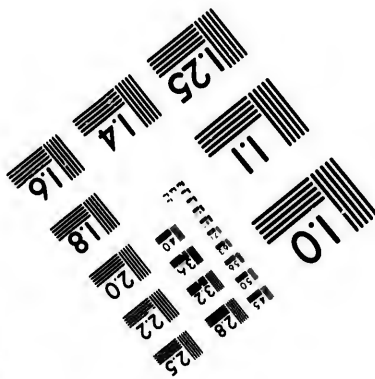
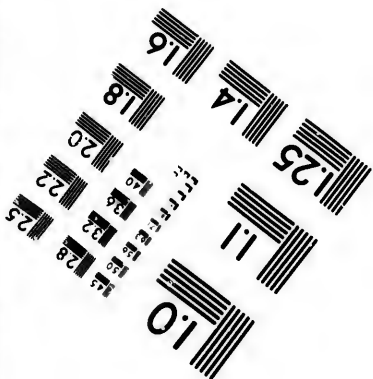
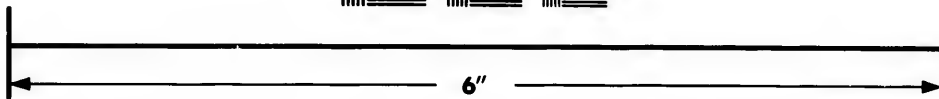
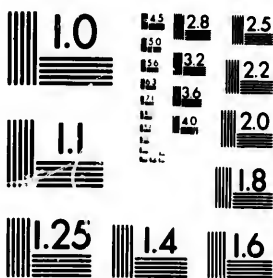


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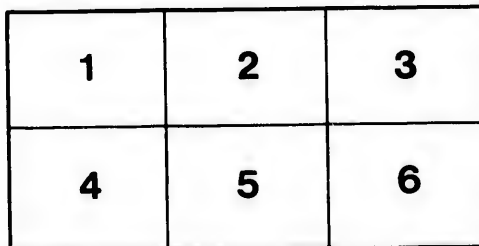
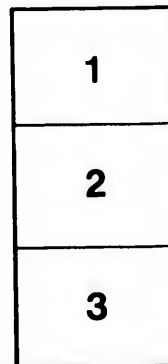
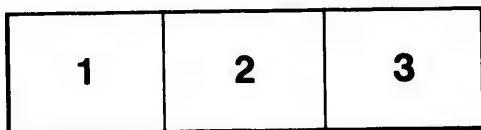
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STAINED PAGES,

THE STORY OF ANTHONY GRACE.

BY

G. MANVILLE FENN,

AUTHOR OF "ONE MAID'S MISCHIEF," "DOUBLE CUNNING,"
"THE DARK HOUSE," &c., &c.

Entered according to Act of Parliament of Canada, in the Office of the Minister of
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THE STORY OF ANTONY GRACE.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN IN POSSESSION.

MR. ROWLE came the day after the funeral, walking straight in and, nodding to cook, who opened the door, hung up his shabby hat in the hall. Then, to my surprise, he took it down again, and after gazing into it as Mr. Blakeford used to do in his when he came over to our church, he turned it round, made an offer as if about to put it on wrong way first, reconsidered the matter, put it on in the regular way, and as it seemed to me drew his sword.

But it was not his sword, only a very long clay pipe which he had been carrying up his left sleeve, with the bowl in his hand. Then, thrusting the said hand into his tail-pocket, he brought out a little roll of tobacco, upon which was printed, as I afterwards saw, a small woodcut, and the conundrum, "When is a door not a door?"

"Ho!" said cook; "I suppose you're the——"

"That's just what I am, my dear," said the stranger, interrupting her; "and my name's Rowle. Introduced by Mr. Blakeford; and just fetch me a light."

"Which you'd best fetch this gentleman a light, Master Antony," said cook; "for I ain't going to bemean myself."

As she spoke she made a sort of whirlwind in the hall, and whisked herself out of the place, slamming the door at the end quite loudly.

"Waxy!" said Mr. Rowle, looking hard at me, and shutting one eye in a peculiar way. "Got a light, young un?"

"Yes," I said, feeling sorry that cook should have been so rude to the visitor: and as I hurried into the study to get a match out of the little bronze stand, and lit the curled-up wax taper that my father used to seal his particular letters, I found that Mr. Rowle had followed me, tucking little bits of tobacco in the pipe-bowl as he came.

He then proceeded to look about, stooped down and punched the big leather-covered chair, uttered a grunt, took the taper, lit his pipe, and began to smoke.

"Now then, squire," he said, "suppose you and I have a look round."

There was such a calm at-homeness about him that the thought struck me that he must somehow belong to the place now; and I gazed at him with a feeling akin to awe.

He was a little man in a loose coat, and his face put me greatly in mind of the cover of a new spelling-book. He was dressed in black, and his tail-coat had an enormously high collar, which seemed to act as a screen to the back of his half-bald head when he sat down, as he did frequently, to try the different chairs or sofas. It never struck me that the coat might have been made for another man, but that he had had it shaped to come down to the tips of his fingers, and so keep him warm. When he had taken off his hat I had noticed that his hair lay in streaks across the top of his head, and the idea occurred to me that his name might be Jacob, because he was in other respects so smooth.

I followed Mr. Rowle as he proceeded to have what he called "a look round," and this consisted in going from room to room, in every one of which he kept his hat on, and stood smoking as he gradually turned his eyes on everything it contained, ending with a grunt as of satisfaction at what he saw.

Every room was taken in turn, even to the kitchen, where our entry caused a sudden cessation of the conversation round the tea-table, and the servants turned away their heads with a look of contempt.

"That'll do," said Mr. Rowle quietly; then, "Mary, my dear, you can bring me my tea in the study."

No one answered, and as we went back I remember thinking that if Mr. Rowle was to be the new master at Cedar Hill he would soon send our old servants away. He walked back, smoking all the time, and seated himself in my father's chair, staring hard at me the while.

"Shut the door, young un," he said at last, and when I had obeyed, "sit down, and make your miserable life happy."

My face began to work, and I had to battle hard to keep back the tears, as for a few minutes I could not speak, but sat there feeling sure Mr. Rowle must think me sulky and strange; and it troubled me, for the old man seemed disposed to be kind.

"Poor boy!" he said all at once, and his voice seemed to me to come out of a cloud of smoke; "so you've lost both your father and your mother?"

"Yes, sir!" I said piteously.

"Hah! so have I," said Mr. Rowle, and he went on smoking. I was thinking as I tried to stare at him through the smoke,

that this must have been a very long time ago, when he quite startled me by seeming to read my thoughts, as he said suddenly:

"Yes; that's a long time ago."

"Yes, sir; I thought it must be," I ventured to say; and then there was a long silence, during which I sat there wanting to go away, but not daring to stir, lest Mr. Rowle should think me rude, and still he smoked on.

"I say, young un," he exclaimed, making me start out of a reverie, in which I was thinking how vexed mamma would have been to see Mr. Rowle smoking in all the bedrooms, "suppose you'd just come here to stop, which room should you sleep in?"

"The blue room's the biggest and the best, sir," I said, "but I like the little pink room the most."

"Hah! then the pink room it must be," he said, sending out such a long puff of smoke that I wondered how his mouth could have held it all. "I say, young un, ain't it time Mary brought up my tea?"

"It's past tea-time ever so much," I said, "and her name's Jane."

He took hold of an old brass key hanging at the end of a thin steel chain, and dragged out a very big old silver watch, looked at it, shook it, and held it to his ear, and then lowered it down once more into its particular pocket.

"Then Mary—Jane won't bring it," said Mr. Rowle.

As he spoke the door opened, and Jane, our housemaid, exclaimed sharply, "Now, Master Antony, I want you," and I rose and followed her into the dining-room, where my solitary tea was spread out for me. I stood gazing at it when she left me in a miserable dejected way, for I felt as if I could not eat, and as if the tea when I poured it out would be bitter and salt as my tears; and then I began to think about Mr. Rowle, and stole to the door, opened it, and stood listening to the laughing and talking in the kitchen.

"I wonder whether they will take Mr. Rowle his tea," I thought; and I leaned against the door, listening still, but there was no sign of any preparation. The strong smoke crept out into the hall, and in imagination I could see the little yellow man sitting back and smoking in the chair always used by my father.

At last I summoned up my courage and went to the study door, opened it, and asked Mr. Rowle if he would come and have some tea.

"I will that!" he said with alacrity; "I never despise my beer, but a cup o' tea's my reg'lar drink."

He followed me into the dining-room, and we sat down, I feeling very awkward, especially as Mr. Rowle leaned across, lifted the pot, and gave me his peculiar wink.

"Silver?" he said.

"Yes, sir; and the coffee-pot and basin and jug too," I replied.

"Hah! yes."

It was very awkward, for there was only one teacup and saucer, and I did not like to ring for another; so I filled that and passed it to Mr. Rowle, who sat smoking all the while.

"Thankye!" he said, nodding; and he was about to pour it into the saucer when he stopped short. "Hallo!" he said, "where's your'n?"

"I—I have not got another cup," I stammered.

"Worse disasters at sea!" he said. "Never mind; look ye here, I'll have the saucer and you have the cup," and pouring out the tea, he passed me back the cup, and the meal went on.

For the first time since his arrival Mr. Rowle laid down his pipe, and after hewing off a great piece of bread, he proceeded to cut it up in little cubes, all six sides of which he buttered before he ate them, while I contented myself with a modest slice or two, for my appetite was gone.

It was a doleful meal, but he seemed to enjoy it, and after partaking of five or six saucerfuls he nodded at me again, took up and refilled his pipe, and then walked back to the study, where he sat smoking till ten o'clock, when he went up to bed.

I'm afraid that I was a very ignorant boy. Perhaps not so in the ordinary sense of the word ignorant, for I had been fairly educated, and besides being pretty forward with my Latin, I could have written a letter or carried on a decent conversation in French; but, living in a secluded part of the country, I was very ignorant about the matters of ordinary every-day life, and I found it hard to understand how it was that Mr. Blakeford, the lawyer, should be allowed to do just as he pleased in our old house.

The terrible misfortunes that had come, one after the other, had seemed to stun me and take away my breath. One day we seemed to be all so happy together, and I was sitting reading to my invalid mother in the pleasant old room opening on to the lawn. And the next day I was holding my throbbing head in my bedroom, after crying till it ached as if about to split, while I tried again and again to believe that it was all some dreadful dream, that my father had been carried home dead, killed in an instant by a fall from his horse, and that my mother lay beside him in the darkened room, silent too in death, for the shock had been too great for her delicate frame.

All that followed seemed to me dream-like and strange—the darkened house and the rustling sounds of the black dresses that were made for the servants; my own new black things and stiff black hat; the terrible stillness of the place, and the awe with which I used to gaze at the closed room upstairs; and lastly that dreadful darkest day when I was the companion of Mr. Blakeford

and an old uncle in the mourning coach which followed the hearse with its nodding plumes to the grave.

I wanted to be alone and sit and think, but those about me seemed to consider that it was their duty to try and comfort and cheer me in my affliction, when all they did was to worry me and make me more wretched than before. It troubled me, too, terribly, that people should think me callous and indifferent to my loss, when all the time my heart was throbbing, and I felt a sensation of desolation and misery that I tried my best to conceal.

I remember going on tiptoe towards the dining-room on the day of the funeral, dreading lest my new boots should make a noise, when, as I reached the mat at the door, I stopped short, for my uncle was saying roughly—

"Don't seem to trouble *him* much."

"No, of course not," Mr. Blakeford replied. "What can you expect? I dare say he's thinking more of his new black clothes."

I had to clench my hands and bite my lips to keep from bursting out into a passionate fit of weeping, and I stood there for some minutes, unable to move, as I heard all that was said.

"Well, it's no business of mine," said my uncle. "It was his own money."

"Yes," said Mr. Blakeford, with a sigh. "I was his legal adviser, but he would not be advised."

"Never would," said my uncle. "All he thought of was catching butterflies and drying weeds in blotting-paper."

"But he was a good man," said Mr. Blakeford.

"Bah! good? What, to plunge into speculation and ruin himself?"

"We are none of us perfect," said Mr. Blakeford.

"Who wants to be?" said my uncle. "Well, I wash my hands of the whole affair. You know where I am if you want me. He was never like a brother to me. I will do as you said."

"Yes," said Mr. Blakeford, "of course. You may trust me, Mr. Grace."

"I don't trust anybody," said my uncle, just as one of the servants, coming along the passage, said kindly—

"Why don't you go in, Master Tony?"

There was a sudden movement of a chair, and I saw Mr. Blakeford come forward and look at me curiously as I entered in a shamefaced way. Then he exchanged glances with my uncle, and my heart sank as I felt that they both suspected me of having been listening on the mat.

It was only at nights when I was alone in my own room that I could cry as a half heart-broken boy of eleven can cry in the desolation of his heart. My uncle had gone away the day after the funeral, telling me shortly that I must be a man now, and mind what Mr. Blakeford said; and Mr. Blakeford had looked at

out a pen, and then, taking a little ink-bottle from another pocket, he took out the cork and balanced it on the top of a china figure; then, securing the ink-bottle to one of the buttons of his coat by a little loop, he pulled out a long pocket-book, drew from it an elastic band with a snap, opened it, and fastened the leaves back with the band, just as a tall, gaunt, elderly man came in with a pen behind one ear, a pencil behind the other, making him look in profile like some peculiar kind of horned snail.

I watched their acts with boyish interest as they proceeded methodically to set down the contents of room after room, punching the chairs, turning up the settees, feeling the curtains, and tapping the mirrors, till at the end of the second day, all being done, they closed their books with a snap, nodded to me, and after a short chat with Mr. Rowle took their departure.

"Sale's on Toosday week," said that gentleman as I looked at him inquiringly. "What's going to be done o' you?"

"Done with me?" I said.

"Yes; where are you going to be?"

"I'm going to stop here," I said.

"That can't be, anyhow, young un. Haven't you got any friends?"

"Yes," I said; "there's Dick Wilmot, but he's at school."

"I say, young un, what a precious innocent you are! Haven't you never been away at school?"

"No, sir."

"Where have you been, then?"

"Here at home with papa and mamma."

"Lor', what a shame, to be sure! Why, you don't seem to know nothin'."

"Indeed I do," I said indignantly. "I can read, and write, and cipher, and I know a little botany, and Latin, and French, and papa was teaching me the violin."

"What, the fiddle? Well, that may be some use to you; but as for t'others, bah! I never found the want of any on 'em. How old are you?"

"Just turned eleven, sir."

"'Leven, and bless your 'art, young un, you're about as innocent as a baby."

"If you please, sir, I'm very sorry."

"Sorry? So am I. Why, up in London I've seen boys of 'leven as was reg'lar old men, and know'd a'most everything. Lookye here, young un, don't you know as your poor guv'nor died ever so much in debt through some bank breaking?"

"I heard poor papa say that the bank had shut its doors."

"That's right," said Mr. Rowle, nodding. "Well, young un, and don't you know what that means for you?"

"No, sir," I said.

know," said Jane, addressing me spitefully. "You don't suppose as I've took them away?"

She looked at me angrily, while I felt as if I had been accusing her unjustly.

"Oh no, my dear, of course not!" said Mr. Rowle. "You're too highly respectable a girl to do such a thing; but where I was once there was a housemaid as stole a little bronze pen-tray out of the study, and she was found out about it, and given into custody of the police, and got three months."

Jane looked fiercely at him and whisked out of the room.

"Please, Mr. Rowle," I said, "the little pen-tray that mamma gave poor papa has—has——"

I could say no more, for the recollection of that birthday present, towards which I had subscribed some of my pocket-money, caused such a choking sensation that I was ready to break down once more, and I had to strive hard to keep it back.

"Gone out of the study, young un? Oh no, not it. You fancy as it has."

"I'm sure it has gone, sir," I said eagerly. "I was looking for it yesterday."

"Ah, well, you'll see when we get downstairs," said Mr. Rowle, and he went on from room to room, always sending a few puffs of smoke into each, till we went downstairs, meeting Jane on the way, looking very hot and indignant as she carried up the little china candlesticks, and sure enough, to my great surprise, on entering the study, there was the pen-tray in its familiar place.

"There; what did I tell you?" said Mr. Rowle, laughing. "It was underneath some papers, or p'raps Jane took it down to give it a rub or two."

"That must have been it, sir," I said; and I went out to have a walk round the garden. But somehow everything looked so different: the grass had not been cut for days, the beds were rapidly growing weedy, and the flowers and fruit looked so different, or seemed to look so different, that I was glad to go back into the house, where I found another stranger, a little dapper, red-faced man, who nodded to me familiarly, and then resumed a conversation with Mr. Rowle.

"My clerk will be here directly," I heard him say, "and we'll soon run over the inventory."

"The sooner the better, I say, Mr. Jevins, sir," said Mr. Rowle. "and then we shall know what we're at."

"You don't mean——" began the newcomer.

"No, sir, I don't, because I've had too sharp a hve on 'em; but there's one young lady here as wouldn't take nothing out of her reach, and if I was Mr. Blakeford I'd make a clean sweep out, and the sooner the better."

The little man drew a silver pencil-case out of his pocket, slid

me in his peculiar way, tightening his thin lips, and smiling strangely, but saying nothing.

I knew that some arrangements had been made about my future, but though I was the person most concerned, every one seemed to consider that I was only a boy, and no explanation was vouchsafed. So it was, then, that I rambled about the house and grounds almost alone, growing more and more thoughtful and wretched as the change oppressed me like a weight of lead.

As the days went on, though, and the first passionate feelings of grief gave way to a strange sense of despair, I began to take notice of what was passing around me. It seemed as if the servants in their new black dresses looked upon the change as a holiday. They had frequent visitors: there seemed to be always a kind of lunch in progress, and as I sat alone of an evening I could often hear laughter from the kitchen: and at last, unable to bear the solitude, I used to go into the study and sit down and stare at Mr. Rowle.

It was not cheerful, even there, for Mr. Rowle used to sit and stare at me. We rarely spoke. Still, it was company, and the old man did sometimes give me a nod, and say, in allusion to a burst of mirth from the kitchen—

“They’re keeping the game alive, young un!”

CHAPTER II.

MR. ROWLE AND I BECOME FRIENDS

As I have said, in the days that followed, I used, when feeling very lonely, to go and sit and stare at Mr. Rowle and he at me. Few words were spoken, but quite a friendship sprang up between us, and by degrees I learned what his position really was—that of man in possession, placed there by Mr. Blakeford.

Mr. Rowle was not an active busy man, but somehow he had a way with him that seemed to take charge of everything in the house. I verily believe that in a few moments he made a mental inventory of the contents of the room, and he quite offended Jane one morning by ringing the blue-room bell.

I was with him at the time, and after the ring had been twice repeated, Jane came bouncing upstairs, and, quite ignoring the presence of Mr. Rowle, addressed herself sharply to me.

“I’m surprised at you, Master Antony, ringing the bells like that, knowing how busy I am. Whatever do you want?”

“It was me as rung, Jane, my dear,” said Mr. Rowle. “What’s gone of those two little chayney candlesticks off this table?”

“I’ll k’em down to clean, Master Antony, if you must

pure charity I am going to take you into my office, you had better try to make yourself of some use, unless you want to be turned adrift and starved ;” and he bent down and shook his finger in my face.

“Come to your office, sir ?” I cried, wondering.

“Come to my office, sir, yes,” he snarled. “What else were you going to do ? Did you think you were going to spend your life sticking pins through butterflies and running about picking butterflies and daisies, as you did with your defrauding scoundrel of a father ?”

“How dare you say that !” I cried, as a fierce burst of passion swept over me at hearing him speak thus of my poor dead father.

I have some recollection of rushing at him with clenched fists, and being caught roughly by a strong hand, of being shaken, my ears sharply boxed, and of being then thrown panting, sobbing, and half heart-broken upon the floor, as Mr. Blakeford stood over me.

“That’s your temper, is it, you young dog ?” he cried ; “but I’ll soon tame that down. What, am I to lose thousands of pounds by your cheating scoundrel of a father, and then, when to save his wretched brat from starvation I have arranged to give him a home, I am to have him turn and rend me ? But I’ll soon cure all that, my fine fellow. You’ve got the wrong man to deal with, and it was quite time your career of spoiled child was over.”

He turned and left the room, and after crouching there sobbing for a few minutes, I got up in a stunned, hopeless way, brushed the dust off my clothes, and as I turned I caught a glimpse of my hot red face and wet eyes in the glass.

I was hastily removing the traces of the childish tears when I smelt the pungent odour of tobacco, and my first impulse was to run away and hide ; but there was no way of escape, and I had to turn round and face Mr. Rowle, who stood smoking in the doorway.

“What’s he been leathering you for ?” he said, without removing his pipe.

“I—I struck him !” I panted out, trembling with shame and indignation.

“You ? You hit Lawyer Blakeford ?” he said, with a broad grin overspreading his face. “Come, I like that. I didn’t think there was so much stuff in you.”

“He—he—said false things about my poor dead father,” I faltered.

“And you tried to punch his head for it, young ’un : and serve him right, that’s what I say. Never mind : cheer up, young un ; you’ll grow a man some day, see if you don’t. But, I say, look here, where are you going to stay ? The house’ll be full of people directly.”

"I'm—I'm to go to Mr. Blakeford—to his office, he says."

"Whee-ew!" whistled Mr. Rowle. "That's it, is it? Your gov'nor owed him money, eh, and he's going to take it out of you? I say, young un, you're in for it."

"Am I, sir?" I said, in a dull, despairing way, for I understood by his words that my future was not to be a very pleasant one, but just then I heard Mr. Blakeford's voice below, and Mr. Rowle gave me a friendly nod and turned away, while I stood listening, expecting to be called.

I can recall those feelings that came over me to this day—shame, mortification, wounded pride, misery, and despair. What was to become of me? How could I ever live with a man who spoke so cruelly of one who had always been so firm and yet so gentle with me? No mother, no father, no one to say one kind and encouraging word to me but that poor rough man in possession, towards whom in those hours of misery my young heart went out with all its passion of childlike affection.

I was half stunned. Had I been so idle and spoiled a boy? I did not know, only that I had been very happy—that every lesson had been a pleasure, and those summer-day entomological and botanical rambles with my father times of joy and delight. It was all a puzzle, too, about my father and Mr. Blakeford and their money matters, and of course I was too young to comprehend the legal instruments which empowered the solicitor to take possession of everything of which my father died possessed.

The entry of one of the porters made me creep hurriedly away, and going downstairs, I found room after room filling with the people coming to the sale, with the result that I crept into the garden and down the old laurel walk to the little summer-house at the bottom, where I shut myself in to lean my head against my arm and try to check the miserable tears that would come.

It was very weak and girlish, but I was only eleven, and during the past few days there had been so much to give me pain. I was heartily ashamed of my weakness, feeling all the time a kind of instinct that I ought to be more manly, and trying hard to become so, though now I can smile at the thought of the little, slight boy of eleven battling with his natural emotions, and striving to school them to his will.

It was very quiet and lonely down there, and in a few minutes I felt calmer and better, seating myself and wondering whether I ought not to go up and look for Mr. Blakeford, as I watched the robin—an old friend of mine—hopping about amongst the twigs.

Perhaps it was a foolish idea, but it seemed to me then as if that bird, as it gazed at me with its large round eyes, could feel for my sorrow, and I felt a kind of envy of the little thing's freedom from pain and care.

While I sat there thinking in my despondent way, the low

"Phew!" replied Mr. Rowle, whistling; "well, p'raps 's kindest to tell you, after all. Why, look here, young un, this place, with every stick in it, is going to be sold up—plate, linen, furniture, chayney, glass, and the house and all, and you'll have to go to some of your friends, unless Mr. Blakeford's got his plans made for you."

"Please, sir, I don't think I've got any friends to go to," I said; "I thought I was going to stay at home—at least, I hoped so," I added despondently.

"It's a rum go," muttered Mr. Rowle, as he raised his hat with one hand and rearranged his hair with the stem of his pipe. "Ah, well, I s'pose I've no call to be putting things into your head, only I should like to see you not quite so innocent, and better able to look after yourself."

Mr. Rowle and I had many such conversations during the interval before the sale, in all of which he was so much troubled by what he called my innocence, that I began to look upon my ignorance of the world as something approaching a crime. I saw no more of Mr. Blakeford or my uncle, and the days glided slowly by till just before the sale, when the servants came upon me one evening in the dining-room, to announce that they were going, and to say "good-bye."

"Going!" I said; "what, all?"

"Yes," said cook sharply, and I think there was a twinkle of moisture in her eyes; "yes, Master Antony, we're all going, and we've come to say good-bye."

I believe that cook would have taken me in her arms and hugged me in good motherly fashion, but for the third person. As it was, she shook hands very warmly and looked tenderly at me for a moment—not more—for her soul seemed to be aroused within her at the presence of Mr. Rowle, at whom she darted the most furious of glances, an example followed by the other two maids; and then we were alone.

"Bless 'em!" said Mr. Rowle, taking his pipe for a moment from his lips, and then going on smoking

CHAPTER III.

MR. BLAKEFORD SHOWS HIS TEETH.

THE morning of the sale arrived, and still no one took any notice of me. I had stood by in a melancholy fashion, and seen little tickets pasted or tied upon the various articles of furniture; the stair rods done up in bundles and the carpets in rolls. The chimney ornaments seemed to be holding a meeting in a corner of

the sideboard recess, presided over by a bronze Neptune; and apparently deceived by the reflection of the sunshine, the steel fender had settled itself calmly on a table before the tall pier-glass as if it were a fire; the pictures looked down in the most melancholy way from the walls at the doleful chaos of furniture, all except one of her Majesty the Queen, and that seemed to follow me in a sorrowful, pitying fashion that made me gaze up at it again and again.

Wearied with wandering from room to room—all dust and confusion now—I turned to go upstairs. As I did so I passed the study, whose door was wide open, with Mr. Rowle in the easy-chair smoking away, his hat on, and the wretchedness of the place with its piled-up bundles of books seeming to have no effect upon him whatever.

Ups'airs matters appeared even worse, though it struck me that the rooms were not so dusty. After the "view" on the previous day the auctioneer's men had arranged the things so that they would be handy for taking downstairs, and the grotesque positions they were now in suggested endless ideas. Pairs of sheets and blankets hung from pegs like so many culprits; towel-horses stood upon their heads, while chairs did acrobatic tricks, one at the bottom sustaining four or five piled up in a state of equilibrium; the tooth-brush trays all seemed to have been frightened into taking refuge in the ewers; while the bedsteads and toilet-tables appeared to think the place so dirty and untidy that they were holding up their trailing garments to keep them from being soiled.

On the previous day I had taken refuge in my favourite haunt, the summer-house, till the strangers had gone, and now, hearing the auctioneer's men below, I was hurriedly taking a farewell glance round before once more making my retreat.

I had heard footsteps on the stairs, and supposed it to be one of the owners of the carpet-caps and aprons that lay tucked in a corner, when suddenly passing out of one of the bedrooms into the passage I came face to face with Mr. Blakeford.

"Oh! you're there, are you?" he said, in quite an ill-used tone, as if he had been hunting for me for days. "Why, where have you been hiding yourself?"

"Please, sir, I've been here all the time."

"It's false, sir. How dare you tell me such a lie! I was hunting for you all day yesterday and you were not here. I supposed you had run away."

"If you please sir," I said, "I was in the summer-house—indeed!"

"Then how dare you tell me, sir, that you were here! Now look here, Master Antony Grace; don't you try to trifle with me, for I'm not the man to be played with. You've been allowed to grow up in sloth, ignorance, and idleness; and now that out of

It was growing dusk, and Mr. Blakeford struck a match and lit a gas-jet over the fireplace, just in front of a yellow-looking almanack; and now I could see that the place was one litter of papers, parchments, and dust, save at the end, which was occupied by a bookcase full of great volumes all bound in leather about the colour of Mr. Rowle's skin.

"Sit down there," he said shortly, and he pointed to one of the tall stools by the great desk; and as I climbed upon it he picked up the bag I had placed upon the desk, threw it upon the table, and walked out of the place.

"Like a man—take it like a man," I said to myself as I recalled Mr. Rowle's words; and, pressing my teeth tightly and clenching my fists, I sat there fighting down the depressing feelings that came upon me in a flood, and wondering what I should have to do.

My musings were interrupted by the loud entry at the end of about half an hour of a cross-looking servant-girl, who banged a small tray containing a mug and a plate of bread and butter down before me.

"There's your tea," she said roughly; "and look here, I'm not going to wait on you. Bring the mug to the kitchen when you've done, and you'll have to fetch it in future."

I looked up at her very wistfully as she scowled at me, but I did not speak.

"Sulky, eh?" she said. "You'll soon get that taken out of you here, I can tell you."

With these words she whisked herself out of the office, the swing-door creaked dismally and banged behind her, and I was left to enjoy my meal.

At first I felt that I could not touch it, but I was faint and hungry, and after a few mouthfuls a boy's young healthy appetite asserted itself, and I drank all the mean thin tea and finished the bread and butter.

Then I remembered that I was to take the things back to the kitchen. Where was the kitchen, and dare I leave that stool without Mr. Blakeford's orders?

I felt that I dare not, and therefore sat there patiently gazing about the room, my eyes resting longest on those bills which told of sales of furniture, as I wondered whether those who had belonged to the furniture had died and left a son alone in the world, as I seemed to be just then.

There was a clock, I found, in one corner—an old Dutch clock—that ticked away in a very silent, reserved fashion, giving further every hour a curious running-down noise, as if it were about to strike; but though I watched it patiently as the minute-hand passed on, it never fulfilled the expectations given, but confined itself to its soft subdued *tick, tick, tick, tick*, hour after hour.

meet him, and if he gives it to you again, why——, there, if I was you I'd take it like a man, that I would."

I hesitated for a moment, and then took my rough friend's advice by going out into the garden, where I found Mr. Blakeford with a black bag in his hand.

"Take that," he said harshly, and threw the bag towards me.

I was taken by surprise, caught at and dropped the bag, which burst open, and a number of papers tied with red tape fell out.

"Bah! you clumsy oaf," he exclaimed angrily. "There, pick them up."

I hastily stooped, gathered them together, and tremblingly replaced the packets in the bag, and as soon as it was closed followed my new master towards the gate, through which he passed to where a man was holding a thin pony attached to a shabby four-wheeled chaise.

"Jump up behind," he said; and I climbed into the back-seat, while he took the reins, got into the front, and fumbled in one pocket. "Here, catch!" he cried to the man, as he gave the reins a shake. The pony started off, and we had not gone a dozen yards before something hard hit me in the back, and turning sharply, I saw one of the big old-fashioned penny-pieces fall into the road, while the man who had thrown it after us was making a derisive gesture at Mr. Blakeford, by which I concluded that he was dissatisfied with the amount that had been given him.

"Sold badly, very badly," Mr. Blakeford kept muttering, and at every word he gave the reins a jerk which made the pony throw up its head; and so he kept on muttering during our four-miles ride into the town, when he drove into a little yard where a rough-looking man was waiting, threw him the reins, and then turned to me.

"Jump down, and bring that bag."

I jumped down, and as I did so leaped aside, for a large dog rushed out to the full extent of his chain and stood baying at me, till Mr. Blakeford gave him a kick, and he disappeared into a kennel that had once been green. I followed the lawyer through a side door and into a blank-looking office cut in two by a wooden partition topped with little rails, over which hung old and new posting-bills, many of which papered the wall, so that look which way I would my eye rested on, "To be sold by auction," "Estate," or "Property," in big black letters.

On one side of the partition were a high double desk and a couple of tall stools; on the other some cocoa-nut matting, a table covered with papers, a number of shelves on which stood black-japanned boxes, each of which had upon it somebody's name or only initials in white letters, with perhaps the word "Exors." after them, while on the chimney-piece were a letter-weight, two or three large ink-bottles, and a bundle of quill pens.

humming of voices up at the house came to me, and now and then I could hear steps on the gravel paths, but that leading up to the summer-house was of short turf, so that I was suddenly surprised by hearing a fresh young voice exclaim :

"Oh, look here, mamma! What a nice summer-house!"

"Yes, my dear," said some one, in cold, harsh tones. "The Graces knew pretty well how to take care of themselves. I haven't patience with such ways."

