels. "*Such* a lazy chap! Why can't you do it, instead of thinking about it?"

"I really shall though, seriously," said Charles, "because one ought to try to clear up ghost-stories. What was it the great Samuel said about it—under those very trees, mayhap!—'the question of the appearance of ghosts was perhaps the most important question humanity had to decide, and we were no nearer a decision than we were three thousand years ago.' That funny little

Alice! How I should have liked to see her acting the ghost on the beach at Shellacombe!"

"You ought to go there—you promised, you know," said Conscience, still at his elbow.

"I shall go. All in good time. Don't be a nuisance! I must just stay for one more sitting when that head's dry." The profile and the eyelid asserted themselves.

"If it wasn't for them," said Conscience, pointing, "you would go down to-morrow!"

Charles laughed scornfully. "I never heard such nonsense in my life," said he. "If it's to be this sort of thing, I shall give up Art, and take to——" But that was as far as he got.

He turned to walk back along the broad walk. The gate was closing; but he was allowed to pass if he would promise to go straight across, and not keep the gate-closing back. He walked on through the almost deserted Park, shouts of "All out!" reaching him from wandering guardians, and the beasts in the Zoological Gardens seeming to echo their injunctions. No wonder, Charles thought, if it is true they are allowed out on parole in the empty Park, at night, as the story goes!

In order to lengthen out his walk in the silence of the Park, now moonlit and enjoyable, and at the same time to keep faith with the authorities, he made for Hanover Gate, instead of keeping on the broad walk. A belated workman or two, and a park-keeper who said, "All out!" sternly and reproachfully, were all the folk he saw until he drew near the bridge over the Ornamental Water. Then he became aware that there was a woman behind him, following at no great distance; but still near enough to give the impression that she *was* following. If so, she must have been following for some time; for the Park at this point is (or was in those days) very bare of trees or any incident of cover, and Charles must have seen her had he passed her anywhere on the open grass land. He quickened his pace, realising that a prowler of the class he supposed her to belong to would see in this a hint that her society was not coveted. She also appeared to quicken her pace, but not sufficiently to lessen the distance between them. Sometimes a cabman, fancying he has been signalled to, will follow you, without your seeing why; and then he is naturally indignant when he finds his mistake. Was this woman under a like delusion? Charles had heard of such things. But as he stopped a moment, hesitating between two paths, he noticed that she stopped too, which seemed to him to dispose of the theory.

He reached the exit gate opening into the inner-circle road, and

felt inclined to argue with its guardian, who told him to "Look alive, can't you?" It seemed ridiculous to look alive, when there was some one else fifty yards behind, who was still at liberty to look dead, at choice, and who was to be allowed to escape also. Charles loitered a moment on the other side of the way, lighting a cigarette, in order to choose the opposite direction to the one taken by the woman. She came out at the gate, and he thought he heard her finish an inaudible remark to the park-keeper with the words, "Tell him to go that way!" and then pointed to her left and went off, quickly, to the right. Charles thought he recognised the woman's voice, as a voice he had heard, but without being sure whose voice, and waited to see who it was that was to be sent the other way. Presently a man came running, who seemed to make enquiry of the park-keeper, who appeared to turn him over in his mind, and then finally pointed with his thumb to his left; in compliance, presumably, with the woman's instructions. Seeing Charles had noticed the transaction, he vouchsafed some explanation—"He's best out of the way," he said.—"Ugly sort o' customer! Forring, *I* should say"—and seemed, to Charles, to think this sufficient. Charles was amused to find that he himself was inclined to accept it, as one accepts anything and everything in England that is done by a person with any sort of badge or uniform. Besides, in the slight glance he had at the ugly sort of customer, he had noted in him that worst of all combinations, the clerical and the dissolute. He turned and went his way home; and, as he went, an impression grew and grew that he knew whose voice this woman's was, and also the figure that went with it. He would listen very carefully to Miss Thiselton, or Straker, next Friday, and would observe the good trying-on figure, to see if this impression was right.

CHAPTER XVIII

OF MISS STRAKER'S ANTECEDENTS, AND HER VOICE. WHY DIDN'T CHARLES GO TO SHELLACOMBE? HOW MISS PRYNNE SAW A GHOST. HOW DR. JOHNSON SAW MISS STRAKER. CHARLES ISN'T IN LOVE

NEXT Friday came, and with it Miss Straker. She was looking very nice, thought Charles—much too nice ever to have anything in common with that Park-woman. The good trying-on figure was near enough certainly; the voice was going to sound quite different, Charles felt confident. She was very *journalière,* clearly, was Miss Straker; for this time she hardly struck him as at all lop-sided as she looked him frankly in the face, and thanked him for his timely loan.

"I don't know what we should have done, Mr. Heath, if it had not been for your great kindness. My mother would have liked to come and thank you herself, but I thought it would only bore you, and said no!"

Was it the voice? Well! It would have been more satisfactory if it had been more unlike it. Still, it was certainly possible to believe it wasn't, and Charles adjusted his belief accordingly—at least for the present. This morning, Miss Straker was at her best, and Charles wanted her *not* to have been that woman in the Park. It did not seem to occur to him that she might have been the vilest of the vile, and yet a good model for Regan. A perfectly logical and detached artist wouldn't have cared twopence whether she was the Park-woman or not. Still, Charles did not suspect that he was other than perfectly detached.

Miss Straker, becoming absorbed in Regan, and remembering the reserve due to a non-professional position, gave no further opportunity of judging of her voice until she struck work and asked for a rest. "I ought to have asked you," said Charles, apologising. "You'll have to sing out when you want to rest, Miss Thisel—Straker." He began with one name, and corrected himself in the middle.

"Miss Thiselstraker," said she, laughing. "It makes a funny name. But I don't mind which you call me. Mr. Calthorpe was very impertinent, I thought. Don't you think it's very impertinent

to call a girl by her Christian name, Mr. Heath?" Charles was comparing the voice; and was getting no nearer, but only puzzling himself. He replied absently, "Yes—very!" The young lady meandered on, but in a suave undertone which gave no clue.

"Mr. Calthorpe used to call me Lavvy. My brother always calls me Vinny. Which do you like best, Mr. Heath? But I mustn't talk and disturb you."—And she picked up a book and began to read. Now Charles saw the book was *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*, and he didn't believe Miss Straker could read French. However, if pretending to read French kept her quiet, why shouldn't she pretend? It pleased her and didn't hurt him. Besides, the profile and the eyelid had recrudesced in that position. Oh no! With a profile and an eyelid like that she never could—never—never! There was one thing though she could do and was doing, viz.: earning money at the rate of one shilling an hour by reading Victor Hugo in a comfortable armchair. Charles protested, in the name of business. "And a nice humbug you are!" thought he to himself, as Miss Straker put down the volume with apparent reluctance, and climbed up to be Regan. Her hand felt very honest though, as he helped her on to the throne.

"I love Victor Hugo! Don't you love Victor Hugo, Mr. Heath? But I like *Notre Dame de Paris* better than the *Travailleurs de la Mer*? But I like *Les Misérables* best. Isn't Jean Valjean grand?"

"I didn't know you read French so well." Charles was taken by surprise. She could pronounce *Travailleurs*.

"Didn't you? I thought you knew. Oh dear, yes!—Why, you know my mother is a Frenchwoman, and I lived in Paris till I was nineteen! I read French much better than English. I can't read Dickens and Thackeray half like I can Dumas or Victor Hugo."

Charles felt ashamed. Perhaps his suspicion about the Park-woman was just as groundless as his assumption that this girl, more French than English, could not read French. He was always suspecting things! Why, at this very moment he was imagining a too-ready assumption of some bygone rapport in the words, "I thought you knew."—Never mind! He would clear all scores by never thinking about the Park incident again. He apologised cordially, in secret.

"We lived at Choisy-le-Roi till my father died," pursued Miss Straker, picking up her thread of narrative at the next rest, having been conscientiously silent during work time. "It was very nice at Choisy-le-Roi. I was learning singing then. Do you like singing, Mr. Heath?" Now Charles was very fond of music—

played a little, himself. "Were you studying for the profession?" he asked.

"Oh yes! I have a good voice. High soprano. But I can't sing for long together. If only it were stronger!"

"How came you to come to London? Surely Paris is better for training than London?"

"Much better, if you can afford it. But we were very poor, and I had an offer of training, without paying any fees at all, from Pesciatino, who, you know, lives in London. I got on very well till my voice played tricks."

"I thought your mother had some house property in London?"

"No—the house is at Choisy-le-Roi—our old house. The mortgagee is an Englishman. I should like to go back to Paris now we have had to give up the singing. Shouldn't you like to live in Paris, Mr. Heath?"

"Oh yes—I shouldn't mind living in Paris. But tell me about your voice—how does it break down?"

"It goes—goes clean away—all of a sudden! I was singing to an Agency—to try for an engagement. I had sung one song—very well, I thought. I tried another, and found I had no voice—couldn't sing a note! Wasn't it funny? Did you ever have it happen to you, Mr. Heath?"

"I never sang to an Agency to try my voice," said Charles, "or it might have. But did that make you give it up? Wasn't it rather premature?"

"Oh no! It happened again soon after. We had to give it up. Then Pesciatino said it was no use my going on training. Then Maurice was always in want of money——"

"Is that your brother?"

"Yes—and money had to be found—so——"

"You took to sitting. I can't help thinking you *were* rather premature—in too great a hurry—about the voice—but of course I can't tell." Charles was leaving Regan to take care of herself. His irrepressible good-nature, coupled with a haunting sense that he had done this poor girl an injustice, was gaining ground; and there was no friendly guidance at hand to steer him into safe waters.

"I *should* like you to hear me sing. Only you have no piano."

"No! I should be playing all day, instead of working, if I had a piano——"

"Oh, do you play? But those ladies upstairs have a piano—they wouldn't mind——?"

"Wouldn't mind lending it? I couldn't ask—don't know them well enough! Oh dear, no! Certainly that would never do." For

Charles didn't feel at all confident about the views the two Miss Prynnes would take of an invasion of their premises by a rather showy-looking young female, to give a matinée musicale to an audience of one single gentleman. Even with the powerful sanction of their own presence it would be doubtful; while as for asking Jeff to consolidate matters, he would only make them worse. The Miss Prynnes were already inclined to kick and make complaint about Mr. Jerrythought's noises overhead; and there had even been allegations of disreputable female characters, only ascribable to him, occurring in the gangways of the house at unearthly hours in the morning. Jeff indignantly repudiated this—it is but just to him to say so.

Charles, at this moment, in this narrative, is hesitating about a plunge, which if taken may affect his future seriously. While he is thinking about it, we may make further reference to these suggestions of the Miss Prynnes about Mr. Jeff. Their story was that on the occasion of a partial eclipse of the moon which was predicted for half-past three in the morning, they had timidly ventured forth to observe it from the window of the little crib mentioned in a former chapter by Mr. Jerrythought, that was neither a room nor a landing; a clear sky being visible therefrom. They remained watching it until all the Astronomy proper had come to an end, and the moon was left to go on by itself, without addition of factitious interests. Then they returned as they had come; but were scandalised at being passed on the stairs by a most disreputable-looking person in a sort of flowered dressing-gown, who could only be going up to see the moon from where they had seen it; or, *culpabile dictu,* to the apartment occupied by that very doubtful and noisy artist with the absurd name. The younger one, though speechless, could not restrain her curiosity; and kept her eyes long enough on this person to see that she disappeared into his room, no doubt closing the door very quietly so that no one should hear it slam.

They of course did not tax the delinquent with his irregularities, but it came to his hearing indirectly; being communicated (to downstairs) by a person of Mrs. Twills's class (but much thicker), who came in to do out the Miss Prynnes, and to empt, and any little bit of cooking when wanted. She was a married woman, and could communicate on such a topic with Mr. Chappell, who was also married. Mr. Chappell did not see his way to making or meddling in Mr. Jerrythought's affairs. What concern was Mr. J. of his? But Mr. Pope saw his way, to the extent of suggesting the existence of a reciprocal understanding, by winks or clucks, be-

tween himself and Mr. J., from which Europe was to be excluded by mutual consent. This led to revelation and total denial by the culprit, only applicable (by special proviso) to this particular case; for Jeff repudiated as a personal insult any imputation of behaving himself, as a rule; and only alleged that at the time in question his door was locked tight, and he was fast asleep. He further said that if it was a humbugging ghost, he would thank it to go and 'ornt somebody else. Charles had heard enough of this story to make him shy of taxing the toleration of the Miss Prynnes by requesting loans of pianos for his lady acquaintances. But we may now go back to him. He has had plenty of time to decide.

"But I suppose your mother wouldn't object to my calling on you to hear you sing?——"

"Why should she?"

"I thought possibly—it was only an idea—that she wouldn't like Artists you are sitting for to be on the footing of friends—I mean ordinary friends——" He felt he wasn't putting it well, and hesitated over it a little.

"Certainly she wouldn't—not *any* Artists. But see how kind you have been! She wanted to come and thank you to-day herself, but I thought it would bore and hinder you, and she had better not. But she really is most grateful, Mr. Heath."

Charles had taken his plunge, and was committed to Miss Straker as an acquaintance. But he threw in a little word or two, to define and limit his position.

"You see, Miss Straker, I often hear of people who want a good singer, to make a party go off well—and who pay very well too. Mind! If I don't think your voice up to the mark, I shall have to be unkind and say so——"

"Oh—the *voice* is all right," said Miss Straker with equable confidence. And she resumed Regan with alacrity, as one who knows time has been wasted.

It might have struck a bystander that as soon as ever she saw a clear road to a permanent acquaintance with Charles, she began to make it much easier for him. It might have been unfair to suggest that her fish being hooked she gave him the line to himself, and sat on the bank quietly, taking good care not to frighten him. But she certainly knocked off the little tentative personalities which are the delight of the female Model in full swing, and which she seemed to be on the way to acquire in perfection after a little more experience. If she did this with a view of making Charles's visit at her mother's an easy and natural thing to him, possibly pleasant to repeat, it shows that she understood her man. She

had gone a long way towards disgusting him by her attempts to introduce the story (probably not exactly true) of Mrs. Calthorpe's jealousy; and he didn't feel at all attracted to a discussion of what name that lady's husband should have called her by. She had much better have left the profile and the eyelid to do the job. But now it was all right. And no doubt Miss Lavinia Straker became much pleasanter to Charles when (for whatever reason) she gave up attempting to captivate, and adjusted her conversation with a due regard to the actual degree of their acquaintance. She also made him quite comfortable on the Park question by saying she and a friend had heard *The Messiah* the evening before, but had had to wait an hour in the street. So she could not have been in Regents Park after "the official hour of sunset."

"I shan't be free for some days now," said Charles, when the sitting was over. "But after next week I have no engagement. To-morrow morning, I am going down to Devonshire, to my family——" For he had remembered his promise to Conscience.

"I didn't know you had a family."

"No more I have, in that sense—in the sense you mean, I mean. I was speaking of my mother and sisters."

"I see. I didn't know. But you *will* come and hear me sing, all the same, won't you?" Charles said of course he would, as soon as ever he returned to town.

Now observe, that *if*—(only we don't at all say this was the case)—*if* this young woman was a designing young woman, her last two remarks did her powers of design great credit. The first did away with any impressions her previous conversation might have created, by registering the fact that she did not know that Charles was a single man. The second, by leaving it doubtful what "all the same" applied to, left a meaning open to it fruitful of suggestion that Charles's coming to see her as a single man might be open to interpretations—not of a sinister sort, certainly, but of a nature that made it more pure-hearted and frank in her to disclaim them in advance. "You need not be the least frightened. However much I like you, I should scorn to take advantage of you," was what she had contrived to say, if we may judge by the way Charles again blamed himself for having misinterpreted her. "What a vain ass I am!" he said to himself. While she, if she had such meanings, may have felt very like Becky Sharp after a master-stroke.

Charles saw her down to the door, honestly believing that, of the two, hers was the pastoral nature. As he stood watching the good

trying-on figure go down the street, he was accosted by "Hullo! Charley—who's the Beauty?" And there stood Dr. Johnson.

"She's not a Beauty. She's only a Model," said Charles. And then his chivalrous heart turned round and blamed him for speaking in such a way of any girl. "She's a very nice, ladylike girl," he added, correcting and extenuating. "Only I shouldn't call her a Beauty, exactly. I'm painting her as Regan."

"*She* was a nice ladylike girl, with a vengeance! Now, Charley, come along in and hear all *my* news. Never mind the nice ladylike girl." For Charles was keeping his eye on the vanishing form. It turned a corner and was gone.

"Peggy hasn't written to me yet about it," said he. Surely none but his mother's son could ever have got so far *in medias res* without an Index, or a Preface, or an Exordium, or at least a Title-page.

"I see there's not much to tell," said Johnson. "But do say you haven't been execrating me—you said I might, you know!——"

"Did I? Well, I suppose I did."—For in a conversation we have not recorded, Charles had said to his friend, jokingly, that if he had fifty sisters, single ones, Johnson was welcome to make offers to them all round.—"But then, my dear Paracelsus, that was to be *if* I *had* fifty. That would leave me forty-nine—or in case of bigamy, forty-eight; or quadrogamy—tetragamy—whatever it ought to be—forty-six."

"I see you're not very angry, old chap——"

"Angry!"—Charles could only wring his friend's hand affectionately. "Angry!—Why, as far as it's being *you* goes, nothing could please me better. Only of course—only of course—it's a sort of break up; might have gone on a little longer, don't you know?" For even in those days people used to say, "don't you know?" Only then they used to say other things as well. A time came when they said nothing else.

Johnson looked as if he did know, and was sorry. "I'm a brute," said he, "and I know it. But you would have had to forgive somebody else, old boy, if it hadn't been me. As for Margaret, I think she's not much ashamed of me, at present. But she didn't like to confess up; because, you see, she had made up her mind not to marry, on high Philanthropic grounds—good example to her species—and so forth! So she said if you hadn't found it out from her letters, I must break it to you. Now it's broke!"

"And at any rate it *isn't* anybody else—that's one comfort! What did the Governor say?"

"Oh, of course I haven't seen him—I want you to come and help me in that quarter. Your mother and I may be said to have made

it up now, after difficulties. We are on very good terms. But she tells me I must anticipate opposition from Mr. Heath." Charles laughed internally, and may have begun to smile outwardly, for Johnson added, "Don't you think so?" However, Charles wasn't going to commit his father, or any one, to anything. So he merely promised his moral support, that evening, if Johnson would come back to dinner at Hyde Park Gardens, after a visit at the Hospital—an institution he said he felt ashamed to look in the face, after the way he had neglected it lately.

Mr. Heath Senior certainly made all the stereotyped objections; and though Charles felt incredulous under the skin, and detected in them a certain spirit of pomposity to which, in his father, he was no stranger, they did not altogether fail to impress his friend as genuine. Master Rupert felt uneasy, and feared his projected mother-in-law was right. But, as it chanced, matters official having been left in abeyance, the talk turned on his family, and he mentioned his father's Christian name—Philip Kenrick Johnson.

"Why, God bless my soul!" exclaimed old Heath. "You don't mean that? Ken Johnson—why!—he and I were at school together at Clifton. Well, now—that *is* strange!" Charles felt immediately that the objections had only a feeble hold on life—were spiritless and anæmic.

"Yes," said the Doctor, "I think my father *was* at school at Clifton. Then he went to Addiscombe. He died when I was quite a boy. He was killed at Inkerman."

"I remember—you told us. But I never knew he was Ken Johnson! Why, we were the greatest friends, he and I! We were there three years nearly. We fought six times in the first two years—beginning of every term. Sometimes he licked; sometimes I licked——" Charles felt that the objections were moribund.

"But you didn't always fight," said he.

"Oh no! Last term I was there he'd got a beetle I hadn't—(we used to collect beetles)—*Necrophorus Sepultor* I think it was; and I had a beetle he hadn't, whose name I can't recollect—dear, dear now! What was the name of that beetle?" Charles said never mind. "Oh yes—but I do mind! I should like to remember the name of that beetle." However, Mr. Heath had to give it up, and went on: "Anyhow—he put *Necrophorus Sepultor* in a little pill-box and put him down my back in class, and we got in a row with the master, and after class I gave him mine in exchange. Ah dear!"

Charles felt that the objections were dead, and that they might be handed over to *Necrophorus Sepultor,* about whom Mr. Heath

was probably wrong, as we believe he is a very common beetle. Anyhow, it was quite clear no one could object to any one marrying his daughter if he had fought that man's father through two years of school, at the beginning of every term. But a definition of the position was called for—that dignity should suffer no outrage!

"As for you two young folks—you and Peggy—you must think it over a bit—consider nothing settled—bad to be in too great a hurry—hardly known each other a year—your own prospects, my boy, most uncertain, etc., etc., etc." But Charles noticed that Dr. Johnson had become my boy. And when he said good-night to his father, after Johnson had departed, evidently reporting a good deal of progress to himself, the general recapitulation certainly contained no element of serious obstacle to the happiness of the two lovers.

"We must see what your mother has to say, Charley. If she says I'm to say yes, I suppose I shall have to say yes—otherwise, otherwise!—she and Peg must have it out between them. I expect they're ordering the wedding-dresses, and settling who's to be asked to the wedding. *I* shan't have any voice in the matter. You'll find it all settled when you get there to-morrow. But just fancy that! Ken Johnson's son!"

Charles, re-enveloped by this interview in the atmosphere of Home, forgot all about his Studio acquaintance—the profile and the eyelid were disestablished for the time being. But they floated back into his field of vision as soon as it was empty, and brewed dissension between himself and Conscience. For the latter had the bad taste and feeling to suggest that the prospect of losing Peggy, so far as he should lose her, was less repellent to him than it would have seemed a month ago—ever so little less, perhaps, but still less.

"If you mean," Charles angrily replied, "that I'm in love with this stupid Model girl, and that she could make up to me for—there! I won't talk about it. It's too disgusting and ridiculous."

"*I* never used the expression 'in love,'" said Conscience; "*you* made that!" And Charles said he wasn't going to talk any more about it, as it was late and he would have to catch an early train at Waterloo.

CHAPTER XIX

OF MR. VERRINDER AT THE RAILWAY STATION. OF ALICE-FOR-SHORT AND THE BEETLE. WHO WAS THE NICE LADYLIKE GIRL? PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

CHARLES caught the early train. As he entered the station a dingy figure said, "How-de-do, Mr. Heath?" to him—a dingy figure in a napless hat, with a threadbare coat anxiously buttoned against contingencies of buttonlessness elsewhere; with an umbrella that was pretending it hadn't a broken rib, and knew better; with a carpet-bag made of carpet, as they always were, once, and one end of its leather handle made uncongenially fast with string, and a brass plate on which a name was once legible. It was what had caught Charles's eye first, and he was wondering *when,* as its owner addressed him. Then he saw that it would have been Verrinder, if it really belonged to its present owner.

What was saddest in the poor fellow's dilapidation was that he evidently believed he had succeeded in his attempt to smarten up for the public eye. His shirt had been washed, but probably at home, in a household without servants. His coat had been brushed, perhaps with the wooden basis of what was once a clothes-brush, but now was bald and hairless. His hat had been stroked round with his sleeve, most likely; and then he had felt that he could go on parade. Charles only felt sorry for him, not repelled by his shabbiness.

"How-de-do, Mr. Heath? I haven't forgotten you gave me three tubes of Asphaltum. Beautiful colour!"

"Are you going by the eight-thirty, Mr. Verrinder? Because if you are we can travel together." If Charles had met Mr. Kerr-Kerr, who was rather a *point-de-vice* gentleman, he would have dodged him, because he wanted to be by himself. But as it was this poor woe-begone piece of antiquity, chivalry stepped in. He wasn't going to shy off from the poor devil. He could have provided himself with good and sufficient reasons, but he would have suspected himself of snobbishness, and he wasn't going to run the risk of trial and conviction.

"Where are you going?" said he, when Verrinder answered him yes to his first question. Verrinder was going to Witley.

"I'll take tickets for both," said Charles; "I'm going to travel third." Of course he wasn't, but he didn't want any class distinctions. He took two third-class tickets, knowing he could change his carriage and pay excess fare.

"You never came to see me at my Studio," said he when they were settled in their places. The train moved slowly out of the station, and was beginning to be at its ease about cross-lines and ambushes before Verrinder answered him.

"Oh no—oh no! Too long ago for me! It's a good way to come, too. No, no—not my line—thank you!"

Charles understood that he really thanked for the invitation—that there was no element of derision in the phrase. "I see," said he, "I won't bother you to come. It *is* a very long way." Charles registered the distance as the reason, lest he should seem to impute a sensibility about old memories the other seemed to wish to disclaim. He judged by a hardness in his voice. Charles remembered at this moment that he had promised to make no enquiries into Verrinder's previous story. Otherwise the words, "Too long ago for me," apart from the voice, might have given him an excuse.

Verrinder said very little indeed during the short journey. He said he shouldn't like to be a brickmaker, but that they said the smell wasn't unwholesome. He said he shouldn't care to work on the line, but that he understood you always got compensation. He seemed to assume that no railway employee could escape death by misadventure or bodily injury. He reflected that it was much quieter in this part of the world before the railway came, showing how far back his memory of this part of the world went. He might have become interesting at this point, Charles thought, but they arrived at Woking and he changed for Witley. Charles remembered this little incident long after.

The journey to Shellacombe was such a long one that it is not to be wondered at that the profile, the eyelid, and the promised voice were completely forgotten by the time Peggy's arms were round her brother at the little railway station at Cleave, where she came with Alice to meet him and show him how quite the same she was in spite of her escapade. He felt *that* was all right. As much the same as the little unalterable railway station on the single line, with the roses still in bloom along the platform fence, and the name of it done large in pebble mosaic on a slope of green along the other end of the platform. Even the two or three other people who arrived were exactly the same as usual; and they were driven away in the same two-horse carriage and the same dog-cart by the same civil men whose nature defied the influences of the

metropolis. Or if they were not absolutely the same people they had some quality about them which answered all the purposes of identity without committing its owner to being anybody else.

"Oh, you bad boy!" said Peggy, when she had driven conviction home, "do you mean to say you've come here with no luggage but that?" It seemed so; or else the train, sanctioned by a whistle from the far end, was taking away Charles's box. No! It was all right, and there was nothing for "the man" to find room for in front. So Charles and Peggy, and his contemptible little valise, were off in the twilight through the little village street, which was as much the same as the station had been, or even more so; with the same sun-browned white-haired children growing up to be the same people, and the same people remembering how very much the same children they were, once, themselves! Charles felt how premature he had been to fancy the world was going to disperse because his sister married. *She* wouldn't change, anyhow! Why, look at her! There she was, more herself than ever! And very lovely Peggy looked in the half-light, I can tell you, with her hair shaken out and only the least little shade of sunscorch from long exposure on the inexhaustible sands. Alice's eyes were fixed on her in admiration; but then they almost always were.

"And is Alice burnt black too?" said Charles, after reference to the baking powers of Shellacombe, which were alleged to be quite outside and beyond all precedent, off the Equator. It really is quite wonderful what individual characteristics towns have along the English coast.

"No—absurd little monkey! She stops quite white, like that. Show Mr. Charley your face, Miss Kavanagh." Alice does seem strangely white, or ivorylike; considering that she too has been baking in the sun, and living most part of the day in a tent on the sands. She has become more than ever one of the family by now, in this gypsified life, and must be thought of as such. It is curious, because really it is only a short two-thirds of a year since she was that poor little—almost street Arab, we wanted to write. Peggy felt all the more for the others who were left.

"Let's have a look at you, Alice-for-short," says Charles. And Peggy has to remind her companions that a waggonette is not a place to romp in. "We've got to shut up and be good, Alice," he says. And Alice repeats after him, "Sut up and be dood!" and becomes demure.

"But I *did* tumble over the tiff," says she, as if it was a merit—an extenuation of any current misdemeanours.

"Cliff, child! When will you learn to speak plain? Oh dear!

My hair's all coming down. No—it's no use trying to stick it up, Alice dear—never mind! We shall be back directly—and you shall do it up for me. Say cliff, plain!"

"Curl-iff!" This with a great effort from Alice, who continues, "Tumbled over it, I did. And Dr. Jomson came down upside down and catched-ed hold ever so tight——"

"*Caught,* Alice! I told you *caught* before."

"Taught." With conscientious gravity. "And I *was* fightened."

"Tell Mr. Charley about the beetle, Alice."

"There *was* a beetle—Oh, the dee-est little beetle—so big, like that—and he got on my nose, and tickled—oh, he *was* so pretty—such beautiful colours!"

"Go on. What did you say to the beetle?"

"I said—susposing Dr. Jomson slides down atop of us, whatever shall we do to hold him up?"

"What indeed?" said Charles. "What did the beetle say?"

"He flowed away because he was angry. Angry with me! Because I rubbed him off my nose on to the grast—grass." A conscientious correction.

"What did you think quite first thing of all, Alice," asks Charles, "when you first went over?"

"I thinked—I thought—susposing I go in the water, and Miss Peggy she comes after me, and Dr. Jomson he comes after Miss Peggy—we should all be in the water together."

"Excuse my saying, Miss Kavanagh, that that was a flat and insipid way of looking at the position, and not worthy of your youthful promise." Alice stares. Peggy stimulates her memory by a word or two.

"Yes, Miss Peggy—please! I wundled and wundled and wundled—susposing we was all in the water together—poor Mr. Charley, what would he do wivout us! And I wanted to cry, but I was fightened it would jolt! And then the strong man came up behind—I *was* glad! And he tied me up—don't recollect nuffint more!" says Alice, breaking off abruptly, and shaking her head prohibitively.

"And here we are," says Peggy. "Really, Miss Kavanagh, if you don't learn to say *nothing,* instead of *nuffint,* I shall give warning and find another place."

"*Nothing,*" says Alice, forcibly and distinctly. And Peggy kisses her. We hope Alice won't be spoiled.

Said Charles to Peggy, next morning on the sands: "Now tell us all about it, Poggy-wogg." For the full-up household in the

sea-side house, playing at games overnight, and the lawless Chaos called the arrangement of plans for the day, in the morning, had prevented all peaceful communication between the brother and sister; and mutual tacit sanction had been given by each to the other's deferred questionings.

"No! First you tell me. Come the other side because of the smoke. No—nearer up under my sunshade and then I can ruffle your hair for you. Oh dear! It's so sticky with the salt water." For there had been swims before breakfast. "No, I won't tell you anything at all till you've told me a great lot—heaps! Rupert came to see you yesterday—I know that much—and you went home and dined at the Gardens. Now go on after that!"

Charles, enjoying the drowsy spell of the sea after so long a dose of the stuffy town, was able to listen to the musical plash of the waves and the cry of the sea-birds; the laughter of the bathers and their voices; the even beat of the oars helping a pleasure-boat with windless sails over a mirror towards a sheet of silver that may be wind; to listen to and enjoy all these, and yet to give, in easy instalments, a narrative of the previous day's events. He began with Rupert's arrival on the doorstep. He ascribed his scrupulous care in omitting any hint of Miss Straker (the good trying-on figure passed away down the street in his brain, but he said nothing about it) entirely to the fact that the bill before the House related to Peggy, not to himself. He would keep in the background, and say nothing about any Miss Strakers. We understand.

He judged it best to make the most of his father's little exhibition of orthodox obstacle-mongering, and Peggy was somewhat downcast for a moment. But she broke into a happy laugh of relief when the story came of the schoolfellowship. "You mustn't of course attach too much weight to the mere fact that Paracelsus's father was at school with yours," said Charles, solemnly.

"Oh, you dear prosy old boy! The idea! Why, of course there won't be any bother with papa. Just fancy! Fought each other every term for six terms! Do you know, I really believe if I hated Rupert (or Paracelsus, as you will persist in calling him) Papa would want me to marry him. And then they swopped specimens. That's what Bob and Dan are always doing. I wonder if that was phosphorus what's-his-name that tickled Alice's nose?"

"*Necrophorus Sepultor?* No—he's a ghoul, I suppose—lives on corpses. By the bye (only it's a shame—he isn't a ghoul at all), I met that queer fellow Verrinder in the train yesterday. I'll tell you about him presently."

Peggy didn't show any interest in Verrinder. But the ghoul

made her think of something she was wanting to talk about. "How about that ghost?"

"Which ghost?" said Charles. He didn't want to tell Peggy about the ghost the younger Miss Prynne saw on the stairs. It didn't seem to him a fit ghost for Peggy. Brothers are mighty particular, we can tell you!

"I didn't know there were two ghosts—unless you count Alice's private ghost with the spots? I meant the one Rupert told me about—what you and your absurd friend (well! he *is* absurd) saw."

"I'll tell you about that presently. I want to hear more about you and Paracelsus."

"There's nothing left to tell, dear old boy! We are a lady and gentleman, and that's all about it. Here's his letter that came this morning—six pages! And what's more I've read every word—yes!—while all that racket was going on, before we came out. I'm dreadfully ashamed of myself, though, if you ask me. Here's a little bit of postscript I haven't read——"

"There's nothing to be ashamed of—you're not the only lady and gentleman."

"I didn't mean that—I meant, all my good resolutions! This is about you." And Peggy, having excited as much curiosity in Charles as can be felt after bathing in the sea before breakfast, and then treating breakfast seriously, and then settling down to smoke in the sun under favourable circumstances—after doing this Peggy becomes absorbed in the letter, with an animated serious countenance. "One can't wonder at Paracelsus," thinks Charles, as he looks drowsily at it.

"Who was the nice ladylike girl who went away down the street?" Peggy's question is, or would be to a bystander, merely a question—quite free of implications of any sort. But Charles's nature was not cunning enough to see that his safest course would be to say it was only Miss Thiselton, and explain her afterwards. "Let's have a look at the letter," said he, as if he couldn't tell who it was without the context.

"Well?" said Peggy, interrogatively, a few moments later; for Charles read, and made no sign.

"Well what?"

"Who was the nice ladylike girl?"

"The nice ladylike girl?" Charles pretended he was interested in another part of the letter. "Oh yes—of course not! Let's see—the nice ladylike girl—that must have been Miss Thiselton."

"Of course it must! Who else could it have been?" There is a spirit of mischief in this: but the fact is, that Peggy always sees clean through her brother, as though he were plate glass.

"*You* don't knew Miss Thiselton. You've never seen her," says he. Peggy's answer revealed the weakness of his position.

"Dear silly old Charley! As if there were a hundred and fifty nice ladylike girls sand-hopping about all over the Studio just that minute when Rupert came in. You are such a dear transparent boy!" Certainly, make-believe wasn't Charles's strong point. He never made any one believe. But then, he always confessed up, candidly.

"Miss Thiselton, or whatever her name is, isn't a secret. I'm painting Regan's head from her. She's very like Regan——"

"That's a recommendation!"

"——to look at. But she's not at all like her in character."

"How do you know that?" Oh dear, how sharp people's sisters are sometimes! However, Charley had to justify his estimate of Miss Thiselton, somehow.

"I'm only guessing." He tried to recall something that would accredit the young woman, and felt the land rather barren. "*You* ought to sympathise with her, Poggy-Woggy, anyhow; she has a younger brother who's a source of anxiety to her——" Charles has a ridiculous, half-humorous expression as he says this.

"Oh, Charley dear! You never were, and never will be, a source of anxiety to me. Only you *are* so good-natured. What does Miss Thiselton's younger brother do to make her anxious?"

"Oh, runs into debt and she has to save his life. He's not a bad boy, but silly."

"Well! That's like you, too! But now, dear old boy, listen to me quite seriously. How much money have you lent Miss Thiselton to help her with her younger brother?"

"How do you know I've lent her any?" says Charley, feebly.

"Oh, you are the transparentest, dearest old boy." And Peggy doesn't press the subject, but goes on ruffling her brother's hair for him. After a little, Charles, who always ends by complete confession, after making nobody believe anything at all, resumes the conversation.

"I want to do Miss Thiselton a good turn if I can. She says she has a very fine voice——"

"*She* says she has?"

"Well—she's a little odd about it, certainly." Charles gives particulars, briefly, of Miss Straker's story of the voice. "You see, if she could get some evening engagements, it would be time

enough to be discouraged when the voice actually *did* break down—which it may never do again. I'm sure we could find some one to give her an opening."

"Of course we could. Any number, if the voice is really fine. But one must know. How if I were to come to the Studio to hear her sing, when we come back?"

"I've promised to call at her mother's next week to hear her." At which a passing look of concern rests for a few seconds on Peggy's face; a slight phase of apprehension. Are such simple brothers as this one of hers to be trusted in the jaws of Miss Thiseltons with splendid voices and French mothers? She hoped he was—but hardly felt that cautions from her would be of any service. In fact that they might precipitate instead of avert. Perhaps it would be safe—why should she be so nervous? She changed the subject. "But when am I to hear about the Ghost?" Charles was not sorry to get away from Miss Thiselton or Straker. Fortunately he had said nothing about profiles, or eyelids. And as for the Park, of course that wasn't Miss Straker. He decided on a platform of Incredulity to tell about the ghost from.

"I don't believe it was a ghost at all. It was a lady who went away without making a noise." And he describes all the circumstances, closely enough; but he shirks doing full justice to the intractable character of the door-lock, as a resource for explanation to go to. Peggy is sure she could pull that door to, and make no noise. This groundless pretension piques Charles, who resumes the door, and intensifies its fastenings.

"What was the figure like to look at?" Peggy asks, thinking perhaps that if the door was as competent as all that, it might be worth concession of possible ghost-ship, under protest, to examine into the personnel of the spectre.

"You see my glasses were on the ground, and Jeff was pegging away at Terpsichore. She left an impression of a grey head and a good deal of crinoline. I saw the white hair as she stooped, in a puff on the top——"

"But, Charley dear, you *couldn't* see it as she stooped unless she had no hat or bonnet on."

"No, that's true. It was funny. But it was only an impression. It all happened in an instant; and how was I to know who would or wouldn't come into Mr. Bauerstein's gallery?"

"It was a ghost, Charley, it was a ghost!" But Charles discerns the mocking tone in this, and is hurt. He wants to do the ridicule himself, and other people to take the ghost's case up, that he may pelt them.

"I don't see why you believe in Alice's ghost and make game of mine," he says.

"Well then! He shall have a little ghost for himself he shall—if he's good! But it really *is* very curious, now, isn't it? Seriously?" Peggy feels that Frivolity ought to give place to Psychical Research. Charles accepts the position.

"We could turn on a Medium or a Clairvoyant. Jeff knows one who saw fourpence in a child's stomach, and they had to turn it upside down and shake it."

"Fourpence in coppers?" says Peggy, immediately on the alert on the child's behalf. "Oh dear! I hope it wasn't fourpence in coppers?"

"I suppose it was a tanner. I'll ask Jeff." But Peggy looks very uncomfortable. "I'll remember to ask," Charles continues. "Anyhow, medium or no, I tell you what I *will* do. I'll hunt up poor old Verrinder again—did I tell you I met him coming along?"

"Yes, you said so—at Waterloo."

"I'll go to see him again, and try to find more about the house and the people that had it. I'll make a point of going. What was the name of the people? Lemuel, wasn't it?"

"No, not Lemuel—Tremlett, I think it was. I know there was an R in it." Which was an example of the sort of attention a story receives from the amateur Psychophil. Fancy the feelings of a ghost that is concerned to reveal buried treasure to impoverished heirs! Alas, poor ghost!

CHAPTER XX

OF MISS STRAKER'S COLD, AND HOW CHARLES WENT TO SEE HER AFTER. OF HER GOBLIN MOTHER, AND HOW CHARLES SPOKE FRENCH. OF A CHAT AFTER MUSIC, IN THE DUSK

When Charles said adieu to Peggy and Alice and other members of his family a week later, at the little railway station, his sister's last injunction to him was to go and see Verrinder and pump him well about his knowledge of No. 40. Charles said he would make a point of it. That is such an incisive expression that it misleads; one who uses it is apt to feel that promise in such terms is almost as good as performance, and that he has already done his duty. It is also clear that anything you are going to make a point of can be "stood over" for special attention later, while anything you are *not* making a point of had better be done right off, or it may get forgotten. But it may be we are, in saying this, only trying to concoct excuses for poor Charley, who is rather a favourite of ours. Better perhaps admit at once that he ought to have gone to see Verrinder, and he didn't.

What a pity he could not forget his promise to Miss Straker to go and hear her sing! Perhaps if his recollecting it had involved an admission that he was interested in a ghost, he would have forgotten. And then who knows how differently many things might have gone? What a pity one cannot always foresee everything and arrange accordingly!

He had done a good deal, in the sweet drowsy world of the Devon beach—surely in such a place the Lotus is at its best—to forget all about the profile and the eyelid and the voice that was to follow. But he had not carried oblivion far enough to have no curiosity about what it was he had nearly forgotten. This curiosity would be satisfied when Miss Straker reappeared for her next sitting. He was quite clear in his own mind that he could satisfy it without danger. As to the visit for the purpose of hearing her voice, that was business, don't you see? He took good care to keep that separate. It was a promise, and he was bound in honour to fulfil it.

Miss Straker was punctual to her engagement. She looked

plain, and had a cold. Charles wasn't quite sure whether he was glad or sorry for this. On the whole, he was inclined to be glad. It justified him in not being in love with her—which he never had been, of course! But it is always pleasant to feel that one has been justified.

The weather had gone off—lost all its beauty. Things generally had collapsed and become flat. They had changed also at Shellacombe on the day he came away. But on the Atlantic when the weather changes, things don't go in the direction of flatness. Giant rollers were pouring in at Shellacombe, and bathing was a thing of the past. While Alice was enjoying the experience of her first really rough sea, Charles was wondering what possessed him to promise to hear Miss Straker sing. He wasn't much vexed though at things being so flat. It put matters on a clear footing—a business footing, in a certain sense. He was determined not to allow them to get on any other. He would get Miss Straker one or two good introductions—if she really had a fine voice—and then he would wash his hands of her.

If Charles's communings with himself strike you as being rather unreasonable, take this into account: that he was constantly denying the young lady's identity with that woman in the Park. Continual denials are like creeds, of which it has been said that no man ever recites one until he doubts its substance. Even so no man formulates his disbelief in anything until he doubts its falsehood. If he had not been haunted by a misgiving that that woman was really Miss Straker, it would not have been necessary to disbelieve it so frequently. He tried to think of subtle ways of eliciting from her where she had been on that Regents Park occasion. But Charles had doubts of his own powers of finesse. He could not even deceive himself. If he had been able, do you suppose he would have been such an inveterate self-examiner? No! He would have allowed himself peace and quiet.

Miss Straker was to get over that cold before he went to hear the voice. Charles seized the opportunity to throw an almost hard-hearted tone into his recognition of the fact that this didn't matter. Any time would do—that suited the vocalist. His time wasn't hers exactly, but he would be sure to be able to find an hour or so.

In this story (perhaps you may have noticed it?) some of the characters are known to and understood by us, the writer, down to the ground. Others there are whom we can make no profession of understanding. We can only conjecture and surmise about their

motives and feelings. Never mind why this is so; include Miss Straker in the latter class, make Charles the most conspicuous character in the former, and ask no questions.

Whether the young woman said to herself that so long as he ended by coming to the house and hearing her sing, the interim was of no importance, we have no means of knowing. It is possible that we do her great injustice by speculating on that point. And remember this too, that, admitting that she had made up her mind to entangle Charles and capture him, she was not, so far as we can see, playing the game unfairly. For it is a game every woman has a right to play—as good a right as the swimmer has to strike out for the shore. Remember too the stakes she puts on the table.

You may also, if you like, ascribe to Miss Straker a feeling of dignity, and believe that this prompted her to have a cold and be rather morose and sulky during that interim; a feeling which said to her that *she* was not going to entrap this guileless and transparent young man, and bring him within reach of a prehensile parent, with any ulterior motives. Why, see! Was she not sniffing, and being as unattractive as possible? You are welcome to this view. It isn't ours. According to us, the cold was oppressive, and she felt quite sure of Mr. Heath when it had gone, and she wasn't going to exert herself to be pleasant until (so to speak) it should be worth putting capital into the venture.

"But then that makes her out such a cold-blooded character!" we fancy we hear you saying. Does it? And suppose it does, how do we know she wasn't?

Anyhow, about a week after his return—a week including three sittings of Regan—Charles found himself on his way to Warren Street, Camden Town. He chose a day when Regan had been in abeyance, so that no question of a personally conducted tour should come in. It isn't called Warren Street, now, and there is no use your looking for it under that name. We believe it is called Delancey Street; if so, we prefer the former name. Charles was just a little discomposed to find from Miss Straker that the pleasantest way to walk was to cross Regents Park to Gloucester Gate, and then go past the York & Albany and turn to the right. When she gave him her address before, he did not associate Camden Town with Regents Park. Subjectively, that Park began for him either at Hanover Gate, or some point in the Marylebone Road. If you went through it, you came out at Primrose Hill, probably. But you might get to Hampstead, or Highgate, or Berwick-on-

Tweed. Now Charles's only active mental association with Camden Town was a street called Osnaburgh Street, that you went to from King's Station, and came away from as soon as you possibly could. So when Regents Park came into court, Charles wished it somewhere else. He drove it out by reflecting that where he saw the woman was no nearer Camden Town than—than places generally are.

It was a wild and gusty afternoon, bred of premature equinoctials, when he found himself knocking at the door of a two-windowed house opposite to a tavern in a garden that overhung the railroad, which at this point was in a deep trench, braced against landslips by iron girders. The dwellers near by live in an incessant roar and rush of passing trains, and as Charles arrived a tunnel-mouth was about to throw up a train shortly; but had only, so far, covered the tavern aforesaid with smoke. It came, in a leisurely sort of way, as he looked out of the first-floor window, waiting for a sloppy servant-girl to say "Mr. Heath" in some other part of the house. He had told her to say it, in the passage; but by mutual consent the recitation had been deferred. He was conscious that the voice of Miss Straker asked suspiciously if he had been shown into the drawing-room: evidently he had had a narrow escape of being left waiting "in the hall." He could not have said after whether he heard this, or whether it was a reading of the character of the sloppy servant that enforced it as a corollary. He caught more clearly a French remark: "Tu as beau me gronder. Je veux le porter. Je ne suis pas encore si vieille"; and Miss Straker's reply: "Ah, mon Dieu! La belle chose que d'avoir une mère qui s'habille en farfadet—en lutin!" It was odd to Charles to hear her fluent French after his judgments of her for affectation of acquaintance with the language. Perhaps some of her defects of English speech were due to her early up-bringing. He then heard her say impatiently: "Allons, ma mère, Monsieur nous attend!" and her mother: "Descends—descends! Tu fais toujours le brouillamini. Descendez aussi le caniche"; and then Miss Straker appeared, preceded by a poodle. They had been very audible on an upper landing as the door was wide open, and perhaps had been less careful about being heard as folks are when they speak their own tongue abroad.

The young lady was certainly looking her best, and Charles was sorry. He wanted to feel secure in his entrenchments; and that Peggy's apprehensions, which he saw as clearly as she saw through him, should turn out groundless. If they could be proved to have no foundation up to date, independent impulses in the future,

quite unconnected with the previous profile and eyelid, might remain an open question. Not that he wanted Miss Straker at home to prove repulsive. She was welcome to a certain allowance of comeliness—but it was to be exactly enough to make his visit pleasant, without making him feel shy of what he should have to report to Peggy, who was always headquarters with him.

"Mamma will be down directly," said Miss Straker, and shook hands unprofessionally. The venue was changed, and she was no longer even a half-fledged Model, but a young lady unexplained. "Would you like tea, Mr. Heath? Shall we have tea now, or shall I sing? I think I shall sing better, after tea. What do you think? I think Tea." And as Charles thought Tea too, she pulled a bell which didn't ring. "Would you be so kind as to pull that other one, Mr. Heath? Sometimes this one doesn't ring." Charles did so, and felt an inch further inside the family circle. He had pulled one bell on one side of the hearth—she had pulled the opposite one. All these little things have an effect on life, for better or worse.

"Here is Mr. Heath, Mamma, in here," she continued, going to the door; and Charles thereon thought he caught the words "Toujours gouvernante—je n'en ai pas besoin!" in a miffy undertone from the old lady. Her daughter may have governessed her, but there was no doubt about her appearance—it was distinctly goblin-like. Charles, describing her afterwards to Peggy, could only testify to brilliant parti-coloured ribbons, like flames that appeared to radiate in every direction from a little old (or oldish) woman who might have been good-looking once, but not on her daughter's lines. If she had been good-looking, it would have been piquancy, quite free from anything the least serpentine.

"I am very pliz-to-see. You-Misterre-Eace." The good lady speaks English right enough, with only an occasional French phrase, but cuts her sentences into segments, independently of their meaning, usually ending each segment in the middle of a word, and with an overpowering French accent: "If I wass atliberre. Tee to sank you ass I shoode laigue. You woode not find me *ingrate*. But I am underre the sum of my daugh. *Terre* and she will not all. *Ow* me to spik." This is the nearest we can manage to Mrs. Straker's English, phonetically. She ended in French for the benefit of her daughterre. "En effet, Mademoiselle me tient toujours en frein"; and her daughter, who was making the tea, said parenthetically, "You mustn't mind Mamma, Mr. Heath."

The bystander of a family tiff never knows what to say, and perhaps is safest saying nothing. But as Charles had hardly

opened his mouth in the house before the battle, he felt he really must speak at the armistice, not to appear taciturn. "I'm sure Miss Straker bullies you awfully, Madame," he said, eluding the question of the gratitude. "But I mustn't quarrel with her about it, and upset the apple-cart, or she'll throw me over and I shan't be able to get my head done." But though Madame speaks fair English, subject to amendments, she does not know all its slang and colloquialisms.

"Throw you ovare? Comment! Ovare where?" And Mademoiselle explains: "Monsieur a peur qu'il soit bouleversé au milieu de son travail—que je lui manque si nous nous désaccordons." This is accompanied by a shaking-off action of the hand not employed tea-making, to illustrate. It is a very pretty white hand—there is no doubt of that!

"Ma foi, non! But now I underr. Stant what you mean. 'Throw you ovare'—it is slanck—argot."

"That's it! We're a slangy lot—we English. Americans are worse. I don't think you're much to boast of, nowadays, in Paris." But it is almost as difficult to speak limited English that a foreigner will be sure to understand, as to speak another language. The goblin is puzzled, and her daughter has to interpret.

"Monsieur dit—que nous autres, nous sommes aussi argoteux, comme les Anglais—comme les Américains."

"Ainsi disait toujours ton père—ze Dictionnaire was gone to ze Deville. Mon mari, Monsieur, my oz-band." Charles felt that interpretation, carried this length, reflected on his education, and began trying his own hand at French, rashly perhaps.

"Je puis parler un peu Français, mais je n'ose pas, parceque j'ai toujours peur d'user les——"

"Mais oui—mais oui—continuez! Tout va bien—Monsieur n'a pas du s'arrêter." But Charles has to go helplessly to the daughter to be rescued. He laughed at himself.

"There now, you see, I wanted to say that I was always afraid of using the wrong words—what's the French for 'the wrong words'?" Neither mother nor daughter are very prompt to reply. One says "parler inexactement," the other, "parler à travers."

"Yes, but what's the exact French for 'the wrong words'? That's what I want to know!"

"Peut-être les mots inexacts—les mots mal-choisis."

"Then when I got the wrong umbrella in Paris and wanted to tell the man at the Hotel it was the wrong umbrella, ought I to have said le parapluie inexact, or mal-choisi?"

"Won't you have another cup of tea? You've had two?—yes, but

have another. No? Very well, then. Now we'll have music. Would you be so kind as to close that window, Mr. Heath? You're nearest to it." Charles did as requested.

"Hope you haven't been feeling cold?" he said.

"Oh no! It isn't that. It's because it sounds so in the street, and the people stop. What sort of music do you like best, Mr. Heath? Gounod's Berceuse? Will that do?"

"Certainly, but anything you like——"

"Gluck?"

"By all means! Whatever you yourself prefer."

"I don't care. One song's the same as another. Perhaps I sing this best. I'm sorry our room's so small, Mr. Heath. Never mind turning over. I can do that. You'll hear best in your old place."

The song was the Gounod she had mentioned. It was a song Charles had never cared for; it wasn't in his line. He would have preferred some Gluck. But the voice! It was simply bewildering—that is to say, bewildering as coming from a young person to all seeming so unmusical. For Charles had decided in his mind that she was an altogether unmusical character. Probably she was. But her voice was superb, for all that.

She followed on with a stornello of Gordigiani and then "Pur Dicesti," and others; but seeming quite indifferent to which she sang, or what sort of music. It was apparently only necessary that it should be a tax on any ordinary singer's high notes. She seemed perfectly happy at the top of the human gamut, singing with a piano tuned up to concert pitch. Charles sat on, sat on, listening to one song after another. The dusk of the evening grew, and the goblin went to sleep in an armchair, and woke with starts at snore-crises, and said ma foi, she had been presque endormie! But Charles still sat on, and another song came. At last Miss Straker said we should have to have lights, and she was sorry, because it was much nicer without. After half-a-dozen songs at least, there could be no immediate hurry for more, if only from mercy to the singer. Also acoustic advantages of distance from the music ceased and determined. To remain at the other end of the room would surely appear needlessly stiff and ceremonious—for the goblin's protests at intervals covered all reasonable claims of chaperonage. Charles crossed over to the piano, and sat beside it in the half-dark. He was a little intoxicated with the music. But he was conscious of a wish to retain formality of relations, provisionally at any rate. He could make any concessions at any time; but, if he committed himself by a word, he could not with his ideas of honour retract one letter of it.

"I cannot understand," he said, "what you told me about the voice breaking down. You have sung to me for quite an hour and a half, and there seems no sign of fatigue."

"None whatever! But it might break down now at this moment; anything the least upsetting—a person I did not like coming into the room—might do it."

"But how does it break down?"

"Simply stops——"

"Would you be afraid of taking an evening engagement—to sing at a party?"

"Not a bit! Only the people might be disappointed. I should be obliged to tell. None of the agents will recommend me because of it. I broke down at a swell party at Lord Ealing's, and it was my last chance with the agents. It had happened before."

"And you could go on singing now, and have no fear of a breakdown?"

"Singing to *you*—none whatever." The accent on *you* was very slight. It might have meant anything from "you alone, whom of all other I would soonest sing to," to "you when you are the only person in the room, and not such an important one neither." Perhaps Charles ought to have had a greater alacrity towards the latter interpretation. He did not catch at it. After all, he was not such a stoic that sentimental confidences with a head of very beautiful hair at least, two side faces that taken apart were certainly very interesting, and a hand that gleamed white in the dusk on the keyboard, should have no charms for him. Charles was young, and male, and dangerously inexperienced for his age in the range of his own susceptibilities. He fondly imagined that a limited study of Peggy and her friends had given him an insight into womankind. As if they had ever—even Peggy herself—told him the whole truth about anything! And if he had been told now, that this girl was saying to herself, "I have only to wait quietly, and this young man will jump down my throat of his own accord," he would have repudiated the suggestion indignantly. Mind you, we are not saying any such thing was true; and we have no means of fathoming Miss Straker's thoughts as she sits sketching a slow tune with her finger tips on the silent piano, with Charles—well! a little farther off would have been safer—thinking to himself that we could do without the lights a bit longer. We are only saying if Charles had been told this he would have snapped the teller's head off; while we should have said, "May be so—may be not!"

"Surely the model business must be very distasteful to you?"

"Money has to be earned, Mr. Heath. Of course when Mamma

and I came to London we thought the singing was going to be a great success. Pesciatino was so hopeful. You must not think it was put aside too easily. We made many trials before we gave up. But of course one cannot *like* sitting to artists. No woman could. Oh dear! What am I saying?"

"Why not? I quite understand."

"I was not thinking of you when I said artists. I am glad to sit for you, Mr. Heath." Surely there was no need to qualify this. "At least—I mean—Well! I only mean—artists are not all alike. Hadn't we better have the lamp? Just listen to Mamma!"

"I like sitting in the half-dark."

"So do I. But she won't sleep at night, if she goes on like that." And the conversation ran on, or sauntered on, like this—Charles couldn't have said how long—till a clock struck and he jumped up suddenly saying he must be gone, it being seven o'clock, by Jove, and he had no idea!

"Maman, eveille-toi! Monsieur s'en va—Il veut te faire ses adieux." But the goblin denied having been asleep, and Charles took his leave, saying that he should certainly try what he could do in the way of evening engagements for Miss Straker.

CHAPTER XXI

HOW CHARLES WENT TO BELGIUM, AND CAME BACK. HOW MISS STRAKER SANG TILL ELEVEN O'CLOCK. ALICE'S SPECIMEN. PROPHETIC POLLY. HOW CHARLES COULD LOOK HIS SISTER STRAIGHT IN THE FACE ABOUT MISS STRAKER

When Charles next saw his sister the equinox was past, and the gales that had been in such a hurry to get to work that afternoon of his visit to Miss Straker had come to an end reluctantly after a busy life exceeding term-time. They had satisfied themselves that frost was at hand; that fog would be forthcoming; that every day would be shorter and chillier than its predecessor; and that the metropolis would be miserable enough now without having chimney-stacks blown down and petticoats blown up and umbrellas blown inside out. The early riser, rubbing the window-pane clear for better vision, could see the hoar-frost glitter in the early sunlight. He could then, by waiting a little, see the smoke of the early kitchen fires go straight up and spread itself around, and thicken and thicken and thicken until it was an early fog, and its nature and origin could be analysed and investigated and made a Blue-Book of, and its connection with the kitchen fire denied. And no doubt the equinox knew this quite well, and felt that London was provided for, and went off on another job.

Charles had not been in London the whole time. He had spent a week in Belgium, going in the boat from Antwerp to London Bridge. It made him think of Mrs. Gamp and the Ankworks Package. It was a mill-pond sea, having a rest after recent exertions, and if it had not been foggy the voyage would have been pleasant. As it was, Charles felt it would have been edifying to have Mrs. Gamp on board, and hear her opinions on the subject of the steam-whistle. He was very glad when they got into the Scheldt, and still gladder when he had found his way to a Hotel and was having coffee out of the thickest of all possible cups, and listening to a carillon playing "Voici le sabre, le sabre, le sabre." There is no pleasanter sensation in the world than feeling you have really got abroad, after being in England. And the coffee is the thing that drives it home to you.

Charles wandered about Antwerp, conscious of defective cultivation. He felt that his organ of Rubens ought to have been more developed before he came there. He was very glad Peggy wasn't with him in connection with the anatomical demonstration picture in the Gallery. But he can't really have cared very much about Art, for he got bored, and went by boat to Temsche and back. And next morning he went to Audenarde, and the carillon said it was la fille de Madame Angot. And then he went on to Bruges, and found that St. Ursula couldn't be seen for another week, because of some rearrangement of the Gallery. So he saw what he could and went on to Ghent. He really went much too fast to see anything. Travellers by themselves are very apt to do this. However, he was amused, rushing about.

He spent an hour or two at several other Flemish towns, and then went back to Antwerp, where he found a steamboat just starting for Rotterdam, and thought he should like to see Holland. He had still a day of his return ticket left. But alas! before he had got half-way he found the next boat back would be too late for the London packet. So he had to get out at Dordrecht to catch the boat that had already started from Rotterdam. He spent two hours in Holland, walking about at Dordrecht. He caught the London boat though, and reappeared at London Bridge just eight days after he started.

You think that all this has nothing to do with our story? Yes—it has. For it shows that whatever impression Miss Straker had produced on the susceptible young man had had ample opportunities for vanishing, in all reason. Just think! Eight whole days, spent in about that number of picturesque old towns. We are sure that, when we were twenty-four, no young lady would have lasted through that. However, we don't believe that this one really did. It was an unfortunate curiosity—akin to what he who firmly abstains from a novelty in nectar feels as to what it would have tasted like had he drunk it—that made Charles discover, on his return to his Studio, that it was absolutely essential that Miss Straker should come next day, before his impressions of Flemish work had faded; otherwise Regan might suffer. He couldn't get a letter to her in time for an answer, and it would be just as easy as not for him to call round at Warren Street in the course of the evening to secure her. In those days there were no sixpenny telegrams, reply paid.

So he must needs have a ride in a hansom to what he himself suspected of being a danger ahead, merely because he had nowhere in particular to go to—for his family were not due in Hyde Park

Gardens till next day, and even his father had been away the last fortnight at Shellacombe. If he had only been content to bide for a talk with his sister, things might have taken a different course. Mind you! If Charles had been irresistibly attracted to this girl, we should not have had a word of blame for him. But he was saying to himself all the while that he was perfectly detached and independent. The only evidence that he had to the contrary was that he said it so often.

He went to Warren Street and soothed his conscience by keeping the hansom waiting half-an-hour, as though forsooth he meant to go soon. Then he settled down to stay on, and dismissed it. Miss Straker was as good as her description of her own powers when there was no one she disliked in the room; for she sang to Charles and the goblin and the poodle till past eleven o'clock. Possibly it is only because we are so fond of poor Charles that it seems to us to have been somewhat sad—it certainly was neither bad, nor perhaps even mad—but it was at least sweet enough to make him feel, as he let Miss Straker's very white hand leave his, at the street door, that he was running away from himself as well as from her, and that he had (this time) got away safely from both.

We hope we are not doing this girl, with her beautiful rippling hair and superb voice, and slight obliquity of visage, a great injustice. But the transition to the family party at Hyde Park Gardens somehow seems to remove us from a doubtful atmosphere to a healthy one. The comers home had brought the freshness of the sea with them, and Charles had a feeling difficult to describe in drawing comparisons with his previous evening. It was the first time he had lived in two worlds apart, and though he had no sort of repugnance to the two worlds merging, he had a haunting sense of its impracticability. Supposing Miss Straker—(and as he carried the sentence no farther in his mind, why should we)—how about Peggy? Oh dear, why did they seem so antipodean?

Charles, while denying Miss Straker overtly, had in some depth of his inner consciousness a speculation going on about the reception of a young lady exactly resembling her into a family exactly resembling his. In this subliminal drama the parallel of Peggy went to call on the parallel of Miss Straker, and found it good—found it in fact fulfilling all sorts of self-denying functions, and an example of heroism in respect of its adoption of the trade of Model. All the revelation of character went in the direction of sound moral qualities, tending to justify the parallel of himself, to

show its judgment, and to exonerate it from too unconditional a surrender to mere beauty—on which, however, Peggy's double laid more stress than his did; in fact the latter spoke of Miss Straker's to the former as squinting, and got indignantly extinguished. His father's parallel kept curiously quiet, but his mother's was active on the score of Family: was, however, just on the point of surrendering to the warm advocacy of Peggy's, when the original of Charles found he had arrived at Hyde Park Gardens in the nick of the departure of unloaded vehicles and the middle of a Chaos of sea-blown, sun-tanned arrivals, kissing him when female and asking questions:—

"I *am* going," thus the voice of Alice, clear above the turmoil; "I *am* going to show Mr. Charley the thpethimen I've collected—I collected it under a great big stone—ever so big! Oh, it was such a big stone. And it kicked, the thpethimen did, awfly—but I held on tight, and Dan he took it and cleaned it out, and it wouldn't die for *ever* so long. Such a beautiful thpethimen! And oh, it does smell no nice."

"To be sure, Alice-for-short dear, I must see that specimen. It sounds a beautiful specimen."

"But the boys are going back to thchool," says Alice, ruefully. She says it with confidence in its relevance to a sympathetic mind. She and Charles and Peggy get out of the mainstream of trunks and arrivals into a backwater in the parlour, where the parrot lives. The excitement without is taking form in Polly in a sort of whirlwind-dance, upside down, round the top of his cage, with a curt, dry remark, at intervals—"Better keep that door shut."

"Alice is to go to school, too! We've settled it all," says Peggy. "But you, dear boy, you do look so townified. Why wouldn't you come for longer to the sea?"

"I've been all over the Low Countries, barring Holland—couldn't get there in time. I've had plenty of change. I only got home two days ago, so I don't see how I can look townified."

"I've such a lot of things to talk about that I don't know which to begin with——"

"Please, Miss Peggy, may Polly come out, just this once—just only this once. He'll promise me to be good—won't you, Polly?" But he declines to commit himself—may even have conscientious misgivings how far it is safe to do so, for he says in a very *saccadé* manner indeed: "The bird makes such a row you can't hear yourself speak."

"Nonsense, chick! The idea of having Polly out now. In fact,

I think he had better be covered up." Perhaps he had, for he has begun calling for the Police, at the top of his lungs.

"But I *shall* show you my thpethimen, Polly, when you do come out," says Alice, as consolation, and Polly falls into an undertone about something that amuses him very much.

"I really have, though, Charley dear, heaps of things to talk about. Only first I want to know about the young lady that sings—Miss Straker."

Charles was a little disconcerted by the suddenness of Miss Straker's appearance into the conversation, having quite forgotten that in his last letter to Peggy he had said: "I heard Miss Straker sing last night—her voice is wonderful."

"Who is Miss Straker? Where did you hear her?"

"Didn't I tell you about her? At Shellacombe?"

"No! That was Miss Thiselton. Bless the boy! He's got such a lot of young ladies he doesn't know which is which!"

"It's the same young lady. She sat for me as Miss Thiselton. But her real name is Straker."

"Oh—Charley dear!"

"What, Poggy-Woggy?"

"Is it the same girl that went away down the street?"

"Why shouldn't it be?"

"I didn't say it shouldn't. I only asked if it was."

"Of course it was!"

"Well then! Why need we be so touchy? But you're a dear old boy. Now I must run or I shan't be ready for dinner. Come along, Alice. Where's Partridge, I wonder." And Peggy departs upstairs in the wake of the family, with Alice attached.

Charles was ready for dinner. So he went upstairs to the drawing-room. But first he uncovered Polly, who said thereon without emotion, "Straker." He repeated it three times with perfect distinctness, and then broke into a genial laugh. Charles covered him up again. He felt that too great a prominence might be given to the name if Polly shouted it all the evening in the hearing of the household.

"And now, Charley darling, do tell me more about Miss Straker." This is in conversation after dinner in the back drawing-room The rest of the family are playing games in the front.

"Why did you say, 'Oh, Charley dear,' downstairs about her?" Peggy is far too truthful to stand on her indisputable right to say, "Oh, Charley dear," and mean nothing at all. Besides, intonation is worse than syllables.

"Well! I did hope she was altogether a new one. Of course I know nothing whatever against Miss Thiselton, or Straker. Only, if it had been a new one, she might not have been——"

"What?"

"Why, of course you know what I mean—a Model and that sort of thing."

"I don't believe she is that sort of thing. But no doubt she is a Model in a sense. She sat for Mr. Calthorpe, who I believe knew her first as a musician—he's a good deal that way—and he passed her on to me." Charles went on and gave a circumstantial account of his acquaintance with the young woman, stating facts but softening aspects. He said nothing about the Park incident: after all, his having half-mistaken some one else for Miss Straker wasn't evidence. He could not have told it either, without seeming to have been three-fourths mistaken at least.

"But what I can't see," said he, when he had made a clean breast of it, "is why I shouldn't get her a singing job—even if she *was* that sort of thing (in reason and moderation of course). If it's bad for girls to sit for artists, surely it's better, when one can, to get them something else to do. And this girl's voice is—I really can't tell you what it is! It's the most singular case. I should like to know what Paracelsus will think about it."

"He'll be here directly," said Peggy, with confidence. "His note only said he wouldn't be here to dinner. Yes, I should like to hear her voice." But she looked very thoughtful over it too.

Peggy's confidence in the early appearance of Dr. Johnson was well-grounded. She went out to meet his footstep on the stairs, and Charles remained, feeling discreet. She returned in due course —which meant quite four minutes in this case—bringing with her a very medical attendant. The yachtsman or tourist had vanished, and his degrees had reasserted themselves. Whether Rupert was himself again now, or had been himself then, who shall say?

There was evidently room for a good deal of conversation about Shellacombe—but it came to an end. Then Peggy seized an opportunity and said: "Now let's ask about the voice. You tell him about it, Charley." And Charles, rather glad to have Miss Straker broached on technical grounds, said: "Yes, we want your opinion," and went on to describe the case. "You saw her at the Studio," said he when he had done so sufficiently. "You called her a beauty. Perhaps she's hardly that." On the whole he felt he had done very well, considering; and that Paracelsus wouldn't get any mistaken impressions, as he called them, about her. He laid mental stress on the importance of this. But when Paracelsus said he

couldn't recall another case like it, but he would ask Huffer, or Hoffer, or some such name, about it, Charles felt illogically that he wasn't prepared to have Miss Straker dismissed so lightly. He was rather difficult to satisfy, was Master Charley, and not quite clear whether he wanted to talk about her or not.

But conversation is like frogs in a marsh, or birds in a wood. It will die quite away, and make you expect the next topic; when just one chirp of a nightingale or trill of a flute from a froglet, and the whole performance is gone through again, da capo ad libitum.

"What was the name—Straker?" asked the Doctor. "Is that what Polly meant, I wonder! I thought it was traitor, and couldn't make it out."

"I suppose his shawl's slipped off," said Peggy. "Sometimes it does and then he begins. I thought I heard him shrieking, just now." She went to the door again, and it was soon manifest that Polly was shouting "Straker" at short intervals. Charles didn't at all look forward to having to explain Polly's new word to the family generally. And he was very audible. Even after the door was closed it was difficult not to hear him, attention being once aroused. And he certainly kept the question before the house.

"I wish you would go to see her, Master Rupert," said Peggy. "You could pretend you wanted particulars of the case for a book. What do you think it is?"

"Something nervous, I fancy. Nothing to do with the throat—nothing in the organ itself."

"Does she look hysterical, Charley?" But the Doctor says looks are nothing to go by, nor symptoms. Some women are hysterical without any symptoms at all.

"Then, how do you know?" says Peggy, with severity. "But even if she's not hysterical I should like to know more about her. Because if this dear goose of a boy is going to sit listening to her by the hour together . . ."

"I've only done so once—or twice."

" . . . I should like to know what sort of a girl she really is."

"Why don't you go and see her yourself?" Thus Johnson.

"Because I'm afraid I shouldn't like her. And then what to say to Charley I couldn't, couldn't tell!"

"Do you think," says Charles, "I care so much as all that?"

"Charley dear, don't be artificial. Oh dear! how transparent young men are! You're not much better yourself, Rupert, so *you* needn't talk."

"But I really *don't*," says Charles. And reassured by his own voice, he really thinks he doesn't.

Rupert hasn't greeted the front room yet, for all he's been such a long time chatting. At this juncture comes Mrs. Heath's voice, asking, "Is that Dr. *John*son I hear?" with an accent that seems to imply that Dr. Jackson and Dr. Wilson might have come. He goes away to an accolade, being very popular with all hands.

"Now, Charley dear," Peggy says, very seriously, "listen to what I am going to say——"

"I'm listening."

"Very well then. What I have to say is this—Yes. Sit still like that, and I'll ruffle your hair. That's right! Now about Miss Straker——"

"Fire away!"

"If you can look me straight in the face, and say, really and truly I needn't be uneasy about you and her——"

"Of course I can say that. Really and truly you needn't be uneasy——"

"Oh, you silly boy! Do you think I don't know when you're prevaricating? You know quite well what I mean."

"Perhaps I do. But then I don't know whether I do or not. So it comes to the same thing in the end."

"Are you indifferent to this girl—absolutely indifferent?"

Charles takes off his spectacles and polishes them. When you can't answer yes or no to a question, it is well to have some stick to whittle, some pipe to light, some stitch to take up. Polishing spectacles is very good. Before Charles replies, he makes the lenses bright; then looks round at his sister through them.

"Absolutely indifferent is a large order," says he. "I don't know that I can quite run to that."

Peggy knows nothing about Miss Straker—only suspects and doubts. And all her misgivings may be groundless. But Charley is her brother of brothers—her idol of old time. There is trouble in her heart, and trouble in her voice. But its words are only, "Very well, Charley dear, you would like me to go and see her, and I'll go." Then Charles tries to pull a little philosophical indifference into the conversation: "Yes, I should like to know what you really think of her voice." But he feels he is a little behind time with this. It may as well stand, however.

CHAPTER XXII

HOW PEGGY CALLED ON MISS STRAKER, AND MISS STRAKER WENT TO THE GARDENS. HOW ALICE AGREED WITH POLLY ABOUT HER. CHARLES'S FATHER THINKS HIM A FOOL. HOW MISS STRAKER WROTE A LETTER, AND LANDED A FISH. BUT WHAT ABOUT REGENTS PARK?

PEGGY was as good as her word, and did go to call upon Miss Straker. It was by appointment, and Miss Straker was at home. It was an uncomfortable visit; but then it would have been more so if there had not been the resource of its professional character. Its object clearly was to forward the young woman's musical prospects. The agents might have given her up, but that was no reason why private introduction should not push her. Provided always that the voice was all that Charles's fancy painted it. But even with this background, the visit was an uncomfortable one.

Miss Straker sang, and was in good form. There was no doubt about the voice. *That* was all right, at any rate! But why did it present itself so strongly as a set-off, a make-weight, against something that wasn't? What was it about the singer that made "at any rate" so necessary? Why did Peggy's mind employ the same phrase about the goblin French mother as she was driven home after arranging a day for Miss Straker to sing at Hyde Park Gardens to her family and a few appreciative friends? What she then said to herself was, "He wouldn't marry the mother at any rate!" Of course not. Nor the poodle. But the appearance of this consideration showed that however little Peggy might feel drawn to the young woman, she had recognised fully the dangers of the situation, and acknowledged to herself that her amount of beauty (with that hair and all), coupled with such a voice, might be quite enough to dazzle and entangle a boy of Charley's sort. But then, what had happened after all to justify her in assuming that this was the girl's motive and intention? Absolutely nothing, except perhaps that it happened to be Charley, and who could help being in love with Charley, for all his spectacles? We, in this story, know more about Miss Straker than Peggy did. Yet, for anything we know, she may have been troth-plight to some other young gentleman elsewhere, without having overtly deceived anybody. Unless, indeed, you hold that she ought to have said to Charles, "That's the end

of the songs—now go—I'm engaged," or, "Leave hold of my hand, Mr. Heath, it is another's; a fair shake is one thing, but——"; and so on. It always seems to us that it would be safer to forbid friendship between what Mrs. Smith called young ladies and gentlemen of opposite sexes, than to pretend to allow it and then be so nice and critical about the demeanour of the former. Especially as we are so very easy-going about the latter. This tirade of ours applies, however, only to Miss Straker's attitude up to the date of her visit to Hyde Park Gardens. After that, discrimination is called for.

As to the visit, it was a success. There was no hitch in the singing, and no dissentient voice about its value. The young lady was looking her best; and that, as we have said, was very striking when the line of sight was not exactly at right angles to the axis of her eyeballs; it improved also in inverse ratio of their inclination. Charles was internally triumphant, with the slightest reservation—analogous to the one Peggy had made in another connection. "They could all see what a fine singer she was, at any rate!" There were rates at which they could not see something else, not specified. But there were many other things which one *could* see, at any rate. Ellen said boldly that one of these was that she wasn't a lady, and had evidently never been in good society. "You're a nice young lady to talk," said her father; "why, you've only been in good society yourself thirteen years."

"There now!" said the monkey, loftily, "that shows how much Papa knows about things. As if I was in any society at all. Why, I'm not out yet!"

"Then I vote you shut up!" said Dan, the youngest boy. "Alice and I think she's awfully jolly. Don't we, Alice?" Now none of these young people had had much opportunity of forming an opinion, having only been in the room for a limited term, and then on tolerance as it were.

"What does Alice-for-short think?" said Charles. "Come and tell me, Alice-for-short." And Alice comes, ending with a leap on to Mr. Charles's knee.

"I *th*ink," she says, struggling on the initial to avoid saying fink. "I *th*ink the same what Polly thinks."

"What does Polly think?" Alice warms up to narrative with her eyes sparkling, and holding very tight to Mr. Charles's watch-chain.

"Polly thuth-inks—Miss Straker's—quite, quite beautiful! Polly seed her—sawed her—of coorth! She came into Polly's room. To see in the glass and take off her shawl. And oh, *such* a funny old woman!"

"And Polly said she was quite beautiful? Go ahead, Alice."

"Yes, only other words. Polly said, 'Just like me, just like me,' and I said who. And he said, 'Straker,' very loud. And I called him a vain bird—yes, I did." And Alice adds emphasis with nods.

"Perhaps Polly meant her mother, Alice?" suggests Peggy, with gravity. But Alice gives a long incredulous shake of the head. She knows Polly better than that.

"Well!" said Charles, after more comparison of notes about the funny old woman and her daughter. "At any rate, Miss Straker has Polly's good opinion." It is extraordinary how often this reservation-phrase came in. She had a wonderful voice, at any rate. She had great facility, at any rate. She had beautiful hair, beautiful hands, teeth, figure, etc., all at any rate. Charles liked her, at any rate. Peggy didn't dislike her, at any rate. Everybody used the expression without noticing that every one else had done so too. However, in spite of this, the visit was on the whole a success.

If we had been Charles and had wanted to avoid an appearance of being in love with Miss Straker, in the interval between this party and a larger one to which musical influence was to be invited, we should not have acted as he did. In our opinion, he would have done better to discontinue sittings altogether at the Studio, and not to call unnecessarily at Warren Street. Instead of which, what between arranging at every sitting for the day after to-morrow, and calling at the house in the evening to say to-morrow would do just as well, he contrived to see a very great deal of Miss Straker in the interim between the two parties. What precise form their interviewings took on these occasions need not be set down in detail; we are satisfied that the goblin would not have fallen asleep if she had not had full confidence in her daughter, and as for Charles we ourselves feel every confidence in him. No doubt their behaviour was unexceptionable. But what concerns this story is that when at the second party the young lady scored a most brilliant success, the opinion was freely expressed, in conversation about her and Charles, that "anybody could see." In dealing with interesting subjects of this class, Society does not always talk like a book. Speech in fragments is more expressive. Society confirmed and extended the verdicts of the family circle; the lady sang magnificently, looked well, was quite producible—all at any rate. But always there was this same reserve.

However, anybody could see! There was no doubt of that. And as everybody looked (perhaps even more than they were asked to

look), everybody did see. Peggy felt uneasy, fretted, distressed—but she could not say exactly why she shrank from hearing what she knew she should hear. There was a sort of stiffness, almost, between her and Charley—neither speaking to the other of Miss Straker, Peggy's feelings taking the form of secret commiseration for her brother, and his of a suspicion of it, coupled with as near an approach to resentment against it as he could feel where Peggy was concerned. Tension in various forms ran through the family. Charles's mother offered him an inanimate cheek to kiss and withdrew it on the spot. Hers was an attitude of regretful dignity under trial; of fulfilled foreknowledge of disaster slighted by a headstrong circle of relations; of an intention ultimately to bring to book the real *fons et origo malorum,* her husband. The boys were under tension in another sense. They were bottling up derision—waiting for the signal that should let them loose on their victim. Ellen alone, acknowledging no jurisdiction, bound by neither man nor Mrs. Grundy, attacked Charles boldly on the subject, and asked him his intentions to his face.

"I don't care what Miss Petherington says," said Miss Ellen, "I'm fourteen next July and I'm not going to hold my tongue and be shished. What I want to know is, *are* we going to have Miss Straker for a sister-in-law or are we not? Which is it to be? And that old Guy with the ribands for an aunt? No—Charley! It's no use your glaring and looking inscrutable. I mean to make you tell. Now, Charley dear—is it to be Miss Straker or is it not?" But Charles kept on looking inscrutable. "Is *what* to be Miss Straker, Jumping Joan?" he asked. It was a general nickname for Ellen, from a well-known nursery rhyme.

"Is—Miss—Straker—going—to marry you or *not*? Now is that plain, or shall I say it all over again? Is—Miss——" But Charles interrupted her to say Miss Straker hadn't asked to be allowed to, so far!

"Now isn't Charley ridiculous?" This was in appeal to Peggy, the only other person in the room. "As if one didn't know that ladies never propose!"

"Ladies never propose," said Charles, imperturbably, "without consulting the gentleman's little sister Joan. Not real ladies."

"Now isn't Charley irritating? Anyhow I shall ask Papa what *he* thinks. You see if I don't." But Charles and Peggy made but a poor job of a laugh over it, when Joan had departed. Peggy was more than half inclined to cry, in reality; while Charles could only say he really hadn't proposed to Miss Straker, after all! "I won't have you worried about it, my darling boy, anyhow," said

his sister, kissing him. And he felt in two minds about whether he wouldn't wash his hands of the whole concern, and pretend he wanted to go away and study in Rome, or something of that sort.

That evening he and his father were left alone, late.

"Charley boy," said the old gentleman, suddenly, "tell me about Miss Straker."

It was Charles's nature and instinct to meet every question (from his father certainly) in the spirit of the questioner, and to reply in full, without evasion or reserve. In the present case he hesitated, not from any desire to keep back information, but because he really could not see his way to wording it. It would have been an easement to him to be able to say: "I love this girl, and would marry her if I could. Will you consent to her if ever I can? Will you take her for your daughter, and help me to ask my mother to accept her too?" He could not manage this, and very strangely it was the first four words he could not fill out. He could have asked his father's consent to his marrying the lady easily enough. But although he could have affirmed his intention as to action, he shrank from anything that expressed or defined a feeling. Under pressure, he might have said grudgingly that he supposed he was what people call in love with her. But he would not have welcomed the obvious rejoinder—"If you only suppose it, hadn't you better try to live without her, for her sake and yours?" Because, you see, he had got to the point of wanting to marry her, and taking for granted that he would not, could not, want to marry her unless he loved her. What a pity he could not analyse his own feelings, and collate them with the fact that he had only known Miss Straker a few weeks!

"I can only tell you a very little about Miss Straker," said he, replying to his father's question. "What I can tell won't take long. She was introduced to me by a fellow artist, not as a professional model, but as a young lady whose circumstances were not very prosperous, and who would not mind earning a little money by sitting provided the artist was a friend, or a friend's friend—well introduced, I mean——" Charles hesitated a moment; his father may have been looking a little incredulous.

"How do professional models generally begin?" he asked. "Do they knock at an artist's studio, and say they feel like Hercules or Venus, and don't the artists want a model?" Charles laughed.

"Very often," he said, "especially Venus. Only, you quite understand? Venus wasn't in it this time." Yes, that was quite understood. "However, I'll tell you the rest I know about her.

Her father was a teacher of languages in Paris; whether he is living or not I am uncertain; there is some reluctance to speak of it and I don't like to ask—he may be a sweep. She has a younger brother named Maurice whom I have not seen yet, and a mother—as per sample the other day."

Charles then recapitulated the story of the singing experience, and honourably admitted how often he had been at Warren Street, and that he had found the house very attractive. If he did not state to a nicety the exact degree of familiarity that subsisted between him and the young lady, we feel sure that (if you have ever been young yourself) you will excuse him. Fancy, every time there was any little kissing or squeezing or tenderness, if you had to schedule it and frame a report! Charles, however, didn't mean to flinch from any essential in his confession.

"I know, Father," said he, "that what you wanted to know about was——"

"Exactly!" said his father. "About your own relation to her—is there anything you can tell me?"

"*Is* there any?" Charles reflected. "I am not sure that I should have her sanction for saying there was. She has never authorised me to do so. Nothing has passed between us that would make it unjustifiable in her to refuse me to-morrow, if I made her an offer of my invaluable self." This was stretching a point; but it was true this far, that the last time Charles parted from her at her mother's door, they parted in silence. Otherwise, the parting had been as loverlike as you would wish to see, or as the contributors would wish you shouldn't.

"What *is* your actual relation, my dear boy, at this moment?" Charles paused a moment—then replied:

"If nothing but the official truth is to be told, none at all—but the official truth would be a lie. In my own heart I hold myself pledged to her, and I believe she knows it. Whether she holds herself pledged to me I do not know. Have I any right to press her to say she does, when I have not had any professional success and may never have any—am still a mere student? When I took up the profession of an artist, I knew it was a lottery, and was quite determined not to involve any one else in the risks I incurred myself, I knew I might never be able to marry, and accepted the position." This sounded heroic, and Charles felt happy over it. But his father evidently did not.

"Are you sure you did accept the position?" said he. "It seems to me that a resolution never to marry was very little use, unless you also made up your mind never to fall in love—let alone not

showing it. You can't carry out the idea honestly short of running away from every girl you like."

Poor Charley looked very downcast. "I see it now," said he; "it's just as you say, Father! But, oh dear!—it *is* so insidious."

"Yes—it's quite celebrated for that quality." The old boy chuckled to himself over his son's candour—but was sorry for him all the more. "But wait a while, Charley boy, wait a while! Hope to see the way clear, and try to see straight."

All this occurred two or three days after the musical gathering, and the second day after the parting in Warren Street which we have hinted at above. Charles had received a note from Miss Straker in the morning asking him to put off his next visit till he should hear again from her. She had to go into the country for a day or two. The letter was not stamped; perhaps was brought by the brother (whom Charles had not so far seen), and left in the letter-box at No. 40.

When he got back to the Studio after the above interview with his father, he found another letter waiting for him from the young lady, with the postmark Watford. She had written from the country, and it was a long one—must have something in it. Charles's face beamed with satisfaction as he opened it. It changed as he read as follows:—

PARFITT'S FARM, ON THE RICKMANSWORTH ROAD,
NEAR WATFORD, MIDDLESEX.

MY DEAR MR. HEATH,

I have made up my mind I should write to you, but *do I do right?* I am inexperienced and do not know where to look for advice, for you have seen my Maman, and as for poor Maurice, he is a boy. But I know you are good and will believe me it is for *both our sakes* I speak.

I have been awake all night thinking of our parting last evening. And I am convinced it is right that I should speak without reserve. There should be *no concealments between us.*

I am convinced that it is better for both of us that we should not deceive ourselves. I feel sure, although I can scarcely tell you what makes me, that happiness is not possible for us except at a price I could not ask you to pay. I cannot ask you to *renonce your family for my sake.* You will say there is no need. But, indeed, indeed, I am right. Sometimes we women see these things more plainly than men. I can see so plainly that there is a gap between us. I cannot ask you to make this sacrifice for my sake.

Dear Mr. Heath, you must not blame me. You would not if you could know what pain it costs me to write this. But I know that *I am right* and that it is *for your happiness* that we should say good-bye. It is best that we should forget. Think of me only as your most affectionate friend—

L. S.

Do not, I beg, say one word of this nor show this letter to your good and beautiful sister. No one is to blame—but I am sure of what I say. Adieu!

Was this letter written with a full understanding of Charles's character, and an intention that he would behave exactly as he did behave? For of course its effect upon him was (and we say this hoping that we have made his character as clear to you as it is to ourselves) that, in the first place, he scarcely slept. In the next that, after an insufficient breakfast, he made straight for Euston Station to catch an early train for Watford. In less than an hour he was being driven to the address so circumstantially detailed in the letter. He was told at the house that Miss Lavinia had walked out but would be back shortly as breakfast was ready. He asked in which direction she had gone, and went to meet her. When she saw him, her exclamation was, "Oh, Mr. Heath—you cannot have got my letter." He made no immediate reply, but caught her in his arms, kissing her passionately. Then he said, in a voice that showed the tension of his feelings: "Your letter? It brought me here. But I will not have it so! You are mine and I am yours. Besides," he continued, becoming calmer, "indeed you are quite mistaken in imagining things about my family—they are not what you think them. What a silly girl you are!" But for all that he had his own misgivings.

We have said that we make no pretence of understanding Miss Straker. But we wish that it should be noted that if she *did* intend to bring about this result, no more skilful manipulation could have been resorted to. It might have failed completely with another man than poor simple, chivalrous Charley! Under the circumstances its effect was threefold. It assumed a more advanced stage in The Lover's Progress than was warrantable, or than it would have been safe to assume with every other man. A good many young gentlemen, as we understand, have even gone the length of kissing young ladies (not under mistletoes), and yet both would have been surprised to hear that there were to be no concealments between them. Secondly, under cover of this assumption, it made a very explicit declaration of the tender sentiments

of the writer without any appearance of over-forwardness on her part. Thirdly, and chiefly, it anticipated the censures of the higher respectabilities, and disarmed them by anticipation. How could even a Title have descended in wrath on the social surroundings of a girl who had of her own accord quoted them to free its son from the rash undertaking of a moment of heedlessness. But whatever suspicion passes through our mind, or yours, there was none in Charles's, as he accompanied Miss Straker back to the farm-house; where she was, as she explained, the guest for a day or two, of a friend she had made in the course of her musical adventures with Agents in London. Her name was Clara Parfitt, and she was a fellow victim with Miss Straker of the said Agents.

Naturally Charles, who had had no breakfast to speak of, accepted an invitation to stop on and have some more. He passed the morning intending to go by each train in succession, but they all snorted away audibly from the station without him; slowly at first as if to give him a chance to overtake them; and then faster and faster, even as trains relieved to have the matter settled. He stayed to dinner, an early mid-day dinner, farm-house wise. To be brief, he forgot himself entirely in a fool's paradise, and Clara Parfitt showed herself a model of sympathetic discretion; for she undertook tacitly to play propriety, and deserted the part without providing an understudy. What with one thing and another, the succession of deferred departures ended in his just catching the last train.

There were two roads to the station, and there had been some debate as to which way the gig which was to take him was to drive. One was the better road, the other the shorter. The couple were considerately left to make their adieux clear of company.

The night had clouded over, and cold sleety rain was beginning. By Charles's request, Miss Straker did not come out into the open. She remained under the honeysuckle porch; the gig was waiting at the other end of the garden walk.

"Good-bye, my dearest love!" said Charles. "Now remember! No more doubts—no more hesitations. You are mine and I am yours." And then, after such a farewell as becomes a lover, he was seated in the drifting rain beside the driver. "It's got rather late," he called back to her, "but we shall catch the train."

"Tell him to go that way," she called after him, and pointed to her left. The young man who drove turned round reluctantly. "The ro-ad's a bad ro-ad," he said, "but belike it's a surer one, taking count of the time."

Charles just caught his train. But whereas the young man who

walked over the gravel garden-path was joyous with an intoxication that comes only once in a life, the one that rode home in the railway train was miserable with a misgiving that by the time he reached Euston had grown to fever-point.