I jumped up angrily to go away, but I was too late, for the door opened suddenly, and I was face to face with a young girl of about my own age, and a tall thin lady, with a careworn, ill-used expression of countenance; and as she seemed to know who I was, she caught the girl's arm and gave her a snatch, exclaiming :

"Come away, Hetty; it's young Grace."

The girl took her eyes unwillingly from mine, and as she accompanied the lady away, she turned round once, and I fancied I read in her looks sorrow for my position, and a desire to come and lay her little hand in mine.

I sat all through that dreary day alone, and getting faint and hungry—though my memories of my encounter with Mr. Blakeford kept me from thinking much about the latter, and it must have been nearly five o'clock when the door once more opened, and Mr. Rowle stood there, holding a bundle tied up in a red handkerchief in one hand, his pipe in the other.

"Why, here you are then, young 'un," he said. "I thought old Blakeford had carried you off. Lookye here! you're just right. I'm going to have a bit of wittles down here in peace, and you'll join in."

As he unfastened the bundle handkerchief and displayed a pork pie and a small loaf, he took a couple of table-knives from his tail pocket.

"Borrowed," he said, holding them up. "They're a part of lot hundred and forty-seven. Stop a moment, let's make sure."

One hand dived into the breast-pocket of his old coat to bring out a dirty catalogue, leaf after leaf of which he turned over, and then, running a dirty thumb down one page he read out :

"Lot hundred and forty-seven: sixteen black— No, that ain't it. Here it is, young 'un. Lot hundred and fifty-seven: two dozen and seven ivory balance-handle knives. Them's them, and they won't be none the worse for my using on 'em."

Mr. Rowle's intentions were most friendly, but I could hardly eat a mouthful, and I was sitting watching him making heavy onslaughts upon the loaf when I heard Mr. Blakeford's voice calling me, and I started up, feeling as if I must run away.

"What are you up to?" said Mr. Rowle, with his mouth full.

"Let me go," I cried excitedly. "Let me run somewhere."

"Gammon! Why, what for? You go out like a man and

Seven, eight, nine, ten had been marked off by that clock, and still I sat there, waiting, and wondering whether I was to sleep there as well as to have my meals; and then I heard a door bang, the sound of a footstep, and with a great tin candlestick in his hand Mr. Blakeford entered the room.

CHAPTER IV.

I BECOME A LAWYER'S CLERK.

"This way!" he said abruptly, and there was a curious look in his face that I could not understand. "Here, hold this," he cried, thrusting the candlestick into my hand; and I held it trembling as he crossed unsteadily to the gas-jet, turned it down, and then strode out of the office.

"There!" he said, opening a door, "up there; and get down in good time. You'll have to clean the boots and things."

"Up there" was up a flight of steps which led into a low sloping-ceiled chamber that had been evidently meant for a lumber-room, but had now been fitted up with an old stump bedstead with a coloured counterpane, a little corner washstand with a cracked jug, a strip of carpet, and a three-legged painted chest of drawers, which had gone down at one corner, and left a corresponding leg slightly raised in the air.

The place was cold and miserable, chilling to a degree, but it was clean; and as I looked round I was surprised by seeing on a chair a heap of my clothes and a brush and comb.

I had just finished looking round when I heard a noise below.

"You Antony!" shouted Mr. Blakeford; "mind you put that candle out safely, and lock sharp into bed."

I obeyed by hastily undressing and putting out the candle to get quickly into bed. It was not to lie down, but, after once more battling with my weakness, to offer up the simple prayers I had been taught, and then, still upon my knees, but with my head drooping on to the pillow, falling fast asleep.

I awoke terribly depressed at daybreak, to listen to some noisy fowls close by, and then I could hear that the rain was pattering heavily down.

Ought I to get up then, or should I lie a little longer? I could not tell, but I recollected Mr. Blakeford's words, and as I did so the same wretched despondent feeling came over me as I thought of my helplessness, and trembled, feeling sure I should give offence.

There are few people who thoroughly realize the sufferings of a tenderly nurtured, sensitive boy when first called upon to battle

with the world amongst unsympathizing strangers. He is only a boy in their eyes, and they fail to give him credit for the same feelings as themselves, when too often he is far more finely strung, and suffers acutely from every unkind word and look. The very act of going from home is distressing enough, but when it is supplemented by his finding himself forced to make his first essays in some uncongenial task to which his hands and the brain that should guide are totally unaccustomed, a feeling of despair often takes possession of his young spirit, and is accompanied by a hopeless despondency that is long before it wears away.

I had had painful afflictions enough during the past weeks, so that I was anything but well prepared for my new life. Besides, I had been badly fed, and the natural sinking caused by the want of proper food terribly augmented my sense of misery.

The rain pattered down on the slates and skylight, while the water ran along the gutter and gurgled strangely in a pipe close to the corner where my bed was placed, as I lay wondering what I had better do. The office was below me, with its silent clock, but perhaps I should not be doing right, I thought, if I got up and went down to see the time. Perhaps, too, the place might be locked up.

I lay thinking in this undecided way till all my doubts were set aside, for there was a loud continuous ringing just outside my door, one which was kept up as if some angry person were sawing away at the wire with the full intention of dragging it down.

It agonized me as I jumped out of bed and began hastily to dress, for I felt as if it must be to rouse me up, and as if I had inadvertently been guilty of some lapse.

The bell stopped ringing as suddenly as it had begun, and with a feeling of relief I continued dressing, but only to start nervously as I heard Mr. Blakeford's voice at the foot of the stairs shouting my name.

"Do you hear that bell, sir?" he cried.

"Yes, sir."

"Then make haste down; don't be all the morning dressing."

Then there was the loud banging of a door, and I hastily finished, and went down cautiously, found the office door at the end of the dim passage, and was just going in when the sharp voice of the servant arrested me.

"Here, you—what's your name?" she said harshly.

"Antony, ma'am."

"Ho! Then, Mister Antony, missus says you're to make yourself useful. They've pretty well worked the flesh off my bones since I've been here, so you must just help to put a little on."

I looked at her in amazement, and she certainly was not at all prepossessing, being a tall raw-boned woman of some three or four

and twenty, in a hastily-put-on cotton dress, her hair rough and untidy, and displaying a general aspect of having spent as little time as possible upon her toilet.

"Now, then, don't stand staring like that!" she said. "Come along here, and fill this scuttle."

She led the way into the kitchen and pointed to a large coal-scuttle, which I had to take and fill for her, after which she seemed to hesitate as to whether she should place the broom she held in my hands; but, probably under the impression that it would save her no trouble, she altered her mind, and went and fetched a large pair of dirty Wellington boots, which she threw down upon the floor.

"There, go into that shed and clean them and your own too, and mind you do 'em well," she cried. "He's a reg'lar wunner about his boots."

My experience in boot-cleaning consisted in having seen the groom at home occasionally polish a pair, so I was no adept: but hastily setting to, I worked hard at the task, and succeeded indifferently well with the big Wellingtons before bestowing the same pains upon my own shoes.

I need hardly say that I was not very quick over my task, and so it happened that when I returned to the kitchen the fire was brightly burning, the kettle boiling, and my new friend, or enemy, seated at her breakfast.

"There, you can put 'em down," she said, with her mouth full of bread and butter. "And now you'd best go and wait in the office till he comes. You're too much of a gent, I s'pose, to have meals with me?"

"I'm sure I don't know," I said, rather piteously.

"Don't you? Well, then, I do. You're to have your victuals in the office, and I s'pose they'll send some out to you when they're done, seeing as you're took here out o' charity."

I felt a red spot burn in each cheek at these words, but I said nothing, only went sadly to the office, which looked terribly dim and gloomy in the morning light. The dust lay thick upon bill and parchment, and the drab books with their red patches upon their backs I could see by this light were old, discoloured, and worn.

Judging from the appearance of the place, in spite of the ink marks and well-stained blotting-paper, there was not much work carried on there, though, of course, I could not judge that then. All that struck me was that the place looked most melancholy, and that a gloomy yew-tree that half shaded one window was heavily laden with drops of rain.

Seeing my mug and plate upon the big desk, I remembered the words of the servant, and hastened to take them to the kitchen where I was received with a scowl, and hastened to retreat back to the office.

I had been standing there about an hour, and had just noticed that the clock pointed to half-past eight, when I heard a light step behind me, and, turning round, there stood the girl I had seen in the garden at home.

Her bright, fresh young face was the first pleasant thing upon which my eyes had rested since I came the night before, and as we stood gazing at each other it seemed to me that I could read sympathy and welcome in her frank smile.

"Good morning," she said quietly, and held out her hand, which I was in the act of taking, when a wiry sharp voice cried loudly—

"Hetty! Hetty! where are you?"

"Here, mamma," cried my visitor.

"Then you've no business there," cried the same voice: and the owner—to wit, the lady I had seen in the garden—came in. "Go back to the parlour directly, miss; and mind this, you are never to come in here at all."

The girl looked eagerly at me again, nodded, and tripped away, leaving a hopeful feeling behind that I could not explain.

"So you are young Grace," said the lady, whom I presumed to be Mrs. Blakeford, and I gazed wonderingly at her pained wrinkled face and weak-looking, wandering eyes. "Mind this: you are to keep in the office. I won't have you in my rooms; and Mr. Blakeford says you're not to be in the kitchen on account of the neighbours' remarks. I'm sure I don't know why we study people who never study us; and I'm pinched enough for money now, without having you thrown on to my housekeeping."

"Now then, what are you doing there?" cried Mr. Blakeford harshly, as he entered in his slippers. "Go and make the tea; what do you want to begin chattering to that boy for about our private affairs?"

Mrs. Blakeford muttered something about being always wrong, and turned to go.

"Always wrong? Of course you are, when you will come meddling with what don't concern you. Now then," he cried, turning sharply round to me, "what are you staring at? Get a cloth and rub down that desk and table. Can't you see how dusty they are?"

"Yes, sir," I said, for it was very evident.

"Then why don't you go and do it, blockhead?"

I started to perform the task in great alarm; but I had no duster, and dared not ask him. Fortunately he was called away just then to his breakfast; but he seemed to me to be there still, gazing at me with his keen dark eyes, while his tightly closed thin lips seemed as if they were about to be drawn aside to bite.

As soon as I was alone I stole into the kitchen to ask for a duster.

"Don't bother me; can't you see I'm making toast?" was my greeting.

I could see she was making toast, and my attention was further called to it by the sharp ringing of a bell.

"Ah, ring away," said the woman, going on with her task. "You may ring the bell down, and then I shan't come till the toast's done. So now then!"

"Please, Mary, is the——"

I turned upon hearing the pleasant little voice again, which stopped short as I looked round, and our eyes met once more.

"No, Miss Hetty, my dear, the toast ain't done," said the woman more softly: "and you may tell your ma that if she is in a hurry she must wait till her hurry's over."

"Don't be cross, Mary," said the child; and tripping across the kitchen, she ran up to where the woman was kneeling before the fender, kissed her cheek, and tripped out again.

"They may thank her for it, that they may," grumbled Mary, as if speaking to the fire, "for if it wasn't for her I wouldn't stop a day longer in their nasty, disagreeable old house. There!"

The toast was by this time done, and Mary was scraping away at a burnt spot, when the bell began to ring more violently than before, with the result that, instead of running off with the toast, Mary deliberately placed it upon the fender and went across to one of the dresser drawers, out of which she took a clean duster.

"Ring away!" she grumbled. "There's a duster for you, boy. And look here; you must be hungry. Stop a minute and I'll cut you a slice. Ah, ring away! You don't frighten me."

To my horror, she coolly spread thickly a slice of bread, cut it, and handed it to me before buttering the toast with which she at last crawled out of the kitchen, while I literally fled to the office, laid the bread and butter on the desk, and stopped to listen.

At the end of half an hour the bell rang again, and soon after Mary came sulkily into the office with a mug of half-cold weak tea and some lumps, not slices, of bread and butter. These she thrust before me, and I was sadly making my breakfast when Mr. Blakeford entered the place.

"Come, make haste!" he said sharply; and as I glanced up at him I read in his face that for some reason or another he had taken a great dislike to me. I could not tell then, nor did I know for long afterwards, why this was; but it grew more evident hour by hour that he hated the sight of my anxious young face, and that my sojourn with him was to be far from pleasant.

He took his seat at the table while I tried to finish my breakfast, but his coming had completely taken away my appetite, and

at the end of a few minutes I hastened to take the mug and plate to the kitchen, and then returned to the office.

"Now, sir," Mr. Blakeford began, "just look here. Your father owed me a large sum of money when he died, and I have taken you on here quite out of compassion. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir," I faltered.

"Well, you've got to learn to be of use to me as soon as you can. You can write, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir—not very well," I faltered.

"Of course you can't. No boy brought up as you have been, without going to a school, could be expected to write a decent hand. But look here, you'll have to try and write well; so take that paper to the desk and copy it out in a neat round hand."

I took the paper with trembling hands, climbed to the desk, spread the sheet of foolscap ready upon a big piece of blotting-paper, and took up one of the pens before me.

Those were the days before steel nibs had become common, and the pen I took was a quill split up and spoiled.

I took another and another, but they were all the same; and then, glancing at the inkstand, I found that it was dry.

I hardly dared to do it, but he glanced up at me to see if I had begun, and I ventured to say that there was neither pen nor ink.

"Of course not, blockhead. Get down and fetch some off the chimney-piece."

I gladly obeyed; and then, resuming my seat, with the words on the paper dancing before my eyes, made my first essay as Mr. Blakeford's clerk.

The writing before me was not very distinct, but I managed to decipher it pretty well, getting a little puzzled as to the meaning of "ads." and "exors.," with various other legal contractions, but after the first line or two going steadily on, for, bad as my education had been, I was able to write a boy's neat round hand, consequent upon often copying out lists for my father, or names to label the collections we made.

I had been writing about half an hour, working away diligently enough, when I heard the chair on the other side of the partition scroop, and Mr. Blakeford came up behind me. I fully expected a severe scolding or a blow when he took up my sheet of foolscap and scanned it over, but he threw it down before me again with a grunt.

Soon afterwards he rose and went out, leaving me busy over my task, writing till I grew giddy and my head began to ache.

About the middle of the day Mary came in with some bread and meat; and about six o'clock there was another mug of thin tea and some pieces of bread and butter. Then the night came on, the gas was lighted, and I finished my first day in what

seemed to be, and really was, as I look back upon it now, little better than a prison.

The days crept slowly by as I took my place each morning at the desk, finding always something fresh to copy in a neat round hand, and at this I patiently toiled on, with my old griefs growing more dull as a little hope began to arise that I might soon see little Hetty to speak to again; but though from time to time I heard the voice and the sound of a piano upon which some one was industriously practising, she never came near the office.

Mr. Blakeford seemed as brutal to everyone in the house as he was to me. The only person who did not seem afraid of him was Mary, and upon her his angry scoldings had no effect whatever. To me she was harsh and uncouth as on my first arrival, but, seeing that the amount given me for my meals was disgracefully small, after the first week she did take care that I had a sufficiency of food, although it only took one form.

I remember upon one occasion, having to go to the kitchen door, and finding her muttering angrily to herself, while upon seeing me she exclaimed:

"They've been going on about too much butter being used again. Come here!"

I went closer to her, and she hurried into the larder, and came out with a roll of fresh butter and a new loaf, cutting off a thick piece and plastering it excessively with butter.

"There!" she exclaimed, "you go back into the office, and don't you show your face here again until you've eaten up every scrap of that. I'll teach 'em to grumble about the butter."

From that day forward Mary was always cutting me great slices of new bread and thickly spreading them with butter.

"There," she used to say ungraciously, "I don't like boys, but they shan't half-starve you while I'm here."

I was so moved by her unexpected kindness—for it really was done out of goodness of heart—that, having become somewhat hardened to being a confederate in this unlawful acquisition of provender, on one occasion I threw my arms round her neck and kissed her.

"Why, you impudent young scamp, what d'yer mean?" she exclaimed, in astonishment.

"Please, Mary," I said, "I didn't mean to be impudent; it was because you were so good to me."

"Good? Stuff!" she said roughly, "I'm not good. There, get along with you, and don't you do that again."

I certainly should have run a good chance of being half-starved but for Mary and another friend.

One day when I opened my desk, I found just inside it a plate with an appetising piece of pudding therein, and concluded that

it was Mary's doing; but I could not be sure, for her benevolence always took the form of thick slices of bread and butter.

The next day there was a piece of cake; another day some apples; another, a couple of tartlets; and at last I determined to hide and see who was the donor of these presents, so welcome to a growing boy. I had made up my mind at last that they came from Hetty, and I was right; for going inside the large paper cupboard one day, instead of going out to fetch the newspaper according to custom, this being one of my new duties, I saw the office door gently open and Hetty's little head peering cautiously in. Then, satisfied that no one was near, she ran lightly to the big desk; I heard it shut down hastily, and then there was a quiet rustling noise, the office door closed and she was gone.

This went on regularly, and at last one day it occurred to me that I should like to make her a present in return. I had a few shillings, the remains of my pocket-money, and I turned over in my own mind what I should give her. Cakes or sweets I voted too trifling, a doll too childish. What should I buy then? Suddenly I recollected that there were in a window in the little town some pretty silver brooches formed like a knot of twisted ribbon, and one of these I determined to buy.

It took three out of my five shillings; but it looked very pretty in its little box, reposing on pink cotton-wool: and having secured it, I returned to my copying at the desk, to think out how I could make my gift.

Nothing was more simple. I wrapped up the little box neatly in a quarter-sheet of foolscap, sealed it with the office wax, and directed it in my best hand to "Miss Hetty Blakeford. From one who is very grateful."

I felt very conscious and excited as I finished and laid it in the bottom of the desk, just where the presents were always placed for me, and to my great delight, when I looked again there was a plate of tart which the poor child had saved from her own dinner, and the packet was gone.

CHAPTER V.

MR. BLAKEFORD SUFFERS, AND I CATCH THE ECHO.

My life at Mr. Blakeford's knew but little change. It was one regular monotonous occupation—copy, copy, copy, from morning till night; and but for stolen bits of reading I believe I should have gone melancholy mad. I had no companions of my own age, no older friends to whom I could confide my troubles or ask for advice. Mr. Blakeford was always stern and repellent; Mrs.

Blakeford, on the rare occasions when I encountered her, ill-used, and ready to say something about my being an extra expense. Only at rare intervals did I see little Hetty, and then it would be in the street, when I had been sent to the post, to fetch stamps, or on some such errand. Then I had a smile and a pleasant look to think about till our next encounter.

A year glided by in this fashion, during which time, in spite of his constant complaints, I must have grown very useful to Mr. Blakeford, for my handwriting was clear and firm, and I copied a great many documents in the course of the month.

He was as brutal to me as ever, and never lost an opportunity of abusing me for my being an incumbrance, or saying something which sent me miserable to my room.

My tender point, and he knew it well enough, was an allusion to my father's debt to him; and afterwards, when I went up wretched and low-spirited to bed, I used to make a vow that some day or another I would save enough money to pay him all my father owed, and so free his memory from what the lawyer always told me was a disgrace.

Quite eighteen months had elapsed, when it became evident to me that Mr. Blakeford was in some trouble with one of his clients. This latter, a tall florid-looking farmer, had, as I learned from what I heard of their conversation, borrowed money from my employer upon some security, with the understanding that payment was not to be enforced so long as the heavy interest was provided for.

Mr. Blakeford's business seemed to consist a great deal in money-lending, and every now and then my old acquaintance, Mr. Rowle, came to the office for instructions, and found time for a friendly chat.

Upon this occasion I noticed that Mr. Blakeford was very anxious about the coming of some one to the office, and he spent a good deal of time in watching from one of the windows.

He was sternly examining a piece of copying that I had just finished, when there came three heavy knocks with a stick upon the outer door of the office.

Mr. Blakeford turned yellow, and, catching me by the arm, whispered—

"It's Mr. Wooster. Antony, say I'm not at home. Say I've gone out. Quick."

He pushed me towards the door, and I went to open it just as there were three more heavy knocks, and on drawing back the fastening, there stood Mr. Wooster, the stout, tall, farmer-looking man, scowling and angry.

"Where's Mr. Blakeford?" he cried, catching me fiercely by the collar, and shaking a stout ash stick he carried.

"Please, sir—" I began.

"It's a lie!" he roared; "he's not out. Didn't he tell you to say he was out?"

"Yes, sir," I faltered, and he strode straight in; and as I followed, I saw him catch Mr. Blakeford by the throat and pin him in his chair.

"Fetch the constable, Antony," cried Mr. Blakeford. "Quick!"

"Stop where you are, you young dog," roared the farmer, "or I'll kill you. Now, you scoundrel, what do you mean by seizing my goods, by putting your rascally man in possession after promising me in this office that you would never put me to any inconvenience?"

"If you have any complaint to make against me, Mr. Wooster, employ your solicitor," cried Mr. Blakeford hoarsely.

"Hang your solicitor and the whole crew, you scoundrelly serpent!" roared the farmer. "You've ruined me, as you ruined that poor boy's father, and a score more before him."

"Antony—a constable—help!" cried Mr. Blakeford, for he was yellow and green with fear.

"If Antony Grace stirs, I'll crush him like I would a snail," cried the farmer. "And now look here, you crawling snake; I trusted you because I didn't believe any one could deliberately ruin another for the sake of a few pounds."

"Mr. Wooster, if you dare to strike me," cried the miserable coward, "I shall proceed against you for assault."

"So you may," cried the farmer, with a bitter laugh; "and as you've got every penny I had, much good may it do you. Look here, Blakeford; if I knew that I should be transported for life to Botany Bay for what I'm going to do, I'd do it now."

As he spoke, he spat in his hand, took a fresh grip of the ash stick, and, in spite of Mr. Blakeford's cries for help and mercy, he thrashed him till the stick broke in pieces; and then, taking him by the collar with both hands, he shook him till he was tired, and ended by throwing him back in his chair.

"There!" cried the farmer; "now do your worst, you cheating scoundrel. I'm satisfied; go and satisfy yourself, and much good may the money you have stolen from the poor, the fatherless, and the widow do you."

As he said this he strode out of the office and banged the door.

I was half stunned with fear and horror, and I remember how thankful I felt that I had seen Mrs. Blakeford go out with Hetty half an hour before. While the thrashing was going on Mary had opened the door and looked in, but as if it were no business of hers, she had gone out again, and I was left the sole spectator.

"Are you much hurt, sir?" I said in trembling tones as soon as we were alone.

"Yes," he whispered hoarsely, and showing his teeth, "a good deal."

"Shall I get you something, sir?"

"Yes," he said, panting less hoarsely, "fetch that leather case out of the passage."

I ran and fetched the heavy leather-covered box he meant, and placed it beside him, watching him anxiously, to see if he were better.

"Now, fasten both the doors," he whispered, laying his hand upon his breast to keep down the panting as he drew his breath more easily, and wiped the perspiration from his face.

I obeyed him, and then returned to his side.

"Now unfasten that case, Antony," he said in quite a faint whisper; and going down on one knee I unbuckled a thick strap that was round it, and was about to raise the lid, but it was locked.

"That will do," he said, suddenly changing his tone as he seized me by the jacket collar with one hand, the strap with the other. "You young villain!" he hissed; "you dog! Didn't I tell you to say I was out, and you let that bully in? I'll give you such a lesson as you will never forget."

I was half stupefied as he raised the thick strap, and then brought it heavily down in blow after blow, cutting me all over the body, across the face, hands, legs, anywhere, and causing the most intense pain. I writhed and twined and screamed out under the first few blows in my agony; then a feeling of blind passion came over me, and I caught at and struggled with him for the possession of the strap, but in vain; for he kept me at bay with one hand and continued to beat me cruelly till I fell; and then, placing one foot upon my chest, he beat me again till his arm fell in weariness to his side.

"I'll teach you to mind me another time," he panted, as he glowered over me in his pitiful revenge for the beating he had himself received. "I'll give you something to remember this day by;" and, as I rose, he once more began to strike me; but this time I caught at the strap and held it with hands and teeth, twisting it round me and holding on while he strove to drag it away.

My resistance seemed to half madden him as I still held on.

"Let go, you dog!" he roared, "let go!" but I held on the more tightly; when, beside himself with rage, as a loud knocking came now at the inner door, he caught up a heavy office ruler from the table and struck me so cruel a blow across the head that I staggered backwards, and should have fallen to the floor if the door had not been dashed in and Mary caught me up.

CHAPTER VI.

UNDER MARY'S MASK.

"You great coward!" she cried in a rage, as, sick, faint, and heavy, and seeing everything now as in a dream, I was lifted in her stout arms.

"Leave this room, woman!" I heard him say.

"Yes, and your house too, you wretch!" she retorted; and then I heard no more till I seemed to wake in a heavy, dull, throbbing fashion in the kitchen, where some one seemed to be wetting my head with water smelling very strongly of pickles.

The place looked as if it was early morning, and the walls, with the dresser, plates, and tureens, and the bright tin dish-covers, seemed to be going round and round, but not regularly, for it was as if they went up and down in a wavy billowy way, and all the time I seemed to feel terribly sick.

"Oh, if I was a man!" I heard Mary mutter; and then more softly, "There, don't you cry, Miss Hetty; he ain't killed. It's left off bleeding now. You go to your mar's work-basket and get me a strip of rag. You ain't got any sticking-plaister, have you?"

"I've got some black court-plaister, Mary."

"That'll do, chucky; go and get it. Poor boy, he has had a beating!" she muttered as I heard Hetty's steps crossing the kitchen floor.

"I'm—I'm better now, Mary," I said faintly; and I tried to rise.

"No, you ain't better, neither; and you'll just lie quite still till your head's done," said Mary, in her rough ungracious way. "You needn't be afraid about him; he's gone to bed and sent for the doctor, because he pretends he's so bad, and Mr. Emmett the constable is upstairs with him, about going to the magistrates and taking up Mr. Wooster for beating him; but he didn't say nothing about taking his self up for beating you, a great ugly coward! Oh! here you are, are you?"

"Here's some clean soft linen and the court-plaister," I heard Hetty say with a sob.

"Where's your mar?" said Mary.

"Upstairs in papa's room."

"Ho!" ejaculated Mary, "and I hope she'll stay there. There, don't you begin a-crying again. Hold his hair back while I put this bit on. There, it's not going to bleed any more, and you needn't get shuddering like that at the sight of a little blood. That's the way. Poor boy, it was enough to knock down a box.

Never mind the wet hair; it's only vinegar and water. That's the way; we'll soon strap it up. I don't want to hurt your feelings, Miss Hetty, but your par's a brute."

"Oh, Mary! I won't stop in the kitchen if you say such things," cried Hetty, stamping her little foot.

"Then you'd better go back into the parlour, my dear, for I shall say what I like in my own kitchen; so there now."

"It's very cruel and unkind of you, Mary."

"And it's very cruel and unkind of your par to keep this poor boy half-starved in that orfis."

"He did not, Mary. I'm sure papa would not do such a thing."

"And that's why you go without half your dinner, and then take and put it in Antony's desk."

"Mary!"

"Ah, you may Mary as long as you like, but I've seen you do it."

"Hush! pray don't, Mary; he'll hear you."

"Not he, my dear. Poor boy! he's dropped off asleep, and the best thing too. You're asleep, aren't you?"

I tried to answer "No," but the faint deathly feeling came over me again as strongly as ever, and all seemed dark and silent once more.

It was getting dark when I awoke; for, from fainting, I must have lapsed into a heavy sleep, the result of exhaustion and the shock. My head ached, and I was very stiff and in great pain as I tried to raise myself from the pillow which propped me up in the great Windsor chair. Mary was seated opposite to me, crooning some ditty in a low voice as she sat sewing, the needle clicking against her thumb as she thrust it through the work.

The fire was burning brightly, the tea-things on the table, the pot on the hob, and some buttered toast upon the fender.

As I was gazing at her, and noticing the play of the flames over her red and rugged countenance, she suddenly raised her eyes, gazed full at me, and the harsh repulsive look passed away as she showed a set of white teeth in a pleasant smile, and rose and came to me, bending down and laying her hand upon my burning forehead.

"You won't want no doctor," she said; and to my utter astonishment she bent lower, kissed me, and then softly patted my cheek. "Poor boy," she said, "it was a shame!"

I gazed up piteously and wildly, I believe, in her face, for it was so strange. She had always been so rough and harsh towards me, and her frequent donations of bread and butter seemed to have been given to me more out of spite to her employers than out of kindness to me; but now it was plain enough that under her rugged crust she possessed a true woman's nature, and the ill-treatment I had received had completely made her my friend.

"I've been waiting all this time for you to wake and have tea,"

she said, placing the pot and the toast on the table. "Now then, see if you can't sit up and have some."

"I couldn't drink any, thank you," I said faintly.

"Such stuff and nonsense! It's quite fresh, and I've put in some extra as Miss Hetty give me. Come now, sit up and try, there's a dear."

I tried to sit up, but the pain was so great that I sank back, having hard work not to cry out; and seeing this, with a tenderness for which I should not have given her credit, she gently raised me and backed the pillows up, so as to support me; and then, finding that this was not sufficient, she ran out of the kitchen, to return in a few minutes, doubling up what I knew was her best shawl, which she now formed into a cushion.

"There, now we shall do," she said cheerily; and, pouring out a cup of tea, she tasted and added milk till it was to her liking, and then held it to my lips.

It was like nectar, and I gave her a grateful look for that which seemed to impart new life to my bruised body.

"Now, you've got to eat some toast," she said, and I stared at her in wonder, for it seemed to be a new Mary upon whom I gazed.

"I couldn't eat a bit," I said helplessly.

"But you must," she said imperatively. "Now look here, you have had hardly anything since breakfast, and if you don't eat, you can't get well."

I took the toast she held to me, and managed to eat it. That done, I had another cup of tea, and the sickly faint feeling I had had every time I moved seemed less overpowering; and at last I lay back there, listening helplessly to Mary as she chatted to me and washed up the tea-things.

"Don't you trouble about them; they won't come in my kitchen. He's ill in bed, or pretending to be, and the doctor says he ain't to move for a week. I hope he mayn't for a month—a brute! I never see such a cowardly trick. I wish my William had him. He's going to have the law of Mr. Wooster, so Mr. Emmett the constable told me; and him and the doctor'll make out a nice case between 'em, I know. Pah! I hate lawyers and doctors. So you make yourself comfortable. I'll be your doctor, and if they ain't pretty civil to me, I'll be your lawyer, too, and go to the madgistris, see if I don't. If I was you I wouldn't stay with 'em a minnit after I got well. I shan't; I'm sick of 'em."

"I wish I could go, Mary," I said, "but I don't want to go now you've been so kind."

"Kind! Stuff! It's only my way. There ain't a better-tempered girl nowhere than I am; only when you come to live in a house where the master's a snarling, biting, growling hound, and the missus is a fault-finding, scolding, murmuring himidge,

it's enough to put out a hartchangel. But I say, if I was you, and could write such a lovely hand, I should send and tell my father and mother. Oh, I am sorry, dear—I forgot about your poor father and mother. But I would write and tell somebody."

Mary's allusion to my lovely handwriting was consequent upon my having copied a letter for her to one Mr. William Revitts, who was a policeman in London. She had asked me to copy it for her, and direct it "proper," because her hands were so dirty when she wrote that she was afraid he might not be able to read it. All the same, Mary's hands seemed to have been perfectly clean, though the probabilities were that the said Mr. William Revitts, "mi one dere willim," would certainly not have been able to read the letter. In fact, I broke down over the very beginning by mistaking "one" for the number, and had to be corrected, Mary having meant to say *own*.

Her allusion to my parents touched a tender chord, and my face worked as I recalled the happy times gone by.

"I have nobody to write to," I said at last—"only my uncle."

"Then I'd write and tell him, that I would."

"I am not quite sure where he lives," I said. "I never saw him till—till he came to the funeral."

"But haven't you got nobody belonging to you—no friends at all?"

"I think not," I said helplessly. "No one who would help me."

"Well, you are a one," said Mary, pausing in the act of wiping out the tea-tray after half filling it and pouring the dirty water off at one corner. "Why, I've got no end o' people belonging to me; and if that brute upstairs—as I wish he may ache bad for a week!—was to raise his hand against me, my William would be down and serve him worse than Mr. Wooster did, I can tell him—a wretch!"