For the words, "tell him to go that way," were the words spoken by the woman at the Park gate, and the movement of the hand that pointed to the left was the movement of hers, and the voice itself was hers, and the figure. And the worst of it was that she had told him, unasked, that she herself had been, at the moment, elsewhere.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW PEGGY CALLED AGAIN ON MISS STRAKER, AND GOT LITTLE COMFORT FOR CHARLES. MISS STRAKER'S UNCERTAIN SOUND

CHARLES had promised to go to dinner at "the Gardens" next evening. He did not go, sending instead a note to Peggy, telling her not to expect him. He wasn't feeling very first-rate—nothing particular wrong; only a slight cold, and he thought it best to keep indoors for a day.

This was an unusual attitude for Charles. His normal course would have been, being unwell, to cab to the family mansion to be nursed. But he was always transparent, as Peggy said. She saw at once there was a screw loose. "It's Miss Straker, *somehow!*" she said, with insight. "I shall go and see." So on the morning of the third day after Charles's interview with his father, Peggy went to the Studio.

"Oh, Charley, dearest boy, what *is* the matter?" said she to the haggard worn-out figure she found there—"instead of her brother," was how it presented itself to her. Anything worse than a slight cold, or a reasonable disquiet, had not crossed her mind. "Yes—you're quite in a high fever, and I shall send for Rupert." She felt his hands and kissed him.

"No, Poggy-Woggy, please! We won't have Rupert just yet. I'll tell you all about it, and then I shan't be so bad. I didn't want to come home and have Joan jumping all over me."

"Very well, dear! Come and let's be quiet and you tell me all about it. Of course it's Miss Straker."

Of course it was; and as Charles told the whole truth, and wouldn't tell anything but the truth; and as he never could soften anything without showing obviously that he *was* softening; the story presented itself to Peggy as an ugly one enough. Still it was impossible to say that there were no circumstances whatever in which a young woman might be alone in a Park, yet blameless. Only, how about Exeter Hall? It was a case for absolute suspension of opinion, pending enquiry. Peggy was thoroughly aware that even in making such enquiries there would be danger. For the sister who (however warrantably) stickles, doubts, negotiates, opposes, in the preliminaries of a brother's marriage, must be pre-

pared to stand or fall by the event. If it comes about, she will be the sister in Law alone, not in affection, of her brother's wife; if it does not, her brother will pass through a crescendo movement of forgiveness, ending in a triumphant wedding-march with another lady, with gratitude *obbligato* to herself.

Peggy was wise, and took up the position that the matter *must* be cleared up at once, in justice to Miss Straker. It was probably easily explainable, if only we looked it in the face. "You stupid boy," said she, "you don't mean to say you would go on and marry this poor girl *without* speaking to her about this? Then why not speak now? As she herself said, there ought to be no concealments between you."

"No—Poggy darling! But fancy my going to her first thing after the way we parted only a few hours ago, and bursting all this on her only because of a sound in her voice, a movement of her hand. If it's all nonsense, as most likely it is, think of the figure I shall cut!"

"That's true enough," said Peggy, "I didn't think of that. But why shouldn't I go to see her, and try if I can't touch the point without scaring her? I should soon see if there was anything in it."

"How should you set about it?"

"Don't know—goosey!—till I try. I should be guided by the conversation. Now just you let me go and see her at once and see if I don't get enough to clear up the mistake—it's only a mistake, I'm sure!—and I'll come straight back here and put your mind at ease. Will she be at home?" Peace dawned in poor Charley's storm-worn heart, and he kissed his sister and called her a duck and an Angel. Yes, most likely she will be at home. So off goes Peggy straightway.

Poor Peggy! She had undertaken a difficult task. She felt like Judas as she kissed what she did not suppose was certain to become her sister on the cheek. "From what Charley tells me, dear Miss Straker," said she, "I think I may take it as certain that he has chosen you for his wife, and that you have chosen him for your husband. None of his family know it, except myself. And I have come at once to tell you that whoever my brother loves, I love, and to ask you, so far as I am concerned, to think of yourself as already one of our family." She felt that she had been rather making a speech, and wasn't sure she wasn't a humbug. Perhaps we all feel this whenever we say anything consecutive. Honesty is supposed to be fraught with jerks, and sincerity with sloppiness of style.

Miss Straker's eyes sought the ground, and the fine eyelids asserted themselves: "Oh, how kind—how generous of you, dear Miss Heath! How can you forgive me?"

"Forgive you for making my brother happy! That is easy enough," Peggy laughed. The conversation that followed was general—but on the same lines. Peggy, however, dwelt on the fact that her own action was quite independent of any of her family, whom she had no right to commit in any way. But, said she, no one of us would ever oppose Charley in anything he had at heart.

"I think he loves me," said Miss Straker. As she sat on the sofa beside Peggy, with her head drooped and her eyelids in evidence, she certainly looked well. If Peggy had seen her on the stage, she would have said how true to Nature. Seeing it done in daily life, some slight idea crossed her mind that it was like on the stage.

"You may be sure he always means what he says," said she, most untheatrically. But she had somehow to get on to the Park question. How should she do it? It got more and more difficult. Suppose she was to try round by Exeter Hall, and see if she could get a lift. "You are very fond of music," she went on; "so is Charley."

"I suppose I am fond of music—yes," said Miss Straker. "Sometimes I think I am not—but only that I happen to have a voice, and that has made me sing."

"You *must* be fond of music—or how could you stand an hour outside Exeter Hall, waiting for the doors to open?" Miss Straker looked blank.

"Oh no! I never did," said she.

"How very funny! Charles certainly told me you told him about standing outside Exeter Hall one evening."

Was it or was it not the case that Miss Straker was biting her lips, and looking a little pale? There was a pause of a few seconds before she spoke. When she did there was the least shade of snappishness in her tone.

"What can make Mr. Heath say so? It must have been somewhere else I said—the Egyptian Hall perhaps?"

"Very likely," said Peggy, conciliatorily, "but it doesn't the least matter. Charley made a mistake." For Peggy had got a little alarmed, and was not prepared to rush the position. "Perhaps," she said, "you are fonder of music than you think, and if you had to do altogether without it, you would miss it very much. I daresay you practise a great deal?" But Miss Straker did not answer

the question, and seemed uneasy. She went back to the previous conversation. "Are you sure he said *Exeter* Hall?"

"Quite sure." And as Miss Straker had revived the point herself, Peggy resolved to carry it a little further. "Quite sure. Because he said he must have been mistaken in fancying he saw you somewhere else the same evening."

There could be no doubt about it. Miss Straker was very disquieted. She twisted her fingers into one another, cleared her throat, and fidgeted as she sat.

"Where did he think he saw me?" she said. But the attempt to speak unconcernedly was not a success.

"In Regents Park coming through a gate into the inner circle, by the Botanic Garden. Some one was following the person he took for you, and she asked the man at the gate to say she had gone in the opposite direction." Miss Straker was certainly very pale.

"There is my mother," said she, as a knock came at the street-door. She left the room hurriedly, as though to meet her coming; but her steps mounted, audibly. One easily hears the difference between going upstairs and going down.

"Et puis! Ne se trouve-t-elle pas à la maison—ma fille?" said the Goblin, coming in a minute or so later. "Ow-do-you-do, Mees-seece? She-as-leave-you-by-your. Self-eet-ees-rude." Peggy, wisely abstaining from school-room French, said Miss Straker had just gone upstairs. She was afraid she might be unwell.

"She was veriwell zeessmor. Ning I will go and see," said the Goblin, and went upstairs.

Then Peggy heard scraps of a colloquy which was (like the one Charles had overheard under the same circumstances) probably more audible owing to the speakers' taking for granted it would not be understood.

"Non—non! Je ne me sens pas malade . . . ne chuchotte pas . . . ni tu n'as pas besoin de beugler. N'est il pas possible de parler à demi-voix sans vociférer?" . . .

"Tu me reproches toujours! . . . Mais, qu'est ce quelle a dit—en effet?"

"C'était lui!" The rapid speech disappeared behind a closed door, and became a murmur. Presently the door opened, and she caught Miss Straker's words.

"Dis comme je le vous ai dit! Moi je ne bouge pas. Je reste ici." The old woman said something which might have been "Mon tyran," and came downstairs.

"Elle a un peu de vertige, ma fille. She-as-geedness-of-de-head. Mais, Mademoiselle m'a bien compris! Ce n'est rien!" For

Peggy had been betrayed in a rash moment into saying in French that she comprehended. It let Madame loose, releasing her from English.

"Ce n'est rien! ça va passer—affaire d'une demi-heure! Plait-il? Mais comment faut-il vous en aller—si peu de temps! Vraiment, si vous vous en allez, je dois payer l'amende. Elle me blâmera." But Peggy insisted on departing. She had distinctly heard Miss Straker say she would not come down again, so where was the use of stopping? Neither she nor the Goblin really cared for conversation, and the latter very likely did not know how quick events had moved. If she had she would have broached the subject, instead of talking about how her daughter bullied her. She appeared to be referring to a recent blowing-up, without considering that Miss Heath was not supposed to know anything about it.

"Ma fille me fait toujours le bouc-émissaire de ses bévues. Vous savez bien ce que c'est—le bouc-émissaire?"

But Peggy didn't know, and the Goblin didn't know what the English equivalent was. This made both feel the limitedness of their communion; so, after a little more reciprocal misunderstanding, for civility's sake, leave-taking developed naturally without dissatisfaction to either.

Peggy went straight back to her brother, thoroughly unhappy about the whole concern. What did it matter if Miss Straker was unable to account to him for the fact that she was out alone late in Regents Park? There might be a thousand ways of explaining that. But nothing could clear away the apparently deliberate falsehood about her having been elsewhere at the time. And what Peggy had overheard seemed to supply the motive for it. "C'était lui," the last words she had heard as the door closed, could only mean that Miss Straker had caught sight of some one she thought Charles, and had feared that *he*—whoever he was—also had seen *her,* and had then fudged up the Exeter Hall story to cover contingencies. Why, if she recognised him, she should not speak to him and get his companionship and protection home was a mystery to Peggy. But then she forgot that a young lady who did not know her brother as she did, might not think him, as she did, an Angel—or if human, a *preux chevalier* at least.

She told Charley all her interview with the daughter, and so far as she could be sure of the French, of the rest of her conversation with the mother. It was all miserably unsatisfactory; almost damnatory, so far as telling a lie went. Peggy saw, before she left Charles, that his feverish misery and anxiety were changing to

angry conviction. Fearing he should rush into an extreme in this direction, and do Miss Straker more injustice, she tried to soften matters. "You know, dear Charley," she said, "there are so many things it might have been. And think what a girl's terror would be of one false construction that might have been put on her being there alone at that time. Do you know; I almost think I myself might have gone the length of a good round lie under the circumstances."

"No, you wouldn't, Peg. You would have up and explained. You're only saying that to exonerate her."

"Oh, Charley! You're getting too hard on her before you know. Now do, dear boy, do as I say. Or let it be this way—I'll write to her at once, and say that I by my stupidity have made you uncomfortable. Put it all on me."

"What good will that do? I should have to tell her when and how I recognised her—the night before last when I came away! Oh, Peggy, it will never be the same thing again. It's all spoiled!" And the poor fellow broke down and was so miserable, that Peggy saw there was only one remedy possible—unreserved explanation. If Miss Straker collapsed, and Charles threw her off as worthless, was that such an evil? It would be less pain for him to know the truth now and get it over, than to be undeceived about her too late. Besides, who could say how completely she might not clear herself? Anyhow, she was entitled to a frank indictment and a fair trial.

It was settled that Charles should see her forthwith and should speak plainly. Peggy was bidden to stay a week in the country with a friend. She had to be off very soon to pack: in fact, she looked at her watch over it. But Charley would write to her all about it directly, wouldn't he? And he wouldn't go and do anything desperate, that was a dear boy, would he? Peggy kissed him exhaustively, and said good-bye. But she went away with misgivings in her heart.

CHAPTER XXIV

OF MISS PRYNNE'S SECOND GHOST, AND HER CAT, MOSES. SHE IS NOT SO SCRAGGY, AFTER ALL. PSYCHICAL RESEARCH. HOW CHARLES BROKE MISS STRAKER QUITE OFF. MISS GEORGIE ARROWSMITH. PEGGY WILL SEE MISS STRAKER AGAIN

Poor Charley could not screw his courage up to sticking point. It was perhaps a relief to him that Mr. Jerrythought appeared, and took him away to lunch. This gentleman, the largeness of whose heart seemed capable of welcoming the widest possible circle of friends, had recently been absorbed into the bosoms of the Miss Prynnes on the second floor. This *rapprochement* had been effected by a second appearance of the same ghost in the sacred bedchamber of the ladies, at an early hour of the morning; when there was no doubt the door was locked, and was found locked by the occupants; who when full daylight came mustered courage to get up and overhaul the apparition of the gloaming. Its authentication as a spectre had cleared Mr. Jerrythought's character, and expressions of the remorse of the two youngish ladies for the injustice they had done him were reported without reservation by Mrs. Farwig, whom we think we have mentioned before. You may remember perhaps that she did for the Miss Prynnes. She also did out Mr. Jerrythought. But these doings out were sporadic—she only done the top-tenant out now and again, just to get him a little tidy, or wherever would he 'a' been? Her function in the incident on hand was to convey to Mr. Jerrythought the apologies of the two ladies, and their sense of the injustice they done him, without committing either party to an acknowledgment that it knew the other party giv' Mrs. Farwig leave to say any such a remark passed. Nobody was to know that anything of any sex whatever had been seen prowling about the apartments of its anti-types.

Nevertheless the second-floor had felt that amends were due to the attics, and had wished them a good-morning, on the stairs. The attics were not going to miff off and be huffy, and had responded. Both were conscious that the substratum of events was the ghost; but that if alluded to at all, it would have to be when acquaintance was maturer. Another step forward was made owing to a Persian cat, the property of the Miss Prynnes, finding that a

chair in the attic studio was good to sleep, curl up, and stretch on. The first time this cat, whose name was Moses, appeared in Mr. Jerrythought's room enjoying a refreshing slumber on the said chair, that gentleman, not realising its identity, conceived the idea of taking it by the scruff of the neck and ejecting it. But Moses was capable of intense deliberation combined with inconceivable rapidity of action. When the scruff was within a yard of the hand that was to take it, Moses began to consider placidly what he should do when it should be within a foot. He turned the matter well over in his mind, without undue haste, and decided that if it came nearer he would get ready to move towards the door. When it was an inch off, he varied his programme and went away with a flicket, in the opposite direction. He left the room after trying to rip the floor up, and yawning. But having seen that the chair was good, he reappeared in it at intervals (without allowing himself to be influenced by closed doors and windows) and when missed downstairs would be reclaimed by his owners. Probably he was mainly responsible for the visiting acquaintance between the second-floor and the attics having so mellowed that comparison of notes about the ghost had become possible by the time Charles and Mr. Jeff were lunching together at Cremoncini's, at the present moment of this story. Even Charles's painful preoccupation (ascribed by Jeff to stomach) did not altogether prevent his paying attention to this last appearance of the ghost. Let us follow Jeff's narrative:—

"She ain't so very scraggy when you come to shake hands with her—the youngest one I mean. It's more as a couple it tells, and then you notice it. No! I should say the youngest—she's Miss Dorothea—didn't run over eight and twenty to thirty. *She* saw the ghost. They admitted they was in bed—but then, of course, I'm gettin' like an old acquaintance——"

"But I say, Jeff, this was before it was daylight, as I understand."

"Yes, sort o' half-light."

"Then where the dickens would they be *but* in bed?" And to this Jeff replies enigmatically, "Some women are like that, when single." And rather makes a parade of his knowledge of the varieties of this strange animal.

"The scraggiest one—she's Miss Laura—she didn't see the ghost, or only just. She's an excellent sort of female, you know, Charley; I've nothing to say against her—only it's no use trying to draw a veil over her. It would be affectation! Because forty she is, and scraggy to a degree——"

"But about the ghost—the ghost! How much did the scraggy one see?"

"She couldn't see because her eyes don't come open easy first thing in the morning. But Miss Dorothea saw her quite plain. She had a lot of grey hair and a sort of sacque as they used to call 'em—flowered silk—and one hand to her side. I told 'em in my opinion it was the ghost of the bones in the cellar—you recollect?"

"Rather! Why, it's not a twelvemonth ago. But don't you see what it is, Jeff? They read all about the bones in the newspapers, and how there was a flowered silk ball-dress, and then they go and see a ghost to match. They don't see exactly the same thing—that would be flat and uninteresting. They make the dress a peignoir, and the powdered toupee comes out grey hair. Then the bones had been run through, so they stick her hand to her side. But that's what it is, of course!" The code of honour in matters of Psychical Research is so very queer that Charles thought nothing of consciously keeping back Alice's detail of the hand on her side. He was not going to encourage superstition.

"Now—I say!" Jeff is indignant. "What on earth have the Miss Prynnes to gain by cookin' up a ghost?"

"They don't cook it up, my dear Jeff! Of course Miss Theodora *thought* she saw the ghost, just as she described it."

"Thought be hanged!" says Jeff. "Besides, her name's Dorothea." He is very unconvinced, but it is because a slight has been put upon *his* ghost. If the ghost had originated elsewhere he might have gone on another tack.

Charles's temper is not at his best, because of his circumstances. They make him supercilious and irritating. "I should be inclined to refer the second ghost to a mere reflex action of the nerve-centres."

"Reflex Grandmother!" interjected Jeff; "I tell you what, Charley! If you're going to talk rot, I shall 'ook it."

"Reflex action of the nerve centres, consequent on having seen the first. The first one is less difficult to account for. It was out in the passage, and we haven't got to deal with the difficulty of the locked door."

"Who saw a ghost himself? Come now, Charley 'Eath, answer that! Who saw a feminine form in a flowered silk dressing-gown?"

"Of course I did! I was coming to that, only you're in such a hurry, Jeff! Well, we know *that* one wasn't a ghost, because I never see ghosts. I ought to know. Well! Mrs. Farwig goes and talks all about that ghost to the Misses Prynnes, and they being only a couple of silly hysterical women, of course go and see a

ghost of the same pattern. They'll see some more like it directly —you see if they don't!"

"Now, do, you, mean, to say," says Jeff, see-sawing his words, as one who warms up to argument, "that Miss Dorothea Prynne is a lady you wouldn't believe on oath? And if so, why not a ghost on the stairs as well as anything else?"

"Because of its intrinsic improbability." Charles is rather proud of this, but Jeff flouts it. "Intrinsic Grandmother!" says he. He is in the habit of resorting to this form of sneer. It is not complex, and appears to be to some minds exhaustive.

The discussion of the ghost goes on as such discussions do, not exactly confirming the opinions of the controversialists (for they may have none), but strengthening their respective determinations to uphold the first thesis each has committed himself to. This is called sticking to the point, and each enjoins the other to stick to it at intervals; always meaning of course his own point, not the other's. If the discussion is about a ghost, neither cares much about the question, but each is usually in love with his own self-assertion, as in the present case.

When each had told the other several times that he was perfectly unreasonable, Charles and Jeff went back to work; the latter perhaps to wonder at himself for having espoused the cause of Miss Dorothea's testimony so strongly, the former to recollect how unhappy he was and what an unpleasant task he had before him. For even if some explanation was forthcoming, the Exeter Hall story *was* a fib—must have been!

As soon as ever he could brood over his trouble again undisturbed, he brooded. Did it cross his mind, we wonder, in the smallest possible degree that he had just been able to take a certain interest in a wrangle about a ghost, in spite of it? However, it is quite true, no doubt, that it came back upon him in full force when left to himself.

He brooded continually, but could not bring himself to go straight to Miss Straker, as he ought to have done, and as he had arranged to do with Peggy. Somehow it had seemed easier to him to do it, in her presence. His courage had failed him now, and he could not even bring himself to write until quite late in the evening. Then after a long letter to Peggy, in which he said, "I *am writing* to Lavinia,"—a convenient ambiguity,—he wrote another to the latter saying that all must be at an end between them. She herself had truly said that there must be no concealments on either part, and he could not but feel after what his sister had told him of their interview two days since that his own confidence

in her had been misplaced; as apparently in order to avoid inquiry into something possibly quite blameless in itself she had resorted to a statement that was at least a subterfuge, and after such a thing had once come to his knowledge it was impossible that his feelings for her should remain unchanged. She had not treated him as he had treated her. She could imagine what it cost him to say farewell, but he could see no other course open to him. He had much better have saved himself so many words, and written: "You told me a lie about Exeter Hall, and you must have had a good reason; so I won't marry you. It's off!" Why must letter-writers always be so sententious?

"Oh dear—oh dear!" said Peggy, when she had read through Charles's letter to her, containing an abstract of the above, "what a mess that dear boy does get into whenever I'm not there to look after him!" And then under pledges of strictest secrecy she told the facts and showed the letter to a very great friend, "the eldest daughter where she was staying" (we absolve ourselves from any share in the construction of this phrase, by inverted commas), and that young lady's remarks are worth recording. Though only twenty-three, she had had great experience.

"Fancy breaking it off on high moral grounds! As if *that* could last!" Peggy felt her own position called for some justification.

"I didn't *want* it broken off, Georgie dear. I only wanted all to be clear as soon as possible."

"Well, of course," said Georgie, who always posed as an authority, "if there's to be a row, the sooner the better! It's no use holding in—it's worse when it comes."

"It's such an injustice to the poor girl——"

"Bother the poor girl!" interjects Georgie.

"——to pass judgment on her in this sort of way. What can she possibly do? Write and beg pardon? What would you do yourself now, Georgie?"

"I should write fast enough. But I shouldn't beg pardon. What would it be for? I might confess to the wrong murder. No! I should tell him it was clear he had never loved me—that he didn't love me now—that it was evident he loved some one else—naming who, where possible. I should point out that he had slighted and insulted me, but for all that I should never love another, and I should wind up by suggesting that I should pass the rest of my life praying for his happiness."

"But it would be so much better to have a complete explanation and get it all clear——"

"Would it though? Now look here, Margaret! My way, the

chap would be on his knees, begging my pardon, and promising never to do so any more. Explanation-way, it would be jaw, jaw, jaw, and there would never be an end of it! Besides, in affairs of this sort it's no use bringing in foreign matter—morality and justice and right and all that sort of thing. However, no doubt you would be glad for this one to come to an end—now wouldn't you?"

"The only thing that would make me glad would be that Charley should be happy, and now he won't be."

We are sorry that Peggy's friend, Miss Arrowsmith, has no more place in this story, because it seems to us that there is much in her suggestion that, in the court of Love, Love himself should be judge and jury, police and witnesses, usher, gaoler, executioner—that he should write the records, grant the reprieves, forge the fetters, sharpen the axes, keep the key of the stocks—reward the deserving, and reprimand the culprits. We have re-worded her; but if that was what she meant, we are inclined to agree.

Peggy wrote back to Charles begging him to go at once and give poor Lavinia a chance to defend herself. She also wrote to Rupert, ordering him to go without delay to Charles, and telling him what to say. He did as he was bid, going straight to the Studio.

"That's what Peg says I am to say, Charley," said he, when he had finished.

"Miss Straker can write," said Charles, grimly. "What do you think yourself, Paracelsus?"

"Tell me more about the Park incident. Was this man with her there?"

"No—he was following at some distance. She might have outwalked or outrun him." He put his palette and brushes down, and leaned his mahl-stick against the angle of the chimney-piece; obviously, a pipe was better than trying to work when you couldn't work.

"I don't think anything of the incident in itself," he resumed, "if only she hadn't told that Exeter Hall story! No—Paracelsus dear! I'm not the only man that ever was disillusioned. There's nothing for it but to forget it." And Charles sits on and pulls at a consolatory pipe, gazing at the fire on the hearth (for fire-time came again, with decision, some time since), and his friend stands opposite to him, in all the fulness of his own triumphant happiness, and feels a greater pity from the contrast of their lots. But, whatever his instructions were from headquarters (perhaps heartquarters would be nearer the mark) he was not going to say a word that would start the hare afresh. It was clearly best that Charley should pass through this experience, and——

And what? What Paracelsus nearly said to himself was, "And marry a decent woman." But he didn't quite say it; he paused and amended the unissued thought into, "Peggy will find somebody to console him."

But Peggy wasn't going to begin this quest till her conscience was quite happy about Miss Straker. When she came back a few days after, she found Charles had received no reply to his letter. "But I tell you this plainly, Charley," said she, "if I had received such a letter as yours myself, I should have torn it up in a rage. *I* wouldn't have answered it, and I'm not surprised at Lavinia not having done so." She was to be Lavinia still, in Peggy's mouth at least. Was Charles quite certain he welcomed the fact, after doing so much forgetting—of which the first forty-eight hours had been so very painful and laborious? Would he not rather have had some more definite assistance towards his present attitude?

"I tell you what I shall do," said his sister, "unless you positively order me not. I shall go to Lavinia myself and talk about it, and get at the whole truth. I suppose, Charley dear——"

"Yes, Poggy-Woggy—what?"

"I suppose that if it all turns out a lot of mares'-nests, you *will* be glad—*really* glad?"

"Oh, Poggy dearest, who wouldn't be glad in my circumstances? What do you take me for?"

"A dear silly old boy. I shall go to Lavinia to-morrow, anyhow!"

How much better it would be if everybody always let every one else's love affairs alone—shut their eyes tight and looked the other way. But we don't want to blame Peggy, mind you!

CHAPTER XXV

CHARLES AND JEFF GO TO SEE VERRINDER. HE WILL NOT USE HIS OLD PAINTS ANY MORE

CHARLES felt much too *désœuvré* to work effectually, and in the course of his broodings over the position found himself sandwiching into his personal reveries a good deal of Jeff's ghost; that was the description his mind recognised the last appearance by. He regarded his own as more authentic; Alice's original venture as the most so. They lost value in proportion to the amount of suggestion preceding their occurrence.

The ghost reminded him that he had never been to hunt up Verrinder again. That would be a nice thing to do now. He would get Jeff to come and they would go together. It was the fifth of November; a grey negative day—wasn't going to snow—wasn't going to rain—much too apathetic! It would be a capital day for the fireworks. So Charles and Jeff decided, as they chartered a promising hansom for the expedition. They spoke of "the Fireworks" as one of the necessities of the year—as Protestants and Englishmen!

Jeff was acquainted with the general bearing Verrinder had on the house, and understood that light might be thrown on Charles's ghost by him, and indirectly on his own. However much Charles might regard it as "purely subjective," he intended to appropriate any illumination thrown on the one as equally applicable to the other. He spoke unhesitatingly of both subjectivity and objectivity as Grandmother. His frequent use of this expression compels repetition *ad nauseam*.

"I was in two minds," said Jeff as the cab rolled away, "whether to invite the Miss Prynnes to come too (of course askin' you first, Charley, don't you know)! Only they couldn't both have rode bodkin."

"You're a nice chap! Besides, I don't see why the Miss Prynnes should be in it."

"They saw the ghost. No! Really, Charley 'Eath, you may make game; but Miss Dorothea's a very intelligent person."

"We couldn't have done it without two cabs, for all that." Both

instinctively avoid discussion of how to divide the pictured images of the four between the cabs they couldn't have done without, in order not to grapple with the point of which should ride with which. It is the elder Miss Prynne (a mere vague potentiality in this case) that is the real stumbling-block. Charles feels a change of subject would be considerate.

"I say, Jeff! You've lived in Paris. What does a Mossoo mean by a misery-nosegay?"

"A what?"

"A misery-nosegay."

"Somebody's been 'oaxin' you. What's the French for it?"

"A Bouquet-misère. What's that if it isn't a misery-nosegay? An old party said it to my sister Peggy."

Jeff puzzled about, trying the words over and over, and at last announced that he'd spotted it. "It's what the Mossoos call that picture of Holman Hunt's—'Le bouc-émissaire.' The scrape-goat, don't you know, in the Wilderness. But then they call all sorts of things all sorts of things! You never know where to have 'em."—And with such conversation they whiled away the time during the drive to Lambeth.

The neighbourhood seemed replete with Guys—more so than in what Charles accounted the more civilised regions north of the Thames. A vigorous Protestantism seemed to flourish. As they stood on the doorstep of the house Verrinder lived in the attics of, an extremely young group of anti-Papists assailed their ears with the corrupt and worthless modern substitute for the original exhortation to sympathise, which was sufficient in our youth. In old times they would have paraded their inability to see any reason why Gunpowder Treason should ever be forgot. Now they said, "Guy Fox Guy, hit him in the eye," which seemed unhistorical. The Guy, in their case, was a very small boy, conducted by hand, owing to his mask not fitting, and obscuring his vision. He solicited a penny to burn himself—an appeal that would have touched a harder heart than Charles's.

The first pulls—plausible ones—at two of the bells on the door-posts were ignored. The second series, backed by a knock that spoke impatience, was answered with reluctance. The function of the door-opener, when it was at last opened, appeared to be to oppose ingress, yet to act as a medium of communication with a concealed authority. The result was not encouraging. The authority would not undertake to say Mr. Verrinder was not in, but would not interest itself actively. Its manner suggested disbelief that any one could possibly want to see Mr. Verrinder. "Do you know

Mr. Verrinder?" it shouted from its lair at the end of a long passage. Charles said *yes,* unquestionably! "I suppose you know he's right up atop o' the house?" Charles said he had been up to Mr. Verrinder's room once before. The authority thereon appeared in its shirt-sleeves, rolled up, and stood soaping its arms at the end of the passage. "I suppose," said their owner, a sallow and depressed man, "I may rely on you two gentlemen to say I never give leave, to exornerate me from bein' 'awled over the coals; if so, up you goes, and welcome!" Charles gave the required undertaking, and the door-ward relaxed. "It ain't Mr. Verrinder so much as my missis I'm keepin' in view," said the soaper, still luxuriating in soap-strokes all down his arms.

Charles and Jeff passed up the wooden stairs; not followed by the girl who had opened the door, but conscious that the soaper came out along the passage and glanced up after them.

He went back, seeming satisfied. No tenant appeared on the way up, except a sudden young man, who flung his door wide open, said abruptly, "Oh, I beg your pardon," quite unreasonably, and shut it again with a slam.

The door of the room Charles had entered by on his previous visit was closed, and no answer came to his knock. He knocked more than once. Verrinder evidently wasn't there. "I shall risk trying the door, as we've come such a long way," said Charles; "he may be asleep." But the door was locked. They pushed cards under the door; then turned and went downstairs.

Charles went down in front. Jeff did not follow closely. "It's no use stopping, Jeff," said Charles, "we must give it up and leave a message." But Jeff hung back. "What's the rumpus, Jeff?" said Charles from below.

"Just come up here half-a-minute. It's rum! At least I can't make it out." Charles went up again. The reason he was summoned was that Jeff, as his eye came on the level with the keyhole, saw that it was black; while he had noticed that light was coming through the opening they had pushed the cards through.

"The key's in the lock," said Jeff.

"What of that?"

"How did he lock the door when he went out?"

"There's another lock."

"No, there isn't. He's in there still."

"Oh no! He came out by the other door—there's a door to the other room. Come along, Jeff! We'll mention it downstairs. Depend on it, Mr. Soapy knows. Come along!" But for all that Charles remembers clearly that pictures were piled thick against

that other door. It was from there Verrinder took the portrait of Phyllis.

"Hain't you found him?" says the soapy one, coming forth dry, and pulling on an overcoat. He has been smartening for an excursion, and must be utilised before he reaches the street door. He means going, clearly.

"We haven't found him. And his door's locked inside. And the key's in the door."

"S'pose he's out!" The speaker ignores the difficulties in the way of this solution—perhaps does not perceive them. "Amelia!" A response comes from the basement.

"Mr. Verrinder's gone out, ain't he?" The maid-of-all-work comes to the surface.

"He hasn't took in his milk—nor yet the can—nor yet I haven't heard him." Then she ends up, as it strikes Charles, most inconsecutively. "I shouldn't worrit, Mr. Tatnall, if I was you." But she waits, wiping her hands on her apron.

Mr. Tatnall appears to be considering—in fact to have for the moment put aside his intention to go out. He seems to hope that sucking his cheeks in and feeling for inspiration on their new-shaved surfaces with his thumb and middle finger will lead to results, but does not seem satisfied with what he gets. Presently he half asks, half affirms: "He's been at his game again," the questioning half being addressed to Amelia, who in return says, "What did I say to Missis?"

"What *is* Mr. Verrinder's game?" asked Charles.

"What did the 'Pothecary call it this time?" Thus Mr. Tatnall to the servant, who still stands wiping her hands on her apron, and seeming to pin her faith on it.

"Mr. Verrinder said go to the photograph shop. That's where I got it."

"That's about it, gentlemen!" said Tatnall, beginning to move away satisfied. "He stoopifies himself with chloroform. He'll come round soon. You knock at his door again in a quarter of an hour—he'll answer to you. Give him a quarter of an hour." And off goes Mr. Tatnall, more interested in his appointment than in his top-tenant.

Charles and Jeff decide on giving him a quarter of an hour; the former very uneasy, remembering that Kavanagh had purchased his cyanide of a photographer. They will take a walk round, and call in again shortly. An inspiration seizes Amelia, and she takes her hands from her apron to point through the open street-door.

"If you was to walk round by the Horspital and ask for Dr.

Fludyer, he knows Mr. Verrinder." Her speech is full of elision and implication, but it serves its turn. Charles quite understands, and knows "the Hospital" is Bethlehem Hospital, or Bedlam.

Dr. Fludyer is easily attainable—knows Verrinder—had better come round, and will be ready in a minute.

"Can a man kill himself with Chloroform?" asks Charles, as they walk briskly towards the house.

"He's only got to take enough of it."

When they arrive, Amelia has reblacked her hands, and has to have a new wipe. They all go upstairs. This time the sudden young man only peeps out discreetly and retires in silence.

They knock at the door again—under tension. "He was there last night," says Amelia, perhaps anticipating an enquiry.

"I'll take on myself to have the door broken open," says the doctor, after a moment's consideration. "Unless there's another way in." Charles remembers the lead-flat sunk in the roof, and suggests the question of its attainability. There may be a trap-door. Yes, it is slowly elicited that there is. Up them steps; 'ooked up to the ceilin'. Also that there is a young man has been out on the roof many's the time—and he may happen to be downstairs now. Amelia goes to seek him—though why it has been so difficult to get at this trapdoor and this young man is not clear. However, he comes with alacrity, is out on the leads and finds the window unfastened, and gets through and opens the door in much less time than it took to discover his existence. How the room smells of chloroform!

There are the remains of a scanty supper on the table—or rather what gives the impression that the supper was scanty. On a peg on the half-open door of a cupboard Charles identifies the napless hat and highly polished coat. A defective umbrella stands open on its circumference to dry in a corner. Last night was drizzly. He had come in wet, had eaten in his loneliness whatever two cold chops off the neck and the balance of those cheerless potatoes represented; and had (so it is silently supposed) gone away to rest on the other side of that closed door each hesitates to open, either from doubt or certainty of what may be found on the other side.

Dr. Fludyer acts first—as he knew him best—and goes into the room; the others follow. The smell of chloroform gets stronger. The bed is occupied. The doctor, going first, turns down the cover-lid, which has all the appearance of being pulled tight, for comfort, round the back of the nightcapped head. He takes hold of the shoulder, and shakes the motionless figure. But it remains stiff

and unresponsive. It will never respond to human touch again. Whatever its occupant's story on this earth was, it is over now.

But he must have become insensible and died, one might almost say, in comfort. The figure is in the attitude that most courts sleep—a perfect pre-arrangement for a long night's rest. The only evil feature is the towel pressed close round the mouth and nose, and firmly held in front with both hands. He had poured the chloroform on it, and so lay down to sleep. "Yes," said Dr. Fludyer, as he removed it, "he did this every night; at least every night when he couldn't sleep without it—most nights, I fancy. This time he took more than he reckoned on. About twelve hours ago! . . . What? . . . Oh no!—nothing to be done. Stone-dead."

The three men and the girl go back into the sitting-room without a word, closing the door very gently. All are white but the doctor; the girl is ashy white. Of course it is all in the doctor's line, he is merely grave—to hurt nobody's feelings. In this case it is doubtful if there is any one to hurt. "I will see to all there is to be done," he says; "there is no immediate hurry. Did you two gentlemen know poor Verrinder well?" Charles tells in the fewest words how very little he has known of him, and ends by volunteering to be of any use.

"There is nothing to be done that I cannot do," says Dr. Fludyer; "unless you know of any of his relations? He assured me that he was absolutely alone in the world, except for the one person through whom I happened to know him. A patient over at the Hospital." He nods out at the window, towards the dome of the madhouse. He speaks with reticence, and Charles does not like to press enquiry. His acquaintance with the dead man had been so slight. He repeats that he has told everything he knows of him, and feels that he and Jeff have no reason for remaining; may even be *de trop*. But the doctor continues speaking of him:

"I knew him fairly well—poor chap! So far as any one could know him. But he was very reserved. I don't think he was really so poor as he seemed—but he would not spend anything on himself. Once he said to me that he was putting by money in case he should ever have a home again." The doctor had followed Charles's glance round the bare apartment.

"Will there be an inquest?" said Charles.

"I think probably not. I don't think you need anticipate being bothered about that."

"I wasn't thinking of the trouble."

"Well, anyhow, I think there won't. I shall make an autopsy—

there's sure to be fatty heart or something of the sort. The dose of chloroform I allowed him could not have killed a healthy man."

"How do you know he didn't exceed it?"

"I don't know—he may have done so. I could only give him directions and trust to his doing as I told him. I'm afraid when there's a craving for anæsthetics, promises are worth very little."

"He didn't kill himself, I suppose?" said Charles, hesitatingly.

"Intentionally? Oh no—oh dear, no! He only did what he may have done fifty times before, for anything I know. He overdid the dose, and this time the heart-complaint met it half-way. You say you met him at the Royal Academy Schools? He was talking about them to me a little while ago—said one of the young men had given him three tubes of colour—seemed very much pleased about it."

"I recollect. One of the chaps did. I recollect his talking about his old box of colours, and how there were some old bladders in it that he said had belonged to Reynolds."

"Oh yes! I've seen that. It's under that bookcase. I daresay you feel curious to look at it."

It was pulled out and placed on the table, near the potato desolation. Charles opened it, and felt in touch with an earlier world. Fifty years or more ago an artist, who must have known these colours were authentic, had given this box to a young man full of hope, longing for and believing in his use of it in the future. It was all past now, future and all, and the years had borne no fruit; and the heart that had beaten so high, that long half-century ago, was dead at last. The colour-tubes in the tray were hard, and the dippers clogged with dried heeltaps of oil and varnish. The badger softener was indurated and awry, and the blade of the palette-knife had a waist. Charles felt curious to see one of the little bladders of which he had heard, if one remained, and, seeing none above the tray, lifted it to search. Underneath lay a letter. Dr. Fludyer was giving some direction to the servant.

"Here's a letter directed to you, doctor." Charles handed it to him as he spoke. He felt it was time for him and Jeff to be going. To stay on would be like waiting to hear the contents of the letter. Charles closed the box, and prepared to go. Dr. Fludyer merely looked at the direction and slipped the letter in his pocket. "I expected this," he said, "but it was an odd place to hide it away in. Very lucky! Will you two gentlemen leave me your names and addresses? I ought to be off too. They want me round there. I shall come back in an hour or so." Charles said, as he handed him his card, he would come over in a day or

two to hear the results of the post-mortem. But the doctor replied, "Don't come—I'll write!" and they said good-bye and went downstairs.

The perverse young man put his head out again, and said, "Is it from Nesbitt's?" and begged more pardon when he heard it wasn't. As they reached the street-door a latch-key clicked in it, and Mr. Tatnall entered. The appointment had involved beer, manifestly! His depression and sallowness had disappeared together. Charles felt disinclined to be his informant about his tenant's death, or doleful changes to ring in any form; feeling that really Mr. Tatnall would have to pretend solemnity and be hypocritical, and the clash would be too great. The beer however asserted itself, and told its human bottle to say, jocularly: "Hain't he slept it off yet? Won't you give him another quarter of an hour?"

"Shall we, Charley? Would it be any use?"

"Not a bit of use. Come along!"

And they went away, leaving Mr. Tatnall to hear the news from Amelia, or otherwise, as might happen.

CHAPTER XXVI

HOW ALICE KNEW ALL ABOUT IT. ALICE'S RING AND THE JEWELS THEREON. MISS STRAKER'S LONG LETTER, WHICH CHARLES DID NOT READ TO HIS FATHER. BUT HOW ABOUT EXETER HALL? OF SCRUNCHY DAYS AND SQUASHY DAYS. HOW PEOPLE TALK. WAS CHARLES PERHAPS UNFAIR, AFTER ALL?

CHARLES was looking no doubt very miserable and depressed when he went to see his family the evening after this. He did not know how far the whole story of himself and Miss Straker had become public property, but he had an uneasy sense that he was being treated considerately, and this made him uncomfortable. As he had quite made up his mind that the whole thing had come to an end, it would have pleased him best that it should never have been known to have existed—it would have been comfortabler that even Peggy should have been in ignorance of it. But he could not find out how far the event had taken substantial form in the eyes of his family. As often happens after any exciting occurrence, it was not easy to recall exactly what had passed and in what order of events, and to assign to each recollection its own proper importance. It certainly seemed to him this evening that there was a disposition to treat him as the killed and wounded after a battle, physically as well as spiritually; the former tendency showing itself in concessions of the most comfortable chairs or sofa-cushions, or the best place in front of the fire, or having a fresh brew of tea made instead of letting him drink that horrid black stuff; while the latter took the form of an almost flamboyant silence about love-affairs and engagements, and indeed young ladies in general—they being the true gist of such matters—but Miss Straker in particular.

This atmosphere of Red-Cross effort on Charles's behalf increased if anything at dinner, later in the evening. There was no company; therefore the presence of Champagne had to be accounted for. Charles perceived in it not only a benevolence towards himself, as one prostrated by the strain of trying experiences, but also an element of Bacchanalian rejoicing at a fortunate delivery from a regrettable embarrassment. He was grateful for the former—not

for the latter. Nobody (unless it was his father) had been in his confidence, and he would have appreciated a more vigorous ignoring of the whole thing. He could not shake free from the idea that Archibald wanted to wink at him, and say—"Well out of that scrape, Charley, old chap!"—that Robin wanted to offer some form of congratulation, but that if he did speak he would take refuge in some inapt abstraction; for example:—"It's always something of that sort," or—"There's nothing like making one's mind up," or even—"You can't help things happening, don't you know!" He felt perfectly certain that if informed of the Park incident, his brothers would discern in it a fishy start, and that Ellen was simply longing to break out against Miss Straker. As for the boys, they were at school, and although he paid Alice a visit in Mrs. Partridge's dominions (where she continued to live either because Mrs. Partridge didn't want to give her up, or from mere normal continuance), he said nothing to her about Miss Straker. She is still so very young, thought he to himself.

But the truth is Alice was old enough to understand a great deal about it; little girls always do. Our own opinion is that the younger they are the more they know, and that inexperience comes on them unawares between childhood and womanhood. The fact is, Alice had catechised Peggy, and acquired a compendious insight into the plot of the story. Charles had been very fond of Miss Straker; ever so fond—as fond as that—indicated by palms held far apart—and Miss Straker was naughty, and Charles was sorry. That was all, and was clear. He may have suspected that the pathetic blue eyes behind his little *protégée's* rough hair were brimming over with pity for Mr. Charley, and that she was quite at a loss how to console him. She could sit on his knee, however—even under the circumstances in which he found her this evening, just retiring for the night; and Alice was very nice in a suitable costume, and it was possible to criticise her toes. Charles thought, as he always did about Alice, what a good day's work he did that day he put her in a hansom and brought her home to the Gardens.

He had said but little to Peggy before dinner about Lavinia. Peggy had not been to see her yet, but would do so if she got an encouraging answer to a letter she had written two evenings back. None had come so far. Their long talk had been about Verrinder, and the end of Charles's fruitless excursion to see him. Peggy was much concerned at his untimely death—untimely in the sense that it took away the last chance known to them of throwing light on No. 40. Charles must find out about what would be done with

his pictures, and try to buy that one of Phyllis Cartwright. They had just been talking about the ring and the ghost, or rather ghosts, when Charles's attention was caught by something in the next room, and Peggy did not succeed in recalling it till dinner was announced.

"Now—let's look at the ring!" said she to Charles, when the latter came into the drawing-room after smoking time—that is, after his smoking time; for the others remained behind. Any abnormal action of his was put down to his recent love-affair, and his abrupt withdrawal after smoking one cigarette was nodded over, and said, *hm!* or *ah!* about, as by sagacity that could quite pierce the meaning of *that*. Sagacity may have been right this far, that he did go upstairs expecting, or hoping, to find a letter had reached Peggy. But the post had not yet come.

"Yes! It's always fun guessing over mysteries," said he. For Peggy had been propounding an idea that the names of the stones on the ring or their initials formed some sort of posy, or anagram, that might afford a clue to work upon. "Let's have a look at the ring. There's the post!" . . .

"No—it's not. That's Rupert. He's only come for a short time though, as he has to get back to a patient. Now, look here! You know that ring of Aunt Sarah's, with ruby, emerald, garnet, amethyst, ruby, diamond—all the initials spell *regard,* which was, I suppose, the sentiment our great-grandfathers felt for our great-grandmothers——"

"It sounds chilly, nowadays! Let's look at this ring the same way. The emerald's the biggest. It ought to begin there. What's the next one?"

"Amethyst, silly boy! Call yourself an Artist and not know an Amethyst when you see one. Come here and help, Rupert! That's a ruby, comes next. Well! That spells *ear;* emerald, amethyst, ruby. That's a pearl comes next. I suppose you know a pearl when you see it?" . . .

"Why didn't you take the diamond for the initial?" asks Rupert; "that would make *dear;* there would be some sense in that."

"To be sure! Sharp boy, go to the top of the class. Then another emerald. Then a sapphire. Then—what's this?—a topaz. 'Dearest!'—Well done us! And the next letter's P. I say, Charley, darling, it's going to be Phyllis."

"There's no reason, remember, why it should be Phyllis merely because there was once a person of that name at the house."

"I know—dear prosy old boy! But there's no reason we shouldn't

make it Phyllis, if we can. What's this next stone?" But alas! Nobody knew. It was a red-brown stone, followed by a deep blue opaque one. Then an opaque yellowish white one. Then another sapphire.

"How disappointing!" said Peggy. "You see, even if we got the letters we want, there's not enough of them. We've only five and we want seven. There *is* the post!" And Peggy put the ring back on her finger, and it wasn't examined again for many many years.

For, even as she drew the ring on, a letter was being brought upstairs that was to make a difference, and a great one, in the lives of both. "It's her handwriting," said Charles, affecting Stoicism. The moment he saw the letter he began thinking about believing he had done Miss Straker an injustice. Her not writing had fortified him. If she had not told him a lie, how simple to write and say so. He had not been able to see, as Peggy did, that his own letter was one that keen resentment and sense of undeserved wrong might leave unanswered just as much as conscious guilt. He had taken the letters from the servant to pass on to his sister; but she left Miss Straker's in his hand, to open himself, if he liked. He continued to practise Stoicism, and laid it on the sofa, between them.

"Well—Charley?"

"I know there can be nothing satisfactory in it——"

"Then I suppose I must open it. What a goose you are, Master Charley! Isn't he now, Rupert?" Rupert gave an amused nod of assent. "Now let's have the letter," said he.

It was a three-sheet letter, and Peggy became absorbed and attentive. Charles carried his affectation of stoical indifference the length of taking the opportunity of telling Dr. Johnson all about Verrinder. It cost him a visible effort, but he may have been satisfied with his performance.

"You're always coming in at the death, Charley," said Johnson. "I know Fludyer. Man with a complete set of artificial teeth. Met him on a very interesting mental case—male patient thought he was his own aunt, and was always boning her caps and bonnets——"

"You've always got some rum new mental case, Paracelsus——"

"Well! It's a subject I've always had a hankering for. I do get a good deal of practice that way, somehow. I've had charge of any number of loonies——"

"And now you've got a whole family on your hands!"—This was Peggy, who continued—"Now don't disturb me. I'm reading."

Which was most unfair, as no one had invited her into the conversation.

"Verrinder died of the Chloroform, of course. But Fludyer will find enough fatty heart to certificate on. He'll deserve the gratitude of an overworked coroner. Besides, if he doesn't, they'll be down on him for allowing a patient to have so much Chloroform. You didn't get any more out of him about Verrinder—did you? Who was the patient in the Hospital?"

"I think he didn't want to tell me. He might tell *you* perhaps."

"They are reticent about this sort of case, naturally. I'll remember to ask about him. If we talk about Verrinder, he's pretty sure to mention him, and then it will come easy."

Peggy got to the end of the letter, and said, "Is that all? Stop a minute!" Then she harked back, reperused, harked back again; then folded the letter abruptly.

"Don't read it now, Charley, if I let you have it."—Charles promised.—"Read it quietly by yourself, and think it well over." He put it in his pocket, and then left the room. He had said he would smoke a pipe in his father's room late, and have a quiet chat. Mr. Heath Senior had gone away from the party in the front room, a few minutes ago.

"I hope I've done right," said Peggy to Johnson, when the door closed.

"Are you afraid of a recurrence of symptoms? I'm not. I believe he is, as he said, disillusioned. However, I don't know what's in the letter, of course."

Charles and his father settled down to a really comfortable chat; one which ignores bed, and is conscious of toddy and lemons and a full coal-scuttle. "We'll turn off the gas here, Phillimore," releases that prime-minister. And nothing remains but to inaugurate the conversation each anticipates, and both fight shy of, after a very elaborate arrangement of preliminaries.

"We've quarrelled with our sweetheart, I understand? Hey, Charley boy?" Charles gives a shrug, which means nothing, but acknowledges that the Bill has been brought up for consideration. The old boy procures a reprieve of a moment or two in connection with choice of lumps of sugar for toddy, and then says vaguely: "Sweethearts? Sweethearts is it? Well, we're all mighty fine people! Now tell us all about it," and leans back in his arm-chair, a listener with closed eyes.

Charles remembered that his father had had no official informa-

tion about anything that had happened since they last conversed on the subject. Since then the actual sequence of events was, that, under the influence of a letter from Miss Straker (which had jumped to the conclusion that what was no more than a well-advanced flirtation gave her a right to anticipate a decisive declaration), he had hurried on to an *éclaircissement,* and become the declared lover of the young lady, with no more knowledge of her character and antecedents than we have been able to communicate to the reader of this narrative; probably with less, for we (and you) are under no tender influence from either a profile or an eyelid, and the wonderful soprano is only a hearsay to us. That then he had, as he thought, identified her beyond a shadow of doubt as having been in Regents Park under circumstances that seemed to him inexplicable, at the very time that she assured him she was waiting at Exeter Hall door to hear *The Messiah.* That thereon he had written putting an end to all relations between them, and had had no answer. That Peggy had thought him wrong and hasty, and had written to Miss Straker. That he had the reply to her letter in his pocket, unread. All these things Charles now told his father, and ended by saying that yes, certainly, now it was all over between them.

"Unless indeed," he added, "this letter contains what I expect it cannot and will not contain—a complete explanation of the Park business, and her lie (because it *was* a lie!) about Exeter Hall." He touched his pocket with an implication in the action that the letter would remain there for private perusal later on. His father seemed quite to accept this as natural and just, and preferred no request to see it.

Perhaps Charley himself felt he could more easily wait to know its contents, because he wished to establish justification in his father's eyes on the materials of the status-quo. He wanted his position to be logical from existing data, and if the letter should contain disturbing new elements, to have time to think them over before acting on them, or committing himself. The thought was not clearly outlined, only hazy.

"I cannot see," said he in conclusion, "that I should be doing Miss Straker any good by attempting to renew a relation that I feel has been destroyed. If I could conceive any *possible* explanation . . . " He paused.

The half-closed eyes of his listener opened somewhat and turned round towards him. "Charley boy," said he, "you've been a fool! You've been a fool all along. The best thing you can do now is to put this girl out of your head and attend to your work. Go

away to some of these foreign places—Italy—Rome—and study the Fine Arts there. Miss Straker won't break her heart about you—not she!"

Charles flushed perceptibly. He wasn't quite so cool yet that he could bear to hear her spoken of slightingly by any one but himself. His father continued: "Quite right to look indignant! But she *won't,* for all that! You go to Italy and Rome—you needn't stick about the money. Besides, if I wasn't here to pay the bills, there's a lot of money of your Aunt Grace's that will come to you. Just you think about it!"

Charles didn't think the suggestion at all an unpleasant one, but he didn't like being told he was a fool. He knew he was, but would have preferred to be complimented for his wisdom in knowing it. Feeling he hadn't much to say in self-defence, he pulled away at his pipe till its extinction, and waited on until his father came to the end of his cigar, without saying anything. The cigar went on to its extremest end, the smoker resorting to a penknife point to hold it when it scorched his fingers. As he closed the penknife he turned to his son, and said: "Ah, well! We're not all of us as wise as we might be. You know why your aunt left you that money, Charley?"

"Because she was sure I should never make anything by my profession. Perhaps I shan't." Charles felt quite hopeful though, in his heart, for all that. Little he knew of the days that were to come, when men then scoring by annual thousands were to live in dread of bankruptcy. He was in some mysterious way to be *lucky,* said Hope. However, it *was* satisfactory to think that his aunt had left him two hundred a year. He felt hurt that she should have insulted him in her will. *"Because* he will never do anything as an artist" was the reason asigned for a life interest in five thousand pounds; he wasn't to be trusted with the principal, perhaps wisely.

"It won't do to marry on, my boy. However, I don't believe you would marry without my consent and your mother's, and of course if we liked your wife we should help you. I'm very glad you are off with Miss Stretcher—what's her name?—because so far as I can see neither your mother nor I should have liked her. By the bye, how long had you known her altogether? Three months?"

Charles didn't answer, but raised the question of bedroom candlesticks.

He was a bit cowardly about reading the letter, but when he found himself alone in the bedroom, still reserved for him as a

resource against the severities of Bohemia, he had no further excuse for not reading it. He opened it and read as follows:—

"Dear Miss Heath:

"I will write to you, but not to your brother—he has treated me cruelly—oh, cruelly!—and I will not see nor speak to him again——"

Charles was not prepared for such Prussian tactics. He wished to monopolise the position of the initiator—the injured person who had a right to resentment. The letter went on on lines identical with those suggested by Georgie Arrowsmith.

"But I forgive him. It is not because my own feelings towards him have changed or could ever change, that I write this. It is because I see now that he does not love me—that he has *never loved me.* Happiness could never have been ours, even if the *great social obstacles* between us could have been overcome. I cannot bring myself to think that these have had any share in his hasty and unfeeling conduct—for I will call it no worse than that—Oh no! He is too good and generous—that can never have influenced him!"

Charles's conscience wriggled uneasily; now (upon his honour) was he positively certain he had never said to himself that at any rate if he did lose Lavinia there would be peace and quiet, and not a beastly bobbery? No! His conscience absolved him of that. But as to whether he had felt a little released from a goblin mother-in-law—well! it would give him the benefit of the doubt; bring in the verdict not proven. He was rather glad to get on to the substance of the explanation:—

"I have *nothing to conceal* about the circumstances which your letter tells me was the provocation to all this *cruelty and unkindness.* I will write it all without reserve, for I know I am safe in *your* hands, but I do not say allow (Charles erased) Mr. Heath to read it. Still, do as you think best! I say this because I do not wish him to reproach himself, and he cannot but do so when he knows the innocent cause of my presence in the Park at that late hour! I will tell you everything, as I would have told him—indeed I would—had he asked me.

"Our great trouble—I mean me and my mother—is my poor father."—Charles stopped abruptly, let the letter fall on his knees, while he stroked his beard. His mouth thought of giving a whistle, but decided not to.—"Why!—she said he was dead," said he, to empty space. However, he went on with the letter: "He is of unsound mind, and we have to live apart from him. But he follows

us about. I cannot in a letter tell the whole story. But we left Paris through him, and he followed us to London. He does not know where we are living. I must tell you he does not seem insane, but it is impossible for my mother and myself to live with him."

Charles paused, considered and decided that it was excusable to call the father dead, under the circumstances. He was softening, but this did not make him suspect himself. He read on:—

"On that evening I caught sight of him coming from a coffee-shop near the Chalk Farm Tavern. I did not know he had come to London, but I knew if he saw me he would follow me home. He was disputing with a cabman about the fare. I walked away towards Primrose Hill, and when I reached the gate, saw he was following. I went as quick as I could across the Hill and got to the Park gate near the Gymnasium. They were just closing, but I got through and I thought most likely he would not, and after running a little more I walked slower to recover breath. I was afraid to go towards where we lived for fear he should follow. So I went the other way. Half-across I saw Mr. Heath in front, and did not want to overtake him. All the same I felt safer, seeing him";—(Charles softened perceptibly at this point)—"just before we reached the gate I heard a step behind and then saw my father had got through and was still following. I hung a little back to make sure Mr. Heath was through the gate, and then asked the gate-keeper to send the man, who was following, the wrong way, if he should ask which way I went. He was good-natured and said yes. All this while your brother must have seen me, and thought it might be me. But he was in the shadow and I thought he had gone on. When I got home, going round, I was glad—but I am afraid now that any time my father may find out where we are.

"Dear Miss Heath, if you feel inclined to blame me, for all this plotting and scheming, think what it must be to be followed by a father who has before now threatened the life of both your mother and yourself. Of course she and I both know it is his head that is affected—but he seems so sane that every one else is misled. . . ."

"But how about Exeter Hall?" said Charles to himself. He went on reading the letter, which dwelt on how the writer had all but taken him into her confidence next day—how she reproached herself now for not having done so. But only let Peggy think what is meant by the existence of insanity in any family—what the effects of its publication are! Was she wrong in this concealment? Perhaps she was. But she never intended to prolong it. And then things had followed on so suddenly! She really had been

taken by surprise. But the fact was, that had it not been for her mother, she would have told everything, and made no reserves. "But how about Exeter Hall?" thought Charles again. Was that the whole of the letter? No—here was a postscript overleaf.

"P. S.: As to what you say about Exeter Hall, I am completely puzzled. I am sure that Mr. Heath mistook something I said. But I cannot make out what. I waited with a friend at the Egyptian Hall two nights before. I can recollect nothing else it could have been."

That was all! Charles read it through again, and yet again. Its first effect upon him was to increase the exasperation he felt against the attitude of his family. He found himself resolving that he would give it hot to that young monkey Joan, if she let him have any more of her nonsense. He chose to regard this resolve as in quite another department of his mind, and having no connection with the letter. Probably it was the thin end of a wedge, which was well in and working forward by the time he re-enveloped the letter, and was at liberty to pretend he was not going to allow himself to be influenced by it. It was a wedge that went continually forwards, never slacked back in the least; it was easy to foresee that at its thick end Miss Straker would be acquitted. But before coming to that point it stuck once or twice—mainly over Exeter Hall. Charles began the series of reflections that ended in a sound sleep with an unalterable certainty that it *was* Exeter Hall and last night—*not* the Egyptian Hall and the night before last. The certainty was relaxing to a concession that it *must* have been the night before last, and he *must* have been mistaken, when oblivion ensued. Next morning this concession was recalled, but with a feeling that some protest ought to have been made as a set-off. So he decided that perhaps it *was* the Egyptian Hall, after all. But it wasn't the night before last—oh dear, no!

It is so easy to remember any number if you can only remember not to recollect any other numbers at the same time. But woe be to you if you once begin to speculate about whether it was a two or a three!

Charles had got himself so muddled over it by the time he got down to breakfast, and found Peggy the only arrival, that he feebly said when they began to speak about it: "Let me see! Was it Exeter Hall I was so certain it was, or the Egyptian Hall? Oh yes, it was Exeter Hall, of course." And he really felt comforted when Peggy assured him this was the case. She kept back a conviction that Charley was being unfair to Lavinia on the strength

of a very shaky memory; and she didn't say "Miss Straker" in her mind, foreseeing that she might turn out Lavinia after all! But she wasn't going to say anything to influence him one way or the other—*thought* she wasn't, anyhow! Each felt that the past night had had a softening effect, and that now what they had to talk about was not so much whether excuse could be found for Miss Straker as how they could make amends to her for the amount of injustice done, whatever it was, without plunging into too great an extreme of reinstatement. Peggy's sense of justice was struggling against the dread of taking the responsibility of throwing the lovers into one another's arms again.

"You know, Charley," said she, "I do feel that the whole business was too hasty—too much like the way people make love on the stage."

"Or mistakes off it—isn't that what you mean, Poggy-Wog? In fact, you consider your brother a pig-headed goose?"

"That's it, dear! You put it beautifully. You see, I can't help feeling—(you won't be angry, dear, if I say it?—Promise!)—feeling glad it's all over, because I do think Lavinia may be right, and that you never really—*really*—did care about her. At least, not as much as you thought." She is getting her ship into all sorts of shoals and troubled waters, and knows it. But the need of finding some way of making up for injustice goads her on—"So I can't pretend I should be glad for your sake that it should all come on again. In fact, I *do* think, Charley dear, that you and Lavinia are better apart." She said "Lavinia" feeling that a harshness might be safely softened—it was a mistake. Besides, the idea of being asunder is fraught with the idea of coming together, and in our opinion Charles was not in a state of mind to be trusted with it. "All the same it seems unkind—to—to believe we were mistaken—don't you see?—and not to—to——" Peggy felt the waters very unsafe indeed; wished she was out of them. She had to pretend to arrange Charley's beard and moustache for him, instead of finishing the sentence. He did it for her.

"And not to go and tell her we think it's all explained and we're very sorry for everything, but that for other reasons—real good ones this time—I would on the whole rather not marry her."

"Oh, Charley dear—how can you be so nonsensical?"

"How would you put it then, Peggy?" But Peggy couldn't tell. Charles cut the Gordian Knot.

"The question is simply whether the story is true. If it were true, Miss Straker would be to me all she was before, and I should

be thoroughly ashamed of myself for my hastiness, and should go at once and ask her to forgive and take me back. But *is* it true?"

Peggy had been so nearly wrecked before that she took refuge in silence. We must confess to being unable to see what she ought to have said. She felt very doubtful if it wasn't cowardly to leave Charles to think she thought it false, and might have found something to say, in time, but an eruption of fastbreakers stopped the colloquy.

Alice, in the natural course of her identification with the family, had become an established incident at breakfast. "The boys" had been the main agents in bringing this about, and had in consequence become very unpopular with Mrs. Partridge. We are sorry to say that Dan, the youngest, had denounced that old retainer as wanting Alice all to her beastly old self. This was, however, in secret communion with his brother. He and Ellen took the place, in the Heath family, that Nihilists, Doukhobors, Agnostics, Turks, Heretics, and Infidels generally hold in the Human family. Usually the espousal of any cause by Jack and Ellen was enough to ensure its condemnation and opposition by their seniors. But occasionally a case occurred that was ower good for banning and ower bad—if not for blessing—at least for spontaneous encouragement. Such a one was Jack and Ellen's demand that Alice, who had merged in the family meals in Devonshire, should continue to do so in London, so far as breakfast was concerned at least. Alice was really welcome everywhere, but the elders felt it a duty to sustain her nondescript position somehow; hence she may be said to have slowly become a member of the family under protest.

On the occasion in hand, Alice was among the earliest of the fastbreakers at Hyde Park Gardens. All were rather early this morning, as Mr. Heath Senior, having shaved (as aforesaid) overnight, meant to get to the city at ten. Hence Peggy's interview with Charles had been cut short. Let us try to hear as much of the conversation as we can through the rattle of knives and forks, and mere demands for more milk, less milk, one more lump, and so on, that drown and interrupt.

"Of course you may have scrunchy toast if you like, Alice dear. Why isn't Alice to have scrunchy toast, Ellen?"

"Because little girls ought to be consistent. Alice said yesterday (No! I'm not a tyrant—any more than everybody else is) that she liked thick toast, light brown all over, and now she wants it thin and hard and the black scraped off——"

"Of courth I do! Because yethterday was Thurthday——" Thus Alice, implying that some scheme for the better organisation

of life has to be observed. Peggy enquired, "Why thick toast, slightly browned, on Thursday?"

"Becawse Thurthday is a thquashy day, like Monday. All the others are scranchey and crickly, except Thaturday."

"Now, Peggy, isn't that ridiculous? As if Wednesday wasn't a lot squashier than Monday." But this view of Joan's is combated by Charles, who takes Alice's part.

"Alice is quite right. Thursday and Monday are soft and squashy, with no crust. The others are crusty; only Saturday is doubtful. She's perfectly right, so come now, Joan!" But Jumping Joan is not a young person who can be contradicted with impunity. She rounds on Charles with the spring of a panther.

"I should like to know what Miss Straker would say to that!" On which Miss Petherington says with a chilling hint of remoteness from the conversation in her tone, "I think, Ellen, you had better eat your breakfast." And Mrs. Heath, who has accrued, and is abounding spaciously behind the urn, enquires once for all, "Ellen, am I, or am I not, your mother?"

"Suppose you write and ask Miss Straker, Joan?" says Charles himself, good-humoured and unmoved. He is really fond of this demonstrative little sister of his, and usually very much amused at the way she hits out all round, and adjusts the universe: "Because I could take the letter, your know." Mrs. Heath's attention is aroused.

"I think, my dear Charles,—but I know I shall be set aside,—I *should* have a right to be told when Miss Straker is to be asked, and what she is to be asked to. But do *not* consider *me!*"

"You don't understand, Mamma dear! It's not an invitation—let's see, what was it she was to be asked?" For Peggy, who says this, has been quite bewildered by the rapidities of the conversation. Alice cuts in with a real desire to clear up obscurities, and place things on a proper footing.

"Miss Straker is to be athked if Thurthday and Monday aren't squashy, and other days crusty——"

"All but Saturday, doubtful!" says Charles. And Alice repeats after him, "All but Thaturday, doubtful!" Her eyes gleam with earnestness, and her small face is serious without trace of a smile. The company feel a wish to kiss her; but it's breakfast, so they can't. Mrs. Heath either ignores the triviality, or does not see the gist, of the conversation, and says freezingly, "At any rate we have no day free till Wednesday. And I beg that no arrangements may be made without my knowledge and sanction."

"Mamma dear—indeed nobody's making any arrangements—it's

all a mistake! Nobody's being asked anywhere, etc., etc." This was a sort of joint-stock remark, joined in by several. Now Mrs. Heath was not so unobservant and stupid as might seem—for concurrently with this discussion there had been another among the males, rather loud and absolutely incomprehensible to bystanders. Here is a chance sample:—

"It's Slack's business—not mine. You must write at once—the moment we get to the office."

"What am I to say? I don't even know if it was her own niece——"

"It's no concern of ours, anyhow! If it had been properly packed, it would have been eatable enough. What could possess Slack to shout so loud, I can't imagine!" . . . And so on. We merely give a fragment. As this and much more cross-countered continually with the dialogue about Alice's squashy days, Mrs. Heath had good excuse for misunderstanding. But she had none for rejecting all explanations, and adhering to a false conception on its own merits, while admitting tacitly that it had no foundation in fact.

"I may be right, or I may be wrong, my dear Margaret. I am accustomed to be corrected. But I do say, and I will say, that I ought not to be asked to receive Miss Straker. The Kemp-Brownes are a different thing. There has been no occurrence there of any sort or kind." Charles has been getting more and more nettled at the semi-allusions to himself and Miss Straker, and at this point the worm turns.

"Am I asked to the Kemp-Brownes', Poggy-Woggy?" says he in semi-sotto-voce across the table.

"Oh yes, Charley dear, you're asked." Peggy looked at him apprehensively—nearly asked him not to be a goose.

"I shall go to the Kemp-Brownes'!" he said; "I don't see any reason why I shouldn't go to the Kemp-Brownes', and I shall go."

This resolution had a certain note of defiance in it. The Kemp-Brownes were very musical people, and a Miss Straker evening had been pending ever since this family had heard her sing at Hyde Park Gardens. Of course Charles might go, and remain at the other end of the room—never speak to the singer, or even listen to her. But that wasn't his meaning! Yet it was impossible to lay hold of a mere acceptance of an invitation to a friend's house because a young lady was going to sing there about whom there had been an occurrence of a sort or kind. An uncomfortable feeling prevailed which might have dispersed naturally if the talk had died down naturally. But it was cut off short by the other end of the

table getting overwhelmingly loud. Mr. Heath's temper had been ruffled by points under discussion between him and Archibald, the eldest son in the business, and at this juncture it climaxed. He went the length of striking the table with his hand.

"I don't care what McCormick says! He has nothing to do with the matter. I should say the same if he was the Archbishop of Canterbury. As for Ekins, he's a colossal idiot!"

"There was nobody at Kew at the time," says Archibald, meekly and apologetically; and the outsiders whose attention is attracted by the vehemence of things, feel inclined to support Archibald and help to point out that there really *was* nobody at Kew, without knowing of any reason why there should have been, or anything whatever about it.

"I shall be very cautious another time, and so I tell him plainly," thus Mr. Heath, with a gesticulating forefinger, "I shall be very cautious another time about leaving anything whatever in the hands of Withers & Shanks. I don't care whether it's wool or pettitoes. You may tell him I said so. No! I don't want any more tea. You may tell him I said so. Is the cab there, Phillimore?"—Yes, it is; and off goes Mr. Heath fuming against some person or persons unknown, who will remain unknown to us, as they do not come into this history.

Peggy saw that the circumstances of Charles's rupture with Miss Straker were responsible for the condemnation her family had showered upon that young lady without waiting for a full and true account; that this very condemnation, half-heard and perhaps exaggerated by him, had stimulated his readiness to turn round and believe himself wrong; and that any word she said might either do the same thing, or be most unfair to a girl who appeared at least to be in a most unfortunate position. If it had been to save Charley from certain unhappiness she might like enough have flung all other considerations aside—but was she sure it would save him? Might there not be infinitely worse Miss Strakers in the bush? What had she against her, personally, but a slightly drawly, theatrical manner? After all the question was, would Charley be happy with her? She couldn't say yes—but could she say no?

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CHAPTER XXVII

HOW MISS PRYNNE HUNTED FOR MOSES. HOW CHARLES WILL BUY PHYLLIS CARTWRIGHT. JONAH AND ST. MARGARET. HOW CHARLES WENT FOR A WALK IN REGENTS PARK. AND OVERHEARD A CONVERSATION. HOW HE FOUND MISS STRAKER AT HOME

When Charles got to the Studio he found a letter from Dr. Fludyer. Cause of death was as he anticipated, heart. Chloroform contributory. Business instructions were given in Verrinder's letter to himself, and a will had been found as indicated therein. As soon as formalities should have been complied with the pictures would be sent to auction. Charles said to himself that he would go to the sale and buy Phyllis Cartwright. It turned out that it was to be otherwise.

For when he came to think over the events of the last three weeks, it became more and more manifest to him that the situation between himself and the young lady had been mainly of his own creating. Of what value were plighted troth, vows of constancy, and so forth, that would not stand the strain that had been put upon his? It had all hinged on his own accuracy of recollection, and if he had really loved the girl surely he would have doubted his own hearing rather than condemn her in such an off-hand way. And then how unjust his family had been! If they were all ready to rejoice over his manifest devotion to Miss Straker coming to an abrupt end, would it not have been kinder—more straightforward, to speak plainly—not to give such an uncertain note in a matter involving so much to all? People usually expect every one else to cut and dry their conduct; to open with a flip and shut with a click. Charles was no exception. He growled to himself and nursed a sort of working resentment against his family, to be discarded when done with. He could *not* consent to be overweighted by the opinions of people who could be so unjust—for plainly as they all showed their condemnation of Miss Straker, they actually did not know, or knew very imperfectly, the grounds of his secession. He could fancy Archibald saying, "So Charley's thrown that young woman of his overboard. Good job, too!" and Robin repeating something acquired from an older mouth, such

as, "Easy enough to see which way the cat would jump," or, "Are you surprised? I'm not"; and Joan announcing audibly all over the house that Charley's Lavinia was an insidious minx, and she didn't care if Charley *did* hear her say so.

No! It was altogether weak and wrong to let himself be swayed by their shallow decisions; a clear abdication of his own individuality, a renunciation of his claims to manhood. He owed it to himself, and to Lavinia if his vows were worth a straw, to act precisely as he would have acted if there had been nothing to consider but their two selves. Peggy was of course an isolated case, always for separate consideration. But then Peggy would admire and excuse any action of his that was based on a shrinking from wrong, stimulated by a generous or chivalrous motive. If he went straight to Lavinia here and now, for forgiveness and recall, he knew that Peggy would applaud him in her heart, *advienne que pourra!*

But he would do nothing in a hurry! To soothe himself and get in a calm frame of mind, he would have a good look at Regan, and see if she was really dry. If he ever did finish Regan (and obviously he couldn't do that without Miss Straker), at any rate she would have a thorough drying! And if he didn't, at any rate it was no fault of his! An inspection of Regan glaring apace with a chin well ahead of her eyes, and clenching two well-balanced fists, ended in a decision that at any rate it was too late to do any work now. This phrase had recrudesced; but to some new end, not yet determined. As no work was possible, the next best thing would be to pay Jeff a visit in his Studio. He hadn't been there for ever so long.

The Miss Prynnes' door was half open, and did not know whether the person who held the handle inside was staying in or coming out. Whoever it was, he or she heard Charles's footstep and inclined to staying in. He passed up and met a sound of voices—Jeff's and the younger Miss Prynne's. The former testified that if its owner saw Moses, he would bring him down at once. The latter that it would be sure to be all right. Moses was always disappearing, and always turning up. Further that tea would be five, and Jerry was to be sure not to be late. Oh no, that he wouldn't! The voices seemed to mingle with alacrity and exhilaration. Charles paused a minute on the stairs with a sudden amused look. Some idea had dawned on him. "No!" said he to himself, "that would be too ridiculous!" Only, as Miss Dorothea passed him on the stairs, with the smile of her interview still on her face, and a good-morning for himself that borrowed a chance cordiality from it, he added, internally, "But why not?"

"What a time you *have* been!" said the door-handle holder. And her sister replied, "We were looking for Moses." The door closed on a sense of a slight domestic ruction.

"Any more ghosts, Jeff?"

"No, only 'untin' for the cat."—Mr. Jerrythought also had a pleasant twinkle on him, and a slight flush.—"Well, I'm blowed! there he is all the time." And there he was sure enough, circling round the visitor's calves. It was as nothing to Moses to cease to exist when hunted for, and to re-materialise when convenient.

"Half a minute till I take him down, Charley!" And Jeff captures Moses, purring like a forge in full blast, and bears him away to his owner.

"I was just going to give you up and go," says Charles, some minutes after—some many minutes—when Jeff reappears apologetic.

The rescued Terpsichore had an easel to herself, as having interesting qualities. We have noticed that works of Art that are being cared for and cosseted over, soon develop *qualities*. It is well known that new things seldom have any qualities whatever. It is a puzzle to the metaphysician, but presents no difficulties to the artist. Terpsichore, who probably was painted in an afternoon, and then looked *banale*, and crude, and commonplace, and meretricious, and affected, and flat, and appealed to no sympathies, and touched no chord, and in whose composition no Treatment was visible, and Values entirely disregarded—this very Terpsichore now that she had had her life saved at such expense, and been provided with a gilt frame (only the gilt was kept down and not allowed to stare), had become endowed with qualities, and had had a good deal of style distinguished in her by a sensitive and thoughtful Omniscience—in fact the Cultivated Critic himself had visited Jeff's Studio and discerned in Terpsichore an interesting example of something it was dutiful to be interested in. Under glass, the portions the Destroyer's hand had spared suggested the beauty of the half-vanished bits he had had a good scratch at, and very nearly abolished before the Preserver caught him at it and chased him away.

"What are you going to do with her?" Charles asks.

"Interestin' memento!" says Jeff. "Shan't part with her. Miss Dorothea was saying the frame would bear puttin' down a little more. What do you think?"

"Was that when you were looking for the cat, Jeff?"

"You go along, Charley! You're always poking your fun! No—

Miss Dorothea really is a very sensible person! Ain't it time for lunch?"

It isn't, just yet. But it will be. In the meantime we can converse a good deal about Verrinder's death; about the old jug this story began with; even about each other's work, which we regard with lukewarm interest, each preferring to stimulate the other into talk about his own, under pretence of advice he doesn't mean to take. But when Charles came to look back on this conversation, it certainly struck him that Miss Dorothea figured in it very often as an extremely sensible person, and wondered whether anything would come of it.

Mrs. Farwig, on the stairs, suspected Charles of having been underfed lately. She had noticed it these three days, and mentioned it to her husband. She referred several times to this last fact; and not only had she said to Farwig that Mr. 'Eath hadn't been looking himself this long time past, and what he wanted was keeping up, but she had dwelt upon the same theme to our old acquaintance Mrs. Twills, whose memory clung about No. 40, even as Petrarch's about Vaucluse, or Dante's about Florence. Mrs. Farwig seemed to adduce the number of times she had mentioned any circumstance as cumulative evidence of its primary certainty. As she had stood her pails on the stairs, durin' cleanin', and she herself had stood between her pails, Charles and Jeff could not avoid a longish colloquy, a good deal of which was foreign matter, and reviewed the difficulties of bringing up a young family on an uncertain income. However, the pails were removed in time, and Mrs. Farwig made a bad finish, oratorically, with the words, "Ah, well—as I say!" And then Charles and Jeff got downstairs.

But they did not get away to lunch. For Mr. Bauerstein, the dealer, intercepted them, and drew them into his room to see a Morland. Charles evaded giving an opinion about it by saying he thought Morland such a very equal artist. Being applauded for this he rashly ventured further on the same lines, and said he thought Reynolds an example of an unequal artist. But the opinion of Europe was evidently against him. He retired ashamed. Then they decided they really must get away, or they wouldn't get lunch till dinner-time. They might have done so, had Charles not recollected as he was leaving the house that there was something he wanted to say to Bauerstein. It related to the sale of Verrinder's pictures, and a short conference ended up thus:—

"Then you'll bid for it for me, up to fifteen pounds? I can't well go beyond that."

Yes—Mr. Bauerstein would undertake the commission. He

would bid up to fifteen pounds for Charles. If he bid higher it would be his own purchase. What did Charles say the name was? "Villis Gardride"?—Charles wrote it down for him, with all other needful particulars. But this delay just made the departure for Cremoncini's overlap with that of Pope and Chappell, who were loquacious in the passage as Charles came forth to rejoin Jeff. Pope's vulgar tongue was audible as he left the old ballroom by the door his and Jeff's private ghost, as they called her, had come out at.

"Expectin' a beggar to know about Transubstarntiation! A Protestant beggar! And him a Dean!"

"What did you say to him, Mr. Pope?" Thus Chappell, who is always a little uneasy about what may happen when the Firm's divinity is gauged by experts in his absence.

"Said the religious pardner was takin' a morsel of bread and cheese and a glass o' sherry, but he'd be round in five minutes."

"No—you didn't say that, Mr. Pope, I do hope?" Mr. Chappell is alarmed, but advantage is only being taken of his being matter-of-fact. Had he been on the other side of the passage, he would have seen that Mr. Pope had closed one eye, for the benefit of himself and Mr. Jerrythought.

"Not in those terms, pardner! But in the spirit of the remark. My pardner always says 'refer him to me' he says. So I 'and 'em all over to 'im—Deans, Minor Canons, Vicars, and Curates. Bishops and Archbishops come by appointment and he sees 'em himself." This explanation he addresses to Jeff.

"What *did* you say this time though, Mr. Pope?" Chappell seems uneasy, and would rather know.

"Said I would sooner he should talk to you about it. Said my own views were those of the religious public, without distinction of creed or sex——"

"No—you didn't say that, I hope?"

"Somethin' to that effect. It sounded all right. Anyhow, he's goin' to send the templates, and he'll run to three pun' a foot for figure-work, and ten shillins for grisaille. And when he comes again, you'll 'ave to talk to him about Transubstarntiation. So look out for squalls."

Charles had come into touch in the middle of this dialogue. Seeing him suggested a new topic to Mr. Chappell. "That was Mr. Heath's sketch of Jonah and St. Margaret he liked, wasn't it, Mr. Pope?"—

"Ah, to be sure, Mr. Heath! He was very much took with your sketch. I pointed out to him the propriety of the treatment——"

"There's a stone mullion between them, anyhow," said Charles.

"Not from that point of view, I don't mean. I was referrin' to the leadin' incidents in their lives. One got swallered by a whale—the other by a dragon—a feller feelin' they'd have! 'A pretty idea,' I said, 'standin' of 'em side by side.' He agreed, the Dean did. Anyhow, you'll have to drore 'em out to scale, and I'll lend you a hand over the lead-lines."

Charles cordially thanked Mr. Pope. It gave him quite a sense of pleasure that he should really do *something,* however small, that should bear fruit as professional. He felt not a little ashamed of his superior tone about Pope & Chappell when he first made their acquaintance through Jeff. To whom he apologised as they walked away to lunch together; he couldn't well do so to Pope himself, although he was longing to make amends for his churlishness.

So long as he was in contact with the varied little world that had drifted into No. 40; so long as he was sitting with Jeff at Cremoncini's, chaffing the waiter, who was a Genoese, and endeavouring to reconcile the Italian of the latter with some slight experience he had of the *Purgatorio;* so long as he was walking back with his companion through the pea-soup that flooded the street, in a singular fit of post-mortem summer that had come off the Atlantic with a gust of southwest wind and blown the early frosts away, and was making folk anticipate green yules and full kirk-yards—so long as these things were, and he had distraction, he was in no danger of doing anything in a hurry; not if the situation *was* of his own creating, ever so!

But when Jeff had gone away to his five-o'clock appointment to tea with the sensible Miss Dorothea and her indisputably scraggy sister; when he had declined to accompany him in response to an invitation he seemed to have no hesitation in giving, and was left alone, as he alleged, to write letters because it was too dark to work; when he had filled out half-an-hour with a pipe of the celebrated Latakia, and had remarked to himself that Jeff's acquaintance with Miss Dorothea seemed going ahead at a great pace—and he never reflected on the great pace at which another acquaintance had gone ahead recently; when he had done all these things, and found no more to do, and really had no letters to write—how often one says one has, when one hasn't!—why, then he was very distinctly in danger of doing something in a hurry; only he didn't know it! He fancied he had got a really good opportunity for reviewing the position with the extremest deliberation, and went out for a walk through the pea-soupy streets in the wind that smelt of the sea, and watched the scavengers scavenging (we presume) the soup

with wide toothless rakes, and spooning it into tureens on wheels; which being put in motion spilled most of it, and carried away the remainder to some destination known only to the Parish.

Obviously the proper way of not doing anything in a hurry would have been to go for a walk in Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, and then go home to dinner and have a good long talk with Peggy—who could say that she hadn't been to see Miss Straker? It would have been much wiser in him to do so, instead of what he did.

He *did* start towards Hyde Park. But when he got to Langham Place he turned to the right. He would walk up to the end of Portland Place, through Park Crescent, and go to "the Gardens" along the Marylebone Road. He called somebody, or something—he wasn't clear which—to witness that he wasn't thinking of going near Regents Park; still less Camden Town.

But when he got to Park Square he reflected that he really wanted a bit of a walk, and it was so nice and airy across Regents Park in this unseasonable delight of a balmy wind, and then round by the outer circle and St. John's Wood, and Maida Vale. A capital walk, and long enough! Of course he would be within a quarter of a mile of Warren Street.

His mind turned resentfully on the passing imp that had murmured this in his ear. What sort of weak character did that imp take him for? Could he not trust himself within a quarter of a mile of this girl? Aye, that he could! He could trust himself to take no rash step unintentionally. As to what he should or should not do as the result of matured intention—why, the intention wasn't mature yet! If he *were* to mature such an intention between, for instance, the corner of Park Square and the Zoological Gardens, he wasn't going to be intimidated by the opinion of an insignificant imp like that! Let him and his fellows scoff at his headstrongness, rashness, vacillation, inconsistency—what did he care? If he really only felt convinced that Miss Straker's story of her father was substantially true, he would go and sue for forgiveness at once. Why did he doubt its truth? It was only that Exeter Hall recollection—and see how hazy he had been about that!

Then he became conscious of what Peggy would have said to him at once had she seen him now: "You foolish boy! Can't you see you are thinking all this *because* you are hankering after Warren Street, and the nearer you get the more you will think it." He acknowledged the shadowy Peggy's insight; pulled himself together and crossed the Park resolutely. He felt Spartan, and sat down

on a seat, near the Primrose Hill entrance he knew so well, to rest after such a moral effort.

His ear was caught by conversation in French not very far off. Words not familiar to him he could not catch, but easy phrases and repetitions he made out clearly enough. The voice that spoke first was a young man's.

"Elle est malade . . . elle n'a pas pu venir . . ."

"Ce sont des mensonges, et tu es menteur, mon fils . . . elle ne l'a pas voulu . . ."

"Ne suffit-il pas qu'elle vous a envoyé cet argent? . . . pourquoi la fatiguer ainsi? . . ."

"Je ne veux pas la fatiguer, moi! . . . Ecoute toi! Je t'attends une demi-heure! . . ."

The two voices then fell and Charles heard no more until they assumed the winding-up tone, which always brings louder speech. The elder man became audible first—and that of the younger remained inaudible, being always pitched in a lower key.

"Alors nous sommes d'accord! Tu viens ici me porter de l'argent —et moi je t'attends samedi—à cette heure. . . . Non! Non! Ma foi—je l'entreprends! Elle peut se fier à moi. . . . Mais mon adresse? Pourquoi veut-elle connaître mon adresse? . . . Faut écrire au Café au delà . . . comme avant."

The young man then walked away westward. The other called after him, "Maurice!" and then seemed to change his mind, adding, "Non—non—ce n'est rien! Va-t-en!" Then he turned to go in the opposite direction, and Charles saw he would pass near him. There was a gas-lamp close by, and as he passed, stowing away in his purse the money he had received, Charles saw him plainly. An appearance at once clerical and dissolute was too distinctive to be mistaken. There was no doubt whatever about it. He was the man that had followed Miss Straker, and been misdirected. . . .

Charles's resolution was taken. He walked straight to the house in Warren Street. As he crossed the road towards the house, he thought he saw Lavinia just retiring from the window; and, a moment after, came a chord on the piano. If Charles was at this time guilty of any self-deception, it was in forcing his mind a little to the belief that she had not seen him approaching.

Was Miss Straker at home? The sloven he asked the question of seemed ambiguous, so he asked it in another form: "Shall I find her in the drawing-room?" The sloven replied, vacuously: "If you was to go up and see——" He heard her singing above at the piano. He left the sloven as a hopeless case, and went upstairs.

Just as he opened the door, after knocking slightly, he heard

the instrument closed noisily. The sound must have drowned his knock, as no answer came. He looked in without speaking. The girl was leaning forward over the piano-lid, her face in her hands. He spoke to her by name, and she looked up.

"Why have you come?" said she, almost with asperity.

"I have come," he replied, "to ask your forgiveness. Will you forgive me?"

CHAPTER XXVIII

ET NOS MUTAMUR IN ILLIS

It was a fine morning in May. The inhabitants of Soho were feeling cheerful from the first outburst of real sunshine the year had granted them. The streets, if not quite dry after a long season of continuous rain, were going to be dry soon; and the new charwoman who was cleaning the front-door steps at No. 40, seemed sanguine of a permanent result. There were almost as many two-horse carriages with coronets on them as omnibuses in Regent Street, and cabs were scarcely being allowed time to disgorge their plebeians, by the impatience of fresh plebeians to take their places. County families in full vigour had cleaned their windows and put scarlet geraniums in their balconies and incited myrmidons to be ready with rolls of carpet to shield the feet of arrivals from the cold inhospitable paving-stone. But we must not be led away to Berkeley Square; our proper place is at the old Soho house, known to us only by its number in the street, where on this May morning the new char was cleaning down the steps, and a "harmonieflute" barrel organ was playing 'Ernani involami' several times over.

She was a new char; there was no doubt of that—but as is the race of leaves, so is the race of chars, and their employers are always turning over a new leaf. Mrs. Farwig no longer did down the steps and did out the house, but the hieroglyphic of Pope & Chappell was bright upon the door-post, and the two human creatures it vouched for were, as usual, at work in what had been the front parlour; combining the painting of glass against the light, and the provision for more to come, with the reception of visitors anxious that somebody else should not be forgotten, and that they themselves should be borne in mind as his commemorators.

"I'm speculatin'," thus Mr. Pope to Mr. Chappell, and then pauses a few seconds to concentrate on a stipple, "I'm speculatin' we shall hear of a wedding." Mr. Chappell says simply and briefly, "Who?"

Mr. Pope appears to pause and consider among possible couples; and finally asks, as one who believes he has struck oil, but would like belief strengthened: "What do you say to our first-floor?"

"What made you think of Mr. Heath?"

"Why—your grumblin' at having to 'unt up his St. Margaret's leads."

"Well, Mr. Pope, I'd a right to grumble. I've had to trace them all over again, anyhow. But I don't mean, what made you think of him, himself—what made you think he was going to be married? *I* never heard he was."

"Only a sort of speculative idear of mine, partner," said Pope. "No man less likely, I should say, if you was to ask me—I threw out the idear——"

"Somebody must have said *something* about it—else how on earth should you come to think it?"

"I didn't think it—a mere floatin' idear!—only 'ang me if I can see why our first-floor shouldn't get married as much as any one else's——"

"Of course not—I never said he shouldn't, anyhow."

"You never said he shouldn't, partner, I grant you! But, to my thinkin', you took up the gauntlet——"

"No—I didn't. I didn't say as much as you did. You said no man was less likely. Why did you say that?"

"Well! because I thought it. Look at the thing all round." But Mr. Pope and Mr. Chappell didn't look at it all round, for the office-bell jangled, and an Architect came in to find as much fault as he could, and to denounce ten clerestory windows for want of repose, and only allow a little grudging praise to the "Jonah" Pope was at work on, on the score of the breadth of treatment of the whale. . . .

While this goes on, let us—as is our prerogative—look round at the office, and see what the changes have been since we were here last. For a feeling is on us that changes have taken place, though we cannot say off-hand what they are. Let us look at them in detail.