"Is that Mr. William Revitts," I asked, "the policeman?"

"Yes; but he wouldn't come down here as a policeman, but as a gentleman, and he'd soon teach Mr. Blakeford what he ought to— Yes! What is it?"

This was in answer to a shrill call for Mary in Mrs. Blakeford's voice, and that lady came in immediately after, to Mary's great disgust.

"You must get hot water ready directly, Mary," she began in an ill-used way. "I'm sure I don't know what I shall do. He's very bad indeed."

"Oh, there's lots of hot water," said Mary shortly. "Biler's full, and kettle's full, and I'll put on the great black saucepan and light the copper if you like."

As she spoke Mary seized the big poker, and began stoking and hammering away at the fire in a most vicious manner, as if determined to vent her spleen upon Mr. Blakeford's coals.

"Your poor master's dreadfully bad," said Mrs. Blakeford again, and she kept on looking at me in a way that seemed quite to indicate that I alone was to blame.

"Oh, yes, mum, I dessay he is, and so's other people too, and wuss. I dessay he'll get better again if he don't die."

Mrs. Blakeford stared at Mary in a half-terrified way, and backed to the door.

"You ring the bell when you want it, and I'll bring you a can of water upstairs," continued Mary ungraciously.

"And couldn't you help me a little in attending upon your master, Mary?"

"No, I couldn't, mum," she said shortly, "for I'm the worst nuss as ever was; and besides, I've got my kitchen work to do; and if you wants a nuss, there's Mrs. Jumfreys over the way would be glad to come, I dessay, only I ain't going to have her here in my kitchen."

Mrs. Blakeford hastily backed out of the kitchen and retreated upstairs; while Mary's rough mask dropped off as soon as she had gone.

"I wasn't going to tell her as I nussed an invalid lady two years 'fore I came here," she said, smiling. "Besides, I didn't want to have nothing to do with him, for fear I should be tempted to give him his lotion 'stead of his physic, he aggravates me so. Lotions is pison, you know—outward happlication only."

That night I had a bed made up down in the kitchen, and passed a weary, feverish time; but towards morning a pleasant feeling of drowsiness came over me. I fell asleep to dream that I was at home once more, and all was bright and sunshiny as I sat half asleep in the summer-house, when my mother came and laid her hand upon my forehead, and I opened my eyes to find it was Mary, ready to ask me whether I was better; and though the sweet, bright dream had gone, there was something very tender in the eyes that looked in mine.

CHAPTER VII.

DREAMS OF THE GREAT MAGNET.

I WAS very stiff and sore, and there was a peculiar giddiness ready to assail me as soon as I moved, so Mary, in her double capacity of doctor and nurse, decided that I was not to attempt to walk about that day.

The consequence was that she made no scruple about dragging a little couch out of the parlour into the kitchen, and after I was dressed, making me lie down near the fire.

"If they don't like it about the sofa, they must do the other thing," she said, laughing. "I say, do you know what time it is?"

"No," I replied.

"Half-past ten, and I've been waiting breakfast till you woke. You *have* had a sleep. I wouldn't wake you, for I thought it would do you good."

"I am better, a great deal," I said.

"Yes; so you are. He ain't, or pretends he ain't. Miss Hetty's been catching it."

"Has she?"

"Yes; for wanting to know about you. Missus told her you were a wicked young wretch, and had half killed your master, and she was never to mention your name again."

I was decidedly better, and in the course of the afternoon I got up and found that the various objects had ceased to waltz around. I made my way up to my bedroom, and for the first time had a look at myself in the glass, where I found that a sore feeling upon my face was caused by a couple of black marks which crossed each other at a sharp angle, and that high up above my temple, and just where the hair would cover it, there was a patch of black court-plaister, which was placed across and across in strips to cover a long and painful cut.

The days glided by; the weals on my face changed colour and began to fade, while the cut on my head grew less painful. I was thrown a good deal with Mary, for no work had been set me in the office, and Mr. Blakeford kept his bed, being regularly attended by the doctor.

I found—Mary being my informant—that there was to be quite a serious case made of it, and Mrs. Blakeford had told her that I was to be an important witness to the assault.

A fortnight had passed; and as I sat alone day after day in the office thinking of a plan that had suggested itself to my mind, but fearing to put it into execution, I had two visitors who completely altered my career in life.

The first came one morning as I was writing a letter to my uncle—a letter destined never to reach him—in the shape of the big farmer, Mr. Wooster, who rapped sharply at the office door, and gazed sternly at me as I opened it and stood in the little passage.

"Where's Blakeford?" he said sharply.

"Ill in bed, sir," I said.

"It's a lie, you young rascal," he cried, catching me by the collar. "Here, how old are you?"

"Thirteen, sir."

"And you can tell lies like that, eh? and without blushing?"

"It is not a lie, sir," I said stoutly. "Mr. Blakeford hasn't been down since—since——"

"I thrashed him, eh?" he said, laughing. "It was a good thrashing too, eh, youngster? But, hallo! what's the matter with your head?"

"A cut, sir."

"What! Did you tumble down?"

"No, sir. It was done the day you—you beat Mr. Blakeford."

"How?"

I was silent.

"He—he didn't dare to do it, did he?"

I was still silent.

"Look here, youngster, tell me the truth and I'll give you a shilling."

"I never told a lie yet, sir," I said stoutly. "and I don't want your shilling."

He looked at me intently for a few moments, and then held out his hand.

"Shake hands," he said.

I placed mine in his, and he squeezed it so that he hurt me, but I did not flinch.

"I believe you, my lad. You don't look like a lying sort, and I wish you were out of this. Now, tell me, did he make that cut on your head?"

I nodded.

"What with?"

"That ruler."

"Humph! And what for?"

"Because I let you in on that day."

"Hang him!" he cried, striding up and down the office, for he had walked straight in, "he's a bigger scoundrel than I thought him. Now, look here, my man, there's going to be an action, or a trial, or something, against me, and you'll be the principal witness. Now, what are you going to do?"

"Going to do, sir?"

"Yes," he said impatiently: "you'll have to appear before the magistrates, and you'll be asked all about my thrashing your master. What are you going to say?"

"I shall tell them the truth, sir."

"No, you won't, my boy. You'll say what Mr. Blakeford tells you to say."

"I shall tell the truth, sir," I said stoutly.

"Look here, my lad, if you tell the truth, that's all I want. If you don't, you'll ruin me."

"I'm sure I shall tell the truth, sir," I said, colouring up and speaking earnestly.

"You'll tell the magistrates, then, that I snatched up the poker and beat Mr. Blakeford with that, eh?"

"No, sir, it was your walking-stick."

"Was it anything like that?" he said, holding out the one he carried.

"Yes, sir, just like it. Here are the pieces, sir," I said; and I took them out of my desk, where I had placed them.

"You're a brave boy," he cried, rubbing his hands; "so they are. Now look here, my boy: Mr. Blakeford says I assaulted him with the poker. Just you button those pieces of stick up in your pocket--no, give them to me: I'll take them. Now; when the day comes, and I ask you to tell the truth about it, you speak out honestly, or, better still, go and hide yourself and never come near the court at all. There's half-a-crown for you. What, you won't take it! Well, just as you like. Good-bye!"

He shook hands with me again, and nodding in a friendly way, left the office.

He had not been gone more than an hour when there was another knock at the door, and on opening it, I admitted Mr. Rowle, who smiled at me as he took off his hat and smoothed his thin straggly hair across his bald head.

"Well, young un," he said, "why, you're growing quite a man. But what's the matter with your forehead?"

I told him, and he gave a low, long whistle.

"I say, young un," he said, "I dare say it ain't no business of mine, but if I was you, I should look after another place. Perhaps, though, he wouldn't let you go."

"Mr. Blakeford often says, Mr. Rowle, that he wishes I was out of his sight."

"Gammon!" said my visitor; "don't you believe him. You do as you like; but if I was a boy like you, I wouldn't stay here."

I looked up at him guiltily, and he stared hard at me, as if reading my thoughts.

"Why, what's wrong?" he said; "you look as red as a turkey-cock!"

"Please, Mr. Rowle—but you won't tell Mr. Blakeford?"

"Tell Mr. Blakeford? Not I."

"I mean to go up to London, and try and find my uncle."

"Try and find him? What, don't you know where he lives?"

"No, sir."

"Humph! London's a big place, you know."

"Yes, sir, but I dare say I could find him."

"What is he—a gentleman?"

"Yes, sir, I think so."

"So don't I, my boy, or he'd never have left you in charge of old Pouncewax. But lookye here now; out with it! What do you mean to do—give notice to leave, or are you going to cut?"

"Cut what, sir?"

"Cut what! Why, cut away—run up to London."

I hesitated for a few moments and hung my head; then, looking up in my old friend's face, as he thrust his hand into his cuff and I expected to see him draw his pipe—I felt that I had nothing to fear from him, and I spoke out.

"Please, Mr. Rowle, I'm so unhappy here, that I was going to run away."

He caught me by the collar so sharply that I thought he was going to punish me; but it was only to bring down his other hand with a sharp clap upon my shoulder.

"I'm glad of it, young un. Run away, then, before he crushes all the hope and spirit out of you."

"Then you don't think it would be very wrong, sir?"

"I think it would be very right, young un; and I hope if you find your uncle, he won't send you back. If he wants to, don't come; but run away again. Look here; you'll want a friend in London. Go and see my brother."

"Your brother, sir?"

"Yes, my brother Jabez. You'll know him as soon as you see him; he's just like me. How old do you think I am?"

"I should think you're fifty, sir."

"Fifty-eight, young un; and so's Jabez. There, you go and put his name and address down. Fifty-eight he is, and I'm fifty-eight, so there's a pair of us. Now, then, write away: Mr. Jabez Rowle, Ruddle and Lister."

"Mr. Jabez Rowle," I said, writing it carefully down.

"Good. Now Ruddle and Lister."

"Ruddle and Lister."

"Commercial printers."

"Com-mer-cial prin-ters."

"Short Street, Fetter Lane."

"Fet-ter Lane."

"And now let's look."

I handed him the scrap of paper.

"Why, it's lovely. Copper-plate's nothing to it, young un. There, you go up and see him, and tell him you've come up to London to make your fortune, and he'll help you. I went up to London to make mine, young un."

"And did you make it, sir?" I said eagerly.

He looked down at his shabby clothes, smoothed his hair, and then, with a curious smile upon his face—

"No, young un, I didn't make it. I made something else instead."

"Did you, sir?"

"Yes, young un—a mess of it. Look here, I might have got on, but I learned to drink like a fish. Don't you. Mind this:

drink means going downwards into the mud; leaving it alone means climbing up to the top of the tree. Bless your young heart, whatever you do, don't drink."

"No, sir," I said, "I will not;" but I did not appreciate his advice.

"There, you stick to that paper. And now, how much money have you got?"

"Money, sir?"

"Yes, money. London's a hundred miles away, and you can't walk."

"I think I could, sir."

"Well, try it; and ride when you're tired. How much have you got?"

I took out my little blue silk purse, and counted in sixpences half-a-crown.

He looked at me for some few moments, and then stood thinking, as if trying to make up his mind about something.

"I'll do it," he muttered. "Look here, young un, you and I are old friends, ain't we?"

"Oh, yes!" I said eagerly.

"Then I will do it," he said, and untying his neckerchief, he, to my great surprise, began to unroll it, to show me the two ends that were hidden in the folds. "For a rainy day," he said, "and this is a rainy day for you. Look here, young un; this is my purse. Here's two half-sus tied up in these two corners—that's one for you, and one for me."

"Oh, no, sir," I said, "I'd rather not take it!" and I shrank away, for he seemed so poor and shabby, that the idea troubled me.

"I don't care whether you'd rather or not," he said, untying one corner with his teeth. "You take it, and some day when you've made your fortune, you give it me back—if so be as you find I haven't succeeded to my estate."

"Do you expect to come in for an estate some day, sir?" I said eagerly.

"Bless your young innocence, yes. A piece of old mother earth, my boy, six foot long, and two foot wide. Just enough to bury me in."

I understood him now, and a pang shot through me at the idea of another one who had been kind to me dying. He saw my look and nodded sadly.

"Yes, my lad, perhaps I shall be dead and gone long before then."

"Oh, sir, don't; it's so dreadful!" I said.

"No, no, my boy," he said quietly; and he patted my shoulder, as he pressed the half-sovereign into my hand. "Not so dreadful as you think. It sounds very awful to you youngsters, with the

world before you, and all hope and brightness; but some day, please God you live long enough, you'll begin to grow very tired, and then it will seem to you more like going to take a long rest. But there, there, we won't talk like that. Here, give me that money back!"

I handed it to him, thinking that he had repented of what he had done, and he hastily rolled the other half-sovereign up, and re-tied his handkerchief.

"Here," he said, "stop a minute, and don't shut the door. I shall soon be back."

He hurried out, and in five minutes was back again to gaze at me smiling.

"Stop a moment," he said, "I must get sixpence out of another pocket. I had to buy an ounce o' bacco so as to get change. Now, here you are—hold out your hand."

I held it out unwillingly, and he counted eight shillings and four sixpences into it.

"That's ten," he said; "it's better for you so. Now you put some in one pocket and some in another, and tie some up just the same as I have, and put a couple of shillings anywhere else you can, and mind and never show your money, and never tell anybody how much you've got. And mind this, too, when anybody asks you to give him something to drink, take him to the pump. That's all. Stop. Don't lose that address. Gov'nor's not down, I s'pose?"

"No, sir," I said.

"All right then, I shan't stay. Good-bye, young un. Where are you going?"

"I'm not quite sure yet, sir."

"No? Well, perhaps I shan't see you again. Jabez Rowle mind you. Tell him all about yourself, mind, and—good-bye."

He trotted off, but came back directly, holding out his hand.

"God bless you, young un," he said huskily. "Good-bye."

Before I could speak again, the door closed sharply, and I was alone.

CHAPTER VIII.

I TAKE A BOLD STEP.

My head was in a whirl as soon as Mr. Rowle had gone, and I sat at my desk thinking over my project, for I had felt for days past that I could not stay where I was—that I would sooner die; and night after night I had lain awake thinking of the, to me, terrible step I proposed to take. My life at Mr. Blakeford's had been such a scene of misery and torture, that I should have gone long enough before, had I dared. Now that I had grown

older, and a little more confident, I had gradually nurtured the idea as my only hope, and the events of the past weeks had pretty well ripened my scheme.

As I sat there, I laid my arms on the big desk, and my head down upon them, trembling at my daring, as the idea took a far more positive shape than ever; and now a feeling of reluctance to leave had come upon me. Mary had been so kind; and then there was little Hetty, who had silently shown me so many tokens of her girlish goodwill.

I felt as I sat there, with the money and address in my pocket, that I must go now; and to act as a spur to my intentions, the words of Mr. Wooster came trooping across my memory.

Would Mr. Blakeford want me to go to the magistrates and say what was not true?

In imagination, I saw his threatening dark face before me, and his thin lips just parting to display his white teeth in that dog-like smile of his, and I shuddered, as I felt how I feared him. It would be horrible to be threatened till I promised to say what he wished, and to lie to the magistrates with Mr. Wooster's threatening face watching me the while.

But he would not ask me to tell a lie, I thought, and I could not run away. Mary would never forgive me, and Hetty would think that I really did cause her father to be so beaten. No: I felt I could not go, and that somehow I must get away from the house, go straight to Mr. Rowle's lodgings, and give him back the money, which I had received upon such a false pretence.

It was all over. I felt the idea of freeing myself from my wretched slavery was one that could never be carried out, and I must wait patiently and bear my miserable lot.

Crack!

I leaped up as if I had been shot, to see Mr. Blakeford, in dressing-gown and slippers, his hair cut short, and looking very pale, standing in the office, the ruler in his hand, with which he had just struck the table and made me start.

"Asleep!" he said sharply.

"No, sir," I said, trembling as I looked at him over the partition. "No, sir, I was not asleep."

"It's a lie, sir, you were asleep. Come here."

I descended from the stool, and opening the partition door, went slowly into his part of the office, and stood by the table, his dark eyes seeming to pierce me through and through.

"Been worked so hard since I was ill, eh?" he said sneeringly.

"No, sir, I——"

"Hold your tongue. What's the matter with your head?"

"My head, sir?" I stammered.

"Yes, that half-healed cut. Oh, I remember, you fell down, didn't you?"

"Fell down, sir! No, I——"

"You fell down—pitched down—I remember, while climbing."

"No, sir, I——"

"Look here, you dog," he hissed between his teeth; "you fell down, do you hear? and cut your head when climbing. Do you understand?"

"No, sir, I——"

"Once more, Antony Grace, listen to me. If anyone asks you how you came by that cut, mind—you fell down when climbing—you fell down when climbing. If you forget that——"

He did not finish, but seemed to hold me with his eye as he played with the ruler and made it go up and down.

"Look here, my boy, you are my clerk, and you are to do exactly as I tell you. Now, listen to me. The day after tomorrow there is to be a case of assault brought before the magistrates, and you will be sworn as a witness. You let Mr. Wooster in—curse him!—and you saw him come up to my table where I was sitting, and make a demand for money."

"Please, sir, I did not hear him ask for money."

"You did, sir," he thundered; "and you saw him strike me with his stick."

"Yes, sir, I saw him strike you," I cried hastily.

"Oh, you did see that, did you?" he said in sneering tones.

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see the stick break?"

"Yes, sir," I said eagerly.

"Oh, come; I'm glad you can remember that. Then he caught up the poker and beat me with it heavily across the body, till the poker was bent right round; and at last, when I was quite stunned and senseless, and with the blood streaming from my lips, he left me half dead and went away."

There was a pause here, during which I could not take my eyes from his.

"You saw all that, didn't you?"

"No, sir," I said, "he did not take the poker."

"What?"

"He did not take the poker, sir."

"Oh! and he did not beat me with it till it was bent?"

"No, sir."

"Go and fetch that poker," he said quietly; and I went trembling, and picked it up, to find it quite bent.

"There, you see?" he said.

"Yes, sir, it is bent."

"Of course it is, Antony. You don't remember that he struck me with it, eh?"

"No, sir," I said, trembling.

"Ah, I shall have to refresh your memory, my boy. You remember, of course, about the blood?"

"No, sir.

"What's that on the floor?"

I looked down at the place to which he pointed with the bent poker, and there were some dark stains where I had fallen. Then, raising my eyes to his again, I looked at him imploringly.

"I shall soon refresh your memory, Antony," he said, laughing silently, and looking at me so that I shivered again. "You will find, on sitting down and thinking a little, that you recollect perfectly well how Mr. Wooster beat me cruelly with the poker, till it was bent like this, and left me bleeding terribly on the office floor. There, hold your tongue. You'll recollect it all. Sit down and try and remember it, there's a good boy. I'm better now, but I can't talk much. Let me see, Antony, what time do you go to bed?"

"Nine o'clock, sir," I faltered.

"Exactly. Well, don't go to sleep, my boy. I'll come up to you after you are in bed, and see if you remember it any better. Go back to your desk."

I crept back, watching him the while, as he stood balancing the poker in his hand, and smiling at me in a way that made my blood turn cold. Then, throwing the poker back with a crash into the grate, he went out as silently as he had come, and I sat there thinking for quite two hours.

At the end of that time, I took a sheet of paper, and wrote upon it as well as my wet trembling hands would let me—

"MY DEAR MARY,—

"Please don't think me a very ungrateful boy, but I cannot, and I can not, stay here any longer. When you read this I shall be gone, never to come back any more. Please tell Miss Hetty I shall never forget her kindness, and I shall never forget yours.

"I remain, your affectionate friend,

"ANTONY GRACE.

"P.S.—Some day, perhaps, we shall meet somewhere. I am very unhappy, and I cannot write any more. Mr. Blakeford frightens me."

This letter I doubled and sealed up in the old fashion, and kept in my pocket, meaning to post it, and at last, when I went into the kitchen to tea, I was half afraid to meet Mary. She noticed my pale face, and I told her the truth, that I had a bad headache, making it an excuse for going up to bed at eight o'clock, feeling as if the greatest event in my life were about to take place, and shaking like a leaf.

I felt that I had an hour to spare, and spent part of the time in

making a bundle of my best clothes and linen. I tied up in a handkerchief, too, some thick slices of bread and butter, and some bread and meat that I had found that afternoon in my desk. Then, as the night grew darker, I sat thinking and asking myself, after placing my bundles ready, whether I should go at once, or wait till I heard Mr. Blakeford coming.

I had just decided to go at once, feeling that I dare not face Mr. Blakeford again, when I heard his voice downstairs, and started up, trembling in every limb.

"Where's that boy?"

"Gone to bed," said Mary surlily. Then I heard a door shut directly after, and breathed more freely. I felt that I must go at once, and stood in the middle of the room, shivering with nervous excitement, as I thought of the madness of the step I was about to undertake.

A dozen times over I felt that I dare not go, till the recollection of Mr. Blakeford's dark threatening face and sneering smile gave me strength, and made me call up the picture of myself before the magistrates telling all I knew about the assault, of course not saying anything about the poker, or my employer's injuries; and then I began to think about meeting him afterwards.

"He'll half kill me," I thought; and stopping at this, I nerved myself for what I had to do, and putting on my cap, went to the door and listened.

I had spent so much time in indecision that the church clock was striking ten, and I started as I thought of Mr. Blakeford being already upon the stairs.

From where I stood I could have seen the light shining out of the kitchen where Mary sat at work; but it was not there, and I knew that she must have gone up to bed.

It now flashed upon me that this was why Mr. Blakeford had been waiting—he did not want Mary to interfere; and a cold chill came over me as I felt that he meant to beat me till I consented to say what he wished.

There was no time to lose, so, darting back, I caught up my two bundles, crept to the door, descended the stairs on tiptoe, and felt my heart beat violently at every creak the woodwork of the wretched steps gave.

Twice over a noise in the house made me turn to run back, but as there was silence once more, I crept down, and at last reached the mat in front of the office door.

At the end of the passage was the parlour, where I knew Mr. Blakeford would be sitting, and as I looked towards it in the darkness, I could see a faint glimmer of light beneath the door, and then heard Mr. Blakeford cough slightly and move his chair.

Turning hastily, I felt for the handle of the office-door, which

was half glass, with a black muslin blind over it, and moving the handle, I found the door locked. The key was in, though, and turning it, there was a sharp crack as the bolt shot back, and then as I unclosed this door, I heard that of the parlour open, and a light shone down the passage.

"He's coming!" I said in despair; and for a moment, my heart failed me, so great an influence over me had this man obtained, and I stood as if nailed to the floor. The next moment, though, with my heart beating so painfully that it was as if I was being suffocated, I glided into the office and closed the door, holding it shut, without daring to let the handle turn and the catch slip back.

If he came into the office, I was lost, and in imagination, I saw myself with my cap on, and my bundles under my arm, standing trembling and detected before him. Trembling, indeed, as the light came nearer, and I saw him dimly through the black blind approaching the office-door.

He was coming into the office, and all was over! Closer, closer he came, till he was opposite the door, when he stopped short, as if listening.

His face was not a yard from mine, and as I gazed at him through the blind, with starting eyes, seeing his evil-looking countenance lit up by the chamber candlestick he carried, and the grim smile upon his lips, I felt that he must hear me breathe.

I was paralyzed, for it seemed to me that his eyes were gazing straight into mine—fascinating me as it were, where I stood.

He was only listening, though, and instead of coming straight into the office, he turned off sharp to the left, and began to ascend the stairs leading to my bedroom.

There was not a moment to lose, but I was as if in a nightmare, and could not stir, till, wrenching myself away, I darted across the office to the outer door, slipped the bolts, and turned the key with frantic haste, just as his steps sounded overhead, and I heard him calling me by name.

The door stuck, and I could not get it open, and all the time I could hear him coming. He ran across the room, every footstep seeming to come down upon my head like lead. He was descending the stairs, and still that door stuck fast at the top.

In a despairing moment, I looked behind me to see the light shining in at the glass door as he descended, and then my hand glided to the top of the door, and I found that I had not quite shot back the bolt.

The next moment it was free, the door open, and I was through; but, feeling that he would catch me in the yard, I tore out the key, thrust it into the hole with trembling fingers, and as he dashed open the inner door I closed the one where I stood, and locked it from the outside.

I had somehow held on to my bundles, and was about to run across the yard to the pump in the corner, place one foot upon the spout, and by this means reach the top of the wall, when I stopped, paralyzed once more by the fierce barking of the dog.

To my horror I found that he was loose, for his hoarse growling came from quite another part of the yard to that where his kennel was fixed; and I stood outside the door, between two enemies, as a faint streak of light shot out through the keyhole, playing strangely upon the bright handle of the key.

"Are you there, Antony? Come back this moment, sir. Unlock this door."

I did not answer, but stood fast, as the handle was tried and shaken again and again.

"You scoundrel! come back, or it will be worse for you. Leo, Leo, Leo!"

The dog answered the indistinctly heard voice with a sharp burst of barking; and as the sound came nearer, I seemed to see the animal's heavy bull-head, and his sharp teeth about to be fixed in my throat.

The perspiration dripped from me, and in my horror I heard Mr. Blakeford exclaim—

"You are there, you scoundrel, I know. I heard you lock the door. Come in directly, or I'll half kill you."

My hoarse breathing was the only sound I heard. Then, directly after, there were hasty steps crossing the office, and I knew he had gone round to reach the front.

There was not a moment to lose, and I was about to risk the dog's attack, sooner than face Mr. Blakeford, when a thought struck me.

I had the little bundle loosely tied up in a handkerchief, and in it the bread and meat.

This might quiet the dog; and with a courage I did not know I possessed, I hastily tore it open, and taking a couple of steps into the yard, called out, in a loud quick voice, "Here, Leo, Leo!" throwing the bread and meat towards where I believed the dog to be.

There was a rush, a snarling whine, and the dog was close to me for the moment. The next, as I heard him in the darkness seize the meat, I was across the yard, with one foot on the pump, and as I raised myself the front door was flung open, and I heard Mr. Blakeford rush out.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE ROAD TO LONDON.

As Mr. Blakeford ran down to the garden gate, I reached the top of the wall, from whence I should have dropped down, but that he was already outside, and would, I felt sure, have heard me. If I had then run away, it seemed to me that it would be the easiest of tasks for him to pursue me, and hunt me down.

If I stayed where I was, I felt that he would see me against the sky, and I knew he would pass close by me directly to reach the yard doors, when, half in despair, I threw myself flat down, and lay as close as I could, embracing the wall, and holding my bundle in my teeth.

I heard him pass beneath the wall directly, and enter the yard by the gate, which he closed after him, before running up to the office-door and unlocking it, allowing a stream of light to issue forth just across where the dog was peaceably eating my provender.

"Curse him, he has gone!" I heard Mr. Blakeford mutter, and my blood ran cold, as he made a hasty tour of the place. "I'll have him back if it costs me five hundred pounds," he snarled. "Antony, Antony! Come here, my boy, and I'll forgive you."

He stopped, listening, but of course I did not move; and then, in an access of rage, he turned upon the dog.

"You beast, what are you eating there?" he roared. "Why didn't you seize him? Take that!"

There was a dull thud as of a heavy kick, a yelp, a whine, a snarl, and then a dull worrying noise, as if the dog had flown at his master, who uttered a loud cry of pain, followed by one for help; but I waited to hear no more, for, trembling in every limb, I had grasped my bundle and dropped from the wall, when with the noise growing faint behind me I ran with all my might in the direction of the London Road.

Hearing steps, though, coming towards me directly after, I stopped short, and ran into a garden, cowering down amongst the shrubs, for I felt certain that whoever it was in front would be in Mr. Blakeford's pay, and I waited some time after he had passed before continuing my flight.

I ran on that night till there was a hot feeling of blood in my throat, and then I staggered up to, and leaned panting upon, a hedge by the roadside, listening for the sounds of pursuit. A dog barking in the distance sounded to me like Leo, and I felt sure that Mr. Blakeford was in hot chase; then I stumbled slowly on, but not for any great distance, my pace soon degenerating into a walk, till I regained my breath, when I ran on again for a time, but at a steady trot now, for I had not since heard the barking of the dog. Still I did not feel safe, knowing that at any moment Mr. Blake-

ford might overtake me in his pony-chaise, when, unless I could escape by running off across country, I should be ignominiously dragged back.

At last, after several attempts to keep up my running, I was compelled to be content with a steady fast walk, and thus I trudged on hour after hour, till Rowford town, where I had spent so many wretched hours, was a long way behind.

I had passed through two villages, but so far I had not met another soul since leaving Rowford, nor heard the sound of wheels.

It was a very solitary road, leading through a pretty woodland tract of the country, and often, as I toiled on, I came to dark over-shadowed parts, passing through woods, and I paused, not caring to go on. But there was a real tangible danger in the rear which drove me onwards, and, daring the imaginary dangers, I pushed on with beating heart, thinking of robbers, poachers, and highway men, as I tried to rejoice that there were no dangerous wild beasts in England.

At last, I could go no farther, but sank down perfectly exhausted upon a heap of stones that had been placed there for mending the road; and, in spite of my fears of pursuit, nature would have her way, and I fell fast asleep.

The sun was shining full upon me when I awoke, stiff and sore, wondering for a moment where I was; and when at last I recalled all the past, I sprang up in dread, and started off at once, feeling that I had been slothfully wasting my opportunity, and that now I might at any moment be overtaken.

As I hurried on, I looked down at my feet, to find that my boots and trousers were thickly covered with dust; but there was no one to see me, and I kept on, awaking fully to the fact that I was faint and hungry.

These sensations reminded me of the contents of the little handkerchief, and I wistfully thought of the bread and butter that I might have saved.

Then I stopped short, for the recollection of one bundle reminded me of the other, and it was gone. Where was it? I had it when I sank down upon that stone-heap, and I must have come away and left it behind.

In my faint, hungry state, this discovery was terribly depressing, for the bundle contained my good suit of mourning, besides my linen and a few trifles, my only valuables in this world.

"I must have them back," I thought; and I started off to retrace my steps at a run, knowing that I had come at least a couple of miles.

It was dreadfully disheartening, but I persevered, gazing straight before me, lest I should run into danger.

It seemed as if that stone-heap would never come into sight, but at last I saw it lying grey in the distant sunshine, and forgetting

my hunger, I ran on till I reached the spot, and began to look round.

I had expected to see the bundle lying beside the stone-heap, as soon as I came in sight, but there were no traces of it; and though I searched round, and in the long grass at the side, there was no bundle.

Yes; I was certain that I had it when I sank down, and therefore somebody must have taken it while I slept, for no one had passed me on the road.

I could have sat down and cried with vexation, but I had pretty well outgrown that weakness; and after a final glance round I was about to go on again, when something a hundred yards nearer the town took my attention, and, running up to it, I saw a pair of worn-out boots lying on the grass by the roadside.

They seemed to be nothing to me, and, sick at heart, I turned back and continued my journey, longing now for the sight of some village, where I could buy a little milk and a few slices of bread.

The sun was growing hot, and licking up the dew beside the dusty road, but it was a glorious morning, and in spite of my loss there was a feeling of hopefulness in my heart at being free from the slavery I had endured at Mr. Blakeford's. I thought of it all, and wondered what Mary would say, what Hetty would think, and whether Mr. Blakeford would try to fetch me back.

As I thought on, I recovered the place I had lost, and reached a pretty part of the road, where it dipped down in a hollow as it passed through a wood. It was very delicious and shady, and the birds were singing as they used to sing from the woods around my old home; and so sweet and full of pleasant memories were these sounds, that for the moment I forgot my hunger, and stood by a gate leading into the woods and listened.

My reverie was broken by the sound of wheels coming up behind me, and taking alarm on the instant, I climbed over the gate and hid myself, crouching down amongst the thick bracken that showed its silvery green fronds around.

I made sure it was Mr. Blakeford in pursuit, and, once secure of my hiding-place, I rose up gently, so that I could peer in between the trees and over the high bank to the sloping road, down which, just as I had pictured, the four-wheeled chaise was coming at a smart trot, with Mr. Blakeford driving, and somebody beside him.