We cannot recall every drawing of a window that hung upon the walls on our previous visit, but surely—surely—that great seven-light perpendicular window over the chimney-piece was not there then? What a piece of work to have done in the time! And all this swarm of major and minor Prophets, Apostles, Archangels, Nativities and Flights into Egypt, Good Samaritans and Unjust Stewards, fitted into every possible type of window tracery, Norman, Decorated, Early English, late Tudor, even Inigo Jones and Christopher Wren—surely the walls were not then all but hidden behind these?

Well! look a bit closer—look at Mr. Pope and Mr. Chappell, as

they stand there agreeing with everything the F. R. I. B. A. says, with a view to complying with none of it in practice. When we saw him first, Pope's hair was black, iron-grey at most, with a tendency to whiten towards the whisker. Now it is most strangely silvered over—and though Chappell seemed then to mean to be bald, there was nothing about his respectable head that suggested an onion or an egg. Now his head is more than respectable—it is venerable—a head most propititious to an ecclesiastical business; and both of them have a certain family effect and give an impression of suburban residences, fraught with daughters and croquet lawns. And what is the speech we catch from the good-looking young man of twenty-odd who comes in with a drawing, and hands it to Mr. Pope: "Is it this one, father?" And the reply is: "That's it, Kit; put it on the table."

Why, surely now—that time that Charles Heath came first into their office with Jeff, to make the Firm's acquaintance—surely Pope spoke then of a child of four, who also was Kit, and who asked embarrassing questions about religious Art. You *must* recollect that? What does it all mean? What is the meaning of Pope's grey head and Chappell's bald crown, of the signs of work and prosperity on the walls, of the venerable employee addressed as Buttifant who brings in window-lights to show, of the many footsteps that come trooping down the stairs outside and make Chappell say that's the chaps going, and it must be twelve-thirty?

What indeed? It means that sixteen years have passed, not sixteen weeks (as, for all the story has told yet, it might have been), since Alice broke the jug and Charles shielded her and brought her home, a small forlorn midget, to his father's house; since she stood by her mother's deathbed at the Hospital, and heard her speak, that one time only, in the voice that, but for drink, would have been her own; since she saw the memorable ghost upon the stairs.—

But the story knows nothing yet of what has come to pass in all those sixteen years. It comes, as Rip Van Winkle came, to note the signs and memories of many changes that have been wrought in the absence of its chroniclers. It knows nothing yet, but that Charles is an unmarried man, and still a tenant of the first-floor Studio at No. 40. Let it—or let us, if you prefer it so—go up and look at him.

We wonder, as we go, who else remains in the house of those we knew. Some one has gone away—else where are all "the chaps" at work about whose footsteps Chappell saw it was twelve-thirty? Either Jeff or the Misses Prynne have given up their tenancy.

Judging by the sound of those feet we should say both. There must be a dozen painters or more at work upstairs—orders for large east-windows, and whole clerestories in a lump, are not done single-handed!

On the stairs we pass a bearded man—a man in early middle life, whose face gives, or leaves, the impression that he is really younger than he looks. It is sad and careworn, but handsome and thoughtful and attractive, and we should stop to look at him if we were not in such a hurry to get to our old friend Charley. Will he be much changed—changed out of all knowledge—in these sixteen long years?

We cannot see him now, for his door is shut and locked and he is gone away till two. A notice on a slate on the door says he will be back then; so we turn to go, disappointed. And then as we go down, it dawns upon us that *that* was he—that man we passed upon the stairs. Of course it was! Think of the spectacles and all! We should have recognised him.

But it may be we recoiled unconsciously from doing so, and could not bear to think that he should look so sad at heart. Were we not, perhaps, shutting our eyes to his identity, and hoping to see again the young bright artist we left here, sixteen years ago? . . .

When the F. R. I. B. A. heard it was twelve-thirty, he recollected that he had an appointment at that time, and fled in a cab. Pope and Chappell and Kit, the son of the former, who had come in from upstairs to join his father at lunch, passed the time in discursive chat. They did not leave till one—so there was a cool twenty minutes. Pope resumed the previous conversation.

"Bad job it was, that marriage of his! Don't you go making a runaway match with a ramshandry sort o' half-French girl, without your father's consent, Kit, or I'll disinherit you."

"Did old Mr. Heath disinherit him?" asked Kit.

"Not he!—Easy-goin' old cock! No—I believe he allowed 'em two or three hundred a year—and Charles Heath had a trifle of his own—with the cartoons he did for us they made up to seven or eight 'undred. But Lard! if it had been seven or eight thousand she'd have walked into it."

"What was her name, Father?"

"Scraper," replies Pope with confidence; but is corrected by Chappell, and Kit evidently says to himself, "I thought so." The speaker continues: "I don't think the old boy forgave him for some time. They didn't get the three hundred at first—and they must

have had a rough time of it. Children coming, and his painting large pictures nobody bought."—

"Can't say I wonder," says Pope; "I wouldn't have 'em at a gift. But he's a nice feller! Amoozin' way he has of puttin' things, too! How many kids? Two?"

"Two, I fancy. First a girl and then a boy, like the children's game. The girl died."

"How did he come to make it up with his father?" Kit, who asks, is young and penetrating, and wishes to go to the root of all subjects. Mr. Pope can't throw much light.

"What was it Jeff said, Mr. Chappell?"—He passes the question on, and Chappell is little better, but can record that the reconciliation was brought about "by Lady Thingumbob, the wife of Sir What's-his-name—you know, the great physician—married Miss Heath—great beauty she was—you recollect?"

"Sir Rupert Johnson, I know. He's a tremendous swell now. What's his gag, Kit? You know about things. Is it stummick—or oviariotomy—or softenin' on the brain?" Kit seems a very well-informed boy—has quite outclassed his father. He believes Sir Rupert Johnson is the great authority on the Brain.

"Ah! to be sure!" says his father, "when Royalties' brains get softenin', they send for him to pronounce—or he oviariotomises 'em." He treats those useful and much maligned members of society in the reckless tone of one who doesn't expect ever to make their acquaintance. Kit recalls the conversation back to Charles Heath; he asks when his wife died. His father replies:

"She ain't dead. She don't mean to die in a hurry."

"I thought you said Mr. Heath was a widower, Father?"

"No, poor beggar! Good job if he was, *I* should say. If he were, *he'd* marry again fast enough! No, he's divorcified her *a vinculo*, and she's enjoyin' guilty splendour with Duke Bailey or Duke Humphy." For a little while before this time the famous Bab Ballad had appeared which introduced that lawless couple to its readers.

"The Catholic Church," says Chappell, with severity, "does not sanction the marriage of divorced persons."

"Don't it? Well then, all I can say is, it ought to give double allowance to the party that divorced 'em. Bigamy to balance, don't you see? That would work 'em up four square again, like at first." But Mr. Chappell doesn't relish this trifling, especially before a young man; he puts on his out-of-doors coat and his hat, and goes away to lunch. Mr. Pope begins following his example. Kit seems to cling to the conversation.

"I say, Father!"

"What do you say, sonny?"

"I thought Mr. Heath's wife *was* dead?"

"Well—she ain't."

"Why?"

"I should have heard—certain!"

"Look here, Father. *I* thought she was dead. Gwen thought so too."

"Your sister thought so—well—you were a couple of wise young customers. She's alive and kicking." Nevertheless, Mr. Pope pauses with one arm in an out-of-doors sleeve, as though waiting contradiction.

"I mean, Father, that when we saw that advertisement at breakfast this morning we thought it couldn't possibly be her, if she was dead already."

The arm goes no farther into the sleeve; its owner fixes his eyes on his son's face.

"What advertisement?" he asks, with aroused interest. The young man repeats it conscientiously, word for word. "'At Wiesbaden, on the 5th instant, Lavinia Straker. Friends and relations will kindly accept this the only intimation.'"

Mr. Pope gives a short whistle, and says, briefly, "My wig!" He then pulls on the long delayed coat, and he and his son walk out together. Presently he remarks, as the result of meditation: "There may have been fifty Lavinia Strakers." Kit, however, is in a position to quote a high social authority.

"Gwen thought not," says he, "because the advertisement looked so," and his father seems to understand this—so we need not examine it critically. But Kit's conclave with his sister is not to escape without comment.

"Nice young pair of half-hatched chicks, you and your sister, to be talking about the poultry yard—and you never asked your mother, I lay!"

"Gwen said mother would shut her up," says Kit, somewhat ruefully—and then the subject of an ill-made template displaces the poultry yard, and lasts till lunch.

CHAPTER XXIX

HOW PEGGY HAD BECOME A GREAT MAD-DOCTOR'S WIFE. HOW ALICE-FOR-SHORT HAD BEEN ALICE FOR LONG ENOUGH TO BECOME A WOMAN. HOW THE PARROT HAD FORGOTTEN NOTHING

KIT POPE was quite right about Sir Rupert Johnson. He was the great authority on the Brain. Not that he was mistrusted in other departments of Medical Science, but that that was his great and superseding speciality. For any one to assume he was in his senses in the face of the contrary verdict from Sir Rupert Johnson would have been held a sufficient proof of insanity in itself; so that no one whom he pronounced mad had any chance of proving the soundness of his mind but by acquiescing in and insisting on its unsoundness.

But our old friend Master Rupert was singularly merciful in his judgments. He had said again and again to the many people who had come to him to get his help towards putting under restraint some person whose property they sought control over: "If you want to lock this man up because he has a harmless delusion, you must get another doctor to help you. I won't!" And he would maintain that almost everybody had some delusion or other if he would only confess it, whereupon his enemies would allege that he had said that everybody was mad. He was appealed to once to aid and abet in consigning to an asylum a girl who believed she was followed by a white dog. "Put her under restraint!" said he, "what do you want to restrain her from? The only thing you object to is that she thinks she is followed by a white dog—she'll think so just the same in Colney Hatch." The story went (but how it came to be known who can say?) that he once said privately to a man who thought he was Napoleon: "I see, Emperor, that what you say is true—but why can't you hold your tongue about it? They won't believe you." And that patient was cured in no time; but if he is still living, probably thinks he is Napoleon to this day. *A quoi mal?* The fact was, Sir Rupert did not believe that fancies of this sort proved that the brain was diseased; so, as long as they were harmless in themselves, he thought it best to let them alone. But if Napoleon had begun recruiting, he would have locked him up. What a pity there was no one who could do the same to his prototype, who was

correct enough in his belief that he was Napoleon, or is usually thought to have been so.

As we have seen from the conversation of Pope and Chappell, Rupert Johnson and Peggy Heath were married; as to the date of their marriage, the fact that they had four boys and three girls leaves us none the wiser, but the circumstance that two of the boys were at Harrow makes it likely that it came about not so very long after we parted from Peggy at Hyde Park Gardens sixteen years ago; that day when Alice asked for scrunchy toast because it was Friday. Anyhow, it was ten years since they moved into the house in Harley Street, and they had been a long time in Welbeck Street before that. *Sic transeunt* human resolutions; all the benefits that were to accrue to the human race, by way of example, from Miss Margaret Heath's singleness, were lost past all recovery. Whether the subtlest eft of all the field felt the balance was in his favour, or wished he had let matters alone, who can say? But he must have been a little disconcerted at the successful family of seven—all more or less with their father's strength and their mother's beauty, and the character of both, who in holiday times rendered the house in Harley Street untenantable except by persons of the strongest nerves and most forbearing dispositions.

When after a long absence we come back full of expectation of change, we are often almost irritated at the pertinacious sameness of some of the people and things we had left behind. We ourselves are exactly the same, of course; our persistent unalterable ego is so absorbing in the foreground of our Self, that trifling changes in details of that composite entity count for nothing. We went away a complete carcass; we come back minus a leg, an arm, an eye—or all three—or, for that matter, all six, *tous compris*. What concern is that of yours? Mind your own business! It is our Self that left you broken-hearted at our departure; that wrote you, duly, those letters that grew less and less, and waned, until at last they all but ceased, and then came only to ask some little favour—something we couldn't get in the colony, or we wouldn't bother you, but if you could get it would you forward per etcetera, care of somebody. It is this very Self that has come back to you, we warrant it, look you now! And we know, intensely and unchangeably as *we* remain the same, that Time has been at work in our absence, and has made hay with your identity that was as the fresh green pasture of the Spring. Whatever we are, we know that you will have grown very fat, or very thin, or very serious; or lost your hair or your teeth, or your looks. Venus will have fled, and

the colour that was so becoming—so more than becoming. But we can make allowances—we know the way of life; and we and our luggage drive up to the door you waved your farewell to us from, ten—fifteen—twenty years ago, and have no misgivings—because we are no longer a child and can realise all about Time, and change, and that sort of thing, don't you know?

And here, after all, we find you. Well!—we'll be hanged if we can see the difference, when all's said and done. You are (sometimes) so very, very little altered—compared with what we expected. Your hair is still all your own, and much of its old colour; your teeth may be new, one or two of them, but that won't part us, even if you confess up about them; your hands may be a bit larger—but what of that? They are sweet and full of life and welcome, and your voice and manner—why, surely they are the very same we remember in the old years which, if not quite unforgotten, we are so very easily reminded of. And then in the first flush of our long-looked-for return, we and you are full of gladness, and think it will all be as it was in the days before our parting.

But it isn't! The chill comes soon, and we know that our rejoicing is dying down. It won't come back, the old time, for all we swept and garnished our hearts to receive it. And then we look round at the things that be, the new young lives that have come and grown in our absence; the vacant places that were full, the homes that have been cleared away; the tenements or dwellings or mansions that have risen where they stood! And we settle down to the actual, and try to find some solace for the loss of the things that were; but perhaps, after all, if we got them back, they would interfere seriously with the things that are, and that we really must attend to.

However—to go back to what we were saying—this firm conservation of appearance and identity has its irritating element. It is most frequent between the twenties and the forties; and what a lady of forty can forget about little incidents of her twenties, and the way she is wrapped up in the new young lives she is (to a great extent) responsible for, may make the outsider—you or ourself—feel very flat indeed.

But what is the end and object of all the lecture? It is to prevent the reader of this narrative imagining that the beautiful young matron who, on the late May morning when we saw Charles Heath on the stairs at No. 40, and thought he must be somebody else, was writing a letter in Harley Street and being dreadfully hindered by two very little girls—that this young woman, who might have been described as Margaret Heath and more, could rec-

ollect nearly so much of the first half of this story she makes part of as you can who have just read it. But you can recollect *her* well enough—there she is, her very self, only perhaps there is in her figure a declaration that it intends to approximate to her mother's, as we knew her, in another sixteen years, and the hand that holds the pen has lost the girlish beauty of the one that wrote to Mrs. Wycherly Watkins, and has got a new beauty of its own; its strength and self-reliance rest on it as a garment, as it pauses above the paper, even as a hand that thinks, and does not mean to write a word that need be altered or erased. And at this moment the younger child, a little three-year-old, captures the arm it belongs to, and makes further writing impossible—its owner has to appeal for succour.

"Alice dear, do come and take Alce away, and show her pictures of something horrible, or let her spin the terrestrial globe round. I shall never get my letter done. Yes—sweet Ducky! That's a Bengal Tidy—and the other's a Serpm."

"Wiss is to eat wiss?"

"Whichever you please, my pet—but go away to Aunty Lissy, and let Mummy write." And then as she refuses, flatly, but sweetly, to go to Aunty Lissy, her mother calls again, in a raised voice, for Alice. . . .

She will come in from somewhere directly—our old own Alice-for-short! Shall we know her again? Oh! yes—why, we recognised Peggy at once! There will be no difficulty about Alice.

Here she comes; we can hear her rustle beyond that door. No! this is Aunty Lissy,—Peggy calls her so,—and very pretty she is. Never a sweeter face to be found in all the length of Harley Street —will you take the wager? But *we* want to see Alice. . . .

What did we expect to see? We fancy we hear you ask this question. Not a little girl with a sort of comic manner, all her own, after all these years? Oh! no—we knew she would be a woman, theoretically. Nor did we think she was going to be plain, with those big blue eyes and that little oval face, so well set on her small round throat. We suspected she would turn out pretty, but it was to be on lines we were prepared for—and nothing, in Alice-for-short that was, prepared us for Aunty Lissy that is. Not that, now we come to look at her, we do not feel that it is really she; as we look her identity dawns, grows stronger, becomes irresistible. We see it now—but what a funny way of remaining the same! Not at all the one we should have chosen. But it's done now, and we may take her as she stands, and be glad that after all she has turned out such a very pretty woman.

Such a very pretty woman! That's it! It's the maturity we resent—we wanted her to be, in some sense, a child still; older, of course—taller, of course; more dignified, of course—heaps of things, of course. But not a woman.—

Well! it can't be helped—we must accept her, self-possession and all. Let us be glad she has kept her pale blue eyes and her small round throat, and thankful that her hair is much the same colour—mouse-colour with a tinge of chestnut; does that convey any idea to you? And let us be grateful that she has never overpassed the average height, but is petite and compact still.—Oh! dear! how very petite and compact she was in those old days—what a small midget it was that was pulled with a rope up the precipice at Surge Point, and left Dr. Jomson behind her, upside down. We must accept the inevitable—look facts in the face—and drop the subject. Or the story won't go on.

When Peggy, having been rescued by Alice, or Aunty Lissy, from the aggressions of the small thing of the same name, had finished her letter, she folded it and allowed the other small thing, because she had been so good it seemed, to lick it and stick it *to* for a treat. Then she wrote another letter, and the silence of the back drawing-room in Harley Street acknowledged only the scratching of her pen; a murmured recital from a picture-book of the senior baby, whose name was Phyllis; a hushed demonstration in Zoology, chiefly fictitious, in the room beyond to keep the junior baby in check, and a distant murmur of carriage wheels implying that visitor-time was coming or had come. A premature Summer had set in with a rush; as sometimes happens in May, and then we know we have to enjoy it while it lasts.

Lady Johnson (that was Peggy Heath's name now, and we can't get over the oddity of it) finished her last letter rapidly, as a letter easily written and involving nothing; she fastened and directed it as one does, much relieved, at the end of a batch of letters, and said triumphantly—"There!"

"Now you may ring the bell, Phillips," she went on, addressing the little girl; "only pull it down very gently and when you've got it down, don't hang on the handle but let it go back click. That's right." And the bell was so successfully rung that it went on for ever so long, and had hardly stopped when a he-servant, in suppressed livery, entered the room with promptness in his manner and responsibility on his countenance.

"These letters must go at once, Handsworth. These for the post—these by hand—send James. And say he must take the underground—and tell nurse she can come for these children."

Peggy spoke of these children as accidents she had not encouraged, and Handsworth disappeared with the letters and his instructions. While the door stood open, a parrot was audible below; we should perhaps have included him in the current noises; but really when the door closed again it almost shut his voice out, so substantial was it and so close at the joints.

"Your baby's very quiet in there, Alice."

"She's gone off like a top on my knee; I'm writing over her." And the scratching of another pen could have been heard by a sharp ear. "Come here—she's sweet!" Peggy went into the little patch-room where Alice was writing, and put her arm around the adopted aunt's neck from behind. Both gloated over the sleeping lapful. I wish you could have seen them.

"Did you hear that parrot, Alice?"

"Oh dear, yes! I heard him. Isn't it funny? He only does it now at intervals. I haven't heard it for months and months."

"I was trying to think when he began—was it when she——"

"Oh no! Ages before that. Why, it's as long as I can recollect."

And then both ladies said together, as by an inspiration: "Oh yes! I know—I remember," and Alice says, for both, what they remember:

"It was that day, of course, when she first came to the Gardens and sang." And Peggy goes on with the reminiscence:

"I know. I recollect it all now. It was when that old mother of hers was in the front room—and he picked the name up and shrieked it all the evening. Poor Charley!"

The nurse came in and the children were conveyed away, one awake and one asleep. As the door opened there came again from afar, clear and unmistakable, the name the parrot had shrieked before—"Straker!"

"There now!" said Alice. "Well! he is a funny Polly. What on earth has made him rake that up now? I wish he would put the kettle on instead, and then we'd all have tea."

"We needn't wait any longer for tea. Ellen won't come now." And Lady Johnson pulled the bell for tea. "I'm not at home if anybody comes, Handsworth," is the postscript to her instruction to bring it. She went on: "Charley will come in and will have a nice quiet time. I really am getting to hate people more and more——"

"What nonsense, Miss Peggy!" for the old first name of all had clung to its owner, as far as Alice was concerned, and we are glad she has not forgotten it, so far, in the story.—But read on, and you will see she will vary her nomenclature, most perversely, as she

continues: "You know you don't hate lots of people, so come now, Lady Johnson——"

"I mean I hate people that call and leave cards, and are at home on Thursdays—Music."

"Very well, Lady Johnson, then I shall tell the Stossingers you hate them, if it's that. Besides, it's very good music."

"Very good music, and we're going; but it isn't to-day and to-day is Thursday—the Stossingers is the fourth, and the eleventh."

"Yes—and to-day's the fourth."

"It can't be! At least, if it is, I've dated my letters wrong."

"Then you've dated your letters wrong—look at the newspaper—it's out there somewhere." On which Peggy went to seek for it, and Alice waited, leaning back in her chair and looking round after her to hear the date confirmed. She heard the newspaper rustle as Peggy picked it up; and said interrogatively, "Well—Lady Johnson—who's right?" Her accuracy was admitted. "Quite right, dear; it is to-night. I don't mind going at all."—But the speaker had caught on to the paper, and had begun to think of something else. She was looking at the Births, Deaths, and Marriages.

"Salmon—Wainwright. Wasn't that a Miss Wainwright with those people at Brighton where Ellen stayed?" And Alice replied: "No, not Wainwright—Pulborough"; and neither seemed to think the error in recollection anything to be surprised at. Alice had dipped her pen to go on writing, when Lady Johnson, who had not put the paper down, gave a short sudden cry—of surprise certainly—scarcely pain:

"Oh! Alice, oh, my dear! Come at once. Look, look at this!"

And Alice went quickly. She took the sheet of *The Times* from the pointing finger, and read the announcement of a death we already know.

"Oh, Margaret darling! Yes—it must be—it must! Oh dear!"

And both women burst into tears; they are not exactly tears of sorrow for the death—that could scarcely be. Rather they are a tribute to the whole unhappy past, and the wasted and ruined life of poor Charles Heath. It is the end—the official end—of a sad epoch, and Death comes, as his way is, to report progress; to put his seal upon events, and make us think back upon the bygone time. And then we, for our part, may weigh it well, and wonder if all that we regret the loss of was really good, and even if what seemed so hard to endure was always evil. And may decide—most likely—that those are points on which we may never be a penny the wiser, and that we may as well let them alone.

CHAPTER XXX

HOW DEATH MUST NEEDS BE SAD, EVEN OF A RIDDANCE. HOW A BOY NAMED PIERRE HAD SMALLPOX, AND ALICE WENT TO NURSE HIM

PEGGY and Alice, as they waited for tea in the front room, listening to the perpetual rumble of carriages, softened down to *nil* in the immediate vicinity by a neighbour who had burst out in straw all over the street, were very silent at first. Peggy went and looked out at the front window, while Alice made the tea. The kettle fizzed and sputtered, and probably wished it could put its spirit-lamp out; the near double-knocks of the callers close by were answered by others afar; and some were futile, while others fructified. Polly was noisy below, and whenever the door opened for some development or extenuation of tea, his shriek was in evidence. His accidental revival of a favourite shout of former years was grisly; and Alice, when she had made the tea, went quietly downstairs and put his shawl over him and quenched him. Then she returned to pour it out, and carried the two cups to the little table near the fresh spring air from the open window, and both ladies sat down on the sofa that belonged to it.

"How much can you remember of all that time, Alice? You were only a small, you know."

"Remember! Why, I remember it all, as plain as yesterday—how she came to sing, and poor little Dan said how awfully jolly she was, and when we were sent away to bed we listened on the stairs."

"Poor little Danny! But we *did* all like her then, Alice, didn't we? I know I wanted to like her then, for Charley's sake—because I saw how it was."

"So did I. But it wasn't so hard for me to like her, because I thought Mr. Charley *must* be right. I think we understood it, on the stairs, Danny and I." And Alice's sad, clear eyes look wistfully back into the past. Did we understand it?—Peggy wonders to herself.—Both sit silent in intervals, and when they speak, it is with voices dropped. This time, Alice speaks first again.

"You know I wasn't such a small as all that; I was old enough to go to Miss Fortescue's, or very nearly. You know it was in the January I went, when the hard frost came."

"I know. You went away the day before the ice. You were not there when Danny was brought in." Peggy's mind pauses on the memory of another grief; it is long enough ago now to talk of it quietly. Have you ever recognised the fact that, in trouble, ease comes from talking of another trouble instead? Alice feels it too, in this case, and does not break the thread; she is silent and Peggy continues:

"I remember Rupert's voice so well—'Don't give in—don't give in'—oh, such a long time! And then at last there was no hope at all. And yet we felt it was wrong to despair, and leave the poor little drowned body alone."

"Oh, I know! I thought I recollected it, but of course I don't. I wasn't really there. I only heard. But I remember your letter to Miss Fortescue, and her saying: 'I'm afraid, Alice, this must be from your Aunt Margaret'—and the black edge. She always said, 'Your Aunt Margaret.'"

"I wonder," says Peggy, striking a new vein in the mine of reminiscence, "if you can recollect when you went away to Miss Fortescue's, and how we could hardly get you off Charley?"

"Oh yes! I remember it all. But it seems now as if it was another little girl, not me."

"Do you recollect my keeping on that you were not to be a goose, because Mr. Charley wasn't going away?"

"I recollect. At least, I seem to recollect that the other little girl went nearly frantic, and screamed to Mr. Charley not to go away; and you all tried to console her, or me, whichever it was."

There is a moment or two of silence, and then Peggy says: "He'll be here very soon now—it's nearly half-past," and then drops back to reminiscence.

"Perhaps I was wrong in letting him persuade me, but what difference could it have made, when he came to me and said: 'Look here, Poggy-Woggy, I'm going to cut it short and marry Lavinia to-morrow!'—what could I say to him? What good would it have done, if I had refused to go?—and how could I when he said: 'If you don't come, Poggy, there won't be a living soul in it of my own belongings, and people will think you think all sorts of things'—what could I have done but what I did?"

"Nothing. It was all right; it had to be."

"But I did think—I always shall think—Papa was wrong, well! mistaken—only it seems hard to say so now, and I'm sure Mamma was. It was refusing to receive her was such a mistake. Of course, Papa was obliged to go Mamma's way."

"Of course!"

"And as for its being her duty because of Ellen, that was all stuff and nonsense; it was no fault of hers that the father was a bad character." Alice puts in a word for Mrs. Heath, or "Grandmamma," for that is her status now. "Was she not right after all?—as it turned out in the end, I mean—'Like father, like son'—so people say," says Alice.

"Yes—she turned out badly," says Peggy; "but what I mean is that if Mamma had been more coming, and temporised a little, it might all have died down naturally, and—oh, dear! it's no use thinking of it now; but of course, as it was, all poor Charley's chivalry was up in arms; you know what Charley's like?"

"Oh! yes—I know!"

"And then, of course, Mamma had to give in in the end. You were not there the day he brought her back from abroad to the Gardens, and took her straight to Mamma and said: 'This is my wife, Mother. If you send her away, you send me too.'"

"And what did Granny say?"

"Said she had been set at naught, but it was her duty as a Christian to forgive. It's a shame to laugh, Alice darling, but really I can hardly help it. Poor Mamma! As long as she could make dear Papa do the work and keep in the background herself, she was all Spartan fortitude. The minute she was face to face with the enemy, she turned tail. And Lavinia looked very nice—and poor Charley looked so happy and beaming. Oh, dear!" And Peggy doesn't look as if she found it hard not to laugh. Alice kisses her, *en passant,* to keep her up. A prolonged knock, that sounds like a disquisition ending in a gun, comes at the street-door; and the conversation is held in check until the concomitant footman has met his fate, and died away, leaving cards. Speech could not be audible below, but such a long coat as came with the knock affects the imagination, and imposes the secrecy of silence on whoso has said he is not at home.

Peggy and Alice speak with bated voices; until the young man (who knows all about it) has enthroned himself on the box, and gone away. Then Peggy speaks above her breath again, as one relieved:

"I've never made out to this day when it was that it began. (Those people were the Fotheringays.) You know they were very happy at first, or seemed so. I fancy it was while you were still too small to understand much about it. I can't say I ever found much fault with her myself—but of course she was extravagant, and there was always the one thing. Charley used to turn it into a joke at first, and talk about her sweethearts; then the moment

there was a suspicion of anything being in earnest, poor Charley's persistent attempt to keep it a joke got painful. Nothing would make him see there was anything wrong with Lavinia; he was too chivalrous to admit it. I don't believe he ever realised it until that business with Lowenstern."

"They were at the Hotel together?" half says, half asks Alice. And Peggy replies: "Yes, and poor Charley all the time thought she was at Birmingham with her mother. Robin came upon them at Leamington and went straight for Lowenstern, and she threw herself on Robin and held him while Lowenstern ran away. Then she wanted to make him believe there was no harm in it—just an accident! But the waiter had told Robin they were Mossoo and Madame Ragon . . . isn't that him?" But it wasn't. Peggy seemed to find a satisfaction in talking it all over, and Alice in hearing her, so she went on:

"He never would have divorced her, you know, except for her own sake. He said it would be her last chance of being a respectable woman; but she never got the chance, for Lowenstern laughed at her."

"Was she with him, I mean Lowenstern, when she died?" Alice asks as believing that there may still be things she has never heard. The unhappy soprano had been talked of as little as possible.

"I don't know the least," Peggy answers. "Charley and I always felt the less we heard about her the better, and you see the advertisement gives no clue. I'm sure that's his knock." But no! It wasn't his knock, even now, and it was getting quite late.

"I wish he'd come," says his sister, "I'm all on the jar—and it makes me fancy every knock is his. That wasn't anybody. It was a mistake—they've gone away to thirty-five opposite." And the two stand at the window and watch the mistake, in the shape of a thick lady with a thin daughter, reinstated as accurate and gathered into the bosom of thirty-five, opposite. Alice keeps silent, but Peggy goes on talking.

"I was always so very, very glad Papa never lived to know it. The disgrace would have broken his heart."

"And people don't really mind," Alice cuts in suddenly and rather enigmatically. "You know what I mean, dear!" And Peggy seems to know so well what she means, that nothing but a nod with closed lips is necessary. We know, of course, that what Alice meant was that public condemnation isn't in earnest about anything of this sort, and indeed has an element of forgiveness in it for those who kindly provide interesting divorce-court cases. What

should we do without them, when we are regular persons: we can't always be at church!

"Poor dear Papa! How he used to reproach himself for letting Charley be an artist! I remember how he said, when I told him how good he'd been to Charley, that he owed it to the poor boy for never having stopped him. 'How can a man know he can't paint unless somebody tells him?' said he, 'and nobody ever told poor Charley.' And then he blamed himself for never having had the courage of his opinions—'But we were all such mighty fine people'—you remember Papa, Alice dear?" And Alice remembered very well. Both sit on, thinking of bygones, but the last recollection has given a new list to the conversation, and Peggy recurs to a theme that is evidently often under discussion. "Alice, dear," says she, as one provided for a fresh possibility in it; and Alice says, "What?"

"Do you really think Charley will never, never, never—make anything of it?"

Alice waives the issue. "He makes something by stained-glass," contains the implication that he makes nothing by something else—pictures, no doubt. We notice that there is in Lady Johnson a certain deference for Alice; that she seems to impute authority to her. Indeed, Alice's face has a sense of brightness on the forehead; which is, however, well-set and free from overpowering phrenologies, or we are not sure we would have anything to do with her. It does not, as some foreheads do, advertise the profoundness of its thought. But it leaves one with a sense that something has flashed, and we can't say what; and we know that the eyebrows, not dark but firmly pencilled, will back up the flash, if need be, for all they are so still in their repose. Just this time, they move a little—a slight half-rueful wrinkle, as she adds: "Poor Mr. Charley!" For note, that to her he is always "Mr." Charley. It is not ceremoniousness—rather, a form of familiarity.

"He'll never paint a really finished picture," says she. And we are painfully conscious that the flash has penetrated the dark corners of the subject. But it has found something there it would like to show us. "He has plenty of ability, you know," Alice goes on, "only he's on the wrong tack."

"Do you mean he's painting the wrong sort of pictures?"

"No, no. The wrong tack altogether!"—But just as we are going to hear what Charles's *métier* should have been, there comes a knock both recognise as really his. Peggy says, "I'll go," and leaves the room to meet him. Alice does not follow, but waits half-way to the door, listening to hear them meet. In a moment it

is clear that they are not speaking of the death. Something present and pressing is displacing it. Alice goes out.

"I don't believe it," Peggy is saying. "Only another false alarm!"

"Well! I'm only saying what old Payne says—I hope he's wrong." Alice asks what's the matter, and Lady Johnson answers:

"Dr. Payne says Pierre has got smallpox."

"Has got some of the early symptoms," Charles corrects the broad statement. "Ten to one he's wrong. We shall see to-morrow—meanwhile, I oughtn't to come here, I only came over to tell you; Payne said there would be no danger yet."

"Oh! Charley dear, what an alarmist you are! Now do come in and don't be silly." And under his sister's soothing influence Charles comes into the drawing-room, and submits to the current refreshment under protest. "Going without your tea won't make it a bit safer, you silly old boy," says Peggy. Charles acquiesces generally, but evidently thinks if he keeps at a distance and kisses nobody, his germs will flock round him and not cross the room. He gives details of the symptoms, which Peggy treats with derision: "If one was to pay attention to all the fussifications about infection," she says, "there would never be an end of it!"

"What's Alice after?" asks Charles, for Alice has quitted the room and run upstairs. Presently she is audible returning. Peggy has been thinking out the best approach to the subject of the advertisement. Alice calls to her from outside, and she goes out; then follows a short colloquy in an undertone, and Peggy returns. "What's Alice after?" Charles asks again. She replies equivocally and the question dies down, and she goes and sits by her brother on the arm of the big chair he is drinking the half-cold tea in. The hand that begins automatically to ruffle his hair, as in old days, is bigger, and the hair it touches is either cut closer or not so thick, but now that we see them together in this way, and there is leisure to think both over, we are aware that the changes of Time have gone mostly in the direction of gravity and sadness on his part, and mere amplification on hers. Lady Johnson of Harley Street with four boys and three girls is quite as like Peggy Heath as one could reasonably expect. But we could have reconciled ourselves to much more tangible change in Charley, to have his old smile back.

"Have you had any other news, Charley dear?"

"Yes!" A simple, direct affirmative is so rare that Peggy at once sees he knows of his wife's death. She could not have guessed it from anything in his previous manner. She finds she does not

know what to say next, and says nothing; if he has heard any particulars of the event, he will tell her of his own accord, but Alice's disappearance is still unaccounted for, and Charles harks back on it. "What was Alice after?" he says.

"Now you mustn't be angry! She went straight away to Acacia Road to see after Pierre." Charles starts up from his chair in great perturbation.

"Oh! Poggy-Woggy, how could you? Oh dear! Oh dear! I must go and see and send her back again."

"Now, Charley dear! don't be silly. Besides, you know perfectly well you can't manage Alice—she always gets her own way." Charles appears to be conscious that this is so, and subsides into his chair again. "It's all very fine, Lady Johnson," he says; for he, like Alice, often uses this designation, "but suppose Alice catches it, and comes out like a nutmeg-grater all over?"

"I don't believe there's any 'it' for her to catch; and I should love Alice just the same if she was ever so scratchy."

"So should I. But you ought to consider the poor girl herself. Alice-for-short! Just think!"

"Be easy, old man. Nobody's going to be a nutmeg-grater. It's only one of your panics about the boy."

From which it would appear that Charley is often in panics about his boy. He seems to accept his sister's decision on this point, as on others, but nothing alters the resolute sadness of his face; it is consistently melancholy, without a trace of the lachrymose. It becomes very absent as he sits in the big armchair, with Peggy ruffling his head as of old. She does not mean to hurry him to speak of the death—she knows he will in his own time. When that comes, he says as though there had been a conversation to continue: "No! I've heard no details—I only know what the advertisement tells—it's all over now." He seemed to put it away as though he said: "Now we have spoken of it, and that's enough"—but the thought was on him that her death must surely bring revival of blame for her, and he was all on the alert to forestall it.

"It was all my fault, Peg," he says, and he is only reaffirming an old position. "It had all come to an end, and it was my obstinacy brought it all on again—I was really never the husband for her."

Peggy's lips want to say, "Which of the other two, or three, was?" but she keeps them still, and says nothing, at least to that effect. All she says is: "It was a mistake, Charley dear, but it's all over now." As his last words were to the same effect, he cannot take any exception to it.

"Pierre recollects her after a fashion," said he, his mind landing, as it were, on an island where he knew his sister's had already arrived. "He was five years old—only a year younger than Alice was." Alice thus referred to, without further description, means Alice at the time of her first occurrence; in fact, as a substantive that describes that occurrence: "But then boys are so much younger than girls; I'm not altogether sorry he remembers her so little."

Peggy is bound to talk to her brother about his wife's death, but is also tongue-tied on the subject, and wants to help him to fabricate extenuation of her conduct; as she can imagine none, least of all by laying blame at his door, she has to be silent. She would like, nevertheless, to soften her silence, the meaning of which she knows he knows. She has slight propensities towards moral tags, true in themselves, but frayed with overmuch use. She gives them up though, and cannot even manage the most trenchant of all known words to the point; for she believes in her heart that in this very popular department of human offence, her brother is as much "without sin" as she herself is. She may be mistaken—very likely is, we think we hear you say, if you are human—but what do *we* know? So she does not suggest that she and Charley should make a merit of not casting stones, and still clings to silence against her will.

He knows why, and leaves it alone, but the very silence works upon them both, and when Peggy breaks it at last with, "Oh! Charley—Charley darling," and a protest against a sob in her voice, he lets the head she draws to her sink on her bosom, and makes no more ado, but cries as a child cries when it seeks concealment for its tears. So they remain, and dwell upon the spoiled past. And so Rupert would have found them, only that when Peggy hears him, without, she gets up from Charley and goes to meet him, and Charles thinks he hears, or thinks he might have heard had he listened, the words: "And a good riddance, too!" at the end of a communication crossed by grunts, for the great physician doesn't soften his speech except for occasion shown.

The appearance of his brother-in-law, and the telling him about the boy, reminded Charles that he ought to get back home. He had forgotten about the germs, although they were, no doubt, just as much to the fore as ever. "I'll run you round and have a look at the kid," said Sir Rupert, and influenced his carriage, through the agency of Handsworth, to stop and take them. Five minutes more chat-margin and twelve minutes trot found them at the door of Charles' domicile in Acacia Road, St. John's Wood, with Alice coming out on the balcony to see who the carriage was. If you had

passed with a friend at that moment, you would probably have said: "You didn't see that very pretty woman in the balcony just now?" And he would have replied: "No, why didn't you tell me?" And you would have felt that perhaps it was because Alice's was a sort of beauty you took pleasure in exaggerating, but didn't want to be convicted on. So, feeling you had got your friend in a corner, you would have condoled with him on his loss.

However, Alice really did look *very* pretty on the balcony; sunset light in May is an improvement to all of us, and you felt that when it died away, there would still be much to be said for her; but she didn't wait to see, for she came downstairs and took the wind out of Charles' latch-key's sail, by opening the door from inside.

Charles had a disappointment in store for him. Peggy's cheerful confidence had made him set his mind on being pooh-poohed and called an alarmist. Alice, on the contrary, was what is called encouraging. This means confession that something is afoot which we have to be encouraged about. Dr. Payne had been again (which was bad enough in itself), and had said we were not to be the least uneasy, because we shouldn't know what it was till this time tomorrow at least. Meanwhile we were approaching smallpox by a process of elimination, Dr. Payne having just deprived us of diseases, which we had some hopes of, by disallowing their principal symptoms; as, for instance, who ever heard of measles with no running at the eyes? We had been sanguine about measles—now we had to give it up. This was the substance of Alice's report of progress on the way up to the patient's bedroom.

A quarter of an hour later, Sir Rupert was departing from the door with: "Remember! all I say is that possibly it isn't." And with that small consolation, Alice and Charles went back, grievously downcast, into the house to do what little might be done to allay fever that meant to have its way, and to keep a watchful eye for the arrival of that most unwelcome guest, the cutaneous eruption that was to christen the disorder. Meanwhile, Pierre, a little chap between eleven and twelve, had become something red-hot, the identity of which he was himself doubtful of, but of which he knew this for certain, that he had a pain in *its* back, or it had a pain in *his*. For he could not tell which was which, Pierre or the red-hot thing; and in the course of a few days, for all Sir Rupert had said that possibly it wasn't, it was perfectly clear that it *was*, and the fever raged and would not be comforted.

CHAPTER XXXI

HOW CHARLES AND MRS. GAMP HAD A CLASSICAL CABMAN, AND HOW THEY ENJOYED THE BALCONY IN THE MOONLIGHT. HOW CHARLES WAS A BAD ARTIST, AND ALICE SHOWED HER LOVE-LETTERS

When Lady Johnson said Alice always got her own way with Charles, she spoke no more than the truth. In the controversy that followed Sir Rupert's departure, as to whether Alice should stay or go, Charles hadn't a chance.

"What's the use of training for a nurse for two years if one isn't to nurse a case that turns up providentially, to keep one's hand in? Answer me that, Mr. Charley dear! And a nice uncle you'll look, if I go back now and give it to Phillips and Alce." This last was the proper distinction-name of the little Alice—her "i" was omitted for clearness. Phillips's real name was Phyllis. "You know quite well, Mr. Charley," Alice continued, "that if I had my white dress and big ribbons under my chin and my blue cloak and bonnet, you would think I was bacillus-proof."

So Alice got her own way; she turned every one out of the house except the cook and its master, and only acquiesced in an auxiliary under extreme pressure. This functionary had a bacillus-proof uniform of the correctest type. But she had soon to be exchanged for another because the patient complained that in the smallest hours of the morning, when he asked for drink, she held the cup near his lips, then drew it away, to tantalise him. Was this fever, or was it true? Who could tell? Anyhow, an exchange was effected, and a new one relieved guard at intervals. She was a sister of St. Bridget and a daughter of a jeweller in Bond Street, and Alice took kindly to her and made a good deal of acquaintance—in fact, she often allowed a needless inroad on what might have been hours of sleep in order to get a good chat with Sister Eulalie, chiefly about that interesting topic, the supernatural. She even went the length of turning tables with her in the silence of the night.

Now, even without the added stimulus of ghosts and spirits, there is a fascination in the companionship of the sick-room. Nowhere is intercourse more social—all formality is swept away,

responsibility is defined, and refreshments are always justifiable; yet never *de rigueur* if unwelcome. If we are inclined to be silent, there is always the excuse that the patient is getting to sleep, but if we wish to talk, who can prevent us? And if we do chance to feel that we have been making too much noise, we can always make up for it by a short interlude of going on tip-toe, and saying something inaudible to show how tight we are holding our tongues. In fact, we have only to consider the patient sufficiently to ensure the luxury of a clear conscience, and we can enjoy ourselves thoroughly.

However, as you say, that is perhaps a malicious and cynical way of putting it. But be easy! Poor Pierre never was a penny the worse from any neglect of his nurses. The most beautiful communications of the table would be ruthlessly sacrificed the instant either nurse heard the patient move, or thought she did. Alice and Sister Eulalie enjoyed the protection of the Red Cross in the Battle of Life, but did their duty by the casualty they had in charge.

"We've christened ourselves Mrs. Gamp and Mrs. Prig," said Alice after reporting to Charles the events of his absence and the state of the patient. More than a fortnight had passed, and the worst was over. No one had been allowed in the house but Charles and the doctor—the primordial one, Sir Rupert being quite unnecessary. Charles had gone every day to his Studio, avoiding his fellow-man, and rushing upstairs surrounded by mental pictures of germs like a swarm of bees, only smaller, and then locking his door to keep the swarm in and his fellow-man out. This conduct would hardly have passed muster nowadays, but in those years people had not been brought under control. At this moment of the story he was scheming in his mind to take Alice out in a hansom, smallpox or no—it was such a glorious evening, and the poor girl had really hardly been out.

"Mrs. Gamp and Mrs. Prig didn't turn tables," said Charles. "However, when Mrs. Gamp comes, or Mrs. Prig, whichever she is, you and me, Miss Kavanagh dearest, are going for ever-such-a-long drive in a cab—yes, we are! And you're going to sit up on the seat beside me and look over the door. Do you recollect that, Alice, I wonder?"

"I remember. Only my feet didn't touch the ground then. But ought we to ride in a cab?"

"We can call the driver's attention to the germs." Charles says this with much of his old manner. "Or we can have the cab sterilised after. I'll tell him, anyhow. There's Mrs. Prig—cut

along, Alice—get your bonnet on." And as Mrs. Prig comes in to relieve guard, Alice disappears to get ready. "We're getting on beautifully, Mr. Heath," says Mrs. Prig, "and if only there are no complications——"

"I can't say I've ever seen him look worse than he does to-day," says Charles, rather dejectedly. But the nurse goes into the sick-room, at the door of which they are standing, and her voice comes out in cheerful confirmation of her opinion. "Looks don't count, you know," she says, and Charles feels happier.

Just as Alice and he are departing, Mrs. Prig calls out from the landing above: "Oh, Miss Kavanagh, I was forgetting to tell you—my father knew about the stone; he says it's a Jacinth. I've brought it back all safe. Here it is! You take it." And comes a few steps down to transfer a ring from her finger to Alice's.

Charles chose a particularly showy Hansom with a spirited horse, and got Alice and himself in. She thought he was going to forget the caution he had contemplated to the cabman, but she was mistaken.

"This young lady and myself," said he, through the trapdoor, pushed up by his stick-point, to the driver, "are from the Smallpox Hospital. Any objection?"

"None whatever, Sir. Convalescent, I presume?" Thus the Cabby replied, with immovable gravity, and Alice felt that even now she had hardly gauged the length and breadth of the London cabman's mind. "Well," said Charles, "I did my duty, anyhow!"

"Which way did you tell him to go?"

"Didn't tell him any way—I'll show him with my stick. Let's go along Finchley Road and round Hampstead," which accordingly they set out to do.

"What was it Mrs. Prig said about a stone?" asked Charles when they had settled down to chat.

"Why, don't you recollect my old ring—the one there was that funny story about?"

"Surely. The old ring—what that poor mother of yours found in Jeff's jug. I wonder whether Jeff sold the old jug. And you were bringing the beer from the pub. Poor little Alice!"

"It all seems now like a strange old dream," says Alice. "Oh, so long ago! Only that time I went over the cliff seems like the other day; and it was only just after when all's said and done."

"*Is* all said and done? But go on telling about Mrs. Prig and the stone."

"Why—Sister Eulalie says—(oh, gracious! that child will be

run over—no, he's all right!)—Sister Eulalie says about that stone—you remember the stone we couldn't find the name of——?"

"I remember there *was* a stone. And I remember one evening before the fire in the back drawing-room at the Gardens, me and Peggy and Rupert trying to make it spell Phyllis. We wanted to tack it on to the ghost at No. 40. *You* saw the ghost, Alice?"

"I said I saw a lady on the stairs, didn't I? I wonder what I did see!"

"You seem a very weak-kneed witness, Miss Kavanagh. Not much to be elicited from *you*. But let's see what the Jacinth will do for us. Don't put your glove over it." For Alice is pulling away at a tight glove that has been refusing to come on since they started. She runs it back as far as the ring, for inspection: Charles examines it.

"I recollect now," he says; "but the Jacinth comes after the P, and that's no use at all. I wish it was after the L, that would give us a lift, because J is I."

"I'm sure that thing after the L isn't a stone at all. It's a little bit of ivory; that would do, you know."

"Peggy wanted the two L's to be Lapis-lazuli.—Well! that looks right—that *is* a bit of Lapis-lazuli." Both reflected over the ring Alice held out for inspection over the folding doors of the cab.

"It *does* look like Phyllis—doesn't it, Alice? If only Jacinth began with an H we should be almost quite complete."

The little incident that followed was always spoken of afterwards by Charles and Alice as, *par excellence,* THE surprise of their lives, for a voice came from above, through the little trap-door—the voice of the cabman, but not sounding at all like the voice of a real cabman.

"I can understand it, Sir, if you'll excuse the interruption—(I've got my eye on the horse. You needn't be uneasy)—Jacinth is Hyacinth—Hyacinth begins with an H." But the horse was not prepared to allow his driver such liberty, and shied, and had to be calmed down with lashing and disparagement, which seemed good for his nervous system. He settled into an easy amble, after one or two snorts and head-flings. The driver resumed:

"He'll be all right now. You'll excuse me, but you see I was just looking through to mention that the road was up in front, and I heard you say Jacinth didn't begin with an H. You'll excuse me?" Both, who had been laughing at the oddity of the whole thing, said at once: "Certainly—you're quite right"; and the cabman added: "It was no use going on and having to come back—

I'll turn off this next turn, if you've no objection"; to which Charles assented, "Go anywhere round by Hampstead, for a drive," he said.

"But—what a strange cabby!" said Alice, and again burst out laughing. It seemed too ridiculous that this puzzle of the stone should be solved after all these years by an occasional cabman, speaking through a hole in his own roof. It was perfectly clear though (and Charles felt quite ashamed of not having solved the mystery before) that Phyllis was spelled by the initials of the ring-stones; only that H and Y were supplied by one stone, and both L's by another. But interest in the discovery was, for the moment, superseded by the way it had come about. It really had to be accounted for; it was impossible to accept such a phenomenon without explanation.

"Shall I shout up through the hole to him, and ask him if he's a Senior Classic, or what?"

"I don't know what one ought to do," said Alice. "Some explanation is necessary." And Charles said, "We can't let it alone—impossible."

The explanation came, but not till the drive was over, and all three were at the street-door of Charley's house. Then, as Charles handed the cabman an extravagant fare, to avoid complications, he asked him point-blank: "How came you to know about Jacinth and Hyacinth?" Alice stood looking at him and wondering what he would answer.

"I am not the only man that has failed in life," he said; "it was my own fault."

And that was all! But it seemed enough. He slipped the fare into his pocket uncounted, remounted his box, and rode away. Alice ran quickly upstairs, to relieve guard: Charles followed slowly, his face sadder and more thoughtful than ever.

"We've had such a funny adventure." Thus Alice to Sister Eulalie, and she gave an account of the cabman. Not having seen him, the nurse was less interested in his antecedents than in the confirmation of the identity of the stone. This was a personal matter; after her father's opinion she felt it was in the family. But Charles was rather silent, and said nothing further about it till quite late in the evening, when the patient had gone off to sleep after a visit from the doctor. Progress was satisfactory, and chat was possible till one or the other of the guardians should go away to rest. It was a beautiful warm, early summer night, and they could sit out on the balcony, within easy hearing of the patient, should he wake.

These two were necessarily isolated from the world without, and thrown, little loth, on one another's society. Theirs was one of those cases, rare enough, of a relation between two of their age and sex into which no element of disquiet could enter; yet which was not the relation of father and daughter, nor of brother and sister. Alice was not changed, in the eyes of Charles, from the Alice he had picked up off the stones that Pussy broke the saucer on, and had wrapped up in his coat. He himself was, to her, simply the great and wondrous good that had come suddenly down from the first floor to the basement to raise her up from what she had since learned to know was Hell, but which had till then been merely a *lot*—one of those things, or states, the Sunday-school teacher had given her to understand it was sinful to repine at. So Alice, being anxious to oblige her Maker, had done all that in her lay to be grateful to him for short commons, underground darkness, a father peevish at the best, and a mother half-drunk at the worst, but improving perceptibly as she became insensible. Still, she found her task of gratitude a much lighter one when there was "vouchsafed" to her—as she understood had occurred in the foregoing instances—an Angel in spectacles, who had picked her up and wafted her away to an earthly Paradise of warmth and light and love; a Paradise that had since become her very own. It had never crossed Alice's mind that had she not been the dear little maiden she was, she would never have clung to that spray, but would have had to pass out into another wilderness—better than her first, and protected; but still, not the haven of calm waters and balmy winds her memory now knew as Hyde Park Gardens. A hint that she herself had helped the end, that her merits had anything to do with it, would have seemed to her blasphemy against Mr. Charley. He was an Avatar that had been vouchsafed and was being vouchsafed to her; and to suppose that her personal identity had made his benevolence an easy one would have made her seem to herself undeserving of having anything further vouchsafed, now or henceforward. On which account when the alarm came that Pierre had smallpox Alice did forthwith what she would have done equally had it been Bubonic Plague, and went straight away to nurse him. It has transpired that she had had two years' training as a nurse, so the thing was a matter of course. He was Mr. Charley's boy, and there was an end of it.

We may speculate, from these data, about what these two were to one another, and to themselves, as they sat out on the balcony in the sweet summer night, enjoying, as Charles put it, the coolth of the warmth. The smoke of his meerschaum pipe—for he still

smoked a meerschaum with a long stem, and Latakia—curled up in the still air, and the reflection of a backward half-moon, only just climbing above the purple haze of an excusable minimum of London fog, glared in his spectacles as he looked through them at the girl opposite; perhaps we should write the woman opposite, for Alice was on the way to twenty-four, if you please. But he saw the girl she had been to him all along—he merely looked on her womanhood as a plaguy intrusion that had been fussing round these five years past and that nobody had wanted—least of all himself! Why could she not stop a baby, and be hanged to her! Twenty-three! Just fancy—Alice-for-short! That expresses how he thought of her as near as we can put it. And all the while she was a woman grown, mature of form and well-established, and with all her share of beauty, and more than her share of self-reliance and character. And he was clinging to her babyhood, as a father clings to that of his favourite daughter.

And how did he picture himself to himself, this man, as he sat there silently smoking in the moonlight, watching her and thinking of his own spoiled past, and unhappy life; of his vague and ill-directed efforts in an art he was never born to practise; of his misplaced, mistaken, misfeatured love for the woman his intense chivalry still refused to think of as entirely bad; and of the many things that, but for this and but for that, might have been and were not? His image of himself was that of an old man, weary with self-reproach and loneliness of heart, ready for confession and repentance, if such were possible, but seeing no outlet for either. He had chosen his life, and must go on to the end; it was a garden where no growth could be; where no seed had been sown in its season; where no stock had been grafted with a right scion. The plantain was in the turf, and the wire-worm in the flower-beds; and one day the tap-roots of the creeping weed would be over all, and the gardener would still be there, older still, sadder still, and saying in his heart: "This is what is left of the rose-tree I planted years ago—this was the vine, and this the fig. And when the young leaves came in their first spring, their first communion with the sun and showers, I dreamed of the bloom and the fruit that were to be, and never doubted of their fulness. And see them now!"

Alice knew Mr. Charley was unhappy about his profession, but did not know how much. She allowed herself a measure of self-deception about his status, and when Mr. Jerrythought A. R. A. affirmed that: "'Eath had seized some aspects of Nature that every one else had overlooked" she really believed that his words meant something, and that Mr. Charley had a strange superior inner life

in his Art. She heard other friendly voices speak of the quality and tone that distinguished it, and longed to be able to see them herself—but alas!—unsuccessfully. So she anchored her ship to the rock of her own incapacity, and trusted that it was this alone that postponed her reaching a port of belief in his powers as an Artist.

As to the way in which she, for her part, thought of herself in her relation to him, it was simple, straightforward, intelligible. She was something he was welcome to, if it was possible or conceivable that it should bring him any earthly advantage. What can I do for poor Mr. Charley? This was the question she asked herself again and again. If it had been clear to her that the sacrifice of her right hand would have done him any mortal good, she would simply have stretched it out and said: "Cut away!" If it could have been shown by some witch that two blue eyes alone were wanting to complete a caldron from which Mr. Charley's happiness would spring, she would have cried out at once to that witch: "Take this pair of mine, and look sharp about it. What are you hesitating for?" For any decent witch *would* have hesitated. To say that Alice had faced, without a shudder, the risk of being turned into a nutmeg-grater by smallpox for Charles's sake, would be a false way of stating a true thing. For Alice had never waited to picture to herself the consequences of her action. Her mind ignored the risks altogether, as things irrelevant where Mr. Charley was concerned; she never even condescended to say, "Bother them!"

So now, if we were to tell the honest truth about why the two blue eyes (which fortunately no witch was making an offer for) were looking rather happily this evening at Charles's grave, absent face, through the floating clouds of his Latakia, we should have to record that Alice was thinking of the death of her patient's mother in its aspect of a release to his father. She was really saying to herself: "*Now* Mr. Charley can marry Lady Anstruther Paston-Forbes and nobody find fault." This lady, an enormously rich widow of great beauty and accomplishments, was supposed by Peggy and Alice to have a fascination for Charles; perhaps she had, only so far as we know she does not come into this story, except as a thought in Alice's mind as she sits there gazing at Charles and his smoke, and herself (we suppose we ought to regret to say) lawlessly smoking a cigarette. But she was well behind the balcony parapet and invisible to the public, so forgive her! Now it is time to let them talk a little.

"I knew that cabman to-day, Alice—recollected him since!"

"You knew him! Oh dear! What a pity you didn't stop him. I'm so sorry."

"I'm not. It was an ugly story." Charles paused; he was almost sorry he had said it, but, however, Alice wouldn't ask for the story, as he had said it was ugly; or would be satisfied with guessing. He continued:

"He and I were at Harrow together; he went to Cambridge and distinguished himself—took a good place in Mathematics and a still better one in Classics—I heard of it all afterwards. He—well, he disgraced himself and was ruined."

"Oh, poor fellow! Quite hopelessly?"

"Quite hopelessly." The pity in the blue eyes would have sought for more information, but there is something in Charles's voice which closes the door on this man's misdeed, and Alice asks no further. Charles goes on to tell what he will, and no more.

"He was sent to penal servitude—I forget for how long. He had influential friends, and efforts were made to get him off on the score of insanity; but a ruthless judge told the Jury, which the prisoner had no influential friends on, that no man was insane in a legal sense when he was perfectly conscious of his own actions. He said: 'No doubt, Gentlemen, there is a sense in which Cain was insane when he killed Abel, but had he been tried in this Court, I should have summed up against him.' So poor Denzil was packed off to gaol without benefit of Clergy. He was in the Church, by the way. Edward Thwaites Denzil—that was his name."

"What a shocking story! It seems so impossible; he looked a nice man."

"A very nice man. A good man, too, I dare say—as good as another man, that is. But he'd been pitchforked into a profession he had no business with."

Charles's voice, on his last three words, had a sense of weariness, or pain, in it. Alice knew its cause, and her mind lost touch with the story of the cabman, interesting though it was, and went solely to join her companion in his thought of his own life. He took this brain-wave for granted, and went on as though it had really become speech:

"I *wasn't* pitchforked into mine. It was all my own doing. Poor Denzil was jammed into the Church by his family. If he had been made a soldier of he would have been all right—or a statesman, or a lawyer, or anything to keep him out of mischief——"

"Oh, Mr. Charley dear, what a shame! I won't sit and listen to

you, so there! You never lose a chance of saying something spiteful about the poor parsons."

"Why should I? Only this time I didn't mean to be spiteful. On the contrary I was complimenting them for remaining decent under their circumstances. You know the story of the Alchemist?"

"Yes—no!—go on."

"The Alchemist who contracted to turn copper into gold? He made his admirers subscribe the copper, then assembled them together to see the magic transmutation; but he gave them a caution—a necessary condition to observe. On no account was any one to think of a blue monkey. The copper vanished from the crucible, but no gold came in its place! The sorcerer taxed the spectators with thinking of blue monkeys, and one and all admitted they had thought of nothing else."

"What's the moral, Teachy-Weachy?"

"Clear enough. Folk that spend their lives professionally shunning Evil *can't* think of anything else. The blue monkey in the case of a parson is our dear old friend the Devil."—But Charles pulled up short in his homily; he didn't want to have to explain Mr. Thwaites Denzil's blue monkey in full. The nearest road away from the unhappy cabby led back to the parallel about himself.

"Anyhow, Alice dear, the poor beggar was right when he said he wasn't the only man that had failed in Life." Alice threw away the end of the lawless cigarette, and sat forward with her elbows on her knees, and her face resting in her hands, looking up at Charles.

"You are thinking of yourself," she said. It was not a question, but a statement.

"Of both my selves, dear," he replied. "Of my human self—and a nice hash I made of that, and we won't talk about it. And of my professional self, and that, at any rate, we can talk about. A nice hash I made of it all the same."

"How old are you now—really and truly how old? Forty-two?"

"Forty-one next November."

"There, see now, you are even younger than I thought. I thought you were. Oh yes! you're going to say that's nonsense—but you know what I mean." And Charles admits it. "I will not deceive you, my sweet, I do," he says. And then his citation from Mrs. Gamp recalls Sister Eulalie.

"Mrs. Prig guessed me forty-seven, and I guessed her twenty-nine. She's thirty-nine, she says. Isn't it incredible?" But Alice's face doesn't care what age Sister Eulalie is: the burden of

an interest, a strong one, is upon it, and she does not mean to be headed off by anybody's age.

"*How* can you know whether you are successful or not at forty-one? How do you know you won't have a tremendous success, all of a sudden? Yes—after another ten years, perhaps—but *some* time! And then twenty years of real, happy work. It has all been before, this sort of thing. Why not you?"

Alice has taken one hand from under her chin to point at poor Charley, like an accusing Angel. "Why not you?" she repeats.

"You needn't look so reproachful, Miss Kavanagh darling. I'm open to conviction, like other culprits. But no! I'll tell you, dear——" He knocks out the ashes of the Latakia from his pipe, and reflects on the first instalment of his explanation. Alice replaces her hand, and remains with closed lips and eyes of fixed attention. A stray lock of hair floats over her forehead in the light night wind that is seeking windows to blow in at, but making little effort to blow them open for itself. If a spectator twenty feet high could have looked over the balcony, he would certainly have felt the beauty of Alice's earnest face without exactly knowing whether it was due to its intelligence, or the remains of the afterglow, all but dead now, but just able to put a faint cadence of benediction on record before saying good-night.

"I *know* my work is rubbish." Thus Charles at the end of his pause. "All unreal rubbish! I *know* it! As I look back through the dreary ranks of spoiled canvases, I ask myself the question: 'If these had been the work of another person, and I had been Crœsus, should *I* have purchased them?' Not I! And yet I paint on, hoping that Crœsus will see something in my work I do not see myself, and humbly ask to be permitted to possess it."

"Because you look at your own work. You should never do that. Put the canvases away till Crœsus comes. The less you see of them the better."

"That's what Crœsus thinks!" But Alice is too earnest even to notice any cynical exaggerations or "grim ironies" of Master Charley's—she knows his way of old. Her mind is on a warpath of solid purpose, and she doesn't mean to humour any extravagances. She takes absolutely no notice of his remark, but goes on.

"Keep them out of your sight, and take the word of your friends about their value—not your own. Think what Mr. Jerrythought says! And what did that man say that came to dinner at Harley Street? He's an Art-Critic and an authority. He ought to know."

"He said my pictures showed a delicacy of insight, combined with a breadth of treatment, that foretold a future for the Artist.

That's what he *said*. What he meant was that the Léoville was unexceptionable, the Pommery-and-Greno extra-sec, and that he would take a leg of the grouse, please!"

"Oh, Mr. Charley—Mr. Charley! For shame! If you take that tone what becomes of the value of human testimony to anything?"

"What *is* the value of human testimony to anything?"

"Very well then! I won't talk to you. Unless you'll be reasonable." A good-humoured smile twinkles over Charles's face as he looks with admiration at the earnestness and the flashing blue eyes, not quite without suspicion of a tear in them. He surrenders and promises to be reasonable, adding something under his breath.

"What's that you said?" asks his monitress.

"I said—'Bravo, Alice!'" This belongs to the class of irrelevant concomitants, and Alice takes no notice of that either. She ploughs straight through the weeds, and goes on turning up the furrow.

"Besides, there are plenty of other people who say just the same about your work—it isn't as if it was only one little humbug of an Art-Critic. And then, your work has never been properly seen. The public don't know it." But Charles notices that his defender retires to a second line of defence, and suspects that the guns on the first line were not fit for use. "Who were the plenty of other people?" he asks. Alice feels that one or two, who have been on the tip of her tongue, are not strong examples, and will only weaken her case. She extricates herself cleverly.

"No—I won't set them up just for you to knock down; you know you will. But though you won't believe me, there really are numbers of people who think a deal of your pictures. Why, only the other day, Lady—What's her-name? (You know who I mean—with a bridge to her nose—well—never mind!) was asking about them and saying how interesting and original they were." Charles shakes an incredulous head slowly.

"Dear little Mistress Alice," he says, using another of her many appellations, "I have noticed that people are rather fond of ascribing a factitious importance to events of little moment in themselves by dwelling on the fact that they only occurred the other day. I will take this opportunity of pointing out that the opinions of Lady Nosebridge are not of any value in themselves, and do not acquire any from the date of their utterance, however recent." Charles has fallen into his old mock-pompous or didactic form of speech, and Alice laughs with pleasure, for it is a sign, to her, that he is less unhappy at heart. He would not do it if he were quite miserable. She knows him, down to the ground.

"I was sure you were talking nonsense all along," she says, hopefully. But she is disappointed when his tone changes again in his reply.

"No, dear, no!" he says. "I *was* talking nonsense then, but not before. I know people praise my work, as you say, after a fashion—but they speak *encouragingly*. Don't you know how crushed one feels when one's encouraged encouragingly?" Alice thinks of rebutting this on the ground of its intrinsic absurdity; but alas! she knows how true it is, and gives up the idea. "Oh dear!" says she, "I wish I knew about painting and could praise it." Charles laughs aloud at this.

"Oh, Mistress Alice—Mistress Alice!" he says, "that's just what you couldn't do if you did know. You praise it now because you love me and Peggy, and because you think you have a warranty from impartial authorities, but you haven't for all that!" Charles knocks the ash out of his pipe with a sigh. Then he begins to fill it again, and rallies to cheerfulness. "Now we've talked enough about me! I want to know about your precious self, chick! What did you write to poor Roger?"

Alice unpacks the arrangement of hand-support for her face, which has had somewhat the force of a gun-carriage; and substitutes a hair-ruffling disposition of her arms above her head, which is not unladylike when there is no company. It has an effect of effrontery, with conscious weakness in the background.

"I'm sure I'm very sorry for Mr. Selwyn-Kerr. It wasn't me, you know."

"Wasn't you?"

"Wasn't my fault! Besides he says if I had been ever so disagreeable it would have been exactly the same."

"Poor Miss Kavanagh! She *was* in a fix! No!—I don't see what was to be done. But what *did* you say to him?"

"*I* don't mind your seeing the letter, Mr. Charley. It's not gone yet. I'll run in and get it." Which she does, but does not return immediately. Charles goes in to look for her, and meets her coming out from the back-room where the patient is. "I thought I heard him," she says, "but he's sleeping nicely still." Charles goes in to the light to read the letter. After a glance at the first page, he looks up. "Highly proper!" is his comment. "I wonder if you girls are aware that every one of you writes exactly the same letter under the same circumstances?"

"Oh, Mr. Charley, we don't! I'm sure mine is quite original." Charles returns to the letter and reads aloud:

"'Dear Mr. Selwyn-Kerr'—nothing original in that, anyhow—'I

cannot find words to tell you how completely your letter yesterday took me by surprise. I ask you most earnestly to believe me when I say that I had *no suspicion* of the existence of such a feeling on the part of one whom I have always regarded *only as a friend,* however cordial the friendly relation might be that has always subsisted between us, and that will, I hope, always continue.'

"Now, Miss Kavanagh! will you be kind enough to tell me whether you consider that original, and if so, why?" Charles is sitting on the corner of a substantial square table as he reads this, under the gas Alice has just turned up. We can recognise that table, and the drawer in it, as the one in which Peggy found the tailor's pattern-book; it has become part of "the furniture" and is taken for granted and undistinguished. If it can think, how puzzled it must be at the Alice of now and its memory of the Alice of then. Does it remember the days of its first furniture-polish, when there was no Alice at all? The days of the great Shop, where everything was new, and your orders received prompt and careful attention? If it does, it says nothing about them, nor does it seem inquisitive about the precise relation of the gentleman who is sitting on it, and the young lady who stands there beside him.

Yet it might be puzzled at this too, although the explanation would be most reasonable. For nothing could throw more light upon it than the perfectly easy and unconcerned way in which Alice lays her right hand across Charles's shoulder, and with her left hand takes hold of a corner of the letter he is reading; as though retaining a right to snatch it back on repentance, if it should occur. Nor the way in which his left hand goes across and finds two fingers of her right to hold, while his own right keeps a firm hold on the letter, as a hand that suspects foul play. Outside in the balcony, they might have been people who had met a year ago; as we see them now, they are redolent of three or four lustres of intimacy, beginning with the babyhood of the younger.

"No, Mr. Charley dear, do be serious! That's only the introduction."

"Very well then! On we go: 'But I should be acting in a most *wrong* and *cowardly* manner, from scruples about saying a disagreeable thing, if I left you to suppose that my feelings towards you could ever be other than those of *friendship.* Pray dismiss the idea from your mind.'

"Poor Mr. Selwyn-Kerr! Squelched!" Charles looks round at

the pretty face on his left, whose owner is biting its under lip, as one half vexed, half laughing; and whose cheeks show a slight flush of embarrassment, accenting the beauty of its eyes. "Well!" says she, in an absurd, apologetic manner, "go ahead and read the rest!" Charles shakes his head reproachfully and resumes.

"'I am to blame—at least, I blame myself—for not guessing about it. Had I suspected the truth, I might at least have discouraged you by my manner from a course which can only result in pain for both of us, especially for me; for indeed, dear Mr. Selwyn-Kerr, I *did* and *do* value your friendship, and now I feel it has got spoiled——' That's original," said Charles, stopping—"'got spoiled' is decidedly original."

"I thought of saying," says Alice, submissively, "couldn't he manage to keep going, and not have any Love in it? But I had to give that up. However, go on!"

Charles does not go on at once. He glances on a few lines in advance, murmuring to himself—"'ought to tell you honestly—Jessie Freeth'—what's all this?" And Alice says, "Read it aloud," and relinquishes the held corner to place her hand on his unoccupied shoulder, and put her chin on it. We give these photographic details, to help on a conception of the general position. Without them, misapprehensions might arise. Charles reads aloud as bidden.

"'I feel that I ought to tell you honestly that I was completely thrown off my guard by a foolish report (as I now suppose, an entirely false one) that you and Jessie Freeth were engaged, or nearly. People are so silly! I daresay, though, I believed it all too easily because I am so fond of Jessie, and I thought it would be so nice, and you would ask me to your house, and now perhaps Jessie will be unhappy about it, because, you know, if one person makes a mistake, another may. Do forgive me, for writing all this to you—but I owe it to myself to tell you how I was misled. I could not bear to be thought heedless or inconsiderate towards a friend, especially towards one whom I have always valued as I have yourself.'"

"Turn over," said Alice. Charles did so, and continued, remarking that, "here was the peroration."

"'Dear Mr. Selwyn-Kerr, you have done me the greatest honour that any man can do to any woman, so do not believe that I am *ungrateful or unfeeling,* because no other course is possible to me than the one I have taken. I shall be very unhappy about you until I hear (as I earnestly hope I some day shall) that you have found happiness elsewhere.* Meanwhile I cannot say too plainly that I

can never be more to you than what I now ask to be allowed to sign myself,

Your affectionate and faithful friend,

ALICIA KAVANAGH.'"

Charles turned back the pages, asking, "What's the asterisk?—oh, here we are!"

"Oh, Mr. Charley, don't say I mustn't put that in. Think what a bother it will be to write it all over again. And so cold-blooded!"

"Let's see what it is, Mistress Alice. 'P. S.—I hope I shall not do wrong in speaking of this matter to Jessie Freeth. I will *promise* not to talk to anybody else.' And then you come straight off and show the letter to me. You're a nice little Alice-for-short!"

"Oh, I do like it so when you call me that. You haven't done it for ever so long. But I may send the letter, mayn't I? I thought it such a good one."

"It's a capital letter. It shows the authoress. You send it off! Jessie Freeth and Roger will suit each other to a nicety."

"Oh—but!——"

"Yes—but! So come now, Miss Alice! You wouldn't be guilty of matchmaking of course! But *that's* what will come of it."

"How can I leave poor Jessie in ignorance? She'll forget all about him if I tell her—only, she ought to know." Alice is all up in arms about her friend, and her face is flashing with earnestness again. She has seemed to think the little drama, so far as she herself came into it, only a farce. Women are apt to look on all their offers but one as farces. But she evidently fears for her friend what speech in time from herself may prevent. "I'm *not* matchmaking!" says she, indignantly. Her chin has come off the hand on Charles's shoulder, and she is half-seated on the table behind him. He is relighting his pipe. When he has done this they go out on the balcony into the moonlight, and settle down as before.

"Why do you say 'no' to all of 'em, little Alice?"

"I've only said no to three so far, unless you count in Sir Thomas Brabazon? He makes four."

"I certainly count him. But why *do* you? Little Mistress Alice, if there is any one in the bush you're keeping back, do confess up! Take a poor old widower into your confidence." Charles sits looking at Alice's drooped eyelids and hesitating manner, and waiting for a concession. Presently she looks up:

"Why do I say no? Because saying yes involves so much, I suppose."

"It involves a great deal. So does asking for it. Think what it must have cost the Brabazon to screw himself up to the point——"

"He's quite happy—he heard poor father was a tailor!——"

"Yes—but he was very heroic. He knew about the beer and the Pub story, and yet he came to the scratch."

"But not about the tailor! I was glad he had the consolation though—it *was* a consolation. A tailor is a tailor, put it how you may!"

"So he is—but never mind Sir Tommy. *Is* there nobody in the bush?"—Alice shakes her head slowly from side to side, and at last says, "No—there's no one I care about in the bush—certainly, no one!"

"Well! We must wait and hope. Little Alices mustn't be worried and hurried. And they shall be old maids if they like. And if they don't they shall marry whoever they please."

"Suppose they want to marry people that don't want to marry them!"—But this question remains unanswered because the patient wakes.

Alice sits thoughtful after she has overruled an attempt of Charles to make her go to bed while he sits up with the invalid. This happens every night and Alice usually gets her way, as she does to-night. She sits and thinks and thinks, and then says with a sigh, "Oh, how glad I *shall* be to kiss Aunty Peggy again!"—For Pierre, suddenly wakeful, has wanted to know why Aunty Peggy was talked to over the balcony to-day and not allowed to come up. He is getting very convalescent.

CHAPTER XXXII

HOW ALICE GOT LET IN FOR PARNASSUS. HOW SHE WISHED CHARLES A RESPLENDENT WIFE. OF TWO FOOLS, AND WHAT THEY SAID. OF A MS. THAT CAME TO LIGHT

A REMARK of Charles's towards the end of last chapter reminds us that a fact has been neglected in this record. When he said that Alice's letter showed the authoress, he was not speaking at random, nor in jest. She was not only an authoress, but, considering her years, a very successful one. She was responsible for a small volume of poems, which were spoken of respectfully by the Press, and for several short stories. It is possible that you are acquainted with both, and if so may agree with us that the latter, though creditable to Alice, were like her love-letters (or friendship-answer to a love-letter)—that is, not specially original. But her verse certainly showed a faculty for verse-making; and when *The Predominant Era* remarked that Mr. Brown, the Author of *Week-Ends at Parnassus,* recalled Miss Kavanagh's method, that influential organ expected Mr. Brown to feel flattered and say thank-you.

Whether Alice's dispositions towards the Muse could have been detected in her recitations to Pussy in the basement of No. 40 we cannot say. For our own part we think either verse or prose in such very young people gives no real clue to their capacities later. Almost all children (little girls especially) tell stories and make verses. But we agree with Lady Johnson that an incident that happened during Alice's school-days at Miss Fortescue's showed that the technical faculty of fitting language to rhythm and providing both with the same meaning was more marked in her than in her school-fellows. Miss Fortescue was an enthusiast in Poetry, and used to examine her pupils on the subject and award prizes as a stimulus to reading. She had been more than once in a tight corner owing to her liberal views about what little girls ought or ought not to read. Indignant parents had descended on her brandishing Elizabethan poems which they had caught their offspring reciting, and (we regret to write it) she had resorted to the mean expedient of imputing depravity of mind to the reader who saw anything to question in them. It was a powerful fulcrum, but we

feel for the parents, and doubt if it was fair play. This phase of the subject, however, does not concern us at this moment.

It chanced that Miss Fortescue one day took it into her head to set up what is called a 'correction-class.' The idea was to take in hand any passages from celebrated poets that struck Miss Fortescue as incomplete or defective, and to write in or substitute others more in keeping (according to her ideas) with their surroundings. She explained to Peggy that her motive in doing this was not to amend the defects of Shakspeare, etc., but to give a wholesome stimulus to the literary faculties of her pupils. The incident in hand was the setting of an examination-paper (with marks) in which some passages were to have substitutes written for the italicised lines, or the hiatus (in other cases) filled in. Here was one case:—

"Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth,
A Youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown;
Fair Science frowned not on his humble birth,
And Melancholy marked him for her own."

Why Miss Fortescue selected this line for excision we are not called on to speculate. It was in the examination paper, and Alice supplied her substitute thus:—

"Nor song, nor lute, made music at his birth."

Perhaps filling in blanks left by a Poet was less impertinent than this interference with an existing text. The impertinence was, however, Miss Fortescue's. Alice had to fill in, or lose marks. So she went at it bravely. These that follow have blanks, left by Shelley, filled in with italicised words by Miss Kavanagh:—

"And still I love, and still I think
But strangely, for my heart can drink
The dregs of such despair and live
And love; *a vain prerogative!*
And if I think, my thoughts come fast,
I mix the present with the past
And each seems uglier than the last.
. . . . . .
. . . . Your sweet voice, like a bird
Singing love to its lone mate
In the ivy-bower disconsolate;
Voice the sweetest ever heard!
And your brow, more *heaven-insphered*
Than the Alp's crest in the noon-day sky
Of this azure Italy."

No doubt you would have acquitted yourself better. But our business is merely to record, and we only note this incident to

remark that Alice's answers were so immeasurably better than those of the other young people, that Miss Fortescue retained them to show to Lady (then Mrs.) Johnson, and Charles. Both required Alice to write verses on the spot, and Alice, who would have thrown her examination-papers into the fire if they had been returned to her, did as she was bid. Peggy informed an editor of a Monthly that unless he inserted a poem of Alice's in his columns she would never ask him to dinner again, and he not only complied, but demanded more of the same sort, and got it. So that in time the poems of A. K. accumulated; and, as you possibly know, have their admirers to this day.

So now we can understand what Alice was at, in that little patch-room at Harley Street. Also what she evidently meant to be at as soon as she had got rid of Mr. Charley—"packed him off to bed" was the way her mind put it—and had devoted herself to the patient's restless hour or so after his long sleep. But her preparations and her new pen did not lead to much copy. Perhaps the atmosphere and the incidents of a fever-ward are not favourable to authorship—they were all there in this case, but we are keeping them out of sight as much as possible, as we all know what they are like without telling. Or, if not, we have been strangely favoured by Providence.

Anyhow, Alice felt very little like writing when she began to try, and threw down the new pen.

She went out into the starlight on the balcony. The street had stilled down towards the small hours of the morning, as much as streets do in London. Stray gusts of late home-comers in Hansoms recurred with intermittent rattle and slapping to of cab-doors. Every one of them made believe to be the last, but left a silence that seemed conscious there would soon be another. And it came. And then the heel of a deliberate policeman appeared to be trying to impress the paving stones, and convince them that every one had now gone to bed. But they rejected his evidence, and were justified. For there was always one last cab still!

But it was pleasant to sit there thinking, in the sweet night-air. And Alice sat and thought, and wished and wished. Her wishes took a curious turn. She wished she was Lady Anstruther Paston-Forbes, and then she could marry Mr. Charley and use all that money to make him happy. For she took Charles's passion for this lady *au grand sérieux*. "Now Miss Straker's dead," said her thoughts to her, "there's nothing to prevent it. Oh dear! how nice it would be!" But so completely was Charles the grown-up person, and so completely was her version of herself, *ad hoc*, the

little girl that he had drawn up out of the gutter and placed in affluence and happiness, that no slightest idea of benefit that would arise from the obvious fact that if she was Lady Anstruther Paston-Forbes, that lady would certainly be Alice Kavanagh, was allowed to enter into her calculations. The intensity of her wish to see Mr. Charley happy, a wish into which no selfish thought entered, really required the expedient of merging her personality in that of an imagined benefactrix, to make a working hypothesis. She knew that Charles was very poor; the extravagance of "Miss Straker" had made him so. And she built a glorious castle in the air in which this next Mrs. Charles Heath was to engineer her wealth so as to place her husband on a pinnacle. But the magnificent widow was not to be trusted with her own identity, intact, to do that. Alice disintegrated it with an infusion of herself; she was to supply volition and purpose. Meanwhile her discarded remainder never came into court—it was to exult with Miss Peggy —for in this dreamland all the *dramatis personæ* were to belong to the early time—over the great achievement of achievements, the making of Charles into a happy and successful man. Bother obstacles!—She chose to dwell on it, for the sheer pleasure of the thought. Fancy seeing Mr. Charley really great and happy, and she, little Alice-for-short, having really had a hand in it!

And as Alice pondered under the starlight with an animated face, Charles was, let us hope, asleep. If so, maybe his own last waking thoughts had crept into his dreams. They were about Alice, and Alice's too numerous rejected lovers. He did not care about most of them; but one or two, Roger Selwyn-Kerr particularly, seemed to him to be worthy applicants. He could not understand Alice's persistent decision in her treatment of the subject. He could recollect, with a smile, his sister's firm resolve about marriage, and her lament in the same breath for their effect upon the man she already loved. But in Alice's case there was no suspicion of exalted Purpose. She honestly meant that she didn't want to marry the gentleman, and said so plainly. "Of course," thought Charles to himself, "she buttered him up about friendship—they always do! Even Peggy *friendshipped* Rupert. But then she gave him distinctly to understand there was no one she liked better." Sleep did not allow him time to finish wondering whether Alice really liked some one else better. But perhaps she did. "Better," in this case, be it observed, always means fifty times as well, or even more.

What manner of thing Charles likened his life to we have tried

to show—a garden run to waste—a weedy tangle on exhausted soil. No place this to plant a sweet young rose-tree in! The tenant of the garden was deeply interested in the place the rose-tree should find—elsewhere. But it never crossed his mind for a moment that it could possibly bloom and flourish among his nettles and ragwort, and he would fain have seen its owner plant it on virgin soil; in a garden full of sunlight, no ray of which ever seemed now to pierce the overgrowth of his own. He was a spoiled piece of goods in his own eyes, and his tired old heart, spacious and empty certainly, was not the home for a young tenant and new curtains and carpets. If this Chaos of metaphors conveys its meaning, it may perhaps be excused.

Meanwhile the young tenant never dreamed of herself in that capacity. She and Peggy were joint-caretakers perhaps, but a really responsible occupant had still to be found. Lady Anstruther Paston-Forbes was a *pourparler,* subject to approval on more intimate acquaintance. She was the most probable at this moment. But there were others. The most desirable fruit on the stall was always being picked up and handled to see if it was really fit for Master Charles's consumption. It is true that Peggy had more than once wondered whether it was necessary to go out of doors to find it. But then she had said to herself, "See what I may spoil by hinting at such a thing!" and decided on leaving these two unconsciousnesses alone.

Neither did either of the joint-caretakers figure to themselves what a ruinous concern the owner of the house thought it. Certainly Alice did not as she sat there in the summer night, conjuring up an image of Lady Anstruther Paston-Forbes, conducted by another image, a radiant one, of Charles, to the altar. She even went the length of dressing the bride in white satin, trimmed with lace, embroidered with roses and leaves *en chiffon.* It is of course possible that the perfect serenity with which she surrendered Mr. Charley to the keeping of this impressive spectacle was founded on a confidence in its instability. She might have grudged to the actual what she yielded easily to a dream of her own invention. But even had she hesitated in the casting of the parts in this drama, there would have been no suspicion of a tendency to assign a leading part to herself. She might have put in another bride, if she had recollected Charles expressing admiration for an eligible one; but, as it chanced, none occurred to her; so Charles and her Ladyship lived happy ever after—that period in dreamland being ready to occur within any given limits, to meet the views of the dreamer.

It was so sweet and the night-air so warm on the balcony that Alice thought she might safely doze a little. Pierre was well within hearing and she had made up her mind that as long as he slept so sound she wasn't going to wake him up for beef-tea or jelly or medicine or anything, whatever the doctor said. But she had the presence of mind before dropping off to wrap herself in a warm railway rug. It might turn cold; but it was so much nicer out here than in the room.

She may have slept an hour when she was half waked by the sound of voices close at hand. It occurred to her that she did not know where she was; so she roused up thoroughly to see. She satisfied herself on this point, and also that the voices were those of Charles's next-door neighbour—a painter like himself, but a successful one—and of a friend who seemed to have walked home with him and to be taking leave to go to his own home. Ought she to indicate her presence by coughing, sneezing, shouting, or otherwise? She was hesitating which to choose when a question from the friend stopped her, and her curiosity to hear it answered made her refrain and listen, dishonourably. But then, the question was about Mr. Charley. Honour be hanged!

"Who lives next door on this side?"

"Heath. Charles Heath. You know the story about him? No? Why, you *must* know it!"

"I *don't* know."

"Well! Three men arranged to give a dinner and each was to ask the worst painter he knew. Nobody turned up but Heath. And he wanted to know why he had had an invitation from all three. Haw! Haw! Haw!"

"Har! Har! Har! What's his work like though, reely?"

"Footy stuff. Gormy colour. No drawin'!"

"Man of property?"—At this point Alice felt that the conversation was carried on for a moment by facial expression. Then the questioner said he twigged, and the other resumed articulate speech.

"At least, I oughtn't to say that. His governor didn't cut up so fat as was expected. He'd been very warm in his time though. But he came to grief in Trade. Still, not so bad!" And again the other said he twigged. Then the first dropped his voice, and Alice knew he was going to speak about a lady. But he intensified in interest to make up for his *sotto-voce*. She only caught snatches, however:

"You must have heard about that affair? . . . seven or eight years ago . . . moddle . . . figure-moddle . . . oh yes! *he* married

her right enough! . . . handsome woman . . . great singer too . . . fine soprano . . . dark horse to put his money on——"

"She alive?"

"Couldn't say! Went regularly to the bad, I believe . . . divorce-court proceedings . . . sorry for him! He's a nice feller—nice a feller as I know! Do you know what o'clock it is, my boy?"

"Three. Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

And the two separated with sudden alacrity, to make up, by saving two minutes, for the spending of three hours in talk like the above. The one shut himself briskly into his house; the other broke into an exculpatory trot till he preferred walking, and lighted a cigar.

As soon as they were clear out of the way, Alice went indoors to finish her doze, so far as she felt likely to do so. She was simply boiling with indignation, especially about the story of the three invitations. Now, had Alice only known it, she need not have troubled about this. For this story is told in just as many forms as there are professions. A is made to figure as the worst lawyer, B as the dullest writer, C as the slowest actor, D as the greatest liar, and E as the dreariest bore in London. It is a very good story, but we confess we are getting tired of it. It was new to Alice, and her blood boiled on Charles's behalf. As for the references to his late wife, she knew well enough that the unheard portions of the conversation were worse than what had reached her ears, and the *sous-entendus* probably still worse than they. Her wrath did not diminish when she remembered that she had heard this very same next-door neighbour (who was no stranger) speak in praise of Charles's art, and ascribe to it a subtle quality. Had his tongue really been in his cheek all the while? She asked herself this question, and then, becoming cynical, asked this one also, "Do real Artists ever speak a word of truth?" And then remembered that Charles was the soul of truthfulness, and could not but speculate on the inevitable inference: Was he a real Artist?

How if it really had all been a mistake from the beginning? Suppose Charles had gone to the Bar—would the Bar have slipped away from him, like an *ignis-fatuus* over a marsh? If he had eaten his Terms, would he have learned how to eat his words gracefully, later on? Other men, as good as he, had learned how to prevaricate, before now. Why not he? He might not have been able to rise to the height of a politician; but, if it was only straightforward equivocation! And after he became a Judge, he wouldn't have had to suppress his veracity any longer.

She reviewed other professions in the same cynical tone, produced by what she had just heard, but always with the assumption taken for granted that Charles *would have been* equal to any of them. He had thrown a doubt on his powers as an Artist during twenty years of practice—but it was only a doubt. Alice would admit no more than that.

There was a general tendency, in all her speculation about Charles's capabilities, to exclude action in favour of reflection and imagination. When she asked herself why she believed in them at all—because she admitted they must be definitely referable to something he said or did—she found herself compelled to answer that it was something he said or wrote; nothing he did. Have not we—have not you?—sometimes been forced to the conclusion that so-and-so *must be* a very clever man because of little things he has thrown out in an unconcerned way—things you could scarcely seriously repeat as achievements in epigram, but that gave a strong bias and colour to your estimation of what he had *not* said, but kept in reserve? When Peggy one day asked Alice, "What makes you think Charley could write a play?" Alice was nonplussed. She felt it would be most unjust to Charles to trot out chance turns of speech of his as the materials on which to build him up as a poet or a wit. But she believed in some latent potentialities all the same; and when her *sæva indignatio* against the gentleman next door had subsided, and her first vigorous resentment of his criticism of Charles had given way to the counter-swing of the pendulum—"How if it really *had* been a mistake from the beginning?"—she recalled this conversation with Peggy; and then she wondered whether the conviction she was not able to support, but felt so strongly, might not have been based on a missed possibility that would *not* have been a mistake from the beginning.

She looked at her patient. He was sleeping quite beautifully again, while she herself had become suddenly intensely wakeful. This does happen when one has been jerked out of one's sleep. She re-read poor Mr. Selwyn-Kerr's letter. It was one of those mistakes—to our thinking—an offer in writing. It lacked spontaneousness; all the vital parts had an effect of steam intentionally turned on, while the more restrained portions suggested priggishness. Alice said to herself, "Yes! Passionate protestations of respectful admiration." It was her isolation in the zone of smallpox that had made Mr. Kerr's declaration come by post. "I hope he doesn't think I'm going to catch it," added Alice, and you may wonder why. What she meant was that there would be a certain heroism (the antithesis of Mr. Guppy) about a proposal to a lady

in the jaws of an infectious hospital, and that she might feel morally bound to marry its author. "But it all turns on whether he believes I'm vaccinated and it took. At least that's what Mr. Charley would say."