My first impulse was to turn round and dash wildly through the wood; but I partly restrained myself, partly felt too much in dread, and crouched there, watching through the bracken till, as the chaise came nearer, I saw that a common, dusty, tramp-looking boy was seated beside Mr. Blakeford, and the next moment I saw that he had my bundle upon his knee.

For a moment I thought I might be deceived; but no, there

was no doubt about it. There was my bundle, sure enough, and that boy must have taken it from me as I lay asleep, and then met and told Mr. Blakeford where he had seen me.

I was pretty nearly right, but not quite, as it afterwards proved. But meanwhile the chaise had passed on, Mr. Blakeford urging the pony to a pretty good speed, and gazing sharply to right and left as he went along.

I had hardly dared to breathe as he passed, but crouched lower and lower, fancying that a robin hopping about on the twigs near seemed ready to betray me: and not until the chaise had gone by some ten minutes or so did I dare to sit up and think about my future movements.

The recollection of the dusty, wretched look of the lad who held my bundle set me brushing my boots and trousers with some fronds of fern, and feeling then somewhat less disreputable-looking, I ventured at last to creep back into the road and look to right and left.

I was terribly undecided as to what I ought to do. Go back I would not, and to go forward seemed like rushing straight into danger. To right or left was nothing but tangled wood, wherein I should soon lose myself, and therefore nothing was left for me to do but go straight on, and this I did in fear and trembling, keeping a sharp look-out in front, and meaning to take to the woods and fields should Mr. Blakeford's chaise again appear in sight.

For quite an hour I journeyed on, and then the roofs of cottages and a church tower appeared, making me at one moment press eagerly forward, the next shrink back for fear Mr. Blakeford should be there. But at last hunger prevailed, and making a bold rush, I walked right on, and seeing no sign of danger, I went into the village shop and bought a little loaf and some wonderfully strong-smelling cheese.

"Did you see a gentleman go by here in a chaise?" I ventured to say.

"What, with a boy in it?" said the woman who served me.

I nodded.

"Yes, he went by ever so long ago. You'll have to look sharp if you want to catch them. The gentleman was asking after you."

I felt that I turned pale and red by turns, as I walked out into the road, wondering what it would be best to do, when, to my great delight I saw that there was a side lane off to the left, just a little way through the village, and hurrying on, I found that it was quite a byway off the main road. Where it led to I did not know, only that there was a finger-post with the words "To Charlack Bridge" upon it, and turning down I walked quite a couple of miles before, completely worn out, I sat down beside a little brook that rippled across the clean-washed stones of the road, and made the most delicious meal I ever ate in my life.

Bread and cheese and spring water under the shade of a high hedge, in which a robin sat—it looked to me like the one I had seen in the wood—and darted down and picked up the crumbs I threw it from time to time. As my hunger began to be appeased, and I had thoroughly slaked my burning thirst, by using my closed hand for a scoop, I began to throw crumbs into the bubbling brook, to see them float down for some distance, and then be snapped up by the silvery little fishes with which the stream seemed to swarm. All the while, though, my head had been constantly turning from side to side, in search of danger, and at last just as I was about to continue my journey, hoping to gain the London Road once more, I saw the danger I sought, in the shape of the boy with my bundle running across the fields, as if he had come from the high road, and was trying to get into the lane below me to cut me off.

I looked sharply behind me, expecting to see the chaise of Mr. Blakeford, but it was not in sight; so, stooping down, I waded quickly through the brook, kept under the shelter of the hedge, and ran on steadily, so as not to be out of breath.

The water filled my boots, but it only felt pleasantly cool, and, as I thought, made me better able to run, while, as I raised my head from time to time, I could catch sight of the boy with the bundle running hard across field after field, and losing so much time in getting through hedges or over gates that I felt that I should be past the spot where he would enter the lane before he could reach it.

To my surprise, though, I found that the lane curved sharply round to the right, giving him less distance to run, so that when I tried hard to get by him, having given up all idea of hiding, I found that he had jumped over into the lane before I came up. Then to my horror, as I turned a sharp corner, I came straight upon him, he being evidently quite as much surprised as I at the suddenness of our encounter—the winding of the lane and the height of the hedges having kept us out of sight the one of the other, until the very last moment, when we came face to face, both dusty, hot, weary, and excited as two lads could be, and for the moment neither of us moved.

I don't know how it was that I did not try to run off by the fields in another direction, but it seems to me now that I was stirred by the same savage instincts as an ostrich, who, seeing any hunter riding as if to cut him off, immediately forgets that there is plenty of room behind, and gallops across his pursuer's track, instead of right away.

As I ran panting up, the lad stopped short, and my eyes falling upon my bundle, a new set of thoughts came flashing across my mind, making me forget my pursuer in the high road.

As for the lad, he stood staring at me in a shifty way, and it

soon became evident that he gave me as much credit for chasing him as I did him for chasing me.

He was the first to speak, and calling up the low cunning of his nature, he advanced a step or two, saying:

"I say, you'd better hook it; that gent's a-looking for you."

"You give me my bundle," I said, making a snatch at it, and getting hold with one hand, to which I soon joined the other.

"Tain't your bundle," he said fiercely. "Let go, or I'll soon let you know. Let go, will yer?"

He shook at it savagely, and dragged me here and there, for he was the bigger and stronger; but I held on with all my might. I was horribly frightened of him, for he was a coarse, ruffianly-looking fellow; but inside that bundle was my little all, and I determined not to give it up without a struggle.

"Here, you wait till I get my knife out," he roared. "It's my bundle, yer young thief!"

"It is not," I panted: "you stole it from me while I lay asleep."

"Yer lie! Take that!"

That was a heavy blow on my chin which cut my lip, and seemed to loosen my teeth, causing me intense pain; but though for a moment I staggered back, the blow had just the opposite effect to that intended by the boy. A few moments before, I was so horribly afraid of him, that I felt that I must give up; now the pain seemed to have driven all the fear out of me, for, springing at him with clenched fists, I struck out wildly, and with all my might; the bundle went down in the dust, and, after a minute's scuffle, and a shower of blows, there, to my intense astonishment, lay the boy too, grovelling and twisting about, rubbing his eyes with his fists, and howling dismally.

"You let me alone; I never did nothing to you," he whined.

"You did; you stole my bundle," I cried, in the heat of my triumph.

"No, I didn't. I on'y picked it up. I didn't know it was yourn."

"You knew I was by it," I said.

"Yes; but I thought perhaps it weren't yourn," he howled.

"Now look here," I said, "you give me what you took out of it."

"I didn't take nothing out of it," he whined. "I was only going to, when that gent came along on the shay, and asked me where you was."

"You've got my best shoes on," I said. "Take them off."

He pulled them off, having half spoiled them by cutting the fronts, to let his feet go in.

"Where's that gentleman now?" I said.

"I don't know," he whined. "He said if I didn't show him where you was, he'd hand me over to the police; and I cut off across the fields, when we was walking the pony up a hill."

"You're a nice blackguard," I said, cooling down fast now, as the fear of Mr. Blakeford came back. I was wondering, too, how to get rid of my conquest, when, just as I stooped to pick up the shoes, he shrank away, uttering a cowardly howl, as if I had aimed a blow at him; and, starting up, he ran back along the lane shoeless, and seemed making for the high road.

"He'll tell Mr. Blakeford," I thought; and catching up the bundle, I hurried on in the opposite direction, till, finding the brook again cross the road, I hastily stooped down and washed my bleeding knuckles, before starting off once more, getting rid of the marks of the struggle as fast as I could, and looking back from time to time, in momentary expectation of seeing Mr. Blakeford's head above the hedge.

CHAPTER X.

ALONG THE TOWING-PATH.

I FELT in better spirits now. My rest and breakfast, and my encounter with the boy, had given me more confidence in myself. Then, too, I had recovered my bundle, replacing in it my shoes, and, after carefully wrapping them up, the remains of my bread and cheese.

Hour after hour I walked on, always taking the turnings that led to the right, in the belief that sooner or later they would bring me to the London Road, which, however, they never did; and at last, in the afternoon, I sat down under a tree and made a second delicious meal.

I passed, during the rest of that day's journey, through a couple more villages, at the latter of which I obtained a large mug of milk for a penny; and at last, footsore and worn out, I found myself at nightfall far away in a pleasant pastoral country, where haymaking seemed to be carried on a good deal, from the stacks I passed. There were hills behind me, and hills again straight before me, the part where I was being very level.

"What am I to do?" I asked myself, for I could go no farther, and a feeling of desolation began to make my heart sink. "I must sleep somewhere—but where?"

The answer came in the shape of a haystack, one side of which was being cut away, and soon after, I was seated on the sweet-scented, soft stuff, feasting away once more, to drop at last, almost unconsciously, into a sweet sleep, from which I started up to find it quite dark, and that I was growing cold.

There was plenty of loose straw close by, as if threshing had been going on, and taking my bundle for a pillow, and nestling

beneath the straw which I drew over the hay, I was soon fast asleep once more, only to wake up rested and refreshed as the birds were singing cheerily upon another sunshiny morning.

My toilet consisted in getting rid of the bits of straw and hay, after which I started to walk on once more, following a winding lane, which brought me out at a wooden bridge, crossing a river, down by whose pebbly side I finished my toilet, and rose refreshed and decent-looking, for my bundle contained my brush and comb.

There was a little public-house on the other side of the stream, with cows in a field hard by, and directing my steps there, after stopping on the bridge for a few minutes to gaze at the fish glancing in the sunshine, I found I could buy some bread and milk, the privilege being given me of sitting down on a bench and watching the sparkling river as I made my breakfast.

With every mouthful came hope and confidence. I felt as if I really was free, and that all I now had to do was to trudge steadily on to London. How long it would take me I did not know—perhaps a month. But it did not matter; I could continue to be very sparing of my money, so as to make it last.

It was a red-armed, apple-faced woman who gave me the mug, and she stared at me curiously, frightening me so much, lest she should ask me questions, that I hastily finished my milk, and, picking up the bread, said "good morning," and walked along by the side of the river, there being here a towing-path, upon which I soon encountered a couple of horses, the foremost of which was ridden by a boy with a whip, while they dragged a long rope which kept plashing down into the river, and then, being drawn taut, showered down pearly drops of water, which seemed to be smoothed out by a long, low, narrow barge, painted yellow and red, at the end of which was a man smoking, with his eyes half shut, as he leaned upon the tiller gear.

They were going against the stream, and their progress was slow, as I sat down and watched them go out of sight round the bend of the river.

"I wonder where this river runs to, and where I should go, if I walked all along this path?" I said to myself, and then like a flash, the idea came, right or wrong, I could not tell, that it must go on and on to London.

It was full of hope, that thought; so full that I leaped up, and trudged on so steadily, that at the end of an hour I again saw a couple of horses in front, drawing another barge, with the rope plashing in and out of the river; but this barge was going on in the same direction as I was, and as I drew nearer I began to envy the boy riding so idly on the foremost horse, and wished it were my fate to change places with him, for one of my feet was very sore.

It pained me a good deal; but, all the same, there was a joyous

feeling of freedom to cheer me on, and I limped forward, thinking how I had nothing to fear now, no dreary copying to do, and then stand shivering, expecting blows, if I had omitted a word, or forgotten to cross some *t*. All was bright and beautiful, with the glancing river, the glorious green meadows, and the gliding barge going so easily with the stream.

There was a stolid-looking man holding the tiller of the barge, staring dreamily before him, and smoking, looking as motionless, and smoking nearly as much, as the chimney of the cabin beside him. The barge itself was covered with great tarred cloths of a dingy black, but the woodwork about the cabin was ornamented with yellow and scarlet diamonds and ovals carved in the sides.

The man took not the slightest notice of me as I limped on, gazing at him and the gliding barge, but smoked away steadily, and I went on, getting nearer and nearer to the horses, thinking as I did so of how pleasant it would be to lie down on that black tarpaulin, and glide along upon the shiny river without a care; and it seemed to me then, ill-used and weary as I was, that the life of a bargeman would be perfect happiness and bliss.

As I drew near the boy, who was sitting sidewise on the foremost horse, with a shallow round-bottomed zinc bucket hanging from the collar on the other side, I found that he was watching me as he whistled some doleful minor ditty, pausing every now and then to crack his whip and utter a loud "Jeet!"

This was evidently a command to the horses, one of which gave its head a toss up and the other a toss down, but paid no further heed, both continuing their steady way along the tow-path, while the boy went on with his whistling.

I gradually drew up closer and closer, as the whistling kept on, to find that about every minute, as if calculated exactly, but of course from mere habit, there was the crack of the whip, the loud "Jeet!" and the nod up and nod down of the two horses.

I trudged up close alongside the boy now, being anxious to learn where the river really did run, but not liking at first to show my ignorance, so we went on for some time in silence.

He was a rough, common-looking lad, with fair curly hair, and the skin of his face all in scaly patches where it had been blistered by the sun, and I took him to be about my own age. He was dressed in a loose jacket and a pair of cord trousers, both of which were several sizes too large for him, but the jacket-sleeves had been cut off above the elbow, and the trousers were rolled up above his knees, showing his bare legs and clean white feet. His coarse shirt was clean, what could be seen of it, but the tops of the trousers were drawn up by strings over his shoulders, so that they took the place of vest.

Altogether, even to his old, muddy, torn felt hat, through which showed tufts of his curly hair, he was ragged to a degree;

but he seemed as happy as the day was long and as healthy as could be, as he whistled away, stared at me, and uttered another loud "*Jeet!*" going a little further this time, and making it "*Jeet, Sammy—jeet, Tommair-y!*"

The horses this time tightened the rope a little, but only for a few moments, when it fell back into the water with a splash, the barge glided on, the horses' hoofs crushed the sandy gravel, and the rope whisked and rustled as it brushed along the thick growth of sedge by the water side.

"Woss the matter with yer foot, matey?" said the boy at last, breaking the ice as he gave his whip another crack, and then caught and examined the thong.

"Sore with walking," I said; and then there was another pause, during which he kept on whistling the minor air over and over again, while I waited for another opening.

"Why don't you take off your shoes, matey?" he said. "They allus makes my feet sore. I don't like shoes. *Jeet, Tommair-y! Jeet, Sam-mair-y!*"

This was a new light, and I thought, perhaps, I should be easier, for one shoe was constantly scraping the tendon at the back of my heel. So sitting down on the grass, I untied and slipped off my shoes, my socks following, to be thrust into my pocket, and I limped on, setting my feet delicately on the gravel, which hurt them, till I changed on to the short soft turf beside the path.

The barge had passed me, but I soon overtook it, and then reached the boy, who watched me complacently as I trudged on, certainly feeling easier.

"One on 'em's a-bleeding," said my new friend then. "Shoes allus hurts. *Jeet!*"

"Yes, when you walk far," I said, the conversation beginning to warm now.

"Walked far, matey?"

"Yes, ever so far. Have you come far?"

"*Pistol,*" I thought he said.

"Where?" I asked.

"Bristol. *Jeet, Sammy!*" *Crack!*

"All along by the river?"

"We don't call it the river, we call it the canal here. It's river farther up towards London."

"Are you going to London?" I said.

"Yes. Are you?"

"Yes," I said; and my heart was at rest, for I knew now that which I wanted to find out without asking. This river did go right to London, and I must be on the upper part of the Thames.

We went on for some little time in silence, and then my new friend began:

"Why don't you go and paddle yer feet in the water a bit?"

It was a good suggestion, and the shallow sparkling water looked very delicious and cool.

"Tie your shoestrings together and hing 'em on to Tommy's collar. You can hing yer bundle, too, if yer li-ak."

I hesitated for a moment. One boy had already appropriated my bundle, but he had not the frank honest look of the one on the horse, and besides, I did not like to seem suspicious. So, tying the shoestrings together, I hung them on the tall hame of the collar, and the bundle beside them, before going quickly over the gravel down to the shallow water.

"Turn up yer trousers!" shouted the boy; and I obeyed his good advice, ending by walking along the shallow water close behind the tow-rope, the soft sand feeling delicious to my feet as the cool water laved and eased the smarting wound.

At last I walked out with my feet rested, and the blood-stain washed away, to run forward and join my companion, who looked at me in a very stolid manner.

"Hev a ride?" he said at last.

"May I?"

"Fev-ther!"

"Hel-lo-a!" came slowly from the barge.

"May this chap hev a ri-ad?"

"Ay-er!"

The boy slipped down off the horse with the greatest ease, and stuck his whip into a link of the trace.

"Now, then," he said, "lay holt o' his collar, and I'll give yer a leg up."

I obeyed him, and seizing my leg, he nearly shot me right over the horse, but by hanging tightly on to the collar I managed to save myself, and shuffled round into the proper position for riding sidewise, feeling the motion of the horse, in spite of a certain amount of boniness of spine, delightfully easy and restful.

"They're all right," the boy said, as I glanced at my bundle. "They won't fall off. Are yer comfortable?"

"Yes, capital," I said, and we journeyed on, my luck seeming almost too good to be believed.

We went on talking away, now and then passing another barge, when the ropes were passed one over the other boat, and the journey continued.

Soon afterwards I made my first acquaintance with a lock, and got down off the horse to stand by the barge and gaze in wonderment at the process. As it glided softly into the space between walls, a pair of great doors were shut behind it, and I and my new companion helped to turn handles, with the result that I saw the water foam and rush out, and the barge slowly sink down to a lower level, when a couple of great doors were swung open at the other end. There was a certain amount of pushing and

thrusting, and the barge glided out into the river ten feet lower than it was before.

Then the rope was once more made fast, the horses tugged, and we went on again, but not far before a shrill voice shouted "Jack!" and my companion stood still till the barge came abreast of him, being steered close in, when I saw a woman lean over the side and hold out a basket, which the boy caught, and then ran after me once more, where I was mounted on the first horse.

"My dinner," he said eagerly. "Got yourn?"

"Yes," I said, colouring up as I pulled the remains of my bread and cheese out of my pocket, there being a large piece of the latter.

"Steak pudden to-day," said my companion, hanging his basket on to the collar by my knee, and revealing a basin half full of savoury-odoured beef-steak pudding, which was maddening to me in my hungry state.

"I say, what a whacking great piece of cheese! I like cheese," said my companion; "let's go hulves."

Pride kept me back for a moment, and then I said—

"I'll give you threepence if you'll give me half your dinner."

"I don't want your threepence," he said scornfully. "You shall have half if you give me half your new bread and cheese. Ourn's allus stale. Look, here's some cold apple puff too."

So there was, and delicious it looked, sufficiently so to make my mouth water.

"Got a knife, matey?"

"Yes," I said, "but——"

"I say, I tell you what," said my would-be host. "Have you really got threepence?"

"Yes," I said, and was about to say more, when Mr. Rowle's words occurred to me and I was silent.

"Then we'll have half a pint o' cider at the next lock, and twopen'orth o' apples, shall us?"

"Yes," I said, delighted at the prospect; and the result was that we two hearty boys soon finished pudding, puff, and the last scrap of the bread and cheese, after which my new friend shouted, "Mother!" The boat was steered in close, and the shrill-voiced woman took the basket back.

"Is your name Jack?" I said, as I descended, and we trudged on together slowly beside the horses, each of which was now furnished with a tin bucket hung from the top of its head, and containing some beans and chaff.

"Yes; what's yourn?"

"Antony."

"Ho!"

There was silence after this, for we came up to another lock,

close by which was a little public-house, where Jack was sent to get a stone bottle filled with beer, and up to whose door he summoned me, and we partook of our half-pint of cider, Jack proving most honourable as to his ideas of half.

Then the beer having been passed on board, Jack's mother and father taking not the slightest notice of me, the barge was passed through the lock, and Jack beckoned and waved his hand.

"You give me the twopence, and I'll buy," he said. "If we ask Mother Burke for twopen'orth all at once she won't give us more than she would for a penny. Stop a moment," he said, "you only give me a penny, and we'll keep t'other for to-morrow."

I handed a penny to him, and we went into the lock cottage, in whose lattice window were displayed two bottles of ginger-beer, a couple of glasses of sugar-sticks, and a pile of apples.

Our penny in that out-of-the-way place bought us a dozen good apples, and these we munched behind the horses as we trudged on slowly, mile after mile.

I did not feel tired now, and we boys found so much to talk about that the time went rapidly by. Jack's father and mother did not trouble themselves about my being there, but towards six o'clock handed the boy out his tea in a bottle, whose neck stuck out of the basket that had held his dinner, and in which were some half a dozen slices of bread and butter.

"Tain't full," said Jack, holding the bottle up to the light; "she might ha' filled it. There is more brem-butter. Never mind, I'll fill it up with water. You won't mind?"

"No," I said; but as a lock was then coming in sight, and a decent-looking village, an idea occurred to me. "Let's buy a pen'orth of milk and put to it," I said.

Jack's eyes sparkled, and hanging the basket *pro tem.* on the hames, he cracked his whip, and we proceeded a little more quickly towards the lock, where I bought a twopenny loaf and some milk for our tea. I say *ours*, for Jack literally shared his with me.

"Where are you going to sleep?" said Jack to me at last, as the evening mists were beginning to rise on the meadows.

"I don't know," I said rather dolefully, for the idea had not occurred to me before.

"Come and bunk along o' me."

"Where?" I asked.

"Under the tarpaulin in front o' the barge," he said; "I allus sleeps there now, cos father says my legs gets in the way in the cabin."

"But would your father mind?"

"Not he. He'll go ashore as soon as we make fast for the night and lets the horses loose to feed. He wouldn't mind."

And so it turned out, for the barge was made fast to a couple of stout posts in a wider part of the canal, close to a lock where there

was a public-house. The horses were turned out to graze on the thick grass beside the tow-path, and after a little hesitation I took my bundle and shoes and crept in beneath a tarpaulin raised up in the middle to make quite a tent, which Jack had contrived in the fore part of the barge.

"Ain't it jolly and snug?" he cried.

"Ye-es," I replied.

"On'y it won't do to stop in when the sun gets on it, 'cos it's so hot and sticky. I like it. Feyther can't kick you here."

This was a revelation. I had been thinking Jack's life must be one of perfect bliss.

"Does your father kick you, then?"

"Not now. He used to when he came home after being to the public, when he was cross; but he didn't mean nothing. Feyther's werry fond o' me. I wouldn't go back to sleep in the cabin now for no money."

Jack's conversation suddenly stopped, and I knew by his hard breathing that he was asleep; but I lay awake for some time, peering out through a little hole left by the tarpaulin folds at the stars, thinking of Mr. Blakeford and his pursuit; of what Mary would say when she read my letter; and from time to time I changed the position of my bundle, to try and turn into a comfortable pillow; but, try how I would, it seemed as if the heel of one or other of my shoes insisted upon getting under my ear, and I dropped asleep at last, dreaming that they were walking all over my head.

CHAPTER XI.

MY VAGABOND LIFE COMES TO AN END.

SOMEHOW or other that idea about my boots being in antagonism to me seemed to pervade the whole of my slumbers till morning, when one of them, I fancied, had turned terribly vicious, and was kicking me hard in the side.

I could not move, and the kicking seemed to go on, till a more vigorous blow than before roused me to consciousness; but still for a few moments I could not make out where I was, only that it was very dark and stuffy, and that I felt stiff and sore.

Just then a gruff voice awoke my mind as well as my body, and I found that some one was administering heavy pokes through the tarpaulin with what seemed to be a piece of wood.

"All right, Feyther," cried Jack just then; and as we scrambled out from beneath the tent I found it was grey dawn, that a heavy mist hung over the river, and that Jack's father had been poking

at the tarpaulin with the end of a hitcher, the long iron-shod pole used in navigating the barge.

"Going to lie abed all day?" he growled. "Git them horses to."

"Come along, matey; never mind your boots," cried Jack, and he leaped ashore.

I did not like leaving my bundle behind, but I felt bound to help, and following Jack's example, I helped him to catch the horses, which were soon attached to the tow-line thrown ashore by the bargeman, who cast loose the mooring ropes, and with the stars still twinkling above our heads we were once more on our way, Jack walking beside the horse and I barefooted beside him.

My feet did not pain me now, but I felt that to replace my boots would be to chafe them again, so I contented myself with letting them ride, while for the present I made my way afoot.

My proceedings as we went along seemed to greatly interest Jack, who stared hard as he saw me stoop down and wash my face and hands at a convenient place in the river, for a shake and a rub of his curly head seemed to constitute the whole of his toilet. My hair I smoothed as I walked by his side, while he looked contemptuously at my little pocket-comb.

"That wouldn't go through my hair," he said at last. Then in the same breath, "Old woman's up."

I turned to see how he knew it, expecting his mother to be on the little deck; but the only thing visible besides Jack's father was a little curl of smoke from the iron chimney in front of the rudder.

"That means brakfass," said Jack, grinning; "don't you want yourn?"

I said I did, and asked how soon we should get to a lock where I could buy some bread and milk.

"Don't you waste your money on bread and milk," said my companion, "there'll be lots o' brakfass for both on us. You wait till we get farther on and we can get some apples and a bottle of ginger-beer."

It seemed so fair an arrangement that when the shrill voice summoned Jack to fetch his breakfast I shared it with him, and so I did his dinner and tea, while we afterwards regaled ourselves with fruit, and sweets, and cider, or ginger-beer.

This went on day after day, for though the pace was slow I found that I could not have got on faster. Besides which, I had endless rides, Jack's proceedings with me never once seeming to awaken either interest or excitement on the part of his parents. In fact, Jack's father seemed to occupy the whole of his time in leaning upon the tiller and smoking, with the very rare exceptions that he might occasionally make use of the hitcher in rounding

some corner. As for the passing of other barges, the men upon them seemed to do the greater part of the necessary work in lifting tow-ropes. At the locks, too, he would stolidly stare at Jack and me as we turned the handles with the lock-keeper, and then perhaps grunt approval.

Jack's mother appeared to spend all her time in cooking and other domestic arrangements, for she never showed herself on deck except to announce the readiness of a meal by a shrill shout for her boy, rarely speaking a word to him at such times as he took his food from her hands.

Life on the river seemed to breed taciturnity, and though we boys generally had something to say, for the most part we jogged on silently with the horses, who hung their heads and kept on their course as if half asleep.

To me it was a dreamy time of constant journeying by the shining river; for at last we passed through a lock into the Isis, and then continued our way on and on through locks innumerable till we passed out again into what I suppose must have been the Grand Junction or Regent's Canal—to this day I am not sure which. The hundred miles or so I was to have walked to London must have been more than doubled by the turnings and doublings of the river; but I was never tired, and Jack never wearied of my society. There was always something to see in the ever-changing scenery, and sometimes, if we came to a stoppage early in the evening, Jack brought out a rough line and a willow wand, and we fished for perch by some rushing weir.

I could have been content to go on for ever leading such a free, enjoyable life, like some young gipsy, so peaceable and happy seemed my existence as compared to that with Mr. Blakeford; but at last, after a very long, slow journey, we began to near the metropolis, the goal of my wanderings, and one evening the pleasant communings of Jack and myself were suddenly brought to an end.

We had been making slow progress along the canal as it wound now amongst houses and large buildings. The pleasant fields were far behind, and the water was no longer bright. It seemed, too, as if we had left the sun behind, while the tow-path had long grown so hard and rough that I was glad to get my boots out of the bundle in which they were tied up and wear them once again.

"Here, you sir," Jack's father shouted to me from the barge, "you must sheer off now."

It was said in a rough, peremptory fashion that was startling; but he took no further notice of me, only went on smoking, and I went back to Jack, who was now seated on the horse just as at our first meeting.

"Feyther say you must go now?"

"Yes," I said dolefully.

"Then you'd better cut off. I say, feyther!"

"Hullo!"

"Lash the tiller, and go and get his bundle and chuck it ashore."

The great rough fellow methodically did as he was told—fastening the rudder, going slowly forward, and fishing out my bundle from under the tarpaulin, and turning to me:

"Ketch!" he shouted, and he threw the bundle from the barge to the shore, where I caught it, and he slowly plodded back, after giving me a friendly nod.

I took my bundle under my arm and rejoined Jack, who was whistling his minor air, and then we boys looked at each other dolefully.

"Aintcher going?" said Jack at last.

"Yes," I said, "I'm going directly." Then, quickly pulling out a little penknife I had in my pocket, I held it to Jack. "Will you have that, Jack?" I said.

His eyes sparkled as he took it, but he did not speak.

"Do you think I might give your father something for letting me come up along with you?" I said.

Jack stared in a dull, stolid way for a moment, the idea being so novel to him. Then his face lit up and he checked the horses.

"Hold on, feyther," he shouted; and as if it was quite right to obey his son's words, the great fellow steered the long barge so that it came close in.

"There's a beer-shop," said Jack, pointing to a place close by the towing-path, all glorious with blue and gold announcements of Barclay, Perkins & Co.'s Entire. "You go and get a pot o' porter—it's threepence ha'penny, mind—and give it the old man; we'll wait."

I ran up to the door of the public-house and asked the man in shirt-sleeves and white apron for a pot of porter, which he drew in the bright pewter vessel, and I paid for it with one of my six-pences, received my change, and then had to make solemn assurance that I would bring back the pot before I was allowed to take it down to the canal-side, where Jack and his father were waiting.

The latter's face was as stolid as ever as I went up to him; but there was a little extra opening of his eyes as he saw the foaming liquid in the bright pewter and stretched out his hand.

"Beer ain't good for boys," he said gruffly; and then, blowing off the froth, he put the vessel to his lips, and slowly poured it all down, without stopping, to the very last drop; after which he uttered a heavy sigh of either pleasure or regret, and brought his eyes to bear on me.

"Feyther likes a drop o' beer," said Jack.

"Ketch!" said "father," and he threw the empty pot to me,

which luckily I caught, and stood watching him as he went to the tiller. "Go on!"

Jack gave me a nod, cracked his whip, and the horses drew the slack rope along the cindery tow-path till it was tight. Jack's father paused in the act of refilling his pipe and gave me another nod, and Jack's mother's head came above the hatchway to stare at me as the barge moved, and I stood watching it with my bundle under my arm and the bright pewter vessel in my hand.

My reverie was interrupted by a shout from the public-house door, and I took the pot back, to return once more to the towing-path, sick at heart and despondent, as I thought of the pleasant days of my short vagabond career.

It was like parting with very good friends, and I sat down at last upon a log, one of a pile of timber, full of regrets: for these rough people had in their way been very kind to me, and I thought that perhaps I should never see them any more.

CHAPTER XII.

MY FIRST NIGHT IN TOWN.

I DID not sit thinking long, for I felt that I must be up and doing. The long barge had crept silently away and was out of sight, but I felt that after my dismissal I ought not to follow it; so I crossed a bridge over the canal and went on and on between rows of houses and along streets busy with vehicles coming and going, and plenty of people.

For the first half-hour I felt that everybody knew me and was staring at the boy who had run away from Mr. Blakeford's office; but by degrees that idea passed off and gave place to another, namely, that I was all alone in this great city, and that it seemed very solitary and strange.

For above an hour I walked on, with the streets growing thicker and the noise and bustle more confusing. I had at last reached a busy thoroughfare; gas was burning, and the shops looked showy and attractive. The one, however, that took my attention was a coffee-shop in a side street, with a great teapot in the window, and a framed card on which I read the list of prices, and found that a half-pint cup of coffee would be one penny, and a loaf and butter twopence.

My money was getting scarce, but I was tired and hungry, and after staring at that card for a long time I thought I would venture to go in, and I walked right up to the door. I dared, however, go no farther, but walked straight on, turned, and came back, and so on several times, without being able to make up my mind;

but at last, as I was still hovering about the place, I caught sight of a policeman advancing in the distance, and, fully assured that it must be Mary's friend, Mr. Revitts, in search of me, I walked breathlessly into the coffee-house and sat down at the nearest table.

There were several men and lads seated about, but they were all, to my great relief, reading papers or periodicals, and I was recovering my equanimity somewhat, when it was upset by a bustling maid, who came as I thought fiercely up to me with a sharp "What's for you?"

"A cup of coffee, if you please," I stammered out.

"And roll and butter?"

"Yes, please," I said, somewhat taken aback that she should, as I felt, have divined my thoughts; and then, in an incredibly short space of time, a large cup of steaming coffee and a roll and pat of butter were placed on the table.

After timidly glancing round to find that it was no novel thing for any one to enter a coffee-house and partake of the fare before me, I proceeded to make my meal, wishing all the while that Jack had been there to share it, and wondering where he was, till at last the coffee was all drunk, the roll and butter eaten, and after paying what was due I stole off once more into the streets. I went on and on in a motiveless way, staring at the wonders ever unfolding before me, till, utterly wearied out, the thought struck me that I must find a resting-place somewhere, for there were no hay-stacks here, there was no friendly tarpaulin to share with Jack, and, look where I would, nothing that seemed likely to suggest a bed.

I had wandered on through wide, well-lighted streets, and through narrow, poverty-stricken places, till I was in a busy, noisy row, along the pavement of which were broad barrows with flaming lamps, and laden with fish, greengrocery, and fruit. There was noise enough to confuse anyone used to London; to me it was absolutely deafening.

I had seen by a clock a short time before that it was nearly ten, and my legs ached so that I could scarcely stand; and yet, in the midst of the busy throng of people hurrying here and there, I alone seemed to be without friend or home.

I had been wandering about in a purposeless way for a long time, trying to see some one who would win my confidence enough to make me ask where I could obtain a night's lodging, when I suddenly became aware that a big lad with a long narrow face and little eyes seemed to be watching me, and I saw what seemed to me so marked a resemblance to the young scoundrel who had stolen my bundle, that I instinctively grasped it more tightly and hurried away.

On glancing back I found that the boy was following, and this

alarmed me so that I hastened back into the big street, walked along some distance, then turned and ran as hard as I could up one street and down another, till at last I was obliged to stop and listen to make sure whether I was pursued.

To my horror I heard advancing steps, and I had just time to shrink back into a doorway before, by the dim light of the gas, I saw the lad I sought to avoid run by, and as soon as his heavy boots had ceased to echo, I crept out and ran in the other direction, till, completely worn out, I sat down upon a doorstep in a deserted street, and at last dropped off fast asleep.

I was startled into wakefulness by a strange glare shining in my face, and, looking up, there was a round glowing eye of light seeming to search me through and through.

For a few moments I could do nothing but stare helplessly and then started nervously as a gruff voice exclaimed—

“Here; what’s in that bundle?”

“My clothes and clean shirt, sir,” I faltered.

“Let’s look.”

My hands shook so that I was some time before I could get the handkerchief undone; but in the meantime I had been able to make out that the speaker was a policeman, and in my confusion at being awakened out of a deep sleep, I associated his coming with instructions from Mr. Blakeford.

At last, though, I laid my bundle open on the step, and my questioner seemed satisfied.

“Tie it up,” he said, and I hastened to obey. “Now, then, young fellow,” he continued, “how is it you are sitting here asleep? Why don’t you go home?”

“Please, sir, I came up from the country to-day, and I ran away from a boy who wanted to steal my bundle, and then I sat down and fell asleep.”

“That’s a likely story,” he said, making the light of the lantern play upon my face. “Where were you going?”

“I don’t know, sir. Yes I do—to Mr. Rowle’s.”

“And where’s Mr. Rowle’s?”

“It’s—it’s—stop a minute, sir. I’ve got the address written down. It’s at a great printing-office.”

As I spoke I felt in my pockets one after the other for the address of Mr. Rowle’s brother, but to my dismay I found that it was gone, and, search how I would, there was no sign of it in either pocket. At last I looked up full in the policeman’s face, to exclaim pitifully—

“Please, sir, it’s gone.”

“Is it now?” he said in a bantering, sneering tone. “That’s a wonder, that is: specially if it warn’t never there. Look here, young fellow, what have you come to London for?”

“Please, sir, I’ve come to seek my fortune.”

"Oh, you have, have you? Now look here, which are you, a young innocent from the country, or an artful one? You may just as well speak out, for I'm sure to find out all about it."

"Indeed I've come up from the country, sir, to try and get a place, for I was so unhappy down there."

"Then you've run away from your father and mother, eh?"

"No, sir; they are both dead."

"Well, then, you've run away from home, eh?"

"No, sir," I said sadly; "I haven't any home."

"Well, what's got to be done? You can't stop here all night."

"Can't I, sir?"

"Can't you, sir? Why, what a young gooseberry it is! Have you been to London before?"

"No, sir."

"When did you come up?"

"Only this evening, sir."

"And don't you know that if I leave you here some one'll have your bundle, and perhaps you too, before morning?"

"I was so tired, sir, I fell asleep."

"Come along o' me. The best thing I can do for you's to lock you up till morning."

"Thank you, sir."

He burst out into a roar of laughter as he turned off the light of his bull's-eye.

"Come along, youngster," he said, "it's all right, I see. Why, you are as green as a gooseberry."

"Am I, sir?" I said piteously, for I felt very sorry that I was so green, as he called it, but I was too much confused to thoroughly understand what he meant.

"Greener, ever so much. Why, if you'd gone down Covent Garden to sleep amongst the baskets you'd have got swept up for cabbage leaves."

"Covent Garden Market, sir? Is that close here?" I said.

"As if you didn't know," he replied, returning to his doubting vein.

"I've heard my papa speak of it," I said, eager to convince him that I was speaking the truth. "He said the finest of all the fruit in the country went there, and that the flowers in the central—central——"

"Evenue?" suggested the constable.

"Yes, central avenue—were always worth a visit."

"That's so. And that's what your papa said, eh?"

"Yes, sir, I have heard him say so more than once."

"Then don't you think, young fellow, as it looks very suspicious for a young gent as talks about his *papa* to be found sleeping on a doorstep?"

"Yes, sir, I suppose it does," I said, "but I have no friends now."

"Well, you'd better come along o' me, and tell your tale to the inspector. I'm not going to leave you here. He'll soon get to know the rights of it. You've run away, that's what you've done."

"Yes, sir," I said: "I did run away, but——"

"Never mind the buts, youngster. You'll have to be sent back to your sorrowing friends, my abscending young sloper."

"No, no, no!" I cried wildly, as he took hold of my cuff.

"Don't send me back, pray don't send me back."

"None o' that 'ere now," he said, giving me a rough shake.

"You just come along quietly."

"Oh, I will, sir, indeed I will!" I cried, "but don't, pray don't send me back."

"Why not? How do you know but it won't be best for yer? You come along o' me sharp, and we'll soon physic your constitution into a right state."

The agony of dread that seized me at that moment was more than I could bear. In imagination I saw myself dragged back to Mr. Blakeford, and saw the smile of triumph on his black-looking face, as he had me again in his power, and, boy as I was then, and full of young life and hopefulness, I believe that I would gladly have jumped into the river sooner than have had to trust to his tender mercies again.

In my horror, then, I flung myself on my knees before the policeman, and clasped his leg as I appealed wildly to him to let me go.

"If you sent me back, sir," I cried piteously, "he'd kill me."

"And then we should kill him," he said, laughing. "Not as that would be much comfort to you. Here, get up."

"You don't know what I suffered, sir, after poor papa and mamma died. He used me so cruelly, and he beat me, too, dreadfully. And now, after I have run away, if he gets me back he will be more cruel than before."

"Well, I s'pose he wouldn't make it very pleasant for you, youngster. There, come: get up, and you shall tell the inspector, too, all about it."

"No, no, no," I cried wildly, as in spite of his efforts to get me up I still clung to his leg.

"Come, none of that, you know. I shall have to carry you. Get up."

He seized me more roughly, and dragged me to my feet, when with a hoarse cry of dread, I made a dash to escape, freed my arm and ran for freedom once again, as if it were for my life.

CHAPTER XIII.

P.C. REVITTS.

IN my blind fear of capture I did not study which way I went, but doubling down the first turning I came to, I ran on, and then along the next, to stop short directly afterwards, being sharply caught by the constable from whom I had fled, and who now held me fast.

"Ah! you thought it, did you?" he said coolly, while, panting and breathless, I feebly struggled to get away. "But it won't do, my lad. You've got to come along o' me."

"And then I shall be sent back," I cried, as I tried to wrestle myself free. "I've never done any harm, sir; and he'll half kill me. You don't know him. Pray let me go."

"I know you to be a reg'lar young coward," he said roughly. "Why, when I was your age, I shouldn't have begun snivelling like this. Now, then, look here. You ain't come to London only to see your Mr. Hot Roll, or whatever you call him. Is there any one else you know as I can take you to? I don't want to lock you up."

"No, sir, nobody," I faltered. "Yes, there is—there's Mr. Revitts."

"Mr. who?"

"Mr. Revitts, sir," I said excitedly. "He's a policeman, like you."

"Ah, that's something like a respectable reference!" he said.

"What division?"

"What did you say, sir?"

"I said what division?"

"Please, sir, I don't know what you mean."

"Do you know P.C. Revitts, VV division?"

"No, sir," I said, with my heart sinking. "It's Mr. William Revitts I know."

"Which his name is William," he muttered. Then, aloud, "Here, come along."

"No, no, sir," I cried in alarm. "Don't send me back."

"Come along, I tell yer."

"What's up?" said a gruff voice; and a second policeman joined us.

"Don't quite know yet," said the first man; and then he said something in a low voice to the other, with the result that, without another word, I was hurried up and down street after street till I felt ready to drop. Suddenly my guide turned into a great blank-looking building and spoke to another policeman, and soon, after a little shouting, a tall, burly-looking constable in his

buttoned-up great-coat came slowly towards us in the white-washed room.

"Here's a lad been absconding," said my guide, "and he says he'll give you for a reference."

"Eh! me?" said the new-comer, making me start as he stared hard in my face. "Who are you, boy. I don't know you."

"Antony Grace, please, sir," I faltered.

"And who's Antony Grace?"

"There, I thought it was a do," said the first constable roughly. "What d'yer mean by gamm'oning me in this way? Come along."

"No, sir, please. Pray give me time," I cried. "Don't send me back. Please, Mr. Revitts, I have run away from Mr. Blakeford, and if I am sent back to Rowford he'll kill me. I know he will."

"'Old 'ard, Smith," said the big constable. "Look here, boy. What did you say? Where did you come from?"

"Rowford, sir. Pray don't send me back."

"And what's the name of the chap us you're afraid on?"

"Mr. Blakeford, sir."

"I'm blest!"

"What did you say, sir?"

"I said I'm blest, boy."

"Then you do know him?" said the first constable.

"I don't quite know as I do, yet," was the reply.

"Well, look here, I want to get back. You take charge of him. I found him on a doorstep in Great Coram Street. There's his bundle. If he don't give a good account of himself, have it entered and lock him up."

"All right," said the other, after a few moments' hesitation.

"Then I'm off," said the first man: and he left me in charge of the big constable, who stood staring down at me so fiercely, as I thought, that I looked to right and left for a way of escape.

"None o' that, sir," he said sharply, in the words and way of the other, whose heavy footsteps were now echoing down the passage. "Lookye here, if you try to run away. I've only got to shout, and hundreds of thousands of pleecemen will start up all round about to stop yer."

As he spoke he pushed me into a windsor arm-chair, where I sat as if in a cage, while he held up one finger to shake in my face.

"As the Clerkenwell magistrate said t'other day, the law's a great network, and spreads wide. You're now in the net o' the law, young fellow, and you can't get out. Just look here, we knows a deal in the law and po-lice, and I can find out in two twos whether you are telling me the truth or doing the artful."

"Please, sir——"

"Hold your tongue, sir! You can make your defence when

your time comes; and mind this, it's my dooty to tell you that what you says now may be used in evidence again you."

Thus silenced, I stood gazing up in his big-whiskered face, that seemed to loom over me, in the gaslight, and wondered why there should be so much form and ceremony over taking my word.

"Now look here," he said pulling out a note-book and pencil, like the auctioneer's, only smaller, and seeming as if he were going to take an inventory of my small person. "Now, look here," he repeated, moistening the point of his pencil, "you told Joe Smith you knowed me, and I never set eyes on you afore."

"Please, sir," I said hastily, "I told him I know Mr. Revitts, who's in the police."

"Yes, and you said you had run away from Rowford and a Mr. Blake—Blake—— What's his name?"

"Blakeford, sir," I said despondently, for it seemed that this was not my Mr. Revitts.

"Blakeford. That's right; and he ill-used you?"

"Yes, sir."

"He's a little fair man, ain't he, with blue eyes?" And he rustled the leaves of his note-book as if about to take down my answer.

"No, sir," I cried eagerly; "he's tall and dark, and has short hair, and very white teeth."

"Ho! Tall! is he?" said the constable, making believe to write, and then holding out his pencil at me. "He's a nice, kind, amiable man, ain't he, as wouldn't say an unkind word to a dorg?"

"Oh no, sir," I said, shuddering; "that's not my Mr. Blakeford."

"Ho! Now, then, once more. There's a servant lives there at that house, and her name's Jane—ain't it?"

"No, sir, Mary."

"And she's got red hair and freckles, and she—she's very little and——"

"No, no," I cried excitedly, for after my heart had seemed to sink terribly low, it now leaped at his words. "That isn't Mary, and you are saying all this to try me, sir. You—you are Mr. William Revitts, I know you are;" and I caught him eagerly by the arm.

"Which I don't deny it, boy," he said, still looking at me suspiciously, and removing my hand. "Revitts is my name. P.C. Revitts, VV 240; and I ain't ashamed of it. But only to think of it. How did you know of me, though?"

"I wrote Mary's letters for her, sir."

"Whew! That's how it was she had so improved in her writing. And so you've been living in the same house along o' her?"

"Yes, sir," I said, "and she was so good and kind."

"When she wasn't in a tantrum, eh?"

"Yes, sir, when she wasn't in a——"

"Tantrum, that's it, boy. We should ha' been spliced afore now if it hadn't been for her tantrums. But only to think o' your being picked up in the street like this. And what am I to do now? You've absconded, you have; you know you've absconded in the eyes of the law."

"Write to Mary, please, sir, and ask her if it wasn't enough to make me run away."

"Abscond, my lad, abscond," said the constable.

"Yes, sir," I said, with a shiver, "abscond."

"You didn't—you didn't," he said in a half hesitating way, as he felt and pinched my bundle, and then ran his hand down by my jacket-pocket. "You didn't—these are all your own things in this, are they?"

"Oh yes, sir!" I said.

"Because some boys when they absconds, makes mistakes, and takes what isn't theirs."

"Do they, sir?"

"Yes, my lad, and I'm puzzled about you. You see, it's my duty to treat you like a runaway 'prentice, and I'm uneasy in my mind about what to do. You see, you did run away."

"Oh yes, sir, I did run away. I was obliged to. Mr. Blakeford wanted me to tell lies."

"Well, that seems to come easy enough to most people," he said.

"But I am telling the truth, sir," I said. "Write down to Rowford, and ask Mary if I'm not telling the truth."

"Truth! Oh, I know that, my boy," he said kindly. "Here, give's your hand. Come along."

"But you won't send me back, sir?"

"Send you back? Not I, boy. He's a blackguard, that Blakeford. I know him, and I only wish he'd do something, and I had him to take up for it. Mary's told me all about him, and if ever we meets, even if it's five pounds or a month, I'll punch his head: that's what I'll do for him. Do yer hear?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"Now, what's to be done with you?"

I shook my head and looked at him helplessly.

He stood looking at me for a few moments and then went into another room, where there was a policeman sitting at a desk, like a clerk, with a big book before him. I could see him through the other doorway, and they talked for a few minutes; and then Mr. Revitts came back, and stood staring at me.

"P'r'aps I'm a fool," he muttered. "P'r'aps I ain't. Anyhow, I'll do it. Look here, youngster, I'm going to trust you, though

as you've absconded I ought to take you before a magistrate or the inspector, but I won't, as you're a friend of my Mary."

"Thank you, sir," I said.

"And if you turn out badly, why, woe betide you."

"Please, sir, I won't turn out badly if I can help it; but Mr. Blakeford said I was good for nothing."

"Mr. Blakeford be blowed! I wouldn't ask him for a character for a dorg; and as for Mary, she don't want his character, and he may keep it. I'll take her without. I wouldn't speak to any one like this, youngster; but you know that gal's got a temper, though she's that good at heart that—that——"

"She'd nurse you so tenderly if you were ill," I said enthusiastically, "that you wouldn't wish to be better."

He held out his hand and gave mine a long and solemn shake.

"Thankye, youngster," he said, "thankye for that. You and I will be good friends, I see. I *will* trust your word, hang me if I don't. Here, come along."

"Are you—are you going to take me up, sir?" I faltered, with a shiver of apprehension.

"I'm a-going to give you the door-key where I lodges, my lad. I'm on night duty, and shan't be home till quarter-past six, so you may have my bed and welcome. Now, look here," he said, "don't you go and let anybody fool you. I'm going to show you the end of a long street, and you'll go right to the top, then turn to the right along the road till you come to the fourth turning, and on the right-hand side, number twenty-seven, is where I lodges. Here's the key. You puts it in the lock, turns it, shets the door after you, and then goes gently upstairs to the second-pair back."

"Second-pair back, sir?" I said dubiously.

"Well there, then, to the back room atop of the house, and there you may sleep till I come. Now then, this way out."

It was a change that I could not have believed in, and I accompanied the constable wonderingly as he led me out of the police-station and through several dark-looking streets, till he stopped short before a long dim vista, where straight before me two lines of gaslights stretched right away till they seemed to end in a bright point.

"Now, then," he said, "you can't make any mistake there."

"No, sir."

"Off you go then to the top, and then you'll find yourself in a big road."

"Yes, sir."

"Turn to the right, and then count four streets on the right-hand side. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Go down that street about half-way, till you see a gaslight shining on a door with number twenty-seven upon it. Twenty-

seven Caroline Street. Now, do you understand? Straight up to the top, and then it's right, right, right, all the way."

"I understand, sir."

"Good luck to you then, be off; here's my sergeant."

I should have stopped to thank him, but he hurried me away: and half forgetting my weariness, I went along the street, found at last the road at the end, followed it as directed, and then in the street of little houses found one where the light from the lamp shone as my guide had said.

I paused with the key in my hand, half fearing to use it, but summoning up my courage, I found the door opened easily and closed quietly, when I stood in a narrow passage with the stairs before me, and following them to the top, I hesitated, hardly knowing back from front. A deep heavy breathing from one room, however, convinced me that that could not be the back, so I tried the other door, to find it yield, and there was just light enough from the window to enable me to find the bed, on which I threw myself half dressed, and slept soundly till morning, when I opened my eyes to find Mr. Revitts taking off his stiff uniform coat.

"Look here, youngster," he said, throwing himself upon the bed, "I dessay you're tired, so don't you get up. Have another nap, and then call me at ten, and we'll have some breakfast. How—how——" he said, yawning.

"What did you say, sir?"

"How—Mary look?"

"Very well indeed, sir. She has looked much better lately, and——"

I stopped short, for a long-drawn breath from where Mr. Revitts had thrown himself upon the bed told me plainly enough that he was asleep.

I was too wakeful now to follow his example, and raising myself softly upon my elbow, I had a good look at my new friend to see that he did not look so big and burly without his great-coat, but all the same he was a stoutly built, fine-looking man, with a bluff, honest expression of countenance.

I stayed there for some minutes, thinking about him, and then about Mary, and Mr. Blakeford, and Hetty, and I wondered how the lawyer had got on before the magistrates without me. Then, rising as quietly as I could, I washed and finished dressing myself before sitting down to wait patiently for my host's awakening.

The first hour passed very tediously, for there was nothing to see from the window but chimney-pots, and though it was early I began to feel that I had not breakfasted, and three hours or so was a long time to wait. The room was clean, but shabbily furnished, and as I glanced round offered little in the way of

recreation, till my eyes lit on a set of hanging shelves with a few books thereon, and going on tiptoe across the room, I began to read their backs, considering which I should choose.

There was the "Farmer of Inglewood Forest," close by the "Old English Baron," with the "Children of the Abbey," and "Robinson Crusoe." Side by side with them was a gilt-edged Prayer-book, upon opening which I found that it was the property of "Mr. William Revitts, a present from his effectinat friend Mary Bloxam." On the opposite leaf was the following verse:—

"When this yu see, remember me,
And bare me in yure mind;
And don't forget old Ingerland,
And the lass yu lef behind."

The Bible on the shelf was from the same source. Besides these were several books in shabby covers—Bogatsky's "Golden Treasury," the "Pilgrim's Progress," and the "Young Man's Best Companion."

I stood looking at them for a few minutes, and then reached down poor old "Robinson Crusoe," bore it to the window, and for the fourth time in my life began its perusal.

In a very short time my past troubles, my precarious future, and my present hunger were all forgotten, and I was far away from the attic in North London, watching the proceedings of Robinson in that wonderful island, having skipped over a good many of the early adventures for the sake of getting as soon as possible into that far-away home of mystery and romance.

The strengthening of his house, the coming of the savages, the intensely interesting occurrences of the story, so enchained me, that I read on and on till I was suddenly startled by the voice of Mr. Revitts exclaiming:

"Hallo, you! I say, what's o'clock?"

CHAPTER XIV.

BREAKFAST WITH THE LAW, AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

I LET the book fall in a shamefaced way as my host took a great, ugly old silver watch from beneath his pillow, looked at it, shook it, looked at it again, and then exclaimed:

"It's either 'levin o'clock or else she's been up to her larks. Hush!"

He held up his hand, for just then a clock began to strike, and we both counted eleven.

"Then she was right for once in a way. Why didn't you call me at ten?"

"I forgot, sir. I was reading," I faltered; for I felt I had been guilty of a great breach of trust.

"And you haven't had no breakfast," he said, dressing himself quickly, and then plunging his face into the basin of water, to splash and blow loudly, before having a most vigorous rub with the towel. "Why, you must be as hungry as a hunter," he continued, as he halted in what was apparently his morning costume of flannel shirt and trousers. "We'll very soon have it ready, though. Shove the cloth on, youngster; the cups and saucers are in that cupboard. That's right, look alive."

I hastened to do what he wished, and in a few minutes had spread the table after the fashion observed by Mary at Mr. Blakeford's, while Mr. Revitts took a couple of rashers of bacon out of a piece of newspaper on the top of the bookshelf, and some bread and a preserve jar containing butter out of a box under the table. Next he poured some coffee out of a canister into the pot, and having inserted his feet into slippers, he prepared to go out of the room.

"Bedroom, with use of the kitchen, for a single gentleman," he said, winking one eye. "That's me. Back in five minutes, youngster."

It must have been ten minutes before he returned, with the coffee-pot in one hand and the two rashers of hot sputtering bacon in the other, when in the most friendly spirit he drew a chair to the table, and saying, "Help yourself, youngster," placed one rasher upon my plate and took the other upon his own.

"I say, only to think of my mate coming upon you fast asleep in London," he said, tearing me off a piece of bread. "Why, if he'd been looking for you, he couldn't ha' done it. Don't be afraid o' the sugar. There ain't no milk."

I was very hungry, and I gladly began my breakfast, since it was offered in so sociable a spirit.

"Let's see. How did you say Mary looked?"

"Very well indeed, sir," I replied.

"Send me--come, tuck in, my lad, you're welcome--send me any message?"

"She did not know I was coming, sir."

"No, of course not. So you've come to London to seek your fortune, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where are you going to look for it first?" he said, grinning.

"I don't know, sir," I said, rather despondently.

"More don't I. Pour me out another cup o' coffee, my lad, while I cut some more bread and scrape. Only to think o' my mate meeting you! And so Mary looks well, does she?"

"Yes, sir."

"And ain't very comfortable, eh?"

"Oh no, sir! It's a very uncomfortable place."

"Ah, I shall have to find her a place a'ter all! She might just as well have said *yes* last time, instead of going into a tantrum. I say, come; you ain't half eating. I shall write and tell her I've seen you."

If I was half eating before, I was eating nothing now, for his words suggested discovery, and my being given up to Mr. Blakeford: when, seeing my dismay, my host laughed at me.

"There, get on with your toke, youngster. If I tell Mary where you are, you don't suppose she'll go and tell old Blakeford?"

"Oh no, sir! she wouldn't do that," I said, taking heart again, and resuming my breakfast.

"And I say, youngster, suppose you don't say *sir* to me any more. I'm only a policeman, you know. I say, you were a bit scared last night, weren't you?"

"Yes, sir—yes, I mean, I was very much afraid."

"Ah, that's the majesty of the law, that is! Do you know, I've only got to go into a crowd, and just give my head a nod, and they disperse directly. The police have wonderful power in London."

"Have they, sir?"

"Wonderful, my lad. We can do anything we like, so long as it's men. Hundreds of 'em 'll give way before a half-dozen of us. It's only when we've got to deal with the women that we get beat: and that ain't no shame, is it?"

"No, sir," I said, though I had not the faintest notion why.

"You're quite right," he said: "it ain't no shame. What! Have you done?"

"Yes, sir—yes, I mean."

"Won't you have that other cup of coffee?"

"No, thank you."

"Then I will," he said, suiting the action to the word. "Well, now then, youngster, what are you going to do, eh?"

"I'm going to try and find Mr. Rowle's brother, sir, at a great printing-office," I said, searching my pockets, and at last finding the address given me. "Perhaps he'll help me to find a situation."

"Ah, p'raps so. They do have boys in printing-offices. Now, if you were a bit bigger you might have joined the police, and got to be a sergeant some day. It's a bad job, but it can't be helped. You must grow."

"I am growing fast, sir," I replied.

"Ah, I s'pose so. Well, now lookye here. You go and see Mr. Rowle, and hear what he says, and then come back to me."

"Come back here?" I said, hesitating.

"Unless you've got somewhere better to go, my lad. There, don't you mind coming. You're an old friend o' my Mary, and so you're an old friend o' mine. So, for a week, or a fortnight, or a month, if you like to bunk down along o' me till you can get settled, why, you're welcome; and if a man can say a better word than that, why, tell him how."

"I—I should be very, very grateful if you would give me a night or two's lodging, sir," I said, "and—and I've got six shillings yet."

"Then don't you spend more than you can help, youngster. Do you know what's the cheapest dinner you can get?"

"No, sir—no, I mean."

"Penny loaf and a pen'orth o' cheese. You come back here and have tea along o' me. I don't go on duty till night. There, no shuffling," he said, grinning. "If you don't come back I'll write and tell old Blakeford."

I could see that he did not mean it, and soon after I left my bundle there, and started off to try if I could find Mr. Rowle's brother at the great printing-office in Short Street, Fetter Lane.

CHAPTER XV.

"BOYS WANTED."

I WENT over the address in my own mind to make sure, and also repeated the directions given me by Mr. Revitts, so as to make no mistake in going into the City. Then I thought over again Mr. Rowle's remarks about his brother, his name, Jabez, his age, and his being exactly like himself. That would, I thought, make it easy for me to recognise him; and in this spirit I walked on through the busy streets, feeling a good deal confused at being pushed and hustled about so much, while twice I was nearly run over in crossing the roads.

At last, after asking, by Mr. Revitts' advice, my way of different policemen when I was at fault, I found myself soon after two in Short Street, Fetter Lane, facing a pile of buildings from the base of which came the hiss and pant of steam, with the whirr, clang, and roar of machinery; while on the doorpost was a bright zinc plate with the legend "Ruddle and Lister, General Printers;" and above that, written on a card in a large legible hand, and tacked against the wood-work, the words "Boys Wanted."

This announcement seemed to take away my breath, and I hesitated for a few minutes before I dared approach the place: but I went up at last, and then, seeing a severe-looking man in a glass box reading a newspaper, I shrank back and walked on a

little way, forgetting all about Mr. Jabez Rowle in my anxiety to try and obtain a situation by whose means I could earn my living.

At last, in a fit of desperation, I went up to the glass case, and the man reading the newspaper let it fall upon his knees and opened a little window.

"Now then, what is it?" he said in a gruff voice.

"If you please, sir, there's a notice about boys wanted——"

"Down that passage, upstairs, first floor," said the man gruffly, and banged down the window.

I was a little taken aback, but I pushed a swing door, and went with a beating heart along the passage, on one side of which were rooms fitted up something like Mr. Blakeford's office, and on the other side a great open floor stacked with reams of paper, and with laths all over the ceiling, upon which boys with curious pieces of wood, something like long wooden crutches, were hanging up sheets of paper to dry, while at broad tables by the windows I could see women busily folding more sheets of paper, as if making books.

It was but a casual glance I had as I passed on, and then went by a room with the door half open and the floor carpeted inside. There was a pleasant, musical voice speaking, and then there was a burst of laughter, all of which seemed out of keeping in that dingy place, full of the throb of machinery, and the odour of oil and steam.

At the end of the passage was the staircase, and going up, I was nearly knocked over by a tall, fat-headed boy, who blundered roughly against me, and then turned round to cry indignantly—

"Now, stoopid, where are yer a-coming to?"

"Can you tell me, please, where I am to ask about boys being wanted?" I said mildly.

"Oh, find out! There ain't no boys wanted here."

"Not wanted here!" I faltered, with my hopes terribly dashed, for I had been building castles high in the air.

"No; be off!" he said roughly, when a new character appeared on the scene in the shape of a business-looking man in a white apron, carrying down an iron frame, and having one hand at liberty, he made use of it to give the big lad a cuff on the ear.

"You make haste and fetch up those galleys, Jem Smith;" and the boy went on down three stairs at a time. "What do you want, my man?" he continued, turning to me.

"I saw there were boys wanted, sir, and I was going upstairs."

"When that young scoundrel told you a lie. There, go on, and in at that swing door; the overseer's office is at the end."

I thanked him, and went on, pausing before a door blackened by dirty hands, and listened for a moment before going in.

The hum of machinery sounded distant here, and all within seemed very still, save a faint clicking noise, till suddenly I heard

a loud clap-clapping, as if a flat piece of wood were being banged down and then struck with a mallet; and directly after came a hammering, as if some one was driving a wooden peg.

There were footsteps below, and I dared not hesitate longer; so, pushing the door, it yielded, and I found myself in a great room, where some forty men in aprons and shirt-sleeves were busy at what at the first glance seemed to be desks full of little compartments, from which they were picking something as they stood. But I was too much confused to notice more than that they took not the slightest notice of me, as I stopped short, wondering where the overseer's room would be.

At one corner I could see an old man at a desk, with a boy standing beside him, both of them shut up in a glass-case, as if they were curiosities; in another corner there was a second glass-case, in which a fierce-looking man with a shiny bald head and glittering spectacles was gesticulating angrily to one of the men in white aprons, and pointing to a long, narrow slip of paper.

I waited for a moment, and then turned to the man nearest to me.

"Can you tell me, please, which is the overseer's office?" I said, cap in hand.

"Folio forty-seven—who's got folio forty-seven?" he said aloud.

"Here!" cried a voice close by.

"Make even.—Get out; don't bother me."

I shrank away, confused and perplexed, and a dark, curly-haired man on the other side turned upon me a pair of deeply set stern eyes, as he rattled some little square pieces of lead into something he held in his hand.

"What is it, boy?" he said in a deep, low voice.

"Can you direct me to the overseer's office, sir?"

"That's it, boy, where that gentleman in spectacles is talking."

"Wigging old Morgan," said another man, laughing.

"Ah!" said the first speaker, "that's the place, boy;" and he turned his eyes upon a slip of paper in front of his desk.

I said, "Thank you!" and went on along the passage between two rows of the frame desks to where the fierce-looking bald man was still gesticulating, and as I drew near I could hear what he said.

"I've spoken till I'm tired of speaking; your slips are as foul as a ditch. Confound you, sir, you're a perfect disgrace to the whole chapel. Do you think your employers keep readers to do nothing else but correct your confounded mistakes? Read your stick, sir—read your stick!"

"Very sorry," grumbled the man, "but it was two o'clock this morning, and I was tired as a dog."

"Don't talk to me, sir; I don't care if it was two o'clock, or

twelve o'clock, or twenty-four o'clock. I say that slip's a disgrace to you; and for two pins, sir—for two pins I'd have it framed and stuck up for the men to see. Be off and correct it.—Now, then, what do you want?"

This was to me, and I was terribly awe-stricken at the fierce aspect of the speaker, whose forehead was now of a lively pink.

"If you please, sir, I saw that you wanted boys, and——"

"No; I don't want boys," he raved. "I'm sick of the young monkeys; but I'm obliged to have them."

"I am sorry, sir——" I faltered.

"Oh yes; of course. Here, stop! where are you going?"

"Please, sir, you said you didn't want any boys."

"You're very sharp, ain't you? Now hold your tongue, and then answer what I ask and no more. What are you—a machine boy or reader?"