Whenever any odd turn of thought or ludicrous phrase presented itself she always put it down to Mr. Charley in this way. And she now proceeded (always ascribing her thoughts potentially to Charles—classing them as what he *would have* thought) to construct a preposterous *lever de rideau* about a heroine who had undertaken a smallpox patient. She had two suitors, a vaccinationist and an anti-vaccinationist. Each was anxious to know how effectually she had been vaccinated, but for different reasons. The former because he wanted to write off an offer of marriage to her and seem to be running a risk of a nutmeg-grater bride, heroically, but all the while relying on well-authenticated lymph. The other, because he wanted also to propose by post, but not until he had examined a sample of the lymph injected into the deltoid of his beloved, to make sure that it didn't contain the virus of Bubonic Plague. One never can tell. The scene of this remarkable little affair was to be the waiting-room of the doctor who had vaccinated her, where the two suitors would present themselves simultaneously to make enquiries, each with a ready-written letter in his pocket. Each suitor then was to try to bribe the vaccinator to give information of a terrifying nature to the other, to put him off. The anti-vaccinator, to say that the lady had accidentally been vaccinated with common spellicans, and was open to any amount of smallpox; while his rival endeavoured to induce him to exhibit some virus of Bubonic Plague (which he has taken the precaution to bring in his pocket) as the selected sample specially used on the lady. "I wish Mr. Charley *would* write that. I know he could do it," said Alice. "If I could only find something he *had* written, to convict him with, I'd soon make him write more."

Whether an old recollection, connected with the table they had read the letter on, was really the underlying cause of all this speculation, or whether the latter had revived the former, would be hard to say. Anyhow, at this moment Alice recalled a conversation of years ago between Peggy and Charles; how a hunt was made for a missing letter in the drawer of this table, and how Peggy turned over some papers and said, "What are all these?"—And how Charles had said they were nothing, and hustled them back into the drawer. Our own belief is the recollection of this had hung about her, unconfessed, all along. She thought otherwise later, and was inclined to believe a well-disposed spook had a hand in her revival

of the incident and consequent impulse to open the drawer. Whichever it was, she did open it, and seemed not displeased with her investigation of its contents. "I was sure of it," said she, half aloud. She put back all she had taken out except one roll of paper which she deliberately appropriated, after glancing at it. "Very well, Mr. Charley," said she, "now we'll see who's right." But the closing of this drawer made a noise and waked the patient, whose claim for attention put an end to further examination. So after enough inspection to see that it appeared to be a story, having for its title, "The Other Road Round," Alice put it away where she could lay her hand on it again, and devoted herself to Pierre until Sister Eulalie appeared to relieve her, by which time she was heartily glad to go to bed and to sleep.

CHAPTER XXXIII

HOW LATAKIA KEPT OFF INFECTION, AND HOW ALICE WENT TO FRIENDS IN THE COUNTRY. HOW PHYLLIS CARTWRIGHT CAME OUT OF A DARK ROOM, AND JEFF SAW AN OPTICAL DELUSION

When there is bad illness about, work goes to the wall. The Artist may be putting the last touch on the concentrated effort of years, the Author on the very verge of a triumphant climax he has been looking forward to through hundreds of seeming-unremunerative pages, the Physiologist within an ace of putting salt on the tail of the vital principle, the Musician of striking the lost chord, or the Accountant a balance—it all comes to the same thing! No matter how industrious we may have been, nor how engrossed in the crisis of the moment, just let diphtheria, typhoid, Asiatic cholera—even vulgar monosyllabic mumps—make their appearance in the household, and there's an end of everything! The colour that was to have brought this into harmony with that, or put t'other down, dries on your palette unused. The ink on the pen that was to have embodied your subtle fancy gets wiped off on your little bit of wet sponge. Your attentive observation of a sterilised vacuum, which amœbæ had as good as undertaken to appear in, is interrupted. The lost chord and the balance remain alike unstruck, and you have to go for the doctor. And your work goes to the Devil.

But if you care for your work and are keenly in earnest about it, you don't give in without a struggle. If, like poor Charley, you are half-hearted, you do. Charles didn't really do any work at his Studio during Pierre's illness. He went there, surreptitiously, but rather than otherwise jumped at the probability of spoiling everything he touched, as an excuse for never touching anything at all. Besides, he couldn't have models to work from! The indecisive beginnings he made as apologies to his own conscience had more the character of records of what he hadn't done than of work. But fidgeting over these, feeling anxious and miserable, and keeping every one else out of the room, seemed to fill out the day. Only it was rather like eating chemical food to give a spurious sense of a full stomach.

Our old friend Jeff paid him frequent visits outside the door during the illness, and was talked to by Charles from within even after the patient had been allowed to get up. When one day, some six weeks after the first attack, he learned that Pierre was to go to the sea-side, he flatly refused to be excluded from the room any longer. He summed up his attitude towards medical authority and hygienic precaution in two forcible words. "'Ang rot!" was the sentiment with which he met Charles's refusal to let him come in. And he followed this with a threat, if Charles persisted, to go straight away to the Smallpox Hospital and rub his nose in a confluent case of the deadliest type. He succeeded in getting past the door, but made one concession to prudence, "You won't object to my smokin'," said he, "as a precaution against infection, don't you know, Charley."

So as the two old friends sit there, puffing clouds from the Latakia of the bygone time, we can take a look round at the Studio and note the changes of sixteen years.

There is the easel Charles was painting Regan on when we were here last; there is the throne she came that memorable header off into Charles's arms; there is the chair she rested in after that adventure. The table she sat reading Victor Hugo at is gone—we saw it the other day at Acacia Road—and there is another in its place. We recognise the tobacco-jar from which Jeff fills a pipe he finds on the chimney-piece, and the mahl-stick Charles puts down as he lights one to keep Jeff company. Why should any man have more than one mahl-stick in his life? Of course there is the invariable lay-figure with her head on the wrong way. We know her of old, with her square bolt-heads buried in her system and her skin slipping over them; her effrontery in pretending she has a key, while she knows it cannot be found, and wouldn't work if it could; her repulsive appearance when her head comes off accidentally and we shudder at her peg. Otherwise, we see little for recognition. The room seems much fuller, but it is mostly due to canvases that are modestly turning their faces to the wall, and a certain number of framed pictures, sometimes with a printed numeral pasted on the frame—a memory of an Exhibition it was concealed from the public eye in, or would have been if the public eye had sought for it. On the easel is a picture—only we can't see it for a stained-glass cartoon that is in front of it, which is upside down. We cannot quite make out whether it is Saul and David, or Christ and the Woman of Samaria. It may be either, and it doesn't matter. It is quite as much leads as anything else, and the leads seem to belong to another design. The walls and ceiling have got very

dirty—one cannot interrupt work and have things shifted for whitewashings and cleanings—*cela se voit!* But then very soon other people don't see it; nor anything else, because of the filth.

Charles and Jeff, having smoked and chatted in the room ever since we were here last, notice no change at all. It is, to them, the first-floor Studio and nothing else. It has no qualifications. The windows have been cleaned at stated intervals, and the floor scrubbed, and what more do you want? The unreachable zones of the ceiling have some cobwebs all to themselves; and as Charles objects to Mrs. Corrigan, the present *chargée d'affaires,* standing on the top of a pair of equivocal steps and stretchin' up a broom just to move the worst of the dust, the said worst thickens and blackens and floats, well out of reach; but is regarded for all that as temporary *per se,* though fortuitously permanent. Probably it understands human nature, and rejoices at Mrs. Corrigan's increasing unsteadiness from beer. Both it and the dust are part of the existing order of things, and Charles has acquired a complete ignorance of the existence of both.

"The boy's going down to St. Leonards to-morrow. Payne says he won't be very badly marked. You see, he's young." Of course it is Charles who speaks. Jeff nods in a way that says, "You will see that all my optimistic prophecies will be confirmed." He pursues the same line in words.

"Nobody's caught it neither! What did I tell you? It's all rubbish about infection when you're properly vaccinated. You ask my wife!"—For ever since Miss Dorothea Prynne became Mrs. Jeff, about a year after Charles's rash and unfortunate marriage, she has been referred to by her husband as a well of accuracy undefiled. He throws truth and falsehood into hotchpot, and redivides the mixture into what Mrs. Jeff says is true, and what she condemns as false.

"Well! You're right so far, Jeff, but we're not out of the wood yet!"

"Now you'll be foomigated, my boy! And stripped and all your clothes burnt. And squirted all over disinfectants. Dolly says they always do." And Jeff is quite satisfied that this is the case.

"I suppose we shall have to do something. But it's not so bad as all that. I shan't be sorry though to have a clean bill of health again."

"Miss Kavanagh's going with him to the sea-side?" This is a statement, so far as confidence in an affirmative answer goes—a question, so far as no such confidence is warranted. Charles's answer accepts the latter form.

"Why, no!—Alice is gone already."

"Gone already?"

"Gone to some friends at Chelverhurst, wherever that is, to get a thorough change of air—some friends of Peggy's. My brother-in-law advised it—thought she couldn't have a complete change too soon. In fact when I went home yesterday I found it had all been settled in a hurry and she had gone off, leaving the Sister and Sarah-cook to see to Pierre."

"Oh, I see."

"Sister Eulalie's to come down to St. Leonards with us to-morrow. I shall stop there long enough to see things are going on all right, and then I must get back to work again. This sort of thing won't do."

"Work reg'lar upset!" Jeff sympathises with the position. He is prepared to go any lengths of insincerity in his lamentations over the hardship of being dragged away from one's work. He sees consolation ahead though. "Never mind, old chap! You'll work all the better when you do get to it again."

Charles jumps at the pleasant chance of self-deception that is offered him: "Yes, I know that is so! There's nothing like a little compulsory idleness."

"Best thing in the world," says the optimist. "You go away to the sea for a week, Charley. And you'll come back a giant refreshed. See if you don't!"

"I shall be all the better for it."—Charles is temperate—speaks with reserve. He would have been better pleased to have the fiction toned down to his powers of pretence. The giant refreshed has stuck in the gizzard of his credulity. He thinks of suggesting a duffer refreshed, as an amendment; but shrinks from the egotism of humility. Better change the subject!

"I shall have to have a regular good overhauling of all my materials—they're in a fearful mess. Just look at that box!"—The box strikes us as familiar—for we are not conscious of the time we have skipped; the sixteen-year interim. Our knowledge of that box is as of yesterday. Jeff knows all about it though.

"What a queer old card he was to be sure, to leave it to you—just because you gave him some Asphaltum! Do you believe it was Reynolds's, Charley?"

"Not the box. Hardly! He only swore to some little bladders of colour. I never found them. And what's so funny is that what's-his-name—don't you know?—the man that had this house—whose daughter Verrinder was in love with—what *was* his name?"

"Oh, I know, perfectly well! Sneathly—Crapewell—Lampwick—I shall remember directly——"

"Well—never mind! That chap, anyhow! He must have used this box a hundred times in this very room."

Jeff looks round a little uncomfortably. "More ghostises!" says he. Charles remarks, with the slightest sound of injury in his tone, "Well, Jeff! There haven't been any more ghosts for ever so long. Years and years! Come now!"—He doesn't feel he can be accused of Psychical Research, this time! He goes on exculpatorily: "The last one was seven years ago at least; the woman the boy saw——" He stops dead, and Jeff disclaims connection with this event. "I wasn't here," he says.

But he knows why Charles stopped, and of the incident. Told briefly, it was that on one occasion, when Charles's wife was at the Studio with the boy Pierre, the latter, being then a child of five or six years old, had looked a good deal at an empty chair, and afterwards had asked who the lady who laughed was, who was sitting in it. Jeff knew that what stopped Charles in his allusion to this incident was, not only that it involved his wife (for they had frequently conversed about her, and Charles was rather easy in his confidences with Jeff), but that there was another person in the room at the time, the man Lowenstern, whom Mrs. Charles had subsequently eloped with. It had been his first introduction and could not but be an unwelcome recollection.

Charles's stumbling into this line of thought jerks the conversation out of its groove; and Jeff, who has been for some time on the watch to ask a question, makes this stumble of Charles, of which both are perfectly conscious, an excuse for it.

"What's become of her, Charley?"

Charles lays down a pipe, not half-smoked, on the easel-ledge. This is an uncommon thing for any smoker to do. He goes to the window and looks out, or makes believe to. Jeff follows him, with concern on his face. He places his hand—slightly slaps it—on to Charles's shoulder, and leaves it there.

"Dead?" he asks abruptly. He is more in Charles's confidence than any man; on this subject more even than Rupert. The latter's impatient indignation against Charles's wife bars free intercourse between them. Charles wants no discordant note to clash with his own chivalry. He cannot bear to hear her condemned. Jeff's simplicity of character, combined with a large-hearted claim to Sin, made in order that he may depute the stone-throwing to a Public whose virtue he acknowledges, makes his blunt speech often

welcome to Charles, where a tact he makes no pretension to would have been wasted.

"Dead?" he repeats. "I see."—For Charles makes no reply. Both go back, and Charles takes up his pipe again. He doesn't mind talking about her.

"Of course," says he, "she herself really died long ago. But the woman she changed into is dead now. She died somewhere abroad. Baden-Baden I think it was."

"That's all very well, old chap! But you don't really think that. People ain't somebody else——"

"That's a very common mistake, Jeff dear. I know that a popular belief exists, to that effect. But recent investigations have shown——"

"Gammon!"—This comes so explicitly that Charles feels he won't get a hearing for a view he seriously holds unless he drops the popular lecturer, and speaks by the light of his own belief.

"I mean what I say. There are plenty of extreme cases of double consciousness—of people who have spoken only French in one state and Dutch in the other, and so forth—who have been two different people at different times, in fact."

"And then when one of them pizoned you, you wouldn't 'ang the other—is that it, Charley?"

"As to hanging, that's the Judge's business. But I shouldn't think harshly of the other, if I thought it was a case of double identity. There must be plenty of cases of change that don't go quite so far, but where it can hardly be said to be the same person."

"Must there? I can't see my way to half-and-half. According to my idear, Charley, identity's got a sharp edge all round. You're either me or somebody else. All the same, your idear is 'andy for Polly-ogamists, or whatever you call 'em."

Vague sketches cross Jeff's mind of questions he would like to ask, such as:—Has Mrs. Corrigan two identities: one a mid-weekly state laying claim to sobriety, the other a Saturdaily state convincing of beer? Or, did the late Mrs. Charles's second individuality begin to ooze through her on that day when Baron Von Lowenstern was brought into the Studio by Herr Bauerstein and casually introduced to the Artist's wife? Had he asked this last question of Charles, the reply must have been that this was not her very first fluctuation of identity, of a nature to accommodate Polygamists, or whatever we call them.

But he asked no such questions and poor Charley was spared more reminders of that painful time, and forced to no further

excuse-mongering; which, however loyal his effort, rang false even in his own ears. Even what had been said had recalled to him how on that morning his wife had come down to the Studio for money, although he had told her he could not overdraw at the Bank, but that he knew Rupert would help him again. And how Rupert signed a blank cheque for him that evening, and he filled it in with a fifty, and gave his wife half next day. And how there were strained relations between them, and she went away for a week to her mother. And how all the rest you know, or may guess came to pass, including how it was "elicited" on the trial that a cheque of Baron Lowenstern's for £100 payable to Mrs. C. Heath, had been part cashed, part taken in settlement of an account, by a Bond Street dressmaker's firm at about that date.

However, Jeff did not pursue the subject, and Charles, after musing a little, seemed to give up the point. For he said presently, "I suppose what I really meant was that she became some one else to me. So she did—quite another person. If I had met her, it would have been a stranger—not my boy's mother. She died long ago, to all intents and purposes. But I would rather she had done it outright."

When you want to get away from a subject, and not to seem to do so, your best course is to hark back to a previous stage of the conversation, with a view to turning off the road at some point you have noted *en passant*. The presence of Herr Bauerstein a little while since would have done to *entâmer* a subject Charles had wished to speak of, but he didn't want to revive the obnoxious appearance of the Baron on the scene; so he got clear back to the first start:

"Let's see! What were we talking of? Poor old Verrinder's colour-box. Has Bauerstein sold the Turner yet? You know he had a big offer for it? I heard of it just before this illness." But Jeff hasn't heard. He is not in the way of hearing these things now, as he was in old times. He lives at Abbey Road, St. John's Wood, and has his Studio in the house. He is a frequent visitor at Charles's house when there is no barrier—hence his rather uncommon presence at the old place to-day. "Do you know, Jeff," Charles continues, "I'm in two minds if I won't have Phyllis Cartwright cleaned after all! I'm sure the hand would come out bright, and we should see the stones—by-the-bye I've never told you we found out about the name on the ring." And he tells the whole story of the cab-drive and the mysterious well-informed driver. Whereupon Jeff says hookey—that was a rum start! It is surprising how little he has changed in the sixteen

years. There is nothing in him that corresponds to the settled sadness that had come upon Charles. He is cheerful and means to be corpulent one day, but has only just announced the fact. Otherwise his differences are negligible.

"I'll come in and have another look at her when you're open to the public again." Thus Jeff, referring to the portrait.

"She isn't at the house. I've had her brought down here. She's in the back room." He gets up and leads the way into the back room, where he used to sleep in the days of early Bohemianism. The shutters are closed, and a long ray of light streams through a heart-shaped hole in the top, and makes a solid bar of illuminated dust across the room, in which flies and strange floating things come and go all day. The space is half-choked with accumulating rubbish, and is hot with the heat of summer and unopened windows. A recent fall of soot hasn't improved the atmosphere, and provokes an admission that we must have the Sweep. When he has done his worst, Mrs. Corrigan, who is straining at the leash, will be unloosed, and will do the whole place thoroughly out. Only she is so careless she is sure to break something. Charles has a touching belief in the existence of intact valuables in the gloom. It dates from the last time he stowed some bric-à-brac of his wife's away, to keep it safe. Since which, seven years ago, little enough has been seen of that room and its contents. It is a chapel of ease to the congregation of lumber in the front one, and it is not often that anything that finds it way here is sought for again and brought out into the light. Phyllis Cartwright is an exception, owing to Jeff's visit and the accidental turn of the conversation.

"Let's have her out in the next room and get a good look at her. Those shutters are a bother to open." Thus Charles; and Phyllis is conveyed into the Studio proper, and placed on an easel. He sits down in front of her, and moistens the chilled varnish that obscures her hand.

"What was that picture of a chap with a sword?" It is Jeff who asks this question. He got a look round at the chapel of ease. But every one in a lumber room always is interested in something that sticks out, and it doesn't do to indulge his curiosity too much. Maybe Charles thinks so, for he pays little attention.

"I thought so, Jeff. Look here! If I rub a little oil on, just to show! There!—there you are! *What* picture of a chap with a sword?" Jeff looks at Phyllis Cartwright's hand, and deals with it before replying.

"That hand, and the finger with the ring on it would come out quite bright and clear if you gave it to what's-his-name—Bauer-

stein's man—to do. . . . What picture?—Why, that one the light was strikin' on—just in front as you go in." But Charles is intent upon Phyllis. "Bracchi—that's his name! He shall have it to-morrow." Charles is very decisive now and then. But he reconsiders, this time.—"Only I suppose he'll catch smallpox from it now. Better wait a week or so . . . I don't know which picture you mean. Man with a sword?"

"That chap in a George the Second dress,—deep crimson coat, a waistcoat and a half, and tie-wig,—with a drawn rapier in his hand—straight in front as you go in."

"You've got Queen Anne on the brain, Jeff." But for all that the attention of both is attracted, so to speak, to their own conversation, and it is promoted from the status of chat to that of active interest. "There *is* no chap in a Queen Anne dress." Charles is quite positive on the point.

"I'll show it you," says Jeff, and they return to the back room. "Just here! . . . Well! that's rum too." And stands puzzled. For there, where Jeff expected to find it, is a picture certainly. But it is, quite distinctly, the Three Graces; an old picture of Charles's that he means to have out again and go on with, some day.

"Well, I'm blowed!" says Jeff. And Charles appears rather blowed too. But very soon optical delusion comes to the rescue, and properties of refraction and polarised light not classified, so far, by scientists. And Charles and Jeff think no more about it; and presently the latter takes his leave, scattering his path as he goes with reassurance about smallpox on the authority of his wife, who is able it appears to vouch for several cases within her own experience, where smallpox has proved rather an advantage than otherwise, clearing the blood of vital organisms of a diabolical nature, and above all things improving the complexion.

Charles, left alone, falls back into thinking how dull the house will be without Alice when he goes back, but for all that how nice it is of those friends of Peggy's at Ewhurst to have her so soon after the illness—however, Rupert knows all about it; so it must be all right. She was looking dreadfully pale and tired yesterday, and now she'll come back her old self. It won't be long.

Alas, for Alice's little scheme for Charles's prosperity and happiness! He hasn't a thought for Lady Anstruther Paston-Forbes. And as for his late wife—well! she *did* die seven years ago, "to all intents and purposes."

CHAPTER XXXIV

HOW CHARLES WENT TO THE ALPS, AND FOUND THEM THERE STILL. BACK IN ENGLAND AND OFF TO SHELLACOMBE. BUT NO ALICE. HOW ST. POB HAD A GAP, AND MR. WILKINSON WAS CURED WITH RAT'S BLOOD AND TREACLE. OF A LETTER UNDER A CARPET, AND ITS LIGHT ON AN ESCAPADE OF ALICE'S. HOW THE PICNIC CAME HOME

It was pleasant cool July weather when Charles and Sister Eulalie, now fully christened Mrs. Prig, took their convalescent down to St. Leonards to recruit. It was nothing like so hot as that celebrated Autumn when Alice so nearly ended her days in the sea at Shellacombe. But it was very pleasant for all that, and when Charles had seen Mrs. Prig and his son comfortably provided for, he returned, not without reluctance, to London, and surrendered his house into the hands of properly vaccinated upholsterers (who had taken), and who almost came up to the standard hinted at by Jeff, and sustained by his wife's authority. For they ripped up everything, and pulled down everything, and wrapped up everything that was to be taken away and burned, in sheets saturated with Carbolic lotion. And there followed in their wake an army of equally well-vaccinated painters, plasterers, and paper-hangers, under whose auspices stripping, clear-coating, and repainting ran riot, hand-in-hand with Carbolic Acid, over the whole house. Charles hung about the premises to protect them from the germ-destroyer, and secure a residuum of his property for future use. While the tempest of disinfection raged he camped as a Bohemian at the Studio; armed, he said, with a medical Certificate that no germ had been detected on him by the most powerful miscroscope. He absolutely refused to go near Harley Street, or see a living soul of his belongings there until he should have had a good run abroad, or somewhere in the country.

But he was all the more anxious to see Alice before he went away, and was rather puzzled at her being away so long. Being glad she should get a good change he said nothing to that effect even to Rupert when he came to see him at the Studio. Peggy wanted to come, but he begged her so earnestly not to do so that she yielded. It was to be nobody but Rupert until he had gone away

and got quite above suspicion. *Why* he took it for granted that any self-respecting germ would avoid his brother-in-law he could not have said; but so it was!

"I've got my nostrils so full of Carbolic Acid," said he, "that I smell it everywhere. Even this letter from Alice, just fresh from the country, seems to me to smell of it."

"One gets these fancies," replied Sir Rupert. But when Charles turned away, he picked up the letter and smelt it.

"Alice seems very well," Charles went on; "when does Peggy expect her back? Of course the longer she stays the better."

"The longer the better. And the longer holiday you take the better, I should say. You go away to-morrow, Charley. Leave everything in my hands. You can trust me."

"Of course I can, Dr. Jomson. But I should have liked to see Alice before I go."

"What for?"

"No particular reason. Just a fancy!"

"You can't do any work now, and you know it. Much better use up the spoiled time in getting some health. Go to Switzerland for a month and get really set up." Charles felt pleasure from the implication that his work would have reality and value when he returned. He believed under the skin in his own estimate of its worth. But still, it was reassuring to walk over the ashes and pretend the warmth of the *ignes suppositi* did not reach his feet. He was grateful to Rupert for the way he made his suggestion, and classed the moraines of glaciers as stepping-stones to pictures on the line at the R. A. So—after a little more demur because he felt that somehow he should like Alice to be ratified before his departure, though he couldn't analyse the feeling—he packed up and found himself in due course looking at the bridge of boats at Cologne, and admitting to himself what an inroad on his health the events of the last two months had made; as one does when the holiday has really come, and one can allow the artificial tension to slack down. He waited till he got letters from his sister and Alice, and also from his son and Sister Eulalie at St. Leonards. He found these warranted ease of mind, and indulged in it; and by the time he got to Lucerne, in two rather tedious railway journeys, he was beginning to feel that he had done the best thing in taking his brother-in-law's advice—and probably, he found himself adding, for Alice and his boy also. But he was rather vague about the exact nature of the benefit his absence would confer, and suspected he was taking a mean advantage, and assuming it on insufficient grounds for purposes of self-justification. You see, he was a

little addicted to over-indulgence in self-analysis. It is a vice that develops under conditions of shaken nerves and health below par, and is none the weaker from disappointment and frustrated purpose.

It vanishes among the Alps, at any rate if you climb them. Charles was caught up at Lucerne by a robust party of young mountaineers, who prevailed upon him to accompany them up a very insignificant peak whose name we have forgotten. As he stood on its summit looking at a sunset that was bathing the world of glaciers in prismatic light on one side, and down on the deep, cool crystal of the darkening lake below on the other, and afar to the huge still peaks against the sky, serene in their confidence of to-morrow's dawn, self-analysis fell away into the background. And when he woke at a châlet next day, after fifteen hours' continuous sleep, and found that his young friends had forsaken him to ascend one of the monsters he had seen against the sun, leaving instructions that he was on no account to be waked, self-analysis was as good as dead. He did not wait for the return of the mountaineers, but went on to the next place he expected letters at; and then, being reassured by them, and unstimulated by other mountaineers, passed a pleasant three weeks in humble pedestrianism from town to town, and one or two most unambitious ascents of peaks of a commodious size, suited to his aspirations. Then, feeling entirely renewed, but always with a sense on him that he had been keeping away in order to be renewed, and that he mustn't do so much longer, he came back and perceived that things English were very undersized, and it would take him some time to live himself into his groove again.

But he broke the shock of re-entry into the stinted life and grudged spaces of London by going first to St. Leonards, and taking his boy and Mrs. Prig a long drive to Eastbourne. The sweep of the channel wind over the flats of Pevensey and Hurstmonceaux, the incessant hushed music of the sea that never tires of its ebb and flow, the cry of the sea-bird that has never paused since the ancestors of all the persons of condition in England came over and overwhelmed Gurth—(at least we understand that this is History);—all these things, and the example of content with them shown by the black cattle on the flats, seemed to contain the essence of a pause—a blank of silence—an empty leaf to rest the mind on between the chapter about the Matterhorn and that—well! about Brewster Sessions and Tied Houses, suppose we say—anything of that sort!

Mrs. Prig hadn't seen Alice, of course. But she had had plenty

of letters—also of course. Whereupon Charles thought to himself that if that was to be of course too, Mrs. Gamp and Mrs. Prig must have gone into very close alliance in a very short time. Very young school-girls do that on the spot; without the acceleration of fighting first, like their future lords and masters, or slaves. But after all, these ladies were grown up, especially Mrs. Prig. However, she only produced one letter, so perhaps it was a *lapsus linguæ*. The letter was quite satisfactory. And we were going home to-morrow. And we went.

Charles was conscious of a good deal of impatience to see Peggy again after his long separation, and vexation that he should not find her at once at Harley Street. Naturally she and all her young brood had taken flight and were basking on the sea-beach. They had this year gone, after several seasons of Scotland and the Lakes, to their old quarters at Shellacombe, which had grown, and become quite a large watering-place, to Peggy's great disgust. Charles was vexed at having still a long journey before him next day, and was very distrait on his way up from St. Leonards, giving only partial attention to incidents on the route. He was preoccupied with his own thoughts, and remained so until he reached home and the accumulations of unforwarded correspondence and parcels demanded attention, and a beautiful new Experimental Chemical Chest for Pierre from Aunt Peggy called for sympathy, which could not be denied to such delicious stoppered bottles and porcelain capsules and spirit-lamps.

Charles was not a little disconcerted, on his arrival, at a letter from Alice telling him not to be surprised if he didn't find her at Shellacombe. Why, the family had been nearly a month at the sea, and surely Alice wanted the sea-air as much as any of them! Besides, fancy Shellacombe and no Alice! It seemed absurd. But Alice said she should come in a day or two, as soon as her friends, where she was, would let her go. Well! that seemed all right too. Fancy any one who had got Alice wanting to be rid of her!

Then a thought came into his mind—was it, at last, *Mr.* Alice? Was it, at last, some one Alice was not prepared to say no to—some one she was thinking of saying yes to? He welcomed the thought mechanically. He had so often said to himself that he should rejoice when this came to pass, that it would never do to be behind now. Oh dear, yes! That would be delightful. How pleased Peggy would be!

He found the pleasure Peggy was going to feel facilitated mat-

ters. He was able to let *his* stand over for a while to make way for it. There couldn't be the smallest shadow of doubt about its existence—but then, of course, he wasn't going to begin ringing joy-bells until he knew something about the chap, if it was a chap. But there now! *He* knew all about it. It always *was* a chap, when girls went to stay at country-houses and couldn't be got back to their sorrowing relations. He had known the same thing happen a hundred times. He said this to himself with confidence, without reflecting that he had probably not been acquainted with a cool hundred of marriageable young ladies in the whole course of his existence. Few of us have, at forty-one.

He acquired a sudden interest—it was odd he had not felt it before—in "c/o Mrs. Wintringham, The Manor House, Chelverhurst, Surrey." Who *was* c/o Mrs. Wintringham? He cast about in his mind to think which circle of Peggy's friends she would be found among. He succeeded in fancying she must be a Miss Constance Batley, who had married a squire with a park—of whom nothing else was reported to distinguish him from his fellow-creatures. That was it, for certain! They had picnics in that park—picnics in parks always brought about general engagements. Charles felt vain of his penetration. But he was going to keep his raptures under until he knew that the chap was a very nice chap indeed. Of course they would come, when called on; but he should be rather difficult to satisfy in respect of Mr. Alice-for-short. There wasn't another like her in the world, and it would never do if—— But the if's were too hideous to contemplate, and Charles brushed them aside in favour of asking Sister Eulalie about what "c/o Mrs. Wintringham" amounted to. He had to let this stand over, as it appeared that while he was reading his letters upstairs she had departed to catch a train to the home of her elder sister, St. Bridget, after shouting good-bye up the stairs to him, and telling him not to come down, or she would lose it.

So when repackings and adjustments were done and bedtime came, Charles paid a valedictory visit to his boy, who was nice in clean sheets and a clean nightgown—boys are, you know!—and was seated on his pillow embracing his knees with his eyes fixed on his current fetish, the glorious Chemical Chest, which he had placed at the bed's side for purposes of worship, and wanted to have candlelight for to the extent of a six-to-the-pound, not a quarter burned through. "Isn't it orfly jolly?" said he, and withdrew not his gaze from the idol. Whereupon his father captured his candle, kissed him, and went away to bed.

He went away, and left to himself in the quiet night, felt the

old sadness come on him again. The old feeling that his life had gone askew from the beginning and that it was too late now to remedy it. The memory of the old days when, rightly or wrongly, he believed in that boy's mother—of whom he spoke truly when he said she had been dead, to him, through all these years when she was living her successful version of a mistaken life with some one (or more) elsewhere. The sense of age—age of mind—age of heart—in a frame that refused to acknowledge any substantial change. For he was obliged to admit that even in his twenties he would have overslept himself after that climb with his young friends of the Alpine Club, and could never have regarded it as a mere preliminary stretch before starting for the Dent-du-Midi. His mood was that of one who, feeling so old at heart and worn in spirit, was little in love with his own vigour, and would almost have welcomed grey hairs and failing muscle, to tell the truth at the door about the inner life of the household. It was a natural feeling under the circumstances, but perhaps not altogether to be relied on to last.

Was it true that Shellacombe had become quite a large watering-place? The little unalterable railway-station at Cleave was in statu-quo, or very nearly. Usually, at a side-station of this sort, when the neighbourhood braces itself up to get abreast of modern civilisation, a sordid and imbecile horror starts from the earth and proclaims that it is the Railway Hotel. It owns a pewter bar floated with beer-slops; and if you enquire of a chance *crétin*, without employment, who is in a fatuous apartment labelled Parlour, whether you can have a chop, a sandwich, a biscuit—with each its due allowance of grease, fingermarks, or mould—he will tell you to arsk at this same pewter bar, and you will shortly find that it is a grove with no Egeria—that its tutelary genius is an Article of Faith, and that no amount of impatience and suggestive noises will cause him (or her) to materialise. No such instalment of the nightmare of prosperity had come to the little station at Cleave. The roses still in bloom on the platform fence, and the hollyhocks and dahlias that lined the approach from the gate, all enjoyed a sea-wind untainted so far by anybody's Entire. And when Charles arrived with his boy by an afternoon train, he found exactly the same people going away by the same carriages, the same station-master calling attention to the fact that he was really the same age, by the collapse of an attempt at a grey head, and the timidity of an irresolute corporation. He took (to all appearance) the same waggonette with the same young man to drive

it. He gave up attempting to solve suggested problems of time and change, and fell back on the memory of Alice the small, and how she jumped off the opposite seat onto his knee, to show him how little her face was burned by the sun, and had to subside rebuked. And how she told the tale of the rescue, and Dr. Jomson, and the beetle. Oh, how vividly the little animated face came back to him, after all those years!

And then he remembered another incident, the day before he went away, a fool to a foolish marriage, with a serene face and an intoxicated heart—the incident spoken of by Peggy at Harley Street. For it was true that as he left the house, the child, who had been very silent all day, and under imputation of stomach-ache, sprang suddenly into his arms, and strained him tightly, convulsively, about the neck, and cried aloud, "Oh, Mr. Charley, Mr. Charley, don't go away from us. Don't go—don't go!" As he sat in the car, and thought back into the past, he could feel the little arms about him still. Then this memory revived his marriage, and the two between them made cross-cuts in his heart. And he thought on into the early, happier years of his married life—stopping short, by a great effort, on the threshold of the clouded time. He was glad to be helped, though, by the plash of the waves and the cry of the birds, when the sea-road was reached, none too soon!

Nobody at the house, not a soul! Unless, indeed, Handsworth and the cook and the housemaid were souls. Her ladyship and the young ladies and gentlemen ("I wish he would say missis and the children," thought Charles) had gone to a tea-picnic at St. Pob's Gap. For St. Pob had a Gap, and they always had hot-water at the boat in the cliff. Hence picnics, frequently. Charles would walk out that way, Handsworth—and would be sure to meet them coming back, though of course her Ladyship would drive by the road. All very clear. But Charles wouldn't start this minute. He and his boy would have a cup of tea first and go off presently across the field-path; they wouldn't be coming home just yet. Charles knew that, broadly speaking, people don't come home from picnics. Very late, and with great difficulty, they may be goaded home, or coaxed home. But if it is fine (and just look at that big yellow moon rise over the hill) two hours late is the earliest to expect them. No hurry!

"I say, pater!"

"What do you say, filius? Only don't talk with your mouth full. A thoughtless world will condemn you as greedy, whereas the reverse is the case. Clearly, he who talks with his mouth full prefers intellectual intercourse with his kind to mere indulgence in the

pleasures of the table. It shows the supremacy of mind over—for instance—white bread, rather too new, and much better fresh butter than one ever gets in town." But Pierre has detected a classical lapse on his father's part, and interrupts him with decision.

"I say, that's wrong!"

"What's wrong?"

"Filius. It's vocative fili. Filius fili filium filii filio filio——"

"I believe you are strictly correct. Pour me out another cup and don't spill it. Yes, two lumps like usually. And now perhaps, vocative fili, you'll say *what* you say, pater!"

"Why, there's a boy at school whose father's a Russian, and lives on oil and live fishes and bites his mother when they quarrel. He's oarfully strong, and can lick coalheavers——"

"What a very disagreeable person! What's his name?"

"Wilkinson."

"A singular name for a Russian. But he may have assumed it to disguise his nationality. The Russians are, I understand, a subtle and a scheming race."

"Oh yes—he's a Russian." Pierre continues with unshaken confidence. "Besides, he can turn right round in the middle and not twist. And once he turned round and couldn't get back. And they had to rub him with rat's blood and treacle."

"And then he came round?"

"Oh yes—he came round then." Pierre's faith in the treatment is touching. His father wonders, if all schoolboys believe, as seems to be the case, all the wild legends their schoolmates tell about each other's parents, which are the wicked boys who make them? He gets out his pipe and tobacco-bag.

"Your story, Pierrot, appears credible throughout, with one exception. The name Wilkinson seems to me to cast doubt on all the other particulars, which are in accordance with what we know of the habits of Russians generally. But Wilkinson!" . . .

"Well—you ask old Butlin if his name isn't Wilkinson!" This was his schoolmaster.

"Ah! but is he a Russian—that's the point? The Muscovite is essential. Where's the matches? All mine are done."

"Handsworth's taken them away. Look here! I'll light a bit of paper at the urn." And Pierre picks up an accidental half-letter, that seems on the drift, to make a spill and light it at the spirit-lamp still burning under the tea-urn.

"You're a man of resource, Pierrot," his father says; "now mind you don't set yourself on fire!" But as the boy begins to tear a

piece off to make the spill, he interrupts him. "Stop half-a-minute, old man," he says; "let's see what we're tearing up."

"It's Aunty Lissy's writing," says the observant eleven-year-old; "it's only a letter!"

"*Only* a letter! You're a nice young man." But Pierrot is frightened, for his father has barely glanced at the first two lines when he utters what would have been a cry had it not been checked. "My God!" cries he, "fancy that!"—And he almost staggers; then drops back on a sofa-seat behind him, holding the letter grasped on his knee in one hand, while the other clenches tight and jerks on his other knee. Pierrot almost begins to cry in earnest.

"Oh, Papa—oh, Papa—are you ill?"

"All right, dear boy, all right! It's nothing—only I got a start." He takes the frightened youngster onto his knee, and consoles him. Tells him to be a man and so forth—not to be frightened at trifles—inculcates Sparta. *He's* not a little girl, is he? He is *not,* and is proud of that achievement. Very well then—he had better go and run about on the beach, because we think we won't go to meet them, but will stay and smoke our pipe till they come. Also we are on no account to go in the water, because we might get a chill after our recent illness. But perhaps to-morrow in the middle of the day. Even then, we mustn't stop in too long. Pierrot's mind slips easily on to a matter that concerns him so nearly, and he forgets his fright and goes out to gloat over the ocean he is going to bathe in to-morrow.

His father remains motionless on the sofa, still grasping the letter, for quite a minute. Then he draws a long breath. "That darling child!" he says, in an undertone, and again, "That *darling* child! Alice-for-short! Think of it!" He drops the letter for a moment, gets at his pocket handkerchief and wipes his forehead; then polishes his spectacles, and the name Alice christened him by in her secret mythology passes through his mind. "The dear, *dear* little thing!" he says, and has to dry his eyes before he puts the glasses back. Then he picks up and smooths out the letter and goes nearer the light—there is not much left—to read it. It is a half-page, and begins in the middle of a sentence.

". . . dreadfully afraid he must come to know it in the end, because though Dr. Pitt says I shan't be badly marked and Mrs. Wintringham thinks so too—(*mind* you, don't direct to the Mother Superior when Mr. Charley comes back—he might see the letter)—of course there must be *some* mark—for a year or so at least—and though

Mr. Charley is the most unobservant male I ever came across, about people's faces, and their things, still I do NOT think we can hocus-pocus him for good. Only I want to be quite well and strong and able to laugh at him when the cat does come out of the bag. Keep the cat in the longest we can, anyhow. What aggravates me is that there is sure to be a mark just round the corner where people always . . ."

That was the end of the other side of the sheet—Charles could not fill out the sentence. He gave it up after one or two guesses. But he read both sides over and over again. Then he sat on—sat on in the twilight—his left hand still holding the letter. If he moved, it was only to raise his two hands together and drop them. Nothing else. At last he roused himself with a little shake.

"Was there ever such another dear, dear, dear girl in the world?" He made the enquiry of space, and didn't wait for an answer.

He pulled the bell—or rather, the bell-handle. A bell-handle does not transmit power except the wire be efficient; or perhaps there was no bell. "It sounds as if there was none," said Charles; "perhaps, more accurately, it doesn't sound as if there was one. It's Platonic, anyhow."—So he went out to find Handsworth, and met him coming. Handsworth had "heard the wire" and concluded "that Mr. Charles had rung." Phrases about parlour-bells seem to run into inaccuracy naturally. Charles asked for the lamp or a couple of candles to write a letter by. When illuminated, he discovered writing-materials and sat down and wrote.

He wrote, absorbed, to the end of a four-page letter. It was written straight through, signature and all, without any apparent difficulty in structure, or stumbling-blocks in phrasing. Then he looked at his watch, gave a short whistle, picked up his hat, and started out to find Master Pierre. A signal, once or twice repeated, of the nature of a coo-ey, convinced him that that young man had got well out of hearing, and would have to be chased. He was considering whether the chase need begin now, or might stand over for a little, when his ear was caught by the sound of wheels, and an anticipative cry that it was Uncle Charley at last.

"Yes, it's Uncle Charley, and what's more he knows all about——" But Charles stopped, to do full justice to his welcome to his sister.—"There's forgiveness in that hug," thought Peggy to herself, after a qualm of misgiving at his words; there could be no doubt what it was he knew all about. He continued:—

"Yes, I know all about it, Poggy-Woggy—(How well you are looking, dear!—give me another kiss, and don't look so scared)—

and I can only say, that of all the darling girls——" And really Charles couldn't say any more, as a matter of fact. So he let it alone during debarcation from the carriage, which involved Phillips and Alce being carried upstairs, like Sabine women sound asleep, over their Uncle's two shoulders. For he said he preferred taking them both, as a too uxorious Roman soldier might have done. He shot them onto a bed, like coals, and left the remainder of their arrangement to the nurse.

"Well—Charley!"

"Well—Lady Johnson!"

"Come and sit down here, dear old boy, and I'll tell you—no, don't!—Come out in front in the moonlight, and we'll sit on the seat.—How well you're looking!—The Alps for ever!"—Charles says they had that sort of flavour about them when he came away; and then they both go out towards the long stream of moonlight on the sea, and the mysterious black pyramid between it and the moon, which vanishes when you hide both. They anchor on a seat in the wilderness; where the sea-wind, had it not been asleep, would have been doing a little sweeping of the sand. As it was, it was so still the tufts of spike-grass hardly stirred. Peggy approached the subject seriously.

"It was Alice herself—(Yes, I know! There *is* nobody like her!)—and she always gets her way, you know—now isn't it true? Well! She arranged it with the Sister——"

"Mrs. Prig?"

"Yes, Mrs. Prig. If she caught it, she was to go away at once to this nursing-home, or another, if they couldn't take her in. The head of it is an old friend of Mrs. Prig. She began feeling headaches and chills two or three days before you went to St. Leonards, and the people at the home sent a special carriage for her—just fancy! it was a four hours' drive and we knowing nothing about it!——"

"But the dear girl! What did they do it *for*? Because we were up to our eyes in contagion already—germs all over the place——"

"Don't you see? She thought you wouldn't get away for a change—besides your getting an extra chance of catching it, if you hung about the house. And she knew she would be just as well nursed—or better."

"The poor, darling child! All by herself at a Hospital! Oh, Peggy! But what did Rupert say?"

"It was no use his saying anything—nor me either. The thing was done. I was very near telling you though, only Rupert stopped me. Yes, stopped me! And I think now he was quite right. 'Sup-

pose,' he said, 'Charley is told, and hangs about at the house, as he would, and catches it too, and dies, and Alice recovers, what good will it have done her to tell him? Circumscribe the disease first—talk metaphysics and morality afterwards!' That was what *he* said. And I think he was right, Charley. Alice will have some pleasure now in seeing what a capital job the Alps have turned you out."

"But when shall I see her?—that's what I want to know. Will she be here in a day or two, as she says? And are the doctor and Mrs. Wintringham right about the marks, or—what's the matter?"

"How do *you* come to know what they say?"—For Peggy has looked blank surprise at Charles, and cut short his torrent of questions.

"How do I come——? Why, of course—oh, I forgot though, I never told you how I read your letter." And Charles describes what had happened.

"See what comes of eaves-dropping and such like, you foolish boy! You might have remained in the dark—I see how it was, though. It was those children. They get my letters and push them under the carpet, to keep them secret. I expect the other half of this one is under the carpet now."

"But are they right about the marks?"

"Indeed, I do hope so, dear Charley." Peggy looks very serious. "Because for a girl——"

"Oh—I know—I know!" says Charles, with pain in his voice. "And oh dear—there was I, fancying what kept Alice away was something of that kind. And *now, now*——!" Chagrin and distress cannot do much more with two words, than make them like these.

"But, Charley dear—are you so very sure? Would you be so very glad, if Alice were really engaged to be married?"

"*Yes,*" almost shouts Charles. "*Yes*—if the man were good enough for her. I want that dearest of girls to have the very best of everything—the best of husbands—the happiest of homes. *Everything.* So do you, Poggy-Woggy, and you know it."

Peggy doesn't deny this. But there is a curious reserve in the handsome face in the moonlight, as she sits looking at her brother. It might have influenced some speech later, but the conversation was cut short by jolly satyrs, so to speak. They were so many, and so many, and such glee. Metaphor apart, they were the picnic; or what had been the picnic, an hour or two since, which had now come back with many strange tales to tell, and alive to the advantages of supper. Pierre reappeared with them; but it seemed that he was indisposed to admit that he had lost much or anything by his

seclusion for the past two months, and, in fact, was inclined to question the advantages of picnics as compared with Smallpox.

So whatever comment was pending in Lady Johnson's mind on her brother's natural aspirations for a beloved *protégée*, it was not made, on this occasion at least, and Charles took no note of any expression on her face. No wonder!—for his was at this moment obsessed by a small nephew of seven years, who sprang on him from behind, and may be said to have sounded the key-note of the performance for the rest of the evening.

CHAPTER XXXV

HOW ALICE LOOKED OUT FOR A SPARROW'S SHADOW, AND LET HER NURSE READ CHARLES'S LETTER ALOUD. HOW CHARLES MADE A MORTAL SHORT-CUT ACROSS A CHURCHYARD, AND TOOK ALICE TO WIMBLEDON. HOW GRANDMAMMA *WOULD* TALK ABOUT MISS STRAKER

If the whole human race were polled to decide the question, what is the most delightful thing in the world that does no harm to any one else, surely more than half would answer—convalescence. Of course there are no end of greater satisfactions that have more claim on our consideration, if we include those which involve discomfort or inconvenience to our fellow-creatures. Nobody would place a mere sensual enjoyment, like returning health, on a level with shooting or fishing or winning heavily on the Stock-Exchange or at Monte Carlo, all of which involve corresponding drawbacks to some one else, and couldn't be enjoyed without them. But, for an absolutely innocuous pleasure, give us getting well after an illness.

So Alice thought to herself as she waked up very slowly, on the second morning after our last chapter, in all the comfort of her little room at Chelverhurst, the old Surrey manor-house that had been turned into a Nursing Home for badly infectious cases. Why not have Smallpox, if the end of it was to be a stream of morning sunlight on an imitation Chinese chintz a hundred years old, and a wallpaper to match with pheasants repeated at intervals, but not showing any *gauche* consciousness of their own sameness? And bedroom china of the very same data, unchipped, yet authentic, so beautiful that Charles's funny friend Mr. Jerrythought would have bid for the merest soap-dish? For that was how Alice thought of Jeff—as a being whose sole joy was the authenticity of his collection of early Georgian.

Jeff might have used his favourite expression, "Grandmother!" in a new sense about the authenticities at Chelverhurst, and with a greater appositeness. For the house as it stood was exactly what it was when the present owner's Grandmother died; and very nearly what it had been when she married, say a hundred years ago. Mrs. Wintringham, when her mother and husband and four chil-

dren died of Smallpox, inherited it and turned it into a Nursing Home. But we have nothing to do with this, any more than we have with any of the appalling tragedies whose survivors pass us in the street every day. We only mention it to account for the intense authenticity of the ewer and basin, the chintz and the wall-paper, which Alice can see the sun-made window on, and is feeling glad of. How heavenly it is in this dear little duck of a room she was moved into yesterday after all that dreadful fever and maddening skin-torture in the real service ward of the institution in the new building in the garden, a little way off! For this was one of two or three choice retreats in the "Mother Superior's" own house, which she kept in reserve for convalescents in special cases. Alice soon became a special case, even when the fever was on her. It was a way she had with her.

In the middle of the sun-made window was a cast shadow of ivy-leaf. It moved with a sudden movement that was not wind. Alice lay and watched it drowsily, delightfully. She was watching for the little dicky-bird that she knew was causing that movement, somewhere out of sight. She knew that by pulling at a fluffy bell-rope handle close to her hand she could have milk or meat-jelly or anything she liked to name. But she preferred to watch for the shadow of the little dicky-bird. Would it be a swallow, or a tomtit, or a little wren, or only a common house-sparrow? And would she know it by its shadow? . . .

Yes—there it was, sure enough! And Alice would have guessed, up to cockney-point of bird-knowledge, if only the little character would have stood still, or said something. But he only got involved in himself, and became a ripple of feathers, and a flick, and disappeared without remark. Alice watched for him again, vexed at his silence. She watched all the while the ivy-spray travelled across a Chinese pheasant. Then the little bird's shadow came again, and Alice decided he was only a sparrow. He said something very loud twice over—something out of all proportion to his size—and flew away. Then Alice suddenly went to sleep again, quite contrariwise to her expectations.

She heard through her sleep, without seeing any need to wake for it, the sound of music. It was that Ave Maria of Arcadelt. Most likely you know the one I mean—one often hears it. It is just like Heaven under ordinary circumstances; but when it is the first music heard after a bad illness, how then? Almost worth the illness to hear it, with the life coming back to one's veins, in the sweet air and the clean white sheets, and what would else—but for it—be silence.

So Alice thought as she came slowly, slowly, from the sleep that listened to the Sisters' matins in the little chapel they had made themselves in the garden. So she was still thinking when Mrs. Wintringham, who was ugly but good, came in to pay her a morning visit, and bring her her letters. What *did* it matter how narrow-minded she was?

"Three Miss Kavanaghs," says the good lady; "Miss Kavanagh—Miss Kavanagh—Miss Kavanagh." She hands the three to Alice. "And one for Miss Alice Kavanagh," which she passes on separately, that there may be no deception—like a conscientious conjurer.

"That's Mr. Charley, I know," says the patient; "he always Miss-Alices me." But she doesn't seem in any hurry to open them. It's such fun looking at the outside of a letter, she considers.

"Have your own way, my dear," says the Mother Superior, as Alice groups the four envelopes on the counterpane in front of her; "you're to be spoiled, you know." She is a little chuckly rather red woman of fifty-odd: you would not describe her as tempting, or what we have heard called cuddlesome. But Alice wants to kiss her for all that. Perhaps she sees straight through to the soul that passed through the Valley of that Shadow of Death, and was saved from wreck by its thought for travellers to come. Anyhow, she gets at the ugly face somehow, and kisses it. "You *have* been a darling to me," says she; "so has everybody."

"You're a pleasant one to do with, my dear! There's the difference." And presently the Mother Superior goes away, after inspecting Alice's face carefully. But she leaves Sister Alethea to attend to her further spoiling.

It was a lucky whim of the patient's that made her leave her letters unopened. Diet, even according to a *régime,* is nourishing—and we are not sure the *régime* in this case wasn't whatever the patient felt inclined for. Anyhow, she was the better for it, and refection had reached the stage of two tablespoonfuls every four hours before she got her finger inside Charles's envelope, and began to rip without misgiving. . . .

"What's the matter, dear Miss Kavanagh?" said Sister Alethea, alarmed, as Alice dropped the letter with a half-cry, half-gasp, and fell back on her pillow, speechless. However, she soon recovered her voice.

"Mr. Charles Heath has found out I've had it. And I wanted him not to know!"

"Oh, is that all? I thought something was the matter!" Sister

Alethea was an imperturbable Sister. Imperturbability is a very good quality, in a Hospital.

"I wish you would read it all through for me, Sister, while I shut my eyes." You see, Alice was so grateful to these excellent ladies that she got pleasure from giving them her unreserved confidence. Though, indeed, if the letter had been from Mr. Selwyn-Kerr or Sir Thomas Brabazon, she would never have let another soul see it. Except of course Miss Peggy or Mr. Charley. People took their chance of that, if they wrote letters to her.

Sister Alethea was nothing loth to read the letters for Alice. When you have renounced the world it's fun to get a read at other people's letters and see what's going on in it. Besides, she had just said her prayers in the Chapel. But would Mr. Charles Heath not mind her seeing his letter?

"Oh, no! Why should he? As if I didn't know Mr. Charley! Cut away." And Alice lay back on the pillow and listened. There really was an element of physical weakness in this. Alice was glad to have anything done for her; for all she felt so well and happy it could not be relied on to last if she tried to do anything beyond existing.

"Fire away, Sister Thea dear," said she. Sister Alethea hesitated a moment, then proceeded:

"'You most dear and darling little girl, there is nothing like you anywhere in all this world. Yes, I know, I've heard all about it. Alice-for-short!—only think of it.'—Is that what he means?" The reader hung fire for a moment, doubtfully.

"Is *what* what he means? . . . 'Alice-for-short?' oh, yes!—it's only Mr. Charley. That's all right. *I* understand. Go ahead!"

"'And instead of that, there was I climbing the Alps. . . .' Are you sure I'm reading right, Miss Kavanagh? Because it doesn't seem to make sense."

"Oh dear, yes! It's all right. Don't you know about 'instead of that you go and steal turkeys'? You don't understand Mr. Charley. Go straight on." The Sister seemed unconvinced, but continued:

"'Whatever can I say to my dear little girl for this? What is there to be said except that I?' . . ."

"Can't you make out his handwriting?"

"Oh yes—it's quite legible. Only . . ."

"Only what?"

"Are you really sure he wouldn't mind other people reading all this?" Alice laughed aloud, quite cheerfully. Why on earth should Mr. Charley mind anybody reading it? Of course, he *meant* it.

Sister Alethea glanced on to the next page, seemed still to hesitate, then finally resumed:

"'What is there to be said except that I love you and shall always love you. Really when you come to think it over, Alice-for-short, darling, you'll find that that exhausts the subject. Further than that there is nothing—only just this—that if that dear sweet face of yours is disfigured I shall never be happy again. It's the simple truth. But what I can't get over is that there was I, climbing all those Alps all the while!'

"'Now, my dear—look here! I know you're not fit to move yet, and can't be for a day or two. But I know you're in good hands. So I'll put up with not seeing you for a few days more—though I tell you plainly I don't above half like it—and then I'll come and fetch you. That's something to look forward to, anyhow? Good-bye for now, darling.'

"'Signed—Mr. Charley.'"

"*Isn't* it a nice letter?" said Alice, with her eyes closed and her head back on the pillow. She seemed very happy over it, now that the first shock of finding Charles knew the whole truth was over.

"Oh, a very nice letter!" The bewilderment on the imperturbable face of the Nursing Sister was just as visible as if Heaven had given her one capable of expression. But Alice didn't see it; so that didn't matter.

"I don't think I shall write back to Mr. Charley yet, not till I know better about my marks. Dr. Pitt said he thought he would be able to make a good guess in a day or two."

"Do you think this gentleman would mind?" Sister Thea felt it would be too familiar to say "Mr. Charley." But she knew no other name. "I mean," she continued, "that I fancy it won't make any difference at all to him."

Alice opened her eyes to full astonishment point, and looked round at the Sister. "You don't *know* Mr. Charley!" she said. "'Not make any difference to him!'—why, he'll just break his heart about it! I don't believe he ever really *will* be happy—just as he says. I'm sure he'll be always thinking about me, all day long. And as far as that goes, I shouldn't care twopence if I was like picturesque cottages outside all over, provided it did him any good. What's it called? . . . rough-cast. Or Pierre's compasses—I mean the box. . . ." Alice was getting tired with talking, and said so. She wouldn't be able to read her other letters, and she wanted to read them all to herself. So Sister Thea took several things in the room as points of order, and when they were disposed of, carried away an extinct tray, to come back in due course.

It was Alice all over to hand her letter from Charles to the Nursing Sister to read, and to have reserves about Peggy's. Her absolute confidence in her relations with Charles prevented her ever looking at them critically, much less analysing them. It completely betrayed her in this case into what seemed to Sister Thea a most perplexing lack of common-sense and common insight. Perhaps this was partly owing to her weak and hazy condition of mind. At another time she might have done otherwise. This time she felt no misgivings as she dozed off—even in the act of opening Peggy's letter—after the Sister went away.

The sunlight had deserted the Chinese pheasants on the wall, and was down on the carpet under the window when she next thought of waking. She felt the envelope still on her finger as she lay there not quite sure whether to wake or not. This reminded her she had not read the letter, and roused her to do so. It was written the day after Charles's—but had come by the same post. Alice wasn't to be the least uncomfortable. Charles had taken the news very sensibly, and had promised not to fidget about her. Peggy told all about how the story had come out. "It was such a piece of luck," said the writer, "that your letter those wicked little monkeys had got at and left sticking out of the carpet was just the sheet about what Mrs. Wintringham and Dr. Pitt said about the marks. Just think if it had been that about the guy you looked in the glass! Charley went to look under the carpet for the rest of the letter, but I had been beforehand with him, and pretended it was lost." She went on to say that Charles had consented to remain at Shellacombe for the present, and not go tearing off like a maniac to Chelverhurst, where he couldn't do any good and would only catch some new infection. Rupert was coming down on Saturday and would keep him quiet. This afternoon he and Pierre had walked over to Surge Point, to see where Aunty Lissy nearly went over the cliff. Did Alice remember Andrew O'Rourke—perhaps she hardly could—Mrs. O'Rourke's son at the Lighthouse? Poor fellow! he had volunteered to go over the ship's stern in a gale, to find what had fouled the screw, and was drowned. Alice could quite well remember the strong man that had come behind her on the cliff, and then carried her home. When Sister Thea came in with her beef-tea, tears were running down Alice's cheeks for the strong man, and the Sister was promised the whole story of the rescue as soon as the patient might talk more. For Alice was weakness itself the moment she spoke or moved.

What were the other two letters? One from Pierre, describing the glorious Chemical Chest Aunt Peggy had given him, with a

book full of experiments it would be scientific to try. Only . . . only . . . only, there was canker in the fruit, gall in the nectar cup! The gift was saddled with the condition that its recipient *should not make gunpowder!!* . . . Pierre, who was developing military and destructive instincts, felt that science, so handicapped, was a mere Dead-Sea apple. And there were the quantities given in the book, and everything! Alice turned from the contemplation of this enormity with a feeling of gratitude that the Scientific Recreation of blowing himself to pieces had been forbidden to Pierre.

And the other letter—who was that? Alice didn't at once recognise the handwriting. Instead of referring to the enclosure, she preferred to remain out of its confidence, and wonder. Then she said, suddenly, "Oh, I know—of course!" and opened it. Which was absurd.

She looked very much amused at the first page, and her amusement grew as she read. By the time she got to the last sheet—it was a long letter—she was fairly glued to and engrossed with the contents, her face sparkling with a forecast of the laugh that was going to come at the end. When it came she used up her last reserve of vigour to enjoy it, and fell back on the pillow exhausted, and drying the tears her laugh had left behind.

"There now!" she said to space, as soon as she thought she would be audible. "What will Mr. Charley say to *that*? Shan't I catch it! However, I don't care what he says. *I'm* not responsible."

She began to frame the wording of her letter to Charley, in which she would give all particulars of what had amused her so. But when one does this sort of thing on a pillow, one goes to sleep again. Alice did, and actually slept till Mrs. Wintringham and Dr. Pitt came, who found her asleep under envelopes and handwritings.

"Better not try getting up to-day, but——" And that is as much as Dr. Pitt need say, in this story. It was a good forecast of next day, as Alice did then get up, and actually lay in a hammock on the lawn in the sun, and talked to the ugly little Mother Superior about the old days before the Smallpox when the "Home" was another sort of home, and her children played on the lawn there. Alice felt so narrow-minded for always catching herself forgiving this little woman for being narrow-minded. She *was* so, no doubt. But after all, what do we know, the wisest of us? Presently, Alice found herself repeating old Mr. Heath's "Well!—we're all mighty fine people!"

She just managed a short note in a shaky hand to Mr. Charley,

promising him another almost directly, with something very amusing in it. And next day she was better still, and wrote it. But, after all, she postponed the something very amusing. Convalescence then began to progress rapidly and the day was fixed for her removal. But Mrs. Wintringham didn't want this patient to go, and got it made as late as possible.

A word of compliment is due to Peggy at this juncture. For she kept her natural eagerness to see Alice back in Harley Street in check, and assented to the convalescent going for a while to her mother's villa on Wimbledon Common before returning to the house that she always regarded as her home. Poor Peggy!—just think! There had been scarcely any Alice for her since that day in May when the news came of Charles's wife's death. And here we were almost in September! But Peggy was all the readier to give way on this point because the drive from Chelverhurst to Oak Villa was shorter, and it had been settled that a long carriage drive was better than a railway-journey with two changes, and a drive at each end. And Grandmamma's carriage could either be shut or open. But as a reward for her self-restraint in the matter of Alice's return, she insisted on Charles remaining at Shellacombe until the time was quite ripe for him to go and bring Alice away from Chelverhurst. So Mr. Charley had to keep his curiosity in check for another week about the something very amusing. At the end of that time he returned to London with his son, whom he forthwith despatched to finish his holidays at his Grandmother's, and get as much cricket as was compatible with a small amount of occasional attention to his hostess. He would come on himself in a day or two, and bring the convalescent with him.

This reminds us that we have quite lost sight of old Mrs. Heath. After the break up of "the Gardens" she retired to a villa on Wimbledon Common, always attended by her faithful Partridge. Her attitude towards mankind was, briefly, that its well-being suffered from its neglect of her behests. This could only be conveyed by implication, as an abstract moral principle, in such cases (for instance) as an earthquake in Japan or a misprint in Bradshaw; but in all family matters it was a concrete reality. No reasonable person could doubt that the death of her husband, the dispersal of her sons and daughters with other people's daughters and sons, and the opportunities of thrusting themselves into the family circle thus given to intrusive babies, were alike due to inattention to her guidance. Combinations of a paradoxical nature sometimes occurred; as in the case of her excessive fondness for Pierre. This

might, in severe logical consistency, have led to a certain amount of forgiveness towards the boy's mother. His Granny (whose devotion he entirely returned) was not prepared to go this length, and a *modus vituperandi* had to be discovered which should hit the mother and miss the son. The one that recommended itself to Mrs. Heath was that of treating Pierre as exactly the very grandson she would have had in any case—a sort of fundamental principle in Nature—and his mother as an interloper who had had the impertinence to bear him. Of course she never said anything of this to poor Pierre himself, whose ideas about his mother were of the haziest sort. He was just alive to the fact that she had "cut away" from his Governor; but owing to the latter's chivalrous and gentle manner in the few cases in which he alluded to her, he grew up with a curious idea that *his* mother's cutting away was not as other boys' mothers' cutting away; and he once had a deadly battle with a school-fellow whose father had cut away from *his* mother, and who had presumed to compare the two cases. We are referring to old Mrs. Heath and her relations with Pierre, now, to give substance and reality to his frequent absence from home. The fact is that during his holidays his Granny simply got him down to Wimbledon whenever she could, and possibilities of cricket in the neighbourhood added to its attractions.

Now on this occasion of Charles's return from Shellacombe near three months had elapsed since Pierre had paid a visit to Oak Villa, and his Granny had been neglected. So his father sent him off the day after their arrival, somewhat crestfallen at not being allowed to take his Chemical Chest with him, and inaugurate research with destructive acids and caustic alkalies all over his Grandmamma's spotless chintzes and irreproachable carpets. He had to be contented with Cricket, and defer Chemistry for the present. His father was positive on the point, and Pierre had to give it up.

After packing him off, Charles went straight to his Studio. He saw his way now to a little quiet painting. Seeing his way to it was a common frame of mind of his. But seeing what it would be when he got to it was quite another matter. It was curious that the fact that what he was looking forward to with pleasure was not the clothing of some image in his mind with a reality, but the reinstatement of the contents of a neglected colour-box, the opening of a parcel of new hog-hair and sable brushes and so forth, and the arrival of a new double-primed canvas; and that this fact gave him no misgivings about his capacities for making use of these seductive materials when he had got them. But so it was. As

he walked down to his Studio next morning he was absolutely without any purpose as to what he was going to put on the canvas he had ordered in Long-Acre yesterday on his way from Waterloo. But this frame of mind seemed to him compatible with a very defined purpose indeed—a moral one, which he described to himself as making up for lost time. He said to himself repeatedly that this would never do and everything was getting behindhand. But he shut his eyes to the fact that this backwardness of his work was a pure abstraction, and was accompanied by no image of a point of arrested progress of any particular picture, or of definite steps towards the inauguration of another. All he knew was he would go to work in earnest and make up for lost time. That was the correct expression. Of course he must get a little order at the Studio, and find out whether Mariuccia Goldoni could come and sit. If you try to begin right off, before your materials are in order and you've got your model, you only get into confusion.

So when Charles got to the Studio he got a little order there with the assistance of Mrs. Corrigan. And then he wrote a summons to Mariuccia with a new J pen, and posted it off when he went to lunch. And when he came back he found that his brushes and canvas had come. Which being unpacked, all was ready for a start. And the intense reality of the brushes and canvas imposed upon him, and convinced him that he really knew what he was going to paint. Or if they didn't quite do that, they prevented his raising any doubts about the genuineness of his vocation. But for them, it may be it would have crossed his mind that in all this past five weeks no seed of a pictorial concept had germinated in the soil of his imagination. As it was, the only way in which he registered a suspicion to that effect was in the indulgence of an idea that the soil had lain fallow to advantage and that the harvest when it came would be all the more plentiful therefore. It was a kind of apology for finding himself at a loose end. It always took a little time to get to work; only, when you did get to work, you found the advantage of the rest. And then—you made up for lost time!

Still, there must have been an undercurrent of discontent at the loose end. Else why did he feel it to be such a welcome relief to something undefined that Mr. Pope should come into his Studio with a small commission that had to be executed immediately? *That* was what Charley felt so grateful for. Mr. Pope wanted a sketch for a five-light window that was to illustrate the Decalogue.

Or, at least, half of it. For it was one of two windows, a pair; and the proposal was that each window should illustrate five com-

mandments. But a difficulty had arisen. An odious stone transom crossed the middle of each light, making twenty medallion-spaces in all. Pope & Chappell proposed to allow two medallions to each commandment—one to illustrate its breach, the other its observance. But this very reasonable idea had failed to procure the approval of the Rector of West Eastleigh, more on the score of some details in the way of carrying it out than on that of the principle involved.

Charles had been a party to the original suggestions of treatment; so the affair was not new to him, and no introduction was necessary. After a few words of chat and congratulations from Mr. Pope on his robust appearance.—"You'll have to 'elp us through this job after all, Mr. 'Eath," said he. "Ten charackters illustrative of observance of a Commandment—ten contrairiwise. Twig?"

"Has the Parson changed his mind?"

"That, Mr. 'Eath, I have no means of knowin'. He has departed this life, and his successor, who orkupies the place he has vacated, is a man of a different religious kidney. As Mr. Chappell says whenever he gets a chance 'Squot homines, tot sententiae'—it's the only Latin he knows; so we mustn't begrudge it him. *I* don't even know *it,* myself. But my young son has translated it."

"They want the window then? All right, I can do it at once. Just a lucky chance while I wait for a model I particularly want. Am I to stick to figures of Potiphar's Wife and Bathsheba for number seven?"

"The present Incumbent has pointed out that these figures might be reversed with advantage, and either will do for either. Just you think it over—it works out."

"All right! Only I don't see why Bathsheba shouldn't do duty as an offender. And as for the other one—well! it was no merit of hers, certainly, but she did *not* break the Commandment."

"No doubt owin' to the other party quotin' it in time. I thought the idea pleasin'. But that's not the pint of view. The present incumbent is anxious not to compromise David."

"But haven't we given David a light all to himself as an observance? In number four?"

"Certainly. On the ground that he did *not* murder Uriah the Hittite. The enemy did that job for him. If that wasn't observing of the Commandment, people ain't easy to satisfy."

"Well!—if the parson is content, of course I'm game. I can't say I see though why Bathsheba should come in as an observance."

"That, Mr. 'Eath, is obvious to the meanest capacity. I am

alludin'," said Mr. Pope, modestly, "to my own. We have to look at the matter from the point of view of the Psalmist's conscientious scruples. He felt that he had placed himself and Bathsheba in a false position so long as her lawful husband was still living, and 'aistened to remedy it. He wished to observe number seven without disregardin' number four, and acted accordingly."

"I see. Better late than never! Clearly an instance of obedience to the Commandment. Cain remains, I suppose?"

"Subject to possible alteration. Parties have objected that there was no Commandment in Cain's days, and he may have acted in ignorance. Extenuatin' circumstances. But the principle is the same. Get it done Thursday, if you can."

So Charles worked peacefully on the traced window-lights Mr. Pope had brought him, till darkness stopped him. And all the while believed that he was being curbed and restrained, by an unkind chance, from the vigorous prosecution of a well-defined idea on his new canvas. If any corner of his brain harboured a dormant suspicion that he had welcomed a let-off, he wasn't going to encourage it to become active. Not he!

He put in the finishing touches and inscriptions on Thursday morning, two days later; and started for Chelverhurst at one o'clock, after a hurried sandwich at Waterloo on the way to the train. The Nursing Home was an hour's walk from the station, and he had arranged to come down, to accompany Alice to Oak Villa. Sister Eulalie was to be driven over in Grandmamma's two-horse carriage that could be open or shut, and then the three were to drive back to Wimbledon in time for tea. It was only a ten-mile drive, and Charles caressed the prospect of it in his imagination as he walked quickly along the cross-cut of by-roads he had to ask his way so often on; and where, for all he was within twenty miles of five millions of Londoners, he so often had to knock at a cottage to make his enquiry, for want of a passer-by.

Yes!—that was something to look forward to. Alice-for-short! Think of it!

This looked very like Chelverhurst. So thought Charles to himself as he walked into a little village a mother of twins at a roadside cottage had spoken confidently of his finding in something rather better than five minutes' walk on, provided he didn't turn neither to the right nor yet to the left. So he had left those twins where he had found them, penned by a timber barrier inside a cottage, after sympathising with their mother about family responsibilities; and had identified a poomp by the ro-ad as a certain landmark, and found a martal easy coot across the church-yard to the

manor-house, and in time the manor-house itself. And there, sure enough, stood Grandmamma's carriage waiting at the door. Which was opened to him by Sister Thea, who supposed he was the gentleman, and accepted his own belief to that effect as conclusive, and showed him in through a greenhouse atmosphere of warm leaves and flowers, and a chorus of singing birds who surely must have been recently vaccinated and taken, so confident did they seem of their security from infection. It wasn't at all like a hospital, thought Charles. But then his conductress explained that the nursing-wards were "over there," and added that Mrs. Wintringham had never had so much as a book moved in the house since the days when her calamity changed her from the head of a healthy family to the Mother Superior of a Nursing Sisterhood. One might have thought the children that had died were still in the air of the place, and that he might have heard the voices of them, any moment. But Charles was too full of the thought of what Alice was going to look like to do much with passing ideas of this sort—dismiss them or accept them.

Alice was in the garden, and no doubt it was some sympathetic apprehension by Sister Thea of his anxious misgivings on this point that made her discover some excuse to go back into the house for a moment, and leave him to meet Alice alone. At least, no other motive occurred to Charles. He never even speculated on the possibility of one, and thought that *his* concept of his relation to Alice-for-short must of course be every one else's.

"Now, Mr. Charley dear, you're not to be a goose and make a serious matter of it. It really doesn't signify one scrap!" There is a little crying, a little laughing, in Alice's voice.

"Take that beastly thing away, darling, and let me see . . ." And Charles pulls away the end of the woollen neck-wrap Alice has used for a momentary concealment, and knows the worst. He has been piling up such horrors, in the nutmeg-grater line, that he is really immensely relieved. But he breaks down a little over it, for all that, and the signs of it are on him as he goes back to the house with Alice hanging on his arm. Sister Thea and the Mother Superior have decided—they were eavesdropping, you see!—that the way Charles kissed Miss Kavanagh as soon as he had taken a good look at her face, all over, left no doubt of the nature of the position. But had they been near enough to hear the way he called her his "dearest child," the phrase and something in the tone would have puzzled them.

"You should have seen me when I was desquamating, a fortnight ago," says Alice, with pride, "and then you *would* have said I was

a credit to the establishment. You see, I'm nothing to look at, now!"

Charles makes an effort to fall in with this way of treating the position, and gets so far as to say, "Oh, no!—you're a very poor Case, indeed, Alice-for-short." But a fault in his voice stops him; and he ends up, "No—I can't laugh, dearest! it was all me and my boy."

So Alice gets him off the subject, and tells him what a delightful time she has had since she came out of the fever-ward into the house. "It's perfectly absurd to have gone on here so long," she says. "Only Mrs. Wintringham has been so kind, and Sister Thea. It's almost worth being a case of discrete smallpox to be so spoiled and cosseted up afterwards."

She makes him turn back when they get to the house and go once round the wide gravel path and see the strawberry beds. In which connection she tells the story of Mrs. Wintringham.

"And oh, Mr. Charley," she says at the end, "the poor lady told me it was always on her mind how she had punished her boy for going on these very beds and gathering the strawberries, and that afternoon he complained of a headache and was sick. And she told him it served him right for gobbling unripe strawberries—and all the while it was IT that was coming. Poor thing!—she can't forgive herself, now. They all died, you know?"

Alice's eyes were full of tears as she stood telling this to Mr. Charley on the gravel path. But Mr. Charley was only giving half attention. He was absorbed in Alice's marks. He wanted first-hand medical authority that they would absorb or disappear. Was Dr. Pitt coming? No—he wasn't. Dr. Pitt had just gone. But really Alice was quite smooth already. Feel if she wasn't! There now!

In case you should feel alarmed about Charles, remember that Alice had really been a week out of quarantine. Everything had medical sanction.

Charles thought that if the Hospital-staff felt the parting as much with all their patients, they must be in a state of constant laceration. Also that if all their patients promised to write, as Alice did, and kept their promises, the postman was to be pitied.

However, farewells and benedictions came to an end, and Charles found himself being driven away in his mother's carriage—open, because it was so warm—with Alice and Sister Eulalie, who had been all this while with her old friend the Mother Superior. Don't be frightened—she hadn't been near any dangerous cases.

"Now, Mr. Charley, I *have* got a surprise for you." Alice pro-

duced a letter—Jessie Freeth's of course. But she didn't open it, yet a while.

"Is that the something very amusing?"

"Yes." Alice nodded. "Now guess who's going to marry who."

"I can see by the envelope, Miss Freeth . . ." Alice hid the envelope, abruptly, too late.

"You saw the Canterbury postmark?"

"I did. I always do, on her letters. I used to find one in the box for you every other day. . . ."

"Well!—it's a great shame. You spoilt half my surprise. But who's she engaged to?—that's the point!"

"Roger Selwyn-Kerr—if you ask me!"

"Well now!—I declare. That *is* a shame! Now confess, Mr. Charley, you knew all along. . . ."

"Certainly I did. I told you so! On the table—don't you recollect?"

"Yes—but that's not what I mean. You know what I mean. Mother Peg told you. Now didn't she?"

"Let me see!—yes-s-s-s! She *did* say something about it—but I'd forgotten that. . . ."

"Oh, the meanness! To make believe you could forget right across the middle of anything in that way! *Isn't* he mean, Sister?"

"Never saw anything like it in my life," says Sister Eulalie. From which trivial conversation you may see that the party were in the highest spirits and were enjoying their drive along the dusty road thoroughly. That is why we have reported it.

Charles's unhappiness at being brought face to face, close up as it were, with all that Alice had suffered for him, and at seeing the record of it on her face—(however much less emphatic a one than he expected)—was giving way before the sheer pleasure of having her back again. To see her flashing out at him for his evasions and paradoxical nonsense was altogether too good to be true. It was an exhilarating dream. And when the carriage got involved in sheep in a lane, he was glad, because it went slow and that made the drive longer, in spite of the fact that the monotonous remarks of the sheep quite prevented him hearing Miss Freeth's letter read aloud.

Alice didn't read it all through aloud. She wasn't going to be disloyal. But she read, under pledges of secrecy, a good deal more than its writer ever meant for the general public. And it lasted—the letter and comments thereon—very nearly all the way to Oak Villa; the main points of the discussion turning on how far Alice had been responsible for the results it narrated.

"Well," said Charles as a recrudescence of the conversation brought them in sight of the house, in reply to Alice's fiftieth disclaimer of responsibility, "all I can say is, Mistress Alice, that if you call yourself a discreet case of smallpox, I don't. Here we are, and there's Pierre watching for us."

In after years Sister Eulalie used often to talk about that delightful drive we had from Chelverhurst to Wimbledon and the pleasant evening that followed. But she felt under an obligation to use the powers, somehow traditionally vested in her, of a professional nurse over a recent patient, to induce Alice to go to bed early. Hence, when ten o'clock came, three bedroom candlesticks out of five were lighted; and Charles and his mother were left to recapitulate life gone by, or forestall the future, at pleasure.

Mrs. Heath was not unlike any other old lady well on in the seventies in preferring the former. But she had her own way of treating recapitulation. It may be described as dealing with two parallels of event; one of them a potential Golden Age, which would have come about if she had been attended to, the other common History—the chaotic consequence of a wilful Era's neglect of her powers of foresight.

"Yes, my dear Charles, put the shade down a little—it dazzles my eyes . . . that's right! What was I saying? About Pierre, of course. What I mean is, that however thankful we may be that by the mercy of God we have escaped a great danger, we ought not to lose sight of the fact that, had wiser counsels prevailed, it need never have been incurred. Had I been listened to, Pierre would have been re-vaccinated two years ago. . . ."

"My dear Mother, the boy *was* re-vaccinated two years ago."

"Let me finish, my dear. He was vaccinated, but it is more than doubtful if he ever took. What I said at the time was, 'Listen to Dr. Prodgett,' and you did not listen. And now you see the consequences."

"But Shaw, who did it, said we might re-vaccinate fifty times and he mightn't take. . . ."

"My dear, do let me finish, and then you shall speak. Dr. Prodgett's view was, 'go on till it takes—no matter how often.' And now we see how right he was."

"But it wasn't certain he didn't take, slightly."

"My dear! how could there be a better proof that he did *not* take than the fact that he afterwards showed himself liable to infection. To reject so conclusive a proof is to refuse to learn by experience. Perhaps another time I shall be listened to."

"Well, Grandmamma dear, Pierre shall be re-vaccinated again as soon as he is well enough. Prodgett shall do it, and go on till he takes."

"My dear Charles, you know perfectly well that nothing I have said would warrant such an absurd mistrust of Providence. Besides, it would be merely shutting the stable-door after the steed had broken loose. But you are your father's own son."

This didn't seem relevant, but comment might have been interpreted as controversial. Charles felt that he was not the person to question its truth, especially considering who said it. So he held his tongue, and Mrs. Heath continued: "We may be thankful that your boy has been spared to us, and no doubt Dr. Prodgett would agree with me that re-vaccination would be *quite* superfluous, for the present at least."

Charles abstained from saying "Blow Dr. Prodgett!" partly from a sub-consciousness that his doing so would not be due only to impatience about vaccination. He was really a little nettled at the thankfulness to Providence not having had a more definite reference to Alice. It was only fair-play he was asking for: there was no trace of a claim for more than equality for Alice. Besides, he had been breathing free about Pierre for more than a month, and Alice's deliverance was quite recent. So Charles didn't blow Dr. Prodgett, in order to show no impatience about Alice. He only said, rather drily, "No doubt he would," and left the field to his mother. After all, she was well on in the seventies, and if she did half-forget Alice, was it not through her devotion to Pierre?

"Remember too, my dear Charles—only it is a subject painful to refer to and perhaps I do wrong to refer to it. . . ."

"There can be nothing to—to *not* talk about, between you and me, dear mother. . . ."

"Quite so, my dear. You are right to say so. I was going to say (only I remember that painful news we had) that it is not as though the darling boy had the constitution to which his birth as an Englishman entitles him. I can never forget that Lavinia Straker was, on one side at least, a Frenchwoman."

"What can his mother's nationality have to do with Pierre not taking when vaccinated?"

"My dear Charles, if you would not be so impatient with me I would tell you. I should never have alluded to Lavinia Straker, knowing all I do, except to lay stress on the fact that she need not be referred to between us. That is indisputable." Here Charles made up his mind to dispute nothing, and leave the old lady carte-blanche. She continued: "But I may speak of Pierre's parentage

as an abstraction. Had he had the good fortune to have an English mother,—I have Dr. Prodgett's word for this,—it would have been much easier to pronounce in his case. I cannot blame you, my dear boy, for this—nor would I if I could. But neither can I blame myself. My worst enemy could not say that I did not point out the dangers of my dear son's unhappy marriage. . . ." Here Charles felt that carte-blanche was being taken too much advantage of, and withdrew it.

"Surely, Mother, there is no need to go back to that now." There is a shade of suppressed asperity in his voice. The old lady intensified her meekness, but maintained her dignity.

"My dear, have I not been careful to say that I have only referred to this subject as one that it is not necessary for us to go back to? Do me justice. I only ask for justice. No one who knows—(and who should know, if not yourself?—my own son!—how painful that unhappy affair was to me—however little I said at the time!)—can possibly imagine that it is any pleasure to me to speak of it." Here a disposition to tears. "But I failed to make myself heard then, and now it will be the same."

Charles saw conciliation would be the better part of discussion, and said, good-humouredly, "I don't see, Grandmamma dear, how poor Lav comes into the matter." The name Grandmamma has always a propitiatory effect, and the old lady softens. Logically the reverse should have been the case, but we have explained that she regarded "Lavinia Straker" as an intruder into the realm of parentage, who had usurped the function of Pierre's real parent, an Englishwoman still at large.

"That is exactly the point, my dear. She does not come in, and we need not talk about what is painful to both of us."

Charles got up from his chair, throwing away a *cigarette permisse*—as the windows were open to the warm night-air—and went across to his mother and kissed her. He would have liked to talk about Alice, and hoped "Lavinia Straker" was clear out of the conversation. But he was premature. The kiss proved only a stepping-stone to a new treatment of the subject.

"That is my dear boy. I know, dear Charles, that you are always good at heart, if a little unreasonable. . . . Well, my dear—you *are* a little unreasonable. Because it is impossible and absurd to pretend that Lavinia"—concession here; Straker omitted—"was not on one side a Frenchwoman. You have thrown half your cigarette away. Now you may smoke another." More concession.

"Anyhow," says Charles, determined to make matters pleasant, "Lav's French parentage was better than her English one."

"My dear, I am not mentioning Lavinia, as I promised you just now. I am speaking of the race as a race. No one can deny that Frenchwomen, as a race, are frivolous and unfaithful to their husbands. . . ."

Charles kept his temper. "Come, I say, Mother," said he, "not all of them!"

"No, my dear Charles, not *all!* I am willing to admit that there are exceptions. But the exceptions prove the rule, and the more numerous and conspicuous the exceptions, the more firmly the rule holds good. If your father were here he would say so. Ask any one. . . . What's that, Partridge?"

Actually our old friend Partridge, come to see if her mistress is ripe for a night's rest. No—she isn't, but will be the moment Mr. Charles has finished his cigarette. Partridge is sixteen years older than she was when she first established a sort of proprietorship over Alice. She is not inclined to relinquish it altogether now, for all the Hospital-nurses in Christendom. Hence suppressed ructions between herself and Sister Eulalie—a usurper! It is rather hard, you see, when you have been re-vaccinated on purpose to give an unqualified welcome to an ex-smallpox-patient, to have an unexpected Sister thrust herself in and keep you off.

"Never mind, Partridge," says Charles. "To-morrow she'll go, and you'll have Alice all to yourself."

So now, as Alice is comfortably located for a complete convalescence, the particulars of which are not wanted for this story, we may leave her to enjoy it, and you may fancy for yourself how Charles went back to work and made up for lost time. He drew ten cartoons of Breaches of Commandments and ten Observances. And also began a picture to be called, "The Shirt of Nessus"—the dying centaur giving Dejanira his tunic as a legacy.

Whether it was a mere accident that made the bride of Heracles much more like Lavinia Straker than ever was Regan, we do not know. But she turned out like enough to make Charles's intimate friends, on analysing the story, see in it a trace of the leniency with which he always spoke and thought of his wife's desertion. Jeff remarked that it was a good job Charles hadn't a poisoned arrow to send after *his* Nessus. He never regarded the disappearance of Mrs. Charles Heath as an unmixed evil. In fact he expressed surprise (to Mr. Pope) that Charles had lost an opportunity of immortalising his late wife in a "Breach" medallion of the second window for West Eastleigh.

CHAPTER XXXVI

A SUDDEN CASE OF CATALEPSY. THE NAME WAS VERRINDER. HOW SIR RUPERT ADVOCATED TREPHINING OLD JANE. WAS THE OLD OAK-CHEST WORSE? WHY VERRINDER WATCHED BEDLAM. HOW CHARLES BELONGED TO THE GENERATION OF PEN-VIPERS

"If I could only get some sort of coolness between them, so that they would quarrel and make it up again, like regular lovers, there would be some chance——"

Peggy is speaking to her husband three months after the end of last chapter. Let her go on:—

"But it's perfectly useless. If I try talking to each of them about the other's little affairs—imaginary ones you understand? . . ."

"I understand."

". . . it only ends in Charles investigating through all Alice's applicants and saying they're not half good enough, and Alice raking up Lady Anstruther Paston-Forbes."

"Why, she's married a curate!"

"I daresay she has. I'm sick of her, anyhow!" Peggy pauses a few seconds, presumably to allow of her ladyship's decent interment in a country parish, and then goes on: "I suppose now Alice will look up some other dazzling meteor for Charley, and turn her on. It's all so unsatisfactory!——"

"Let 'em alone, wife, let 'em alone. 'Over rocks that are steepest,' don't you know?" Sir Rupert is making entries in his Diary in his own room, and his voice heard through the open door between it and his wife's bedroom gives a hint of preoccupation.

"You're not listening, Dr. Jomson."—For this is the family name, *par excellence,* for its head. It is a tribute to Alice's status in it from childhood.

"Fire away, darling! I'm listening now."—And Peggy hears the Diary slapped to. She hopes he won't begin stropping a razor next. But sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. She continues, seriously:

"If I dared, I would do as you said—speak straight to Charley, and tell him I don't believe Alice will ever be really happy with any one else. But just think—if I were to make a blunder—do it all wrong! I might just spoil all."

"Don't do it if you feel afraid. But I don't think I should feel much afraid, if I were a woman."

"Why don't you do it now?"

"Because a man speaking to a man on the subject always has a flavour of a moral lecture."

"Why hasn't a woman?"

"Because a woman may be undertaking a confession for a friend. A man would be supposed to act in consequence of something noticed in behaviour; attentions—that sort of game!"

"Charley wouldn't mind anything from you."

"He wouldn't be angry with me, I know. But would the end be gained? I doubt it. It's ticklish, anyhow! I'm bound to say I had much sooner let it alone."

Sir Rupert comes out of his room, dressing-gowned. Peggy is in like plight, sitting before the fire. The wind is north, and we shall have snow, and poor Robin will very soon be sitting in a barn. Fires are welcome, and Sir Rupert isn't sorry to roast himself a little before going to bed.

"Don't fret about it, dear love!" he says; "it will all turn out right, left to itself. You see if it doesn't!"—But Peggy's anxious beauty only clears a little; the cloud hangs. Still, the hand that comes caressingly round her head has reassurance in it. It is like her husband's voice. Both make matters better than they find them.

"I won't fret, dear!" says Peggy, and means not to. But she isn't sure what she ought to do, and she remains as one who considers. He talks of something else, to clear the cobwebs.

"Talking of love-affairs, I went to Bedlam to-day. They're all against me about that case except Paisley."

"Let's see! What case was that? The girl that eats the needles?"

"No—no! She's at the Hospital. I mean the very old woman who never speaks; has been fed with a spoon for fifty years—*you* know?"

"I think I remember. She moves about though, doesn't she?"

"Hardly that! Still she does move and takes nourishment, so that there is no difficulty in dealing with the case, from the nurses' point of view. But it is all like an automaton. In a certain sense her health is wonderful. She must be nearly ninety, but is extraordinarily well preserved."

"Well?—you were going to say?"

"I was going to say that they had a consultation over the case at my suggestion, and that they won't have it—except Paisley—that she's a case of traumatic insanity. I'm sure she is. It was not

found out at the beginning—ten years nearly before she came into the Hospital, and then she was badly diagnosed, I suspect. And I believe there would be a possibility—it's only a possibility, mind!—that if she were trepanned some mental revival might take place. But I'm the only person it has ever occurred to that it might be a case for operating. It would be very interesting to try, at any rate."

"Would it be right?"

"Perhaps. Possibly even a release from a long agony—an inconceivable release. Baron Trenck would be a trifle by comparison. Anyway, it wouldn't be wrong *because* it was intensely interesting."

"No, darling! I didn't mean that—you know?"

"I don't want to slice people up for a lark. But there are cases—and I think this is one——"

"What is known of how it began?" Peggy's thoughts have got free of her perplexity, and she is getting interested in the Case.