"If you please, sir, I—I don't know—I thought—I want——"

"Confound you; hold your tongue!" he roared. "Where did you work last?"

"At—at Mr. Blakeford's," I faltered, feeling bound to speak the truth.

"Blakeford's! Blakeford's!—I know no Blakeford's. At machine?"

"No, sir! I wrote all day."

"Wrote? What, wasn't it a printing-office?"

"No, sir."

"How dare you come wasting my time like this, you insolent young scoundrel! Be off! Get out with you! I never knew such insolence in my life."

I shrank away, trembling, and began to retreat down the avenue, this time with the men's faces towards me, ready to gaze in my red and guilty countenance, for I felt as if I had been guilty of some insult to the majesty of the printing-office. To my great relief, though, the men were too busy to notice me; but I heard one say to another, "Old Brimstone's hot this morning." Then I passed on, and saw the dark man looking at me silently from beneath his overhanging brows; and the next moment, heartsick and choking with the effects of this rebuff, the swing-door was thrown open by the fat-headed boy coming in, and as I passed out, unaccustomed to its spring, the boy contrived that it would strike me full in the back, just as if the overseer had given me a rude push to drive me away.

I descended the stairs with the spirit for the moment crushed out of me; and with my eyes dim with disappointment, I was passing along the passage, when, as I came to the open door of the carpeted room, a man's voice exclaimed—

"No, no, Miss Carr, you really shall not. We'll send it on by one of the boys."

"Oh, nonsense, Mr. Lister; I can carry it."

"Yes, yes; of course you can, but I shall not let you. Here, boy, come here."

I entered the room nervously, to find myself in presence of a handsome, well-dressed man, another who was stout and elderly, and two young ladies, while upon the table lay a parcel of books, probably the subject of the remark.

"Hallo! what boy are you?" said the younger man. "Oh! one of the new ones, I suppose."

"No, sir," I said, with voice trembling and my face working, for I was unnerved by the treatment I had just received and the dashing of my hopes; "I came to be engaged, but—but the gentleman upstairs turned me away."

"Why?" said the elder man sharply.

"Because I had not been in the printing-office, sir."

"Oh, of course!" he said, nodding. "Of course. We want lads accustomed to the trade, my man."

"You should teach him the trade, Mr. Ruddle," said one of the young ladies quickly, and I darted a look of gratitude at her.

"Too busy, Miss Carr," he said, smiling at her. "We don't keep a printer's school."

"I'll teach him," whispered the young man eagerly, though I heard him; "I'll teach him anything, if you'll promise not to be so cruel."

"What a bargain!" she replied, laughing; and she turned away.

"I don't think we need keep you, my lad," said the young man bitterly.

"Indeed!" said the other young lady; "why, I thought he was to carry our parcel of books?"

"But he is a strange boy, my dear young ladies," said the elder man; "I'll ring for one from the office."

"No; don't, pray!" said the lady addressed as Miss Carr quickly. "I don't think we will carry the parcel. You will carry it for us, will you not?"

"Oh, yes, indeed I will!" I cried eagerly; and I stepped forward, for there was something very winning in the speaker's voice.

"Stop a moment, my man," said the elder gentleman rather sternly, while the younger stood biting his lips; "where do your father and mother live?"

Those words made something rise in my throat, and I looked wildly at him, but could not speak.

He did not see my face, for he had taken up a pen and drawn a memorandum slip towards him.

"Well; why don't you speak?" he said sharply, and as he raised his eyes I tried, but could not get out a word, only pointed mutely to the shabby band of crape upon my cap.

" Ah ! "

There was a deep sigh close by me, and I saw that the young lady addressed as Miss Carr was deadly pale, and for the first time I noticed that she was in deep mourning.

" My dear Miss Carr ! " whispered the young man earnestly.

" Don't speak to me for a minute," she said in the same tone; and then I saw her face working and lip quivering as she gazed wistfully at me.

" Poor lad ! " said the elder man abruptly. Then, " Your friends, my boy, your relatives ? "

" I have none, sir," I said huskily, " only an uncle, and I don't know for certain where he lives. "

" But you don't mean that you are alone in the world ? " said the young man quickly, and he glanced at the lady as he spoke.

" Yes, sir," I said quietly, for I had now recovered myself, " I am quite alone, and I want to get a situation to earn my living. "

The elder gentleman turned upon me and seemed to look me through and through.

" Now, look here, young fellow," he said, " you are either a very unfortunate boy or a designing young impostor. "

" Mr. Ruddle ! " exclaimed Miss Carr indignantly; and I saw the young man's eyes glitter as he gazed at her sweet, sad face, twenty times more attractive now than when she was speaking lightly a minute before.

" I don't want to be harsh, my dear, but here we are obliged to be firm and business-like. Now, boy, answer me; have you been to a good school ? "

" No, sir," I said, speaking sharply now, for his use of the word " impostor " stung me; " I was educated at home. "

" Humph! where do you come from ? "

" Rowford, sir. "

" Town on a tall hill ? "

" No, sir," I said in surprise; " Rowford is quite in a hole; but we live four miles from Rowford, sir, on the Cawleigh road. "

" Then you know Leydon Wood. "

" Oh yes, sir! that's where papa used to take me to collect specimens. "

" Humph! Don't say *papa*, my boy. Boys who go into the world to get their living don't speak of their papas. John Lister! "

" Wait a minute, Ruddle," said the younger man, whose back was towards us; and I saw that he was leaning over Miss Carr and holding her hand. " If you wish it," he whispered softly, " it shall be done. "

" I do wish it," she said with an earnest look in her large eyes as she gazed kindly at me; and the young man turned round, flushed and excited.

I was shrinking away towards the door, pained and troubled, for

I felt that I had no business there, when Mr. Lister motioned me to stop, and said something to the elder gentleman.

He in turn screwed up his face, and gave the younger a comical look.

"Your father would not have done so, John Lister," he said. "What am I to say, Miss Carr?"

For answer the young lady rose and went and laid her hands in one of his.

"If you please, Mr. Ruddle," she said in a low musical voice, "it will be a kindly act."

"God bless you, my dear," he said tenderly. "I believe if I were with you long you'd make me as much your slave as you have John Lister."

"Then you will?"

"Yes, my dear, yes, if it is really as he says."

She darted an intelligent look at me, and then hastily pulled down her crape veil as Mr. Lister followed her to her chair.

"Come here, my lad," said Mr. Ruddle, in quiet business-like tones. "We want boys here, but boys used to the printing trade, for it does not answer our purpose to teach them; we have no time. But as you seem a sharp, respectable boy, and pretty well educated, you might, perhaps, be willing to try."

"Oh, if you'll try me, I'll strive so hard to learn, sir!" I cried excitedly.

"I hope you will, my boy," he said drily, "but don't profess too much; and mind this, you are not coming here as a young gentleman, but as a reading-boy—to work."

"Yes, sir. I want to work," I said earnestly.

"That's well. Now, look here. I want to know a little more about you. If, as you say, you came from near Rowford, you can tell me the names of some of the principal people there?"

"Yes, sir; there's Doctor Heston, and the Reverend James Wyatt, and Mr. Elton."

"Exactly," he said gruffly; and he opened a large book and turned over a number of pages. "Humph! here it is," he said to himself, and he seemed to check off the names. "Now, look here, my man. What is the name of the principal solicitor at Rowford?"

"Mr. Blakeford, sir," I said with a shiver, lest he should want to write to him about me.

"Oh, you know him?" he said sharply.

"Yes, sir. He managed papa's—my father's—affairs," I said, correcting myself.

"Then I'm sorry for your poor father's affairs," he said, tightening his lips. "That will do, my lad. You can come to work here. Be honest and industrious, and you'll get on. Never mind about having been a gentleman, but learn to be a true man. Go and wait outside."

I tried to speak. I wanted to catch his hands in mine. I wanted to fling my arms round Miss Carr, and kiss and bless her for her goodness. I was so weak and sentimental a boy then. But I had to fight it all down, and satisfy myself by casting a grateful glance at her as I went out to wait.

I was no listener, but I heard every word that passed as the ladies rose to go.

"Are you satisfied, my dear?" said Mr. Ruddle.

"God bless you!" she said; and I saw her raise her veil and kiss him.

"God bless you, my dear!" he said softly. "So this little affair has regularly settled it all, eh? And you are to be John's wife. Well, well, well, my dear, I'm glad of it, very glad of it. John, my boy, I would my old partner were alive to see your choice; and as for you, my child, you've won a good man, and I hope your sister will be as fortunate."

"I hope I shall, Mr. Ruddle," said the other lady softly.

"If I were not sixty, and you nineteen, my dear, I'd propose for you myself," he went on laughingly. "But come, come, I can't have you giddy girls coming to our works to settle your affairs. There, be off with you, and you dine with us on Tuesday next. The old lady says you are to come early. I'm afraid John Lister here won't be able to leave the office till twelve o'clock; but we can do without him, eh?"

"Don't you mind what he says, Miriam," said Mr. Lister. "But stop, here's the parcel. I'll send it on."

"No, no. Please let that youth carry it for us," said Miss Carr.

"Anything you wish," he whispered earnestly; and the next moment he was at the door.

"You'll carry this parcel for these ladies," he said; "and to-morrow morning be here at ten o'clock, and we'll find you something to do."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir," I said eagerly; and taking the parcel, I followed the ladies into Holborn, and then along Oxford Street to a substantial row of houses near Cavendish Square, where the one I looked upon as my friend paused at a large door and held out her hand to me.

"I shall hope to hear from Mr. Lister that you have got on well at the office," she said in her sweet musical voice. "Recollect that you are my *protégé*, and I hope you will do me credit. I shall not forget to ask about you. You will try, will you not?"

"Oh yes," I said hoarsely, "so hard—so very hard!"

"I believe you will," she said, taking the parcel from my hand; "and now good-bye."

The next moment I was standing alone upon the pavement, feeling as if a cloudiness had come over the day, while, as I looked down into my hand, it was to see there a bright new sovereign.

CHAPTER XVI.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.

I WENT straight back to Mr. Revitts, and only when nearly there did I remember that I had not thought to ask about Mr. Rowle. But I felt it did not matter now, for I had obtained a situation, and he could not be annoyed to find that I was coming to the same establishment.

Mr. Revitts was enjoying himself when I reached his room: that is to say, he was sitting in his dingy old red-flannel shirt and his blue uniform trousers, with his sleeves rolled well up above the elbow, reading the police news in a daily paper and smoking a short black pipe, with the wreaths of smoke floating out of the open window.

"Here you are then, my lad," he said, "just in time. You and I will go out and have a bit o' something at the cookshop. Did you find your friend?"

"No, sir—no Mr. Revitts," I said, correcting myself, "I forgot to ask for him."

He let his paper fall in his lap and stared hard at me.

"Now, look here, my lad," he said, expelling a large cloud of smoke, "I don't want you to commit yourself, and it's my dooty to tell you that whatever you say will be—No, no, nonsense. Come, speak out. What are you laughing at? What have you been doing?"

Hereupon I told him my adventure, my eyes sparkling with delight.

"And a whole sovereign into the bargain!" he cried as I finished. "Let's look at it."

I handed him the bright new golden coin, and he span it up in the air, caught it dexterously, and bit it. Then he tried it three or four times on the table, as a shopman would a piece of money on a counter, and ended by making believe to thrust it into his pocket.

"It's a good one," he said, "and I think I shall stick to it for your board and lodging last night and this morning. What do you say?"

"I think you ought to be paid, sir," I said eagerly, "for you were very good to me."

He stared hard at me for a few moments, and then thrust the sovereign back in my hand.

"I've seen a good many boys in my time," he said, "but I'm blessed if ever I run again one like you. Why, you've got plenty of pluck, or else you wouldn't have run away; but of all the simple—well, I won't say simple, but green—of the green chaps I ever did come across you are about the greenest."

I flushed up far from that tint at his words, for there was the old complaint again about my greenness.

"Please, Mr. Revitts, I'm very sorry I'm so green," I said, looking at him wistfully; "perhaps it's because I've always lived in the country."

He stared harder at me.

"Come here," he said sharply, and going to the window, he placed me between his knees, laid a great hand upon each of my shoulders grasping them firmly, and gazed straight into my eyes. "Look here, youngster," he said angrily, "is it R or F? Are you trying to humbug me? Because, if so, it won't do: I'm too old."

"Humbug you, sir?" I said wonderingly. "I don't know what you mean."

"That you don't," he said, dropping his fierce way and sinking back smiling. "Struth, what a boy you are!"

I gazed at him in a troubled way, for I felt hurt.

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Revitts," I said, "and I hope you don't think I would do anything to deceive you," for that "R or F" puzzled me.

"Deceive me? Not you, my boy. Why, you couldn't deceive a sparrer or a hoyster. Why, you're as transparent as a pane of glass. I can see right through you and out on the other side."

"I'm afraid I am very stupid, sir," I said sadly. "I'll try to learn to be more clever. I don't know much, only about books, and natural history, and botany, but I'll try very hard not—not to be so—so—green."

"Why, bless your young heart, where have you been all your life? You're either as cunning as — No, you ain't, you really are as innocent as a lamb."

"I've always been at home with papa and mamma, sir."

"Sir, be hanged! My name's William Revitts; and if you and me's going to be good friends, my boy, you'll drop that sir-ing and mistering, and call me plain Bill."

"Should you like it, sir, if I did?" I asked anxiously.

"No, *sir*, I shouldn't. Yes, I should. Now then, is it to be friends or enemies?"

"Oh, friends, please," I said, holding out my hand.

"Then there's mine, young Antony," he cried seizing it in his great fingers. "And mind, I'm Bill, or old Bill, whichever you like."

"I'm sure—— Bill, I should be glad to be the best of friends," I said, "for I have none."

"Oh, come now, you said that Polly was very good to you."

"What, Mary? Oh yes!"

"Well, then, that's one. But, I say, you know, you mustn't be so precious innocent."

"Mustn't I, sir?"

"What!" he cried, bringing his hand down crash on the table.

"Mustn't I, Bill?"

"That's better. No: that you mustn't. I seem to look upon you as quite an old friend since you lived so long with my Polly. But, I say, your education has been horribly neglected. You're quite a baby to the boys up here at your age."

"But papa was so anxious that I should learn everything," I said, as I thought of Mr. Ruddle's words, "and we had lessons every day."

"Hah! Yes; but you can't learn everything out o' books," he continued, looking at me curiously. "You never went away to school, then?"

"No. I was going in a month or two."

"Hah! and it was put off. Well, we can't help it now, only you mustn't be so jolly easy-going. Everybody here will glory in taking you in."

"Do you mean cheating me?"

"That's just what I do mean. Why, some chaps would have nailed that suv like a shot, and you'd never have seen it again. You see, I'm in the police, and we couldn't stoop to such a thing. but I know lots o' men as would say as a suv was no use to a boy like you, and think as they ought to take care of it for you."

"Well, wouldn't that be right, Mr. Revitts?" I said.

"No, it wouldn't, young greenhorn," he cried sharply, "because they'd take care of it their way."

"Greenhorn?" I said eagerly. "Oh, that's what you mean by my being green! You mean ignorant and unripe in the world's ways."

"That's just what I do mean," he cried, slapping me on the shoulder. "Brayvo! that's the result of my first lesson," he continued admiringly. "Why, I'm blessed if I don't think that if I had you here six months, and took pains, I could make a man of you."

"Oh, I wish you would," I cried excitedly. "I do so want to be a true, good man—one such as papa used to speak of—one who could carve his way to a noble and honourable career, and grow to be loved and venerated and held in high esteem by the world at large. Oh, I would try so hard—I'd work night and day, and feel at last that I had not tried in vain."

"He-ar! he-ar! Brayvo, brayvo, youngster! Well done our side! That's your style!" he cried, clapping his hands and stamping his feet as I stopped short, flushed and excited with the ideas that had come thronging to my brain, and then gazed at him in a shamefaced and bashful manner. "That's your sort, my boy, I like that. I say, did your father teach you that sorter thing."

"Yes, Mr. Rev— Yes, Bill."

"I say, your par, as you called him, wasn't a fool."

"My papa," I said proudly, "I mean my dear father, was the best and kindest of men."

"That I'll lay sixpence he was. Why, I was feeling quite out of heart about you, and thinking you such a hinnocent young goose that I shouldn't know how to help you. Why, lookye here, I've been kicking about in the world ever since I was ten, and been in the police six years, and I couldn't make a speech like that."

"Couldn't you, sir—Mr.—I mean Bill?"

"No, that I couldn't. Why, I tell you what. You and I'll stick together and I don't know what we mightn't make of you at last—p'raps Lord Mayor o' London. Or, look here, after a few years we might get you in the police."

"In the police?" I faltered.

"To be sure, and you being such a scholard and writing such a hand—I know it, you know. Lookye here," he continued, pulling out a pocket-book, from one of the wallets in which he drew a note I had written for Mary, "I say; you writing such a hand, and being well up in your spelling, you'd rise like a air balloon, and get to be sergeant, and inspector, and perhaps superintendent, and wear a sword! You mark my words, youngster; you've got a future before you."

"Do you think so?"

"I just do. I like you, young Antony, hang me if I don't; and if you stick to me I'll teach you all I know."

"Will you?" I said eagerly.

"Well, all I can. Just hand me that paper o' tobacco. Thankye. I'll have just one more pipe, and then we'll go to dinner."

He filled and lit his pipe, and went on talking.

"First and foremost, don't you get trying to smoke."

"No, I will not," I said.

"That's right. It's all very well for men, a little of it; but I don't like to see boys at it, as too many tries just now. I often sees 'em on my beat, and I never feel so jolly happy as when I come across one looking white after it about the gills, and so sick he can't hold his head straight up. But, as I was a-saying, you stick to me and I'll teach you all I can, and I know two or three things," he continued, closing one eye and opening it again.

"You must, sir."

"Yes; there's some clever chaps I have to deal with sometimes—roughs and thieves and the like; but they have to get up very early in the morning to take me in."

"Do they, sir—Bill?" I said wonderingly.

"There, now you're getting innocent again," he said sharply. "You don't mean to tell me as you don't understand that?"

"Oh yes, I do: you mean that they would have to get up very early to master you—say at daybreak."

"What a young innocent you are," he cried, laughing; and then seeing my pained look, he slapped me on the shoulder again. "It's all right, my boy. You can't help it; and you'll soon learn all these things. I know a lot, but so do you—a sight o' things I don't. Why, I'll be bound to say you could write a long letter without making a single mistake in the spelling."

"Yes, I think I could," I said innocently. "Both papa and mamma took great pains with me over that."

"Look at that, now!" he said. "Why, I couldn't write two lines in my pocket-book without putting down something as the sergeant would chaff."

"Chaff?" I said, "cut-up stuff for horses?"

"Yes: that's it," he said, grinning. "Stuff as they cut up. There, you'll soon know what chaff is, my lad. But, you know, all the same, and speaking quite fair, I do maintain as spelling ain't square."

"Not square?"

"I mean fair and square and above-board. Them as invented spelling couldn't have been very clever, or they'd have made everything spelt as it sounded. Why, it only seems natural to spell doctor's stuff f-i-z-z-i-k, and here you have to stick in *p's*, and *h's*, and *y's*, and *s's*, and *c's*, as ain't wanted at all."

"It is puzzling, certainly," I said.

"Puzzling? Puzzling ain't nothing to it. I can write a fair round hand, and spell fast enough my way. Our sergeant says there isn't a man on our station as can write such a nice looking report; but when it comes to the spelling—there, I won't tell you what he said about that!"

"But you could soon improve your spelling."

"Think so?" he said eagerly. "Oh no, I don't fancy we could."

"I am sure you could," I said. "The best way is to do dictation."

"Dictation? What, ordering about?"

"Oh no; not that sort of dictation. I mean for me to read to you from a book and you write it down, and then I mark all the misspelt words, and you write them down and learn them."

"Look at that now!" he exclaimed. "To be sure, that's the way. Now, you know, I bought a spelling book, that didn't seem to do no good; so I bought a pocket dictionary, and that was such a job to go through, so full of breakneck words as no one never heard of before, that I give that up. Why, you ain't innocent after all. Would you mind trying me?"

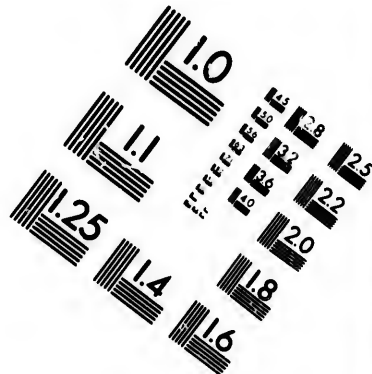
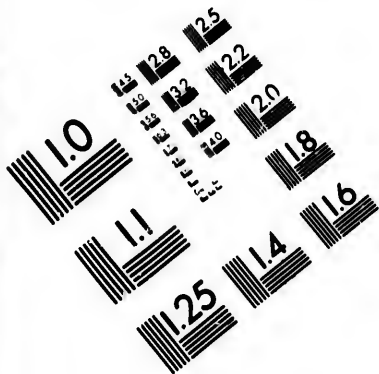
"Mind! no," I cried; "we could use either a slate or paper."

"So we could, and do it with either a pencil or a pen. I say, come: fair and square, I'll teach you all I know if you'll teach me all you know."

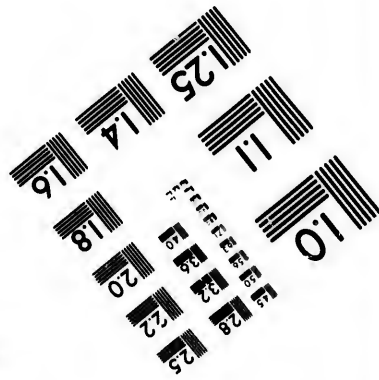
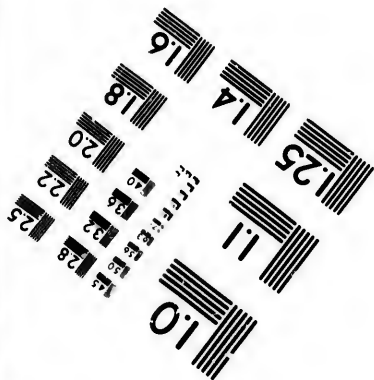
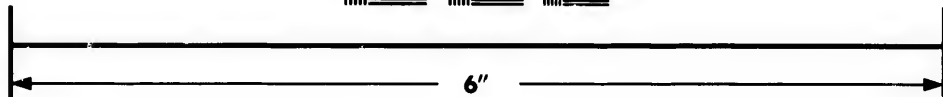
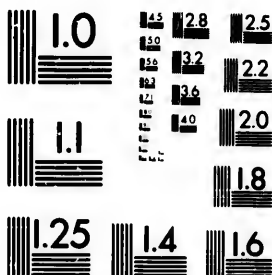
"That's agreed," I said.

"Done for you," he cried, shaking hands. "And now my pipe's





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out, and we'll go and have dinner. Wait till I roll down my sleeves and get on my stock. Why, you and I will be as jolly as can be here. It's rather a long way to go to your work, but you must get up a bit earlier. Two miles night and morning won't kill you, and I've been thinking what we'll do. You've got your sovereign. We'll go to a place I know, and buy one o' them little iron fold-up bedsteads and a mattress and pillow and blanket, and stand it there. It's breaking into your suv, but then you'll have the bit o' furniture, which will be your property, so the money won't be wasted. What do you say?"

I was delighted, and said so.

"Well, then, lookye here," he continued, as he took great pains with his hair and whiskers before the glass, and then put on and buttoned up his uniform coat, to stand before me a frank, manly fellow of about thirty, "you're my company this week, and after that you shall put so much of your selery into the stock to pay for living, and we shall both be free and independent, and what's left you can shove in the bank."

"In the bank?"

"Yes, savings-bank. I don't mind telling you as an old friend I've got forty-four pun ten there."

"Mary has thirty-seven pounds in a savings-bank," I said.

"Now there's for you!" he said.

"Yes, she told me so; but perhaps I oughtn't to have told you."

"Well," he said seriously, "I s'pose you oughtn't, because it was told you in confidence, but I'm glad you did. She never told me."

"Did you ever tell her how much you had saved?"

"No, that I didn't, only as I was saving, so it's all fair. Look here, youngster—I mean Antony," he said, after standing staring in the glass for a few minutes, "I tell you what it is, you coming up has about brought matters to a head."

"Has it, Bill?"

"Yes, it hayve, my boy. Do you know, I don't for the life of me know why we two have been waiting; do you?"

"No," I said shaking my head.

"No, nor more don't Mary, I'll bet a sixpence. We got engaged to one another, and then we said as it wouldn't be sensible, to get married at once, as we might both see some one we liked better, don't you see?"

"Yes," I said, feeling puzzled all the same, "it was very prudent."

"I could have got married lots o' times since, but I've never seen a girl as I liked so well, and I s'pose Mary hasn't seen a chap, for she keeps on writing."

"Oh yes; and she thinks a deal of you. She's very proud of you."

"Is she, though?" he said, with a satisfied smile, and giving his head a shake in his stock. "Well, then, I tell you what: I'll write and ask Mary to say the day, and then meet her at the station. We'll take a little bigger place, and she'll come up and make us both comfortable. What do you say to that?"

I clapped my hands, and he stood smiling in an exceedingly simple way, and looking like a very big overgrown boy, for a few moments, before turning himself round to me.

"See that," he said, in a quiet business-like way. "I was laughing at you for being soft and green just now, and I'm blessed if I don't feel as if I was ten times worse. Come along, company, it's ever so late, and my report says hot mutton chop, a cup of tea, and some bread and butter."

That evening, after a hearty meal, for which Revitts insisted upon paying, there was just time to make the purchases he proposed, which almost melted the whole of my sovereign, and then it was time for him to go on duty.

"They've cost a deal," he said thoughtfully, "but then you've still got the money, only in another shape. Now, you get back home and take in the things when they come, and then sit and read a bit, and afterwards go to bed. I wouldn't go out, if I was you."

We parted, and I followed out his directions, being shrewd enough to see that he thought me hardly fit to be trusted alone.

The next morning I woke to find it was half-past six, and that Revitts had come home and was preparing for bed. He looked tired out, and was very black and dirty, having been, he said, at a fire; but he was not too much fatigued to give me a friendly bit or two of advice as to getting my breakfast and going down to the office.

"Have a good breakfast before you start, my boy, and get some bread and cheese for your lunch--that's twopence. When you come back you'll find the tea-things out, and you can make dinner and tea too."

In good time I started, leaving Revitts sleeping off his night's fatigue, and about ten minutes to ten I was at the door of the great printing-office, flushed with exercise and dread, but eager all the same to make a beginning.

I hesitated as to whether I should go in at once or wait till it struck ten, but I thought that perhaps I might be some time before I saw Mr. Ruddle, so I walked straight in, and the man reading the paper in his glass case looked up at me in a very ill-used way as I stopped at his window.

"You again?" he said gruffly. "Well, what is it?"

"If you please, I've come to work," I said.

"Work? Why, it's ten o'clock. Why weren't you here at eight?"

"Mr. Ruddle said ten o'clock, sir, and I want to see him."

"Oh!" he said gruffly, as if he were the gatekeeper of an earthly paradise. "Well, I s'pose you must pass in. Go on."

I went on into the passage, feeling as if the doorkeeper was the most important personage there, and as if the proprietors must make a practice of asking permission to go into their own place.

I went, then, nervously down the passage till I came to the door of the room where I had seen Messrs. Ruddle and Lister. It was ajar, and there were loud voices talking, and though I knocked they went on.

"Stern firmness is one thing, Grimstone," I heard Mr. Ruddle saying, "and bullying another."

"But you don't consider, sir, that I bully the men, do you?" said another voice which was quite familiar to me.

"You may call it what you like, Grimstone. There, I'm busy now."

There was a sharp step, and the door was flung wide open and closed, when my friend the overseer, who had been so rough to me on the previous day, came out and pretty nearly knocked me down.

CHAPTER XVII.

MY FIRST LITERARY EFFORTS. I MAKE ANOTHER FRIEND.

THE overseer and I stood in the dim light gazing at one another for a few moments, during which I seemed to read in his sharp, harsh face an air of resentment at my presence.

"Hallo!" he said, in an angry voice, and evidently rejoicing at having encountered some one upon whom he could vent a little of the anger seething within him. "What, are you here again, you young vagabond? Didn't I tell you yesterday to go about your business? Be off with you, or I'll send for a policeman. How dare you! What do you mean?"

"But please, sir," I remonstrated.

"Will you be off?" he roared; and I felt that I was about to be driven from the place, when the proprietor's door was sharply opened and Mr. Lister appeared.

"Confound it all, Grimstone," he cried, "what's the matter now? Look here, sir; I will not have this bullying and noise in the place."

"Your father never spoke to me like that, Mr. John, when he was alive."

"My father put up with a great deal from you, Grimstone, because you were an old and faithful servant of the firm; but that

is no reason why I, his son, should submit to what is sometimes bordering on insolence."

"Insolence, Mr. John?"

"Yes, Grimstone, insolence."

"What is the matter?" said Mr. Ruddle, coming out.

"Mr. John says I'm insolent, Mr. Ruddle," said the overseer angrily; "was I ever insolent to you, sir, or his father?"

"Well, if you want the truth, Grimstone, you often were very insolent, only we put up with it for old acquaintance' sake. But what's the matter now?"

"I was just speaking to this young vagabond, who persists in hanging about the place, sir, when Mr. John came out and attacked me, sir."

"Don't call names, Grimstone," said Mr. Lister hotly. "This young vagabond, as you call him, is a fresh boy whom Mr. Ruddle has taken on, and whom I desire you to treat kindly."

"Why didn't he speak, then," said the overseer angrily; "how was I to know that he was engaged? In Mr. Lister senior's time the engaging of boys for the office was left to the overseer."

He stalked off, evidently in high dudgeon, leaving the masters gazing at one another.

"He grows insufferable," said Mr. Lister angrily. "One would think the place belonged to him."

"Yes, he is rough," said Mr. Ruddle; "but he's a good overseer. John, and a faithful old servant. He was with us when we first began. Well, my boy, you've come then; now go upstairs to the composing-room, and ask Mr. Grimstone to give you a job; he'll be a bit cross, I dare say, but you must not mind that."

"No, sir; I'll try not."

"That's right," he said, giving me a friendly nod, and I hurried upstairs and walked right through the composing-room to Mr. Grimstone's glass case.

He saw me coming, but, though I tapped softly at the door several times, he refused to take any notice of me for some minutes, during which I had to stand uncomfortably aware of the fact that I had given terrible offence to this man in authority, by allowing myself to be engaged downstairs after he had bade me go.

He was busy, pen in hand, looking over some long, narrow pieces of paper, and kept on turning them over and over, making his spectacles flash as he changed his position, and directing the top of his very shiny bald head at me, till at last he raised it, gave a start, and turned as if astonished at seeing me there; but it was poor pantomime and badly done.

"Well, what is it?" he said.

"If you please, sir, Mr. Lister sent me up to ask you to give me a job."

"Me give you a job," he said, in a menacing tone; "why, I

thought you would be hanger-on down below, and not come up into the office, where you'd get your nice white hands dirtied. What job can I give you? What can you do? What do you know? Here, Smith, take this boy, and give him a page of pie to dis."

The big, fat-headed boy came up from a distant part of the room, scowled at me, and led me to one of the desk-like frames, upon which were four large open trays full of compartments of various sizes.

"Here you are!" he said, "lay holt;" and he thrust a little heavy square paper packet into my hands. "It's burjoyce"—so it sounded to me; "look alive, and then come for another."

He went away, leaving me balancing the heavy packet in my hand. It was about the size and thickness of a small book, but what next to do with it, or how I was to do it, I did not know.

Of course I know now that it was the petty, contemptible revenge of a little-minded man to set me, a totally uninstructed novice, to do that which an old practised compositor will shelve if he can, as an ungenial task. To "dis a page of burjoyce pie" was, in fact, to distribute—that is, place in its proper compartments, or in the case—every large and small letter, space and point, of a quantity of *bourgeois*, or ordinary newspaper type, that had been accidentally mixed, or "pied" as it is technically termed. The distribution of an ordinary page or column of type is comparatively easy, for the skilled workman reads it off word by word, and drops the letters dexterously in the compartment assigned; but in "pie" the letters and spaces are all jumbled, and the task is troublesome and slow.