"The description in the Register at the Asylum—it's fifty years old now!—just fancy! it was standing there near ten years before we were born——"

Peggy shudders. It is too appalling to bear thinking of. Rupert continues:—

"——says she was found one day by her husband seated at the foot of the stairs, in the state in which she remains now. She was not brought into the Asylum for a long time after. There was then no trace of a lesion on the head or spine. My own belief is that if she had been properly examined at first something would have been found. But the husband doesn't seem to have been very sharp about it."

"Didn't care, perhaps?"

"On the contrary, he was heartbroken. Lived for thirty years in a place close by, that he might be at hand if a lucid interval came. None ever came. He's been dead a long time."

What strange tricks memory plays us when she has the field to herself! A good honest wench, and serviceable, is she when any check is at hand, to keep her in order and make her do her duty. She only wants the slightest reminder, and there she is, ready at her post to act when called on, or candidly to confess to failure. But leave her in empty space (we ought to say empty time, in her case) without a monitor of any sort in sight, and behold!—in the twinkling of an eye she changes to a disorderly slattern that will do nothing; and then, in the twinkling of another eye, into an imp of the activity of a wildcat and the mendacity of a Jack-o'-lantern.

Don't say that it is impossible that Peggy and her husband can have forgotten Verrinder and Charles's report of his death, and gone on with their conversation as though they had never heard of it. Take account of sixteen mortal years, and recollect that *you* read it yesterday. We will answer for it that neither of them at the moment connected Verrinder with this case of catalepsy.

"What a terrible story! What is her name?"

"Do you know?—now it's very funny—but either I've never been told, or I've forgotten. The name was on the register too—Macfarlane—Brindley—what was it?—Very funny!"

"But what do they call her at the Asylum?"

"Oh—they call her Old Jane. I don't know if her name is really Jane. It doesn't follow."

Old Jane! Sixty years of torpor! And the man that loved her, that she loved, waiting—waiting—a stone's throw off, for a lucid interval that never came. Oh, but it was grisly! Peggy felt quite sick to think of it. She shut her eyes tight, tried to grasp what it would have been, had it been herself and Rupert. And it might have been, for that matter. Just a knock on the head, enough to depress the skull (if Rupert was right) but not enough to cause merciful death,—and then sixty years of life—such life! However, of course it was quite possible that Old Jane was insane constitutionally, and that accident had nothing to do with it. That would be much less shocking, somehow. You say *why*, perhaps? But is it not true that a life all warped and twisted, by a trivial miscarriage, is more shocking than when it bears the hallmark of an unseen mystery—something that looks like the well-considered fiat of a malignant Destiny, not an unintentional stab of Chance? The higher metaphysic will no doubt point out that there is really no such thing as Chance. But it won't point out what constitutes the strange thing, Chance, that there is no such thing as.

Peggy and her husband talked so long and so late about Old Jane, that Lucy their eldest daughter (we have not seen her, so far), who slept overhead, wondered what on earth papa and mamma were going on about. And just on the point of dropping asleep, mamma suddenly half-roused up and asked (somewhat in the manner of an inquisitive dormouse in January) whether the name wasn't Verrinder. But papa had quite stopped going off, and had gone off, past recall.

"What, on, earth," said Miss Lucy, when she appeared next morning—she was Miss Johnson, please you, and going to be fifteen very soon.—"What—on—*earth,* were you and mamma talking about

late last night? Talk—talk—talk—talk—talk—talk! I thought you were never going to stop and go to sleep."

"We were talking," replies her father, mendaciously, "about little pussy cats, and how they ought to kiss their father on both sides, instead of only one."

"*Nonsense*, puppy!"—But the broad hint was taken for all that. "*Do* come and help me to manage him, Aunty Lissy. You know you can always make him reasonable." Lucy's mother used to say she reminded her strongly of her Aunt Ellen when *she* was a girl.

Alice is making tea at this moment in the story. When you are making tea you don't answer chits. But when you have filled the pot quite up to the top, then you answer the chits, and tell them to kiss you on both sides, as well as papa. At least Alice did so, in this case.

"And there IS no bad side, and I don't care WHAT you say, Aunty Lissy. You can't feel it with your lips, if you try ever so." The chit tries ever so. Others try ever so too, and our old Alice bids fair to be suffocated under this course of experimental research. One has to pay penalties for extreme popularity.

As Peggy appears, rather later than the world generally, we can't help being reminded of that other breakfast-table, years ago, at Hyde Park Gardens. We see that Peggy is on her way to her mother's majesty of form (suppose we call it) and it can't be helped. If she could only achieve a certain pomposity—("poor Grandmamma!")—we should feel that she was on the road to general identification. But she doesn't come up to the mark. We see the likeness of the confidence and youth of now to that of old; that Lucy is as cocksure of everything in Heaven and Earth as her Aunt Ellen was before her; that poor little drowned Dan's posthumous namesake (given the chance) would go on the ice in defiance of park-keepers, even as he did. Let us hope no such thing may happen, and that Lucy may not marry a reprobate in the face of every warning, and be left a young widow dependent on relations after paying all her dear husband's debts, gambling and otherwise.

We see all these things, and then we see there is a thing we miss. It is Alice-for-short. There are midgets and poppets in this house too, but if they were downstairs now and not in the nursery, we should see they belonged to another type of midget and poppet. We are glad to find that the young woman who is correcting the effects of what amounted to a scrimmage, before sitting down to breakfast, actually reminds us of what Alice-for-short was then.

"Well, children, I hope you're satisfied. Aunty Lissy is going to have tea, thank you! And you may pour it out for her, Juicy

dear, and save her the trouble. And you boys may hand her the hot rolls from the fender; only don't fight for which it's to be." Juicy is of course Lucy, who proceeds to predominate over the serving out of tea and coffee.

"I tell you what, Aunty Lissy"—it is Rupert who speaks—"if you don't look alive and settle up about who he's to be, you won't get the benefit of your marks——" Two or three demands are made for explanation.

"Why!—wasn't your epidermis going to keep worthless, shallow, thingummy-bobs, and mere something-or-others at a distance? Briled rasher? yes—pass your Aunty the mustard along with it, Dan, and don't spill it over the tablecloth."

"You've given me the whole dish full. No, Dr. Jomson—come now—be reasonable! It wasn't me said that. It was mamma."—This is the name Peggy is known by whenever there is a quorum of children.

"Was it me? I hope not. It's too much like a book for a good boy."

"All I can say is," Alice goes on, "that if Mr. Charley's next great find for me comes and says:—'See how I love you in spite of your repulsive physiognomy,' I shall just——" But she is interrupted by Dan, who wants to know what *physiognomy* means.

"It's long for mug." And Dan retires for the time to reflect. "There now! that boy's made me forget what I was going to say!"

"Do you know," interposes the great physician, "last night mamma asked me quite suddenly what an old woman's name was, and I knew it, I know; and her asking knocked it clean out of my head, and I haven't been able to get it back since."

"Of course you did!" says Peggy, looking up, "and I recollected it afterwards, and you were asleep!"—Sir Rupert expresses bewilderment by ruffling his hair, and glaring. "Well, that *is* a little incomprehensible, I admit. But I recollected what the name must be. Of course it was Verrinder. And that poor fellow Charley knew, that died—oh! before ever we were married, must have been her husband?"

Rupert sits still with an animated face, letting memory revive and take possession. "Of course! I recollect it *all* now. Fancy my never putting two and two together!"

One of Time's odd revenges, or paradoxes, is that Alice shows no interest at all in this reminiscence. But is it really odd, seeing she was six when it happened? She certainly shows none, and while Peggy and her husband talk about Verrinder, she explains to Dan the meaning of the word *mug,* metaphorically used. Dan has come

out of his maze of thought, and demanded light, more light. But Peggy brings Alice back into her section of the conversation, saying, "Alice dear, do listen to this. You ought to be interested in it because it's all mixed up with your ring." On which Alice does one of the little illogical things one so often does, in reality and out of fiction, and immediately looks at her ring, with her pretty fingers stretched out for its best advantage. "Why my ring?" she asks.

"Because, Miss Kavanagh, this Verrinder was the queer old artist Charles knew, that had the portrait Phillips was called after, that was supposed to have been painted at No. 40. And was supposed to have been connected with your ghost. And was supposed to have had to do with the murder in the cellar."

"Oh, I remember! They dug up bones."—Thus far Alice, in response to explanation as above, given mixedly by Peggy and her husband. We have to keep on recollecting Alice's age sixteen years ago, to account for the way she accepts the story as a passing interest, nowise vital. The ring had always been to her a ring with an odd association, half-forgotten, that had as it were wanted to spell Phyllis and failed. There had been some talk of the story since; as when Phillips was christened Phyllis Cartwright Johnson, in a freak, at the time Charles had the old picture out and was discussing if it should be cleaned or not. But even about her own ghost, Alice was, as Charles said, a weak-kneed witness. If you are about twenty-three, turn to and try recollections of six and seven, and you won't wonder at Alice.

However, she on reflection acquired a strong vicarious interest in the subject. She recollected how interesting it would be to Mr. Charley to hear all about it when he came in the evening. Also, as soon as she fully assimilated the story of Old Jane, she felt excited to see how the experiment would turn out, if it were ever tried.

There were a good many difficulties in the way of this. All the Asylum was against it, except Dr. Paisley, mentioned by Rupert as his only supporter. Its strongest opponent was Dr. Fludyer, whom we recollect at the time of Verrinder's death, and who was in fact the only person who could be considered to be his representative. He had what Rupert called a strong inverse interest in the life of Old Jane, because a sum of money left with him as trustee for her, was to come to him at her death. This made him morbidly sensitive about any departure from the routine of fifty years. So long as no change was made, he was safe from imputation of an unpleasant sort. He certainly would not consent to an experiment

which could at best only give one chance in a thousand of any benefit to the patient; and, which, ten chances to one, might end in her death during the operation. Sir Rupert, who was a very old friend of his, said to him: "You know, Fludyer, I have only a scientific interest in the case. And I have no *locus standi*. For I am not even attached to the Hospital. All I say is, that if Old Jane were my mother, I would make the trial." Fludyer replied: "So would I, on the strength of an opinion like yours, if she were *my* mother. But she isn't, and at her death I should come into a thousand pounds in consols. I would rather she died a perfectly natural death."

"You admit then," said Sir Rupert, "that you are grudging this poor old remnant a chance you would give your mother, in order to avoid an imputation no man who knew anything about you would attach the slightest weight to."

"Would you guarantee her surviving the operation, Johnson?"

"No—I wouldn't! Nor your mother's either, *cæteris paribus*."

"You don't understand. What I mean is that nobody would impute mere selfish scientific interest—nor even a wish for a thousand pounds—as a motive in the case of a son and mother."

"Quite a mistake! There is a large and influential public which believes that the Faculty of Medicine is only restrained by Law from vivisecting its wives and daughters under anæsthetics; and a still larger one that credits it with readiness to do the same without anæsthetics for a thousand pounds—mother, father, anybody, even to the third and fourth generation. Never mind *them!* Give the old woman a chance. If you do kill her she'll be grateful."

"You don't know that."

"Don't I? Well! she's not altogether in her right mind—so perhaps I don't!"

A short time after this conversation Sir Rupert got a note from Dr. Fludyer, as follows:—

"I have managed to assign my trusteeship to the Hospital, as well as the interest in the reversion. My colleagues know why I have done this. I shouldn't at all wonder if a good many changes of opinion came about in the matter of Old Jane. I fancy the opposition was a good deal my doing. . . ."

"I do hope you're right, dearest," said Peggy, when he read her this letter.

"I shall have no doubt I am if they all come round. But I shall say nothing further to influence them. I told them my opinion because it was and is my opinion. But the case is theirs, and they must take the responsibility of deciding."

"Well now—I call that mean!"

"Not a bit of it! If they settle to do it, I shall back them up. But I shan't say more than I have done. They know what I think." And then his wife felt certain that sooner or later the trial would be made.

Meanwhile, Old Jane—that was young Jane once—was a case in a ward. She was young Jane once, young and active Jane, with a life before her to live, with another young life (so it transpired afterwards) to come and to be lived for later, when that strange unforeseen mischance consigned her to a living death, with the husband she had loved watching by the tomb, waiting for news that the corpse had moved, for a gleam of hope that he might see the dismantled home replenished, and the fires burning again upon the hearths. Think how he must have started at every step upon the stairs, how he must have said to himself a thousand times, "It may be—at last!"—and how it was a mistake, or a parcel, or a letter with nothing in it. Think how, one by one, the friends he had had died away, and he had no heart for more, even had he had the power to draw them to him. But the springs grew brackish in that desert, and then dried up. And the canker of his loneliness crept into his heart, and his life grew to be a blank, a long drawn-out pause, an awaiting of a thing that came not; a silence with a listener in it—a listener for a word that was still as possible—so they said who should know—as on the day when he found his wife speechless at the stairfoot, at the beginning of the silence, and wondered why she did not speak.

Poor old Jane, that was young Jane once! That was alive, and spoke and breathed and moved in the days before the battle of Waterloo; the days before any railway with trains worth mentioning on it, or any paddleboat on the Atlantic, with its triumphant record of nine miles an hour all the way from Bristol to New York; the days before the Twopenny Post and Winsor's Patent Gas. In those days her awful home of half-a-century was unbuilt; and the fields were green near where it stands; and milestones told the foot-traveller on the Lambeth Road that he was one from Westminster and two from London. For then Bethlehem Hospital was in Moorfields, far enough away, and "The Magdalen" stood where it stands now; and its patients were under treatment, in those days, with leg-locks and surprise-baths, and rotatory chairs. Lucky for Jane that while this System was in vogue she was still young Jane, and the daughter of a fashionable portrait-painter who was having a high old time at No. 40, our old house in Soho;

where she was requiting the passion of his young assistant, whose employment was to put his tablecloth, his chair-back, his bit of drapery, his landscape background, into his fashionable portrait. This father of hers had a very good standing in his day; and even now the fortunate owner of one of his works will say to you, "That's a Sleezle," with confidence that you will be *au fait* of Sleezles. That wasn't his real name, and we are not going to tell it, for the same reason we have kept secret the name of the street he lived in. He was there, name or no, and painted the fashionable portraits in the room where Charles is now at this moment, with Alice, who has been shopping in Oxford Street and has looked in to pay him a visit, telling him that Dr. Jomson is quite excited because, owing to his advice, they are going to trepan the old lady of nearly ninety at Bethlehem Hospital.

"And she was old Verrinder's wife! Poor old chap! Sixty years!"—Charles, who says this, is, we perceive, going to leave off bringing his picture together (that is what he was doing) and to fill a pipe. One would really think, from the amount of bringing together they require, that Charles's pictures were painted in segments, each in a different European capital. He deserts some piece of it (so to speak) on its way from Buda-Pesth (for instance) and sits down on one of those boxes with an S perforated in them, into which valuables get and rattle for ever and never come out. He lights the pipe and sits facing Alice, and the gloom we know was on his face before she came in has vanished. She has thrown herself into the chair Miss Straker sat in as Miss Thiselton, reading about the Octopus. Her hands are on the arms, and her face is bright and animated, and flushed with walking in the cold, clear weather. And you really can only just see any mark, bar that bad place round the corner where people kiss you. That, it seems, was on the next page of that letter. What did it matter, as long as they kissed you? That was her selfish view.

Alice keeps her parcels on her knee, to express the full momentariness of the proceeding. "I am in the lap of a bird of passage," they seem to say. She very often pays Charley a flying visit of this sort, but always defines the position to herself, no doubt as an apology for interrupting business. This time she has come in to tell him about Rupert's announcement the night before. It is quite true he will be at Harley Street in the evening, but then—you see—Alice was absolutely passing the door.

"Dr. Fludyer was at dinner last night, and Mr. Lionel Isaacson, who's to do it." Alice continues thus: "We were so sorry you weren't there."

"It was Mrs. Jeff's birthday, and I couldn't be off going. Did Fludyer say if he's found out any more about Old Jane?"

"Oh yes. He talked a good deal about her, and told us lots of things. But I thought it was the twins' birthday—or the twinses'—which ought it to be?"

"I prefer twinses'. But it was most of their birthdays. They take them all in a lump now, on the same day. We had a most turbulent evening. But tell me what Fludyer said he'd found out."

"Well—he hadn't found out anything new. But when Miss Peggy and I got at him, of course we made him talk about what Verrinder had told him—heaps more than Lord Rupert ever did." This was another sobriquet of Rupert, used in this case as a suggestion that its owner needn't be so high and mighty and give himself airs, because we could collect evidence much better than he. Verrinder had told at odd times a good deal about his wedding. "It was a regular Gretna-Green business. They actually went all the way to Scotland, and were pursued, and got a couple of people their own size to put on their clothes and go on instead of them in the coach to York, and they stayed at the Inn and took another coach later. Then her father was in such a rage he never would speak to her or see her after. Dr. Fludyer says he never saw Verrinder really smile except that time he told about the stage-coach trick."

"Did Fluyder make out there had ever been a reconciliation?"

"Oh yes—there was no reconciliation. He never told Dr. Fludyer the father's name. But they never made it up. He made a little by illustrations to books—they were always done from his wife."

"I think I've seen one. It was called Melesinda. She was being a Beauty, and goggling at you."

"I know! Well—poor Jane, or Melesinda, used to give singing lessons to help things out. And they were awfully poor and the father never would help."

"And did Fludyer say he told him how the catalepsy, or whatever it was, began?"

"Yes—only he says he didn't tell him much. Only he told it over and over again; so he recollects it. There was a very old lady Melesinda knew, whom he called her father's landlady—but Dr. Fludyer never made out why, or what she was. Either she had spent the evening at their house, or they at hers, Dr. Fludyer wasn't sure which, and she had been telling them odd stories of

when she was a girl, and either Melesinda—that's Old Jane, you know——"

"I know. Go ahead!"

"Either she went upstairs to bring the old lady's things down for her to go, or went up to get on her own, one or the other——"

"Doesn't matter which! And she tumbled downstairs?"

"Just that! Only you might have let me do the climax, Mr. Charley dear! Spoiling my story! Well—they heard a cry and a tumble and went out and found her sitting at the foot of the stairs. And he said to her, 'My darling—are you hurt?'—And she never answered, and never spoke again."

Alice's voice breaks as she finishes Dr. Fludyer's reminiscence. "Poor old Jane!" says Charles. And both sit silent for a space. Then Alice speaks.

"I think the Old Oak Chest was worse," she says.

"Do you? I don't! Young Lovell's bride was dead outright. And as for young Lovell, I expect he married the prettiest bridesmaid. Oh no! This was worse. But did he never tell Fludyer how he came to have the father's pictures?"

"Oh yes—Dr. Fludyer did say something about that. What was it? Oh, *I* remember. He—the father—died a year or so after the daughter was placed in the Hospital. All his belongings went to a nephew, who wasn't a bad fellow and allowed Verrinder to choose a dozen of the pictures provided he only saw the backs. So Verrinder chose from them with their faces to the wall."

"He made a lucky choice. Bauerstein has just sold the Turner for eight hundred. I suppose that was when he noticed the name Phyllis Cartwright." But Charles didn't say the last two words. He only thought them, and Alice wasn't on the alert, and didn't ask what name.

"Why did he never try to sell them?"

"I can understand that. There was nothing to be gained then by withdrawing her from the Asylum. Probably she was better cared for there than she would have been elsewhere. Besides, he knew the value of the pictures would go up. He kept on hoping—poor devil!—for news of a gleam of light."

"I suppose it was what they sold for that made up most of the thousand pounds Dr. Fludyer talked about."

"I was told they fetched two hundred. But he must have had something of his own, or what did he live on?"

"Dr. Fludyer supposes he ran through most of it trying to keep up his home, and nurse her. And then when he was beaten at that, he got her into the Hospital and lived on a shilling a day, and

spent as much of his life as he could at the Royal Academy Schools. The landlord of the house says he used to pass whole hours outside on the roof, looking at the dome of the Asylum."

Charles's face clouds over slightly—"That's how I shall end up," said he. "I don't mean sitting on a roof looking at Bedlam. I mean messing about at the Schools. Only I haven't a Life-Studentship, by-the-bye! Not even an Academy medallist!"

"Oh, Mr. Charley! What affectation and nonsense! You know you're only fishing for compliments. Why—'The Shirt of Nessus' is the best thing you've ever painted, and it's to be done by April and hung on the line."

"It sounds exactly like the Wash," says Charles. "I wonder whether Nessus's shirt was sent home starched, and pinned together without cause, and Nessus couldn't get the pins out and used an expression." Alice laughs with pleasure at a relaxation in the tone of the conversation.

"I like you now!" she says. "You've come out of the dumps. But you know what I think, Mr. Charley, and what Mother Peg thinks?" Yet another nickname, for Peggy, this time.

"No—what?"

"Why, we both think you would succeed in the other as well."

"Which other? I haven't succeeded in this one yet."

"Now, that's mere affectation. Don't be so juvenile, Mr. Charley dear! Why, of course, Literature—Fiction—I ought to know! I'm a literary lady."

"I daresay you would know, Alice, if I had ever written anything."

"That's suppressio veri and suggestio falsi! Besides, it's fibs!"—The blue eyes get more serious as Alice goes on—"No—Mr. Charley dearest! I'll deal candidly with you. I stole a manuscript of yours and read it."

"Hullo!"

"Yes, I did. And it went away with me and my germs to the Nursing Home, and when the rash had come out I began reading it. Then I got awfully bad again and I had to finish it after."

"Here's a pretty confession, Alice-for-short! Well—I never!" Charles's face, as he sits puffing at his pipe and gazing at the penitent, is full of love and admiration for her. If the former is crossed by a half-thought that the love of a real father, brother, uncle—whatever he counts himself—does not call for keeping under; he thrusts it aside, fortified by the confidence that *she* has no such line of thought; and if it is so, so long as *he* keeps it under, it can't matter what it is. Alice-for-short is to be beloved of a

sanctioned Romeo, with never a blood-feud between the families—a highly endowed Lovell whose old oak chests don't hasp. Probably what would be reluctance to lose Alice takes the form of preposterous demands on the powers of the Creator in connection with Mr. Alice. But his admiration is unqualified, even by that awful mark just round the corner, where they kiss you. However, let Alice go on with her story.

"I'm not much ashamed, Mr. Charley Heath; so you needn't look so reproachful. I finished it after, when I was getting better. And I thought it was because I was so weak and used-up that I cried over it as I did."

"Probably it was. A sufficiently large Public of convalescents from Smallpox would be a boon to sentimental publishers."

"No—it was nothing of the sort. Sister Thea got it after me——"

"The Smallpox?"

"No! The manuscript. And she cried and sniffed all one night. And then the Mother Superior got it and cried and sniffed too."

"And which was this valuable and affecting work that you stole, Miss Thief, dear? And where did you steal it?"

"Out of the drawer in the old table. If I'd known there were others, I'd have turned the whole place out."

"What was this one?"

"About Cicely Smith——"

"Oh yes, I remember her. She lived in a small stuffy semi-detached villa on some land that was ripe for building, and nobody built any more villas——"

"Yes, and her father called himself an Agent, on a brass plate, and nobody knew what he was Agent for. And she had a stuffy mother, and a stuffy aunt, and there were scarlet geraniums and dandelions in the front garden. And,—oh, my gracious me,—how stuffy it all was!"

"I remember Sis'ly Smith. She wanted to marry anybody to get away from home, and proposed to a cabman. She proposed by letter, and directed to his number, and he wasn't driving his own cab, and the wrong cabman wrote that he was a married man or nothing would have suited him better."

"Oh, indeed, Mr. Charley! Then there's another one for me to read. Hand over the manuscript!"

"Wasn't that Sis'ly Smith? Then it was Sis'ly Brown. There were three of them, I know, all Sis'ly. Which was Sis'ly Smith?"

"How funny you don't remember! Don't you remember the young man who used to go every morning to the City past Cicely

Smith's house? And how he asked if the umbrella was hers, and then after that they said good-morning always? And how she used to look out for him every day, and one day he didn't come?"

"Allow me to remark, Miss Kavanagh," says Charles, speaking exactly in the same way as he spoke to Alice as she hugged the fragments of her broken beer-jug in the street, years ago, "that the British novelist would have an easy task before him if he could command a public ready to shed tears on such very small provocation. The tale, so far, strikes me as neither novel nor exciting."

"You old stupid! It was the way it was told. It quite made one smell the London suburb—the May mixing with the burnt ballast—and then when the heap was burned and got cold, how the mallows burst out all over it. And the inexplicable steam-boiler that had got left in the fields and seemed to belong to nobody."

But Charles shakes a slow incredulous head. "There is nothing in that boiler beyond the powers of the humblest aspirant to literary fame," he says, and Alice thereon says if he means to be aggravating, she shall go. So he draws in his horns.

"No—darling child! It's only my nonsense! I remember the story quite well. Sis'ly heard the young beggar was dead, and cooked up a romance about him. And the stuffy home went on, and Sis'ly got older and older and older, and her father took to drinking and had a stroke, and the stuffiness got stuffier."

"Of course, you remember all about it! But what I thought so good was the growth of the ghastly suburb, and then the end. Only I don't think you should have made the old man tell her he 'thought he recollected coming along that road every morning when he was a boy, before they made the short-cut to the station,' and never recognise her."

"What would you have had me do, Mistress Alice? Marry 'em up?"

"*Certainly.* It would have been such a relief!"

"And him sixty!"

"How often am I to tell you, Mr. Charley, that Age has *nothing*—nothing whatever!—to *do* with it!"—Alice is quite flushed and excited, because, you see, it is this rubbish about age that is standing in the way of some most happy arrangement for Charles. Her eyes are this much more open than his, that she has wondered whether, if he married again, she would misbehave herself as she did on the eve of his first marriage. She acknowledges the wrench, but is blind to every happiness except his. What would she have been, but for him?

Her rooted belief in the terms of his affection for her is two-

fold; one phase of it assures her that he doesn't love her "like that"; the other that their relation (consequently) need not change if he marries fifty wives—all of whom Alice would love too if he did.

But Alice will be late for lunch, and the trampling of Pope & Chappell's men going upstairs says one o'clock. So she cools down and says she must run, and she and the parcels, which have awaited this moment with confidence, are consigned to a Hansom, which promises to look sharp, and nearly runs over a butcher's boy, who defies it with yells.

Charles goes away to lunch at Cremoncini's, with a happy glow at heart, which will have to last him till seven o'clock, when he will have Alice again in Harley Street. He builds a few extra perfections into Romeo, or Lovell, without the dimmest overt idea of any self-defensive motive in so doing.

Parenthetically, we may ask you to note that there was nothing in the foregoing interview to fix Alice's attention on Verrinder's connection with No. 40. She knew of it, but vaguely. The whole of his tragedy could be dwelt on without the old house coming into the story at all. You will see later why we call your attention to this.

CHAPTER XXXVII

HOW SIR RUPERT GOT HIS WAY, AND PEGGY AND ALICE WENT TO BEDLAM. WHERE WERE THE PATIENTS? A USELESS VIGIL

In spite of Dr. Fludyer's change of opinion, there was a good deal of delay before the operation was decided on. All the officials of the Hospital seemed to feel confident that if Old Jane was carefully fed she would last indefinitely. After sixty years, three months counted for little. It was February before the final decision was arrived at and the day fixed.

Then, one morning suddenly, Sir Rupert said to his wife, "The operation on Old Jane is fixed for Thursday." He spoke as if it was quite an everyday affair.

"Oh, Rupert, darling! How anxious you will be!" But he appeared quite unmoved.

"Not the least!" said he. "I've given my opinion for what it's worth, and they think it worth acting on."

"I should run away and hide my eyes and hold my ears till it was over, if I were you!"

"No—you wouldn't! If you were me you would do as I mean to do. I shall be on the spot the whole time. I shan't be of any use, but Isaacson says he would like me to be there. He's twenty times the operator I am. But he would like my moral support, he says."

"I'm thankful I'm not going to be there."

"I want you to come. You and Alice."

"Good heavens, Rupert! What next?" Peggy exclaims.

And then the voice of Alice comes through the door from the little puff-room where she is scribbling: "What's that about me?"

"Come in here and we'll tell you." Both say this together, and Alice rustles, and adjusts papers, and shuts an inkpot, and comes. She settles on a sofa, with her chin on her hands, as we have seen her before. "Fire away!" she says, and the blue eyes stand open to receive information. Sir Rupert sits down beside his wife opposite to her.

"Didn't you hear what Dr. Jomson said?"

"No—I didn't!"

"He wants me and you to go to Bedlam and see that poor old woman trepanned."

"Well?"

"Well! I don't think I can stand it."

"No more could I. But if Dr. Jomson likes me to go, and break down and have hysterics, I'm game."

"I don't want you to see anything of the operation." He is grave and serious, and quite in earnest. "What I want is to have one or more good observers, preferably women, at hand when the revival of consciousness comes, if it comes. My own impression is that it will, to a certain extent. Only there may be a complete relapse after, and I want everything to be observed and recollected."

"Why won't the people—nurses—attendants—at the Asylum do? Why us?" It is Peggy who asks.

"Because," answers her husband, "they've got a theory apiece about everything, and none of them will recollect anything that don't agree with it. I want raw, live human creatures, of good average intelligence."

"Go and slap your wicked papa, Alcey darling." Big Alice is speaking to little Alce, who was present, and took an early opportunity of climbing up her when she sat down.

"Then you'll come, you and Alice?"

"No, that's not fair! We never promised." Both join in this statement, more or less.

"I must tell you, I don't the least anticipate anything like a resurrection from the grave. It would be almost like that if she showed any consecutive intelligence. But what I want to have very carefully noted, is whether she throws any light on how far she has been conscious in all this enormous period of apparent mental torpor. Is absolute suspension of the mind for so long compatible with maintenance of the circulation and all the bodily functions? If it was so, in this case, a good many scientific conclusions will have to be reconsidered." Sir Rupert pauses. Perhaps he is running too much into anticipation of the lecture on the subject he will certainly give at some future time, at the Hospital, or elsewhere. He pulls out his watch and looks at it. "That man's late," he says, showing that his present moment of idleness is not part of a programme, though a recent cup of tea was. But there comes a knock at the door. "There we are," he says. And Handsworth comes in and says he has shown the gentleman into Sir Rupert's room. "Very good then! Three o'clock on Thursday." And he hurries away, looking back to say, "Now mind you neither of you make any other engagement."

"A wilful man will have his way," says Peggy, laughing, to Alice. And Alice replies: "Never mind! He really wants us; so let's go!"

The day had come for Alice and Peggy to visit the gloomy mystery, Bedlam, which had been hitherto, to both of them, only the name of a nightmare, a Dantesque Hell of horrors, that went on existing somewhere, but that no one had ever come across. To have Bedlam sprung upon them as an actuality, in a modern time and in the metropolitan area, was an experience in itself, quite apart from what it was going to be when they got there. Peggy looked forward to this with shrinking, in which anticipated pity of the unhappy inmates allowed of no alleviation from curiosity. Alice felt the same, but the vital activity of her inquisitiveness about the unknown palliated it, and now that she had made up her mind to the adventure she would not have given it up on any account.

Her imagination, running ahead of her companion's, suggested that it would be safe to forget mediæval Bedlam, and prepare the mind for something not much worse than a Workhouse. To this end, the mind would clearly be easier, if the conversation on the way down took the form of a general résumé of recorded horrors. It would be like Garrick's performance of *Macbeth,* when he showed his dread of Banquo's ghost by going nearer to it with outstretched protecting hands and averted head. Besides, so much stress could be laid on pastnesses, and the general advantages of being Modern could be exhibited by force of contrast.

"All the time I was going off last night," said Alice, in Saint Martin's Lane, "that song Madge Wildfire sings was running in my head:—

> "In the bonny cells of Bedlam
> When I was ane-and-twenty
> I had hempen bracelets strong
> And merry whips ding-dong
> And prayer and fasting plenty."

And Lady Johnson said she remembered it well and how it used to make her shudder when she was a girl. "Oh, Alice, think of it!" she said, "one and twenty!"

"It *is* unpleasant," said Alice; which was bravado. She continued, piling up the agony, "They used to be put to sleep on wooden pallets in the middle of big rooms with the floors covered all over with pin-points sticking up. And exhibited to the public as a show, and spun round rapidly on chairs, and confined without food

in underground dungeons. And they were really sane, as often as not. How nice it is that it's *now,* now! And that it's Charing Cross, with the fountains playing."

It was Charing Cross, and the sun had just come out after a shower, and a very small street Arab was indulging in an escapade in the fountains. For in defiance of all decency, he had flung off his things and gone into the water, and was deriding the civil authority. Peggy wanted to stop and adopt him on the spot—he was so tempting in his well-knit nudity—but the other appointment could not be trifled with. They had to go on.

Everything they passed and saw insisted on being looked at and weighed in its relation to Old Jane. Even the juvenile rebel, slapping his shining tummy contentedly in the sunshine, with a subdivision of Police threatening him, but unable to act, made them contrast his splendid liberty, and glorious outlook of future defiance of authority, with her cancelled and torpid life. The window of Whitehall from which King Charles stepped out into the sun, and thence into his grave, suggested that his fate was an enviable one by comparison. The Horseguards, however much they were making believe that they were cut off from sympathy with human life, its struggles and passions, were only doing so officially, and were really taking notice of everything and meaning to converse intelligently with one another about it as soon as they were at liberty to speak. No surgical relief to the brain would be necessary there. Even when Peggy and Alice said nothing to one another about impressions of this sort, they felt them, one or both. And both probably experienced, without defining, a feeling of the callousness and self-absorption of the vast crowd in its constant ebb and flow, and contented ignorance of old Jane's sixty years of silence and oblivion. This was unreasonable; for were they themselves giving her a thought, six months ago?

"I must say," said Alice to Peggy, as they turned round towards the bridge, "the poor old woman's was a much nicer sort of insanity than that other one's Dr. Fludyer told us of, who talked incessantly for seven years. I hope to goodness we shan't see a case of that sort."

"I hope not," said Peggy, fervently. She was feeling very uneasy about possible horrors. Alice wasn't unfeeling, but in her temperament active curiosity outflanked uneasiness. She therefore talked and speculated for herself and her companion.

"What a good thing it would be if people that talk too much could be vaccinated off Old Jane! What are all those men on the terrace there over the river? Members of Parliament, are they?"

Alice stopped and became reflective. We have no means of knowing whether her thoughts were disrespectful or otherwise. They must have lasted over the bridge, as it was abreast of St. Thomas's Hospital that she drew a long breath of relief, and said, "We're not going to hear a debate—that's one comfort!"

Perhaps you who read this have been a prowler about London, like ourself. If so, you will know the huge building with the portico and dome, and its pleasant open grounds all round, and its beautiful oval lawn in front. But, if a languid prowler—like ourself—content to look at many things and wonder, and make no enquiries, you may have sauntered by this huge building and never asked its name; never known that, as an institution, it records and represents three hundred years at least of the most appalling misery that can fall on man. You may have passed it over and dismissed it; as, if one is lazy and prowls, one is apt to do with large buildings that look as if they had boards and funds and annual reports. No doubt they are all right, and really have a purpose if one could only find it out. If they were merely Institutions *per se*, without qualifications, we must surely (if we think seriously) wonder that any one should have been at the trouble and expense of constructing them! If, however, after you got home it came to your knowledge that the huge building was Bethlehem Hospital, and that Bethlehem Hospital was actually Bedlam—Bedlam itself, no other!—you must then have felt sorry you did not know it at the time, and pay a little more attention.

For though it is no longer in Moorfields, but Saint George's, even as when in Moorfields it was no longer in Bishopsgate, it is still the Hospital of St. Mary Bethlehem. Even as the Cases that were in the home of the old thirteenth-century monastery, whose property had been "redistributed," were shifted through the air and light from their prison to the new one of Moorditch, so when the latter gave up its mentally dead, this was the new tomb to which the still animated bodies were transferred. The tradition of horror has never paused, since the first poor creature, supposed (groundedly or not) to be possessed by an evil spirit, was taken charge of by the pious fraternity of Saint Mary, and judiciously impaled on spikes, burned, lashed, or put in cramping irons, as a practical step towards the ejection of a Devil who made light of Exorcism.

And if Alice and Charles, as a result of slight and unskilful investigation, had hit upon the right records of the treatment of this last exodus of woe, it was little better than that of the Friars.

If the merry whips ding-dong had been hung up out of the way, the hempen bracelets strong continued in evidence—and did so till a few years later. But it is all long ago now, for except as an expedient of relatives—a check on obnoxious brothers and sisters, wives or husbands—probably there has never been a fetter on a lunatic for more than fifty years past. Maybe it makes less difference than one thinks! But it is pleasant to know, pleasant only to believe, that nowadays Madness is all the lunatic has to suffer from, and that he has not to endure Mediævalism into the bargain. Still, insanity is what it is! What the Latin poet called it two thousand years ago it remains now—the greatest of evils, that knows not the name of the slave that boyhood knew, nor the face of the friend who calls us, in vain, by our own.

"But I can't hear any patients," said Peggy to her husband, when he met them under the great porch, with Dr. Fludyer. He had come early to be present at the operation, and had sent the carriage back for them. "What did you expect?" said he.

"Why, of course, Dr. Jomson dear!" answered Alice, for her. "Mother Peg expected to hear the patients howl and gibber."

They passed up two flights of stairs into a long gallery-like ward—quite a hundred and fifty feet long. But it wasn't like Peggy's idea of Bedlam at all, nor Alice's. It was furnished from end to end as luxuriously as a first-class hotel. There were pictures on the walls and flowers on the tables. A lady was playing a piano. Others sat about reading, or looking at picture books, or doing needlework. One saw nothing wrong, so far.

"But we shall see some of the patients?" said Peggy. The nurse who accompanied them answered:

"These are all patients. This is a patient." She laid her hand on the shoulder of a girl who sat close by, counting her fingers. "Oh, no! she doesn't know I'm speaking about her. She doesn't know anything." This was in answer to a half-expression of protest or apology from Peggy. Then she addressed the girl herself by name, and the girl replied, "Directly!" But she went on counting her fingers.

"It looks so reasonable for a moment," said the nurse, "but she has been like that for three months. She'll become chronic, most likely. But she's perfectly safe by herself. That other one isn't." The other one was a placid respectable lady, who looked quite fit to be left in charge of the ward single-handed. Peggy said so, and the nurse replied: "Yes! Responsible sort of person, to look at!

But she's not safe with a knife. It came quite suddenly though; it may go away as quickly as it came."

"How did it come?"

"She sent a leg of mutton flying at her husband's head one day at dinner. Something he said annoyed her, and that brought it out. This is the ward."

They had got to the end of the long ward, and went into a passage that made a lobby to another. Alice would so much have liked to know why the girl counted her fingers, and what it was the husband had said to exasperate his wife. Did not many husbands deserve to have legs of mutton thrown at them? Also a group she had noticed, near the piano, had puzzled her. A young man on a sofa with his face in his hands, seeming to be either in pain, or great trouble. Over him, with pity on her face, stood a comely pleasant girl. Her right hand was on his shoulder; her left stroked his head. "It's her husband," said the nurse. But then—this was a Women's Ward! However, there was no time for questioning—Alice would ask after. They passed on into a small ward, with beds, where they were to find the object of this journey—the old chronic patient of a lifetime.

You know, perfectly well, how when the image of anything you anticipate seeing has taken up space in your mind, you expect the thing, when it comes, to fill up as large a space in the room (or, for that matter, the district) in which you find it. Old Jane had filled up so much of Alice's and Lady Johnson's minds, that they could hardly believe that little white still thing on the bed was really she. What they saw seemed a small mask with white hair on a pillow, the head it belonged to encased in a covering that made it more like the sarcophagus than its contents. The body it belonged to was just manifest, no more, through its coverlid. The likeness to a graven image was the greater that it hardly, if at all, suggested Death.

The operation had only just been completed, and all sign of it removed except the head bandages, when Alice and Peggy came into the ward. Mr. Isaacson the surgeon stood by the bed, his eyes fixed attentively on the face. His intensely Egyptian features suggested a Pharaoh standing over his mummied mother. He took no notice of the new arrivals. Sir Rupert went to him, and they stood talking, *sotto-voce,* side by side. Then Isaacson raised his voice.

"I don't believe she'll speak. I can't. But if she does, it will be within a week; either speak or try it on. I must be off." He dropped his voice again and Alice fancied she heard him say he had

to remove a kidney at three. So like a late lunch, thought Alice! He wished Lady Johnson and Miss Kavanagh good-morning, but reluctantly, as if he scorned to be ungenerous, but had very little heart in his wishing. However, he made up for it by the cordiality with which he wished them a whole good-day a minute later. But then, mind you, the first wish was that of a detained, the second of a released man.

And then Alice and Peggy, at Sir Rupert's wish, made up their minds for a long vigil. It was two o'clock, and they were not to be at liberty till eight; not even then if Old Jane broke out in speech. "But it's what she says *first* I want," said Rupert; "and if it doesn't come very soon it won't be for some time. Still, it's worth the chance of her speaking for you to be here."

So he departed and left them sitting on. They could chat with the nurse, and hear about Cases.

"I didn't know you had any male patients on this side," said Alice.

"We haven't any. Why?"

"Because of that poor fellow we saw, whose wife had come to see him."

"She hadn't come to see him. He'd come to see her. *He's* all right! *She's* as mad as a March hare."

"Is it possible? She looked so absolutely sane."

"She put the baby in the fire, to purify it from Sin. Has to be watched constantly, or she'd kill herself. Because she's too bad to live! Only been married a couple of years."

"Was *she*"—Alice nodded towards the bed—"always quite still and silent, like this?"

"Not quite like this: that is, she has never spoken since she came here. Before we were born. But she has always moved slightly—enough to show she was alive. A nurse who was here before her husband died, told me that once she was thought to have moved and tried to speak. They sent for her husband, who used to live near here, in case anything changed. But it turned out a mistake. They had better have waited till they were sure."

Poor Verrinder! Fancy how he came round in response to the summons! Fancy how he went back! So thought Alice to herself.

"She told me too," continued the nurse, whose name was Gaisford, Alice learned, "that after that he got so sleepless at night that he took to chloral or chloroform. It had to do with his death in the end."

Lady Johnson was very silent, and seemed oppressed. Alice

on the contrary prosecuted active enquiry on all subjects. Was it not horribly trying work? It was—and very few people could bear it for long. "*You* might stand it for six weeks; her ladyship wouldn't hold out for twenty-four hours." Peggy felt the truth of this. How came Mrs. Gaisford to be able to bear it? She supposed she knew what it was to be worse off. How long *had* she borne it? She had been eighteen years in the institution—about sixteen in her present position. Alice thought this referred to her status as a nurse, and asked no further question on the point. She fancied she noticed some reserve, and changed the subject. Would Mrs. Gaisford show her all over the institution some time? Oh yes, that she would, padded rooms, swimming-bath, billiard-rooms, theatre, and ballroom—everything! If it hadn't been that this Case must be seen to, we could have gone to see the Magic Lantern this evening under the Dome in the Chapel Room. Dr. Livingstone in Central Africa, Mrs. Gaisford believed. Alice thought of Madge Wildfire's song, and the prayer and fasting plenty. The clash between the perfect modern Hospital and the genuine scrap of *moyen-âge* that Alice had brought from Harley Street might be described as historically painful.

As Alice and Peggy remained watching by the motionless figure for over five hours, and Alice talked almost all that time with the nurse, you may be sure she heard a great deal about Insanity in all its phases. But we cannot write it all down here, and need not, as she wrote it all down herself afterwards. If you recollect her story of "Ann Carlyon," you will see how she made use of the girl who counted her fingers. Ann (you may remember) was betrothed to a man who was sentenced to ten years' penal servitude for forgery. In the first year she got into the habit of counting her ten fingers continually; in the second she counted to the ninth, and so on. If spoken to she always counted to her limit before answering. At the end of the fifth year came the news that he had died in prison. After that she never ceased counting as far as the fifth finger, and became a hopeless lunatic. Peggy said she had a great mind never to speak to Aunty Lissy again when she wrote this: "You wicked A. K.," said she; "how ever can you do such things, with that innocent blue-eyed look all over your face, I can't think!" And Alice looked ashamed, and answered: "But I *did* cry over it, Mother Peggy dear, and real tears too!" And, as she said it, the little six-year-old Alice, "Alice the kid," came back—oh, so strongly—to her questioner's mind. But all this has nothing to do with the story.

More than once during the long vigil by the bedside one of the

three watchers fancied she saw a movement of the still features. It always turned out to be a mistake due to nervousness. At least, if movement there had been, it was not confirmed and repeated. There was a great difference between the susceptibility to nervous impressions of the three; the nurse being by far the least impressionable, while Lady Johnson towards the end of the time was quite upset in her judgment by the constant strain of fixed attention. "I'm sure I saw the lips move then," she would say at intervals. But she was always wrong. Both she and Alice were glad when the clock gave them leave to go.

And when Peggy arrived at home, and went to her own room, tired and disconcerted, she felt quite sorry for her husband, and the report she had to give. "I'm afraid you'll be so disgusted, darling," she began. But Sir Rupert, who was in his dressing-room, only asked if they had brought back Fludyer in the carriage with them. "I told him to come," he said. "Is any one else coming? No one else. Then I shan't dress, it's so late—oh! there's his knock. I thought he'd come."

"But it is disgusting, dear, isn't it?"

"Yes! The old lady ought to have looked alive! But—better luck next time!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII

HOW OLD JANE WAKED FROM YOUNG JANE'S SLEEP. HOW ALICE WENT BACK TO BEDLAM

It was a disappointment—there could be no doubt of it. Alice and Peggy had, without admitting it, worked themselves up into a state of expectation that Old Jane would "come to." It was true that Sir Rupert had dwelt on his belief that there was only one chance of it in thousands; that, almost to a certainty, the matter of the brain was compacted past all reinstatement, and that the recovery, if any, would be slow and the steps imperceptible. All that he had committed himself to was that there would be *some* amount of recovery, and when there was none whatever he was disappointed. Still, he bore it philosophically. On the other hand, Alice and Peggy, whose imagination had endowed the human brain with a resiliency surpassing that of the best Para rubber, were inclined to resent the result of the experiment, and to consider that they had been cheated. However, in response to Rupert's caution, "not to be too previous," because the play wasn't played out yet, they agreed to suspend judgment.

As it turned out, it was as well that they did so. For a fortnight after the operation Old Jane, quite suddenly, spoke. We have to rely for the particulars of her first utterances on Mrs. Gaisford, the nurse who was with her at the time, and on Dr. Fludyer, who was at once summoned. Stated briefly, the facts appear to have been as follows:—

Since the operation the only noticeable change in the patient had been that the slight appearance of a distinction between a sleeping and a waking state had become intensified, so that it was no longer a matter of opinion which predominated. On this occasion the nurse's attention was aroused by a more definite aspect of healthy sleep than she had seen hitherto. It may have been only her fancy that the colour of the face had changed, but she had no doubt of the fact that the lips moved once or twice without giving any sound, in a way that seemed to suggest an effort to speak. She at once sent word to Dr. Fludyer, who arrived from his own residence about an hour later. Her impression must have been strong about the movement of the lips, as it was well past midnight

and there was a heavy downpour of rain. It was not an occasion to bring even a doctor out of his bed into the streets, except for cause shown.

On his arrival he found that nothing further had occurred; but he noticed the change in the appearance of the patient, and remarked to the nurse that had he known nothing of the case, he should have supposed her to be in a healthy sleep, making of course due allowance for her age. The sleep of very old people when not stertorous has an appearance of torpor, often enough. He remained watching by the bedside for the slightest movement, occasionally touching the patient's pulse, but observed no change of any sort. At last, despairing of anything, and hearing a slight lull in the steady torrents of rain which had continued for more than two hours without intermission, he got up to go.

"Send for me again," said he to the nurse, "if you see any movement whatever, or think you do. Never mind if it is fancy. I would sooner be brought here fifty times by mistake than miss seeing the return of consciousness—if ever there is any. Possibly you were, as you think now, mistaken this time. But never mind! Send again." And the nurse promised to do so, though evidently disconcerted at her mistake.

Dr. Fludyer put on the overcoat he had taken off on coming into the ward, and his hat. He took one more look at the almost inanimate white figure on the bed before him, the head enclosed in a close-fitting black coif that protected without oppressing the seat of the operation. He touched the pulse of the motionless hand on the coverlid once more, and finding no fluctuation of the slow beat that had for sixty years registered the vitality of a living tomb, turned to go, leaving the nurse to her dreary vigil in the silence, broken only by the sound of the falling rain, and now and then the groan, or, almost worse, the laugh of some distant patient. As he walked out into the corridor a door slammed and the echoes reverberated through the building. The sounds of a discussion or altercation, that was part of the door-slamming incident, mixed in with another sound that had caught his attention and made him stop. The voice of a woman, not the nurse, coming from the ward he had just left.

Yes, it came quite distinctly from that room, and was *not* the voice of the nurse, for her voice followed it immediately—entirely different.

"Oh—Dr. Fludyer! come—come at once!" And as he returned, in response to the agitated summons, the first voice came again, with the startled sound that was in it before, showing a growth

towards terror. "What is it?" and again, "What *is* it?" And the louder accent suggested the sort of utterance of one who, anxious to warn a suspected evil-doer, betrays his own apprehension in the attempt.

Dr. Fludyer afterwards told Sir Rupert that at this point he felt dumb-struck—could not find a word. The nurse was more prompt; perhaps readier in the class of fiction with which patients are soothed and silenced.

"The doctor says you are not to move, Mrs. Verrinder, but to lie quite still till he comes."

The figure that had half-moved, and still seemed to struggle to move, fell back passively. Then the voice came again, only with less of strain and tension.

"But you will tell me what it is? What is it?"

The nurse replied with what struck Dr. Fludyer as a good deal of readiness and tact, "I am only just come. The doctor will be here soon." The patient appeared to attach full meaning to these words.

"Will you," she said, still with bewilderment and apprehension in her tone, "be so kind as to ring the bell, or call the girl. Call 'Elizabeth' over the stairs, and she will come." And then, as though she mistrusted the carrying out of these instructions, she began to call herself, "Elizabeth! Elizabeth!" No response following, she went on, "The girl must have gone out." And then suddenly, "Where is Mr. Verrinder?"

The nurse replied as before, "I have only just come, Ma'am," and then looked enquiringly at Dr. Fludyer. He understood her, and nodded; she continued, "The doctor has just come—but he begs you will lie still and not try to talk."

"That is quite right, Mrs. Verrinder," said he; "you lie quite still and try not to talk." This slightly varied way of putting it seemed to have its effect, for the patient appeared to acquiesce. Dr. Fludyer said afterwards to Sir Rupert that from this moment he made up his mind to behave exactly as he should have done had the suspension of consciousness been sixty hours instead of sixty years. He found, he said, that by adhering blindly to this rule, difficulties that seemed insuperable vanished.

He sat down by the bedside, and put his finger on the pulse. "That is right," he repeated, "lie quite quiet and we shall do nicely." Then anticipating that her next speech would be a repetition of her last, he thought it safest to forestall it. He had made up his mind that some falsehood would be inevitable, and felt it would be safest to be beforehand.

"Mr. Verrinder has been obliged to go away," he said. "We have not heard from him." And then, conscious that it was absolutely necessary to touch some new point, little matter what, that would arrest the current of enquiry, he added, "I am Dr. Fludyer." He could not at the time analyse his reasons for believing this would answer the purpose, but it seemed to do so. Maybe it carried a suggestion that more would come without being asked for; and he thought it safest, having procured a pause, to follow on in it at once, and choose his own line of explanation.

"You have had a most dangerous illness, Mrs. Verrinder, and have been for a long time unconscious. You are not in your own home, but in a Hospital. You were moved here at your husband's wish, as he knew you would be far better nursed here than would have been possible at home."

"And is he gone away, leaving me here?" The old lips, that did not know how old they were, twitched and worked about; and the old eyes, that probably saw little and thought the cause was darkness, went nearer to turning round and looking at the doctor than they had done yet.

"He was obliged to go. He had no choice."

"What could oblige him to go? He had told me nothing." The doctor felt he was at dangerously close quarters with his difficulty, and he must retreat.

"You must remember, Mrs. Verrinder, that I have only very lately taken charge of you, and I cannot give you all the information I should like to give. The nurse also is new, and knows even less than I do. It is now three in the morning, and she sent for me quite suddenly a couple of hours since, having seen signs of consciousness returning."

"Oh dear! I am so sorry. I could have waited. I fear you had to get up to come to me."

"That," said Fludyer afterwards to Sir Rupert, "was the worst of all. There was an awful unearthly feel about it that her civil speech was really an apology made in the beginning of the century. It felt as though it were not the old woman who had come back like a ghost into the present time, but that I was being dragged back into the past. The colloquial, everyday character of her speech was so intense." But he persevered in the course he had laid down for himself, and glued his mind to the fiction of the three days' torpor.

"We doctors get used to this sort of thing, Mrs. Verrinder," he said, cheerfully. And the recumbent figure replied, in the same voice of appreciative civility, "You are very good."

"I think it right to tell you, Mrs. Verrinder," he continued, "that your accident made an operation necessary"—he hesitated a moment.

"I cannot understand," she said; "have I had an accident?—oh, if I could only understand!" The distress in her voice was intensely painful to her hearers, accustomed as both were to every incident of mental disease. Dr. Fludyer thought he saw his way clearer.

"Is it possible, Mrs. Verrinder," said he, speaking with studious gentleness, "that you do not remember your fall—on the stairs?" She seemed to think a minute. "Yes, I do remember that I fell on the stairs," said she, "but that was just now." The doctor saw his way clearer still.

"No, dear Mrs. Verrinder. That is where your mistake is. It was not just now, but some time since. I will not tell you how long. You have been insensible for a long time." He paused, but the puzzled look on the old face seemed not to intend speech—only to wait to hear more. He went on:

"Your fall on the stairs resulted in concussion of the brain, and as a consequence you fell into a state of insensibility. A recent operation has relieved the depression of the skull which caused this insensibility, but has left behind it the pain you are now feeling in the back of the head. You have not spoken of it, but I know it is there." The patient murmured, "Oh yes—great pain," but spoke more drowsily than before. Evidently the exertion of her recent speech was telling.

"Until that pain subsides, Mrs. Verrinder, I wish you—I most earnestly beg of you—to be patient and not try to talk." He stopped again, for the nurse had conveyed to him by a sign that she thought no more need be said then. "She'll be quiet awhile now," she said.

What had struck the doctor as strangest in all this was the way in which the speech and manner of the patient had lent itself to the fiction that she had only been two or three days insensible. If he could have felt certain of a result he was inclined to anticipate—namely, reaction and collapse—he would have assured her that this was no fiction at all. But he was handicapped by the thought of explanations to come. He was fortified by scientific certainty of her extinction in case of death, and no unsettling new scientific certainties happened to have been recently demonstrated; so, to put it briefly, if she died, fibs wouldn't matter. If you happen to belong to any of the many schools of philosophy that condemn his view, as well as each other, be good enough to recollect that he had no thought but for the patient.

After waiting the best part of an hour, both nurse and doctor became convinced that the excitement and exertion of speech had produced their natural effect, and that poor old Jane had collapsed into a deep sleep, or its equivalent in her condition. They were mistaken; for as the doctor was departing, he was a second time recalled by a voice from the bed. Its self-command was extraordinary: taken apart from the abnormal state of the speaker. It was perfectly normal in itself.

"Is the gentleman gone—that was here just now?"

"No, Ma'am! Dr. Fludyer is here."

"Dr. Fludyer. I did not catch your name before. I have something, Sir, I wish to ask you. But I speak with difficulty. Something catches. And I have no feeling except the head-pain. Will it go?"

"Oh yes! We must have patience, and lie quiet. Do you feel my hand on yours? Now!"—He raised and replaced his hand on the inanimate one on the coverlid, once or twice.

"Yes, I think I do. But my head prevents my feeling anything else. Is this good woman touching my other hand?" The nurse had done so. She drew her hand down the body and legs. "Did you feel that?" said she.

"Oh yes! I felt you touch my chest." The doctor and nurse glanced at each other.

"We must not talk too much," said he. "There was something you said you wished to ask me, Mrs. Verrinder."

"Yes. My baby was to come in September. Will this—will this——?"

The doctor beckoned the nurse away from the bed, and they spoke together in a whisper. They had taken for granted that the patient would not be conscious of their doing so. It was a mistake.

"Is it something I am not to hear?" The terrified inflection of the voice was painful beyond expression.

"You shall hear directly, Mrs. Verrinder." The doctor said this, and again spoke to the nurse, under his breath, but emphatically. She shrugged her shoulders very slightly, and raised her eyebrows, as in protest, and then went again to the patient. When she spoke, her effort in doing so was audible in her voice.

"Dr. Fludyer wishes me to tell you, Mrs. Verrinder, your baby was born, and did not live." She could get no further. Yet she was manifestly not a soft character—no mere dweller on the sentimental side of the terrible dramas she saw daily. She was a thorough madhouse nurse, chosen as specially worthy of reliance. But this case staggered her.

"What she tells you is true," said Dr. Fludyer, firmly, but quietly. "Your baby—a little girl—was born prematurely in consequence of the accident. It could not have been reared, in any case."

"When we told her of the death of the child," said Fludyer when he afterwards described this scene to Sir Rupert, "she was quite silent and motionless for more than a minute. Then she gave a cry—if one can call it a cry—such as I hope I may never hear again. It affected Gaisford as much as it did me—and I can assure you Gaisford is not one to be easily upset."

"Did she say anything articulate after that?" asked Rupert. Fludyer shook his head.

"Hardly a word!" he replied. "She began saying, 'Oh, what will my——' or 'What will he——' and got no further. After that she became almost silent, and has remained so, except for short beginnings, such as 'I must get——' or 'Will you send——?' She seems to be weaker than at first, and to half-capture thoughts and let them slip."

"Get some food, Fludyer; you must want it. And afterwards we can talk of what's to be done next." For this was in Harley Street, whither Dr. Fludyer had gone as soon as the hour was plausible. He need not have been so scrupulous, for the great physician was at the end of a very early breakfast when he was shown in. "Jane has spoken!" said he. And then he used the last energies a wearisome night had left in him to give a conscientiously detailed account of the amazing revival.

"I suppose there never was another case like it," said Rupert. "See that Dr. Fludyer gets plenty to eat, Handsworth. You'll excuse me, Fludyer, I must run up and tell Lady Johnson this." For the hallucination we chronicled long ago of a young House-Physician, of a strange wireless current between himself and that handsome eldest daughter of old Heath in Hyde Park Gardens, was still as active as ever. And for all that he was so great and distinguished, he was just as conscious now, wherever he was, of the *locus* of Harley Street and Lady Johnson in it, as ever he was of "the Gardens" and their relation to Miss Margaret Heath. Only he had got used to it, you see! In the present case Dr. Fludyer's tale was firstly to be passed on to Peggy, and secondly to excite its full interest as soon as she was qualified to share it. It was rather a tit-bit to him, but he wasn't going to turn it over in his mouth until she was helped. There was a gleam of satisfaction on his face as he half-opened the bedroom door. He went straight to the point.

"She's *spoken!* May I come in?"

"Yes, come in! Who's spoken? Oh dear, I had fallen asleep again."

"Old Jane, of course. But it's only just eight."

"You don't mean it? How did you hear?"

"Fludyer has come. Spoke at three o'clock this morning. Seems coherent too." Sir Rupert made no concealment of his triumphant feeling. He had scored.

"I'll get up at once. Pull that bell hard, and then run away and don't hinder, that's a ducky! That's right!" And Sir Rupert, anxious not to hinder, is retreating downstairs, when the door he has just closed is opened to tell him to mind and not let Dr. Fludyer go till the speaker comes.

(We could have put this little conversation into much more logical order. But the fact is, that's the way people talk, and it can't be helped.)

Sir Rupert could not have been more than four minutes on the stairs—because he only had a short interview with Lucy about what sort of literature young ladies-of-fourteen's governesses have a right to say they are not to read; and as for Phillips and Alice he brought them down, one over each shoulder. Nevertheless he found when he got back to the breakfast-room that Aunt Lissy was interviewing Dr. Fludyer, and knew all about it.

"I'm going straight away to see her," she said. And she had clearly made up her mind. We believe we have made it understood that when Alice decided on a course of action, opposition was useless. Besides, Dr. Fludyer was only too glad that she should do as she wished.

"It will be very kind of you to come," he said. "I have no fault to find with Gaisford, nor the others. But their employment gives them a certain tone—they can't help it. This poor old—curiosity—is, remember, not *insane* now in any sense. And probably no human creature ever needed consolation and sympathy from a fellow-woman more."

"Mamma will want to go too," remarked Sir Rupert, using this epithet in acknowledgment of the two little people he was unloading from his shoulders. "At least I suppose so."

"I'm not sure mamma had better come." Thus Alice, thoughtfully. "Won't there be rather too much of us, doctor?"

"I would just as soon she didn't go," said Sir Rupert. "She does take these things to heart so terribly. Not that you're an unfeeling beast, Aunt Lissy. But you have a sort of buoyancy."

"Listen to papa trying to get out of his difficulties, Lucy."

"Why mustn't *I* go?" says Miss Lucy. And papa observes in an

undertone to Dr. Fludyer that he has brought an old house about his ears. Lucy, however, is reduced *ad absurdum* by a claim from Alce that she shall *do* too.

When Peggy came down ten minutes later, she found the matter settled by council, and enforced by circumstance. For Alice had hurried through her own breakfast in order to depart at once with Dr. Fludyer in his responsible brougham, which had been waiting all this while. Appealed to as Mother Peg, darling, to be reasonable, she surrendered her wish to come too, especially as time was passing, and she couldn't get her breakfast and see Snaith, the housekeeper, in less than half-an-hour. So Alice went off with Dr. Fludyer. "Just like an elopement," said she as she took her seat in the carriage. "Sorry about Mrs. Fludyer," said the doctor. "Also you're sixty if you're a minute!" said Alice, the rude, unladylike girl!

"And what's so intensely shocking to me," she went on, her laugh dying abruptly, "is that the poor old curiosity we are going to is my age only; so far as the living of life goes!"

"And mine into the bargain," said the doctor, "as far as the passage of time goes. And I'm afraid it goes furthest in the long run!"

The carriage went responsibly along the proper side of the way, with two silent people in it, thinking.

CHAPTER XXXIX

HOW ALICE STAYED IN BEDLAM, AND HAD TO BE CYNTHIA LUTTRELL. HOW MRS. GAISFORD WAS A MENTAL CASE

"Has she said any more?" said the doctor to the nurse, as she met them just outside the door of the ward.

"Only once. She roused up and said again could we not send to Miss—something like 'letter L'—I could not catch the name. She said she was very old, but she was sure she would come."

"What did you say to her?"

"Oh—I said we would send, and she went off into a doze again. She hasn't spoken or moved since."

"You're a rash woman, Mrs. Gaisford."

"Oh no—nothing easier than to say she was out of town—had a cold—anything!"

"You see I have brought Miss Kavanagh back with me. She will remain with you in the ward. I will just look at the patient and then see Dr. Paisley." Alice and Mrs. Gaisford exchanged good-mornings, and they went into the ward.

"Is it possible she has really spoken?" said Alice, as she looked at the white motionless figure on the bed. She had asked the question under her breath; she did not imagine it could have been overheard. To her surprise the patient moved, and said quite distinctly, but weakly: "Who is it that has come in?" Dr. Fludyer replied:

"Only Miss Kavanagh. She has come to sit with you till I come back, Mrs. Verrinder." He felt that the policy of taking things for granted was safe, and spoke as though the patient would of course know who Miss Kavanagh was. His instinct was right. She accepted Miss Kavanagh without question, no doubt on the strength of the confidence in his voice. After one or two efforts towards speech, she got at her words again. "Can you find a chair?" she said. Her total unconsciousness of her own history, of the long lapse of cancelled life, could not have been driven home to her hearers better than by this slight speech. All the continuity of her old experience was in it. It was what she would have said to a visitor had she been convalescent in her own bedroom, at home, sixty years ago!

"I'll sit here, please, Mrs. Verrinder," said Alice. Her voice in the still place, with its centuries of woeful memories, was like spring violets in a coal-shaft. She sat down so that the patient should see her as much as possible. It showed (so the nurse thought to herself) how rapidly her faculties were beginning to assert themselves, that she said, as Alice took her seat, "Yes—I can see you now."

"Is there nothing you would like, Mrs. Verrinder?" said Alice. She settled at once that it would be best to be easy, trivial, colloquial—anything rather than betray her own appalled feeling. "Can't I tell them to get you anything?"

"She's to have her beef-tea," said Gaisford the nurse. And then Alice felt the truth of what Dr. Fludyer had said. The incidents and surroundings of madhouse nursing made it impossible for this woman (good in herself, no doubt) to adopt the rôle this case called for. Deference was lacking, and could not be assumed at a short notice.

"Would you like that, Mrs. Verrinder?" said Alice. But the old figure shook its head, and spoke.

"I should *like* a cup of tea. Only tell Elizabeth one slice of bread-and-butter, not more. Is the girl come back?" Then her recollection cleared, and she knew it was no longer her own home. She began, "Oh dear—oh dear—oh dear!" a panic-stricken sobbing utterance most painful to hear, "why will they not tell me? I know it is something!" Alice was just making up her mind that it would be quite impossible to keep the truth from her much longer, and that she might just as well be told at once, when the perturbation began to subside spontaneously, and before long she had fallen back into seeming unconsciousness. Then Alice spoke with the nurse about the difficulties of the case.

"If we *did* tell her the truth," said the latter, "do you suppose she would believe it?" True enough! She wouldn't. "But how long do you mean to wait before telling her?" asked Alice. Postponement and evasion were all Mrs. Gaisford could suggest.

"If you can get time for the head to heal up, and get her taking regular nourishment—why, then the poor soul will *have* to be told. Only I'm afraid she's going to get too sharp for us. You see she's nothing the matter with her really. It's only the head. And, to me, it looks like coming round."

"Do you really mean she'll come round altogether?"

"If she comes round at all, why shouldn't she come round altogether?" This seemed sense; and at this moment Dr. Fludyer rejoined them, bringing Dr. Paisley and also Sir Rupert Johnson,

who had followed as soon as he was able. He had been obliged to answer a letter before leaving the house.

"Now let's have a look at the old lady," said he. And then all five went on into the ward from the anteroom where Alice and Mrs. Gaisford had been talking.

It would be tedious to follow the conversation of the doctors at the bedside. We can only touch on points that concern this story, and the old Mrs. Verrinder's relations with Alice. The medical details would have great interest for scientific readers, as the case was certainly what Sir Rupert called it, one of perfectly phenomenal vitality. But these are already in print. We may, however, take advantage of the words of eye-witnesses. The following is quoted from Dr. Fludyer's account of the case:

"One very noticeable point in connection with this curious case was that while the patient was able to recollect clearly the interview that had taken place immediately before her accident, her memory was (and has since continued) clouded and indistinct about events that occurred before this interview. This went the length of confusing the identity of Miss A. K. (the lady I have mentioned as present at the time of her first recovery) with that of a friend of her own previous to her marriage. Even now that she has come to the full knowledge of her extraordinary history, and can speak calmly and with clearness of her husband's death, she cannot rid herself of this confusion, and constantly goes back to it, and has to be recalled to a knowledge of the actual facts. It was, however, of great service in supplying an antidote to the sense of solitude among absolute strangers which would otherwise have affected her, probably injuriously. I am inclined to ascribe a great deal of her mental reinstatement to the presence and soothing influence of Miss A. K., acting in connection with this hallucination, which it has not always been thought prudent to discourage."

For, as a matter of fact, the first thing Old Jane said after a long silence, following on the departure of the three doctors from her bedside, was, "Where is Cynthia Luttrell? She was here just now," and stood out against the nurse's denial of any such person. The latter, however, shrewdly detecting the nature of the delusion, recalled Alice (who had left the ward with Sir Rupert and the others) again to the bedside of the patient; but without bringing any of the doctors back. When Alice resumed her place by the bed, the patient said, more clearly than she had spoken yet, "I am so

glad you are come, dear! Kiss me—only very carefully, and take care not to jolt my head. Is that nurse gone?" There was the slightest shade of asperity in the tone of the question. The nurse and Alice exchanged nods, almost imperceptibly, and the former acquiesced in self-suppression, disappearing behind a screen. She remained there, but made some very useful shorthand notes of what followed.

Alice stooped over the recumbent figure and kissed the pale, thin lips. A memory of her own youth crossed her mind; one she had always kept intact, while many others had faded outright. It was the recollection of the beautiful and wonderful Miss Heath as she stooped over the pallid remnant of what she had had to call her mother. To think that, even then, this poor old thing was here, in this very building—had indeed been here thirty years and more! It was not a thing for the mind to face. Alice's could not supply a word. Besides, had she spoken she might have gone hysterical. That would never do! She kissed the poor cold lips, not grudgingly, in silence, and sat down as before. Old Jane continued, evidently quite satisfied it was Cynthia Luttrell, whoever she was:

"I was so sorry you couldn't come last night—at least last week or—when was I brought here?" Alice showed presence of mind.

"When was Mrs. Verrinder brought here, nurse?" But Mrs. Gaisford was far too astute to speak, and Alice continued: "She'll be back directly, and I'll ask her. I was sorry too."

"Because you know John and I got your old cousin Becky on the story of the ring, and it was more interesting than I can tell you. I feel so much better since that tea."

"I'm so glad. I do wish I had been there to hear it."

"Never mind! We must get her on it again, when I'm up. It was so stupid of me not to recollect the drugget. I'd noticed it going up, and then coming back forgot all about it. Then I tried to save the books and missed the banister rail." She was almost garrulous, talking as one who had settled down to a chat. Mrs. Gaisford, in her concealment, felt glad her pencil would not want cutting. Alice, always adventurous, resolved to run a risk. "Cousin Becky does chatter so!" she said. It was a success. "She *does!* But I can tell you we quite forgave her, this time. She said she thought we knew it all, long ago! But what with all these new excitements, and the new gas-lamps in Pall Mall, we young people never troubled about our fathers and mothers. She went on talking, like old people do, you know, dear, and she must be near ninety." Oh, how untruthful Alice did feel! Old Jane continued:—

"I should like to tell you the whole story sometime. Only it's a pity I can't now! I recollect it all so plain—as if it was half-an-hour ago. But I think I shall have to have a tooth seen to. My mouth isn't comfortable." Alice's curiosity got the better of her. She could not resist saying something to keep "cousin Becky" in the foreground.

"What was it set her off talking about this particular story?"

"She'd had news of a tradesman's wife in Kentish Town whom she used to help with money. I can't remember her name. But she was a sort of illegitimate niece, or cousin. I fancy she was a daughter or granddaughter of Sir Cramer Luttrell—that would be Becky's uncle, you know,—that horrible man!" This seemed to want an assent, and Alice gave it, feeling more and more a liar.

"All this happened when Becky was sixteen." This came rather suddenly, after a short pause, in which the old woman perhaps dozed. She spoke as though she was continuing a story. "I mean all this about the duel and that odious sister of his. She was as bad as he was. It's funny that old Becky should be such a nice old lady! Because she *is* a dear old thing, with her grand manners and old-fashioned language. Surely that must be John come back?" Alice said she would go and see, and came back reporting a negative. She remarked that little performances of this sort seemed to satisfy at the time. Just so we derive satisfaction from walking to the corner of the street to anticipate an expected return by a few seconds.

But when she came back she found the patient drowsing off. She roused up a little to say, "I do wish I could recollect the name of that woman at Kentish Town," and then became apparently unconscious.

It was clear to Alice that this vividly remembered narrative of sixty years past, heard then from the lips of an old lady of ninety, might put her in touch with some forgotten events of at least a hundred and thirty years ago! What might there not be, hanging on this frail old life? Her curiosity was intensely excited. The nurse also was eagerly on the *qui vive*. Between them they concerted a plan of action. As the patient had got this misconception about Alice being "Cynthia Luttrell" let her keep it! If it helped her on through the dangers of convalescence after the operation, so much the better. As to the discovery that she had been deceived in this, when she came to know the whole truth—indeed, as to *anything at all* making any difference, the idea was absurd. Let an imaginary "Cynthia Luttrell" be made a stepping-stone.

Alice, with her usual intrepidity, volunteered to live and sleep at the Asylum for the time being, as her presence was so clearly beneficial. The arrangement was easily made, and a messenger despatched to Harley Street with a letter, to bring back necessaries. When he got there, the only member of the family in the house happened to be Miss Lucy, waiting for friends to call for her to go to the Botanic Gardens. She read the letter and pocketed it, and despatched the goods; and when she rejoined her family (who were a little puzzled at Alice being so late) announced to them that Aunty Lissy was gone to Bedlam, and there was her letter if they liked to look at it!

Charles, when he came late in the evening, was much disquieted at this escapade of Alice's. "Just see what a little while ago she was ill herself," said he to his sister. But Peggy reassured him, telling him Rupert was driving down to the Asylum in the morning, and he had better stop and go with him. And as for Alice, she had been quite well and strong for three months past, and he needn't be an old fidget!

The steady drip of the rain which had begun again and threatened to go on through the night made the gloom gloomier at the Asylum. The ward, or room, the patient had been placed in had no other occupant than herself, the nurse, and Alice, for whom a bed had been prepared near by, while that of the nurse was concealed behind the screen. There was an evident animus on the patient's part against this woman, but feelings of this kind are so common in nerve and mental cases, that no importance was attached to it. The only concession made was that she was to be kept out of sight as much as possible; while Alice's soothing influence—which could not be gainsaid—was to be made the most of.

There was a small anteroom with an open fire in it, which was welcome; for the weather had gone bitterly cold, as well as rainy. The ward was well warmed, but a stove is not an open fire; and Alice and the nurse felt glad of the alternative. They satisfied themselves that the slightest sound from the patient's bed would reach them, and sat on late into the night, finding many things to talk about.

"You'll see it will be as I say," said Mrs. Gaisford. "She'll go back again on this conversation that happened immediately before the accident, and then get tired and fall asleep. She may never do anything else, all the rest of her life."

"But suppose her head gets stronger—you said why shouldn't it?"

"And I don't see why it shouldn't, but it may not. Predictions are not much good in cases of this sort. If it does, she'll remember just like you or me, and then she'll have to be told."

"It's very dreadful."

"So it is; but one is sure to have to put up with something, and it may as well be this as anything else. Was that her?" Alice went to see, but the figure on the bed was silent and motionless. She returned to the fireside, and settled down to a chat.

"How came you to go in for Mental Cases?" she asked. You see, during Alice's two years' training (at a London Hospital) she had fallen into sympathy with nursehood.

"I was a Mental Case myself. Here. Acute Suicidal Mania. Then I married one of the attendants." As Alice had made up her mind not to be surprised at anything, this was easy.

"Mr. Gaisford is at Witley just now. That's the convalescent Home. That's where I met him. We've no children. But I shouldn't have been the least afraid. I saw you thought of inheritance?" Alice nodded.

"There was nothing to inherit. I was as sane as you are now. But under the same circumstances you would try to kill yourself. It was the only thing a girl of sixteen, in her senses, could try to do, that I can see." Then, dropping her voice, though there was no one near, the madhouse nurse told Alice her story. It has nothing to do with ours; but, briefly, it was a tale of the sudden revelation, to a totally inexperienced girl, of the full resources of the Devil. We need neither tell it, nor dwell on it.

"He was a Churchwarden," said Mrs. Gaisford in conclusion, "great churchgoer—used to read prayers in our church. Man of fifty. Seven children. Said I had encouraged him."

"Oh dear! what a sickening world it is!" exclaimed Alice.

"That's exactly what I said, and felt. And that's what they settled I was mad for. They preached to me—said it was wicked to try and destroy myself."

"What did you say to them?"

"Said it was God's fault, not mine."

"What did they say to that?"

"They couldn't say anything. What was there to be said?" Alice wasn't prepared with an answer. "How long were you here?" she asked.

"Eighteen months. Then I was sent to Witley. By-the-bye, it was there I saw this case first. Dr. Fludyer had her sent down there for a change. He was curious to see if it would have any

effect. Her husband went down too. He always lived close to the case. Because there might have been a change."

"And he died sixteen years ago?"

"Quite that. Let's see! Yes—I've been married fourteen. It was then I met Gaisford. He was a young doctor—at least he would have been if he could have passed. But he was always ploughed, on Brain. It was a subject he had given special attention to, so he got a place here. Sir Rupert says he knows more about madness than all the staff put together."

"How came he to propose to you?"

"I know all about it, so I can tell you. He and two others were talking, in the garden. And they saw me on the lawn, with a friend. His friend said: 'I don't believe that Case is mad, or ever was. If she had a husband she would never try to pitch herself out of window.' My husband—that is, Mr. Gaisford—took a good look to make sure, and then said: 'I'll play you fifty up for which it's to be.' And they went to the billiard room, and he won in two breaks, and came across the lawn and asked me to marry him. It didn't take long."

When Alice told this to Charles, afterwards, he recalled how he had met Verrinder, on his way to Shellacombe, a few days after her misadventure at Surge Point. How things do intersect in this world!

The end of the story made Alice feel cheerful again. She could sleep now, she thought. So she went to bed, not far from the patient, for readiness' sake. Mrs. Gaisford said she would see the fire out, and then go too.

She was going to settle down to go to sleep, when the old lady spoke again, but, as she thought, not coherently. For what she said was, "I've just recollected the name of that Kentish Town cousin woman. It was Alice Kavanagh." She was mixing the recollection of what she had lately heard with the memories of sixty years back.

CHAPTER XL

HOW ALICE RAN AWAY, AND OLD JANE GUESSED. HOW CHARLES AND ALICE GOT PHOTOGRAPHED IN VERRINDER'S LODGINGS

ALICE lay down under the impression she could go to sleep on the spot, without more ado. As soon as her head reached the pillow, she found this was a mistake. The ceaseless drip of the rain, and some unwarrantable limb-twitchings without antecedents, had their say in the matter. But she found her way to dreamland in the end, and a very disagreeable dreamland it was. For there was a Hospital there made up of all her Hospitals, and Sir Rupert was lecturing on her smallpox marks, and all the students refused to kiss her on account of them, and she was sorry. Only she couldn't be sure whether it was Sir Rupert or that Churchwarden. She was hoping it was really the latter, when an intelligent nurse, with wings, suddenly said "Cynthia!" and she awoke with a start. In a few seconds Old Jane, who had spoken, again said "Cynthia!" and Alice said she was coming.

"Here I am, Mrs. Verrinder," said she, and was at the bedside in an instant.

"Would you light a candle, dear? I want to see if I can't get this thing on my head comfortabler. I was asleep."

The nurse was on the alert; but, true to the plan of campaign, had allowed Alice to go first. She came forward and whispered to Alice. "We must fuss a little, to satisfy her. We can't touch the bandages now." A little manipulation of this sort, and Old Jane, who probably was feeling restraint more as vitality increased, decided that that was much comfortabler. Mrs. Gaisford said, under her breath to Alice, that she would have been an enormously strong person, *had she lived* (sic!), and retired to her concealment, to take notes. Old Jane went on talking with less of apparent effort.

"I really am feeling better, dear. I think it's you. You do me good. Come and sit by me—touch me." Alice did so. "You know, dear, you mustn't think it was you I meant, when I said that about Christian-naming. I didn't want *you* to call me Mrs. Verrinder. *You* say Kate." Alice afterwards felt vain of her penetration. Instead of trying to find out what the incident was in last night's

conversation (sixty years ago), a thing of really no importance, she acted on the hint at once.

"Did I, dear Kate? I didn't know. I suppose it was because of the nurse. She's gone." How lucky, thought she, that she had not called her Jane; of course that was a sobriquet.

"I don't like her," said Old Jane. "But you are so nice. Now I want to tell you what your cousin Becky said. Fancy your not knowing about old Sir Cramer's will!"

"It *is* odd. But I've never heard a word of it."

"Well, you know, it was like this. Old Sir Cramer—that was his uncle, you know?—he was the man that married the great heiress and brought all the money into the family. Let me see! She was a Saxelby, and limped—not the Northallerton family—Gloucester people, I fancy."

Alice was so afraid the old memory would wander away into seductive genealogies, that she went the length of supporting the claims of the Gloucester people. But she need not have done this violence to her conscience. There was, behind the patient's readiness to converse about the last vivid recollection of her healthy, youthful life, a growing need for explanation of her surroundings. This had been kept in abeyance by suggestions that her husband's return was imminent, and it was clear that at any moment dissatisfaction might set in, and suspicion could not be headed off indefinitely. It seemed to Alice that a wave of misgiving passed through her mind at this moment. For there was a tone of distress in her voice as she continued.

"Perhaps, dear Cynthia, I had better not tell you now; another time might be better. I'll recollect it all for you. Is that nurse here? Oh no, I don't want her! I only wanted to know she wasn't listening." This was trying to an inexperienced liar. How Alice vowed to herself that she would never incur the like embarrassment again! It wasn't her own veracity she was concerned about. That might take its chance. It was the fear that if she ventured too far in an unexplored land of mendacity, she might lose her way or get stuck in a bog. She fell back on an ambiguity that seemed to admit everything, and assure sympathy. "Better speak low!" she said, and got nearer, as though to listen better. The old voice fell almost to a whisper.

"I don't want her to hear what I was going to say. I can't tell what it is, but I feel as if there was something wrong. It may be my head." Alice felt it would be quite safe to assent to this, and indeed laid stress upon it. But the reference to the head injury as a means of accounting for everything seemed to be losing force.

Old Jane fell back on the most troublesome point. "Where can John have gone, not to be back by now? If he had gone to the Gossetts', he certainly would have been back. Can he have gone to the Furnivals'?" Alice ventured on saying, "Yes! can he?" But she was sorry she had spoken at all, for the old woman, noting a sound in her voice, said: "You're not crying, dear? Not about me? I shall be all right soon when John comes back, and then we'll have the piano moved, and we'll try the duet in the front-room. That back-room was always bad for music." She went on with some references to the arrangements of her house. Alice did not understand clearly enough to recollect them, and Mrs. Gaisford could not hear. Then she said: "You know the front top room was to be the nursery—now we may never want it. No, dear Cynthia, don't now, don't! Not because of me!"—Alice made a shift to pull herself together, and speak courageously—it was a poor attempt. The old voice that went on was weak, but brave.—"You mustn't think that I shall fret about my baby. It was God's will. And the doctor said it could not have lived. . . . But I know John will fret—and then you know he may blame me for being so careless. I shall be so glad when he comes. . . . We used to talk about the little thing, and how nice one of our own would be. And if it was a girl it was to be called Fanny. And if a boy, Frank. And he wanted a girl, and I didn't care. . . . Oh, dear! it's all done with now. . . . Perhaps that's him?"

It was no use—Alice could hold out no longer. She felt the hysterical tears coming, and that come they must. She had presence of mind and voice enough to say, "Yes, Mrs. Gaisford!" as though she had been called; and then she slipped away into the anteroom, the door of which had been left unclosed, as the nurse had not thought it necessary to shut and lock it according to the usual rule, the outer door being locked and they being the only occupants. She had just time to close it, when she gave way to a torrent of tears. For the life of her she could not keep them back. But she could recover herself—would do so in a minute. Only give her a minute! Perhaps she was a little weakened since that illness, for all she had been so well for three months.

She felt it was best—if it could be done—to have her cry out in that minute. If it could not, what a useless girl was she in anything of this sort! And she had boasted to herself of her own strength, many a time. She gave way for the minute; then choked it back. "Courage now!" said or thought she to herself, and laid her hand on the knob of the door. Perhaps, please God, the old lady had drowsed off again.

But there was another hand on the other side. The door was opened from without and the nurse came in. Her face looked set and stony in the firelight, for the gas was turned down. She had been behind the screen, and had come out as Alice closed the door. The minute had been more than a minute.

Alice had heard no voices through the door, only a cry. But it was a solid door with a listed rim, and shut close. She saw by Mrs. Gaisford's face that something had passed, and that it had been of moment. Yet she started when, in reply to her questioning "Why?" that was a response to an admonitory finger that she pointed at as she asked it, came two words, "She's told!"

"Oh dear! it was my fault!" and truly, Alice fancied it was.

"It must have come," said the other. "Go in. She's quite quiet now." And Alice passed in, feeling that it would be no great wonder if the quietness were death.

But it was not. She had gone back into a semi-torpid state, and remained so. A shock that might have produced insensibility for a time in a person in full health had reacted in a greater degree on a system that was fighting for existence. When six hours later Sir Rupert arrived, accompanied by Charles, who had been feeling very uneasy about Alice, the patient had not moved nor spoken.

"We could hardly expect anything else," said Rupert. "And as you say, Mrs. Gaisford, it must have come, sooner or later. I don't think we need assume that it will be permanent."

"Won't she have to be told all over again?" asked Alice. "That's what I'm afraid of."

"Well, Aunty Lissy, don't let's beg and borrow troubles. What was it that passed, exactly, Mrs. Gaisford?"

"After Miss Kavanagh ran away? You did run away, Miss Kavanagh, now didn't you?"

"Simply turned tail and fled," said Alice. "I couldn't bear it!" And, indeed, Alice was holding very tight to Charles's arm, for protection against her own shaken nervous system. Mrs. Gaisford continued, stoically enough. It is possible that the patient's animus against her had contributed to her stoicism. On the other hand, attraction towards Alice had no doubt hastened the latter's collapse.

"I came out from the screen where I had been taking notes (here they are), and then immediately the old lady said: 'Why is Miss Luttrell crying? What have I done?'"

"Miss Luttrell?" exclaimed together Sir Rupert and Charles, both with surprise. But Sir Rupert's was only that another person had been in the room; Charles's astonished tone of voice went deeper. Sir Rupert said: "Let's have Miss Luttrell back then."

Charles answered Alice's "Why *whew-w-w,* Mr. Charley?" in a rapid undertone: "It's very queer! I'll tell after."

"There *was* no Miss Luttrell," said the nurse, incomprehensibly; and then Alice cleared up the situation.

"She took me for a girl named Cynthia Luttrell that she knew—sixty years ago!" Charles felt the hand on his arm tighten, as the speaker shuddered. "We let her think so. It seemed to soothe her. But I couldn't have kept it up. It must have come." Then Mrs. Gaisford went on with her report.

"I said, '*You* have done nothing, poor soul!' I couldn't help speaking so, Sir Rupert, but perhaps it wasn't cool judgment. She tried to sit up, and said—with a sort of indignation—'Why do you "poor soul" me, woman? Why am I to be "poor souled"?' I said, 'For God's sake be quiet, Ma'am, and I'll tell you all'—not meaning to tell quite the whole. She said, 'Something is being kept back from me'—and after a moment's pause (while I was trying to feel clear about it)—'I know it! My husband is dead?' It came so suddenly I could not speak and she cried out and fell back. And she hasn't moved since. Oh yes! I know she understood. She saw from my silence." This was in answer to a joint enquiry.

They approached the bed, where the figure lay, as still as before it had first spoken. There was no response to pressure or movement of the hand. But the pulse and heart-beat were regular, and the breathing steady. "Unconsciousness was instantaneous, eh, Fludyer?" said Sir Rupert to his colleague, who had come in in time to hear most of the story.

"I don't think the game's up, though, Johnson?"

"Nor I. She'll pull round in time. Hope she won't have to be told again!"

Decisions followed, touching action to be taken. Mrs. Gaisford to remain behind in constant watch. Sir Rupert to be driven rapidly away to an appointment, but willing and able to give Charles and Alice a lift as far as Eaton Square. Lift rejected, as not going home to the heart of the subject. No! Alice would leave her things in case of coming back, and you would take her for a little walk, Mr. Charley dear, wouldn't you, and then we would have a nice drive home in a hansom because it had stopped raining and was going to come out quite fine. Alice brightened up over the prospect. But it seemed horribly unfeeling to go away and leave Mrs. Gaisford all alone. Especially because the usual result of twelve hours of Alice had come to Mrs. Gaisford. She was in love, and Alice had to kiss the excellent woman for consolation. Then action was taken on the decisions. Sir Rupert was

whirled away Londonwards to fresh fields and consultations new, and Charles and Alice forsook Mrs. Gaisford and found themselves sauntering purposelessly in the opposite direction. Alice spoke first.

"Oh, if she might only die! Never come to at all!"

"Well-ll-ll! I don't know——"

"Oh yes! I know very well though. I'll tell you what I should really like, Mr. Charley."

"Tell away, darling!" Charles used to use all sorts of terms of endearment to Alice, especially when she was visibly in trouble. At this moment she was taking full leave to cry, as a release and luxury.

"I should like when I get to Harley Street to find a telegraph message to say she was gone." For in those days people didn't say wire, nor even telegram.

"Poor old lady! I wouldn't grudge her the pleasure of dying, Heaven knows! But I want to hear who Cynthia Luttrell was. Particularly because I remember poor Verrinder himself telling me the old No. 40 house belonged to a family of that name."

"Then that's why you said whew-w-w?"

"That is the reason I employed that expression, Madam. That alone was, I submit, a sufficient reason for the employment of that expression." Charles is making use, perhaps you may observe, of the mock-pompous phrasing he so often falls into when he is in a particularly good humour. He is now supremely happy, for he has got Alice all to himself, and though he is concerned at her distress about Old Jane, he knows it will clear off. Besides, this sauntering with Alice in streets unknown, without an idea where they will lead, or any scrutable purpose, exactly meets his views.

"I may mention, Miss Kavanagh, that if I hadn't said whew-w-w for that reason, I should have said it for another. So, as the sayin' is, it's as broad as it is long."

"Now, Mr. Charley dear, do come downstairs, and be a Christian—I mean tell me right off, and don't go round and round. I never met such an unmitigated circumference as you are in all my life."

"Very well then! As soon as we have not been run over by this cab, which is now approaching, I will throw off all disguise and speak candidly." And as soon as they have reached an opposite side of a road, Charles keeps his promise, in a dry business manner.

"Cynthia Luttrell was the name on one of the portraits Bauerstein bought at Verrinder's sale. It was written on the back, like

Phyllis Cartwright. Bauerstein may have it still. I couldn't say at this length of time whether it resembled your ugly little mug, or not." Alice's grave absorption in the subject ignores this unprovoked discourtesy. "She couldn't see it, I'm sure—the mug I mean. It must have been my voice. You know it must seem to her only like yesterday that she heard this Miss Luttrell's voice. I wonder if she is still living?"

"Most unlikely. Dr. Fludyer could not find a trace of any friend or connection."

"What was Sir Cramer Luttrell?"

"I don't know. I've never heard of him."

"She talked about him. He was a bad lot—a horrible man, she said—and his sister was as odious as himself. But let me tell you all as I recollect it." And thereon Alice gave all the fragments as they had come.

"It made me wish," said she, "that I had really understood better what we really do know, and what we don't, about the history of No. 40. Now I had quite forgotten that Mr. Verrinder told you the house had belonged to a family of Luttrells. Don't you know how children forget things one would think they would remember, and remember the most absurd things. Then when they hear things repeated after, they don't pay attention because they have heard them before, and they are grown-up people's things, and only belong to that obsolete race. At least I did. So, though I've heard it later, the story has never caught on properly."

"I tell you what, Alice-for-short," said Charles, "we won't do too much speculating about it—don't let's run the risk of making up a legend out of surmises, and then fancying we've heard it. We'll possess our souls in peace, and hope that poor old Jane may pull round enough to give us some more reminiscences. Fancy reaching back through a hundred and thirty years!"

"Very well then! Let it alone's the word. Now I tell you what I should like to do. We can't be far off where her husband went to live—I do feel curious to see the place."

The neighbourhood had lost the shadowy remains of a semi-suburban character that it still had when Charles and Jeff saw poor Verrinder's departure sixteen years before, and had become sheer unqualified town. But the row of houses (they found it with some difficulty) from one roof-top of which he had watched the madhouse dome for over thirty years—always hoping, never quite despairing—there it stood, still; one of those terraces that slowly, slowly, gives up its right to be called residential, and makes gradual concession to degrading miscellanies. Ground-floors become offices

where no man sleeps or dines; basements that were humble as mere kitchens thrust themselves forward and claim a status in commercial life as storage-room. Institutions are instituted, and supported (in vain) by Voluntary Contributions, on first-floors that will one day fall a prey to Dentists, or even to Clairvoyants. Second-floors submit to Milliners and Typewriters, and invite the Public up by an independent appeal on the door-post in polished brass. There too appear more bells than Poe ever wrote about, or Irving acted in—a rash of bells that makes you think before you ring. And at the door of the house Charles indentified was a top-top-top-bell that said with emphasis, "Photographer's Bell," and seemed to have no doubt at all about it. Charles remembered the place on the roof: just the place for a Photographic Studio.

"I should so like to see the rooms," Alice said. "Mightn't we go up?"

"We should have to be took," said Charles.

"Then let's be took," said Alice. And they rang the explicit bell, and it made a great noise somewhere. Then, to corroborate themselves, they went leisurely up the stairs.

They read the door-plate of the Institution on the first floor, and wondered at the keen insight of its founders into the needs of the human race. But Charles had forgotten its proper title before he got quite upstairs; for he called it the "Society for Providing Inexpensive Luncheons for Deserving Baritones," which appeared absurd. However, it didn't matter! They got to the photographer. And Charles represented, with perfect gravity, that he and Alice had met as strangers outside, and she had asked for his photograph.

Might they look out and see the view? Yes, they might. What was that large dome over yonder? "I see you're both strangers in this part of the world," said the photographer, trickling onto a glass, reflectively. "That place over there's Bedlam. Some people admire that dome very much. There was a man lived in these very rooms, years ago—an Artist, too, he was—only for the sake of the view. Thirty-odd years! Now, Sir, if you're ready, I am."

When a very promising negative had been secured, and Charles had written the address to which six copies were to be sent, he asked the photographer whether he had known the former tenant personally. "Rather!" was the reply. "Why—he killed himself with chloroform bought at our shop!"

Alice thought to herself that tragedy was easiest to bear with when she has the stage to herself. The clash with grotesquerie makes what is grisly in itself grislier still. She and Charles did not feel quite cheerful again till they were having lunch at Gatti's

in the Strand. Then they went to the National Gallery, and when they reappeared in Harley Street at past six o'clock, had to confess to having had a regular good outing.

"I'm quite in despair about them," said Peggy to her husband that night. "Are they going to go on like this for ever?"

"You be a sensible wench and let 'em alone," said Rupert. "They're as happy as ever they can be, and what more can you want?"

CHAPTER XLI

HOW OLD JANE PUT ON HER WIDOW'S WEEDS. AND SAW HERSELF IN THE GLASS. HOW ALICE AND OLD JANE RESIDED TEMPORARILY AT CHARLES'S HOUSE

It must be much less difficult to weave a fiction than to give a narrative of actual events. Our conviction is that the former would be easy by comparison. One could do as one pleased; and one's reader would have to accept one's word for the truth of statements inconsistent with one another, doing violence to his sense of probability, and not far apart enough for their discrepancy to remain unnoticed. Of course if any obligation rested on the writer of fiction to make improbable events seem probable, and give plausibility to outrages against understanding and experience, he would have his hands full.

With narrative of actual event, it is otherwise; that is to say, if the event is to be so narrated as not to seem improbable to any and every reader. We may as well say at once that in this narrative we have completely given up the idea of doing so—in fact we saw how impossible it would be soon after the first start. We can only go on, stupidly narrating what happened, and not allowing ourselves to be influenced towards curtailment of any portion by its intrinsic improbability. Our only motive in any omission is our wish to avoid prolixity.

Perhaps we ought to dwell at greater length on the long and careful nursing that followed the fearful shock poor old Jane, or Kate, had to endure—the shock that had to be endured sooner or later, and that chanced a few hours sooner; on the slow recovery and dawn of life in a changed world; on her life, in short, in the Asylum until she was cautiously removed from the awful home she never knew the name of, and the terrible companions in misfortune she had never seen.

But before we got so far forward as this, many things occurred that we should have liked to tell in full. We cannot do more than name them; or sketch them at most.

One was, the very painful interval in which Old Jane, though she knew of her husband's death, and of the fact that she had

passed some time before she was removed to "the Hospital," remained in complete ignorance of the duration of her unconsciousness. She knew that her husband had come to live close at hand, to watch for a possible revival; that he had been sleepless at night, had resorted to a powerful soporific, and had killed himself with an overdose; that Charles had made his acquaintance as a Student of the Royal Academy "where he went in the evening, because of his Life Studentship"; that "at first" it was not thought advisable to operate, but that her case attracted the attention of Sir Rupert Johnson; with the result that after much consultation, the operation was decided on, and was performed most successfully by Mr. Lionel Isaacson, the great surgeon; but though she was told all these things she was told nothing about times and seasons. Until she came to a knowledge of the truth about this, the way she was always fretting under discrepancies and impossibilities was most distressing. In the end came the inevitable revelation, and the manner of it was this:—

Clothes had been provided for her—the fact that it was a widow's wardrobe having removed many difficulties in choosing it. She had been induced to wear spectacles, for which the accident to the head was made responsible. But now the time had come when she was fit to move, without danger to the head. It was the only source of apprehension, for in all other respects her condition was marvellous; even her teeth being better than those of many young people. They had always been carefully seen to.

"She's a dear old thing," said Alice to Charles, "but what is so dreadful is that—except for the feel of it—she really has no means of knowing she isn't young. I know perfectly well that the image she has of herself is that of a young widow—probably very pretty. In fact she as good as says she was thought so—*she* calls it *is*." No doubt Alice had come to rank her as a "dear old thing" the more readily that she herself had become, in the old lady's eyes, such a very dear young thing. In fact the whole of the poor old soul had gone out in love to Alice—she was its resource and refuge in a barren land of bitter waters; the one blue gleam in a winter sky.

So, the trying on of her new dress presented itself to the old mind, that had not aged with the body it dwelt in, exactly as it would have done to any other young woman of twenty-four or -five; to Alice, for instance, had her case been alike, lapse of unknown time apart. We do not believe that under any conceivable circumstances is a young woman, who thinks of herself as comely, absolutely indifferent to a new dress. Probably Old Jane was as nearly

indifferent as any recently bereaved widow ever was. But she was curious to see how the dress fitted, for all that.

"Isn't the stuff heavy?" she said, "and won't it be too tight in front if I ever get any flesh on my bones again? I've got dreadfully thin—dreadfully! Isn't it a very long waist? And such a lot of skirts!"

"It's much the same as mine, dear Kate. But you're so weak, you know. You won't feel the weight when you get a bit stronger." So spoke Alice, who, of course, had come expressly to see it tried. But she felt like the skater on ice that scarcely bears him. Her heart quite failed her as Old Jane, who could now move about without much difficulty, "though feeling very strange," worked gradually over towards a full-length mirror that had come from Heaven knows what purpose connected with insanity, for her to see herself in. She was preoccupied and distressed with her armpits.

"It must be let out a little on this side," she said, "it cuts under the arms. But it will do very well for now. They always are so troublesome about that. I have to speak every time, and it never does any good; and I do like room. *Who is that?*"

Alice's heart was quaking, and she could not speak. Mrs. Gaisford spoke: "Who is what, Mrs. Verrinder?" Old Jane, instead of going nearer to the glass, looked all round behind her.

"I would have sworn," said she, "that I saw the reflection of a new old lady, with white hair, in the glass. Where is she?"

"There is no one here but ourselves," said the nurse.

"How very odd!" she replied. "I would have sworn it." And then she approached nearer to the mirror; but, always preoccupied with that vexatious armpit, she did not look up till she got quite close. Then she broke into an hysterical laugh, more painful to hear than any cry of pain.

"Oh, Cynthia—oh, Cynthia—it's *me!*" For she more often called Alice Cynthia than not, although she knew. Alice helped her as she staggered, and guided her, trembling like an aspen-leaf, to a chair. The old hands clung to her as she kissed the wrinkled face. She could not speak—the nurse did not. Old Jane spoke first, through gasps that caught her voice:—

"Oh now—oh now—you will tell me—you will tell me all! I knew there was *something*—you *will* tell?—will you not?" And then as one who struggles for self-control, she asked again the question she had asked in the first speech that had followed her sixty years of silence, *"What is it?"*

"Yes—I will tell you, dear Kate. I will tell you all!" And Alice, recovering herself, told in few and resolute words the story as we

know it. She flinched at nothing, and ended, "I was near telling it you all long ago, dear Kate. But I couldn't find the heart."

"And that is quite all?" asked Old Jane, when she had finished. She seemed to have become much calmer.

"Quite all!"

"Help me across, that I may look again." She spoke as being curious to see. There was little fear in her voice. "Stand by me, dear child, so! Then I shall see both at once. And that is you, and that is me! A little further back I shall see plainer. The glasses are the wrong focus for this distance." She stood with Alice's hand pressed close to her, for perhaps two minutes, and then said: "The dress is not cut like my grey poplin. But it will do very well—only, John is not here now. . . ."

The only scheme that had recommended itself for disposing of the old lady on leaving the Asylum was that she should go provisionally to Charles's house; and accordingly a few hours later she was on her way there with Alice and Mrs. Gaisford, who were glad on the whole that their companion failed to identify places and buildings. Perhaps dim eyesight had more to do with this than lack of memory. Otherwise she might, by crossing the river, have got a clue to the name of the Hospital she came from, which they had managed to keep back. For all that skill and never-tiring patience can do in the most perfect of modern Hospitals, to alleviate the lot of the most afflicted of mankind, fails to counteract the terror of the name Bedlam.

She did not really grasp the position—how could she? That Charles (whom she knew by no other name as yet) and Alice (whom she knew now to be Alice Kavanagh—though she always seemed puzzled by the name) were most hospitably taking her in—this she understood. And also that her stay was to last until such time as some shadowy permanent arrangement could be made; an arrangement dependent on the discovery of a class or section of society which the old lady spoke of as "my relatives." But she did not seem impressed by her family's neglect of her in the Hospital, nor by its delay in turning up to relieve her hosts of her presence. She shelved anything that threatened a difficult problem, nearly always. This was a great relief to Alice—was, as she said, half the battle. She used this expression so often in connection with Mrs. Verrinder, that Charles had to point out that the number of halves possible, even to battles, is limited.

Whatever fraction of the battle it was, this readiness to be quiet under accomplished facts was voted a "let-off" to the bystanders

in what might else have proved an embarrassment in more than one case. She accepted the whole of the relations between those who came to see her, without curiosity. And sometimes a good deal of explaining was wanted, or would have been had her mind been fully active. Such a mind might have enquired, restlessly, what was Alice to Charles, or Charles to Alice? What was Alice's position at Harley Street? Who or what was Pierre? But Old Jane never asked any questions. She christened Charles "Mr. Kavanagh" at first, but when she found this was wrong, she accepted him as Mr. Heath, without renaming Alice "Mrs. Heath," although Alice more than once thought she detected a disposition to do so. In truth, Alice and Charles might have puzzled any mere outsider.

Mrs. Gaisford, towards whom her patient had relented, accompanied her to Charles's as what might be called a nurse of first instance, without intention to remain long in charge. Peggy (and Sir Rupert acting under her orders) had negotiated this in the course of several visits to the Asylum, which had been fully appreciated by Old Jane. "How sweet your Aunt is!" said the latter to Alice after Lady Johnson's first visit. "She does me good." And Alice let the accusation of Aunthood remain undefended. But Peggy was not without a distinct motive in urging this arrangement. She took alarm at the alternative, which appeared to be that Alice should go instead.

"If Alice goes and lives at Charles's," said she, emphatically, to her husband, "there will simply be *no chance at all!*"

"I should have thought the more they saw each other the better—if that's your game?"

"Of course it's my game, darling. But you are such a stupid old dear! Can't you see that if they go on much longer like this they'll get grimed in, and there they'll stick, like a couple of geese?"

"You express it beautifully, dearest! Doesn't your mamma express herself beautifully, Alcey?" This was to the only other person present, who seemed to hold aloof from the conversation, and to be pursuing a detached line of thought. "Me and Phifulps wants the ciprum on the deery cake between us," she says, quietly but firmly.

"You delicious little greedy," says her mother; "you know perfectly well you only put your sister in to save appearances—at any rate you shall not have it, ducky, till she comes. That's flat!" For Alcey has suggested that she should become her sister's bailee in the matter of the citron on the Madeira cake, by holding out her hand to receive it.

"Your papa knows perfectly what I mean, Alcey—and you know he does! And you know, Dr. Jomson, if Charley and Alice could be dragged apart, one to Jericho and the other to Coventry, he'd write next day to say he couldn't live without her, and she must come at once and make the usual arrangement. Most likely she'd have written already. But if she's going to live in his house——! Another cup of tea?"

"Yes—look alive! Because I must run. I vote for letting 'em alone. It's strictly—eh?"

"My dear! of course it is! If it isn't correct with an old lady of eighty-six there, it never will be. Besides——! However, there's Phillips coming and we mustn't talk. That child's getting so sharp she knows absolutely everything. She's five next month."

But there remains a thoughtful troubled look on the beautiful face, which we, who know things, know to mean, "Oh, Charley and Alice—how you are wasting the precious hours! And here you are, constructing a new *impasse,* a stupid deadlock that will just spoil all, and take away the last chance for good!"

Alcey and Phillips got the citron off the Madeira cake, between them, and Alcey got most. And Aunt Lissy announced that evening that she was going to camp out for a bit at Acacia Road, just till old Mrs. Verrinder had had time to turn round, and get used to things. And she kissed the whole family, to console them for her impending absence.

And thus it came to pass that in the next chapter we shall have to speak of Alice and old Mrs. Verrinder as residing temporarily (with a sort of firmness in the temporariness) at Charles's house in St. John's Wood. Charles did not trouble much about the extra expense; for, thanks to Alice's discovery of a new employment for him, he was making huge sums of money; three or four hundred a year, Report said. She always deals in round numbers. Anyhow Charles was quite happy about his expenses. And it was well that he should rejoice in Alice while she lasted, for it was just as like as not that when she married he would see little or nothing more of her.

"Little or nothing more" of Alice! Oh, but his heart was sore to think of it! But sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof, and—after all—there *was* nothing, at present!

CHAPTER XLII

OF THE RUIN OF CHARLES'S ART. HOW ABOUT OLD JANE'S MEMORIES? BEST TAKE HER TO NO. 40

It was near midsummer of the year in which Old Jane was operated on before Charles's household could be said to have settled down to the course it intended to pursue. Everybody was contented with it inside the family—only, you must discount something from the satisfaction of Harley Street, which had lost a great deal of Alice; more than it could afford. But it would have been worse, "if Mr. Alice." We borrow a phrase of Charles. As for him, if he had had to choose between giving up Alice (to any not impossible he) and accommodating all Bedlam's discharged patients, he would have chosen the latter. And as for Alice, our suspicion is, that though she felt for Harley Street, she consoled herself with the recollection that it was only a shilling cab; and that she really was determined to get as much Mr. Charley as she possibly could, until she (and Peggy, she chose to think) should succeed in their endeavours to consign Charles to some uncomfortable female with gifts, or exalted motives, or Property—or something else Charles would care nothing about. Provisionally, she felt divided between the two establishments, which she spoke of respectively as Harley Street and Charley Street.

You may be sure that the *ménage* in Charley Street was the subject of much comment and criticism; had it been a menagerie it could not have attracted much more attention. Besides, another subject at the same time kept Charles under discussion among his friends: namely, his extraordinary and unanticipated success in Literature. Our old friend Jeff, of whom we have seen nothing lately, took a gloomy view of the outlook, on behalf of the Fine Arts. He had a low opinion of Literature.

"'Eath'll never do any more work now," said he, regretfully, to his wife. "He's done for!" And the sensible Dorothea, whom five children had assisted to an expansive maturity, remarked with some, but not much, diffidence: "Perhaps nobody will be any the worse."

"I don't know, Dolly!—I, don't, know, Dolly!—No! I do *not*

know about that. There was a Quality in 'Eath's work that marked the man——"

"Didn't you say, Jeffrey, that he couldn't draw; nor paint; nor compose?"

"I did, my dear! Right you are. But with it all there was a Quality. A something you don't often meet with. Not a thing the untrained eye can see right off. You are incredulous, Mrs. Jerrythought."

"No, my dear, I dare say it's all right." But Jeff feels that the subject cannot be left stranded in this flat and unsatisfactory condition. It has to be illuminated by something that it is not given to normal minds to attach any intelligible meaning to. He turns the searchlight of a Higher Criticism upon it.

"What was Wilkinson Foster sayin'—in that critique of the New Barnet School? Depend on it that's the point. That's the rock Charley 'Eath splits upon, Literary Art, mind you! It always ends in neglect of Values. Once you begin that game, it's all up. But Charley's work is full of Quality." And Jeff, who is smoking in a garden-hammock on his own lawn at St. John's Wood, on a beautiful summer evening, a short time after Charles's first story had such a prodigious run, and watching a spirited rally in a game of lawn-tennis between his eldest girl and a couple of young male appreciators, who have come on their bicycles and don't mean to go, dedicates a sigh and a headshake to the memory of Charles's ruined art. The sensible Dorothea gave up the Fine Arts when she married, and doesn't trouble about them now. But her interest in her fellow-creatures is strong, and she always diverts all conversation to Humanity. She is neither impressive nor shrewd of tongue, so one wonders that she always succeeds. But she does! And it must be something in the subject. It's easy, this time.

"Can you make the old lady out, Jeffrey?"

"No—yes—that is, stop a minute!"—Jeff is pitting the duration of his tobacco-smoke rings against the rallies of the lawn-tennis, and the rings always beat. "That one's lasted out a rally, and shoutin' fifteen-love, and crossin' over. No, I can't make her out."

"What did he tell you?"

"She ain't a relative——"

"No. I know that. But what *did* he tell you?"

"He was rather close about her. But she's old Mrs. Verrinder, and she's had a long illness. That's why she's so rum in her manner. She don't seem ill—not for an old lady of eighty-six."

"Of course one can understand why Mr. Heath has her there; only I don't see the necessity for it. After all, Alice is the same

as one of the family. And every one thinks they're uncle and niece——"

"What's all that got to do with the turn out?"

"Why everything—don't you see, Jeffrey? Mr. Heath wants Alice there, and fancies he ought to have some older person in the house. *I* don't see why, but he thinks so——"

"Isn't it runnin' it rather 'ard to make it an eighty-sixer? I should have thought forty-two—forty-three—or fifty for strangers! Plenty! But, him a widower and all! 'Ooky!"

"But where did he get her from? She must be accountable, somehow."

"Sister Peggy fished her up. Or their friend Dr. Fludyer——"

"Stop!"—Mrs. Jerrythought points at her husband's watch-pocket, while her eye fixes him to attention.—"That doctor that came to 40, years and ages ago, and you witnessed a transfer thing for him—he was Fludyer! You told me——"

"Well—what of that?"

"Why, of course! It was about that poor fellow that committed suicide—you remember *him?*"

"Perfectly. I remember all about it."

"Well—how slow you are! What was his name?"

"Callender." This is an absurd lapse of memory on Jeff's part, and his wife points out that though the name Callender occurred about the time of the suicide in question, it was in quite another connection. That was Edith Callender, doesn't he remember, that was to have married Captain Bradbury, and took to homœopathy? Of course that queer artist's name was Verrinder, and this must be his mother, or his aunt. But Jeff won't acknowledge his mistake.

"No—it was Callender, not Verrinder. I noticed partic'larly at the time that it wasn't Verrinder. Besides, it was Captain Bradley, not Bradbury."

"So it was. He was spooney about Lady Johnson. So were others." Dorothea nods, with insight. Jeff doesn't disguise the point.

"So were others," he admits. And Dorothea says nobody wonders at it, and he needn't look so guilty. Then compromise becomes possible about the names; Jeff gives up Callender, in return for his wife surrendering Bradbury.

"I thought her rather a sweet old lady," says she, when this is settled. "Only so queer! I couldn't make out what she meant sometimes. What was that she said about 'the poor Queen'? Did you understand?"

"No—*I* couldn't make that out. Nor what she was saying about the new theatre. What new theatre? There's not been any theatre burned, neither."

"And about some shocking murder of a Member of Parliament. There was nothing in the newspaper. What name was it she said? Percy, wasn't it?"

"Yes—Percy. *I* saw nothing in the paper!"

It was little wonder they were puzzled. For the "poor Queen" was Queen Caroline, and the New Theatre was Drury Lane, and "Percy" was Spencer Perceval. And they were all things of yesterday to poor old Jane. She had not had time yet to get abreast of the age she found herself suddenly landed in, sixty years after her death—for that was what it amounted to.

We are sorry that Mr. and Mrs. Jerrythought, of Circus Road, St. John's Wood, conversed no further about the new inmate at their neighbour's in Acacia Road. They went on to consider how far Kit Pope, who was playing lawn-tennis, was "desirable." He was desirous, no doubt. Jeff said he really didn't see that it mattered what a young man's father was like. And his wife said if they didn't stop "it" now, it wouldn't be any good. Did Jeff hear *that*? He was calling her Jessie already! However, these young people really don't come into the story. They are perfectly happy just now, and what more can they want? And Jessie wasn't sixteen, so there!

Kit Pope's objectionable father was very curious indeed when he heard that a sing'ler old lady Mr. Heath had got from somewhere, who had known No. 40 when she was girl, was coming to see the house. So was Mr. Chappell, but much more temperately.

"No," said the former to the latter, in answer to a question, "I can't say I've exactly seen the old party myself. But I've had a sort of squintindicular view of her (puttin' it metaphorically) owing to that young jackanapes of a son of mine. He's always flandering round after that little Jessie girl of Jeff's at Circus Road, and *she's* seen her to talk to. Then of course she tells Kit, and Kit he tells Gwen, and Gwen she tells her mother and your faithful servant, Sir. Prodoocin' the impression of a piece of 'oary antiquity—relict of a bygone earer. You'll be interested, Mr. Chappell, without bein' enthoosiastic. After knowin' you many years, Mr. Chappell, I am quorlified to say that enthusiasm is not your gag. Can't say I've seen her though, so far! Name of Verrinder."

"Verrinder? Hum! Feel as if I'd heard the name, too."—And Mr. Chappell, who was writing Perpendicular lettering on a large

telegraph-tape that took two Angels to carry it, laid down his pencil to think more easily. It didn't seem to help him, for he presently took it up again, with the remark: "Felt as if I'd heard the name."

"*I* was tryin' to think, too," said Mr. Pope. But it was quite three minutes before thought, accompanied only by the ticking of the clock on the chimney-piece, fructified. Then each exclaimed that he had "got it." It was a brain-wave, evidently.

"Who do you make it out to be?" asked Mr. Pope.

"Bauerstein's pictures he bought, years ago, at that sale at Newington Butts—*he* was Verrinder!"

"That's the beggar, Sir! As large as life. I knew it was him." Which was palpably a lie, taken literally; but was a *façon-de-parler* that passed muster, taken leniently. Mr. Chappell did not cavil, and his partner continued: "It connects itself with the Bones, to my mind. But as to *how,* I couldn't say off-hand. No 'urry." Presently he seems to think he has been asked a question, which is not the case, and goes on: "What Bones? Why, *our* Bones, on the premises. Whose Bones did you think? We're the only house with any Bones."

The reason we have interleaved these fragmentary scraps of interviews, is our wish that you should not be blind to the impression Old Jane produced on casual visitors at Charley Street. During the first fortnight, when Mrs. Gaisford was still in evidence in nurse's costume, she was obviously an invalid, though not incapacitated. When Mrs. Gaisford tore herself away with tears, vowing she would never have such a happy time again, the old lady seemed really on her way to as much health and strength as her eighty-six years could be expected to allow. Doctors and nurse alike thought that the careful systematic routine of the Hospital had had a preservative character, and that her physique was really in better form than if it had had to endure the dangers and exhaustions of a normal life. Mrs. Gaisford (whose strained relations with her patient had died a natural death) was perfectly right in her surmise that if the brain recovered she would have nothing the matter with her. She was so well, when the nurse went, that she was much distressed in her mind about what gratuity she should give her, and borrowed a sovereign of Alice (to be repaid by her shadowy relatives), which Mrs. Gaisford accepted with gratitude and promptly brought back to Alice, who gave her a kiss instead.

Morally, she was sweet-tempered and tractable. She complained much of her inability to use her hands; though in truth their resumption of vitality was far more rapid than could have been

anticipated. Her general attitude of mind and feeling seemed to be that which sometimes follows on an overwhelming shock; an equable acquiescence in an existence that had to be completed, accepting slight temporary interests as they accrued, but without anything that could be interpreted as joy or sorrow. The nearest approach to the former was discernible in her intense love for Alice; while the latter had completely permeated the whole atmosphere of her existence—even as a fog is uniformity with one incident only, a disc of sun that is one spot in an expanse. Alice was the sun in this case; and, as was natural, she grew very fond of the poor old wreck; and strove always to bear in mind that she must needs think of her, not as ancestral, but as a contemporary. Her old mind, she remembered, was twenty-six, not eighty-six.

The impression produced on introduction was that of a pretty, very old lady, with very white hair and most picturesque wrinkles, but little fallen away in the lower part of the face. She had a good deal of snow-white eyebrow; none of the sternness of face so often associated with old age—the expression either negatively sweet as in sculptured effigies, or more actively breaking into what Charles called a submissive smile. There was something about her that made it most difficult for him to think of her as having been the wife of that odd old Life Student at the Royal Academy. But this very something quite explained why Verrinder had never faltered in his life-long vigil; why he had thought that any chance, however small, of any slightest revival, was still the best chance left for him on earth.

The slaves that we are of the matter that encloses us! Think of that one undetected contusion and all it meant!

So long a time passed at Charley Street without any hint of an allusion to the Luttrells and the story about Cousin Becky and the ring, that both Charles and Alice began to feel afraid that it might never revive in the old lady's mind. They did not like to make open attempts to stir up her memory and put her again upon narrating it, for fear that in the attempt to recall it her recollection should become confused. They felt that the more spontaneously she returned to it, the better the chance of a clear and connected narrative.

"Much better not fidget her," said Sir Rupert. "If it doesn't occur yet awhile it doesn't the least follow that it won't be as clear when it comes. Give her time. But I don't see why you shouldn't suggest it. Why not take her on a visit to the old house? Ten chances to one it would all come back!"

This was asked by Sir Rupert on more than one occasion, and the last time he asked it Alice, who was keeping well in touch with Harley Street by making afternoon-tea there nearly every day, paused with the great medico's second lump of sugar in the tongs to reply: "Because it is so *awfully* grisly." And she went as far as she dared (for fear of spilling the tea) towards acting a shudder. Peggy did it for her, being free from tea-cups. Then she enlarged upon the grisliness.

"Just fancy, Dr. Jomson! she's never been in that house since she married, and there's the room her father painted in, and she'll be able to tell which her bedroom was, and where they sat in the evening, and all sorts of things."

"And why shouldn't she?"

"Isn't he opaque, Mother Peggy? Well then—because I should burst, you stupid man. Can't you see?"

"Of course Alice would burst. I can quite see that. I should, myself!"—It was Peggy who said this.

"Of course *you* would, darling," replied her husband, "but I thought Alice was rolled steel plates."

"So I am, as a general rule. But there are limits even to rolled steel plates." Rupert takes up a brutal attitude.

"If you *do* burst, what does it matter?" says he. On which Alice says then she'll burst. "I'm always ready," she adds, "to sacrifice myself and jump into holes, like Thingummybob!" Marcus Curtius, possibly.

Peggy thought to herself she would really like to come too, if the truth were told, and said so. Curiosity is a powerful incentive. But Alice ruled Peggy out, affectionately.

"Don't you see, darling, the fewer there are, the better for the chances! *I* think only me and Mr. Charley——"

"Very well, dear; only you and Mr. Charley."

"You'll see he'll think so too." For Alice had no sooner excluded Peggy than she felt sorry for her, and wasn't sure. So she built in a moral support. But Lady Johnson's mind had wandered from the point, and she was thinking to herself: "If Alice would only drop 'Mr. Charley' there might be a chance!" For the use of this prefix to her brother's name was a constant affirmation and register of the way in which Alice thought of herself: she was still the little girl with the beer-jug, and he was her saviour from a hideous might-have-been that ran alongside of her as she lived. As long as she had this idea and was scheming other schemes for Charles's happiness, and as long as he was nursing his belief in his own nullity, and watching for a human perfection, who was to

claim Alice on his merits—why, there simply *was* no chance! If she would only once call him Charley without the 'Mr'!

But there was consolation too in the assurance with which Alice said, "He's sure to look in for me, and you'll see if he doesn't say exactly the same as I do"; and also in Charles's voice, when he came an hour later, saying in the passage below: "Miss Kavanagh here, Handsworth? Is your Aunt Alice-for-short here, Juicy?"—the first form of the question making a parade of unconcern, the second containing an audible caress.

"Yes, Uncle Charley, and she wants you directly. How you scratch! It's settled you're to take old Mrs. Verrinder to-morrow at three-thirty to your Studio. To see your pictures and to see all over the house. And she's not to be flustered for fear she shouldn't tell about her Cousin Becky's first ball."

Charles, as he went upstairs partly towed by Miss Lucy the predominant, thought to himself: "A hundred and thirty years ago!"

CHAPTER XLIII

OLD JANE'S VISIT TO HER HOME OF SEVENTY YEARS AGO. A PEEP INTO THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY. WHO THE GHOST WAS, UNDER THE LITTLE DANCING FIGURE. HOW LAVINIA SAT IN THE CHAIR AGAIN

As Miss Lucy had said it, it was no use contesting the point. When Charles arrived in the drawing-room, he found that that dictatrix was correct in the main; only, she had herself fixed the date, which had not been spoken of. The final decision was—sometime next week. Peggy would come and drive Alice and Mrs. Verrinder down, and go on herself. Oh no! she wouldn't come in! Now she thought of it she saw Alice was right. But Juicy might go—she wasn't like a grown-up person. And she was sharp, and would do to recollect everything. Juicy pocketed the affront to her dignity in consideration of the concession that accompanied it.

And thus it was settled, after the lapse of a long lifetime, that Katharine Verrinder, *née* ———, should re-enter the house she passed her youth in—the house she left, more than sixty years ago, a headstrong young girl, probably madly in love with her equally infatuated companion.

Charles and Alice discussed, on their way back to Charley Street that evening, whether it would be best to tell her that the house had been identified by her husband, when at work in the Painting-School with Charles, or simply to take her to see his pictures, and leave her to find it out. If she did not, they could tell after. So they decided on the latter. When they told her of the projected expedition, she showed no surprise, taking it equably as she did all things now. There was a little stress laid on her readiness to go, but both her hearers imputed it to a desire to seem courteously anxious to see Charles's pictures.

"You know, I daresay," she said, "that my dear husband was a painter. So is my father."

She knew, or had known that her father was long dead, with the rest of her story. But she was not able to maintain her grasp of the facts, with the exception of the one that absorbed and superseded all others, her husband's death. That was never absent.

"I used always to be in Studios once. Where did you say yours was, Mr. Heath?"

"In X—— Street, not very far from Soho Square."

"Oh, but I know! I *ought* to know—for that was where my father lived. At number seven. What is your number?"

"Number forty."

"Quite up the street. But we might go to look at the outside of my father's house. He is dead—you know?" She had remembered that she knew he was dead, but not who had told her. "Perhaps they would let us just look in—the new people. I should so like my dear Cynthia to see over it. My darling Cynthia!" Image to yourself Alice sitting at the feet of an old lady whom you at once call a dear old lady, whose almost transparent hand smooths over the mouse-coloured hair that has a touch of chestnut, and then caresses the faintly marked cheek below. We want you to get rid, as far as possible, of the idea of a patient in a hospital ward. You may add a mental portrait of Charles, as this narrative has made you think of him, with eyes of much contentment resting on Alice through a pair of double-lensed spectacles—a line through the middle. Make him square and strong-built, and of an age you might guess to be forty. Don't put too much gray in his brown beard. Give him a meerschaum pipe. You may chance on a good group, true enough to nature. We know we describe badly; and shall think we have not succeeded at all in our description if it has not produced an impression of something strange about the three—something that does not belong to a very pretty young woman, a normal grandmother, and a good-looking husband in spectacles fifteen years her senior, only that doesn't matter. The oddity of it all, nevertheless, should hardly be within guessing range; for (we ask you) could it have been guessed?

Alice kissed old Kate's hand, to cheer her up. "They'll show us the house if we tell them," she says, and adds: "If they're not Christians, at least they're human." But obviously it isn't fair to condemn these hypothetical people unheard, and they lapse.

"I daresay, dear Cynthia—(I know you're Alice you know, but I like to call you Cynthia)—I daresay it will all seem very strange to go back there now my father's dead."

"Very strange—it must."

"I wonder if they've altered the place, the new people. If they have, I don't think I shall like it. You see, I've been there nearly all my life."

"I should think, Mrs. Verrinder," Charles says, "that what will strike you most will be the way the whole neighbourhood has been built up."

"Ah, yes! I daresay they've built all over those pretty Paddington fields where we used to walk—John and I. I shouldn't wonder."

Alice said to Charles afterwards: "When she talks like that it's you and me that want to cry. *She* goes on quite quietly." And Charles said: "She only feels *here* provisionally, I suppose!" To which Alice replied: "Something of that sort, and it's not to last."

When the carriage called with Lady Johnson and her eldest daughter in it, to drive Alice and that odd old Mrs. Verrinder to No. 40 X—— Street, the old lady walked downstairs quite by herself; and we suspect (for we have only surmise to guide us about the working of old Kate's mind) that she only accepted assistance into the carriage in order not to hurt Lucy's feelings, who offered it. This young person conceived of herself as in charge of the expedition, and responsible for the log-book. If she had been scheming to write a History of My Own Times and leave out nothing, she could not have been more attentive and watchful.

She gave the old lady a good deal of information about the buildings and places they passed, which might well have puzzled a clearer mind, assigning to Regents Park and the Church in Langham Place dates anterior to the Stuarts; whereas, they had no existence, or very little, till Old Jane's had practically ceased. Presently the latter closed her eyes, perhaps quite bewildered, and did not open them till the carriage stopped at No. 40. Then she looked out and said: "I hope they will let us in." Alice said: "But this is Mr. Charley's Studio—this is number forty. We'll go to your old house after. Or shall we go now? Stop, Hutchins! We'll go on to number seven and come here after." For Alice continued a little mixed in her mind about how much was known of the relations between No. 40 and the Verrinders.

"But this *is* our old house!" said Mrs. Verrinder, quite collectedly. "I know it by the corner, and those things there." She pointed at the extinguishers on either side of the entrance. "You know once there were no street-lamps, before we were born, and the running footmen used those to put their torches out." Alice hesitated. Peggy and Miss Lucy looked at one another. None was so quick to solve the mystery as the old lady herself.

"I see, darling Cynthia," she said, "they've changed the numbers. It's the very same house. Now how strange that does seem!" It did.

Lady Johnson drove away to her Institution: have we ever mentioned it? It was a home for the Children of Drunken Parents,

and had been in the newspapers several times for interfering with the liberty of the subject. But the subjects' parents disappointed their backers by always coming to the scratch filthily drunk. Peggy was driven off, thinking of the Drunken Parent who had been carried out half-dead between those extinguishers, so many years ago now; and how, had Rupert only chanced (even then) to come across the old lady who had just passed in, there might still have been a measure of life left for her and her husband, who would not then have needed to play fast and loose with chloroform. Presently she got to the Institution, and forgot it all in her delight at a new male refugee of four and a half, who was being washed for the first time in his life, and making statements about which of the attendants and visitors he could foight. "What very nice chunky children inebriates do contrive to have sometimes!" she said.

And Katharine Verrinder stood on the threshold of the house she left near seventy years ago! There was something so creepy in the reality of the place, the actuality of the Old Jane who had come out as Young Kate, that Alice felt quite sick and dizzy as she thought of it. She must talk and ask questions for relief. Which was the dining-room in Kate's time? This on the right. But the big room along the passage was really the finest room in the house—shouldn't we go in and see it? Alice said yes—but hadn't we better do that when Mr. Charley had given us a cup of tea upstairs in the Studio? Yes—suppose he did—and then we could come down after.

Mrs. Verrinder did not seem much impressed with Charles's pictures, possibly not so much because they were not good pictures, as because they were not of any school she had been familiar with in her youth. She constantly lost sight of what she would perceive at once after a moment's thought, simply because it was not humanly possibly to be always on the watch for contingencies evolved by a negative, for that was what the blank in her life presented to her. It was not like keeping a term of imprisonment in mind. That would have been a tangible fact, however monotonous and however difficult to assign its duration. She had stopped suddenly and begun again like a clock, and the pause was mere vacuum. So when she said to Charles that his work was a little like young Mr. Haydon's, she spoke as taking it for granted that Mr. Haydon might still be at work in the next street, for anything that appeared to the contrary. When Charles said: "Benjamin Robert Haydon?" as a question, she replied: "I think his name is Benjamin." They allowed things of this sort to pass, as much as

possible; there was no object in constantly reminding her of the terms she had to live on.

The interest revived seemed to act more as a stimulant to vitality than as a source of pain, and this was a great relief to Alice. She soon saw that anything like a break-down on the old lady's part was not to be apprehended, and even did not hesitate to suggest an inspection of the rooms upstairs. Charles said they were full of work-people, doing stained glass. This rather excited her curiosity, and the ascent was made. Some young men who were painting quarries in one upper room were rather astonished when a picturesque old white-headed person looked in and said: "This is my bedroom."

She told, fragmentarily, how the Luttrell family to whom the house had belonged at the time it was built had squandered, gambled away, or sold, all their property; until at last what was left of it, chiefly this house and some farms in Yorkshire, was the sole property of the only survivor of the family, by name Miss Rebecca Luttrell, who had let the house to her father. "We were very intimate with her, John and me," she said, "and she tried to make it up with my father. But, ah, dear me! how obstinate he was!"—"She," of course, was Cynthia's "cousin Becky."

They were coming slowly down from the attics, and passing the room the Miss Prynnes had slept in, when Mrs. Verrinder stopped and said: "We used always to call this room Aunt Esther's room. She was Mrs. Greville Kaimes, whose husband was killed in a duel. It made a great talk—but I told you all this before?"—she stopped suddenly. "Only I can't recollect when."

"It was at the Hospital, dear Kate. When you were in such pain with your head. No wonder you don't recollect!"

"I remember—I remember, darling Cynthia." She went slowly down the stairs, saying at intervals, "I remember. Yes, in the 'Ospital." For she always said "'Ospital," as we daresay you have noticed many old ladies do.

When they got back to the Studio, she sat down to rest, but seemed marvellously little fatigued—marvellously to Alice and Charles, for they could not help imagining that the long abeyance or semi-extinction of the system must have involved decay. It was an assumption; all the medical authorities took the opposite view, and inclined to the belief that if she was not already stronger than she would have been in a normal life, she would ultimately become so. But, of course, there was nothing in itself extraordinary in an old woman of eighty-six walking upstairs, and returning, and talking all the while.

"My head aches a little, but not to hurt," she said when they had settled down. "Yes, that's right, put a cushion behind my head." She sat in the armchair that has appeared once or twice in this story, with her eyes closed, seeming to like talking.

"What was it made me speak about the duel?"

"You thought I was Cynthia Luttrell, dear, you know!" Alice as she said this felt terribly responsible lest she should break the thread of memory. "Then you began to tell me how much the real Cynthia's cousin Becky had talked, and the strange story she had told."

"The *real* Cynthia's cousin? And all the while *you* are——?" She paused with her delicate old hand pressed across her eyes, to shut out the world and let her think. Alice said: "And all the while I was Alice Kavanagh. I'll close this shutter; then it won't glare." She did so; while the old lady murmured: "Alice Kavanagh—Alice Kavanagh—I can't make it out now." Alice, remembering that she had once before got into confusion with her name, tried to turn her from it.

"And all the while *I* was Alice Kavanagh. But you said you would tell about Cousin Becky another time."

"So I did, dear Cynthia. Only it's all very odd! But never mind! Come and sit down here and touch me, and I'll tell it all now as I recollect it. Dear me, how clear it does all come back!"

We must caution you that the story as she told it was not consecutive like the following. But it would be purposeless to record pauses and breaks that you can imagine, perhaps better than we can tell them.

"Old Becky! Now isn't it strange to think, dear, that my father painted her portrait in this very room, and I sat here, just a mere girl—wanting really to go away to John Verrinder, who was at work in the big room downstairs. We called it the gallery. Mr. Haydon wanted to put in a skylight, and paint a picture exactly the size of the wall. . . . And they made me mimic you doing your hair, to amuse them. You know what I mean, darling; I mean mimic the real Cynthia—ah, yes!—dead and gone long now, poor child!—perhaps. . . .

"I remember it all quite clearly, like yesterday. Something set Becky off telling about her great-uncle's queer will. I hope I shall remember this part all right. But it's difficult! I think though it was something like this:—

"Old Sir Cramer left the Vixencroft property—it was only a small farm or two in Yorkshire, and a lot of moorland, to his wife for life; and afterwards to any female descendant of his that

was in possession of a certain family diamond after his widow's death. If it was not in possession of a female descendant, either legitimate or illegitimate, that didn't matter, it was to go to the School, at Blaydon, where he was educated. . . .

"You may fancy, dear, how all the females of the family longed to get possession of that diamond, because though Vixencroft was small, still it was landed property, and meant a safe income of some two hundred a year—not bad, you know! When the old man was on his deathbed, the son, the Sir Cramer who was your cousin Becky's uncle, persuaded him to have the diamond placed in a ring with a lot of other stones; and he himself arranged the order of the stones. He told his father if he did not do this, there would be a dispute about the identity of the diamond. Of course, he was right. But where he was such a cunning fox was that he arranged the stones so that the initials made his wife's name. . . .

"The old man had absolute faith in his son, and as he felt himself failing, shifted all matters more and more into his hands. He left all the property that was not entailed to his widow unconditionally. But (so Becky thought) he must have had some uneasiness about whether some previous woman wasn't really his wife, who might have walked in and made some legal trouble. Anyhow, he seemed to have an idea that he could secure his daughter's inheriting Vixencroft by this expedient about the ring. When his widow died, which was not so very long after he did, she had never given the ring to Esther Kaimes—which is what Becky supposed he meant her to do—and the ring wasn't to be found. You understand that Esther was Sir Cramer's half-sister, and very much younger than he. It was *her* mother's marriage-lines that might have been flawed, not *his*."

Some difficulty in clearing this up caused delay in the story here. To spare the teller, Charles suggested the point should be waived. It wasn't necessary to understand all the motives for a crazy clause in a will. There had been thousands of wills crazier than this. So Old Jane continued, occasionally mimicking the manner of the original teller of the story, perhaps involuntarily. Evidently it was all very vivid to her.

"Well! Esther Kaimes (she was Greville Kaimes's wife) suspected her brother of having appropriated the ring and that it was really the one on his wife's finger. The order of the stones was named to identify it, in the Will. But it did not seem to tally with this ring, which certainly must have been set especially for Lady Luttrell. Its initials made her name, you see!"

"My ring is like that," said Alice, but Charles contrived to hint silence. Miss Lucy sat absorbing the story with almost savage intensity.

"Oh, that's funny! Well—but I must be fatiguing you . . . Well then! I'll go on. Lady Luttrell never would show the whole ring together, and there was some hitch about one of the initials. She always managed to baffle attempts to count the stones fairly. But Esther felt sure it was the ring, because of the splendid diamond, and that her brother, whom she hated, had really stolen it in his father's lifetime. Becky supposed that her aunt, who was very vain, had persuaded him to let her wear it—or perhaps he thought it really was safest so, as no one could possibly suspect when it was shown so publicly. Anyhow (so Becky thought), Esther Kaimes must have made up her mind to attack her sister-in-law about it the first time they were together with a lot of people.

"That was the bit of the story that excited me and John so. Because old Becky was an eye-witness and now it's *over seventy years ago!* Just fancy! One almost shudders to think of it." A thought passed through Alice's mind equivalent to:—If this old lady is shuddering to think of it—(being herself, so to speak, sixty years ago)—what must *I* be now, nearly twice as far on from the event? It was not an idea that could be formulated, and it dissolved. Old Jane went on after a moment's pause.

"It was like this. Becky was a girl of sixteen and was to come out at a grand ball at the Cramer Luttrells', at our old house, you know, in X—— Street. . . . To be sure, darling Cynthia, I had quite forgotten—*this* house, of course. Ah, dear! . . . Well! Becky was to come out—and she danced all the evening, minuets and things; not this horrid new waltzing—there was nothing then like it! And there was a young gentleman she danced a great deal with, and he told her on the stairs he should dream about her for weeks, and she never saw him again! Do you know I almost cried, with her sitting there as single as you are yourself, my dear, and looking like an old marquise! . . . John had to keep her to the point, or I believe she would have gone on talking till now about that young man—she told us who he was, and I've forgotten—a nephew of Sir Richard Steele's, I think. . . .

"Where was I? Oh, your cousin Becky! Well, it was near the end of the ball, and she could see daylight coming through the little skylight in the ceiling, when Esther Kaimes—she called her 'Mistress Esther Kaimes'; wasn't it funny?—suddenly cried out: 'A wager—a wager! His Lordship wagers a hundred guineas that no one in this room hath a ring showing ten sorts of stone, one

several stone to each setting.' And then Becky saw Lady Luttrell, her aunt, close her hand tightly, and thrust it in the bosom of her dress. But it was Lord Ferrars of Toft, a great man at the Court, who had laid the wager, and every lady in the room had to show her ring—it could not be avoided. Becky said she saw Sir Cramer scowling at his sister—he had an evil face, and was a man of ungovernable temper—an evil man who had killed many an opponent in duels; for he was one of the best swordsmen of his time. But for all his anger, the counting of the jewels on each lady's finger went on, till it came to his wife. Then he himself drew her ring off, and held it up, saying to Lord Ferrars: 'See you, my Lord! I will not allow this ring out of my possession, even to your Lordship. But I will count over the stones, that you shall see!' And he counted round them, clearly showing thirteen stones, and three occurred twice, so that the ring really had ten stones. But (and, my dear, I am trying to give old Becky's own words the best I can—no! it doesn't hurt my head) Lord Ferrars, before he would pay over his hundred pounds, would have these stones named, so he should know that each one was truly a precious stone and no counterfeit. And there was one which stood for an *I* in the name, and my Lord would have it this was but a bit of ivory and no precious stone at all!"

"If I can only keep my head!" thought Alice to herself. There was the very ring on her finger! How doubt it? But the trouble was, to keep speculation in abeyance and secure the whole story. A false step—a wrong word—might spoil it all. Still, the old lady had warmed to the narrative, and weak as her voice was, she showed no immediate signs of collapse. She went on, giving the impression that she was mimicking, cleverly, but in a weak voice, the speech and accent of the original narrator.

"Then Mistress Kaimes laughed out loud before them all: 'Your Lordship is right!' she cried out so that all could hear, 'and none should know it better than I, for that ring is my mother's, and none of Phyllis's; for all my brother has set the stones so that it shall seem hers alone.' Then she told out the whole story as she guessed it, shrewdly enough; she was a voluble wench, and full of malice against her brother. He let her finish, and then said: 'This is a fine tale for the small hours of the morning! I will be accountable for all that relates to my father's property and his devisings to whoever has a right to call me in question, but in the right time and place. I know well how to answer any man who does so, who has no such right.' But his Lordship cried out: 'Peace! peace! let's have no bloodshed over a light wager, to amuse a lady.' But he

did not catch that a family feud was in it, and thought only of the ring. 'Let me but look at it in my own hands,' says he, 'and if the two emeralds, or two sapphires, are of two shades, they shall count as separate stones, and Mistress Kaimes shall have the hundred.' Then Sir Cramer, keeping close to hand, be sure! let him handle the ring. But just in that moment there came a great riot from the card-room above where Mr. Greville Kaimes, Esther's husband, was at quadrille with others, and play had run high; and then angry altercation on the stairs. Sir Cramer would snatch back the ring, but his Lordship held to it, and by a chance each relinquished it to the other, at the same moment, and it fell. Becky was close and saw all that happened."

This had been a long spell of narrative, with only trifling interruptions omitted, and Alice begged the speaker to rest. "I want to get it all told," said she. "But give me some tea." After a few sips, she resumed.

"Your cousin remembered it all so clearly—how she saw Lady Luttrell standing just under the little figure dancing on the wall in the middle of the room, and how when the ring fell, she saw Mrs. Kaimes step quickly to the place and stoop, and then say: 'I thought it was *that!*' and make believe she had mistaken a mark on the wall. But Becky was certain she had picked up the ring, and when none could find it elsewhere, she told her aunt, Lady Luttrell, she thought so for a surety.

"'But, oh,' said old Becky—and, my dears, I can't tell you how strange it was to sit there and hear that *old, old* lady talking about it as if it was all yesterday—just think of it—seventy years ago!—'But, oh!' she said, 'I was frightened and dumb, as you may guess, with terror when I heard the shouting and the oaths upon the stairs, and the anger of the gentlemen in their drink, and then a hush for a moment with a sound of steel in it—for swords were drawn, even in the house itself.'

"But no blood was shed then, for when that sound came, Sir Cramer, who was by the door, shouted aloud: 'Let no one leave this room. That ring is on my Lady's finger again before any one leaves this room.' And then he threw open the door, and as he went out I heard the clash grow louder, and the door close upon it, and then it stopped and there was only Sir Cramer's voice saying: 'Put them up, gentlemen, put them up! If you will meet, the Park is near enough to hand.' Why we heard was that the other door was still open, and through it my Aunt Esther slipped out, bearing, I had little doubt, the ring."

Keep well in mind that all this was delivered by Old Jane as a

verbatim report of the narrator's words. Her hearers could distinguish this clearly; so marked was the old lady's dramatic power —she was literally playing the part of old Becky.

"Then back comes Sir Cramer, fuming mightily, for he was none the calmer for this encounter in the passage. 'They would not stand me down,' says he to his Lordship. 'I have sent them to make a finish in the Park,' and Oh! my dears! how my blood ran cold, me—a young girl! Then my aunt must speak a minute with Sir Cramer—and then she points to where Aunt Esther had gone out. For, my dears, I had spoken a word in her ear. And off goes Sir Cramer after her, like mad.

"'There will be bloodshed over this, Lady Luttrell," says his Lordship. And then all the guests hurried off, and there was calling for carriages in great confusion. But for me, I ran for my room and held my ears in my pillow, to hear no more, or as little as might be."

Old Jane stopped short, and so entirely had her mimetic power (subdued, of course, by feebleness, but entirely true to art) carried her hearers with her, that it almost seemed to them as though they really heard the narrative of long ago pause and vanish into the past. It is useless for us to try to make this part of our tale seem probable, for nothing analogous to it comes into common life. But reason from like to like. Picture to yourself the best actor you know, retelling a tale of his grandfather's, heard in his childhood; and then throw in the fact that all that Old Jane told she felt she had heard almost yesterday, and you may be ready to admit that we may have reported this entirely exceptional narrative without exaggeration.

Alice and Charles were not a little alarmed about their old charge. She was shaking a good deal from the excitement; and considering her fragile appearance, and all the circumstances of the case, we must admit it was rather terrifying. She had not talked so much, all told, since her revival.

"Let me alone," she said, almost inaudibly, "I shall come all to rights if I lie quiet." Charles recollected something opportunely. "There's a bottle of the dear old Governor's precious old port," said he, "in the bottom of the cupboard here—been here for ages!" Out it came and was uncorked in a twinkling. The old lady did not protest against it at all. "Oh, no! I like port," said she. And Charles and Alice and Lucy sat quietly by while the magic of the nectar worked. Presently Old Jane drew a long breath, and spoke.

"Yes! I'm glad of that. Now I shall be able to go and see the

old ballroom, where it all happened. Only think what a time ago it must be, by now!"

As they went down, a vision and an echo passed through Alice's mind. A vision of the dazzling crowd in turmoil and confusion on the stairs—of tie-wigs and long-skirted coats magnificent with gold and silver lace—of long-lappeted waistcoats—of jewelled hilts of real rapiers, no mere court swords, but deadly implements of death—of knee-breeches, coloured silk stockings, shoes resplendent with buckles—faces flushed with drink! An echo of loud accusation, of licentious speech and furious oath, of strong lungs overbearing the voice of the peacemaker, scarcely heard in the chaotic din; and then when they reached the ballroom, now Herr Bauerstein's picture gallery, another vision of the still more dazzling throng of dancers—of tall toupees and powder and patches—of flashing diamonds and painted fans—of wide-spread skirts and high-heeled shoes. Another echo; of women's voices and laughter; of wit and repartee not altogether unstimulated by drink, of the music of Bach and Rameau. It was all gone now, and Herr Bauerstein was having a row with a picture-frame maker.

"I shall not pay you one penny. It was a fine old Italian frame, and it is ruined. Before I pay you one penny I will see you——. Ah, I beg your pardon, Mr. Heath, but it is trying to have a fine old frame ruined with a bad gold."

The old lady was looking wistfully round at the room. "Oh dear!" said she, "they have altered it so. All the figures have gone off the walls, and the ceiling is all changed. But the chimney is the same, with the wreaths on it. And the fireplace—and I remember the two doors, with the rounds over the top. And where John Verrinder used to work to get the best of the light."

Alice noticed how, when she spoke of her husband at this date, she always called him John Verrinder. It was the way she had thought and spoken of him as her father's assistant. She took no notice of the numerous pictures, and crossed over to the place where Terpsichore had been.

"There was a little dancing figure up there," she said, "and it was here old Becky said she saw her aunt pick up the ring."

Mr. Bauerstein was interested in this: "I do not know of any ring," he said. "No one has picked up a ring. I should have told Mr. Pope, or Mrs. Corrigan." Charles explained. "This lady, Mrs. Verrinder, lived in the house a good many years ago." This was enough for Mr. Bauerstein to know, he said, and he waved himself out of his intrusion with two fat hands outspread. But he re-

mained on, subject to this correction, and observed, interestedly. Old Jane continued:

"And then she went out at that door." She turned round with a revival on her of her recollection of old Becky's telling. "You know, we almost felt, John and I, that we could *see* it. She showed us, against the folded screen, just how she saw Mrs. Kaimes stoop and pick it up where it had rolled against the wall. It would have been just here." It was then that Charles suddenly remembered the person that he fancied he saw in that very place, who stooped down to pick up his spectacles for him, and then vanished mysteriously. It was so odd, that he had to make up his mind, provisionally, that he didn't really recollect it, as a safeguard against ghost-concession. It was long enough ago for that. But it got still worse when Old Jane continued: "Miss Luttrell said her aunt had an immense powdered toupee, like they used to wear at dress-balls, and she saw it bob as she stooped, and she was afraid it would fall forward. She showed us exactly. And it was just here the little dancing figure was on the wall."

Charles felt quite uncomfortable as the old lady rose up from a half-indication of the way old Becky had shown them exactly. But give him time! He would find correct attitudes of mind enough, if he only had time. As for his suddenly recollecting a misgiving about that woman's hair, or hat, coming off, didn't that show now how fanciful one was, and how little one could trust one's etcetera?

Alice, please observe, had the vaguest knowledge, gathered child-wise, of this incident, which was talked of at the time, but not fostered and encouraged later. It was sixteen years ago, and she was a babe and suckling.

Mr. Bauerstein spoke to Charles under his breath, and asked him if Mrs. Verrinder was the mother of the gentleman whose pictures he bought. No! she was his widow. Of course he wouldn't talk about him to her. Of course not, but there was a picture with a name on the back he had just heard Mrs. Verrinder mention. It was in behind here, and he would get it out.

Alice explained to Old Jane, who seemed pleased. But she also seemed embarrassed by whatever forced home to her mind that Alice was not Cynthia Luttrell. She wanted her to be as much Cynthia as possible—not to be disfranchised. Still it would be interesting to see if there was really any likeness. Her father painted Cynthia three times. She wondered which it was. Much the best was the round head and shoulders in a square frame. Oh, dear! how strange it all was!

Herr Bauerstein emerged from a contest with canvases, bearing what was manifestly the round Cynthia in the square frame. He held it out—it was not very large—at arm's length. He looked up at Alice. It was, he said in German, not unlike the Fräulein. It was not; in fact, it was quite like enough to warrant Old Jane's first confusion of identity—not an astonishing likeness—a sort of family likeness.

The old lady herself was pleased that this should be so: she stood justified in her own eyes. But what troubled her greatly was that the picture had got so black. Young Mr. Mulready always told John Verrinder her father's pictures would get black if he used so much Megilp. But, oh dear! this was terrible—in such a short time! She had forgotten again—but they did not remind her. And at this moment Lady Johnson appeared, having called for them in the carriage, and been hunting for them upstairs for hours. Old Jane was beginning to give in; so it was just as well! There was no room for Charles in the carriage. So he saw them off and went back into the house.

He went upstairs to finish a pipe and think it over. And he sat and thought in the dying light of the late afternoon.

It was all so strange—so mercilessly strange, was how he thought of it. The chance that brought him across old Verrinder, in his studentship. The strange renewal of his memory of him—almost faded—by the slight chance of his brother-in-law's attention being caught by Old Jane, in a passing visit to Dr. Fludyer, at the Asylum. The almost miraculous resuscitation; and last and strangest, this thread—one might almost say this cable, so strong was it—of tradition and its vivid drama of a hundred and thirty years ago—of the days of Watteau and Lancret—almost the days when Handel was writing to the order of Queen Anne—when Sir Godfrey Kneller was but just dead and Oliver Goldsmith but just born. A pity, was it not, that this message handed down through the ages, all but lost a thousand times, and only recovered by a chance, had no better tale to tell than one of a scoundrel and a thief, a betrayal of a father's trust, a brutal riot of drunken profligates and fools. "It was very Queen Anne," thought Charles, as he sat and smoked in the twilight. "I suppose Jeff will be delighted with his *protégée*."

That brought back the memory of himself and Jeff hard at work on the preservation of Terpsichore, and then naturally on what he chose to think of as all those absurd stories that got hatched up about the old house and its ghosts. He supposed Poggy-Woggy would be triumphant over this coincidence about the woman with

the white head who got out of the room without their hearing. Because, of course, it was clear enough that was only an hallucination. It only lasted a few seconds; and, mind you, he had dropped his spectacles. And wasn't it just about that time that——?

And then he heaved a sigh, and gave up shaping the thought that an abnormal excitement of mind, caused by the intrusion of Lavinia Straker into his life, had made him not quite responsible for what he did see and didn't see. He thought fit to forget that Lavinia had not really done so. She accrued very soon after that, certainly! But Charles wasn't playing fair in making her responsible.

The image of Lavinia came and sat in the chair in the half-light—made his heart beat and his eyesight dim, for a moment. Oh, what a fool he had been, in that infatuated past!

Yet, if it were all to do again, would he act otherwise? Surely!—and that too even if he knew the thing he had now learned, in vain; that if a marriage of dissonant minds is to last, it must be in a world where no strong temptation shall cross its path, and snap the flimsy bond. His old chivalry came in, and forged excuses for the image sitting in the chair. What right had he to make her his yoke-fellow with so little warrant that both were prepared to travel the same road at the same rate? . . .

And then, were they not happy—very happy—for a term? And was she not his boy's mother? And now! He thought of how there was, in some place of burial he should never see, a stone that held her name, not his, and made no record of the life they shared. And he held his mind resolutely closed, in his chivalry, against all thought or speculation on what her other life had been. All the blame of that he laid to the score of others; whom *we* are at liberty to think may have been no worse than herself.

A sort of stupid idea crossed his mind of removing that chair that brought her memory back into the other room; but he felt its cowardice, and brushed it away with the tears he could not deny the existence of. Besides, where would Alice sit next time she came? The moment the image of Alice sat in the chair, the sun shone again in Charles's heart, and the flowers bloomed, and it was filled again with the singing of the birds. The eclipse had passed. It was time to be off, and Alice would be at home. How Peggy would have said, "You fool!"

But it did not occur to Charles that there was anything foolish about his attitude. Alice was the best thing in the world, of course; but as to what it would be to have to give her up—why!—

sufficient for the day was the evil thereof! And was he not due at his own table at seven-thirty, and Alice the same?

As he was hurrying away he was stopped by Mr. Bauerstein to tell him that the portrait of Phyllis Cartwright had been carefully repaired and varnished. But there had been a mishap—that fool Braschi, the restorer, had cleaned one stone out of the ring before he found out that it had been painted over the varnish, after the picture had been finished some years. Mr. Bauerstein was very serious and concerned about it.

"Can't be helped, I suppose!" said Charles, and started for home.

CHAPTER XLIV

PSYCHICAL RESEARCH. HOW HERCULES OVERTOOK NESSUS. SIXTY-SIX FOR THREE WICKETS. SHE MUST HAVE BEEN PRETTY ONCE

WHEN Charles walked up to the door there was Alice ready for dinner, leaning on the parapet of the balcony, on the look-out. Charles was very late.

"Now, Mr. Charley! Look alive!"

"How's Mrs. Siddons? How's Rachel?" Alice found no difficulty in understanding that this was a compliment to old Jane's dramatic faculty. "She's gone to bed," she replied. "She won't be any the worse."

"I hope not!" Charles is fishing for his latchkey with one foot on the doorstep. Alice is so full of some topic she can't wait.

"*Isn't* this strange about the woman?"

"It's uncommon strange about the ring. But which woman?"

"*I* had forgotten her! Mother Peg recollected it all in the carriage. The woman you and Mr. Jerrythought saw."

"I'm coming up." And Charles came up, and devoted himself to pouring cold water over that woman and over Psychical Research generally, except in so far as it threw doubts upon its own conclusions. In that aspect it took a respectable place among the exact sciences. As for the ring, it got ignored for the moment.

However, he had relented to a certain extent by tobacco time, and was prepared to admit that though no one of the No. 40 ghosts was worthy of credence taken separately, the whole of them taken together deserved careful consideration with a view to their rejection. He called this dealing with cumulative evidence. Alice treated his Method disrespectfully.

"Now you're going on like the Legal Mind, Mr. Charley, and talking a lot of nonsense you don't believe." The Legal Mind was brother Robin, whom perhaps you recollect. He was gaining laurels at the Bar.

"It's only my intense love of truth, dear Alice-for-short. It's so strong I can't afford to run the risk of being mistaken. I prefer to suspend judgment. So the old lady wasn't knocked up?"

"She was very quiet all the way in the carriage. And when we

got home I thought she would be just as well in bed. I'll go up and see if she ate the boiled fowl."

When Alice came back, she was able to report that she had done so; but had told Priscilla she didn't want any more and would go to sleep. We record these trivial facts because we credit you with being glad to know that Mrs. Verrinder was being properly attended to, and was comfortably asleep upstairs while Alice and Charles were talking in the drawing-room.

"Now give me a cigarette," said Alice. "How many ghosts have there been, all told, Mr. Charley?"

"One, your own little ghost, my dear. I mean the lidy with the spots. You recollect her?"

"I'm not sure whether it's her I recollect, or being told of her after. But—oh yes!—surely I recollect her. And my poor—mother!" Alice always flinches at this recollection and Charles is sorry he has revived it. He goes on rapidly to his second ghost.

"Then you had another one. The red man with the long knife on the stairs."

"I remember *him* plainly. I was quite ill with terror. He wasn't exactly on the stairs, but in the passage—nearer the area door."

"Then there was the woman ghost Mrs. Jeff saw twice upstairs. She pooh-poohs it now; but all I know is she wanted to take away poor dear Jeff's irreproachable character about her, and then there was the woman that got out—that *I* saw. *That* I have no doubt was an hallucination, because I saw her myself."

"Then whenever a disbelieving Thomas sees a ghost it's an hallucination?"

"Generally speaking, yes!" Charles is so extremely happy just now that it is difficult to make out if he is in earnest. You see, he has got Alice all to himself. Most evenings, there would be Pierre or the old lady; but Pierre has been at a cricket-match, and no doubt gone home with a friend to dinner; and Old Jane is dreaming, perhaps, of the old days in the old house; having a surreptitious time maybe with John Verrinder, where he used to paint to get the light.

"Was that all?" Alice asks.

"Unless you count an absurd fancy of Jeff's about a picture of a man with a sword, that's all!"

"Well! that's one for you—two for me—two for Mrs. Jeff—and half a one for Mr. Jeff. Not a ghost—say, a phenomenon. Five and a half!"

"Well?"

"Well! what more do you want?"

"I want the other half, to make up six."

"There now, Mr. Charley, that's just like you! You never can be in earnest, for two minutes together."

"I'll be in earnest then, dear! I don't think we've got quite all the phenomena. There was a woman sitting in a chair and laughing—at the Studio—it was Pierre saw it."

"I never heard of that."

"You were at Miss Fortescue's at that particular time. I recollect quite well."

"Tell me about it. Was nobody else in the room?"

"Oh yes! There was—besides myself—Bauerstein, a friend of his, and—and Pierre's mother." Alice's face goes grave. She throws away quite half the cigarette, and falls into her attitude of concentration; her chin in her hands and her elbows on her knees. She is seated on a very low chair at Charles's feet, which he has deposited on a very high one.

"Of course Pierre was the merest baby. Was he frightened?"

"He said he wasn't. He didn't seem so. I saw him looking, looking at something; and afterwards he said it was this figure sitting with her arms folded in the chair, and laughing at his mother."

"What was—she doing?"

"Talking to Mr. Bauerstein's friend, by the window." A cloud has fallen on Charles. But they have spoken together often enough about "her" for Alice to know that it is not caused only by Mrs. Charles Heath's appearance in the conversation. Alice looks puzzled—only for a few seconds. Then she sees it all. "Oh! Mr. Charley," she says, "I wonder you didn't murder him!"

"I did, very nearly," said he.

"Mother Peg knows nothing about that——"

"I never told her a word of it. Don't you tell her, Alice-for-short darling, and I'll tell you. . . . Yes, dear; but I don't want her to know, because she always thinks it was her fault we were married; thinks it would have gone off, but for her."

"Very well, *I* won't tell. You tell *me*." Alice has quite forgotten the ghosts, and listens intently with tightly closed lips.

"I traced them to Spezzia, and caught him on the stairs of the Hotel. They are funny stairs, that play you tricks, and you always turn up in the wrong place, do what you will! He managed to get out at the back, while I came out at the front, goodness knows how! However, I chased him out in the street and caught him——"

"And then?"

"I half murdered him."

"Oh! I'm so glad." Alice draws a great breath of relief.

"Not quite, that time! And t'other time only three-quarters or seven-eights—like Mr. Lammle's friends." Charles has taken his feet off the very high chair, and left Alice on the very low one. He is walking about the room. Alice naturally wants to know what "t'other time" was. Charles says is she quite sure she won't mention a word of this to Peg. Alice says: "Honour bright!"

"Well! he didn't half like the thrashing he'd had, and wanted a duel with swords, like in The Corsican Brothers. Of course, I said nothing would please me better."

"You? Oh! Mr. Charley! you never used a sword in your life."

"Exactly. So I went to a great professor of *Scherma,* as the Italians absurdly call fencing—but then they *are* foreigners——"

"Yes—yes! go on."

"——and asked him how much he could teach me in a fortnight, I never having handled a sword in my life. He said, through an interpreter, who spoke English fluently: 'No usefulness. Not for you.' And then added: 'I vite you coat?' He gave me a foil to show my paces with, and put some chalk on the end of his own. In a few seconds he had put a white spot exactly on every button of my waistcoat, beginning at the top one and going down!"

"Good gracious me!"

"Yes, he had. Then he told me all he could recommend was that I should point my sword straight at my adversary and keep quiet. I did so, and the excellent man was in such a hurry to murder me, in addition to his other benefactions, that he rushed right on to my abominable spike, and very nearly hurt himself seriously. He was in hospital six weeks, I believe."

"And she nursed him, I hope?"

"My dearest little Alice-for-short, you think every woman as good as yourself. No! she didn't wait for him."

"Good God!"

"It's quite true! But, my dear little girl, I tell you *she* was dead. This was some one else who came instead."—Charles has stopped walking about the room, and is standing by Alice, who has got up off the very low chair during the narrative of the duel.

"And all this while, you poor dear Mr. Charley, you never told *anybody!*"

"Why should I? Peg would have thought it was *her* fault I know. And as for you, dear chick, I think you were *out,* but that's as much as one could say."

Alice's eyes are flashing, and she is fairly trembling with excitement. "Oh! it was too bad—too bad!" she cries. "I can't help it. She was *horrible!*"

"Oh! no—gently, darling, gently!"

"Yes! she destroyed your life for you, and set you all adrift! And let you keep her odious old mother from starvation—you know she did! And never so much as tried to see Pierre again. She was an unnatural *Beast!*"

"No, no—darling—gently, gently! Not so bad as that!"

"Don't care what you say, Mr. Charley!" says Alice, relieved and calming down, "that's what she *was*. And now you'll never get married again—Mother Peg says so."—Charles evades the question.

"I'm much more interested about a little girl I know and her offers than I am or ever shall be about myself."

"No—Mr. Charley—no! It's no use your talking like that. It's got nothing whatever to do with my having no offers worth considering. If it was the Emperor of China——"

"Who is married at present, I believe."

"If it was the Emperor of China and he undertook to divorce them all and become a Christian, I wouldn't! Not until I saw you quite *comfortably* and *happily* settled with a *really* nice wife. I wouldn't! I wouldn't! I *wouldn't!*—so *there!*"

Perhaps nothing could have been more forcibly illustrative of the false gamut in which the duet of these two was being played than the little incident which followed. About the time of the introduction of the Emperor of China into the conversation, Alice and Charles were standing near enough to one another for her to accentuate her declaration and enforce it by holding to the two lappets of his coat-collar, which she had just brushed some tobacco-ash off, for tidiness. Her doing this reacted somehow on the dramatic ensemble. It was a species of little ritual by the way, performed to attest a solemn asseveration. Charles did not seem to attach much weight either to the ritual or the asseveration. He seemed to be thinking wistfully of something else, afar off, as he smoothed over the soft mouse-coloured hair with a tinge of chestnut. For him, it still lay on the brow of the little girl with the broken jug. It was that fact that made it seem natural and consecutive that Alice should put both her arms quite round his neck and kiss his cheek. She was so sorry for him in his loneliness.

If it did occur to him (not that we believe it did) to say to Alice: "Then, dear love, if I can secure you here, alive and continuous, by not attaching to myself some odious eligible somebody else,

then I won't—I won't—I *won't*. So there!" If this did occur to him he brushed it away in favour of another thought. "If I am really acting as an influence over this dear child, and the happiness of her life, ought I not forthwith to marry Miss Everitt Collinson?" This was the last selection of the council in Harley Street; she was even less popular with Charles than Lady Anstruther Paston-Forbes had been.

We are convinced that there was one thought that never entered into his mind—the thought that what his heart called his old wasted, thwarted life could ever be linked with this young new one—all the more because he prized and valued Alice almost above everything else in the world. Yes! almost more than Peggy! It seems to you and to us that this ought to have suggested an improved way of looking at the whole matter, but it didn't. It is strange but true that any utilisation of Alice's affection for himself as a stepping-stone to an almost inconceivable happiness, a reinstatement of his old broken life by a love sweeter than any he had ever known, would have seemed to him a disloyalty towards her youth and inexperience. "Oh dear!" (we can fancy many a lady saying) "if only men would mind their own affairs, and let us look after ours!"

However, Charles was not without excuse for what would have been mere officious altruism in others. He regarded Alice as a charge entrusted to him by Fate. He had all the duties of a parent towards her, and shrank (so to speak) from the appropriation of a fund placed in his hands to his own purposes. He might have thought (only we have no evidence that he even went that far) that it would have been quite another matter if he had never made hay of his own life. It was all his own fault.

It is almost needless to dwell on the fact that every manifestation of Alice's affection for him only emphasised the character his mind had automatically given it. He did not say to himself that the very freedom with which her arms went round his neck—the absolute unreserve with which her soft lips kissed his cheek—furnished a sufficient proof that her love for him was not "that sort"; and that she was, in effect, a daughter. He did not say it, but the facts that might have made him speak passed speech by, and settled in his soul in silence.

We are dwelling (to your disgust, we doubt not) on these points because we really want to take you into our confidence about Charles and Alice, and what they thought and felt. Never you mind how we come to know these things! We answer for their accuracy. Be content with that!

Charles rather laid stress upon his treatment of Alice as a very little girl, and when she had kissed him as above narrated, merely said: "Now the other side to make it even." By the time the balance was struck, Charles was beaming again. Alice had kissed the cloud away. A sense of dismissal of the recent conversation ensued. Charles glanced back for a resumption point, and had to go a long way.

"Let's see, Miss Kavanagh! What was it you interrupted my saying just now? Oh, about the ring——"

"Just now! Three hours ago! But it *is* strange—the strangest thing of the whole turn out."

"It's all clear so far as how the diamond was worked in with the other stones. Stick out your little pud." Alice complies. There is the ring. There are the stones. And, as interpreted with the help of that stray cabman, they certainly spell—"dearest Phyllis."

"Why," asked Alice, "did he go in for such a long string of stones? *Dear* would have been enough in all conscience!" Charles shook his head with gravity. "It would have looked as if it had been done after marriage, and referred to milliner's bills." He took Alice's fingers in his, and pondered over the ring. For him, it was on the little hand he had led her home by, to the extensive basement with cellarage.

"Now, Alice-for-short, we can consider. So far, we're clear! Except on the supposition of an undesigned coincidence. Of course, it is *possible,* though not probable, that this ring is a ring some one accidentally dropped in that celebrated beer-jug—some one who came in to look at the premises."

"Not so very improbable, compared to some of the expedients of incredulity at bay."

"I beg your pardon—I beg your pardon! It wasn't me. Well now! how did this here ring get into that there beer-jug? that's the point."

"I think I see. Mrs. Kaimes was frightened when the enraged brother came after her, and dropped it in the beer. I suppose they had beer at parties in those days. Then it got overlooked and was left in the jug. Then the jug got used for common, and was stood down by the side of the cask."

"Probability itself! And then when the Luttrell family cleared out, their beer-cask and draught-jug were passed on as a sort of tenant's fixtures."

"No, no, Mr. Charley, dear! didn't you tell me?—only very likely I've got the story all wrong."

"Didn't I tell you what?"

"Didn't you tell me that it was supposed that the sand that was taken out of where the bones were buried had been shovelled in on the top of the beer-jug and that was how it got hidden till my poor——"

"Father and mother?"

"Yes—found it? And surely this ring never could have been living in that beer-jug for very long undetected?" Whereupon Charles remarks that the plot is thickening, and he must fill his pipe to think that over. Assisted by a few whiffs, he resumes:

"You mean the jug must have been covered in when the bones were buried?"

"And that the ring cannot have been long in the jug. Or it would have been found."

"So, if Mrs. Esther Kaimes put the ring in the beer that evening, the bones must have been interred then or shortly after."

"It seems to fix the date of the bones, doesn't it?"

"Well—perhaps! But if so I should say it threw a doubt on the date when the ring was put in the jug. There's the boy!" So there is, and in a few seconds he rushes upstairs and bursts into the room shouting. "Not out! sixty-six for three wickets!"

When cricket comes in at the door, rational intercourse flies out of the window. And if you are wise, you say it is time to go to bed. Charles said so, and Alice and Pierre took the broad hint and went. Charles himself had another pipe.

He smoked his pipe out, turned off the gas, lit his bedroom candle, and followed. When he came to his boy's bedroom door he opened it gently and looked in. He need not have been so particular. The cricketer was already in a deep and motionless sleep. He looked at him for a few moments, not fearing that any candlelight would disturb such a depth of slumber—a depth that an afternoon of powerful off-driving, etc., etc., deserves and reaches—and thought to himself that a cricketer of this age, awake, suggests the man he is going to be; but put him to bed, and forthwith he suggests the baby he was! The arm that had not gone quite to bed, and still hung outside, was as sound asleep as the rest; and Charles remembered his old happiness in an early day, when he looked at that same hand once as it rested on its mother's bosom—one day when they were going out to a party, and baby was produced at his request, and consented to be took, but refused to wake on any terms. "Poor Lav," said Charles to himself. And he would have gone to bed sad, only as it chanced he met Alice

in a sort of blue tea-gown thing in the passage, coming from the old lady's room. "Sh-sh-sh-sh-sh!" said she, very *sotto-voce,* "just look in at her! She's like an effigy on a tomb."

So she was. "She must have been a pretty girl once," said Alice. "I should think she must," said he. "Good-night, dear!"

CHAPTER XLV

HOW MR. SCOTT HAD WRITTEN A NOVEL. MORE MEMORY OF OLD JANE'S. CHELSEA WATERWORKS IN HYDE PARK! MORE INGREDIENTS FOR A SUPERNATURAL PIE

OLD JANE paid the penalty of her high-strung condition when she told the story. She was below par for several days, and seemed to like to be quiet, and to read, in an absent way, anything she had read in her youth. She asked for the poems of Mr. Walter Scott, which she had been very fond of. But she was much surprised and interested to hear that Mr. Scott had made a great success as a novelist, only a year or so after her accident.

"I have missed so many things," said she, with a gentle sweetness that was quite characteristic. Then as if the thought had crossed her mind that she need lose no more, she continued: "But you are always writing, darling Cynthia, and it isn't letters. Do tell me!" Then Alice told her, to amuse her, what she was writing now was a story, and she was to have a hundreds pounds for it if the publisher didn't change his mind when he read it.

"Well, that *is* nice, dear! Fancy being able to earn a whole hundred pounds!"

"Ah, but that's nothing to Mr. Charley! Do you know he's to have a penny a word for the story he's writing now? But then it's got to be exactly twelve thousand words." This was the case, and Charles had written an absurd letter to his publisher to know if the word *finis* was to be included. Would he write by return, he said; because it all depended on that what plot he chose? Alice didn't tell the old lady this; it was too complex.

"You must read them both to me, darling Cynthia, won't you? But I have such a lot to read. I *should* like to read that novel of Mr. Scott's you told me of." This did not mean *Waverley,* nor any particular novel. All she realised was that Mr. Walter Scott, the poet, had written "a Novel" and had a great success. She was glad to hear that he had been made a baronet. Was he still living?—but, ah, yes!—she had forgotten.

Alice promised to get a copy of "Scott's Novel" with a print not

too small for Mrs. Verrinder to read. There was more than one edition, she said. She spoke to Charles about it, as she thought *Waverley* would be dull for her; Charles recommended the *Heart of Midlothian*. The old lady tried to read it, but she had overestimated her powers of fixing her attention on anything new, and gave it up. She fell back on the *Vicar of Wakefield* and the Bible. Practically, she could only read what she *had* read. Alice tried her with Dickens and Thackeray, but she could make nothing of them.

She was perfectly sweet-tempered and contented. When left alone, as of course she was for hours at a time, she very rarely rang the hand-bell that stood beside her for Priscilla the maid, who was always at hand. She appeared to read and re-read the Gospels and the *Vicar of Wakefield*. Whenever Alice found her reading the former, she would look over her shoulder to find where she was reading. It was almost always the story of the Resurrection. She once accounted for this to Alice: "You see, my darling," she said, "it may be really true, and not only like Going to Church." There was every reason to suppose that the main thought current in her mind was:—Should she meet her husband again, or not? She had evidently had a dose of Sunday Religion in her youth, and did not find it a tower of strength. She fell back on the best translation she could get of the original story. It was the Psychical Research of a stranded and shipwrecked soul.

She took very kindly to Lady Johnson, whom she called a delightful person. Peggy used often to come and sit with her; but she was afraid to say a word of her wishes about Charles and Alice, lest it should pass on to them, and only serve to make them uncomfortable, without bringing her wishes nearer their fulfilment. Besides, Rupert entreated her on no account to breathe a hint of "anything." So she held her tongue.

But there was no embargo on conversation about No. 40. As Peggy had been quite outside the audience of the cousin Becky story, she could talk about the old house without seeming to connect them together. One day she referred to the Phyllis Cartwright portrait, which had come from the cleaners. Now you must bear in mind that by common consent the whole of the mysterious occurrences at the house had been kept back from the old lady, for fear of any portion of them acting as suggestion, and qualifying her recollections, which were probably far from exhausted. Charles was especially anxious nothing should confuse or bewilder her. Left alone, she would remember more.

So, when Peggy spoke to her about the portrait and how the cleaner had muddled one of the stones in the ring through not

understanding that it had been painted over the first varnish, she was careful not to allude to the discovery in the cellar, or the candidates for Psychical Research. The portrait was merely an interesting portrait, so far as she was supposed to be informed. It was the portrait of one Phyllis Cartwright, but what should she know of Phyllis Cartwright? She merely mentioned the name as the one she had heard Charley call it by. The old lady repeated it after her, two or three times.

"That must be Lady Luttrell's portrait—my dear Alice's cousin, Rebecca Luttrell's aunt by marriage. Her name—yes!—her name *was* Cartwright."

"Not Alice's, dear Mrs. Verrinder. You mean the Cynthia she reminds you of." The thin colourless hands, that looked almost as if they might vanish at any moment, made a sort of despairing movement. "I am always making that mistake," said their owner, "but I know, Lady Johnson, that you forgive me. Of course I meant dear Cynthia Luttrell." She spoke in a wistful, absent way, not as expressing doubt of what she said, but with a kind of reflection in her voice of the distance and dimness of the person she spoke of.

"It is so difficult to think," she went on, "that my real Cynthia is gone. She must be dead or she would have come, or written."

It had been found possible to give the old mind the idea of the actual lapse of time; but not of the complete detachment it had effected, between herself and all her old associations. On this occasion she did not dwell on the original Cynthia; she went back to the portrait, speaking slowly and reflectively.

"I wonder—which—stone—it is! Not the diamond, I hope?"

"No! At least, I don't think there was a diamond." Peggy was getting a little alarmed lest she should make a false step. If the ring was invisible before it was cleaned, how should she know what stone had been taken out? Yet, of course, all the while, she *did* know: it was the jacinth.

"There must have been a diamond, dear Lady Johnson, *the* diamond, you know!"

"Very likely I'm wrong—you see I haven't seen it myself. Charley told me." The old lady was not critical over this: her mind was fructifying though.

"Of course!" she said, after a short silence, in which Peggy helped, "Lady Luttrell would be sure to have the ring painted on with the diamond hidden, and only the letters of Phyllis visible. Because, dear Lady Johnson, don't you see that *her* object was to prove the ring was her own, so she had it painted on a picture

that was done of her before she married." Old Jane was wonderfully sharp and bright this morning. How Peggy did wish, if she was just going to tell something interesting, that some one else had been there to help in recollecting it!

"Can you recollect the picture yourself, Mrs. Verrinder?"

"I daresay I shall when I see it. Only there were so many pictures! In my father's house, I mean. I wonder how this came to be there? I should have thought old Becky would have taken away all her pictures."

"Had she any place to hang them in?"

"No—that's true! She lived with a relation, who hated her family, but forgave *her*. Of course; she left the pictures in my father's charge." This seemed not to matter—old pictures do slop about the world in a vague way, till some æsthomenous person detects quality in them, and has them restored; and then some other denounces his Vandalism, and between the two the pictures get into expensive frames behind plate glass and have Vokins or Agnew bracketed after them at sales. Let Old Jane go on talking:—

"It was wonderful she remembered it all so clearly. What I told you and my dear Cynthia, you know——?"

"No, not me. You told Alice and Charley, and my girl Lucy."

"Yes—a nice little thing! Isn't she here?"—She is. But she is having an Argument with Pierre two rooms off. Peggy discerns help in recollection, and summons her.

"Yes—my child!" says the old lady. "Kiss me! Of course you were there, and heard all about old Becky and the ball, and the duel——" Lucy is armed at all points for interrogation and record, and immediately vaults on to the back of an interviewer's Pegasus.

"Not the duel," says she, shaking her head firmly. "You didn't tell us about it. You only said there *was* a duel." The old lady's eyes rest with pleasure on the earnest face of the new one—the very new one—bracing itself up to take notes. There is seventy years between them! And the notes are to be about what was seen and heard by another very new one, in days that have become History and can be researched in. Oh, so long ago!—

"Didn't I tell about the duel? But I told you how old Becky heard the men quarrelling on the stairs?"—Oh yes, Lucy testifies, and how Sir Cramer went out, and came back, and then went off in a rage after his sister.—"Well! my dear—those two men that quarrelled went away and fought in the Park—in Hyde Park—with swords. And one was killed! It is so dreadful, dear Lady Johnson, to think that that wickedness goes on, even now! They told me there

was a man shot in a duel at Nine Elms, only the other day!"—She paused, seeming to try to remember something. "Yes! I remember now. It was Lord ———,* who ran Neville Kaimes through the body. And old Becky said the story went that this Lord was in love with Mistress Kaimes, as she called her—but, dear child, I oughtn't to tell you all this wickedness."—Lucy alleges that she is familiar with every enormity man is capable of, and her mother says at any rate she knows the commandments. The old lady continues:—"Well! he and Esther Kaimes had broken one of them—so they said! And after the duel both of them vanished. In fact, it was believed that when she slipped away with the ring, she followed the duellists to the Park, and went straight away to Paris with her husband's murderer. Old Becky said she was bad enough for anything."

"I wonder where they fought in Hyde Park?" This is Lucy, who is projecting a personally conducted tour to the spot, if it can be identified.

"Old Becky told us. It was on the banks of what she called the New Serpentine. But I think her memory was confused with old age. Because she said it was just beyond where the Chelsea Waterworks used to be."

"Are you sure the name was Lord ———?" asked Peggy. The old lady was quite sure she had it right. Peggy, however, felt equally sure there must be some mistake. She suspected the original old narrator of having made one. Her mind was evidently wandering, on some subjects. Fancy the Chelsea Waterworks in Hyde Park! Besides, Peggy had a recollection about Lord ——— which made the story most improbable. She would talk to Charles about it.

"Did they always wear swords, all of them, in those days?" asks Lucy. "What did they do when they danced?"

"I can't say, my dear child. I can only tell the tale as old Becky told it to us—John and me. Ah, dear! I can almost shut my eyes now, and fancy I hear her telling—it seems only like the other day." But the interviewer is not happy about those swords.

"Perhaps they left them outside, like umbrellas," says she.

"Perhaps they did, my dear. But Sir Cramer must have had his on. Because I remember Miss Rebecca saying he touched it with his finger when he spoke to Lord Ferrars about his father's will. Of course the others may have found theirs in the lobby when they came down."

At this point Peggy thought Mrs. Verrinder was beginning to

* A well-known name at the time. About 1730–40.

feel tired. So she collected Lucy and carried her off, still not quite contented about the swords. It was the effect on a young mind of being compelled to think of a past age as an actuality. She would have accepted any amount of rapiers on the stage as readily as tie-wigs and hoops, when there was courtliness going on, and repartee. But when it came to talking about people who had been seen by an old friend of the live person you were talking to—why really! Lucy would go home, and read *Esmond* and *The Four Georges*. And her mother would recollect to ask Charles about a story she had read of the death of Lord ——— which seemed to her to quarrel with that of his elopement with Mrs. Kaimes. Also, she asked herself, why should a man run away to Paris merely because he had killed another in a duel? In those days it was all right. He had only to marry the widow. But perhaps he thought it would be better taste to do that in Paris. She would talk to Charles.

She got the opportunity shortly. A few days after this, Alice went into the country to help a friend to look at a house her husband was in treaty for. So Charles was lonesome, and appealed to Peggy to rescue him as much as possible. He didn't want to leave the old lady quite alone. It really was extraordinary what a hold she had unconsciously established on him and Alice. So he wouldn't come away from Charley Street in the evening. But Peggy would come and see the restored picture at No. 40—wouldn't she? And then he would come to Harley Street to tea. Only if he stayed on to dinner he must go away directly after.

"So you shall, Charley dear!" said Peggy after they had looked at the picture together. "He shall go home to his adopted grandmamma, he shall! I don't at all wonder at you, dear old boy. *I* should, if I were you. There's something so very sweet about her white hair. And those sad eyes that seem to have given it all up. And those transparent hands one sees the veins in. I really could have cried like any little girl when she held out that almost atmospheric wedding-finger to show me how slack the ring had gone. And then she said, quite with a quiet smile—it was *I* that wanted to cry—'It was not like that when John——'" Peggy pulls up short with her lips very tightly shut, for some reason.

"I know!" said Charles, "I can assure you she puts me and Alice to it sometimes. Alice has to run away to cry."

"Don't you?"