There was I, then, with about as easy a task as if I had been suddenly handed the various parts of a watch, and told to put them together; and I felt helpless and ashamed, not daring to interrupt any of the busy men intent upon their work at the various frames.

An hour must have elapsed before I felt that I dare venture to go towards Mr. Grimstone's glass case, and I was about desperately to tell him that I was ignorant and helpless, and quite unfit to do what he had set me, when the dark, stern-eyed man I had seen on the previous day came round by where I stood.

He gazed at me curiously, and gave me a nod, and was passing on, when I desperately exclaimed:

"If you please, sir——"

"Eh? What is it, my boy?" he said.

"I was told, sir, to dis this pie," I said, fearful that I was making some absurd blunder about the word *pie*.

"Well, why don't you do it? Get the sponge off the stone and give it a good soaking in a galley."

"I'm very sorry, sir," I said, encouraged by his quiet, kind way, "but I don't know how."

"Haven't you been in a printing-office before?"

"No, sir."

"And never distributed type?"

"No, sir."

"How absurd! Who set you to do it?"

"Mr. Grimstone, sir."

"But does he know that you have never handled type."

"Yes, sir."

"Ass!" he muttered. "Here, come along with me, my man. No; better not, perhaps. Leave that packet alone, my boy. There, lay it down. Stand here and try and learn the case."

"Learn the case, sir?" I said, with my heart sinking within me at being given another impossible task.

"Yes, it's very easy; only wants time," he said kindly.

"Here, pick up one of these pieces of type," he continued, dexterously taking up a little thin bit of black metal, "like this, and turn it in your fingers, and see what letter is stamped on the end, and then put it back in the same compartment of the case."

"Is that tray the case, sir?"

"Yes, quite right, go on. You can come and ask me anything you don't know."

I darted a grateful look at him, and eagerly began my task, though in fear and trembling, lest Mr. Grimstone should come and find fault because I had not "dis'd the pie."

Few people, I think, realize the sufferings of a sensitive boy at school, or at his first launching into life, when set to some task beyond his perception or powers. The dread of being considered stupid; the fear of the task-masters, the strangeness, the uncongenial surroundings, all combine to make up a state of mental torture that produces illness; and yet it is often ridiculed, and the sufferer treated with cruelty for non-performance of that which, simple to the initiated, is to him in his ignorance an utter impossibility.

It was with a sense of relief I cannot describe that I began to lift the metal types one by one, looked at them, and put them back; and I was not long in finding out that, while the capital letters in the upper of the two trays before me ran nearly regularly A, B, C, D, and so on, and beneath them the figures 1, 2, 3, 4, etc., the lower case was a perfect puzzle.

The compartments were not like those above, all small squares, and the same size, but some were very large, and some very small; some were long, and some were square; but I found that they were made upon a regular plan. For instance, there was one very large compartment nearly in the middle at the top of the lower tray, that was evidently six times as big as the small com-

partments; while below and beside it were many more that were four times as big as the small ones; others being only twice as big.

I naturally examined the large compartment first, and found it full of little thin slips of metal nearly an inch long, at the end of each of which, and beautifully formed, was the letter *e*. There was no doubt about it, and it was evident that there were more *e*'s than anything else. Then under it I found the compartment full of *h*'s, and away to the left, *n*'s and *m*'s; *t*'s, *d*'s, *u*'s, *o*'s, *a*'s, and *r*'s were in other large compartments, and it gradually dawned upon my mind that these letters were placed where they would be handiest for use, and that there was the largest number of those that would be most frequently required.

My surmise was quite right, and with this idea as the key, I soon found out that little-used *x* and *z* were in very small numbers, in the most out-of-the-way parts of the tray, just as were the double letters *æ* and *œ*, etc. One compartment close under my hand, and very full, puzzled me the most, for the pieces of metal therein were short, and had no letters on the end; and at last, after trying in vain to understand their meaning, I determined to ask the dark man next time he passed, and went on trying to master my task with the strange clicking noise made by the men going on all round.

I hardly dared glance about, but in the casual glimpses I stole, I began to understand now that the men about me were picking up, letter by letter, the types, to form words, and arranging them in little curiously shaped tools they held in their hands.

I had been busily learning my letters for about half an hour, when the big, fat-headed boy came up to me.

"Now then!" he said, in a bullying tone that was a very good imitation of the overseer's, "done that page?"

"No!" I said.

"You ain't?"

"No; I did not know how."

"Oh, you'll catch it, just, when Mr. Grimstone knows. You ain't coming here to do just as you like; and I tell you what it is——"

"Well, what is it, boy?" said a quiet, stern voice, and my heart gave a joyful thump as I saw the dark man come up.

"Please, he ain't dis'd this here pie."

"No; he did not know how. I set him to learn the case."

"But Mr. Grimstone said he was to——"

"Jem Smith, do you know you are a fool?" said the dark man quietly.

"I dessay I am, Mr. Hallett, but Mr. Grimstone said as this boy was to——"

"Ar! if you don't go about your business I shall box your ears."

"No, you——"

He did not finish his sentence, for there was something in the deep-set dark eyes which had such an effect upon him that he sneaked off, and I turned to my protector.

"Would you please tell me why these little things have no letters on their ends, sir?" I said.

"Because they are spaces, my boy. Don't you remember in reading a book there is a little distance between every word?"

"Yes, sir," I said eagerly; "and after a full stop there's a bigger space."

"To be sure!" he said, smiling, and his pale face looked less stern and severe. "Look: these little things, as you call them, but as we call them, thick spaces, go between every word, and these square ones after a full stop. How are you getting on?"

"I know that's *e*, sir."

"Yes; go on."

"And that's *h*, and that *o*, and *u-m-a-r-i-s-o-n-t*," I said, touching the boxes in turn.

"Good, very good," he said, "and what is that?"

"That, sir?—*d*."

"No, it is *p*. And that?"

"Oh, that is *b*."

"No, it is *q*. Now you know the meaning of mind your *p*'s and *q*'s. You must learn the difference, and try to recollect this; all the letters, you see, are reversed, like a seal."

"Like the motto on papa's seal. Yes, I see, sir," I said eagerly.

"That's right, my boy," he said looking at me curiously. "Go on, I am too busy to stay."

"Now! what's all this?" said Mr. Grimstone, bustling up with Jem Smith.

"Please, sir," said the latter, "I told him as he was to—"

"I found the boy unable to do what was set him, Mr. Grimstone," said my protector quietly, "and told him to go on with learning his case. The boy has never been in an office before."

"That was for me to know, Mr. Hallett," cried the overseer, growing red in the face. "What the devil do you mean by—"

"Interfering, Mr. Grimstone? I did it because I was sure you were too good a manager to wish time to be wasted in this large office. And I must ask you, please when you speak to me, to omit these coarse expressions."

"Of all the insolence—"

"Insolent or not, sir," said the dark man sternly, "have the goodness to remember that I always treat you with respect, and I expect the same from you. Excuse me, but a quarrel between us will not improve your position with the men."

Mr. Grimstone looked at him furiously; and turning redder in the face than ever, seemed about to burst into a tirade of angry language, but my protector met his look in a way that quelled

him, and turning upon the fat-headed boy, who was looking on open-mouthed, the overseer gave him a sounding box on the ear.

"What are you standing gaping there for, you lazy young scoundrel?" he roared; "go and wash those galleys, and do them well."

Then, striding off, he went into his glass-case, while Jem Smith, in a compartment at the end of an avenue of cases, began to brush some long lengths of type, and whenever I glanced at him, he shook his fist, as he showed his inflamed eyes red with crying and his face blackened by contact with his dirty hands.

My protector, Mr. Hallett, had left me at once, and I saw no more of him for some time, as I worked away, sorry at having been the innocent means of getting him into a quarrel. At last, just as I was very intent in puzzling out the difference between *p*'s and *q*'s I started, for the great lubberly boy came up close behind me.

"I'll give you a warming when you goes out to dinner, see if I don't," he whispered; but he shuffled off directly, as Mr. Hallett came towards me, saw that I was busy, and after giving me a friendly nod, went back, leaving his calm, strangely stern face so impressed upon me, that I kept finding myself thinking of him, his eyes seeming to stare at me from out of every box.

But still I worked on, feeling each moment more and more sure of my way, and at last in a fit of enterprise I set to work and managed to find the letters forming my own name, and laid them side by side.

I felt no little nervous dread as dinner-time approached, for Jem Smith's warming was in waiting; but as one o'clock struck, Mr. Hallett came up to me while the other men were hurrying off, and said kindly:

"Did that boy threaten you?"

"He—he said somethin', sir," I replied, hesitating.

"I thought so. He's gone now, so don't go out to dinner, my man. I can give you a little of mine. I'll speak to him before you go to-night."

CHAPTER XVIII.

MY FRIEND JEM SMITH MAKES ME AMBITIOUS.

I WAS receiving my first lessons in the fact that there is as much good-will as ill-will in the world—in other words, that there really is, as has been so poetically expressed, a silver lining to every cloud; and I gladly availed myself of Mr. Hallett's kind offer, following him to his frame, as they called the skeleton desks that

supported the cases, and there sitting down close by him to partake of some bread and meat which he brought out carefully wrapped in a clean white napkin.

"Don't be afraid, my boy," he said, "make a good meal; and I should advise you, for the present, to bring your dinner with you and eat it here. Better than going into the streets."

He then ate his own dinner quickly, and without taking the slightest notice of me beyond seeing once that I had a sufficiency of the bread and meat, but took out an oblong memorandum-book, and began busily drawing and making some calculation.

As he worked at this, I sat and had a good look at him, and could see that his large, massive head was covered with crisp dark hair that was already slightly sprinkled with grey. From time to time he raised his eyes from his book to look up, as if diving into the distance, or trying to catch some idea that was wandering away from him, and at such moments his deeply set eyes had a curiously intense look about them, while his forehead was deeply marked with thoughtful lines.

I don't think he was more than thirty, but he looked, so to speak, vigorously old, or, rather, worn like some piece of steel that has been used hard, but has grown sharper and more elastic by that use. He was a tall, well-made man, but thin and spare, giving the idea of one who was ascetic in his habits and devoting himself to some particular end.

He did not speak to me again, and I was not sorry, for there was that in his face and ways that rather repelled than attracted, and I somehow felt that if he, in his quiet, firm way, were angry with me, I should be more alarmed than by the noisy bullying of Mr. Grimstone, the overseer.

Two o'clock was signalled by the coming back of the compositors, who resumed their white aprons and rolled up their sleeves, when the sharp clicking noise went on as before. Mr. Hallett, at the first entrance of one of his fellow-workmen, had shut his book with a snap, and thrust it in to his breast, rolled up the napkin, and then, turning to me with a nod,—

"Two o'clock, my boy," he said "Get on with your work."

As he spoke he resumed his own, and I went back to my case.

I had hardly been there ten seconds, and was diligently making sure which was the compartment containing the letter *z*, which had a terribly strong resemblance to the letter *n*, when Mr. Grimstone suddenly pounced on me from round the end of the case. I say pounced, for it was so wonderfully like a cat coming upon a mouse. He seemed surprised and disappointed at finding me there, though I did not comprehend his looks then, and after staring hard for a moment or two, he went away.

The hours glided away, and I was so interested in what I was doing, that I hardly noticed the lapse of time, while, long before

the afternoon was past, the work the men were engaged upon seemed so attractive that I felt impelled to imitate them by trying to pick up the letters forming various words, and then replacing them in the different boxes.

The first time it was rather difficult, but the second time I got on pretty well, and I was just beginning for the third time, when Mr. Hallett came round my way and caught me in the act. I felt very guilty, but he seemed to approve, and walked away, to return directly with a little sliding steel thing, such as the men were using.

"Here's a stick, my boy; try and place the letters, nick uppermost, in that."

I took the stick, as he called it, and found that as fast as I placed a letter in, it seemed to do its best to jump out again; then one letter got upon another, or two or three appeared to quarrel and join in a regular squabble, so that their awkwardness and utter refusal to lie quietly side by side at last put me in a profuse perspiration.

I was busily fumbling about when Mr. Grimstone, whose voice I had often heard scolding different men, came round, saw what I was doing, and snatched the composing-stick away.

"Tchah! What waste of time! Come along here," he cried angrily, and I followed him to his glass office, where he sat down upon a worn stool. "Now then," he said, sharply, "I've decided to give you a trial."

I remember thinking that he was very stupid to assume that he had full authority, when I knew that he had not, but, of course, I was silent.

"And now mind this, sir: I am overseer here, and what I say I will have done, I have done. You hear?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"And now we understand one another."

Saying this, he bounced down from his stool again, and led me to the end of the large room and through a door into a dirty place with a great leaden sink, water, and brushes, and a pot containing some liquid.

Jem Smith was there, having just brought in a long narrow tray containing a column of type.

"Here, Smith, show this boy how to wash a galley; and see that he does it well."

Jem Smith grinned at me as soon as we were left alone, and I saw plainly enough that he meant to have some compensation for the box on the ear he had received; but I tried hard to contain myself, and meant to submit patiently to anything that might follow.

"Here, ketch hold o' that galley," he said sharply, "and look here, young man, don't you get trying to play the sneak here, and

begin getting old Hallett to take your part. He's only a sneak, and everybody here hates him 'cause he won't take his beer. You keep away from him, or it'll be the worse for you. I've only got to tell the other boys, and they'll make it so warm for you as you'll wish as you'd never come here. Now, then, why don't you ketch hold o' that galley?"

"I don't know what a galley is," I said sturdily.

"Don't know what a galley is," he said, imitating my way of speaking; "you're a pretty sort of fellow to come and get work at a printing-office. There, ketch hold, stoopid; that's the galley. put it here, and you needn't be so precious frightened of getting your fingers black. There's the brush, dip it, and fetch all that ink off."

I took the brush, dipped it in the liquor in the pot, and on brushing the surface of the type found that the strong solution easily brought off all the black ink; and I ended as instructed, by thoroughly rinsing the type and placing it to drain.

This done, I had to wash several more galleys, with the result that I was made tolerably black; and to make matters worse, my companion brought in a black roller of some soft material, and dabbed it against my cheek.

I plucked up my spirit and felt ready to strike out, but somehow I kept my anger down, and after washing the roller in turn, I was allowed to dry my hands and clean my face, which Jem Smith persuaded me to do with the strong solution of potash, making it tingle smartly; and, but for the rapid application of pure water, I believe the skin would have been made sore.

This seemed to afford the young ruffian intense delight, and taking up the brush, he dipped it in the potash and tried to brush my hair.

I retreated from him as far as I could, but he got between me and the door, and with the malignant pleasure felt by some boys in persecuting those who are weaker than themselves, he caught me by the collar.

"Just you call out, that's all," he said, "and I'll half kill you. Hold still, you little sneak. You make so much noise us'll reach outside, and I'll jump on you."

We were close beside the lead sink and the pot of solution—lye, as the printers call it; and now a new idea seemed to come into the spiteful young wretch's mind, for, throwing down the brush, he seized hold of me with both hands, and as we struggled, being much the stronger, he got behind me, thrust his knee violently into my back, and brought me down kneeling before the great earthen pot. And now for the first time I saw what he intended to do, namely, to thrust my face and head into the black caustic solution, and, in spite of my resistance, he got it down lower and lower.

I might have shrieked out for help, and I might have cried for mercy: but, moved partly by his threats, partly by shame, I refrained, and made use of all my strength to escape, but in vain; strive as I would, he forced me down lower and lower, and then by one quick effort placed a hand on the back of my head and thrust it right into the filthy water.

Fortunately for me it was but a momentary affair, and the next instant he allowed me to struggle up and run blindly to the sink, where, perhaps, a little alarmed by his success, he filled a bowl with clean water, leaving the tap running, as I strove to sluice off the blinding, tingling fluid.

I was in the midst of this, and with soaked necktie and collar, kept on bathing my face and hair, when I heard Mr. Grimstone's voice at the door, and hastily thrust my fingers into my ears to clear them.

"What's he doing?"

"Washing hisself, sir."

"Washing himself?"

"Yes, sir; he said it was such a nasty dirty job to brush galleys that he must have a good clean."

"Where's the towel?" I said blindly, for my eyes smarted so that I dare not open them, and they grew so painful that I hurried once more to the sink and bathed them with clear water before pressing my hair as dry as I could, and then using my handkerchief to wipe my face.

I now opened my eyes, and saw that there was a very dirty jack-towel on a roller behind the door, to which I hastily ran.

"Look here, sir," said Mr. Grimstone, as I hastily rubbed away at my head; "we can't have these goings-on here. What have you been doing?"

"I think he's been using the lye, sir," cried the young hypocrite. "I told him it was only for the type."

"It isn't true, sir," I cried indignantly; when a compositor came up to the door, and Mr. Grimstone was called away.

The moment he was gone, Smith darted at me, and thrust his doubled fist hard against my face.

"You say a word agen me," he said, "and I'll half kill yer. I'll smash yer, that I will, so look out."

He went out of the place, leaving me hot and indignant, rubbing away at my tingling head, which I at length got pretty dry and combed before a scrap of glass stuck by four tacks in a corner; and when I had finished it was in time to see the men just returning from their tea and resuming their work.

Not being told to do anything else, I went back to the case, and continued to learn the boxes, not much the worse for my adventure, only feeling uncomfortably wet about the neck.

At last the clock pointed to eight, and, following the example

of the rest, I hurried out of the great office, eager to get back to Mr. Revitts before he went on duty, for I wanted to ask him a question.

I got up to the street in Pentonville just as he was coming out of the house, and in answer to his "Halloa! here you are, then," I caught hold of his arm.

"Bill!" I exclaimed, panting with excitement, "can you teach me how to fight?"

CHAPTER XIX.

WILLIAM REVITTS ON LESSONS.

SOME time passed before William Revitts replied in full to my question. He had, of course, asked me what I meant, and I had explained to him the treatment I had received, but his duties and mine kept us a great deal apart. One night, however, when he had returned to day-duty, he was seated in his shirt sleeves talking to me, and said all of a sudden:

"Yes, I could teach you how to fight, Antony."

"And will you?" I said eagerly.

"Give me my 'bacco and pipe off the chimney-piece."

I handed them to him, and waited patiently while he filled and lighted his pipe, and then all at once, along with a puff of smoke, he exclaimed:

"No, I sha'n't. Fighting's all blackguardism, as I know as well as most men. I've had the taking up of some of the beauties as go in for it, and beauties they are. I don't say as if I was you I wouldn't give that Master Jem Smith an awful crack for himself if he meddled with me again; but I should do it when I was in a passion, and when he'd hurt me. You'll hit as hard again then, and serve him right. Now let's have a turn at spelling."

We did "have a turn at spelling," and I dictated while Revitts wrote, varying the task with bits of advice to me—aloud enough some of them, while others were as shrewd and full of common sense.

By that time I had rapidly begun to fish up odds and ends of experience, such as stood me in good stead, and, in spite of what was really little better than contemptible persecution on the overseer's part, I was making some little way at the printing-office.

I shall not soon forget the feeling of pride with which on the first Friday night I heard my name called out by a business-like clerk with a book, after he had summoned everyone in the room, and received from him a little paper-bag containing my wages.

"You haven't been full time, Grace," he said, entering the sum paid in a book; "but the firm said I was to pay you for the week, as you were a beginner."

As soon as I thought I was unobserved, I counted out seven shillings, a sum that showed that I was a little favoured, for honestly I believe that I was not worth that amount to my employers.

Hardly had I made sure of my good fortune than I had a visit from Jem Smith, who came up grinning.

"Now, then," he said, "old Grim's gone for the night, and you've got to come down and pay your footing."

I stared at him in my ignorance, but, fully under the impression that something unpleasant was meant, I resolutely determined to stay where I was, and I was saved from further persecution by Mr. Hallett coming up, which was the signal for Jem Smith to sneak off. I asked Hallett what was meant, and he explained to me that it was a custom for working men on entering a new place to pay for some beer for their fellow-workmen.

"But don't you pay a penny to the young wolves," he said, and I determined that I would not.

I was well on in the second week, and during the intervening days I had been set to every dirty and objectionable task Mr. Grimstone could invent for me, but I did them patiently and well. I had seen nothing of my employers, and but little of Mr. Hallett, who seemed too busy to take much notice of me; but he somehow had a knack of turning up in emergencies, just when I required help and counsel, showing that he kept an eye upon me for my good.

I noticed as I sat beneath a frame eating my dinner in the composing-room that he always employed a good deal of his time in drawing or calculating, and I found, too, that he was no great favourite with his fellow-workmen, who nicknamed him the steam-engine, because he worked so rapidly and did so much. It was very plain, too, that the overseer hated him, giving him the most difficult and unpleasant tasks, but they were always willingly done by Mr. Hallett, who was too good a workman to be spared.

I had just completed the washing of some very dirty type one day, and, according to orders, made my way up to Mr. Grimstone's glass-case, very dirty and grubby-looking, no doubt, when I stared with surprise on seeing there before me a little cleanly-shaven man who, except in clothes, was the exact counterpart of Mr. Rowle.

Somehow or other I had been so occupied, and my mind so intent upon the task given me, that I had thought no more about asking to see him; and now, here he was, Mr. Rowle's twin brother, in angry altercation with the overseer, while Jem Smith stood in the door. The latter had been let off a good many dirty tasks of late, and I had succeeded to them, but the promotion he had received did not seem to have been attended with success.

"Now look here, Grimstone," the little man was saying, "you needn't bark at me, for I don't care a pinch of snuff for all your snarls. I asked you to send me up the best boy you had, to read, and you sent me your worst."

"Mr. Rowle, it is false, sir."

"And I say it is true, and that you did it all out of your crass obstinacy and determination to be as disagreeable as you can to everybody in the place."

"I sent you up one of my best boys, Mr. Rowle."

"And I say you sent me your very worst—as thick-headed, stupid a dunce as ever entered the place. Look here," he continued, flourishing a sheet of manuscript in one hand, a long slip of printed paper in the other. "He can't read that plain piece of writing, and as to the print, why, he's little better."

"No such thing, sir," said Mr. Grimstone, fuming.

"Don't tell me 'no such thing,'" said the little man fiercely. "Why, the biggest fool in the office would do better. Here, boy," he cried to me, as I stood there with my hands as black as dirty type could make them; "come here."

I went up to him.

"He's no good," said Mr. Grimstone sharply. "He has only just come."

"Don't talk to me, sir," cried Mr. Rowle angrily. "You can't pick out a decent boy, so I must do it myself. Here, boy, read that out aloud."

I took the piece of paper with trembling hands, doubting my own power to read the lines of crabbed writing, and feeling that even if I could read it I should give dire offence to the overseer by so doing; but I could not help myself, and raising the piece of manuscript written closely on a sheet of ruled foolscap, I saw that it was just such a legal document as I had often copied at Mr. Blakeford's. In fact, something of the old feeling of dread that I used to experience when receiving such a paper from him made a huskiness come in my throat, but clearing my voice, I began:

"And the aforesaid deponent also saith that in such a case it would be necessary for the said lessor, his heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns, to make over and deliver, whenever and wheresoever the aforesaid lessee, his heirs, executors, administrators or assigns should desire him so to do——"

"Stop!" said the little man tightening his lips and taking a pinch of snuff. "You did not read that exactly as it's written there."

"No, sir," I said, "executors, administrators, and assigns, were all contracted."

"There!" he exclaimed, turning to the overseer triumphantly. "What did I say? Here's the first boy I meet, fresh from the

lye-tub, and he reads it straight off without a blunder, and better than you could have read it yourself. Here, boy, read that."

He took a letter from his pocket, written in a terribly puzzling hand, and placed it before me.

I took it, hesitated for a moment, and then began :

"My dear sir,—I have given the most careful consideration to your proposal, and I am quite willing to—to—to—to—to—" If you please, sir, I'm very sorry," I stammered, "but I can't make out that word."

"No, boy, nor I neither. I don't believe the writer can. There, go and wash those dirty hands," he continued, snatching the letter from me.

"No: stop!" cried Mr. Grimstone wrathfully; "I want that boy here."

"Then you may take your great clever noodle, Jem Smith," said the little man.

"Mr. Rowle, I will not have my rules and regulations broken in this way, sir."

"Hang you and your rules," said the little man. "Have a pinch? No? Then let it alone."

"I cannot and will not spare that boy," cried Mr. Grimstone, motioning away the snuff-box.

For answer the little man tightened his lips, snapped to the lid of his snuff-box, hastily took a pinch, snapped his fingers in the overseer's face, and taking me by the shoulder, marched me before him towards the door, and past Mr. Hallett's frame.

"Here, get your jacket, my lad," said the little man. "You can wash your hands upstairs."

Mr. Hallett nodded to me and looked, as I thought, pleased as I passed him, and preceding my new taskmaster, I went up to the next floor, where he led me to a glass-case, exactly like that occupied by Mr. Grimstone and the reader in his room, the sides being similarly decorated with slips of paper hanging from nails.

He showed me where to wash, and, this done, I was soon by his side, reading steadily on to him various pieces of manuscript, while, spectacles on nose, he pored over and made corrections on the margins of the printed slips of paper that were constantly being brought to him by a youth who printed them from the column galleys at a small hand-press.

I got on pretty well, for my home training had made manuscript easy to me. In fact, I had often copied pieces for my father, containing letters from various naturalist friends, while my sojourn at Mr. Blakeford's had made anything of a legal character perfectly clear.

That night, when it was time to go, and I had had no greater unpleasantness to contend with than several severe fits of sneezing brought on when the little man used his snuff-box, I timidly

asked him if I was wanted the next day, for as yet no opportunity had served for making known my knowledge of his brother.

"Wanted!" he cried; "why, I had serious thoughts of locking you up, boy, so as to make sure of you to-morrow. Wanted! Yes: I've got you, and I mean to keep you; and if Grimstone says another word—but only let him. Look here: you are very stupid yet, but you'll soon improve; and mind this, come with clean hands and face to-morrow, and clean apron."

"Yes, sir," I said, and then I hesitated.

"Well, what is it?"

"Please, sir, you are Mr. Jabez Rowle, are you not?"

"Yes, and what then?" he said shortly.

"Only, sir, that Mr. Peter Rowle, who is a friend of mine, said I might mention his name to you."

"Oh, he did, did he? Well, he need not have taken the trouble. There, be off, and mind you are here in good time."

This was damping, especially as Mr. Jabez Rowle took snuff viciously, and stood staring before him, tapping his box, and muttering angrily, in which state I left him, and made the best of my way home.

I was in good time next morning, but, all the same, there sat Mr. Jabez Rowle in his glass-case waiting for me, and as I entered and said "Good morning, sir," he just nodded shortly and pointed with the penholder in his hand to a piece of paper.

"Go on!" he said; and, taking it up, I began to read.

"Not quite so fast, and say *par* when you come to a fresh paragraph."

I read on, making a good many blunders in my anxiety to be right, but, I presume, getting on very well, for Mr. Rowle found but little fault, as he seemed to dart his pen down at every error in the slip proofs before him—turned letters, *p*'s where *q*'s should be, and *b*'s for *d*'s; *c*'s were often in the place of *e*'s; and then there were omissions, repetitions, absence of spaces or points, a score of different little omissions on the compositor's part; and, besides all these, the busy pen made marks and signs that were cabalistic to me.

This had gone on about a couple of days, and I was reading away to him what I believed was a prayer in a chancery-bill, when Mr. Jabez suddenly laid down his pen, took out his snuff-box, and said, looking me full in the face, "How's Peter?"

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"I say, how's Peter?"

"How's Peter, sir?"

"Don't pretend to be stupid, boy, when you're as sharp as a needle," he cried, tapping the desk angrily with his snuff-box. "Didn't you say you knew my brother Peter?"

"Oh yes, sir! he was very kind to me, but I haven't seen him for some weeks. He was quite well then."

"Humph! look old?"

"He looks very much like you, sir."

"Then he does look old. We're very fond of one another, boy, but we always quarrel; so we never meet. 'And your petitioner furthermore sayeth—'"

"I beg your pardon, sir."

"'And your petitioner furthermore sayeth'—get on, boy: go on."

I dashed at the manuscript again, for he had resumed his work, and read on to the end, for he made no further inquiries about his brother.

I soon grew quite accustomed to reading, and found that Mr. Jabez Rowle meant what he said about keeping to me, for I was regularly installed as reading-boy, and, as I have said, I was delighted with the change. I often met Jem Smith, and, from his looks, it was evident that he bore me no good will, and, to be frank, I felt rather revengeful for his treatment. One day, during the dinner hour, I went down into the lower part before the men came back, and, after getting some slips which Mr. Rowle had told me to have ready for him, my enemy pounced upon me, coming in at the door just as I was about to leave.

"Now I've got yer, then," he cried, with a malicious grin, and, rushing at me, I had only time to evade the first onslaught by running round the frames, when a hot chase ensued, ending in my being brought to bay, and receiving blow after blow from my stronger antagonist.

I did all I could to defend myself, till, closing with me, he held me tight with one arm, and struck me so cruelly in the face, that it roused me to greater efforts, and, after a short wrestle, I was free.

It was but a moment's respite before he dashed at me again, and, in my rage and desperation, I struck out at him so fiercely that my fist caught him full between the eyes, making him stagger and catch at the first object he could to save himself, and the result was that he pulled over a full case of small type. There was a crash, I uttered a cry, and some twenty pounds of type were scattered in confusion all over the floor.

Before I had recovered from my horror, the door was thrown open, and Mr. Grimstone came hurrying in.

"What's this—what's this?" he cried.

"Please, sir, Grace was playing larks with one of the cases, and he let it fall."

"Then Mr. Grace shall soon find out what it is to destroy the property of the firm in this wanton way," he cried.

"Indeed, sir——" I began.

"Not a word, sir—not a word!" he cried. "Smith, go about your work. You, Grace, pick up every bit of that pie at once."

"But please, sir, I did not knock it down, and Mr. Rowle is waiting for me."

"Pick it up, sir."

"But Mr. Rowle——"

"Pick it up, sir."

I was so hot and excited that I was about to declare angrily that I would not, when I caught Mr. Hallett's eyes gazing fixedly at me, and without a word, but feeling half-choked with anger and indignation, I fetched a galley and began to pick up the fallen type.

I had not been engaged in my uncongenial task many minutes before Mr. Jabez Rowle came down to see where I was, and I noticed that there was quite a triumphant look in Mr. Grimstone's eyes as he said I must stay and pick up all the type, the matter being compromised on the understanding that as soon as the metal was picked up I was to resume my reading upstairs, and, by Mr. Grimstone's orders, stay in every dinner-time and get to the office an hour sooner every morning till I had set up and distributed the whole of the pie.

How I dwelt on the injustice of that task! It was one which seemed to give Mr. Grimstone great satisfaction, for it took my inexperienced fingers many weeks, and I had to toil very hard. But all the same, it was no waste of time, for it gave me dexterity in handling type such as I should not otherwise have had.

I had suffered a great deal from anxiety lest some morning Mr. Blakeford should step into the office and claim me; for, unpleasant as were my dealings with Mr. Grimstone, Jem Smith, and through the latter with several of the other boys, I thoroughly enjoyed my present existence. Revitts was very kind, and, in spite of his sharp abruptness, I did not dislike quaint old Mr. Jabez Rowle, who seemed never to be happy unless he was correcting proofs.

My dread arose from the thought that Revitts might in some communication to Mary be the cause of her naming my whereabouts to the lawyer. Then I was afraid that Mr. Ruddle might write down and make inquiries. Lastly, that Mr. Jabez Rowle might mention me in writing to his brother. But I grew more reassured as it became evident that Mr. Ruddle had not written, while Mr. Jabez Rowle said one day, just in the middle of some corrections:

"Ah, I'm very fond of Peter, so I never write to him."

Then, too, I found that Mr. Revitts never wrote to Mary without, in a half-bashful way, showing me the letter.

"Lookye here," he would say, "we said we'd help one another.

lad. Some o' these days you'll want to write such a letter as this here, and so you may us well see how it's done. Then you can just shove your pen through where the spellin' ain't quite square, and I'll write it out again. I don't know as it's quite right to let her get thinking as I'm such a tip-topper at spellin', but she came the same game with me over the writing, making me think as she'd improved wonderful, when it was you; so it's six o' one and half-a-dozen o' t'other. What do you say?"