"Oh no! I'm a male he—it's another pair of shoes. But it *is* trying, now and again. The evening before last, for instance, she was very quiet. Then Alice went to her and kissed her and

said what was it? And what do you suppose the poor old lady was thinking about? Why, pancakes!—of all things in the world. John was so fond of pancakes and she was so afraid that all that time he never got any, with no one to see to him. He never took any care of himself! But she was quite quiet, the way she said it—musically quiet—you know her way?"

"I know. I don't the least wonder at you, Charley dear!"

"Then she went on, 'I should like to know if he ever bought himself a new hat. One of the last things I recollect was when he went out to buy some strawberries because old Miss Rebecca was coming, and I said to him he really must get himself a new hat.'—And I thought to myself," said Charles, "this would account for the poor old chap's extraordinary hat. I recollect some of the students at the Schools making game of it, and trying it on. It belonged to the date—well! say of Napoleon at Elba."—Charles recalled the occasion when he met Verrinder on the rail, and the dismal attempt to make a polished coat-sleeve renew the nap of that strangest of headdresses.

"Have you adopted her altogether, Charley darling?"

"Well—me and Alice—we shouldn't like to part with her, you know!"

"You are so funny—you and your adopted daughter and your adopted grandmother!" If Peggy had any hope in saying this that Charles would recoil from Alice's daughtership, she was going to be disappointed.

"Yes—my adopted daughter—Alice-for-short!" Image to yourself that he is sitting at Peggy's feet, she being in Miss Straker's old chair and ruffling his head for him, just as of old. There is no sort of change between this brother and sister. What they were once, that they are now. Charles continues:—"Dear little Alice-for-short! Recollect her coming in here and having no cake, because of the man with the red knife, on the stairs?"

"Sir Cramer Luttrell, I suppose! Oh yes—it seems only yesterday. What a dear little maid she was!"

"And what a dear little maid she is still! I almost wish she was a dear little matron." And when he says this, does he say it rather artificially? Peggy feels annoyed at the way she committed herself to "adopted daughter." It just comes to block her pouncing on Charles with, "You fool! why not make her one?" Charles's enormous unconsciousness of the possibility of such a suggestion is irritating. To have him reposing there with his ears so temptingly within reach of boxing, and showing on his face the glow Alice lights in his heart, is very irritating to Peggy. But

she remembers Rupert's injunction, and shows self-restraint. Only, the years are going by—the precious years! However, Charles can dwell on Alice-for-short, and blow rings out of his pipe, and yet talk of something else.

"But I say, Poggy-Woggy—Sir Cramer Luttrell! Now I'll lay any wager you've worked Old Jane's tale of old Becky up with all the celebrated ghosts and bedevilments of this mansion, and made a regular Supernatural Pie."

"It doesn't want any working up, Charley darling! The pie is already made. Perhaps I oughtn't to say that though! There's a little uppercrust wanting yet."—And then Peggy recapitulated carefully all particulars of what she and Juicy had heard from Mrs. Verrinder.

"It *couldn't* be Lord ———," said Charles, "because *his* body was identified in the dead-house on the Simplon not so many years ago. I saw him, you know!—just a sort of frozen mummy. He had been twenty years in the Morgue when I saw him. He had just been identified."

"And how long had he been in the ice—or snow?"

"It could only be guessed by the date of his clothes. Mind you!—there was nothing to identify him by—only a purse with a good lot of money in the pocket. A fine-looking man in an English George the Second dress—*not* a travelling dress, strangely enough. He had probably gone up the moraine of the glacier, in company with others and had slipped and fallen in a crevasse and never been found. He may have been there a century—any time!"

"How was he found in the end?"

"One of the great dogs that had been missed for some days came back excited, and said (or as good as said) that he had found something worth coming for. He led the *frates* to a nasty place, where sure enough was a block of ice some extra sun had struck on, and melted a corner away. And there were four human fingers with rings sticking out."

Peggy's attention is arrested by the dog. It was such a darling. She would have liked to be there to kiss it. Charles remarks that she would have found it large and sloppy. Peggy, a little discouraged by the sloppiness, goes back to the text.

"But how did they find out he was Lord ——— in the end?"

"Well! he had got to be one of three or four missed travellers recorded on the books at the monastery. The question was which he was to be. The only one that answered at all had evidently given a false name—I haven't details, you know—only vague recollection——"

"I understand. Go on!"

"Then I think it was like this. There was a careful drawing of him showing his teeth. It was done by a Dutchman—a very careful drawing. What put the family making the comparison I don't know. But a photograph was sent out, and it was decided beyond a doubt that the teeth of the skeleton were the teeth of the drawing. When I was there they were just going to remove the remains to England."

"And when was that, and why did you never tell me such an interesting story?" Charles says it was when he was abroad for a fortnight seven years ago. Peggy knows well what was afoot at that date, and asks no more questions.

"But, Charley dear!" she says, "I do not see why Lord ———'s coming to grief on the Alps should interfere with old Becky's story. Why shouldn't they both—him and this scandalous Esther Kaimes—have been lost on the Alps, and she not found?"

"No go, Poggy-Woggy! She would be on the record as missing, at the monastery. It isn't as if they had gone on by the diligence. They wouldn't do that and desert the diligence to go Alpineering alone. No, no!—she never was there."

"Perhaps she stayed in Paris with somebody else. She was quite equal! However, just you wait till Alice is back from Mrs. Gaisford's, and see if she and I don't put a finishing-touch on the Supernatural Pie. Why! just look at the ring! There it is on the picture. Alice's very own ring to the life. Only, why need that fool clean away the jacinth? However, it's on the original still! Now come to tea and then go back to Granny!"

Alice's friend was Mrs. Gaisford the Hospital nurse. Her husband had renewed his efforts for the degree, and had mysteriously passed. He was buying the house for a private enterprise of his own, and expected an inexhaustible supply of opulent lunatics.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE PIE CREEPS ON. HOW ALICE SAW MRS. KAIMES AGAIN AT NO. 40. HOW CHARLES AND ALICE WENT TO SEE THE TOWER. SO DID OLD JANE AND HER HUSBAND ONCE. OF EXPERIMENTS WITH A WEDDING-RING. AN EMBARRASSMENT, AND A DECEPTION. STILL, OLD JANE GOES TO SLEEP HAPPY

Mrs. Verrinder added little or nothing to her version of old Becky's story. As time went on her recollection of the narrative became less vivid, and more diffuse. It might have been expected that, as it died away, she would cease to confuse between Alice and the shadowy Cynthia Luttrell. But the contrary was the case; if anything the confusion increased. No doubt this was partly owing to the accidental likeness between Alice and the portrait of Cynthia, which Charles purchased of Mr. Bauerstein, and hung beside the portrait of her Aunt Phyllis in his drawing-room at Acacia Road. There was also an element of added confusion in Old Jane's memory of the Alice Kavanagh who was some sort of pensionnaire or dependent of old Miss Luttrell. Neither Alice nor Charles doubted that this person had been mentioned by old Becky in that interview of sixty years ago. But they did think that probably Old Jane had mixed her first hearing of Alice's name with one perhaps nearly resembling it. This was much more likely, surely, than that there should have been another Alice Kavanagh in the connection. Old Jane herself assented to this, saying very likely she was mistaken. This possible previous Alice Kavanagh had no interest for her—in fact only came in accidentally.

As for the tales of the disinterred bones and the frequent ghosts at No. 40, they were told to Old Jane as soon as it appeared that she was not likely to add to her reminiscences. But she seemed to have been educated in a school of incredulity; phases of this, and its reverse, pass over Society from time to time. When Old Jane was a girl the stage of provisional receptivity we now live in was undreamed of. It was not then thought necessary to self-respect to preface a final rejection of superstitious fancies with any parade at all of our readiness to give them a fair hearing. Röntgen Rays and Radium, Gramophones and Wireless Teleg-

raphy, have produced the cautious sparring which belongs to the second round of a Fight. Incredulity has had all the bounce knocked out of it.

Old Jane came quite fresh from another age; and, when confronted with Psychical Research, was able to enjoy a good ghost-story to-day for its own sake, with a well-defined intention to disbelieve in it altogether to-morrow. Her readiness to enjoy and forget it was quite conclusive against taking her into council in the collation and classification of the various items that had to be woven into a consecutive story.

Alice and Peggy, therefore, laid their heads together undisturbed. They made up their minds about all the facts except how the ring came in the beer-jug. It looked as if that must remain a mystery for all time. But, for the rest, it was clear that the ghost Charles had seen was Esther Kaimes re-acting her share of the terrible evening of the ball and the duel; that probably she was also the lidy with the spots; and that her remains were those found in the cellar. If this last was so, the suggestion was very strong that the hideous red man with the knife was her murderer, and that an organised attempt had been made by the unresting spirits of the murdered sister and her guilty brother to throw a light on their own misdeeds. Peggy revived the story of Alice's father's deam (that he deamed he deamed) as a contribution to this conclusion. If you have forgotten all about this, see page 111. But the theory that this dream was an impression on the dreamer's mind of an attempt to show what had happened on the same spot, involved the investigators in the difficult question of how the murderer and his victim came there. At what hour of the day or night? If Sir Cramer pursued his sister into this basement room (as Alice supposed), then where were the servants? Even if they were unable to prevent the murder, or dared not interpose, their presence would have ensured a disclosure in the end. Besides, adopting the only means of accounting for the ring in the jug, namely, that Mrs. Kaimes to avoid detection dropped it in as a temporary place of concealment, it surely could not have remained in the jug undetected. It must either have been noticed, or washed out unnoticed. And supposing that Sir Cramer had overtaken his sister, and had been convinced either by searching her or by her manner that she had no longer got it concealed, is it likely that he would stab her, and cancel by her death the only possible testimony to its whereabouts? But Peggy in her own mind rejected that jug altogether—thought it a pious fiction of Alice's mother on her deathbed. Of course the woman had found the ring! But

was it in the jug? Might not she and her husband have disinterred enough of the buried body to find the hands and remove the rings; then covered it up carefully, and concealed their own handiwork? But, of course, she could not propound this theory to Alice; it would be too atrocious a burden of criminality to heap on her parents' memory. Still, it recommended itself to her. Had not the fingers been found ringless, while a gorgeous array of pearls still hung about what had been a throat? But then!—surely the murderer would not bury the ring he had been seeking! Yes, he might; fancy the horror of a conscience-stricken man face to face with his own deed, when the storm of brutal fury that caused it had subsided!

However, speculation, though amusing, was of little avail; and there was no apparent chance of anything further coming to light. Charles and Peggy and Alice now and again made excursions among possibilities, without getting any forwarder.

The currents of Life ran in their usual channels. Peggy wished two of them, instead of running side by side a pace apart, to run in the same. If she took her spade and just made a start for them would it not be possible to conduct them into it, and rely on the joint torrent running peacefully on till it should be due in the eternal sea? Oh, how her fingers did itch to grasp that spade! But her husband always dissuaded her, and the Peggy who of yore wanted to make all the he-rivulets and she-rivulets run in opposite watersheds, underwent genuine exasperation at the placidity with which her brother's life seemed to flow, and the musical ripple of Alice's alongside of it—just within reach! It was maddening!

Peggy was not at all sure she was grateful to Mrs. Verrinder for rising (so to speak) from the tomb to help in the constitution of a home where such a state of things was possible. She could not say to herself that she wished the old lady was still under that awful dome. But she did wish some asylum (with a small initial) could have been found for her other than her brother's fireside; where (so it seemed to Peggy) the beautiful old silver-haired image tended to foster and encourage the fiction of the adopted daughter. If Charles could adopt a grandmother, why not a daughter? Moreover, although the mixing up of the improper idea of "propriety" with either Charles or Alice, or bringing it into question, was obviously absurd; still, if Old Jane had not been there, you know perfectly well—— But at this point Lady Johnson's mind always dismissed the subject, and we may do so too. *We* know perfectly well!

Peggy and her husband always spoke of it as "the Unsatisfactory State of Things"; and it became a definite entity with a title, like the Bill of Rights or the Protestant Succession or the Statute of Limitations. "Any improvement in the Unsatisfactory State of Things?" was Rupert's way of asking whether any step had been made towards the resolution of what Peggy thought quite as good, or as bad, as a discord. And his wife would reply that there was not a sign of any, unless, indeed, her patience was getting exhausted, when she would prefer "Worse than ever! Oh dear—how trying they are!"

Her mother took up a very well-defined position—in fact, as Lucy phrased it, Grandmamma took it up and harped upon it. It was one of energetic silence, to which attention was frequently called by the speechless one. *"I* shall say *nothing!"*—thus ran the communication—"Your brother Charley knows I shall say nothing, and I say it. I said nothing before, and I shall say nothing now. Charley knows what came of it before, and this time he will find out too late, as he did then, that he had better have listened to me. But I do not wish my opinion to be quoted, and I must beg that it may not be. Charley and Alice must just go their own way. And as for old Mrs. Verrinder, I am far from saying she is not a very ladylike person. But there *are* limits! However, as long as Charles and Alice are satisfied——" And the speaker entered on a career of saying, actively and continuously, nothing.

This old lady had taken very strongly to her grandson—we think we mentioned this when Charles and Alice passed those two days at her house at Wimbledon, after the smallpox. We need say no more now to make it understood that when Pierre is not at Acacia Road impaling butterflies in a smell of camphor, cutting himself with new tools and not stopping hammering directly, or explaining difficult technical points in cricket to Mrs. Verrinder, he is either at school or at Oak Villa at Wimbledon, dictating new concessions from his Grandmother.

From whichever cause, he was not at home with his father and his adopted aunt (who should strictly have been his adopted cousin —but never mind!) one day in the September following the April in which Old Jane was operated on. All the world was out of town except a few stragglers, who seemed to have had no reason for coming back, unless it were to establish a grievance against those who remained away for taking a longer holiday than themselves. They could have the double satisfaction of writing, "Oh, how I envy you those delicious sea breezes!" and as many other seaside things as they could think of, and at the same time thoroughly

enjoying the delights of an empty town—a delicious vacancy of swirling dry leaves in unpopulous squares and streets, of dispassionate business transactions that you and the other party can take your time over because there is no one else waiting, of opportunities of dancing to piano-organs in what would have been "the Traffic" two months ago, of undisguised tendresses with the Bread, or the Milk, or the Wash, over the Airey-palins. But even the joy of those who stop in town is as nothing to that of those who return, exuberant after sea-bathes and prawns, to the fag-end of your paradise, and find they have got the Metropolis all to themselves; and now they can really get a little work done and not be bothered.

Charles and Alice belonged to the latter class. After actually taking the old lady successfully to Littlehampton, and bringing her safely back, they settled down to work. Alice wrote all the morning—rather in the old lady's room than otherwise, that she might listen to the scratching of the pen. Charles departed to the Studio, where he adhered religiously to a fiction that he was a painter, and frequently had a good clean-up for a start to-morrow. But he was really all the time "jotting down" short stories at a penny a word; and at this particular time gratifying his sense of absurdity by writing a monosyllabic story, with a view to writing a polysyllabic one later. "You'll see," said he to Alice, "the next volume of this series will be considered too thick." He foresaw a time when literature would be paid by letters and spaces, the latter counting double, so as to ensure the maximum of ideas per line. Or, perhaps, he said, words will be paid for by the gross, at a special tariff for each word—for instance, *him* at threepence a gross; *her* at a shilling; *love* at eighteenpence; and regular good plummy words, such as *forever, evermore, Sin,* and so forth, at five shillings to half-a-sovereign.

It was then at the very beginning of this September afternoon—ten minutes past twelve, in fact—that Alice made her appearance at No. 40, in pursuance of an arrangement made at breakfast to take Charles down the river in a boat, and see the Tower. A glorious excursion! And Old Jane would be quite safe, because Mrs. Gaisford was coming to sit with her for an hour or so at tea time, and stop on. So you needn't be uneasy about her.

At the door Alice chanced on Mr. Pope, coming to the Office from the lower regions. He wished her good-morning rather absently, and remarked that we didn't see much of you, Miss Kavanagh, in these parts nowadays. Alice replied that that must be because Mr. Pope was always in his room hard at work when she

came, as she was there nearly every day. The fact is, Mr. Pope had made his remark on the very common assumption that it doesn't matter what you say, as long as you say nothing else. Even so, when we've got to catch the 'bus we remark that it's a beautiful day, when it's really a beastly day; or vice-versa. Mr. Pope was roused by Alice's reply to a sense of his own inaccuracy, and implied an admission of it.

"I *have* got my 'ands pretty full, Miss Kavanagh, and that's the truth. You'd say so if you was to see the amazin' variety of Martyrs' heads we've knocked off and burned in this last month. Large West Window in memory of St. Peter Martyr. Parties he burned himself, turn and turn about with medallions of opposition martyrdoms. Pretty idear!—Mr. Chappell he's attended to his side, me to mine."

"I don't understand! Did St. Peter ever burn anybody?" Mr. Pope smiled benignly. "Not he! Knew better than to 'any such thing. This was a mediævally disposed party—Inquisitor I believe —'Oly Office! You go to the National Gallery—there's a picter of him bein' stuck through the gizzard in a pleasant champagne country. Would you perhaps care to see some of the 'eads? Got 'em on a bench downstairs."

Alice was rather early, and was not only amused at the idea of a window commemorating impartially the reciprocal murders of the Holy Catholic Church and its various Dissenters; but, owing to recently revived interest in "the No. 40 ghosts," felt well-disposed towards a journey into the basement, where she had not been for a very long time. Even though it would be painful to her to be reminded of her parents' tragedy, she would bear that, in order to revive the recollection of the lidy with the spots and the red man with the knife. She did not specially relish either, for its own sake; but her curiosity had been aroused by the recent conversations. So she accepted Mr. Pope's suggestion, and followed him through the swing-door of her youth. Oh, how well she remembered the dreadful feeling with which, when she came back from School, or fetching the beer, she would push it two inches back and call out, "Mother!" And how that worthy lady would set it quite open and say immediately, "Now!—don't keep me standin' here!" before she had time to pull her small self together for a start.

She did not wish Mr. Pope, though, to suspect her of any other motive than a desire for Martyrs. So she was careful not to look back or about her on the way down to the workshop.

The heads of the Martyrs were impartially mixed up on the leading-up bench, and Mr. Pope picked them up one by one to show

against the light. "'Eads of Ridley and Latimer"—thus ran his commentary.—"Interestin' countenance! 'Ead of an Albigence. All belongin' to my side. 'Ead of Joan of Arc—Mr. Chappell's department. *I* call it appealin' to the Gallery. St. George, sim'lar remark!—St. Lawrence—St. Barbara. All Mr. Chappell's—Buttifant! Where's that superb bit of ruby you cut for the flames in No. 7—Latimer?"

"Sorry to say, Mr. Pope, it's been broke in two, and we shall have to jine it up with a string-lead."

Mr. Pope turned quite red with vexation. "Now Mr. Buttifant, what's the meaning of this?" said he.

"You must ask Mrs. Corrigan that, Sir," replied Buttifant, with a suspicion of satisfaction in his manner. "It ain't *my* fault if she's allowed down here. *I've* spoke *my* mind free enough!" Some explanation followed, touching on the water-supply. Mrs. Corrigan had to be allowed the run of the basement, in this connection. If you let her come in here to draw water, how could you prevent her meddling, when as like as not it was six in the morning? Of course she just went smashing round, like an earthquake, with nobody to prevent her. Thus Buttifant.

"What does she say herself?" said Mr. Pope. Alice looked round, fully expecting to see Mrs. Corrigan, about whom she had a strong impression that she had followed Mr. Pope and herself downstairs. This impression, which she could not assign its origin to, was so strong that (although she regarded herself as quite outside the discussion) she could not help commenting on the absence of the expected image of Mrs. C. prefacing a guilty person's defence with obeisances, and not impressing the jury favourably. "Well, but—she was here only just this minute. She came down behind us." Mr. Pope hadn't seen her. But she must have been there, clearly. "Some of you young jokers just stir your stumps and find her," says Mr. Buttifant to the apprentice world generally. But Mrs. Corrigan is not in the basement now, whatever she was two minutes since, and the young jokers report accordingly. One of them seems to have something on his mind, not necessarily a joke, to communicate, and Alice says "What?" to him, to encourage him. Pope also adds, "Speak up, young Deaf and Dumb Asylum," which seems to Alice a severe treatment of mere respectful hesitation before seniors. It causes the hesitation to vanish, however.

"There *was* a lady come down. Not Mrs. Corrigan. A lady! Behind—behind—behind"—this hesitation is produced by the obvious rudeness of calling Alice "you" to her face. Ultimately

"Behind Madam"—is decided on. Perhaps the speaker has a friend or brother in a draper's shop.

"Behind *me!*" says Alice, looking round uncomfortably. "Like what? What was she like?"

"Couldn't say, Miss! But she was a lady——"

"She must have been like something. Was she like me?"

Two of the jokers seem to have noticed the lady, and the one who has spoken refers to the other. After consultation, to Alice's surprise, both nod assent. Mr. Pope is impatient. "Don't you believe either of 'em, Miss Kavanagh. They're only guessin'. Couple of everlastin' young humbugs!"

But it is in the nature of that strange animal, the uneducated Englishman, to be hopelessly incapable of direct narrative, under circumstances of peaceful interchange of ideas. He requires the stimulus of a grievance, or the desire to prove a friend a liar, before his tongue will unloose itself. No sooner has Mr. Pope put the matter on a disagreeable footing, than the young humbugs find their voices. The speaking one, a freckled boy with a red head, to whom contention appears congenial, extends an indignant palm (with his case on it, presumably) towards Buttifant, as the intermediary through whom a sense of wrong undeserved may be conveyed, even from a drummer-boy to a Field-Marshal.

"It ain't only me!" he cries, indignantly. "You ask young James! He seen her as well as I did. He's here to ask! You ask him. He won't tell you no lies. Spots of hink on her face and a piller of wool on her head."

"I see the ink."

"Ah, and you see the wool."

"It warn't wool. More like scruffy hair!"

"You see it though, whatever you call it!"

"Oh yes—I *see* it, plain enough!"

"Wot did I tell you? Young James he see it—and I see it. And you can tell the guv'nor I see it." The freckled boy retires into private life to caress his grievance, and pushes things about irritably. Buttifant doesn't see his way to anything further, and devotes himself to the Martyrs. Mr. Pope says it's queer, and you can't account for things—a view which, carried far enough, would undermine Physical Science. Alice thinks she won't stop any longer because she believes Mr. Heath may be waiting for her. Whether Mrs. Corrigan got blown up or not we really cannot say.

"My dearest child, how white you look!" said Charles as Alice came in. He was just finishing the twelfth thousand of the monosyllables, and fancying the polysyllables would be a lot easier.

"So would you, Mr. Charley dear, if you were me! Just fancy! The lidy with the spots came downstairs behind me?"

"Down what stairs? Did you see her?"—Thus Charles, and Alice tells the tale. When she has done, Charles says that as she came in she quite reminded him of herself when she was frightened by the red man with the knife, and wouldn't have any cake. When she was a small kid. Alice can recollect, perfectly.

Charles and Alice's voyage down the river (after lunch at Cremoncini's; for which we have given them time) and visit to the Tower, was an ideal experience. Escapades of this sort are always delightful; but when you have a little extra ghost to talk about, what can you want more? They certainly wanted nothing more. There was no drawback—unless it was that in one corner of Charles's mind was a recollection of the same excursion with another companion fifteen years before. The doubt whether it was pleasant or painful was worse than the certainty of the latter would have been. It seemed cruel, all the same, to brush it out of his mind, and let the present supersede it so completely. His old vice of self-examination was at work. Alice couldn't contribute consciously to the brushing out, but she was the unconscious cause of it in the end. For an intrusive thought (which seemed brutal to "poor Lavinia") of how different it would seem to Alice's husband, under like circumstances, drove Lavinia and her languid interests out of her widower's mind, and substituted an image that he tried not to think a discomfort.

Alice's husband! There!—of course—Charles wasn't blind! Of course he knew quite well it was going to be a wrench, when it came. How could it be otherwise? Alice-for-short!—just think of it, after all these years! But then, consider the child's own welfare! It had to be seen to, of course, that this vague husband-in-a-mist should turn out resplendent, flawless, chivalrous, distinguished—a man among men. Dear us! If the women we love could wed the only men we would be glad to give them up to, what very perfect husbands they would have!

If the slightest suspicion of the absurdity of the way he classed Alice crossed Charles's mind as he watched a beautiful young woman (who *was* Alice) looking down the river from near the fore-end of the boat, it was only for the moment; he did not see her face, and the individuality was less forcible. She might have been any other well-finished girl of five-and-twenty. And Peggy might have been pairing off her lonely brother with her every bit as much as if she had been Miss Everitt Collinson. But when Alice returned

to where Charles was sitting smoking, and brought back her animated face with the clear blue eyes, the mouse-coloured hair touched with chestnut, a little wind-blown on the forehead, the row of unimpeached pearls between the lips that nobody ever kissed apparently (if that slight defacement round the corner *was* where people always kissed you); when in short she came back her very own self—why, clearly then she was Alice-for-short, and not a real person that could be met in Society and mustn't on any account go out without gloves. And Alice-for-short she was going to remain, as far as Charles could have any jurisdiction. Because, according to him, when Alice was standing gazing over the boat's prow at a pernicious tug-boat that was snorting down the river, one abreast, and belching out solid black like a cuttle-fish, an old chap was enjoying a pipe a few yards off, and picturing to himself a glorified home that was to be Alice's, and what a satisfaction it would be to the old chap to talk over Alice's happiness with his sister, and what a resource it would be to him to have "Alice's" to go to when he felt lonely, and smoke a pipe with her paragon of a husband! Certainly.

A consciousness of Peggy, inside Charles's mind, seized upon this point, and asked him point-blank, "Why did you say 'Certainly'? Couldn't you be glad to smoke a pipe with that admirable Mr. Alice without ratification?" His mind wriggled uneasily, and evaded the question. It had the effrontery to begin thinking of his first wife; to caress, as it were, his widowerhood, and confirm his position. He *was* an old chap, clearly. However, here was Alice back again talking about the little extra ghost.

"He was an odious boy, with freckles and a bullet head—a kind of boy that always tells lies——"

"Boys of that sort can't see ghosts."

"Of course they can't! It stands to reason. But the other boy was a dear little black-eyed chap. *He* was speaking the truth, I'm sure."

"But if boy number one always tells lies, and swears to the same ghost as boy number two, who always tells truth, the two tales neutralise one another to a nicety, and there warn't any ghost at all! This teaches us the absurdity of believing in the supernatural, and the advisability of distrusting our own judgment, and putting faith in everybody else's——"

"Now you're talking nonsense, Mr. Charley. Only I like you when you talk nonsense. Do be serious though, just for a minute!"

But the sun was sparkling on the water, and the tide was at the full, and determined to enjoy itself thoroughly until it was

obliged to go out, like a Cabinet whose days are numbered. And the boat was being turned astarn, and going too far, and then going on ahead easy, and going too far the other way, and refusing to hear reason and lie up alongside at the suggestion of a little bell amidships. And we were being exhorted to concentrate our mind on getting out tickets ready. So Charles and Alice put off the minute they were to be serious in, and got ashore packed tight between backs in front and fronts behind, and at last escaped along Great Tower Street, and were soon enjoying decapitation with Lady Jane Grey, and the advantages of the rack with Guy Fawkes. Whereupon Charles's mind went back to the day when he and Jeff went to seek out Verrinder, and encountered a very poor reading of the great conspirator, whose mask had to be held on by Catesby.

"Well, Mr. Charley!" said Alice, who was examining Guy's signature before and after torture, "*I* don't see anything to laugh at." Charles explained the smile his recollection had provoked; of course his doing so recalled Verrinder. Alice went off at a tangent.

"I hope Mrs. Gaisford's wrong," said she, suddenly.

"Wrong about what?"

"About the old lady. She thinks she might slip off at any moment, quite suddenly."

"She's very old. Any little thing might do it—a slight cold—an attack of bronchitis."

"Mrs. Gaisford thinks she might die simply of old age, with hardly any warning."

"I suppose she might," said Charles, "I suppose she might." But the thought of losing Old Jane (you may think it strange to say—but we do not, altogether) had made them both so sad that it needed a particularly hideous dungeon, with inscriptions on the wall written by those who had languished there for years, while the sun shone overhead, to make them forget it and feel cheerful again.

At the end of expeditions of this sort people get silent and thoughtful, and even go to sleep in the cab home. Neither Charles nor Alice did this, but both were very contemplative, in different ways.

Charles was thinking to himself how more than strange it was that that Verrinder, whom he had seen first before the dawn of Alice-for-short, was even then a heartbroken watcher for the return of the mysterious thing called Life to a brain which never opened to receive it; that the woman he waited for in vain through all those

years was, even now, expecting them at home; and what a very funny thing it was that Guy Fawkes, of all people in the world, should have taken his mind back to Verrinder, during a pleasure excursion with a little girl, who at that time when he first saw him, was bringing home the beer from publics round the corner. There was no end to the rumness of things, clearly.

Alice was wondering to herself what would happen if Old Jane were to go out suddenly, like the gas all over the house the other day, when Pierre, in the course of scientific research, turned it off at the main. The question had a twofold meaning for her. One way it meant:—How much will you and Mr. Charley miss the dear old silver hair and patient musical voice? the other, how will her death affect your residence at Mr. Charley's? Alice could answer the first question, both for herself and Charles. The second was more troublesome. It did not connect itself with Mrs. Grundy in the least. It was entirely a matter of Charles's comfort; never was unselfishness more absolute or less egotistic. There was no trace in it of the spirit of aggressive self-sacrifice which runs a debtor and creditor account with God, and usually makes false entries on both sides. It was simply resolvable into sub-inquiries, such as:—"If I stop on, will it come in the way of Mr. Charley's marrying, and being really happy?" or, "If I go away, will Mr. Charley be properly attended to, and not be put off with underdone loin-of-mutton much too fat, and watery potatoes?" Then came a twinge of doubt that had never crossed her mind before:—"After all, my stopping on and making the place comfortable may be bad for Mr. Charley, even if Old Jane is there." Conceivably, Miss Everitt Collinson, or some equivalent benefit, might come to pass more readily if she, Alice, were out of the way.

All this while, mind you, she was quite aware that there was a *mauvais quart d'heure* in store for her when her final surrender of all rights in Mr. Charley should come, and he should be carried away by Miss Everitt Collinson, or Miss or Mrs. Somebody-Something, anyhow! Did it much matter who—it would be all one to Alice? Her mind raised a slight involuntary protest against the exclusion of the possibility that she might keep some of Charles, for all he found a real wife elsewhere. But it gave up the point after a perfunctory effort. There!—it wouldn't be the same thing, and it was no use pretending. If Mr. Charley had a Mrs. Charley, when would Alice get a ride alone with him in a Hansom? Nobody really enjoys riding bodkin. And think how long ago it was that Alice had her first ride in a Hansom with Mr. Charley. Oh no! If Mrs. Charley was in the Hansom, she would wish them as pleas-

ant a ride as hers was now—but, as for bodkin, not if she knew it!

Perhaps we are all wrong in our interpretation of little girls, or women, but we certainly believe that most of them would have felt exactly as Alice did. The only difference we can surmise between what she felt now, and what she felt when as a mere baby she tried to put a spoke in the wheel of Charles's foolish wedding, is that *then* she said, "Oh, Mr. Charley, don't go away from *us*." Whereas *now*, she might have said, "from *me*." But we don't vouch for it, because we don't know.

Whatever Alice would have thought, under circumstances which had not arisen so far, her thoughts in this present Hansom had to come to a close. For the delightful ride which ended the delightful excursion did so on its own account; and Charles and Alice were on the doorstep at Acacia Road, saying well!—they *had* had a delicious time!

Priscilla the handmaid was on the watch, and just in time to make the door-bolt overshoot Charles's latchkey; a thing he said always tried his temper. But they were very late, and she and cook had wanted Mrs. Verrinder and Mrs. Gaisford to have dinner and not wait. They preferred waiting, and Mrs. Verrinder was asleep in the drawing-room. They looked in at her.

"She really is wonderfully pretty," said Alice to Mrs. Gaisford, "but we must look alive for dinner, Mr. Charley. It's awfully late!" Whereupon Mrs. Gaisford said: "Don't hurry on my account—I shall catch my train," in a tone which clearly meant—*do* hurry! I shall lose my train.

So, when the coffee-stage arrived, it was natural that Mrs. Gaisford should pull out her watch and apparently see written on its face that it would take her three-quarters of an hour to get to Victoria and the train was nine-forty. Alice went away with her to find her things. They had only time for three words.

"I expect it will be as I said," said Mrs. Gaisford, through a safety-pin she was holding in her mouth: "She'll go on a bit longer —perhaps—but one day she'll go out—like the flame of a candle. You needn't be uneasy about her!" Alice thought this very inconsequent, but it was just like Mrs. Gaisford. She was always like that. "All the same she may live to be a hundred. She was talking very funnily about you—I must run! It's the last train to-night, and it won't do to miss it. Good-bye!" and off went Mrs. Gaisford. After raising Alice's curiosity she left it unsatisfied. "Never mind," said Alice to herself, and went back to finish her coffee in the drawing-room. She could hear the old musical

voice talking on to Charles as she opened the door. It interrupted itself:

"Is that my darling Cynthia? I was just saying to your husband, my dear, that John and I went to the Tower. We had to get tickets. And we saw all the things you've seen to-day. Only we didn't go in this queer boat thing you've been down the river in. Fancy steam engines on board a boat! Why doesn't it sink! They're all made of iron, and it must be such a weight!"

The only effect produced by the old lady's misdescription of Charles, was that Alice looked up at him in an amused interrogative way, and he smiled and shrugged his shoulders. If they had been a pending couple, not quite ripe but very touchy and sensitive, it might have been embarrassing. They let it pass unnoticed, and Old Jane continued:

"I suppose it's right, making all these railways and things. But there were none when I was with John—none in London, I'm sure. It's all very strange! We did very well without them then. When John and I went off to Scotland—we ran away, you know, to get married—we went in the stage-coach. We went a deal faster than these trains, as you call them." She disbelieved altogether in the speed of railways, treating speed as a kind of abstract idea—a thing timetables and mileage had no bearing on. "I was a wilful girl, and I suppose we did what was wrong. But my father turned against John, and then—ah, dear!"—it was always when she spoke of her father's quarrel with her husband that her voice showed most distress. Alice tried to get her mind off him.

"But you did go to the Tower, like us?"

"Oh yes!—and then we took a little boat, and a man rowed us down the river, and we saw a great West Indiaman going into the docks. It was a beautiful sunshiny day, only it came on a shower, and wetted us through. But we didn't mind, John and I!"

"We didn't go in a little boat," said Alice. "Another time we must. This time we shouldn't have had time enough."

"We had plenty of time—all day! We went off early in the morning, with sandwiches. Some with mustard and some without—for me, because I didn't like mustard. And we lived all day long on them and penny buns and ginger-beer. And when we got home—past twelve at night—there was nothing to eat, because a cat had been in the larder. But we didn't mind, John and I!"

Her thoughts were back in the days of youth and strength and confidence. When she was first resuscitated, those days had seemed like yesterday. As she slowly absorbed the facts (that is, if she really did absorb them) the long years that had elapsed began to tell; and

though statements in figures could have had little meaning for her, and she was still far short of grasping them, she understood the position better than even Charles or Alice had expected. Something of a need of apology for her slowness seemed to be hanging in her mind now, nevertheless.

"You know, darling Cynthia," she went on, "and I know I ought to know, how very very long ago it is. But it is so hard to think it. If I let myself forget, it grows to be the other day that we bought my new Irish poplin and John wanted it made without flounces. And it was—how many years ago, my dear—you say?"

"More than fifty!" said Alice. And Charles, who had been very silent, repeated her words. Something seemed to have made him very grave and dreamy.

"More than fifty—more than fifty." Old Jane repeated it several times. "But, oh, how little use words are! It seems as if it could not be! Why, it really—really—scarcely seems a day since my dear John pulled the bell too hard in our little sitting-room at Stoke Newington and the rope came down and knocked my wedding-present off the mantelshelf and broke it. It was a little Dresden China shepherdess old Miss Luttrell gave me—we called it my wedding-present because it was the only one we had—it and the little shepherd in a three-cornered hat, playing on a pipe. We called it John's wedding-present. John mended up the shepherdess with glue. Only the other day!" Alice had drawn her chair close to the old lady, and put her arm on the cushion the old silvered head lay back on, with the eyes half-closed. She stroked the white locks responsively, but would not trust herself to speech. Old Jane talked on quietly; there was no audible pang in her voice. It was a quiet musical ripple.

"There was a tumbler knocked down too, with John's grog in it—I had just made it, only Elizabeth hadn't brought the sugar."—She seemed to be looking at her hand, spreading and closing the delicate finger-tips.—"I can almost hear my husband's voice now, saying, 'Don't cut your pretty hand, dear love,' because I stooped to pick up the glass. And then Elizabeth came in, and I said bring another glass and the sugar-basin."

She kept on looking at her hand, and moving the slack wedding-ring up and down on the finger. In a moment she resumed:

"And do you know, darling?—(I am old now and it doesn't matter!)—I thought to myself what a pretty hand it was. And I said—I really did, dear!—I said, 'Yes, Sir! see what a pretty hand I have given you! And much you deserve it!' But you know, darling Cynthia, that was my joke. For I loved John dearly! I used to

call him John Anderson, my Jo! It was a song there was then—about 'your locks are like the snow'—I should like John to see mine, now—'John Anderson, my Jo!'" She still dwelt on her hand, and taking Alice's in her other one, placed the two left hands side by side, comparing them.

"Yes, dear Cynthia, you may find it hard to believe, but my pretty hand then was like your pretty hand now! And now—look at mine!" Alice wanted to say how pretty it was still. But the words stuck in her throat. Charles did nothing to reinforce her; rather the contrary!

"Oh, my darling, what is it? See now—that is stupid me! Just think—that I should set you off crying with all this melancholy talk!" But Alice collected her self-possession, the more easily that, tears having been publicly spoken of, she could now produce a pocket-handkerchief without disguise. When it had retired to its lair again, she kissed Old Jane, affectionately, but did not feel loquacious.

"You are really so much younger than me, dear, that's why!" said Old Jane. She seemed to mean that youth could not look death in the face as old age can—or something to that effect. Also, she seemed to imply that the strange thing, on the face of it, was Alice's youth, not her own age. Every one is normal in his own eyes. Alice felt she must try to say something, if only to convince herself of her own self-control. She pulled off her own ring—the celebrated ghost's ring, as Lucy called it.

"You ought to have a guard-ring," she said, "to keep yours on. Like this."—And she slipped it on Old Jane's finger, outside the gold ring. But Old Jane said it was just as sloppy, and one would have to be made. You see, they were talking so unlike people in books!

"Now, Cynthia darling—just to please me, see! You try *my* ring on *your* finger." Alice took the gold ring, and was about to put it on her wedding-finger, when the old lady interposed. "No—no!" said she, "that will never do! Most unlucky! Mr. Charley must put it on that hand. You must only put it on the right." Alice thought this was some funny old-world superstition she did not know, and slipped the ring on her right hand.

"Of course," added Old Jane, "I should have liked it on the other hand. Because it would have looked just like mine that day! But——"

Alice, with the most perfect simplicity and unconsciousness, withdrew the ring from her right finger and held it out to Charles. Old Jane interposed again.

"No—no! That's unlucky too."

"Nonsense unlucky! Stick it on, Mr. Charley, and have done with it!" Thus Alice, and out goes her wedding-finger proper towards Charles. He has been very grave and quiet for some time. Now he speaks.

"I think, darling girl, that perhaps—perhaps you don't quite understand what Mrs. Verrinder meant." He comes and sits on the other side of Mrs. Verrinder, and speaks to her by her name, gently and affectionately.

"Dear Kate, I am afraid you have got a false idea about me and Alice. I am not going to marry Alice, and Alice is not going to marry me——"

"Oh, Mr. Charley dear, WHAT a silly old goose you are!" Alice has flushed scarlet, and her pulse has gone up—very much up! "Dear Kate! she never thought any such nonsense. *Do* tell her, Mr. Charley!"

"*You* tell her, Alice!" This was mean. You see, the fact is Charles had not the dimmest idea what he was going to say. Alice might try her hand.

"You don't understand, dear Kate. It's not like that. Mr. Charley and I are—Mr. Charley is—well! it's *quite* different——" And Alice doesn't feel that she's scoring. Charles's delicacy is in terror lest any form of disclaimer should be interpreted into something dreadful, and feels he *must* clear the position.

"Alice was a baby when I knew her first——"

"And picked me out of the filthy street and the area full of cats and my bedroom near the water coming in, and took me home to Mother Peg, and saved me! Yes—my dear—my dear—you *did!*" Alice is getting excited, but excitement may not be good for Old Jane, and she sees her way out easiest by turning all to a joke. She remembers Charles's letter Sister Alethea read, and the stolen turkeys, and winds up: "And instead of that, suppose I was to go and marry you! Poor Mr. Charley!"—

Charles is just going to avail himself of the proffered exit through laughter, when he is stopped by the tears he sees running down Old Jane's cheek. During the attempted explanation she has been looking, puzzled, from one speaker to the other. Now she herself speaks.

"Oh no! oh no!—it isn't true. You are only joking with me. But do not—do not! Oh, do tell me truly—are you not, you two—are you not to be married—to be made man and wife?" She keeps looking from one to the other. The position she has placed them in is a convolution of embarrassments.

Alice, confronted for the first time with the problem of her own relations with Charles, which from childhood she has always taken for granted, thinks first and foremost of *his* difficult position, and how she shall best extricate him from it. She thinks of saying: "I love Mr. Charley so dearly that I certainly wouldn't marry him on any account. He must marry somebody he's passionately attached to, etcetera." But what an idea! Fancy trusting Mr. Charley with an admission of that sort! He'd order a ring at once, if it was Alice-for-short, even if he was head-over-ears in love with two or three duchesses. Then she thinks how would it be to say, "I hate Mr. Charley so that nothing would induce me," and turn it off as a joke. But she is not certain the joke would avert the further discussion of the point, and besides!—the silver hair, the beseeching look, the trembling hands still holding hers and Charles's—how could a joke be thought of, much less spoken? She is sorely puzzled what to say. But she is always full of intrepidity and resource, is Alice! An idea crosses her mind. She knows Old Jane's hearing is not equal to a *sotto-voce,* and she speaks across her quickly, under her breath.

"Can't you think of anything to say?"

"No! whatever I think of seems wrong."

"Then do as I tell you, Mr. Charley, and ask no questions. Pretend we're engaged, for her sake!"

"For her sake?" Alice nods. She stoops over the old wrinkled face, and kisses it affectionately.

"Dear Kate! don't cry—I will tell you. We mean to be married, one day—me and Mr. Charley—when we're in the humour. And we'll tell you all about it when we know ourselves. There!"

An expression of perfectly seraphic rapture illuminates the old face. "Oh, my darlings," she says, "I was right. I was right. And it will be?"

"Oh yes—one day! But we are very happy as we are."

"And you will be happier yet—as John and I were."

Alice had to admit to herself that her adventure had been a rash one. She had not had time to consider the consequences. It was not only that the old lady was sure to talk, whatever promises of secrecy she might make, but that she herself felt, the moment that Old Jane gave way to her delight at the announcement, that she was not really prepared to play out her part in the drama. She could have simply made her misstatement, and there an end. But, to have to face the constant recurrences that might be expected, and to supply the little inventions that would certainly be called for! How about that? And worse still, how about meeting Mr.

Charley to-morrow morning? Just for to-night, and for an expedient, it didn't matter what nonsense we talked! But how about the cold light of day? It would never be possible to keep discreet silence on the subject by mutual consent. That would breed a subconsciousness; *that* would never do. It might even undermine them—Alice shuddered to think! And if it was bad for her it would be worse for him. See what she had done!

At the same time, what was the alternative? Sticking to the truth, and letting the dear old thing break her poor heart over it? A pretty choice! No—she could rub the unselfishness of the motive into Mr. Charley, and square it all up that way.

These reflections passed rapidly through Alice's mind, probably in some modified form through Charles's also, as they stood by the old lady, neither liking to withdraw the hand she held; both at a loss what to say next. Presently her own fingers relaxed, and she remained perfectly motionless with her eyes closed—so motionless that Charles thought she had fainted. But she had not. It was only the sudden sleep possible to old age and low vitality.

"She's all right," said Alice, after examination. "Very little pulse—but it's there! She ought to have something. There's some brandy in the cellaret of the sideboard." But before Charles, who went immediately to get it, returned, the old lady opened her eyes and drew a long breath. "I must have dropped asleep for a minute," she said; "I wonder whether I was dreaming or not," and then seemed to become partially unconscious again.

"Oughtn't we to send for Shaw?" said Charles. Shaw was the local medical resource. But at the sound of his name the old lady roused herself. "No—don't send for any doctors for me," she said, not without asperity, "I shall be best in bed."

She tried to get on her feet, but succeeded so ill that Charles settled the matter by picking her up like a baby—she was almost a featherweight—and carrying her tenderly to her room. Alice summoned Priscilla, and the two of them got her to bed. Then she became wakeful and remembered the events of the evening clearly. So Alice decided on sitting with her till she slept; Charles on a final pipe, and made himself, as Alice requested him to do so, scarce.

"My darling," said Old Jane when she was comfortably settled, and Priscilla had waned, "I can't tell you how happy you have made me. I've been thinking that it was, and thinking that it wasn't, off and on—off and on! And then when I heard your cab back, something made me fancy it *was,* for certain. Then I suppose I said something and you both thought I thought you were

going to be married at once. Of course I meant in the end. But now it's all quite right, and I shall sleep and wake quite happy."

"Do you dream much, dear Kate?"

"Yes, a great deal. It's always me and John. There's one dream I dream over and over again. We are walking about in those pretty Paddington fields, and he calls me Miss ——— just as he used to do at first. Because that was before. We went there again though. Only this particular dream is always before. And, oh dear! I can smell the May blossom, and hear the singing of the birds. We heard a nightingale, I know. Oh yes! I dream that dream over and over again." Alice felt the lump in her throat, and for reply only stroked the speaker's hand, as it lay on the coverlid. Old Jane went on, speaking more with pleasure than pain—with perfect self-command at any rate.

"We walked more than six miles, John said. I daresay the fields are not so pretty now. We went all round by Westbourne Green and the Grand Junction Canal, and saw a barge go through the lock, and all the water bubbling up. How we did enjoy it, that day! I shall never enjoy anything again so much. . . ." There came a little pause, giving the idea (to Alice at least) that she had remembered her age, and was reflecting that future enjoyment, if any, must needs be elsewhere.

"Cynthia darling, do you know what I should *really* like, instead of going to Heaven when I die—because you know, dear, they may want me to go to Heaven, and John might not be there—I don't think he believed in anything at all—do you know what I should *like*—really—if I could have my own way?"

"No! what, dear?"

"Why, I should like to die in my sleep, just in the middle of that dream. Only to have the dream go on. Because the smell of the May—in the dream—and the singing of the birds—and oh, the sunlight! Now you go to bed, dear. I shall sleep."

She turned her head again and closed her eyes, but left her hand still on the coverlid. Alice said good-night; kissed her again, and left the room.

CHAPTER XLVII

BUT SHE DOES NOT WAKE, THIS TIME. AND SHE DIED UNDER A DELUSION. NOW SUPPOSE IT HAD BEEN TRUE! HOW CHARLES MET HIS BEAUPERE IN THE REGENTS PARK. THE WITCHES IN MACBETH. A LETTER OF MISS STRAKER'S. HOW IF ALICE HERSELF——?

ALICE herself slept, unmistakably. Only, owing to her general arrangement about being called in the morning, it was very late indeed before she waked. For her system was that Priscilla should remain in abeyance until she rang her bell, and should then appear with hot water. This plan of life had been established with a view to its inevitable corollary; that, however early Alice rang, the hot water should be ready for delivery. In fact it was only the corollary in disguise—a palatable way of introducing it, to avoid unpleasantness.

So when she awoke at nearly nine o'clock, she said good gracious how late it was, and pulled the bell violently. Not because she supposed the hot water would come any quicker on that account, but as a foretaste of compensating alacrities to come. Let no rash retainer presume on an exceptional delinquency like this!

"What is it by downstairs?" said she to Priscilla as she opened the shutters. And Priscilla replied, "Five-and-twenty to, Miss." Nine understood.

"Oh, well! that's not so bad as I thought. Is Mr. Charles down?" He had been down an hour, and was writing in the drawing-room. Very well then—say breakfast in ten minutes, and Alice would be ready by then. And tell cook not to boil the eggs too hard. Yesterday they were not eatable.

"Am I to wake Mrs. Verrinder, Miss?"

"Certainly not. Is she sound asleep?"

"Oh yes, Miss—quite sound!"

Alice was so preoccupied with the difficult task of getting through ablutions and into garments in ten minutes, that she did not notice, or postponed noticing, that Priscilla's question was unusual. General instructions interdicted Mrs. Verrinder ever being waked, at all; in fact Charles and Alice (fortified by Sir Rupert) regarded much sleep as likely to prolong life, and quite invaluable to the

old lady. It was not until Alice had broken the back of her toilette and was combing out her hair, that her mind went back on the fag-end of her conference with Priscilla, and then detected, retrospectively, some kind of uncertainty in her last words. Had she gone too far in taking for granted that stupidity would account for anything and everything Priscilla said or did? She stopped combing a moment with a thoughtful face, then hurriedly pulled on slippers and a sort of peignoir or tea-gown, and went out.

Priscilla and cook (unusual again) were standing at Mrs. Verrinder's door conversing in an undertone. They looked frightened and Priscilla said, "Here she is!"—as though they had been speaking of her.

"Has Mrs. Verrinder rung?"

"No—Miss!" Alice glanced at the speaker, Cook. Her replying, instead of Priscilla, who stood silent, was contrary to routine—an invasion of Priscilla's province.

"Have you been into the room?" Alice asked. And Cook again replied, "Yes, Miss." Priscilla remained silent. Alice waived explanation, and pushing the door gently open, looked in. Only for two seconds; for almost immediately she closed it, and turning ran quickly downstairs to the drawing-room, where Charles was writing. He turned as she entered and saw something was wrong. "Another ghost, dear?" he said, jokingly.

"I want you to come upstairs at once. Come now!"

"How white the child looks! I'll come, darling." But she looked as if she might fall, and Charles passed his arm round her. "Oh no! I'm all right," she said. But she leaned on him, too!

He paused an instant at the stairfoot, and glanced round in her face. "Old Jane!" he said, interrogatively. She nodded, and they went upstairs.

On the landing were Cook and Priscilla, as before. Both were crying, as though the short interim had made things clearer to them. They followed Charles and Alice into the room.

The old hand that Alice had held the night before still lay where she had left it on the coverlid; but what it had of colour then, was gone. It might have been alabaster. The old face that looked so happy to Alice as she said farewell to her was almost as white as the hair upon the brow. But for that, what Charles and Alice both knew at once was Death might have been sleep. So little had the lips parted, so nearly did the eyelid still close over the glazed eye, that it would have been hard to say wherein what was now left of Old Jane differed from what had been Old Jane in her half-century of living Death in the Asylum. But no one who had seen

and noted Death that is really dead, could have doubted for a moment that the end had come. For a short half-year—no more!—she had stepped from the tomb into the light; and now the dust would return to Earth as it was, as the Spirit had returned to God who gave it. But neither Alice nor Charles, if thought took shape thus as they stood by the motionless form that had moved and spoken for them so few hours before, could have gone further with the Preacher, and said that all was Vanity. Had not Old Jane, in that brief span of time, wound herself round the hearts of both? And what was the meaning of it all?—of the thread that was now broken—of the memory that would remain? All was not Vanity, preach whoso might! So long as Love itself—the mystery of all mysteries—shall remain unsolved, there is an immeasurable music beyond the octave-stretch forlorn of our fingers, an unfathomable ocean beyond our little world of pebbles on the shore.

Alice's nurse-experience had taught her all the minor duties that weigh us down in the presence of Death—all the "things that have to be done." She knew them better than Cook or Priscilla, who went away to provide some necessaries, after a few words of instruction. Having given these Alice returned to Charles, who after writing a few words for Priscilla to take to Mr. Shaw the medical man, had come back into the room, and stood looking at the seeming-sculptured effigy upon the bed. He placed his arm round her again, as it had been before. She found her voice, in a whisper almost.

"Oh, Mr. Charley dear! To think that she was here with us—less than ten hours ago—and now——!"

"And now we don't know what to think."

"No, nobody does! I was thinking what shall we do about her wedding-ring? It will come off when they move it."

"Tie something round her finger."

"No, I won't. I'll put it on my own finger till . . . well! *she* did last night, you know."

"All right, darling. I don't object. You can put it back after."

Alice asked pardon in her heart, as she stooped over the old white face, and kissed the ivory brow. The hair still felt as it would have felt yesterday. She drew the ring from the finger—how easily it came off!—and placed it on her own hand behind the Ghost's ring. But it brought back the evening before so vividly, that she was fain to hide her sobs on Charles's shoulder. Cook and Priscilla wouldn't be back for a minute or two. His arm closed round

her, as his free hand caressed the loose hair that had only been half-combed.

"Poor little Alice-for-short!" said he. But it would have puzzled any one to say if it was a father or a lover that spoke. Conceivably the latter, seeking reinforcement for a spurious paternity in the name bestowed on Alice's babyhood, preserved through Alice's girlhood. Or possibly, he did not know himself.

Alice felt happier for her torrent of tears; but though she dried her eyes, she did not dissociate herself from him, but looked up in his face with something on her mind. The clear blue eyes gazed into his through the last of the shower, and the hands Old Jane's were once so like folded themselves on his shoulder as the fingers of the left moved on the third finger of the right over Old Jane's wedding-ring. It was that that kept taking her mind back to the evening before.

"It does seem such a shame!" said she at last.

"What seems a shame, darling?"

"Why! To think that the last thing—the very last thing of all when we were together—you and she and I—was a *deception!*"

"What was the deception?"

"When we said let's pretend—all that. It wasn't you, dear Mr. Charley, I know. It was I did it—nobody but me. And she believed it all and never knew it was pretence! I felt so guilty up here when she said how happy it made her."

Whether it occurred to Charles then that he might say, as an infallible logical sequence, "Then why not make it a reality?" we do not know. But if it did, we feel certain he dismissed it at once. The serene unconsciousness of that aspect of the matter in the blue eyes that looked up again so trustingly at him as their owner pleaded guilty to her duplicity; the evident retention by that duplicity and that only of the foreground of her mind, completely forbade any reference to a selfish aspect of the case on either part. The predominant, indeed the only aspect, for Alice, was that her last intercourse with her old dead friend had been soiled by a deception on her part. Charles could never avail himself of a false context of ideas; he accepted Alice's thought of the matter as the only one possible—the only ground on which it could be discussed.

"What made her happiest was best, wasn't it?" he said. "Don't grieve about that, dearest little Alice. What does it matter?"

Alice dried her eyes. "I daresay it's only a fancy," said she, "but one does have fancies!—I would sooner everything I said to her had been true——" Alice was interrupted by the advent of the doctor, knockless but with musical boots. Priscilla had left the

street-door on the jar. She and Cook were throwing their whole souls into averting slams, outflanking rings, and making under their breath. Cook's attitude appeared to Alice to consist of imperfectly digested reminiscences of correctitudes elsewhere. An unwarranted Prayer-book that lived normally in a soup-tureen on the dresser was seen by Alice in the Tea-Anhydride on the little wooden table in the kitchen. It was not on service; a mere implement of bereavement. The doctor's verdict was soon given; and then, his function discharged, he went his way.

If Charles had ever contemplated straining Alice's words to a meaning she had not seen in them, he must have felt glad now that he did not do so. Her detachment from any such meaning was absolute. She would sooner everything she said had been true! And what she had said was that he and she were to be man and wife. But though Charles could not jump at a misinterpretation, to gain an end he had never, so far, dreamed of as possible, he could repeat over her words to himself, as he went in to town to give directions for the funeral. He was to meet Alice at Harley Street, where she would go at once after she had got things settled at the house. But there was no hurry, and he wanted a walk. He walked across Regents Park repeating to himself Alice's words: "She would sooner everything she said had been true!"

Ah! Now suppose—only suppose—he had been the young man who crossed this greensward sixteen—seventeen—years ago, instead of the old man he had elected to think himself now! Or rather, the worn-out, used-up, spoiled, disfranchised man, who could not offer an unsullied love (according to his own romantic notions) to any woman. But suppose it! Just for once! Let Imagination loose—give her the bit in her teeth! And then, suppose!—how if everything that Alice had said *had* been true? Charles's heart quickened as his blood ran riot in his veins—as it mounted to his head. He went dizzy with the idea—the dream of a happiness almost too intoxicating to be borne!

Just conceive it! If the words could have meant what he knew they could not mean, that she would rather it *had* been true that they were to be man and wife! Shut your eyes to think, Charles! Yes! squeeze your fingers on them if that is any help—to think what that would mean for all the days to come that you have left of life; of the life you have chosen to think of as a dried leaf hanging to its stem till the winter shall sweep it away. What would that sweet impossible reality really be?

Charles's dizziness was so genuine a vertigo, that he actually stopped and dropped on a park seat to collect himself for a moment

—to unthink his dangerous thoughts. Might not this sort of thing disturb his existing relation with Alice—his most precious possession, and substitute nothing for it? *Absit omen!* Shake it off and have done with it!

The seat had another occupant; a previous one. Had Charles been in a mood to examine and observe he would not have sat down beside him so easily. He was a Park-waif of the dingiest type possible; all the dingier that each and all of his mouldy garments cried aloud that it had been black and respectable once, and in some mysterious way laid claim to having always been worn by its present owner. Oftenest, the miserable nondescript that hangs about the parks is clothed in a style more eclectic than any known to the Arts in their very latest Periods. His coat may cry aloud that long ago it was an Archdeacon's, and that its present owner is a layman; his trousers that they once adorned a Buck, in the days when they had all their buttons; a Buck six inches longer in the legs. His hat may have been touched by a Groom in the days of its glory, and his boots may have been 'bespokes' for anybody, except himself. Then you probably discern that he never was any good, and are not impressed that he has seen better days, or deserved them. But with Charles's decayed neighbour it was otherwise. Charles decided on the better days at once, and against the deserts immediately after; then followed a misgiving that he had seen the face before, the depraved old face that insisted alike on its claim to belong to the respectable and the criminal classes. It was possible that it might be the Reverend Theophilus Straker, Lavinia's father, sent to the *travaux-forcés* by a French court-of-law, twenty years before; convicted since in England of what the newspapers call blackmail, and the French police *chantage,* meaning thereby extortion of money by disgraceful threats; living always, as Charles had well known, even when subsidising the old Frenchwoman, his wife, after her daughter's desertion, on what he could extract by complaints or threats from the one or the other. It was so possible that it was he, that Charles immediately rose to walk away. He thought as he did so that he heard the words, "Stop, Sir!" but he went on without noticing. Then the other began shouting after him, "Mr. Charles Heath—Mr. Charles Heath!"

It was just the hour of the morning when the Park is at its fullest—late enough for complete enjoyment of the autumn morning; too early for absence at lunch. People were passing, and Charles turned back. The old reprobate evidently meant to compel him to stop by attracting the attention of passers-by, and there was no saying what device he might not resort to. Besides, on second

thoughts, was it not possible he might know something about Lavinia's last days? It was not in Charles's nature to expel altogether from his mind the memory of a past love. The draught had turned to wormwood, but was it not once wine—wine from the grapes that had ripened in the sun of his early days? And had not he and she rejoiced in their sweetness, and dreamed no foretaste of the bitterness in store? He turned back and sat down again beside his respectable father-in-law.

"You were in too great a hurry, *mon gendre!*" Charles knew he would try to be as irritating as possible and resolved not to be irritated. He replied with perfect equanimity.

"I was not anxious to recognise you, Mr. Straker. But if you have anything to say, I will hear it."

"You talk easily, *mon gendre.* You talk as a man talks who has slept all night in a warm bed, warm sheets—warm blankets—a pillow for the head! A man who has had hot coffee *en famille*—hot coffee—buttered toast!—Eugh!" The sound he made through his closed teeth, and a sort of grin-glare, cannot be spelled. It combined pity for himself with resentment against Charles.

"Where do you suppose *I* have slept, Mr. Charles Heath? When do you suppose I shall break *my* fast? I will tell you. I evaded the park-keepers last night when they closed—lay hid. I slept on the grass—what sleep! I was thawing in the sun—like a frozen snake, Sir!—when you came by. A man thaws slow on an empty stomach. Oui vraiment!—hier j'ai diné par cœur!" Charles remembered that this man had been a preacher—(in fact, a very famous one in a puny world)—and he could be eloquent in English as well as in French. Probably he was lying. Had he really had no dinner yesterday?

"I am sorry you have got your deserts, Mr. Straker. But come to the point. How much money are you going to ask me for?"

"Enough to pay for the breakfast I have not had yet. A pint of coffee—*such* coffee! Stale bread réchauffé à l'eau, and butterine kept over from yesterday—kept under the firm's bed, I should say. You had fresh butter this morning, mon gendre?"

"I believe so—I don't remember taking any." In fact, Charles's morning meal had been a mere form.

"Madame would remember—Madame l'épouse. Cette fille charmante que j'ai vu promener, toujours au bras de Monsieur—toujours en carrosse. I saw you and your pretty wife—mais comme elle est gentille!—in a Hansom yesterday. Yes, mon gendre!"

Charles could not tell why it was that his mixing of French and English should make him more irritating; probably he himself

hardly noted which he was using. But so it was. He had hard work to reply quietly: "That young lady is not my wife." Mr. Straker broke into an offensive laugh.

"Ho—ho—ho! M'sieur Charles! Not your wife? Et puis, de qui est-elle l'épouse? De quelqu'un qui n'a pas su bien garder le seragli? Monsieur Charles—Monsieur Charles—d'un honneur si délicat! I say, Mr. Charley, I say-y! Clck!"

And the foul creature made a clucking sound to express mutual understanding in enjoyment of wickedness. He half-closed one eye over the upper side of a twisted grin, and tapped his nose in furtherance of his position.

Charles was unable to endure him any longer. He started to his feet scarlet with anger, and seizing the reverend gentleman by the collar, in spite of his strong reluctance to touch it, shook him to and fro until his disreputable old head vibrated on his shoulders. It was not an act of prowess; and Charles often felt ashamed when he thought of it afterwards. But he was irritated beyond all bearing.

The old miscreant gathered himself together on the grass, where Charles had flung him; and sat muttering curses, not too audibly. A repetition might be feared.

There were very few people close at hand at the moment—two ladies who were frightened and took to their heels—some boys who thought it interesting, and were building up hopes of a fight—and a park-keeper with a Crimean medal approaching along the walk, leisurely enough. Straker recovered his hat and his legs slowly, and then turning to Charles said: "Vous m'en rendrez compte. I will pay you for this." Charles gave him leave to do his worst. To his surprise the park-keeper who now came up seemed to take the justice of his position for granted, over and beyond the normal deference to the better dressed of two disputants, which is inherent in constabularies of all sorts.

"Do you wish to charge him, Sir?" said he.

"Does he wish to charge me?" said Charles.

"Have you any charge to make?" said the Crimean hero, addressing Straker. The latter made no reply, and began to move off. Charles called after him. "You pretended you were starving," he said; "I don't want you to starve," and gave him a sovereign. The reverend gentleman said, "Damn you!" but took the money and went his way.

"He was at his usual game, Sir, I suppose?"

"You know him then?"

"He's pretty well known, Sir. I should like your card, Sir, if

you've no objection." Charles gave it, and added that Mr. Straker was unhappily a connection of his own, and that he had no complaint against him except that he had been offensive and impertinent. He had lost his temper and was sorry. The park-keeper said that sort of thing was trying, and then Charles walked on to complete his business and recover his equanimity.

He was just administering to himself a dose of Alice, mentally, to clear the filth out of his mind, when he became aware that he had been overtaken by three boys—the same that had witnessed the fracas. The smallest of the three seemed to be the spokesman; he opened his case by saying that he said, Guv'nor!

"What do you say, old man?" said Charles.

"I say, Guv'nor! The boys has got a letter wot they picked up—they picked up—they picked up——"

"Where did they pick it up?"

"Orf of the ground. You arsk 'em!"

"Could you indicate the locality?" Charles's manner, and the beaming good-nature of his face as he looks at the little Arab (who is sucking his cap when not speaking), remind us of the Charles who talked to the little girl with the beer-jug!

"Show yer where? Over there. You come along of us. *We'll* show yer!" And the three all point simultaneously like the Witches in Macbeth, to the place where the row was. But the eldest boy, who may be eleven years old, suddenly distinguishes:

"You young hass! Wot do you want to be walkin' the Guv-'nor all the way back there? Don't you listen to him, Guv'nor!" And then the speaker turns, inconsistently, on the young ass, and asks him why he don't tell the Guv'nor it was where the minister bloke was on the ground? Charles's old manner grows.

"Let us avoid recrimination!" he says. "I am to understand, am I not, that the boys picked up this letter where the minister bloke was on the ground?" The Witches in Macbeth nod simultaneously.

"Then—where are the boys? This is in strict order, and arises naturally from the question before the House." The Witches look at one another, puzzled. Then the First Witch (the young hass) is illuminated.

"Them two!" he says, and indicates his companions as if they were on a distant promontory.

"Is there any objection to the production of this correspondence?" The tone of the colloquy is parliamentary, but the conduct of the Second and Third Witch is not. For, instead of saying that it is not at present consistent with the public service to do so, they at

once produce two folded sheets, one apiece. Charles wonders what would happen if the Home Secretary, for instance, were to produce a document from the interior of his trousers, unbuttoning his waistcoat to get at it, as the Third Witch did!

"Thruppince!" All the three Witches say this at once, like a well-trained Opera-chorus. Charles gives them a penny apiece, and takes the papers. The three walk away, conversing about investments.

Charles saw that the letter or letters had probably fallen out of his amiable father-in-law's hat, and ought to be returned to him if an opportunity ever occurred. He thought most likely none ever would, and was content that it should be so. But as he was putting them away in his pocket, his eye was caught by the writing. It was his late wife's. Possibly *you* would have been too scrupulous to look at them. Charles was not, under the circumstances—and we confess that we should have done exactly as he did. He found the beginning and read on, as follows:—

"Mon père—You do not deserve it, but I will send it—it is the urgent wish of la bonne Maman. Elle raffole de son aimable mari! Pour moi, je ne m'engoue pas autant de mon père. But take the money—I hope it may keep you out of gaol for a time.

"As I told you, the letter came. I felt sure. Ce jeune homme est le vrai dindon de la farce. Sa famille est bien riche—il n'a pas besoin de l'argent. Pour les Beaux Arts, ce sont son dada—Il n'en gagnera jamais rien! But I shall not ask him for any more just yet—je vais tondre le brebis—je ne veux pas l'écorcher.

"You see—you could not catch me! Vous aurez beau-faire de chercher trouver notre petit chez-nous. Let it alone—you will never have another penny from me if you find us out.

"Votre fille—pas trop devouée,

L."

Charles opened the second letter without refolding the first, and read:—

"Mon père—I shall not come myself to bring you the cash—but Maurice will meet you, and I write this note for him to take.

"Would you believe it? Ce pauvre Charles—he saw me in the Park after I ran away from you—j'ai peur qu'il m'a reconnu. I have told him I was at Exeter Hall at the time—I do not wish him to know about my respectable parent—and yet I should have no story to tell without bringing you in. At present he is lulled to

sleep. Il dort à poings fermés. Mais je ne veux pas l'éveiller. And, therefore, mon ami, be content not to see your dutiful daughter for the present. Or else fix another meeting-place, farther from Monsieur Charles's daily round. He says he often walks that way. Tell Maurice somewhere else. Ampthill Square? He won't go over that way.

L.

"Ce bon Charles va me reccommander! But first, he must hear me sing. Cela s'entend."

Charles angrily crumpled up both letters, and walked briskly on. He thought he could account for their long preservation, and reappearance now. The old fox had evidently kept them to terrorise his daughter, and Lavinia's frequent intercessions for this father of hers, and donations to him, had been made under apprehension of their production—and perhaps others. Probably he carried them about with him latterly in case he should ever get speech of Charles. He had been sent away from the house more than once. But he could easily have used them to get money, and may have had them in his hands with that view at the time of the rupture. Anyhow, it was certain that he left them on the grass.

It was in vain that Charles said to himself that, after all, the letters told him no more than he knew already. Why should not Lavinia write so to her father? He caught rather despairingly at her contemptuous way of mentioning him, as evidence that at that time she was forming no scheme of entangling him, whatever she did later. But something in the postscript that he could not define came in the way, and this attempt to whitewash Lavinia failed. Besides, the whitewash was not white. It might obscure a dingy stain, but it was of a grimy tint itself. There was, however, an element in the letters for the force of which perhaps Charles did not make full allowance—may not have been actively conscious of—namely, the half English, half French. It reminded him that the repulsive object he had just got rid of so summarily was bone of the bone, flesh of the flesh, of this woman. And she was Pierre's mother! The admixture of tongues by both did not of necessity imply like character in the two, but the dose of it from both so near together had the effect of a nightmare.

Poor Charles! He was so wrenched and twisted, so put on the rack by the whole incident and its cross-fire of thoughts and memories, that he was almost glad to remember he had other troubles in hand, so sweet by contrast was the thought of the old face

and silver hair of yesterday; so sweet was it still, even with the pallor of Death upon it, that to go back on it was like awakening from a dreadful dream. And with it came again the pressure of the two soft hands upon his shoulder, the memory of the clear blue eyes that had looked up into his with so complete a faith that he would understand. There was trouble and grief in all, as there might be in a winter's morning for the escaped prey of an incubus. But, oh, the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the jewels in the snow! Charles tore up the letters into pieces enough for safety, and scattered them to the winds.

One thing was certain—he wouldn't say a word to Peggy about it. Her old self-blame for the marriage would come back, and no end be gained. He might tell Alice. He would like to tell Alice everything—only all this would be pain to her. Why tell her what would hurt her? Still, it could be nothing but balm to him that she should see his whole soul; only, thought he, I would not have her look down into a charnel-house.

This, you see, was exaggeration. Alice would not have looked down into a charnel-house: only into a dwelling the last tenant had made a disgraceful litter in, and run away from. But she would have seen that, though the owner had not made the place tidy for a new tenant, he had dusted every table, polished every pedestal and console, cleaned up every window-ledge and mantel-shelf, that he could place an image of herself on. She would have seen one of a very little girl with a very large bonnet and an apron full of something; and another of the same little girl well washed and dried, and dressed in a little blue frock, throwing her whole small soul into a spasmodic delivery of the memorable tale of the spotted lady. Then many another image, of the growing school-girl, acquiring information at a great rate on every conceivable subject; of the experimental nurse of two or three years ago; and last, but not least, a constant double image of herself as she might have been, and herself as she was—the former exceeding the wildest aspirations of the Smallpox Hospital, the latter a deal too beautiful, and not doing proper justice to that awful mark round the corner, where people kissed you. She would have seen all these, and probably would have said: "What a pity I should not come in and clean up all this mess—for I love this house so dearly, and it breaks my heart to see it neglected and forsaken."

Of course she would have said so, and Charles knew it. And that would have been reason enough alone—charnel-house apart—for Charles not to want his soul seen through by Alice. Why, if she came to know, from an autopsy, how absorbingly he loved her, she

would at once fling all her own feelings to the winds and say: "Oh, dear Mr. Charley, how can you be so silly? Do you really suppose I would ever leave you, if you wanted me to stay? Marry me right off if you like—nothing would please me better!" Yes—Charles knew that. But *would* nothing please her better? There was the crux! Charles couldn't have Alice's happiness tampered with.

Then there crept into his mind again—he could not keep it out!—the same strain that had sent the blood flying to his head before—a Hallelujah Chorus breaking into a Pastoral Symphony, and filling his whole soul with its triumphant resonances—"How if Alice herself"—it always began, and always lost articulate expression in its admission of the possibility of an affirmative answer. "It might even be! Such things have been, and will be again." But if so, how had human reason survived for the after life—for the hours of fruition? Absurd speculation! Be still, ambitious soul! Remember what you are, for your own sake and hers. Do not give way to extravagance, and destroy the happiness that is real, for the sake of a dazzling chimaera.

Charles silenced the importunities of his soul and waked up from his dangerous dream, as he passed through the gate where, years ago, he had seen Lavinia give that intolerable father the slip. "Poor girl!" said he, "perhaps if one only knew——" and walked briskly on to his business in a humour of incorrigible forgiveness.

Perhaps you may not see as plainly as we do that the difficulty between Alice and Charles was an epitome of all man's stumbling blocks that are laid in his path by Selfishness and Altruism. Just as *his* results work out the same under consistent Selfishness or consistent Christianity, so would theirs have done had each had either a miraculous insight into the true well-being of the other, or a blind absorbing greed for that other, regardless of obstacles and forgetful of everything but its object. We prefer the latter motive force in love-affairs, but unfortunately it is only possible to Romeo and Juliet. Maturity *will* be thinking about other folks' welfare, with painful results—Poor-Laws, populations pauperised, and collectively congested, but with personally empty stomachs. There is much to be said for the Stone Age. What the exact parallel of the Poor-Law was in the case of Charles and Alice we do not know, but we do see that the chivalric scruples of the former didn't do the latter any good, and made Charles poor indeed.

CHAPTER XLVIII

NONE SO BLIND AS THOSE WHO CAN'T SEE. PEGGY GIVES ALICE UP. NOT WANT TO MARRY ALICE—RUBBISH! A GREAT REVELATION, WHICH IS PREMATURE

THAT night, Old Jane's last on this earth, Lady Johnson and her husband were recapitulating in their bedroom and dressing-room, as we have known them to do before, relying on the solidity of a Harley Street house to prevent that little monkey Lucy overhead hearing every word they said as they shouted from one room to the other.

"I'm sure I don't know what to say to Nelly." This comes in a puzzled tone from Peggy in the bedroom. Rupert first says he can't hear, and then replies without waiting for a repeat. Why are people always so inconsistent in conversation?

"Advise her not to ask for advice—tell her to marry him without it! She's done it once before, and may as well do it again."

"She says he's such a boy!"

"Does he wipe it off when she kisses him? It seems to me that's the point!" Each smiles and knows the other does, in spite of the wall between.

"Yes! your youngest daughter *was* funny, Dr. Jomson. She wouldn't mally that little boy, because he wiped it off when she kissed him. Did you hear the little boy's perfectly disgusting apology for his conduct?"

"Oh yes!—there was something to be said, though. As for Nelly, she wants to marry this one, whether or no—only this time, she particularly wants to do it *à contre cœur,* and because other folk advise it. One she can't; t'other she can try for. But *they'll* do very well—never fear!"

"I suppose he went to Vevey on purpose. I wish I was half as easy about the other two as I am about them."

"The Contented Vacillators? Couldn't they be forbidden one another's society? That would do it." But they couldn't obviously. Peggy reviews other possibilities.

"I can't bear to think of the old lady dying—one gets so very fond of her. But, of course——"

"Of course, that would make a difference! I say, Lady Jomson!"

"What?"

"Couldn't you persuade the washerwoman not to tie up all my shirts with beastly little red threads? That woman is an incarnate fiend—she knows I hate it and does it on purpose—etc., etc., etc."

But the conversation loses interest for us. Why we are concerned in anything so inconsecutive is that when Peggy heard next morning, at an unusually early time, an unusually early voice as of Alice on the stairs asking if Lady Johnson was in the back drawing-room, and then Alice came in with a pale face and the news, her first remark was: "Oh dear! and I was talking of her last night!" For it struck Lady Johnson as a cruel and cold-blooded thing to speak conversationally of any one who was near death elsewhere, or dying, however ignorant we might be of the fact. She put by the letter she was writing to her sister Ellen—a letter not very likely to deter that still young lady from her new enterprise—and sat down beside Alice on the sofa.

When was it and how was it? Particulars, known to us, are given. Doctor says he can call it heart-failure, for the sake of a name. Really it was just what Anne Gaisford anticipated—a natural end of her term of life. Stimulated perhaps by a little excitement just before she went to bed. She burned up a little too much overnight and flickered out in the dull small hours of the morning—between one and two, Mr. Shaw thought.

"You darling child! And you found her! And where has Charley gone?"

"Gone for Mr. Mould. I don't know what his real name is."

"And will Charley come on here?"

"Yes—he was to come straight on." And so keenly did Peggy scan every word Alice said about Charles, that she absolutely noticed the omission of the name with the invariable Mr. and the accepted pronoun Charley, and thought to herself: "Now, how nice it will be if next time she speaks of him, she calls him Charles or Charley!" But she said nothing except "What had the dear old lady been excited about?" and Alice disappointed her in her first sentence. For she looked unhesitatingly straight into Peggy's face, the blue eyes full of tears, and answered: "Poor darling Old Jane! Do you know, dear Mother Peg, she had absolutely got it into her head that Mr. Charley and I were fiancés, lovers, Darby and Joan, don't you know? And were going to be married and she asked us when. And poor Mr. Charley had to tell her we weren't! Oh! I was *so* sorry for him. You know how he hates giving pain. And she cried so! And then I did what I've felt so sorry for since, be-

cause she really cried so we thought she would be hurt—you know how frail she looked?"

"What did you do?"

"I told her a great fib just to make her mind easy. I said Mr. Charley and I were going to be married, some day, if ever we were in the humour, and it made her so happy, and Mr. Charley didn't mind—it was only nonsense! But you would have done it yourself, because she cried so."

"I don't wonder!" Peggy cannot for the life of her resist saying this. When she has said it, for one moment she fancies the cat is out of the bag, and all the fat in the fire; but how little she understands her Alice!

"No more do I! I should have been so bitterly disappointed myself if I had thought any girl *I* was very fond of—and she *was* very fond of me——" And Alice breaks down in the middle and loses speech in sobs. She recovers, however, and finishes up: "was to marry Mr. Charley and then I found it was all a mistake!"

"That's why I didn't wonder, darling! because I am very fond, indeed, of you!" Alice looks puzzled over this—doesn't seem to follow the reasoning—prefers to finish what she was saying.

"—Because, just think what she would lose!"

"Oh! Alcey—Alcey," cries Peggy, quite out of patience, "do come here, my ducky, and tell your Aunty Lissy she's the biggest little goose of an Aunty ever was."

"Well, I do *not* see anything goosey in that! Isn't he better than any other man—any man we know, I mean? And just think how uneasy one would be about the poor girl herself—why, she might have fancied Mr. Charley *was* going to marry her!—I simply cannot bear to think of it—it would be too dreadful for her."

"Alice! you're hopeless! I give you up. Tell your Aunty Lissy she's hopeless, Ducky!" But the spoiled youngest of the family is busy, and says so explicitly. She is reading from a book held upside down, a tale of two mouses and a worm, which she has to make up as she goes.

"Very well, darling—you're biddy and you shan't be disturbed. But your Aunty is quite hopeless, and I give her up."

Alice says: "I don't see why I'm hopeless!" But she sits on with the puzzled look growing on her face, and buttons and unbuttons the glove she has not taken off. Peggy having given her up, leaves her to think it out, even as the propounder of a conundrum that has made up his mind not to say, "Give it up?" Alice speaks first in the end:

"I can't see what you mean, unless it's something—that you can't possibly mean."

"Why not?" Observe that both these ladies take what it is for granted!

"Well—evidently!"

"Why evidently?"

"Me and Mr. Charley—just fancy!"

"What is there absurd in that? It would be very nice."

"Very nice for me—yes! Of course it would prevent any other girl marrying him and taking him away. Besides——"

"Besides what?"

"Oh, the whole thing! But how do you know Mr. Charley would like it? That's the point!"

"I don't *know,* but I can't see how there can be any doubt about it."

"Did you ever ask him?"

"Never! But I know Charley."

"I could ask him myself, of course." Alice doesn't seem prepared to do any bashfulness on the subject. She takes the matter quietly enough, as the bather from the shore takes the chill on his feet in the shallows—the gasping is to come later—the glorious complete immersion last. But her principal feeling is confusion at an unforeseen combination.

"Of course, I could ask him if he would like it—but, of course, he would say yes directly. That would never do!"

"Why not?"

"Because he would be doing it for my sake. You know, Mr. Charley would do *anything* for my sake. He would hang himself to-morrow if I asked him—he's so fond of me, don't you see? I sometimes think he's as fond of me as I am of him."

"Alice dear! you *are*—without exception—one of the most bewildering little minxes I ever came across. What on earth you expect I can't make out!"

Alice substitutes a pulling on and off of the glove for buttoning and unbuttoning. If Peggy is not mistaken, there is the faintest flush in the world on the bewildering minx's cheek.

"You see, Margaret dearest,"—an unusual method of address, always implying seriousness,—"it would be very nice that way, and I should love Mr. Charley dearly for it. But it wouldn't, you know, be quite the same thing as if—as if——" The flush is certainly increasing, and Alice's eyes are much preoccupied over that glove.

"As if what?"

"It wouldn't be quite the same thing as if—as if—he wanted me all for his *own* sake. I think many other girls would feel the same. Like greediness, you know!"

Lady Johnson's laugh rings out all through the house, and Charles and Sir Rupert, who have just met on the doorstep, wonder what is making Mother Peggy laugh so. She is laughing at the *naïveté* with which Alice has expressed a universal truth. She kisses her a great deal on both sides, and says: "What a very human minx, after all!"

"Ven ve two mouses tooked hold of each end of ve wum, and pulled ve wum in halfed, and ve wum kyed because it hurted to be pulled in half and ve mouses didn't kye because they was bad mouses, etc." Thus continues the legend in a sweet stuttered monotone, which has been theoretically reaching the ears of its audience all along.

Charles walked into the great physician's private sanctum with him. Patients who could not minister to themselves were waiting in the anteroom, but let them wait! Opinions like Sir Rupert Johnson's were things to be waited for. The moment he saw Charles he guessed the news from his face.

"When did it happen?" said he after a few words. Charles gave particulars. "I should like to examine the brain," resumed Sir Rupert. "Would Alice object to a post-mortem? You see, I regard you and Alice as the old lady's representatives." Charles said it would hardly be possible to refuse it, under the circumstances; after all, it was an ante-mortem that "the case" had owed her short spell of resurrection to.

"This will upset you and Alice very much."

"Very much! Alice has been very much upset by it. You see, she had got very fond of the old lady, so had Pierre. . . ."

"So had you! Always tell truth and shame the Devil, Charley. But I didn't mean only that sort of upset. I meant your housekeeping. We're not going to let you have Alice all to yourself, and so I tell you plainly. While the old lady was there—well! it could only have been for a short time. At least, that was my forecast. But now——"

"I see what you mean. Of course, it will be much better for Alice to come back here. For her own sake."

"Ah!—and for yours. (Never mind the patient, he's only the heir to half-a-million and the relatives want to know if he's fit to look after it and I can tell 'em he isn't in five minutes.) And for yours. Where were we? Yes—she had better come back here

for your sake. Because look at it this way, dear boy! You're a young man still, and ought to marry again—get that boy of yours a mother to look after him. His Granny spoils him, and if Alice remains with you, you'll never marry."

"Certainly not!" Emphasis itself, on this point.

"And she won't marry either. I feel it in my bones, and Peg feels it in hers. And we want her back here—the house hasn't been the same house, without her! So make up your mind, old boy, and give Alice up. And Peg will tell her to make up *her* mind and give *you* up. There's no way out of it, unless you marry each other!" The physician's shrewd eye turns round on his brother-in-law, with merciless decision, and remains fixing him. Charles wavers, but thoughtfully, not morally.

"Perhaps you don't want to marry her?"

"No, Rupert, that's absurd, and you know it! Fancy any man, in his senses, not wanting to marry Alice!"

"Some people *do* want to marry other girls, for all that!"

"They mustn't expect any sympathy from me," says Charles, with a touch of his paradoxical humour. But he puts it aside, and meets earnestness with earnestness. He sees that Rupert has a well-defined purpose in what he says, and that evasion would be shabby. "Look at it this way, Rupert," he says. "If I were to ask Alice to marry me, she would accept me at once——"

"Well—what harm would that do you? (Never mind the patient.)"

"None whatever—unless I went out of my senses with happiness! I am making you my father-confessor! But remember this, Rupert! All her life, almost, Alice has fancied that she owes it to me that she is not a—well! God knows what she might or might not have been had I not picked her up and put her in a Hansom and brought her home to the Gardens." (Charles's voice fluctuates towards tenderness as his mind picks up the little blue-eyed midget's image and places it in a spectral cab.) "And she hasn't the least idea that she is to me a precious jewel, a diamond that I treasure all the more that I found it on a dust-heap. She fancies herself, the darling girl, deeply indebted to me, when really it is I that am *her* debtor. She can't possibly know whether or not her feelings towards me are or are not such as a girl ought to feel towards a man who is to be her husband. She only knows she is ready to do whatever I ask her. I know all that in a dozen ways. Would it be fair, Rupert,—now think of it seriously,—to take advantage of the position, and allow her to make an irrevocable step under what I myself believe may be a misapprehension of her own feelings?"

Charles knows he is in earnest, but feels that he sounds like a novel of his grandmother's youth.

"Don't you be too metaphysical over it, Charley. Let Alice fry her own fish—you see to yours. Don't imagine Alice would do her benefactor such an injustice as to marry him out of gratitude; she has your interests far too much at heart for that. Now you know what I think about it. If I didn't consider you were a Mental Case I wouldn't keep the Duke's nephew waiting."

At this moment Phillimore appeared, and said he believed Miss Kavanagh wanted Mr. Charles, and had been asking for him. "There! you see—Charley!" said his brother-in-law, but Phillimore didn't understand, naturally!

. . . . . .

In due course the whole of Alice's conversation with Peggy, and Charles's with Rupert, were communicated by each of the latter to the other. Due course in this case was in the confidence of the night—the next night. And narrative, comment, and necessary qualification went on into the small hours of the morning; and Lucy above wondered what on earth papa and mamma could have got to talk about.

No wonder, after each had heard the other, that they looked on Charles and Alice as joint constituents of a lighted firework which is now nothing but a red spot in the dark, but means to distinguish itself as soon as it is on the job. They remained quite silent, not giving way to the weak impatience you show when you tip catherine-wheels slightly, to start them. It isn't any use; and just as like as not you'll jiggle them on their pin, and they'll get stuck. The same holds good, in principle, of Orchestras and the Drama. No reasonable Conductor or Manager allows himself to be influenced by catcalls and noisy stamping. Much better to be quiet, and wait with patience as Rupert and Peggy did.

They had not to wait long. For on the afternoon of the day on which what had been (or had held) Old Jane was laid in the earth —ashes to the ashes of her long dead husband, dust to his dust— Peggy was conscious, as she came downstairs to go out shopping with her eldest daughter, and then call on the somebody somethings, of a certain *empressement* in the behaviour of the street door, or the umbrella-stand, or Charlotte, who had been dusting the latter and answering the former, or Lucy, who had rushed down in front of her, armed *cap-à-pie* either for Shoolbred's or Society. It was indefinite and unusual, and made her tell Space she wondered what all that was. Space must have told Charles to answer the question, for what he said as he came up two stairs at a time,

to anticipate Peggy, was, "It's us!" He was so radiant that she simply stood at gaze—heart and speech stopped—to hear what was coming next. For remember, Charles and Alice were back from a funeral, and the speaker's face was out of keeping.

"I've brought Alice back." *That* wasn't all, clearly!

"Yes—yes—Charley darling! go on—go on quick!"

"Not for good, you know! I'll let you have her for awhile." But his sister's arms are round his neck, and the tears and laughter of her joy show that no more is needed; the murder is out, and wild excitement and felicitation reign in Harley Street.

"Yes—Mr. Charley and I are going to be married unless I change my mind. I've promised not to marry him if I change my mind." Thus Alice.

"We shall have to see about your things." Thus Lucy.

"S'ant I have tratters off the tate to pull faw myself?" Thus Alice junior, who, whenever anything in the nature of a celebration is afoot, surrenders herself to an uncurbed passion for crackers, which almost always turn out, so to speak, Dead-Sea crackers.

. . . . . .

But this is all anticipation—mere story-spoiling, in fact! If you wish to know how this result came about, go on to the next chapter.

CHAPTER XLIX

THE LITTLE ARCADIANS, AND HOW CHARLES BOUGHT THEM. A FUNERAL IN A FOG, AND HOW ALICE CLEANED THE SHEPHERD. AND WHAT SHE FOUND. HOW CHARLES COULD STAND IT NO LONGER, AND COOK WASN'T CANDID

WHEN Charles left Sir Rupert, making way for the Duke's nephew (who looked more like a wolf's nephew, for his ears stuck out like bats' wings), he found that Alice did not want, as might have been supposed, to lead him straightway to the Altar of Hymen, but to tell him that she and Lucy were going to Jay's in Regent Street. They would come round to No. 40 after, if Charles was going to be there, in time for lunch; and then they could all go and lunch together somewhere, or come back to Harley Street. Agreed to. And Charles was to be sure to recollect this; to be particularly certain to remember that; and to make a point of not forgetting the other. Agreed to also, and Alice and Lucy took an impatient cab that would hardly stand still for them to get in, and went off to buy details of mourning. Charles took the cab's number carefully, as part of a nonsensical system of fidgeting about Alice whenever she went out of his sight, and walked away to his Studio.

His brain was rather in a whirl after the events of the last day or two. When he arrived at No. 40 he was not altogether sorry to exchange a few words with Mr. Pope, whom he met coming downstairs. It tended to settle matters down—to recognition of the routine of every day life. He told about the death, speaking of it as a serious loss to himself and Alice. By the merest accident he called her Alice; deliberation, in speaking to Pope, would certainly have made her Miss Kavanagh. It would have seemed mere priggism to correct it.

"Sort of maternal parent to Mrs. 'Eath?" said the stained-glass maker. He was always allotting Alice to Charles—perhaps he had derived a spirit of prophecy from the numerous Isaiahs, Habakkuks, and Jonahs whom he had delineated, all looking as if they had a low opinion of the future—and naturally this mention of her by her Christian name had its effect on him.

"There *is* no Mrs. Heath," said Charles, seeing the mistake. "My wife died some years ago—don't you remember?" Poor Mr. Pope looked disconcerted.

"I'm puttin' my foot in it," said he. "I'm wantin' that leeftenant of mine—my son, Kit—to keep me on the square. You ask him! He'll tell you his guv'nor spends his time forgettin' himself and commemoratin' other people."

"How's Kit?" said Charles, to change the subject.

"Spooney young customer! That's what's the matter with Kit. Otherwise, lawn-tennis, football, swimmin' matches—anythin' you like!"

"Is it Miss Jerrythought?"

"That's the young lady, Sir!—if you call her a young lady. I don't. I call her a little girl—a little girl in her teens, and not too many of 'em. Can't see why their mothers can't let 'em alone, for my part! Me and Mr. J. 'old to the opinion of lookin' the other way when there's any kissin' goin' on, and lettin' 'em alone. Couple of infants in arms, accordin' to me!"

"A long engagement's the best thing in the world for a boy," said Charles. "I'm on your side and Jeff's. They can wait."

"So I tell 'em. But what upsets their respective mammas is the way they have of going about looking for furniture for their house. Catalogues all over the place—best white wool in super tick mattress—combination chest-of-drors and washstand—three fifteen. That sort o' game! No knowin' what'll come next!"

"Nothing like being beforehand," said Charles. He wanted to go upstairs, but Mr. Pope was full of his subject.

"You ask Mr. Bauerstein—here he comes!—how those two young shavers were going on in the Gallery yesterday." Mr. Bauerstein, appealed to for further explanation, shook with laughter internally, and recalled how that nice little girl had pitched upon a very sweet little pair of Dresden-china figures and made a note of the price. She was sure her Aunt Sarah would give them to her and Christopher for a wedding-present, if she asked her, and her mother said thereon: "But you are not engaged. I will not have it." Mr. Bauerstein became inarticulate with laughter. When he recovered, he wiped his eyes and his spectacles and said: "They are valuable figures, but one is broken. I bought them with Mr. Verrinder's pictures. Mr. Heath would remember?"

Mr. Heath remembered the pictures (but had never seen the china) and also recalled where he had been hearing of Dresden porcelain. These little figures were Old Jane's wedding-present.

Charles had no difficulty, when he had told Mr. Bauerstein of the death of Mrs. Verrinder, and that she had mentioned these figures, in negotiating a purchase. He carried the little shepherd and shepherdess, in Court dresses, up into the Studio. And lighted a pipe, and wondered.

Sixty years ago! old Becky's gift to Old Jane, when she was young Jane—when life was new and bright, and the sun shone on Paddington fields. In the days when a Gretna Green elopement from London meant four days' posting, day and night, through pastoral silences that are now resonant with pumping-engines; under skies then clear that now are tainted with a Cimmerian gloom, or blacked outright, like Hell—through villages that have become railway-stations and village-inns that have become Hotels, with lifts. That like was the wedding journey of young Jane and her bridegroom, and the wedding-presents they came back to were this very same little Arcadian pair, and no others. And how strangely *they* had come back, by a succession of unconnected accidents, to a link with their original donor—to the old ballroom where she, young Becky, then a girl in her first season, had witnessed an infamous scene of the good old days; the days of Vauxhall and Ranelagh in their glory, of a Court that aped a Harem, of a Press that dared not speak for dread of the Pillory, and a Parliament packed with placemen; the days when no woman could call her soul or body her own—in a word, the days of a hundred and thirty years ago. That was the image of those days Charles had in his mind—maybe a false one! How he would have liked to follow out the story to its sequel, the cellar-murder! For that the two were connected he did not doubt. But now there were no further data to ground surmises on. The mystery must remain a mystery, for all time.

If only we could have oblivion, just where we want it! If we could but use the curtain that hides from us a past our curiosity craves to fathom, to veil the things in our lives that we are craving to forget! So Charles thought as he watched his smoke-rings melt to nothing, and die. If only that cloud that hid that murder and its story could be lifted, and become instead an impenetrable darkness between him and his own past! He was not of that sort that consoles itself with the reflection: "At any rate I was not to blame." Rather, he was always seeking to whitewash others at his own expense. He would far sooner have treasured his last weak attempts in his dead wife's favour than have to look at her in the ugly light of those two letters he had torn up and thrown away so gladly. But there was something in the tone of the let-

ters that was worse even than the contemptuous expressions about himself. "Le vrai dindon de la farce," was bad enough—even with the forced excuse that she hardly knew him at the time—but the semi-jocular, hail-fellow-well-met tone in which she wrote to her criminal old parent had sickened Charles of his task of extenuation. "I'm afraid I can do nothing for poor Lavinia after that," said he to himself. Only note—he still said "Poor Lavinia!"

By-the-bye (apropos of Lavinia), he was all this time forgetting that dear boy at home, who was just as dear to him as if his mother had been an angel. Of course, the poor child would be coming back from his Granny, and there he would find his "other-wicket granny," as he called Old Jane, lying dead and cold. And the boy had never seen Death near. So Charles gave up the intention of beginning a glass-cartoon he had promised Pope, and writing a hurried line of explanation to Alice, which he directed and attached to his door, went back to Acacia Road as fast as a cab could take him. But he wrapped up the Dresden figures and carried them home with him.

Poor Pierre! He had arrived and heard the news, with no one but Cook and Priscilla to console him. As far as Charles could make out he must have divided his despair between shedding tears on Cook (who was kind-hearted, though greasy) and listening outside the death-chamber with no tangible motive, and with his shoes off in case he should make a noise! When he saw his father his sobs made him almost inarticulate, but he managed to convey that he had been looking forward to telling the old lady that on Saturday he made three sixers. And now she would never know! His faith in her interest in cricket was touching. (It was a holiday, for some reason, and Pierre was engaged to go to a schoolfellow's, where he was to spend the night, and return to school with his friend—it was a large public day-school—in the morning.)

Alice would be pretty sure to stop on in Harley Street; so Charles made up his mind to stay at home, and write. He was near the end of his polysyllabic story, and the publisher was crying aloud for it. He must unpack the Arcadians, though.

Where should he stand them? On the chimney-piece would be best. But first he must wash the male. The female had evidently been the broken one, and Mr. Bauerstein had had her cleaned from glue and properly mended. She looked as good as new. But the male (as well as herself) had been an inkpot, or rather, lived in a champaign-country where each tree had an inkpot at its roots. He had been careless and the ink had got on his Rose-du-Barry silk stockings.

There was a piece of paper roughly gummed or pasted under his hollow base. On it was faint writing, nearly vanished. But "For Katey" still remained legible. Oh! how strange it was, with her lying dead upstairs!

The writing was so faint that if hot water was used to wash it or to detach the paper, the forest ink might go outright. Charles decided, as the safest course, to stand it in cold water, and let the paper soak off slowly. That would not hurt it, and it could be replaced, if Alice liked. Every arrangement Charles made was subject to this condition. He left that courtly little shepherd sitting on an island in a basin of water, well out of reach of Priscilla's *trop de zèle,* for which she was celebrated. Then he sat down seriously to finish his story, and to work in all the longest words he knew.

A pause for refreshments, and three hours more writing and he was at the end of the twelve thousand words. He acknowledged fatigue, and rang for tea. Just as he was measuring it out scrupulously, came the sound of Alice. So he put in another heaped-up spoonful. Alice's footstep on the stairs, and her voice, in the rooms above, giving instructions to Priscilla, put a new heart in him, in place of the mere workaday heart of the past three hours.

"Now, Mr. Charley dear, tea! Have you stirred it? Only just made—very good! I'm not going to stop, you know. I'm going back to Harley Street. I've come for my things." The new heart fell—went down below the level of the old one.

"*Must* you go, Alice-for-short? Does Peggy say you must?"

Alice longed to say that Peggy would be only too glad to give her up, under certain circumstances. But although she had made claim to be able to speak of those circumstances to Mr. Charley with perfect self-command, she found, face to face with the undertaking, that it was not so easy as it had seemed. The water was up to the bather's waist, and she was gasping.

"She thinks I had better go back, all things considered."

"Whatever shall I do without you, my dearest girl?" Alice then made a completely false step. Perhaps the gasping was uncontrollable.

"Of course, if you were ill, dear Mr. Charley, I would come directly, whatever they said."

What a mistake! Immediately, whatever Charles's mind had allowed itself of imaginings that Alice's heart might be his outright, as though he were the young Romeo he had often allotted her

to, was swamped in a vision in which Gratitude, Benevolence, even Duty, came on the stage, while poor little Love fluttered away crest-fallen to the flies.

"I daresay they are right. But I don't know what I shall do without you, Alice-for-short, for all that!"

"You don't know what you can do till you try, Mr. Charley dear! Just you try! Anyhow, back I go—that's certain."

And back Alice went sure enough. And so hurt and disconcerted was Charles at being roughly brought face to face with the inevitable full-stop to his daily Alice that he actually forgot the poor little Arcadian shepherd, and left him playing on a reed in his little three-cornered hat, with never a shepherdess to console him, on a shelf in his own bedroom where nobody else would touch him and he would be safe, if anywhere. So, as it chanced, Alice heard nothing about him, that time.

Charles, when he appeared next morning, went as near being ill-tempered as Priscilla could recollect seeing him. She made matters worse (she was quite without tact) by saying Miss Alice said coffee was to be made for two just the same whether master was alone or not, because good coffee couldn't be made for one, and it could always be finished in the kitchen. This rubbed Alice's absence in, and Charles felt it was undeserved. So, instead of conversing amiably with Priscilla, he told her that would do. This was a hint, and Priscilla took it, and left him to the *Daily Telegraph*. He ate a soulless egg and prepared to go. He glanced in at the room where the body lay. The gleam of morning sun that struck across it, as he opened the closed shutter, showed where Alice had placed some flowers about the figure on the bed, when she had come upstairs the day before. The motionless remnant of eighty-six years of nominal life, that had only been actual for less than one-third of its time, was so pale and unsubstantial, such a mere technical record of humanity passed away, that the little China shepherd, could he have seen it and spoken, would have called it porcelain like himself, and never could have dreamed that *that* was once the bride that owned him, sixty years ago! Look at his shepherdess—how little the change! True, she had been broken, and mended! So had Old Jane, but the mending had come too late.

Charles uncovered the face, and let his imagination put down the perfect happiness of its serenity to the last impressions on her mind at death, the memories of her old days with her husband; of the happy hours in Paddington fields, that are fields no more; and, not least, the delusion about himself and Alice. Yes! Charles

did wish she had been under no delusion when she died. So had Alice wished, but not in exactly the same way.

How about that ring? He drew the coverlid also off the hand. Yes, there was the ring all right. Alice had replaced it yesterday. Charles wondered whether Mr. Mould (whose real name was ignored, though no doubt he had one) was really to be trusted about valuables, when no member of the family stood by to see the coffin-lid screwed on. We wonder, too. Let us hope, with Charles, that a strong professional feeling prevents malpractices. But, what do we know? Charles took his last look at the silver hair and old features Alice had grown to love so in so short a time, and wondered where or what the young soul was now, that had slept on earth for sixty years. He closed up the room, gave some directions about the undertaker, who would probably come before he returned, and some others in case Sir Rupert or Dr. Fludyer should come to examine the body, and went away to spend at the Studio the working hours of the loneliest day he had had for a long time.

However, he completed a cartoon for Mr. Pope, who was greatly delighted with it. With a singular perversity, Fate had ordained that Charles should develope a capacity for doing respectable work the moment he had another employment he was better fitted for. Had some guardian Angel been purposely blocking his path; and now, having turned him into a better groove, was allowing him a little luxury—a pleasant self-justification for his many pictures that clung about him still. Every day as he looked at the dreary backs of the canvases against the walls, they seemed to him years the locust had eaten and been unable to digest. And every day he wished he could burn them all and see the last of them.

He did not wish it less at the end of this lonely day than on any other, but he put very little side on in his wishing. For he felt that all life had gone colourless and flat. He had imagined he could really give up Alice, for Alice's own sake; and he was not best pleased with himself for beginning to suspect that he might possibly be mistaken. He was honestly (but quite fallaciously) convinced that the surrender was necessary and inevitable, and would of course make it. But he was by no means sure he would not cry out on the rack, and destroy all the merit; and, what was more important, all the intended good effect of his self-denial. Yet every throe of disquiet (and each was worse than the last) ended the same way—consider Alice! Nobody could say Charles Heath did not make a good fight against an opponent who never attacks without a certainty that there is a traitor in the enemy's camp—himself! And he is an opponent who can bide his time—who can

afford to wait—whose entrenchments are secure; whose commissariat is unimpeachable, and whose name is Love.

When Charles had completed his cartoon (a coloured cartoon, because it had little numerals and letters all over it to show what glasses to use) he went away to Harley Street. But he felt that Harley Street had got a little dog's-eared. Are we too metaphorical? Our meaning is that Charles was conscious of Something, and conscious of a consciousness of Something on the part of Alice and Peggy and Rupert. And further he was conscious that each and all of them were doing their level best to enable all and each to pretend that there never was a community with so little below the surface. A parade was made of the abnormal usualness of current life. It was an epidemic sensitiveness that always breaks out in families where engagements are brewing, or suspected. Under these circumstances it has always seemed to us that the kith and kin of the two principals might be described as their strained relations. Peggy and Rupert talked a good deal into the night, and rather regretted that they should have said anything about it—the Something! And Lucy overhead, this time, felt quite sure she knew what papa and mamma were talking about.

But to-morrow was the funeral. It was an early October day, on which London was turning over in its mind how it would do its first November fog.

Alice and Charles were to be the only mourners—Lucy wanted to come, but her mamma overruled her. She had a cold, certainly, but—well! perhaps there was a mixture of motives.

Old Verrinder's will had determined that he should be buried at Kensal Green, in the Dissenters' Ground, and that the remains "of his dearly loved wife, when actual Death shall ensue" should be laid "beside my own." Dr. Fludyer had carefully observed all the terms of his will; and, therefore, it was at Kensal Green Gate that the hearse, after a respectful crawl through suburbs in which the middle-class was leading what it called its life, and a cheerful trot (after a pause to collect itself) through what were once the fields its tenant walked in—thinking perhaps to herself all the time what a very nice sort of young fellow this young man beside her was, papa's new assistant!—that this hearse, bearing her ashes to his ashes, her dust to his dust, remembered what was due to itself and the occasion and went, under a profound conviction of our common lot, very little quicker over the soft gravel road than if it had contained the chrysalis of a bygone churchwarden.

London was trying a curious experiment with a great black

cloud overhead when Alice and Charles followed the coffin to the grave. The fog had risen from the ground and hung above, like a pall. The sparrows, who always seem to know about these things, twittered to one another that it was abnormal, and one appeared to ask suddenly if it wasn't an eclipse. Alice thought they quarrelled about it violently in the dust—or the ashes. Then they left, in the hands of a local stonemason, the lettering to follow her husband's name on the headstone: "Katharine Verrinder. Wife of the above. Died September 1876, aged eighty-six." And then were driven off for home. The mourning-coach was cheerful about it; that job was done, anyhow!

On the way Charles was silent—very silent. But then he had been that five years before, at his father's funeral, when Alice went also, and returned with him and his mother and Peggy in one of the coaches. She remembered that he hardly said a word. This time, however, he did speak in the end, just as they got to Praed Street. "I never told you, Alice dear, about the little shepherd," said he. And then he told her; and she, who had had an uncomfortable impression that she should somehow leave him at his door and be driven home alone to Harley Street in this lugubrious ancient carriage that smelt of the Georges, replied that she must come in then to see that little pair of Utopians, and she supposed, but hesitatingly, that they might send this thing away, and she go home in a hansom. She spoke as though doing so might outrage some funeral propriety unknown to her.

"I'll risk it!" said Charles. "But it's rather like sending Guildhall away, or the Lion and Unicorn."

But it made no difficulties, touching its hat in the person of its head-steward, who may have felt nearer pewter than before. He looked that sort. Charles and Alice drew freer breath as the last obsequy dispersed, and she ran into the house to open the shutters.

"However those men get any wives, I can't imagine," said she, when she and Priscilla had opened everywhere and let in what light there was.

"I believe they all marry pew-openers," said Charles, with perfect seriousness. And Alice believed him for a moment; then her laugh rang out quite happily and naturally. The funeral was over.

"Oh! here's the little lady! What a pretty little thing! How she must be missing her little shepherd! Where is he?"

"Up in the bedroom. On the top-shelf—by the window."

"Which bedroom—yours or mine?"

"Mine. Beside Julius Cæsar above the books. He's stood in a basin."

"All right!" and off goes Alice, twice as quick as Charles would have done, and comes back, basin and all. He sits gravely by, looking at her. He is very saddened, or *distrait,* or something. This won't do! Alice can't go off in hansoms and leave him like this. She must cheer him up.

"Take care of the bit of paper, stuck underneath him," says he, but absently, as if he didn't care so very much about the little shepherd.

"There is no piece of paper. Yes, there is! It's floating in the water. I say, Mr. Charley——"

"What, dear?"

"What's the meaning of this—written on it?"

"It's what Miss Luttrell—old Becky, you know—stuck on it. Some direction to some one she left it with—'for Katey.'"

"Yes, I see all that, but this on the other side? How comes my name to be written on it at all?"

"Hullo, Alice-for-short, darling! What's all that? . . . Let's have a look. . . . Well, I'm blowed!"

So was Alice. For there, on the side of the paper which for sixty-odd years had stuck under that little shepherd who had passed straight from Verrinder's strange eyrie that looked out on Bedlam to the back slums of Mr. Bauerstein's collection, and only been resuscitated for repair the other day—on that inexplicable scrap of paper was written plain and clear for all to read, Alice's own name, "Alicia Kavanagh!"

If Charles had been by himself when this came to light he would very likely have given up trying to guess the conundrum. But Alice was sharper. She only wanted time to put two and two together.

"Then there *was* an Alice Kavanagh. That was what she meant—dear Old Jane!" Alice's eyes are full of tears. "Don't you remember, Mr. Charley, how she said there was, and we didn't believe her, and thought it was because she heard my name just after she came to? Only—how strange that it should be Alicia, too!" Charles remembered it all, but proceeded to discover that there was nothing very remarkable in the coincidence. He had a disposition towards minimising; had always shown skill in this direction in dealing with the No. 40 ghosts. There might be fifty Alicia Kavanaghs. Why not?

Said Alice: "Why not indeed? I'm one myself, and it would be too selfish to expect everybody else not to be! But I must wash this little man's ink off and make him as smart as his little she. I'll do it directly we've had some lunch." And she did so; getting

some soap and soda from Priscilla. Charles was almost too preoccupied to eat anything; and she could see plainly that all Cook's efforts to produce that impossible thing, a chronic lunch to become acute at pleasure, had turned out useless. Alice was sorry, but then she was nearly as bad herself. However, Charles soothed his troubled soul with a pipe, and watching Alice's pretty fingers removing the ink from the soiled Arcadian.

"Don't pour my coffee—not till I've quite finished him," said she. "The ink's in all his frills and folds." But she got him quite smart like his little love, and stood them on the chimney-piece together—rather far apart certainly. But as they were inflexible and sounded when tapped, what did that matter?

The great gloom of London's little experiment, now several hours in operation, had brought chill as well as darkness on St. John's Wood certainly, probably elsewhere. The fire was lighted, and flickered on the faces of Charles and Alice as he puffed at his pipe and she drank her coffee. Both were sad, but each in its own way; Charles's an absorbed sadness, full of thought; Alice's a sadness of tears that may have their way and leave the soul in peace.

"Oh! Mr. Charley dear, think how long ago! And they may have placed them on their chimney-piece just as we do now——"

"On ours? But I shall have the chimney-piece all to myself, dearest Alice-for-short! Alice has run away—gone to Harley Street now, instead of Charley Street."

"Oh! don't—please don't! You know I can always come and pay the little China shepherd and shepherdess a visit—whenever I like."

"Yes, dear child! I know. And you will come—often—till——" Something a little queer, surely, in Charles's voice.

"Till what?"

"Till after I have made them a wedding-present, dear, to you. And then you will always be able to see them, at home. The time will come, and you shall have them, darling!"

Charles tried a laugh, and it turned out a miserable failure. Alice got up and went to the window. "I think the fog's clearing," she said. "I ought to be going." A minute or two elapses, as she stands at the window, very tremulous. Then she turns round, not concealing it well at all, and says, as she puts on her cloak:

"You know how I hate to hear you talk like that—yes; about me—marrying! I ought to go now, dear Mr. Charley. You're coming this evening, of course?" Alice is going off. The fog is clearing, no doubt. Charles's farewell seems to hang fire. The fact is, that if Alice is tremulous Charles is worse. He has put

his pipe down, for smoking has become a mere pretence, and each hand alternately grasps the other to keep it still, and betrays its own weakness.

"Alice! Stop!" He has made no effort to control his voice—leaves it to its own devices. So left, it simply announces to Alice what is coming next. She knows what it will mean, though she doesn't know what form it will take. Her heart thumps painfully, uncontrollably, as she closes the door she is just opening, and goes half-way back to Charles.

"Yes—Mr. Charley dear—what?"

"It's no use, darling, I *must* speak! I simply can't bear to be without you. I simply—can't—*bear* it!"

Alice says never a word. She can't. But she knows Charles won't misinterpret her silence, if she does not flinch from the arms that come so naturally round her. After all, a girl can't be expected to speak when nerve-thrills are all through her arms and hands, and making her teeth chatter, as a galvanic battery does when you hold the handles and the proprietor puts it on too much. In Alice's case the current is only perceptible because it is intermittent. Soon it will be constant, and then we shall have all the advantage and none of the fuss.

Charles was able to speak first, and he spoke to Alice's head that was on his shoulder, to Alice's face that he was kissing. And he had the meanness, the unmanliness, to say: "Oh, my darling! how you shake!" Alice had thought of saying it herself of him and to him, only really it was just the critical moment; like the bather of our former metaphor she was half-way-in, and the gasping made speech impossible. This was the moment of the plunge, and the easiest way of taking it was to leave it to the other bather who had hold of her hand. In a very little time both felt that the plunge was taken, and that they were fellow-swimmers in a sunlit ocean of happiness. The last phase of the metaphor had come, and was to last a long time. It has in fact lasted till now—it is no breach of confidence to tell you this. However, for the present our business is to round off this little perturbation of two human souls, and to qualify them to go and tell Rupert and Peggy, as we believe we have already shown them doing.

They sat on the table to rest. This could be done without prejudice to the status-quo. Then Charles found the voice of everyday speech, after one or two deep drawn breaths, like the sigh a big dog gives as he settles down to sleep, after gyrating on his axis in search of it:

"Yes—darling love—Alice-for-short! that's about it—I can't

live without you. I knew I couldn't ever so long ago, and kept on making believe. Only I don't think I ever succeeded in making myself believe."

"Poor dear Mr. Charley!" It isn't much to say, but it's something—a contribution towards future possibility of speech.

"Of course, if you had taken kindly to any other fellow——"

"Only I didn't!" A shade of resentful spirit, the original Adam of contradictiousness, helps Alice mightily at this point. She will speak like herself directly.

"——that was really fit for you, darling (which was impossible!), I should have had to give you away to him with the best grace I could. But there was no such person seemingly; only I kept on thinking there might be."

"And then I should have been Mrs. Harris," says Alice, coming up out of Charles's neckcloth, and speaking collectedly. Perhaps you can analyse her remark to the bottom. She did not, herself; but seemed content with it for all that. Then as she looked at Old Jane's empty chair, on which a ray of strange unexpected sunlight was shining, for the fog had vanished, she broke into a flood of tears and cried as if her heart would break.

"Oh, Kate—Kate! dear old Kate—if only you could have known! Oh, my dearest, think—think how she was sitting crying there, only five days ago, because it wasn't true! Think how happy it would have made her! And then, perhaps, she might have lived a little longer—and——" Alice was conscious of the absurdity of adding what her ingrained *naïveté* of character suggested: "And seen the little shepherd and shepherdess again." But the truth is, the absurdity would have been a natural absurdity, and the exclusion of it was an artificial deference to the spirit of the mourning coach. She had seen what was professionally possible done in the morning at the cemetery; and she felt that the mutes, if speech could have been lawfully theirs, would have rebuked her for saying such a thing, and would have looked reproachful, anyhow. She would wait to say it another time, when those august but stuffy creatures should be forgotten. At present the sun had not poured into the room long enough to rinse their memory away.

"It would have come to the same thing in the end, darling," says Charles, caressing the hand Alice's return to a sane demeanour has left him. He doesn't feel that his remark is very profound; but it will do. He won't be answerable much for what he says, until he and his fellow-swimmer are a little used to the golden sea they have just plunged into.

"Everything does that!" says Alice, for whom we may also

plead that at present she is an irresponsible imbecile. Some little reminder of the claims of daily life is wanted to rouse these people from the state of collapse they have fallen into. They mustn't sit on that table, moralising, all the rest of the afternoon!

. . . . . .

What came to rouse them was Priscilla, who had an inspiration to take away the coffee. In pursuance of her Method, she charged the drawing-room door like a steam-ram, and entering suddenly, said Ho! as if she had been addressing a varlet. This was due to finding Master sitting on the table with his arm round Miss Alice. On which, Priscilla retired, saying it was nothing. She seemed ashamed of the weakness of this conclusion, though; for she closed the door with tenderness, and retired stealthily. Her retention of her soul in silence, however, went no farther than the kitchen door. "Now!" said she, triumphantly, "what did I tell you, Cook?"

But Cook was turning cataracts of water into her sink, to slooshy it well out after a real good wash-up, and Priscilla had to wait until the drumming sound of an overwrought water-jet on a metal pail had softened down to a steady narrative of its wrongs. Then she repeated her question, and Cook turned round, wiping a great deal of flesh.

"What did *you* tell *me*? Oh, Priscilla, you untruthful girl! What did *I* tell *you*?" Now please observe, that neither said what it was. Full particulars were in the expression of Priscilla's face, in which Cook saw, distinctly reflected, an image of Charles and Alice, exactly as we left them, or its equivalent.

"No, Cook! Now you ain't candid! It was *me* told *you*. Ask the Wash—ask Pinnocks—I can see their boy standin' there at the time—their boy *himself!* etc., etc."

We are sorry we cannot give enough of this conversation to show at what point Cook and Priscilla recognised the fact that the matters that provoked the discussion had as strong an interest as the question which of them had first pointed them out to the other; that is to say, if they did so recognise it. We confess to doubts on the point. This discussion was still going on when Charles and Alice came downstairs after ringing for Priscilla—when the latter was informed that Mr. Charles might come back, but it wasn't certain; but that anyhow Priscilla was to leave a big can of hot water for him that would hold the heat, and put a towel over it, or it was no use. And then they went off in a cab. And in due course invaded Harley Street tempestuously, with the news, as we have before related.

CHAPTER L

HOW CHARLES CLEARED OUT HIS OLD CUPBOARDS. OF LAVINIA STRAKER'S EPITAPH. OF A WEDDING AND ONE OF ITS SEQUELS. OF A REMOVAL, AND A DOCUMENT THAT CAME TO LIFE. HOW THE FATHER OF ALICE'S RED MAN HAD BEEN IN FEAR OF GOD, AND ACKNOWLEDGED ANOTHER OF HIS SONS. HOW ALICE WAS DESCENDED FROM THE VICTIM OF A DEVIL. HEBREWS THIRTEEN

And all that happened two years ago. How the time does run away, to be sure!

Two years ago from now—that is, you know, from the *now* of this particular chapter. How long ago it is from the date of us who write, or you who read does not matter. Quite a little lifetime back from the former date, that of the ink we are now using. An obviously indeterminable figure, from the latter. Perhaps you have picked up a forgotten volume from the wastriff of a bookseller's stall—the twopennyworths that would be such bargains if they were wanted at all. Or your attention may have been caught by a wealth of unsold sheets that its publisher has used to pack a present from a friend in. Throw us away, and read the present! You can't possibly do anything, by reading this last chapter, except excite a languid curiosity about what has gone before, which will never, in your case, be satisfied. And nothing is more irritating than trying to follow a story on an unfolded sheet.

When Charles and Alice had a wedding, about three months after we saw them last, it was after much discussion of whether they should take a new house, or remain on at Charley Street. The author this street was called after was really, at heart, anxious to clear out of it, and get some more oblivion of his most unfortunate early marriage. But happening, before overt declaration of this feeling, to detect or suspect a strong attachment to the old residence on the part of the authoress he was marrying, he not only concealed it, but affected a reluctance to moving that he did *not* feel. The reconstitution of all old arrangements that followed was accompanied by many painful incidents in the way of reappearance of little old familiar things from cupboards that had never

been opened since the day when Lavinia went to see her mother, never went near her, and never came back, for reasons.

Unpleasantries of this sort are always unwelcome, although as soon as they become memories they are forgotten with alacrity. The unworn pair of gloves with the little wrap of silver paper round the button; the long bottle with Jean Maria Farina on it, and a little eau-de-cologne in it still; the comb no longer practical, being in two halves, but kept because it was tortoise-shell; all these—from a drawer that had mislaid its key, and had to be broken into—brought back a thousand other things to Charles that he did not mind facing in solitude, but that he hated when Alice was to hand. On a high-up shelf in a cupboard, under a stack of paper-covered French novels, was quite a cubic foot of soprano songs, most of which Charles could remember Lavinia's rendering of; some of which had been put away unsung, having probably been sent by the authors to induce her to sing them at concerts, with or without remuneration. Most of the others were favourite songs of his, and made it clear to Charles why so often, when latterly he asked for special songs, these favourites were never to be found. As time went on his wife's tastes had always been in revolt against his own.

It was all very trying, and a good deal of burning had to be done. There was the usual "Oh, you're never going to throw *that* away!" which comes like a millstone round the neck of the Augean scavenger every time he thinks he has registered an instalment for the dust-heap. But it was got through in the end, and all Lavinia was swept away except a glass paperweight with perishable annuals blooming inside it. "Let's keep just *something,* Charley," said Alice—about the time when after a severe contest she was dropping the "Mr."—"Only just a little Homœopathic Monument of poor Aunt La! Perhaps, after all——!" and as it was so very much after all Charles consented to the paperweight.

But strictly speaking, this paperweight was not the only monument of "poor Aunt La" that came to light just at this time. For Pierre, turning over stray sheets of paper, stopped suddenly on a pencil-sketch of a tombstone, with "What's this, Aunty?"

"What's what, Pierrot?" said his father. "Let's look!" But Alice had got it first, and was looking at it with grave eyes.

"It's nothing, Charley dearest," said she, and suppressed it. Pierre was conscious that it wasn't exactly nothing, but something that called for silence on his part. He acquiesced—the more readily as tombstones were grown-up people's concerns, not his. Besides, Alice invented a message to the gardener at the new house, and

packed Master Pierre off to give it him. Then she reproduced the sketch, and went across to Charles with it, where he was burrowing, half-choked with dust, in forgotten lumber.

"I thought you said it was only her name on the stone, Charley darling," said she. Charles took the sketch from her, and his eyes too were grave over it.

"It *was* only her name, on the old stone," said he. "'Lavinia Straker,' and just the date of her death. I had this put up instead. Poor Lav!"

Alice read, thoughtfully, from the drawing: "'Under this stone lie the mortal remains of Lavinia, sometime the beloved wife of Charles Heath of No. 40 ——— Street, Soho, London. Requiescat in pace,'" and then remained silent.

"Anything wrong, pet? I had it done in English . . . it wasn't any business of the Vons, after all. . . ."

"I wasn't thinking of that, darling. I was think of the 'Requiescat in pace.'"

"Well, Alice-for-short?"

"I thought you didn't believe people requiescatted in pace." There was a perverse paradoxical twinkle in Charles's face as he answered:

"Of course I don't! It doesn't mean her. It means me. . . ."

"You!"

"Yes, Miss Kavanagh, me! So you needn't be so bounceable. Are you not aware, Madam"—Charles goes on with a trace of his own old manner—"that, when two consecutive genitives are followed by a word that demands an antecedent, the latter of the two is referred to. That is my recollection, anyhow. The meaning is obvious; that I shall be obliged to everybody—except your own dear self—to say nothing to me about her; and let me have the luxury of forgiving her, if I choose. . . ."

"It was so like him, altogether," said Alice to Lady Johnson, when she told her of this incident.

"Oh, yes!" said Peggy, "that was Charley down to the ground."

Did you ever realise that before Alice's teens set in Mrs. Charles Heath was, for years, Aunt La; a showy woman and a brilliant singer, of whom her husband, "at any rate," was fond? We are not prepared to say that we do even now, without thinking it over.

However tedious the job was, it was all got through in the end. And then the whole domicile was repainted and papered with Trellis Rose and Honeysuckle and Sunflower—(we can give the address of the firm that makes these papers if you want it; but perhaps it is hardly necessary)—and Charles and Alice Heath went away to

the North and South of Italy, and the North of Egypt, and were away ever so long. And when they came back (*via* the Atlantic) they were almost offensively robust and beaming. However, they settled down to producing copy and were not disturbed until, more than a year after their marriage, they were intruded on by an excessively ugly, violent, and ill-tempered person, coloured purple, who had never been in the world before, and didn't seem to approve of it. In spite of his nasty temper, and his inability to keep his breakfast down when jolted, he got his own way in everything. And one of his demands a trifle later was that more roomy premises should be provided for him, rather nearer Harley Street, so that his cousin Lucy should be able to take him and have him, and his Granny when she came to Harley Street should be able to call on him by the way, and show him her watch that said ting! Alice said he said so, anyhow—said so frequently!

"And, oh, Charley darling," she added once; "poor dear Old Jane! Think how she would have enjoyed this baby!"

"Do you remember, sweetheart," Charles asked, "that time about three weeks before she died, when you said it was the second week in September?"

"Yes! and she said, 'It's just about now my baby was to have come!' Oh dear! I can hear her saying it now. I don't believe she remembered the interval, at that moment, the least."

"Most likely not! Take care—Rupert Daniel has got at the ink."

"It's his hereditary instinct." Alice referred to Rupert Daniel for confirmation, asking him if it was not his little hereditary instinct then, and saying that if he wanted to black himself all over he should, he should. This was translated, as Rupert Daniel seemed to require it, into one of the dialects in use. But his mother was not as good as her word, and strangled him off the inkstand.

"What does his hereditary instinct tell him about the house in Avenue Road?" asked Charles, sitting sideways on his chair to fold his arms over the back, and contemplate his family through his own smoke.

"He says it's no nearer Harley Street than this, but that there would be lots of room, even if he ever has a little sister. He votes for going there, and says take it on lease from Lady Day. Seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years. Only the landlord must put the house in thorough substantial repair. He'll choose the papers himself and see the painter about the colour of the wood-work where already painted. Won't you, my pessusickle soogarpum?"

"What does he say about the rent?" asked Charles, who felt the responsibility of the proposed step. He took very kindly to this indirect way of getting Alice's sanction. It had a kind of flavour of consultation of an Oracle.

"He says his papa is a silly goose for not offering a hundred and twenty—only if he was a little older he wouldn't splutter so and his mamma would understand him better. Oh, my sweet—my precious treasure—do take care! He's got hold of me by the earring and he'll scratch himself. Come and get him off, Charley darling, before he murders himself and me too."—

The Oracle was detached from his prey, and his counsels accepted, presumably. For a few weeks after, in spite of the Charley Street renovations being as good as new, the negotiations were completed for the other house, and Rupert Daniel was arranging the decorations and allotting the rooms; at least, Mrs. Charles Heath said he was.

And now the event we have to relate will, we hope, justify this little excursion into the happy married life of Charles and Alice; of which, else, we have no reason for discoursing. Whether it threw an indirect light on the activity of the No. 40 ghosts, as was alleged by the party we may speak of as their supporters, you will judge when you are in possession of the facts.

A Firm, Community, or League that described itself broadly as *Removals,* but owned the name of Tamwell, and in small confidential italics on its card added that it was also *Jobs done with Horse and Cart, by the day or hour*—this agency had for two days had possession of both houses; stood with its vans at both doors; covered the pavements in front of each with a mixed mysterious flue of mattings and strange chips, while it deceived its horses with a vain show of empty bags upon their noses; suggesting, but not fulfilling, the idea of oats. Its constituents had bandied instructions across pieces of furniture at critical angles of staircases, reciprocally, and had expressed the lowest opinions of each other's faculties. There was not one of them who, starting in a pure atmosphere, could not have been traced, by the smell of beer he left behind, through the worst intricacies of the Ituri forest. And any two of them, coming upstairs forwards, gave the listener unseen the impression that one cart-horse was coming downstairs backwards. And the hoarseness of them who shall tell? Or their sustained power of conversation without subject-matter? Or their perspiration?

It was on the second day of their ministry—towards the dusk of it—that a spirit of jubilation developed itself among them, as

the very last van left the doors of Charley Street, pursued by its youngest abettor known as "the Boy" with a forgotten article that never should have seen the light. He was proud of the rescue, and placed it inside a fender on the tail of the van. Which then went round by 'Igh Street, instead of goin' straight, to get a cup of Tea. This took a long time to drink—was perhaps hot, and Tamwell had to put it in the saucer and blow it. It was not wholesome Tea, because when Tamwell's components came, quite an hour later, to Avenue Road, they were all (except the Boy) artificially concealing its effects.

But no effort could disguise a thickness of speech, nor successfully affect a power of walking straight. And they did not smell of Tea.

"What *is* to be done, Charley?" said Alice to her husband, who had come from his last last last look at the old home, turning over many things in his heart, as you may well believe.

"What's wrong, darling love?"

"Why! all these men are as drunk as they can be—they can't possibly get the things in to-night!"

"Can't they? They've got to!" The delinquents were in the basement, chiefly. Charles penetrated below; and found them, possibly endeavouring to collect themselves, in the front kitchen.

"Now, Mr. Tamwell, what do you mean by coming here drunk? You're all drunk—as drunk as you can be!"

"No, Shir! Nosh drunk as we can be! Shober as we can be, Mish Heath!" Charles appeared to give this consideration.

"Perhaps you're right, Mr. Tamwell. At any rate, you're not quite so drunk as you can be. Now, look here, all of you! You may just go to work again, and get the job through. But every single thing you break, every scrap of damage done,—if it's only a scratch on the walls,—will come off your account. Now you understand!"

At this juncture the Boy, who was sober, struck in: "It's my dad's the best on 'em, Sir! Send him 'ome. Me and Sam and the Dook—(what we call him—the Dook)—can stop on and end up the job. *I'll* see to 'em." Charles was puzzled about his dad, and the Boy explained: "The best on 'em, in the manner of speaking; the forradest you might say!" So Sam and the Dook stopped on, in charge of the Boy, who did his work nobly.

It was towards seven o'clock, and the dispositions of furniture were going on by gaslight, when Peggy and Lucy drove up to the house, and waded upstairs through unallotted furniture breast-high to the back room with the big bay, opening on the Garden.

"Now—you poor, tired, dirty people, we've come to fetch you. Aunty Lissy, your son has been reproaching you bitterly for your absence. Do get the things in anyhow—they'll stand till to-morrow—and come home to dinner!" It was Peggy who spoke. But Lucy chimed in.

"Oh, do look at this poor Aunty Lissy, she's quite worn out and done for. Do come along, Aunty, at once. Never mind the things!"

"It's not the fatigue, Juicy dear! It's those men being so abominably drunk. The Boy's worth the whole lot put together. Bring it in here! No—*not* upstairs, Priscilla—in here." This was the very last piece of furniture. It was the old table that we have so often mentioned—Alice's poor mother's wedding-present that had stood so long in Charles's room. Alice thought of it as "the table I accepted Charley on."

"You'll have the *legs* off, I tell yer! *Turn* her over! Now, down your end under the gairce—down, your, end! *Keep* your eye on the bookcase—you'll *jam* the bookcase—keep her off—keep her *off*, Sam, yer darned fool! . . . There! wot did I tell yer, both on yer? A tidy job you've made of it, and then you'll say *I* done it!" Thus, volubly, the capable Boy.

Sam was on the floor, sobered by having a tolerably heavy table on the top of him as he fell. Alice and Charles, Peggy and Lucy, were a group standing back to keep out of the way, in the room into which the table had pitched itself and Sam. Priscilla and Cook, attracted by the noise, were on the stairs outside, having come from an upper room. The Duke and the Boy in the doorway, the former trying to lay claim to having foreseen this and endeavoured to prevent it. It happened because he wasn't listened to, he said drunkenly.

As soon as it was clear that no bones were broken the table was turned face-up, and public opinion had leisure to reflect how much worse it would have been if something totally different had happened. It was at this point that Lucy asked what that was that fell out. It was detected on the floor and picked up. A little steel pin, or rod, with a wooden head on it.

"Put it back," Alice said, "it's a thing to stop the drawer coming out. I wonder it didn't. You'll see the little hole, just the shape of the head——"

"I don't see any little hole."—"Oh yes," Alice said, "it *was* there." And she came to find it herself.

"This is funny, Charley! There's two little pins, exactly alike. There must be two little holes, exactly alike."

"I've never seen more than one," says Charles, and comes to look for it. But both are looking along and round the table-corner, just over the drawer.

"You're looking in the wrong place," says Lucy. "There it is! Right out in the middle of the table." So it is, and under a momentary impression that it is an extra stop, it is replaced. Then Alice is suddenly perceptive and says: "My opinion is we've all gone silly. If it had been like that we never could have opened the drawer without finding it out!"

"Of course not!" says Charles. The Duke and Sam, as authorities on furniture, offer valueless opinions, which acquire nothing from a display of much respectful reserve and drunken deference on their part. The Boy is more to the purpose, only he speaks with a tone of absolute contempt for the whole human race.

"It don't b'long with *that* drore. No c'nection! 'Nother drore inside! Secrecy drore! Opens into the wacancy when this is took out. You look t'other side! Correspondin' sitiwation, correspondin' 'ole! . . . Oh no! don't you believe me unless you like—but that's the way of it. *You* see, Miss!"

He passes over opaque seniorities, and establishes direct communication with the other creature in the room that is his own age, or thereabouts. The four eyes of the two are in an instant concentrated on the table surface. Which will see it first, he or Lucy? It is a draw. Both shout exactly in a breath, that there it is! And Lucy's clean gloved finger, and the Boy's dirty one, touch it at the same moment. The Boy is a proud boy, as the second pin is extracted, the drawer pulled out, and two small hidden unsuspected drawers brought to light; pulled, as he had foretold, into the wacancy, by small sunk handles. There was a folded sheet of foolscap paper in one of them with writing on it. But nothing else.

"Charley darling—what's this?"—Alice, who speaks, is reading the paper, which she has unfolded.

"A Bill!" says Charles at a guess. But there is no printing on it, nothing but handwriting. A formal document, on old foolscap with uncut edges like a legal document. It has the marks of age—the faded ink, the spots of many sizes—black asteroids in a space that, held to the nose, smells of a law-stationer's lumber room—the damaged edge where a mouse, long dead, paused for refreshments. Three or four single sheets tied at the corner with a piece of tape, conveying an idea of a claim to be engrossed on parchment, and adorned with the usual column of wafers one expects, which are your Act and Deed; and with a real seal, of wax; but there are only

signatures and an informal attestation. An informal document altogether, but apparently having a formal intention.

"Well, Charley, don't stand gaping at it!"

"What on earth is it, dear old boy?"

"Now, Uncle Charley, don't be ridiculous! Here—give it me! *I'll* read it, if you won't."

Thus, respectively, Alice, Peggy, and Lucy. But Charles remains immovable, with his eyes on the paper. He is looking at the signatures. Suddenly, he folds it up and thrusts it in his pocket.

"Shan't tell! Wait till after dinner!"

"Oh—what a *shame!!*" *Sic omnes.*

But Charles stuck to his point and carried it, *omnibus contradicentibus.*

Picture to yourself that after dinner has come, and the males, Sir Rupert, Charles, and his brother Robin, the Legal Mind, have promised to smoke quick and given their words they won't look at the paper before they come upstairs. "All right," Charles says, "I won't let it out of my pocket. Honest Injun!" Further, that they have come upstairs and Charles is tantalising them all by the deliberate way in which he prepares to read. However, all is ready at last! But first he says to his wife, whose arms are round his neck from behind as she looks over his shoulder, "Look at the signatures, Miss Kavanagh!" and adds, "What do you say to that, Maternal Parent?" His ways of designating her are considered scandalous by his mother, who is present, but whom he is not in this case addressing.

As to describing the bewildered surprise on Alice's face, it is simply impossible. Use your imagination to the utmost, is all we can say. What follows is what Charles read:

"I the undersigned Edward Cramer Stendhall Luttrell, baronet, of Crewys Morchard in the County of Devon and of No. 7 ——— Street, Soho near the city of London, being in fear of God and daily expectation of death from mortal disease which hath for three whole years bidden defiance to the skill of physicians whether of this country or of France or Italy, do hereby affirm and declare as my true testimony in regard to my relations with Alice the reputed wife of John Kavanagh of the dairy-farm known as the Flete on the road from Highgate to London in the parish of St. Saviour by Gospell Oak field. That Edward Kavanagh now apprenticed to a Taylor and reputed the eldest son of the above-named John Kavanagh is in truth my own son by the said Alice born in a

false aspect and belief of lawful wedlock in her father's house Samuel Lecheminant of Barnstaple in the county of Devon. And is registered in the Parish registers of that town as Edward Luttrell the son of Edward and Alice Luttrell to which name the said Alice did at that time believe herself truly entitled."

"That's a very funny thing too," said Sir Rupert, interrupting. "However, never mind! Go on. I'll tell you after." Charles continued:—

"For by no other means than a false ceremony of marriage could this young wench be won, being then but seventeen years of age and filled up with high-flown ideas above and beyond her place in life. Wherefore I being now on my death-bed, as I truly conceive, do humbly pray that God may forgive her sin and mine, and many another that I have done of a like sort. For it is not to her alone that I have done wrong, neither could I account to myself for all the wrongs I have done nor of all the women to whom I have forsworn myself to deceive them. For whom too I pray that their sin may be forgiven as I doubt not mine will be, through no merit of mine own, but through the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen! But in the case of this same Alice Lecheminant, called Kavanagh, I yield to her uneasiness of conscience and her earnest and repeated prayer and do now solemnly affirm that she resolutely defied all my advances except she should be truly and honourably my wife. On which ground seeing that the recent death of my dearly-loved first wife Barbara Lady Oglethorp had left me without reasonable excuse for other conduct, I was fain to give way to her scruples, and do affirm now that nothing was left undone that could contribute to deceive so shrewd a young person, whose father was by good-fortune bedridden, and whose mother was besotted against myself and full of malice and ill-feeling, on which account her daughter's mind was easy towards her exclusion from our councils. But there was need of contrivance and expenditure of money (which had been better spent on discharging debts on my Devonshire estate) to make such arrangement as would soothe all suspicion of treacherous action. And I doubt now whether I should have gained the end but for old experience in like adventures which had taught me wisdom. And I now make this solemn affirmation on Oath, being in fear of Death and with serious and awful apprehension of Futurity; in part that Alice Lecheminant (or Kavanagh) may bear in mind that if ye forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Father forgive you your

trespasses (Matt. vi. 15) and may turn in time, as I have done, unto the Rock of our Salvation; but in some part also on this condition that the said Alice shall sign an undertaking that she will forego all claim soever on me as a husband, acknowledging her ceremonial of marriage with me to have been invalid and informal, however much she may have thought otherwise at the time. And further that for my greater security from all such claim she shall solempnise Holy Matrimony with the said John Kavanagh, thereby incurring the penalty of Bigamy should mine own marriage with her ever be proven. And further that the said John Kavanagh in consideration of his accommodation to this end shall enjoy the use and emolument rent-free during his life of the Farm he now occupies aforesaid without prejudice to my own manorial rights therein. And shall be indemnified in respect of all expenses he may incur.

"And in confirmation of the above attestation I now append my signature this third day of February seventeen hundred and thirty-three, at my house situate and being No. 7 ——— Street, Soho.

"(SIGNED) EDWARD CRAMER STENDHALL LUTTRELL.

"(WITNESSED) DOROTHY KELSEY,

"(Housekeeper to the above)."

This singular document could not be understood in one reading. Charles had no sooner finished it than he turned back, and re-read the whole more slowly, no one interrupting him. A pause of silence followed, and then Peggy found her voice:

"What a *hideous* monster!"

"And *what* a loathsome hypocrite!" This was Alice.

"Man of the world, my dears, man of the world." This was Charles.

"But I want to know what relation Alice Le-thingummy was of Aunty Lissy." This was Lucy, who perhaps only half grasped the full iniquity revealed; certainly she could not grasp its motives.

"My dear Lucy," this was her Grandmother, majestically, "I can only say when I was a little girl of your age, I was always sent to bed. Yes—*always*—whenever documents of this sort were got out and read aloud."

"You never saw a document like it in your life—come, Grandma! besides, I'm right! How came it in Aunty Lissy's father's drawer? That's what *I* want to know."

"Suppose you shut up, some of you, while I read the rest." Thus Charles, and popular assent followed. On the back of one sheet was written in a woman's hand, in blacker ink.

"January 16, 1751.—I, Alice Luttrell, *née* Lecheminant, actually the wife of Sir Edward Cramer Luttrell whose signature is overleaf did eighteen years since sign in exchange for this a relinquishment of all claim as a wife on the said Sir Cramer, and did then contract lawful matrimony with my supposed husband John Kavanagh, thereby incurring risk of bigamy. This I did for the reason that had I not done so I myself and my supposed husband John Kavanagh, then in broken health and a cripple, had been turned into the street. Yet even this I refused to do except this wicked man whom nevertheless I could not but love, seeing he was my husband, should bear testimony to his own deception, practised on a young girl quite innocent of this world and its wickedness. And as he has done this, so will I pray for him as he for me, for that I have loved him in despite of myself. Else I should have prayed that he might expiate his sins in Hell.

"Alice Kavanagh."

"Here's some more in another hand, written in pencil," said Charles. And then read:—

"Edward Kavanagh born 1710 was my great-grandfather. My grandfather John Kavanagh was born 1784 or 5. This Alice Kavanagh was his great-grandmother. If this document is found after my death I want whoever finds it on no account to let my half-brother Jonathan get it as his game in doing so would be for no good and to spite me. Also the same is untrustworthy and has no right to anything of mine. I have seen lawyers to find if there is money in it but all go against it. Samuel Kavanagh 114 Pratt Street. Camden Town. November 16 1844."

The tempest of discussion that followed this no doubt cleared up the ideas of those who took part in it about what the actual story was, its moral and legal aspects. To our mind the former was well expressed by the lady known to Peggy and Alice as poor dear Robin's uninteresting wife. We have seen nothing of her, and feel she ought to say something in the story. What she said was: "Oh dear, oh dear! this is all very shocking!" We agree.

We are not qualified to agree or disagree with her husband's exposition of the legal aspects. But we cannot help suspecting that the fact that the interests of a very dear brother (for Charley was very dear to all his family) and his wife were concerned caused him to infuse an unprofessional amount of common-sense into the letter he wrote to Charles after thinking it well over.

If you will just have patience till we have recorded an excerpt of conversation between Sir Rupert and Lady Johnson after they had retired (very late) for the night, we will give you Robin Q. C.'s letter in full.

"I say, Dr. Jomson——"

"Wait till I've done splashing! Now."

"Why did you say 'that's a very funny thing too? Never mind, go on?' I forgot to ask you in all the rumpus."

"Oh, ah! To be sure! Do you remember, darling, how I came down to Shellacombe in a boating suit?"

"Rather!" Emphasis can say no more.

"Do you remember I told you about my old nurse at Barnstaple—old Sarah Barrett?"

"I remember—she was ninety and a twin—and had had four husbands and no children."

"Well! the second husband was a Lecheminant. And she showed me in the churchyard a curious epitaph of an aunt of his, who must have been this very Alice. As near as I recollect, it ran: *'Alice L——. The victim of a Devil.'* Then there was a Scripture reference. Hebrews thirteen, I think it was. I remember I resolved to look up Hebrews thirteen, and you knocked it all out of my head. Then next day was Alice and The Beetle." (This is, as it were, the title of a chapter in their lives.)

"Now really, Rupert darling, you might have told us that downstairs. Think how interesting!"

"Well!—I had it on the tip of my tongue to tell it. But then I thought as like as not Hebrews thirteen was just as well not trotted out with penetrating intelligent Lucys all over the place, like lynxes. We'll look it up to-morrow."

"Do you remember the great white cloud over the offing that day, that never went?"

"Yes! And the dog that wouldn't go in the water after my stick? And Alice the pony?"

"And Alice's performance of the lidy with the spots?"

"The spots that flowed away. And the sheep that ran about? And how scared you were at the accident?"

"Well, love! who wouldn't have been scared? Just think how different things would have been *now,* susposing we'd all gone in the water together." . . .

And so the conversation ran on till sleep stopped it. You have read the substance of it all in Chapter XV.

CHAPTER LI

OF SIR CRAMER STENDHALL LUTTRELL'S WILL, AND HOW ALICE'S PROPERTY WAS TOO LARGE TO CLAIM. HOW SHE LET IT ALONE AND WAS HAPPY. OF A CAT SHE COULD REMEMBER IN THE AREA, AND THE STRANGENESS OF THINGS

A WEEK or more elapsed before Robin's letter came. Charles and Alice had already decided that under no circumstances would they institute proceedings to prove their claim to one of the largest collieries in England. Nevertheless, they were glad to have their decision supported by legal opinion.

Robin's letter was as follows:—

"167 DEVONSHIRE PLACE W.,
Apr: 11, 1879.

"MY DEAR CHARLEY,

"I've found the will after hunting half through the Prerogative Calendars. Copy enclosed. You'll see that the testator was entirely under the influence of his son. He acts 'always with the knowledge and consent of my dear son . . . in whom I have absolute confidence,' and whom he names sole executor. His dear son had evidently convinced his dear father that if he left the unentailed property to Esther Kaimes as the daughter of his lawful wife the Dowager Lady Luttrell, and Esther's legitimacy was called in question, her inheritance might miscarry. No doubt he said to his papa: '*You* can't suggest that Esther is illegitimate, but you can make sure that she shall inherit, whether or no!' And then he developed his ring-trick, always affecting great concern on Esther's behalf. As to whether the old scoundrel was too easily duped by the young one—well! consider what failing powers and approaching death mean. Fancy yourself sinking: and how you would lean on the strong support of a devoted son!

"As to the validity of such a Will, it must have depended entirely (to my thinking) on how far the ring was produced simply as evidence of identity; I can't conceive any judicial ruling that the chance possession of that ring by an illegitimate daughter not intended by the Testator could constitute a legal claim.

"Apart from this, if a claim were made to property after the

lapse of a thousand years there is nothing so far as I know in the constitution of the Court of Chancery to prevent a consideration of the case on its merits, and (theoretically at least) the claimant might succeed in asserting his title. But it is very doubtful if any evidence *could* be produced which would prevent a Court of Equity doing what it has a perfect right to do, and taking advantage of the existing Statutes of Limitations. That would be the usual course: and in the present case the hundred and thirty years would be fatal.

"When old Sir Cramer died, young Sir Cramer was caught in a trap of his own setting. No ring was forthcoming, and Vixencroft became the property of Blaydon School. Whether it really became so legally is more than doubtful. The Law of Mortmain as it stood at the date of the will may have appeared to sanction a bequest of real property in perpetuity to an institution like Blaydon School. But to my mind the existence of such a bequest argues that no legal advice was taken in this matter. The father and son cooked it up between them. And the son did not trouble himself about the Reversionary Legatees. He didn't mean *them* to inherit.

"But even if the title was sound when the will was written, it is far from certain that it was so when it was signed. The signature was appended, oddly enough, on the very day when the present Statute of Mortmain came into operation, presumably at midday. If the last signature was written at eleven fifty-five on June 24, 1836, the Will might have held good under the old Acts or usages, but if at twelve-five it would come under the present Act.

"So there's a chance of voiding the title, for the ghosts. Couldn't they prove that the Will was witnessed after twelve o'clock?

"You and Alice must not imagine that the possession of the ring and the proof (sufficient to my mind) that Alice is an illegitimate descendant of Sir Luttrell can make you possessors of the Pencarrow Weald Collieries, which is, if you please, the 'Vixencroft estate' of the Will!

"YOUR AFFECT: BRO:

"R.

"P. S.—There must have been some traditions current in Alice's family, or somehow, somewhere; because the No. 40 ghosts were all made to match the story. Otherwise the ghosts were ghosts. Which is absurd. Q. E. D."

The extracts from Sir Cramer Stendhall Luttrell's Will were long, although containing only the portions of interest to Charles

and Alice; and as the letter has already given you some of its contents, we shall not give the whole. The important point was, that after dealing with a very considerable property outside his entailed family estate, which with a few legacies made up the total not devised to his widow for life, in the event of his not marrying again, the will went on to what was really only a small item in this total, the Pencarrow Weald, or Vixencroft farm or farms, in a very peculiar way. Old Mrs. Verrinder had remembered rightly; this property was actually left (without specifying any heir by name) "to whomsoever of my female descendants shall be by lawful means in possession of the ring containing the Mysoor diamond taken by my brother Denis Stendhall Luttrell from the finger of Shubadar Khan Bahadoor at the battle of Chingleput and given to me by him on the day of his duel with Lord Cairndrum of Saltoun whereby he came by his death. Which Lord hath rendered account to me since of his deed, and may God have mercy on his Soul! And this property of Pencarrow Weald in the north-riding of Yorkshire I give and bequeath to such female descendant of mine whether she shall have been born in lawful wedlock or not, if a daughter; but only if lawfully born in other case. And that there may be no doubt whatever of the identity of this diamond I have caused it to be set with other stones in a ring in a manner to place it beyond doubt that it is truly this diamond and no other. And I have arranged, with the full concurrence and consent of my dear Son and Sole Executor of these presents, that these stones shall be as followeth: Sapphire, Lapis Lazuli, Jacynth, Pearl, Tourmaline, Emerald, Ruby, Amethyst, and the Diamond aforenamed. Also therein a second Sapphire and Emerald and Lapis Lazuli; and, by the advice of my dear Son, on whom I rely in all matters of prudence and foresight, I have caused one blank space to contain no precious stone at all, and but a piece of plain ivory, that being in his Judgment a most sure and safe aid to a perfect identification of this ring should any doubt arise to call it in question." Then followed an appointment of reversionary legatees; naming first the school in his own county of Hereford where the testator (presumably) was educated. It had been ascertained, since the finding of the Will (from the Pencarrow Company's solicitors —intimate friends of Robin), that the property had passed to this school and remained in its possession for thirty years. It was then sold to a private individual who died shortly after. His son, who inherited it, lost it at cards. The successful card-player found out about the coal, and promoted the Company.

As Alice, after reading thus far, re-read through the list of

stones, Charles took her hand in his, and turned the ring—the very ring itself!—round on her finger.

"They are all there now," said he, "Ivory and all."—Alice shuddered and felt creepy. "But just think," Charles continued, "how the amiable son must have chuckled as he read through the stones backwards!"

"I'm so glad," said Alice, "that he ran Lord Cairndrum through for running his brother through. It showed he had something good about him."

"Did it?" said Charles.

"Well! you know what I mean, darling. I mean that a little honest, savage revenge is like a breath of fresh air among such a parcel of skunks." Charles agreed. Was there any more of the Will? he asked. That was all there was of interest. There was no mention of Alice Lecheminant, nor of any of her fellow-victims.

"And this man," said Alice, "was the father of the red man I saw with the knife. Ugh! Do you know, dearest, I can always shiver at the recollection of him, even now!"

"Dearest love, when you talk like that you remind me of Alice-for-short in the extensive basement with cellarage. I can almost see the horrid black area again, and the cats."

"I remember the cats. There was a yellow one with one eye out. It was named Barleycorn. I don't know why, nor who named it. I had forgotten it altogether till this minute. How funny it all is!"

FINIS

ADDENDUM

"(THE following is an extract from the diary of the late Abbé Bernardin Fabrôt, of Boulestin l'Annonay, a most accomplished man and industrious scholar, who died in 1843. The diary is full of such lengthy narratives, chiefly interesting. It is to be hoped that the whole may one day be given to the world. As the Abbé expresses strong opinions about the obligations of Father Confessors, we must suppose that he did not regard this communication as coming under the seal of confession, and need be under no scruple about publishing it.)"

(The above is the editorial note accompanying its publication in the *Journal d'Hier,* February 29, 1853.)

"May 27, 1813.—I have just come from visiting the poor Michaud. Latterly I have seen him twice in the week. But this is the third time this week. For he cannot last long, le pauvre Israel! His cough has been better since the mild season, but he is very old. He will not see his hundredth birthday, assuredly. Nevertheless, two years ago I had anticipated it.

"I will charge myself with the painful labour of writing out the strange story he has told me of the murder in . . . But here I feel myself stopped. I cannot give the name of the street nor the quarter in Paris where this frightful crime was committed. For Israel Michaud will tell nothing of its whereabouts. He has only told me one or two names (as he has said, 'by a lapsus linguæ'), desiring always to shrink from involving others, or their ancestors' memory. I cannot identify by these names; they are not uncommon names, and the time is long ago.

"Two days past, the poor Israel accosted me thus as I sat by his bedside thinking how strange it was I should know this man so well, for himself, yet know so little of his provenance and antecedents. I will give his words the nearest that I can recall them.

"'You have well said, M. l'Abbé, that it is in vain we choke back (on a beau suffoquer) a guilty knowledge; for that God knows all, and can read all hearts. But your blameless life has left you to know nothing of how a guilty secret may burden the soul of him

who possesses it, little as he may have shared the guilt, but always —*always* dreading the consequences of his confession to others— to others, M. l'Abbé, whom he cannot absolve, but must needs love. . . .' He was interrupted by his cough.

"'Tell me,' I said, when he had recovered, and lay exhausted, 'tell me as much as you are willing I should know. No more! I will not ask you for name nor place. I will guard your secret as though I were of your faith, and your confessor. But I will forego the confessor's right to hear all. All I desire is that you should ease your mind.'

"'Ah—mon père—but you are good! And you will ask me nothing—nothing of the others—only of myself?'

"'I promise it. Trust yourself to me.'

"'Then I will tell you. But I will tell you slowly, else I may be arrested by my cough.' He then continued as follows, with pauses as I have indicated them, I sitting always silent by his bed:—

"'As a boy I was placed out in service by my father with the Sieur Latreille. . . . Ah, my God! how confused I get! (comme je me confonds) . . . I had promised myself to tell no name even to you! . . . He had a son of my own age—a brave lad, but furious as a wild beast when roused. He made of me a friend, servitor though I was. We were together as boys, in the playground as also in the schoolroom, for my elder patron his father gave me also some education, which I needed. Had I not loved him otherwise, I should have loved him because he was the son of an old and beloved master, to whom I owed everything, and for whom I would have died. . . .

"'It is seventy-five years—yes! M. l'Abbé, seventy-five years since I was first in service, after the old man's death, in the family of his son—you will pardon me, M. l'Abbé, that I do not give his name, nor that of his residence; I thank you for allowing me to omit all names. To what end should I resume them, when in fact the whole affair relates to seventy-five years ago—and now they are all dead! All dead long since; my master and his wife, their sons and daughters; even the last one I knew of as still living—his brother's daughter—very old, nearly as old as I am. For I, M. l'Abbé, have ninety-seven years. It is true, and so is the tale I have to tell, for my memory is clear, and all comes back to me as yesterday. . . .

"'Yes—and it is seventy-five years since that terrible night, the most terrible I have ever experienced. Seventy-five since he, my master then—although my brother still—came to the room where

I slept; and shaking me by the shoulder, for I slept sound, said in a voice that I can hear—yes! my God, I can hear it now—"Wake up, Israel, wake up and help! I have slain my sister, and know not where to put her away. Wake up and help!"

"'Figure to yourself, M. l'Abbé, that in the first moment I believed myself the victim of a frightful nightmare from Hell (un véritable cauchemar d'Enfer), for we were without any light. But I rose trembling, and could scarce strike a light for trembling—indeed, I had much ado to find the flint-and-steel (pierre à fusil) while he chafed with impatience in the dark. And then when the lamp burned slowly up, I saw HIM. And his face was white and like a Devil's, for the anger was still on it. He was still in his costume-de-bal—for there had been a great ball in the house, and card-play till late, and somewhat of riot and confusion at the end, as was not uncommon in that day. And as he stood there, his coat of red silk, worked over in broderies de soie, and the red facings of his long waistcoat, reaching, as was then the custom, nearly to his knee, were not so red as the drops I saw on the blade he still grasped in his right hand, while his left was on his heart as though from pain.

"'"My master," said I, when I refound my voice, "all I am is yours. Tell me all, and trust me."

"'"I have killed my sister, Israel," said he again—"I have struck her here, through the heart, with this sword. This blood that you see, is her blood, and the blood of my father, and her mother—not mine!" And he lifted the hand that was on his heart, and struck it back as he said the word. Then he cried out, yet keeping his voice under as in fear: "Quick—give me some rag—God's curse be on the blood!" Then, with some clout of rag (torchon) that I gave him, he wiped the sword all its length, and flung the rag from him as though it stung him. But he continued holding the sword and I saw there was no scabbard, and wondered. But I heard after.

"'"It is not true," he cried in the same voice, but as though he answered some one. "It is not true! I am not Cain, say what they may! She was no more my sister than a many others—some I know not of——" Then, stopping suddenly, he caught me by the arm, and said: "Help me, Israel! She is dead, by her own fault. Why did she madden me as she did? Oh, that I had not had this accursed sword!—But to what good is all this? She is dead. Would you that I should die too—on a gibbet?" For in those days, M. l'Abbé, we had no guillotine. . . .'

"At this point the old man stopped. He was exhausted; and I

saw that I should have to be patient, and accept the story as it came. I made him take a little coffee, with a few drops of cognac in it, and it revived him. I saw he was anxious to continue.

"'How much have I told of it, M. l'Abbé?'

"'Your master says to you, M. Israel, would you that he too should die, on a gibbet.'

"'Ah, truly, yes! I can see him now, as he hears me swear that whatever he may have done, he may entrust himself to my fidelity. "Come with me," he says. And we go together. And then I follow him along the long passage that leads from my room to the kitchen. And I am able to see that it is already daylight—just before sunrise—and that what I thought was the darkness of night was but the closed shutter of my room, and that he had shut the door before he spoke. And when I am going to blow out the lamp I carry he says to me: "Do not—it will be wanted." For it was troublesome to get a light in those days.

"'We go into the kitchen, where all is dark, though one may see the dawn through the shutter-cracks. I go first, for he puts me first, and follows me, flinching back (reculant). I go first, always in a shivering fit (en frisson). There is a draught down the chimney, and a smell of soot, for the weather is suddenly warm, and the air in the house cold—at least in houses of this sort. For I must tell you, M. l'Abbé, that this house was not like the houses in this quarter of Paris; there were many like it *there,* though! The entresol was below the level of the street, and one descended to it by a stairway. It was dark too—very dark—dark at all times, even in the day. So one sees it was little wonder I should have struck the light, believing it night.

"'Well! We go in. I place the lamp on the chimney-shelf, to shield it from the draught, and go to open the shutter. But he will not permit me to open it fully—nor to touch but only one—nor to go near the other window till there is light. Then, when the gleam comes in of day from without, I see what is lying under the other window.

"'Understand me, M. l'Abbé! I did not love this Madame Quesnes. Who did?——' He stopped suddenly, and reproached himself for having again let slip a name he had wished to reserve. I pointed out to him how little it must matter, after so many years. If, I said, it had even been twenty or thirty years, and the culprit had been still living, it would have been another matter. But I should not consider it my duty to reveal any portion of what he might tell; and indeed considered myself under the pledge of

secrecy, as much as though the story had been given in the Confessional.* He seemed reassured, and proceeded.

"'No one loved this lady—haughty, defiant, vain, close with money, and in her soul cruel, and bitter of tongue. But to see her lying there—stabbed to the heart by her own brother, her blood still oozing out on the flowered silk of the rich robe-de-bal she had been dancing in but an hour since—Oh, but it was horrible, horrible!' Michaud paused, pressing his fingers on his eyes, as though he saw it all again and would shut out the sight—then went on: 'I can see the white face now, M. l'Abbé,—the arms thrown straight above the head—the eyes that glare—the bloodless lips that part—the teeth still close set—for she was but just dead. I see, a pace away upon the floor, the hand-lamp she had carried—I knew it for hers—and the broken glass that had rolled upon the floor. Then I look round and see her brother, my master; still holding the sword that had slain her, gazing aslant, with his face set, on the work he could not undo. And I hear him speak again a quick, suffocated whisper (demi-voix étouffante) that has to fight with his teeth. I can hear them close against it and cut it short, by jerks.

"'"There is no time, Israel, no time! It must be done now, at once—before the household wakes. There is none I can trust—none but you, mon Israel." Then he gasps twice before he can say: "It must be done now at once—underground!" And he points down.

"'"But where, mon maître? If we remove it——"

"'"Bah, my friend, you are a fool! We cannot remove it. We must find a place *here*—here at hand—some dark cellar. There are plenty such, and you know them better than I do. Think!—God has given you wits—think!"

"'And then I, half-stunned—more, to say truth, for pity for my master, my brother, than for any sorrow for that dead Jezebel, who had struck me with her fist more than once, M. l'Abbé!—I think at my best. And I can think only of a dark cellar, but little used, without the house, opening into an enclosed arène—I know of no house near, like it, to make you understand. I tell him of this, and he says I am un brave—it is good! But we shall be seen from the street—is it not true? But I say no! For I will watch from the stair-top, level with the street, that no one comes, while he carries it across the arène. And none will hear in the house, for the door at the stair-head within, that always closes of itself, and

* The Abbé seems to have been curiously unconscious of the absurdity of putting on paper a tale that was to be a secret! However, others have done the same thing, forgetting their own liability to death and an executor.

is heavy so that no sound may pass. My master would then that I should carry it across the arène, while he would watch above. But I say to him: "How then, my dear master, if the watchman who is always on his beat (qui se tient toujours aux aguets) should note you in passing? What would you say—you who never descend to this étage? He knows me well, and that I sleep below. It is an affair of a word, and he passes on." So then my master assents, with a sort of growl or snarl (espèce de grognement) terrible to hear; and I find the key of this cellar, and open it with some force, for it is seldom opened. It is a large cellar, or washhouse, very dark, for the window is closed over with boards.

"'I carry my lamp with great care across the arène, and place it safely in the cellar. Then I find in the fuel-cellar, near by, a spade and a crowbar. And then I tell my master all is ready, and he must listen for my signal that none is near to see. Then I go to the stair-top and watch. And there is no one near but some drabs and young gallants, singing discordantly and all drunk. I wait to see them well past, and to see that they have assaulted the watch, who sounds his rattle (fait son allarme de sonnette). So I know they are employed, and give my signal, a tap on the kitchen window.

"'M. l'Abbé, I can see him now! I can see him come bearing IT across his shoulder, round the corner of the house, and pass under an archway that crosses the arène. And as he comes, ITS head strikes—hard!—on the pier of the archway. But he gives no heed to this, for what he carries has no feeling. Oh—horrible—horrible! . . .

"'M. l'Abbé, I can tell no more now. If God pleases that I shall live till to-morrow, I will tell you more.'"

"May 29.—I have thought it better to defer my visit to the poor old Michaud. He was exhausted by his effort the day before yesterday. I found him much rested this morning, and most anxious to resume his narrative. I told him he should do so, but would he answer first a question, to satisfy my curiosity. It was not to find any name nor place. 'Tell me,' I said, 'as to this master of yours. Was he of noble birth?'

"'Assuredly, M. l'Abbé!'

"'And was he—this uncontrollable violence apart—an honourable gentleman, just in his dealings with his fellow-men, and generous and forbearing to those weaker than himself?'

"'I never knew him under any other character, M. l'Abbé; until indeed he gave me the whole story of the embrouillement which led

to this awful business. I had always figured him to myself strictly honourable in all money matters. As to galanteries, no doubt he was like his father; but in these matters we know, M. l'Abbé, that all young men of spirit, in a high position, are the same. What would you?'

"'I would many things, mon cher Israel, that I shall never attain, in this world—among others that men of spirit should be neither vermin nor devils. But do not let us waste your strength over discussion. Go on and tell me what happens next. Your master carries this poor lady, his victim, to the vault for burial——'

"'Ah, M. l'Abbé, do not speak so cruelly. Mon pauvre maître! But I will tell you. Listen! My master carries her to the vault, but I do not see him go. For when the head strikes on the hard brick, I am sick and look away, to see no more. And I see, down the street, that the young bloods and their women have gone their ways, in great glee, and the watchman is in pain sitting doubled up on the pavement edge. Then I hear my master say, "pst! Israel!"—And I must go. . . .

"'There on the brick-floor is what was the woman, all askew (toute de biais). She that was dancing, gay, full of repartee; for she was a bel esprit—one cannot deny it!—And now look at her!—ah, my God!

"'But there is no time for caquetage. We must work. We choose a place for the grave that no prayer will be said over. And I take the crowbar and loosen up the first floor-brick. The bricks are set zig-zag, and it is difficult. My master becomes impatient. But in time it is done, and I take the spade and we work alternately in silence for what I should have believed an hour. But it is less. We are both strong and can work quick.

"'Then comes the terrible moment. Ah, M. l'Abbé—a moment to make the strong man shudder. I can hardly speak of it now. But it has to be done. . . .

"'We have straightened out the body when I entered the vault. That is well done. And my master throws back the dress-lappet to hide (masquer) the face. We need not see it again. Then says my master to me: "You merit your reward, my Israel. Take the rings. It would be a pity to lose the good rings." But no! I would not. Then my master stoops and takes the rings from the hand, bague d'alliance and all, and would have me take them. But I still refuse, and he calls me fool; but slips the rings in his pocket. But he will not unmask the face again, for all the pearls there are on the neck. I saw them.

"'So he takes the head and I take the feet, and we lay it in the new-made grave. And we fill in the sandy mould, so much as will enter in, and commence to replace the bricks as before. But one foot, with its satin shoe, will protrude do what we may! Then my master, impatient, snatches up a brick and beats it into the ground. And I turn sick and hide my eyes, for I hear the bones that crack (la fente des os).

"'Then we flush over all, and replace the brickwork with care. Then, there is question about the mould we have taken out. It will show itself, and reveal all, says my master. But I tell him that no one comes to this vault—that I will lock the door, and take the key. And years may pass, but none will know. Besides, if we work longer now we shall be seen; for the sun has come, and we hear the footsteps of the workmen going to their work, and their voices. And the clink of the tin cans of the laitière as she goes down the street en criante. It is time to get back to bed. "Madame is a sound sleeper, grâce à Dieu," says my master. And we go back to hide our hearts, as best we may. . . .'

"'Ah, poor Israel,' said I, 'how I weep for you! For you had done no crime, you yourself! Your only crime was that you gave help to a man, who surely seems to me—pardon my frankness!—to have gone near to be a devil incarnate.'

"'Ah no, mon père!' replied the old man, 'it is not as you think. For what merit have we of our own, the best among us? And I know this, that my poor master, ere he died, turned, as his father had done before him, to the blessed Lord Jesus, by whose blood we can alone be washed free from sin.' And then the old invalid went on to console himself for the crime of a man he held in loving memory, by a long screed of gibberish (récit de baragouinages) of the so-called Evangelical sectaries. For there is, I know, more than one coterie of heretics that flatters its conscience with a belief that sin is safe for all provided that the sinner applies in time (even to the hour of his death) to the Lord Jesus as his Intercessor and Mediator; and yet fails to see that the surest way to His mercy is through the beatified Mary, His sweet Mother. Yet I too hope that this intercession may not be for sinners only, but for those who have lived to give what-may-be of happiness to their fellow-man. But I will not be led away by this theme. Let me continue Michaud's story. He had broken down at this point, and I would have had him desist. But presently he resumed, of his own accord.

"'I would you should know, M. l'Abbé, the story my master told me of the events that anticipated this murder. He told me them all, keeping nothing back—for who else was there to whom he could

speak?—but by fits and starts (à batons rompus), not in one continuous narrative. It is too long to tell at what intervals precisely. I will tell it in one.

"'This Madame Quesnes was the half-sister of my master, as he had said. She had ever (so he told me) been scheming and plotting to rob his daughter of an inheritance specially devised to her by his father. It was owing to an entanglement, he said, that it all came about. For his father, being whimsical in his old age, and not being in good terms with his belle-fille, my master's wife, though much attached to his grandchild her daughter, had thought well to attach a special condition to this bequest; namely, that on coming of age his grandchild should be in possession of a certain ring he had given her, else she should not inherit. "Naturally," said my master, "I entrusted this ring to the care of Madame, my wife, enjoining her to wear it night and day. And this she did, until, as I shall tell you, it was stolen from her by my sister, Madame Quesnes, on the evening of the ball that ended so disastrously for her." . . .

"'I need not say, M. l'Abbé, that it was not for me, a poor servitor, to understand the ins-and-outs of the inheritance of property. I was content to make no enquiry about this matter,—though it seemed to me strange,—and to be content that all was as my master told me. I myself saw somewhat of the theft in the ballroom, and can answer in part for the truth of my master's narrative, of which I can repeat the words. But first I must tell you of the reason no enquiry was made about the disappearance of Madame Quesnes. It was this. At the end of this ball, it may be at two or three in the morning, there broke out a great quarrel among certain gentlemen who in an upper room had been playing cards for high stakes. And some would have it that a certain Milord Anglais, who was reputed to be the lover of this Madame Quesnes—but what do I know?—had provoked her husband to the duel by accusations of cheating at cards, whereon blows were struck and swords drawn. But my master—this I saw—coming from the dancing-room in anger, bade them put up their swords and begone to the Parc to fight, as became gallant gentlemen, rather than to buffet one another on the stairs like drunken citizens in a tavern brawl. And they, all in fear of him, for none would face his sword,—as it was, to say the truth, an assured death to do so,—went away to the Parc as bidden, and there M. Quesnes met his end from the sword of Milord, who fought, having won the choice of place, with his back to the sun. But from that hour Milord was not again seen, and the tale went that he and Madame Quesnes had

fled together and were living together, in Italy or Corsica, more because there was much anger at Court over the death of her husband than from any mauvaise-honte of their amours. Indeed, some said he had made her his wife; but others made light of this, saying he had little need to do so, and was not the man. This story was the more easy of belief that my master affirmed that, an hour or so after all had departed, he came from his room hearing a noise, and saw Madame Quesnes going downstairs as though to leave the house. And this, M. l'Abbé, you will see *was* true, if I tell you the rest of my master's tale in his own words:—

"'"This arrangement of the inheritance being seen and well understood, mon Israel," said he, "figure to yourself my anger and disgust when I hear this woman proclaim aloud at the ball that she has taken a wager that no lady in the room has ten stones in a ring, setting aside small stones that encircle other stones. Well, I know this is a scheme of hers to get my wife's ring from her finger and snatch it away and hide it. For I know her capable of such conduct. And I hear her tell some cock-and-bull tale (histoire) when I refuse to allow this ring to leave my wife's finger, of how it is really a ring of her mother's that my wife has stolen. And then, as I would not offend the great Duke who had laid the wager, I myself keep hold of the ring for him to count the stones. And between us, each thinking the ring in the other's keeping, we let go at the instant. And then as the ring rolls away on the ground, I am called away to make peace without. And then, when I return, where is the ring? Where, truly? But Madame, my sister, knows, and knows well. And I see, from her face, what my wife believes, and I speak with her; for I would know also. What she tells me is, that Mademoiselle my niece has seen her aunt stoop and pick up the ring"—this, M. l'Abbé, was the young orpheline daughter of his brother the soldier; she had but sixteen years—a child—and this marmotte repeats again what she has seen; and that Madame her aunt escaped by the other door, at the moment that I returned. It is enough! I pursue her, and meet you without. You remember? . . ."

"'And M. l'Abbé,'—thus spoke Michaud himself,—'I remembered well, and that I had seen Madame Quesnes make away through the door leading down to the entresol. And her return at this moment, and that my master taxed her with the theft, and she defied him, and denied all knowledge of the ring. But she made but a poor excuse for her inexplicable visit below, where she may have been three minutes, before my master met me on the stairs above, seeking her, and heard from me that she was below.'

"I did not want Michaud to waste his strength in making clear points of small importance, so I recalled him to the narrative of the murderer himself.

"'I will tell you tout-de-suite, mon père. But now, I wish to make you see, so to speak, the excited confusion of the guests who disperse, and to hear the voix terrible of my master, who silences all recriminations by calling out that he knows well who has the ring, and it will be found in time. But for M. le Duc, the great man, he has only apologies that this fracas should cross the pleasure of his guests, and tries now to treat the whole concern as contemptible (faire fi de l'affaire toute entière) and the ring itself as a mere brimborion. And for the Duke, he speaks him fair, but shows himself incredulous. And then the last carriage and the last Sedan chair (chaise à porteurs) is gone, and when my master turns to seek his sister—behold! she is gone away to bed, for she and her husband were to sleep in the house, having come from the country expressly for this ball. And Madame pacifies him, and swears that it is but that his sister is only making game of him (veut plaisanter); and at least, she will not leave the house. And then my master, to make sure, gives a double turn to the key of the porte d'entrée, and all go to their rooms. I delay only to put out the lights and then descend to my room below and am soon unconscious. But for what happened while I am asleep, I will tell you again my master's own words.

"'"After I go to my room"—it was thus he told me—"I am too inflamed against Madame my sister to repose, and I do not go to bed at once. My wife goes to bed, and sleeps sound. She can sleep, and is sure the ring will be found. It is impossible my sister should be so friponne. At least, she can sleep, if I cannot! And then, a little time after, I hear a light struck, and I hear footsteps. And as I look out from my door to see who is moving, I hear the creak (grincement) of the door of your stair. And then I say to myself, mon cher Israel, that this young maroufle whom my sister has brought with her from the country, and who seems a Bohémien, a Gipsy, may be in league with burglars; and I cheat myself in figuring him descending the stairs nu-pieds, to admit the voleur-de-nuit. And it is for me an accursed fancy (rêve maudit), for it is this that makes me carry my sword—Dieu ait merci!—sans fourreau; et c'est ça qui m'a fait autant de malheur. Ne suis-je pas vraiment malheureux, mon Israel?

"'"Well! I too descend the stairs, not too quickly, lest mon ami vilain should not be well inside the house when I arrive. It is to me a divertissement. But I am surprised to find, at the stairfoot,

beyond the door of the squeaking hinge, my sister still in her costume-de-danse, who has just lighted her lamp. And at this I do not wonder; for thou knowest how dark it is below there. But I do wonder, for a moment, what may be the business of Madame in the basement, at this hour. Then, in another moment, I have understood all, and I speak.

"'"'You have hidden the ring down here, my beloved sister, and now you have descended to find it.'

"'"'It is true, my beloved brother!' she replies in a mocking tone, 'but what would you? I can look for it another time, when my beloved brother is not here. Ah!—my dear brother, mon frère de demi-sang, who is it that would have torn the clothes from my back, to hunt for this ring—sans respect, sans égard ni de femme ni de sœur? See now! I am alone here—I am powerless. Search!—search! but there will be no ring.' And she laughs in my face (me rit au nez). And thou knowest, mon Israel, the laugh of my sister when she mocks. And she laughs long; and loud enough, I should have thought, to wake you in your chenil down there. But in truth you had drunk too much, and M. l'Ivrogne sleeps sound. Confess it, mon cher! Have I not reason? At least, you do not wake.

"'"'Mais cherche—cherche toujours, mon frère si bien aimé! Tu ne la trouveras pas—la bague précieuse—sur ma personne. Voilà ce qui est vrai! Mais peut-être tu pourras la trouver ailleurs. Elle n'est pas loin de vous, Monsieur l'Écorcheur. Cherche, cherche bien! Tu la trouveras. . . .'

"'"I am enraged against her, and rage—be sure of it! But I know she is speaking truth—for brothers always know, of each other, or sisters of sisters, or either of other, if there is truth in what is said. And I seek about, and she makes as though to accommodate me with the lamp she holds, mocking always, and saying now, you are warmer—now colder, as the children play at cache-cache."'

"(I then knew—I had not seen it before—that all this had taken place in England. For there the children play 'hide and seek' in this way. But I say nothing, and Michaud continued, repeating always the tale of his master.)

"'"And I seek thus, feeling sure that what she says is true, so far as that she has concealed the ring, and at no great distance. Then says she, making a moue, as one does to a child—why do I not seek in the kitchen? I pass into the kitchen, all dark with closed shutters; and I search about, while *she* stands, the vixen, leaning back against the window-cupboard, her arms akimbo, or her elbows on the ledge, where also she places her lamp. None can say she

is not a comely wench; but as for me, she maddens me and I hate her.

"'"Then when this farce has gone on some while—I know not how long—she breaks into a low malicious laugh. 'Ah, mon frère bien-aimé,' she says, 'you are colder now than ever! You were warmer in the passage.'

"'"Then the Devil seizes on me, and I become mad—yes!—mad outright, mon Israel! 'You said it was here,' I cry, furieusement. But, with irritating calmness, she picks up her lamp, tossing her head. 'But I never said so,' says she, almost smiling, 'I only said why not seek in the kitchen?'

"'"And then he possesses me outright—the Devil! I am his.

"'"Oh, mon Israel! thou dost not know—hast never known—how swift, how facile to the swordsman's hand is the weapon he knows so well! None can know it who has not been, as I have truly, a great swordsman, a perfect master! But I tell you, it was the Devil that seized me. As I stood there, her mocking smile, her lip that curled up from her white teeth, her head thrown back, her eyelids dropped—all fed my delirium of fury. Again she spoke, with sweetness.

"'"'It is time for bed, mon frère bien-aimé. Let us go. Madame will miss you. Et mon mari adorable sera aussi de retour—s'il n'est pas tué par ce joli petit Milord Anglais. Allons—tu peux chercher encore demain—et le demain suivant. . . .'

"'"Oui, je le redis, mon Israel. Nul autre peut le savoir, la démangeaison de doigts qu'elle sent pour son épée—la main qui sait bien s'en servir . . . c'est ça qui m'a trahi—mais elle aurait dû penser à ça. M'exaspérer ainsi! Elle aurait dû penser. . . ."'

"At this point I saw (says the Abbé) that the old man was becoming exhausted after so long a recital. He consented to stop, but said: 'I have more to tell.' He then fell asleep and I left him.

"June 2.—I have again seen old Israel, and he has told me the rest of his story, but of a continuity so broken that I judge it best to write the narrative as my memory understands it, and not to attempt to give all his fragmentary words.

"He told me how the murderer, having none other to confide in, and (not being a Christian) having no resource in the Church, had talked to him constantly. And, said he, he could see that the tooth of his remorse bit deep. Yet he would marvel, when by chance the name of this Esther (the sister's name, which also came accidentally) was spoken in his circle, how bravely he would speak out and denounce her for the dishonour she had done to his family,

jusqu'alors sans tache! For, as he had told me before, she was supposed at this time to be living in sin with the noble Milord Anglais. And when *he* did not reappear (for he never did) it was laid to her account. But she could not be caught, so none was any the wiser. And the story being put about by my master that she had left the house on the morning of the duel, and was nowhere to be found, put a padlock on gossip (cadenassait les langues).

"Yet, in spite of all this, when he was alone with his so faithful servant, the Sieur Latreille would break down and shed tears. Then, one day, being greatly afflicted at heart, he told him that he would not have the guilt on his soul of having told him a lie; and then admitted that his version of the inheritance and the ring story was false, and that he had really in some way deceived his father. But of this I have understood little, and can only think that poor Michaud must have misconceived much of it, or been flagging when he tried to tell it; for it was (as I heard it) a mere galimatias, a confused tale of the initials of the ring-jewels which made up his wife's name of Phillis—I could make no sense of it.

"But this was, it may be, no truer than the other version he had told. I mistrust all the story, except the portion poor old Israel himself knows for truth. That he is truth-telling I cannot doubt.

"One thing more he told me, that one should put on record. His master continued uneasy about the soil that had been dug up out of the grave, and that still lay in a heap in the vault where they had left it. He himself was unwilling to make any effort to conceal this, thinking that no one would see anything in it more than some rubbish left by bricklayers. But his master had in his soul the restlessness of guilt, and must needs be always doing something active to conceal his crime. So he persuades Michaud to go with him in the dead of night, and to remove this rubbish or loam in basket-loads, choosing for its receptacle a hollow (concavité) in the wall under the stairway—of which I can only understand this, that it is covered in part by a large beer-cask, and that when this is shifted aside, and Michaud reaches down to find its depth, behold a beer-jug in a recess which he would have removed before filling in the loam. Thereat, said he, his master was in a great perturbation. One minute he would have this jug removed, the next he commands that it should be left quiet—now this way, now that, comme une vraie girouette.

"'Enfin,' said he, 'nous sommes décidés de laisser tranquille cette cruche, et de ça je me sens mécontent; parce que je l'ai reconnue pour une cruche égarée l'an passé, pour laquelle l'on a fait chercher beaucoup—oui, que l'on a cru volée. "Alors," dit mon maître,

"laissez-les croire! Plutôt ça que de faire soupçonner les gens qui ne soupçonnent rien. Remplacez-la-vite!—vite!" Et ensuite, je la remplace, et nous allons verser les paniers tous pleins dans le trou. Et enfin c'est fini!' . . .

"It made me sad (adds the Abbé) that I could not join my poor friend in his attempts to whitewash (reblanchir) his old friend and master. But I would gladly have done so had I seen a loophole. I could only say that we must hope that the Almighty Wisdom, which can truly read the human heart, might find some excuses for his conduct which it was not given to our limited vision to distinguish."

"August 22, 1814.—The poor Israel Michaud is departed, ninety-eight years of age. Had he lived till la Saint Michel, he would have been ninety-nine. He had been happier, he said, in this last year and a half, for having told me the terrible tale of the murder of Madame Quesnes. He held to his affection for his old master, the Sieur Latreille, to the last. It was a strange fascination! I have promised to pray for this murderer, and must do so. But, mon Dieu! with how much more heart one prays for good men, than for human wolves and foxes!"

(Editor's Note.—As there are still so many who do not read French, the above has been translated so as to suggest its original as nearly as possible—retaining the French at discretion in one or two places, and bracketing in the words that might add emphasis to their substitutes. This treatment of a foreign language is not without precedent.)

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