"I don't think Mary meant to deceive you, Bill," I said. "Poor girl, she had to work very hard, and her hands were not used to holding a pen. I don't suppose she ever thought of saying who wrote for her. There's nothing to be ashamed of in trying to improve your spelling."

"No, there ain't, is there, lad?"

"Nothing at all. Mr. Hallett says we go on learning all our lives."

"Hah! I suppose we do. What would you do then?"

"I should tell Mary I helped you."

"So I will—so I will," he said, in his quiet simple way; for as sure as the subject *Mary* was in question, all William Revitt's sharp police-constable ways dropped off, and he was as simple and smiling as a child.

"Give my love to her, Bill," I said.

He looked heavily and steadily at me for a few moments, and then in a very stupid way he began:

"I say, youngster, do you think Mary is fond of you?"

"I'm sure she is—very," I said.

He fidgeted in his chair, and then continued:

"And you like her?"

"Very, very, very much. She was horribly cross at first, but towards the last nobody could have been kinder."

"I say, how old are you?"

"Between thirteen and fourteen," I said.

"Ah, to be sure; of course, lad, so you are," he said, brightening up and shaking hands. "Yes, I'll give your love to her. I say, boy, it won't be long first," he continued, rubbing his hands.

"Won't it?" I said, easily divining what he meant.

"No, not long now, for we've been engaged a precious long while."

CHAPTER XX.

THE WAYZEGOOSE.

LONG before the fallen type was sorted I had heard rumours of the annual holiday and dinner of the *employés* of the firm; and

on a delicious autumn morning I found myself in a great covered van, one of three conveying the large party down to Epping Forest.

According to old custom, the members of the firm did a great deal to encourage the affair, supplying a large proportion of the funds required, and presiding at the dinner at an inn in the forest.

Boy-like, I was very eager to go, and looked forward to joining in a projected game at cricket; but, somehow, when we reached the inn, after a drive made noisy by a good deal of absurd mirth, the result of several calls at public-houses on the way to give the horses hay and water, the pleasure seemed to be taken a good deal out of the affair, and the presence of Mr. Grimstone did not tend to make me feel upon the highest pinnacle of enjoyment.

Somehow or another the boys seemed to look upon me as a sort of butt, and, headed by Jem Smith, they had played several practical jokes upon me already, so that at last I was standing wistfully looking on instead of playing cricket, and wishing I was alone, when a handsome waggonette was driven by, and to my surprise I saw in it Mr. Ruddle, Mr. Lister, his partner, and the two young ladies whom I had met on my first day in Short Street.

As I started forward and took off my cap, Miss Carr saw me, and smiled and nodded: and then as I stood gazing after the departing carriage, a change seemed to have come over the day, and I began to wonder whether I should see them again, and, if so, whether they would speak to me, when a hand was laid upon my shoulder, and turning round, there stood Mr. Hallett.

"Well, my solitary little philosopher," he said, in a quiet, half-cynical way, "what are you doing? Not playing with the boys at cricket, and not drinking more beer than is good for you, according to the immemorial custom of a British workman taking a holiday?"

"No," I said, "I was looking after that carriage."

"Carriage? Oh, that! Well, what was there in it to take your attention?"

"Mr. Ruddle and Mr. Lister were in it, with Miss Carr and her sister."

"What, in that?" he said. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir, quite sure. Miss Carr nodded to me."

"Nodded?—to you, Grace?"

"Oh yes, Mr. Hallett, it was through Miss Carr that I was engaged;" and I told him how it happened.

"And so you are not going to play cricket?" he said dreamily, as he stood gazing wistfully in the direction taken by the waggonette.

"No, thank you," I replied sadly. "I'd rather not."

"Well, I'm going for a ramble in the forest. Dinner will not be ready for two hours. Will you come?"

"Oh yes, sir."

"Come along then, Grace, and we'll throw away the work for one day, and enjoy the country."

I had never seen him look so bright and pleasant before. The stern, cold, distant air was gone, and his eyes were bright and eager. He seemed to unbend, and it was delightful to find him take so much interest in me as he did.

"Well," he exclaimed, as we turned right into the wood by the first narrow foot-path, "and how are you getting on with the pie?"

"Very slowly, sir," I said sadly.

"Never mind, my boy; patience, and you will do it all; and it will not hurt you."

"But it was so unjust, sir. It was Smith who upset it."

"Ah! and he said it was you?"

"Yes, sir; and it was a lie."

"I thought as much; a young rascal! but never mind, Grace. I would rather be the lad who manfully bears an injustice like a hero, than be the big successful blackguard who escapes his punishment by a contemptible lie."

"So would I, sir," I said, swallowing down something which seemed to rise in my throat as I gazed in his bright, intelligent face.

"Bah! It was a pitiful bit of triumph for the young idiot; but never mind, my lad: work at it and finish it like a man, and it will be a piece of self-denial that you may be proud of to the end of your days."

We walked on for some distance in silence, he evidently thoroughly enjoying the beauty of the forest as we rambled on, knee-deep in ferns and heather, and I feeling that the old days were coming back, such as I used to love when wandering with my father through one of our woods, botanizing or collecting bird and insect. Almost involuntarily as Mr. Hallett took off his soft felt hat to let the breeze blow on his broad white forehead, I began, as of old, to pick a specimen here and there, till, after being in a musing fit for some time, he suddenly noticed what I was doing, and became interested.

"What have you got there?" he said, pointing to a plant I had just picked.

"Oh, that's a twayblade," I replied, "one of the orchis family."

"Indeed," he said, looking at me curiously, "and what is this?"

"Oh, a very common plant—dog's mercury."

"And this, Grace?" he continued, pointing to another, with its bulbous roots in the water.

"Water hemlock, sir."

"Why, Antony Grace, you are quite a young botanist," he said, smiling and showing his white teeth, while I gazed up at him wonderingly, he seemed so changed.

"I only know a little that papa—I mean my father, taught me."

"He used to take you for walks, then, my boy?"

"Oh, such delicious walks, sir."

"And you learned a good deal? Look! What a great toad-stool! Don't handle it, my boy, some of these things are very poisonous."

"This is not, sir," I said eagerly; "this is *Boletus edulis*, and very good eating."

"Indeed; and pray what does *Boletus edulis* mean?"

"The eatable *boletus*, sir. There is a family of fungi called the *boleti*, sir, and you can easily tell them, because they are all full of pores, or little holes, underneath, while the ordinary agarics have gills like this."

I picked up one with a brilliant scarlet top as I spoke, and showed him the white gills beneath.

"And has that a name?" he said.

"Oh yes; that is a very poisonous and rather rare specimen: it is *Russula emetica*."

"Why, Grace," he said, laying his hand on my shoulder, "you and I must come for country walks together. You must take me for a pupil. Good heavens!" he muttered, "how one does live to find out one's ignorance."

His whole manner from that moment was changed towards me. He seemed to throw off his mask of cold reserve, and laughed and chatted; ran up banks to get rare ferns, and climbed a tree to look at a late wood-pigeon's nest, so that the time flew by till, on referring to his watch, he found that we should have enough to do to get back to the dinner.

"I would rather stay in the forest," he said.

"So would I, sir," I replied rather dolefully.

"But no," he continued, "the firm are very kind, and we should be wanting in respect if we stayed away. Come along; you sit beside me, and we'll slip off afterwards and have another run."

We hurried back just in time for the dinner, but I did not get a place by Mr. Hallett; and as soon as this was over speech-making began. It did not interest me, for my eyes were fixed upon a kind of gallery above the heads of the people at the upper table, in which I could see Miss Carr and her sister had taken their places, apparently to listen to the speeches made by Mr. Ruddle and Mr. Lister in turn.

They seemed, however, to pay little attention to them after the first, and as I sat watching them, and wishing Miss Carr could see me, to my disappointment I saw them rise to go, just as, after a good deal of whispering between Mr. Grimstone, Mr. Jabez Rowle, and Mr. Hallett, the latter, evidently unwillingly, rose to propose the health of the firm.

At the first sound of his voice I saw Miss Carr pause and stay

her sister, and as he went on, she paid more and more attention, leaning over the rail to catch every word, while he, quite unconscious of the presence of such listeners, warmed to his task, and in well-chosen vigorous language, spoke in praise of the firm, and, at the same time, urged his fellow-workmen to give them in the future their best support as earnestly as they would promise it upon this present day.

He grew eager and excited as he spoke, and carried his eloquent speech on to such a climax that he sat down amidst a perfect tempest of cheering, both Mr. Ruddle and Mr. Lister leaving their seats afterwards to go and quietly shake hands with him, Mr. Grimstone all the while apparently seeing in him a rival, for he scowled ominously, and Mr. Jabez Rowle completely emptied his box of snuff.

My eyes, though, were principally fixed upon the ladies in the little gallery, and I was near enough to see that Miss Carr's lips were parted, and her eyes looked eager and strange as she leaned forward more and more, till the speech was at an end. The next time I looked, she was gone.

Soon after I felt some one pull my arm, and starting round, there stood Mr. Hallett, and hurriedly following him out of the hot, noisy room, we made our way once more into the forest.

As we rambled on, delighted with the delicious coolness and the sweet scents of the woodlands, Mr. Hallett asked me a few questions about myself, soon learning my little history, while my respect for him had increased as I found out more and more how different he was from the ordinary workmen at the office. He was evidently a scholar, and seemed to have a great depth of knowledge in mechanical contrivances.

"We must know more of one another, Grace," he said; "I am glad we have been together to-day. What do you do on Sundays?"

I explained that when Mr. Revitts was off duty we went for a walk.

"And pray who is Mr. Revitts?" he said.

I explained that he was a policeman, and had been very kind to me since I had lodged with him in town.

"I am quite alone in London, you see, Mr. Hallett," I said in an old-fashioned way at which I now can smile.

He nodded, and seemed thoughtful for a few minutes.

"Mine is not a very cheerful home, Grace," he said at length; "but if you will come and spend a Sunday—say Sunday week—with us, I shall be glad to see you. Will you come?"

"I should be so glad," I cried, and then I stopped short.

"What is it?" he said.

"Mr. Revitts will be off duty that day, sir; and he would be so disappointed if I were not at home. He has been so very kind to me."

Mr. Hallett looked amused.

"Do you mind, sir?" I said.

"No, Grace. You are quite right," he quietly said. "Always be faithful to your friends. You shall come next Sunday instead," he added, as we turned into a beautiful little glade that looked bright and golden with the setting sun. "Never throw a trusted friend over for the sake of one you believe to be——"

He stopped short, for we had come suddenly upon two ladies, one of whom was Miss Carr.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE FOREST.

MISS CARR started slightly on seeing my companion, and it seemed to me that she coloured for the moment, but she recovered her composure on the instant, responded to Mr. Hallett's salute with a quiet bend of the head, and turned at once to me, talking in a sweet grave way, as if there were no one else present, though Mr. Hallett stood close by me, hat in hand.

"Antony," she said, laying her hand upon my shoulder, "I am very glad to see you again. Mr. Ruddle tells me that you are striving very hard, and that you have already made a step upwards. Mind, though I do not see you, I always hear how you progress, and, now that you have begun so well, I have no fear for your future. Are you happy and comfortable where you are?"

"Oh yes, ma'am," I said, flushing red with pride and pleasure, as I gazed in her face; "and—and I have made such good friends."

"Indeed!" she said quickly. "I hope you are careful."

"Oh yes, ma'am; Mr. Revitte is very good to me, and Mr. Hallett, here."

Miss Carr turned her face to him for the moment, and once more there was a slight flush upon her cheeks; then she seemed very pale.

"I am glad to hear it," she said, in a firm, distinct tone; "and I hope your friend Mr. Hallett will remember your unprotected position, and advise you for your good."

Mr. Hallett was about to speak, but she had turned from him and now laid her other hand upon my shoulder.

"Good-bye, Antony," she said: "you know where I live; come to me if ever you should require help. And mind this, I shall expect you to fight hard and rise. It is no disgrace to be a common workman"—she glanced hastily, and as if in apology towards Mr. Hallett, as she spoke—"My dead father was but a

workman, but he rose to a higher position in life, and I think those who fight the battle well and are self-made, are quite as worthy of honour and respect as those who are born to wealth. Good-bye."

I could not speak, but I stood there gazing in her bright animated face, and listened to the sweet grave voice, whose every word seemed to fix itself in my mind. I was only recalled from my dreamy state by those words "good-bye," and the sight of the soft white hand that she held out.

It was from no sentimental feeling of politeness that I acted as I did, for I felt moved to my very soul, and the same feelings came over me that had animated me in the past days in my pleasant old home. I loved Miss Carr—loved her with the same sweet wholesome love that a boy feels towards a tender mother, and my eyes felt suffused, and things looked dim, as with quite a natural effort I took the hand extended to me, kissed it, and held it for a moment against my cheek. Then it seemed to glide from my hold, there was a faint rustle of silken garments over the heath and grass, and Mr. Hallett and I were alone.

I turned to speak to him, to find that he was still standing, hat in hand, gazing down the path by which the sisters had gone; then it seemed to me that he drew a long breath as he stood looking at me apparently, but evidently recalling that which was past.

"Oh, Mr. Hallett!" I cried enthusiastically, and with all the impulsiveness of a boy; "isn't she beautiful?"

"As beautiful as true, Grace," he said softly, and his manner seemed reverent and strange.

"She was so kind to me—spoke so kindly for me when I first came to the office," I cried.

"Yes, my boy," he said in the same low, soft voice; "you are very fortunate—you have found a true friend."

"And I will try," I cried. "She shall find that I have remembered what she told me."

"Come and sit down here, my boy," he said, throwing himself upon a patch of heath and fern. "Let's forget the smell of oil and steam and printing-ink for a time. Come and tell me all about your meeting with Miss Carr."

I was eager to tell him, and I had a willing listener, and as I sat there at his feet I told him of the interview at the office, and all about how Mr. Lister seemed so attentive to Miss Carr; what he had said, and how he seemed to love her. In my ignorance I dwelt at length upon even Mr. Ruddle's words of congratulation, talking rapidly and well in my enthusiasm—blind and ignorant that I was—for I could not read then why the lines in Stephen Hallett's face grew deeper and more marked, nor yet why his eyelids should droop down, and then his head, till it rested upon

one hand, while the other plucked slowly at the strands of grass and scraps of heath.

Once or twice I thought he was asleep, but if I stopped he spoke to me softly, asking some questions till I had done, when he startled me again with inquiries about myself and my old life, gradually winning from me all I had to tell.

The sun had set, and the soft evening shadows were descending as we still sat there drinking in the moist fresh air of the forest, till, as if rousing himself from a dream, Mr. Hallett rose hastily, and I too sprang to my feet.

"Come, Grace," he said, with an effort to be cheerful, "we must get back to the inn, or we shall be left behind. One minute, though; let us walk along here."

I looked at him wonderingly as he strode hastily to where we had met the ladies, and I saw that he had removed his hat as he stood gazing slowly around.

It might have been from the heat, but I do not think so now; and he was just turning away, when I saw him stoop hastily and snatch from among the ferns a grey kid glove.

"Why, that must be Miss Carr's," I said eagerly.

"Yes," he replied softly; "it is Miss Carr's."

He stood holding it pressed in his hand; and his brow was knit, and he stood gazing straight before him, struggling with himself before saying, as he doubled the glove:

"You must take it back, my boy. You will see her again; perhaps I never shall."

I looked at him curiously as I took the glove, for he seemed so strange, but the next moment his dreamy manner was cast aside, as he clapped me on the shoulder.

"Come, Grace," he said; "no, I will not call you Grace," he added, laughing; "it sounds as if you were a girl, and you are rather too girlish, my boy; I will call you Antony in future."

"Yes, do, please, Mr. Hallett," I said; though I flushed a little at being called girlish.

"Come along, then. Our pleasant day has nearly come to an end."

"Yes," I said with a sigh; "pleasant days do so soon come to an end."

"To be sure they do," he cried; "but never mind, my boy: others will come."

"Yes," I sighed; "and miserable ones, too, full of Grimston and Jem Smith, and pie, and mistakes."

"Of course," he cried; "bitters, all of them, to make life the sweeter. Why, Antony—no, Tony's better—why, Tony, if you could be always revelling in good things, such a day as this would not have seemed so delightful as it has."

"And it has been delightful!" I cried, as we walked on, my friend resting his hand almost affectionately upon my shoulder

"Yes," he said softly; "a day to be marked with a white stone—a tombstone over the grave of one's brightest hopes," he added, very, very softly; but I caught the import of his words, and I turned to him quite a troubled look, when there was a sound of cheering some distance away. "Come, Tony," he said cheerfully. "there are our men hurrahing. We must join them now."

"Do you know what time we were to start back, sir?" I said.

"Eight o'clock," he replied, taking out an old-fashioned gold watch, and then starting. "Why, Tony, my lad, it's past nine. Come along, let's run."

We started off, and ran at a steady trot till we reached the inn, to find that the cheering had been when the vans set out.

"Yes, they was a-cheerin' away like fun," said our informant, a rather beery-looking public-house hanger-on. "What, are you two left behind?"

"Yes," said Mr. Hallett, shortly. "How long have they been gone?"

"More'n quarter of 'n'our," said the man; "and I say, they just was on—all of 'em. The driver o' the last one couldn't hardly hold his reins."

"What time did Messrs. Ruddle and Lister go?"

"Who?" said the man.

"The gentlemen with the waggonette."

"What, with them two gals? Oh! more'n 'n'our ago. They wasn't on."

"How can we get back to town?"

"Walk," said the man; "less you like to take a fly."

"It is very tiresome, Tony," said Mr. Hallett. "Are you a good walker?"

"Pretty well," I said. "How far is it?"

"Twelve or thirteen miles. Shall we try it?"

"Oh yes," I said. "It's a beautiful night, and we shall see plenty of moths."

"Come along, then, my boy," he cried; and away we went.

Our long rest since dinner had made me better able to manage the task; and I noticed that Mr Hallett did all he could to lighten the way by talking, and he could talk well. As, then, we trudged along the wide, firm road, he told me a little about himself and his home; and so it was that I learned that he had an invalid mother and a sister, who were dependent upon him; that his early life had been in the country, where his father had been a surgeon, and that on his father's death he had been compelled to come to London.

"To seek your fortune, Mr. Hallett?" I asked.

"Well, yes, if you like to call it so, Tony," he said, laughing. "Ah, my boy, let me give you advice that I am only too loth to take myself—don't degenerate into a dreamer."

"A dreamer, Mr. Hallett?"

"Yes, boy; one whose mind is set on what people call making a fortune—that miserable style of enthusiast, who ignores the present in his search for something that he may never find, and which, even if he does, he may never enjoy. Tony, my boy, don't heed what people say about this being a miserable world and a vale of tears; it is a very beautiful and a very glorious world with heights and mountains bright in the sunshine of truth. We all have to wander down into the valley sometimes, but there are other times when we are in the sunshine on the heights. When we are there, let's take it and enjoy it, and not sit down and grumble, and strive to climb to another mountain, close by, that seems higher and brighter than the one we are on. Take what fate sends you, my dear boy, and take it patiently. Use your strength to bear it, and—there, let's come back out of the imaginary into the real—go on setting up your pied type, and enjoy the pleasure after of having won a victory, or, in the present case, stride out manfully. Every step takes us nearer to London: and when we have got there, and have slept off our fatigue, we can laugh at our adventure. Why, we must be halfway there now. But how you limp!"

"I'm afraid it's my boot rubs my foot, sir," I said, wincing.

"Tut, tut!" he exclaimed. "This won't do. Sit down and have a rest, and let's think, Tony."

"Oh, I can go on yet, sir," I said hastily.

"No, no; sit down, my boy, sit down," he said: and I sat down upon a bank. "I can't carry you, Tony," he said kindly. "I could manage you for a couple of miles or so; I don't think I could get you right up home. We are unlucky to-night, and—there is something turning up."

"Where, sir?" I said.

"On ahead, Tony. Yonder is a roadside inn, with a couple of hay-carts. Come along, my lad, and we'll see if one of them cannot be turned into a chariot to convey us to London Town."

I limped on beside him to where the hay-carts were standing by a water-trough at the roadside, the horses tossing their nose-bags so as to get at the oats at the bottom, and the carters just coming out of the public-house.

"Can you give us a lift on to London?" said Mr. Hallett. "This boy has turned lame."

"What'll you stand?" said the man heavily.

"A couple of pints," said Mr. Hallett.

"All right; up you get," said the man. "You must lie atop o the hay. I only goes to Whitechapel, you know."

"That will do," said Mr. Hallett. And together we climbed up, and lay down, twelve or fifteen feet above the road, on the top of the sweet-scented trusses of hay; the carter cracked his whip, and away we went jolting over the road, with the stars

above us, and my couch seeming delicious to my weary limbs, as the scent seemed to bring up my sleeping-place by the hay-rick, when I ran away from Rowford and my slavery at Mr. Blakeford's house.

"That's one of the peculiarities of the true-born Briton, Tony," said Mr. Hallett, after a pause.

"What is, sir?"

"The love and reverence for beer. If I had offered that man sixpence or a shilling to give us a ride, he would have laughed me to scorn. Two pints of beer, you see, carry us right to town, and another pint would have acted like a return ticket to bring us back."

"To bring us back?" I said in drowsy accents; and, trusting to my companion to save me from a fall, I dropped into a heavy dreamless sleep, from which I was aroused by Mr. Hallett, who shook my arm and told me that we were once more in town.

CHAPTER XXII.

WILLIAM REVITTS IS ANGRY.

MR. HALLETT saw me right to the door of my lodgings before he left me, shaking hands warmly as he said "Good-night," and altered it to "Good-morning."

I was thoroughly awake now, and somewhat refreshed as I ascended the stairs very gently, having risen now to the honour of a latch-key. It was Revitts' turn for day duty, and I was unwilling to disturb him, so I had slipped off my boots, and cautiously turning the handle of the door, I entered, to find, to my surprise, a light burning, and Mr. Revitts buttoned up in his uniform and with his heavy hat upon his head.

"Oh, here you are, then," he cried roughly.

"What, not in bed!" I said.

"In bed? How was I going to bed? I was just off to the station to send word round as you was missing, and to make inquiries where the vans went from."

"Oh, Mr. Revitts! Oh, Bill, I am sorry!" I cried.

"Don't you Bill me, young man," he cried. "Now, lookye here. Was it an accident to the van as made you late?"

"No," I said; "it was——"

"There!" he cried, bringing his fist down heavily upon the table. "I won't hear another word. I won't listen to you. Those vans was doo back at ten thirty—say 'leven, and it's now two forty-five."

"Yes, Bill, but——"

"Don't Bill me," he cried; and, running to the corner of the room, he caught up a black silver-topped cane, with shabby silk tassels. "Look here," he said; "for the last hour or two I've been thinking whether, as your best friend, I oughtn't to give you a good whiting down, only you're such a man now that I can't stoop to hit the feller as I've made my friend."

"But will you listen to me, Bill?" I cried angrily.

"No, I won't," he said, throwing down the cane. "You've been up to your larks, you have, and I tell you what it is, I won't have larks."

"I haven't," I cried.

"You have, sir, so don't deny it. What am I to say to my Mary when she comes up, if she finds you going wrong? I won't have larks, so there's an end of it, d'ye hear? There, you needn't look sulky, and you won't go and lodge somewhere else. You'll stay here and I won't have no larks. I know what it means; I've seen boys begin with stopping out o' nights, and I know what sort o' chickens they turn out. Stopping out late o' nights an' larks means going to the bad; and you ain't going to the bad if I know it."

"I couldn't help it, Bill; I've been along with Mr. Hallett."

"Then I'll punch Mr. Hallett's head," he cried in a rage, as he stamped up and down the room, till some one rapped at the ceiling of the floor below. "No, I won't. I'll pay him a visit in full uniform with my bracelet on, that's what I'll do with him."

"Don't be so foolish, Bill," I cried, as in imagination I saw Mr. Revitts stalking along amongst the frames at the office, as if about to take Mr. Hallett into custody.

"Foolish?" he cried. "And look here, once for all, don't you Bill me. As for that Hallett, he's a bad 'un, that's what he is, and I'll let him know—carrying on larks with a youngster like you."

"Mr. Hallett's a gentleman," I said indignantly.

"Oh, is he?" said Revitts excitedly; "then I'd rather be a pore police constable. Why, I never so much as took you inside a public to have half-a-pint o' beer, I was so particular over your morals; and your precious gentleman takes you to dozens, and keeps you out till two forty-five. Why, you make the whole room smell o' beer."

"I don't, Bill," I cried; "it's that hay. Look here, it's sticking to my clothes."

"Then, what ha' yer been sleeping under haystacks for, when here was your own bed waiting for you? That's the way. That's the first step to being a rogue and a vagabond. Do you know, young fellow, as I could have taken you and locked you up, and had you afore the magistrates next morning, if I'd found you lying under haystacks?"

"What a dear old stupid you are, Bill," I cried, half angry, half amused: for he had talked so fast and been in such a rage, that I could not get a chance to explain.

"Am I?" he cried, just as if I had added fresh fuel to the flame. "If I am—I'm honest, so now then. That's more than your Mr. Hullett can say. But I haven't done with him yet."

"Why don't you be quiet, Bill?" I said.

"Quiet, when you get out on larks?"

"You won't let me speak."

"Let you speak! No, I won't. Here have I been worried to death about you, thinking all the chaps had got on, and that the van was upset, and all the time it was your games."

"We went strolling about the forest, Bill," I said, as I removed my stockings and bathed my sore feet, "and had to walk ever so much of the way home, and that's what made me so late."

He snatched up my boots from where I had set them, and found that they were covered with dust.

"But you said you'd been sleeping in the hay," he said stubbornly.

"Yes; on the top of a hay-cart, coming up to Whitechapel, and I went to sleep."

Revitts began rubbing his ear in a puzzled way; and then, as if seized by a bright idea, he took out his note-book and pencil.

"Now look here," he said, making believe to take down my words and shaking his pencil at me in a magisterial way. "Why should you have to walk nearly all the way home, because you went for a stroll in the woods with that there Hallett?"

This last with a contemptuous emphasis on the name of my companion.

"Why, I told you, Bill. When we got back to the inn the last van had gone."

"There; now, you're shuffling," he said. "You never said a word about the van being gone."

"Didn't I, Bill? Well, I meant to say so. Mr. Hallett thought it would be much nicer to go for a walk in the woods than to sit in that hot room where the men were drinking and smoking, so we did, only we stopped too long."

Revitts shut his pocket-book with a snap, scratched his head with the end of his pencil, wetted the point between his lips, and had another scratch; then pushed the pencil into the loop at the side, replaced the book in his breast, and buttoned it up tight, as he stood staring hard at me. Then he coughed behind his hand, rubbed his ear again, unbuttoned his coat, buttoned it up tightly, cleared his throat again, and then said:

"Well, it was circumstarntial evidence, cert'nly."

"It's too bad, Bill," I said, in an injured tone; "you had no business to doubt me."

"More I hadn't, old lad," he replied in a deprecating way. "But you know, Ant'ny, I had been a-sitting here wait-wait-waiting and thinking all sorts o' things."

"Why didn't you go to bed?"

"I'd been thinking, old lad, that being a holiday, you might be hungry, and look here."

He opened the little cupboard and took out a raised pork pie and a bottle of pale ale.

"I'd got the cloth laid and the knives and forks out ready, but I got in such a wax about one o'clock that I snatched 'em all off and cleared 'em away."

"And why did you get in a wax, Bill?" I said. "You ought to have known me better."

"So I ought, old lad," he said penitently; "but I got thinking you'd chucked me over, and was out on larks with that there Hallett; and it ain't nice to be chucked over for a chap like that, specially when you seem to belong to me. "You'll shake hands, won't you, Tony?"

"Of course I will."

"And I won't doubt you another time; let's have the pie, after all."

We did; and in a dozen ways the good fellow strove to show me his sorrow for his past doubts, picking me out the best bits of the pie, foaming up my glass with the ale, and when I expressed my fears of not being awake in time for the office, he promised to call me; and though he never owned to it, I have good reason for believing that he sat up writing out corrections in an old dictation lesson, calling me in excellent time, and having the breakfast all ready upon the table.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MR. HALLETT AT HOME.

PUNCTUAL to the appointed time, I rang the topmost of four bells on the door-post of one of the old-fashioned red-brick houses in Great Ormond Street, and a few minutes after it was opened by Mr. Hallett, whose face lit up as he offered me his hand.

"That's right, Antony!" he exclaimed; "now we'll go upstairs and see the ladies, and then you and I will have a walk till dinner-time."

I followed him up the well-worn, uncarpeted stairs to the second floor, where he introduced me to his mother, a stern, pale, careworn-looking woman in a widow's cap, half sitting, half reclining in a large easy chair.

"How do you do?" she said, wearily, as she gazed at me through her half-closed eyes. "You are Stephen's friend. I am glad to see you; but you are very young," she added in an ill-used tone.

"Not a very serious failing, mother dear," said Mr. Hallett cheerfully.

"No," said Mrs. Hallett, "no. I am sorry we have not a better place to receive him in."

"Tut—tut, dear," said Mr. Hallett. "Antony Grace comes to see us, not our rooms or our furniture."

I had already glanced round the large, old-fashioned room, which was shabbily furnished, but scrupulously clean, while everything was in good taste, and I hastened to say something about how glad I was to come.

"Yes," said Mrs. Hallett wearily; "it is very polite and nice of you to say so, but it is not the home I expected for my old age."

"My mother is——"

"You always used to call me *mamma*, Stephen," said Mrs. Hallett, with the tears in her eyes.

"Did I love you any more tenderly then, dear?" he said, bending over her and kissing her wrinkled forehead with reverent affection, and then placing his lips upon her hand.

"No, Stephen, no," she cried, bursting into a fit of sobbing; "but—but we might cling to some of our old respectability, even if you will persist in being a workman and lowering our family by wearing aprons like a common man."

"There, there, dear, don't fret," he said cheerfully. "You are in pain this morning. I am going for a walk with Antony Grace, and we'll bring you back a bunch of flowers."

"No, no, don't—pray don't, Stephen," said Mrs. Hallett querulously; "you cannot afford it, and it only puts me in mind of happier days, when we had our own garden, and I was so fond of my conservatory. You remember the camellias?"

"Yes, yes, dear," he said, passing his arm round her; "and some day you shall have your conservatory again."

"Never, Stephen—never, while you are so obstinate."

"Come, come, dear," he said, kissing her again; "let me put your pillow a little more easy, and we won't talk of the past; it cannot interest Antony Grace. Where has Linny hidden herself?"

"I suppose she is seeing after the cooking," said Mrs. Hallett querulously. "We have no servants now, Mr. Grace."

"No, Antony," said Mr. Hallett, laughing; and I could not help contrasting the man I saw before me—so bright, airy, and tender in his ways—with the stern, rather grim-looking workman of the office. "No servants; I clean my own boots and help with the cooking, too. It is inconvenient, for my dear mother here is a great invalid."

"Helpless for seventeen years, Mr. Grace," said the poor woman, looking at me piteously. "We used to have a carriage, but we have none now. Stephen is very kind to me, only he will be so thoughtless; and he is so wanting in ambition, clever as he is."

"There, dear, we won't talk about that now," said Mr. Hallett. "Come Antony; my sister will not show herself, so we'll find her blooming in flour, or carving potato rings, or handling a truncheon bigger than that of your friend Mr. Revitts as she makes the paste. Oh, here she is!"

A door opened as he spoke, and I quite started as a bright, pretty girl entered, and came forward smiling pleasantly to shake hands. She seemed to bring sunshine into the room, and, damped as I was by Mrs. Hallett's reception and the prospect of a dull, cheerless day, the coming of Miss Hallett seemed quite to change the state of affairs.

"I am very glad to see you," she said, showing her little white teeth. "Stephen has so often talked about you, and said he would bring you home."

"Ah, me, yes, home!" sighed Mrs. Hallett, glancing round the shabby apartment.

Not that it seemed shabby any longer to me, for Linny, in her tight, well-fitting, plain holland dress, white collar and cuffs, and with her long golden-brown, naturally curling hair, seemed to me to radiate brightness all around. For she certainly was very pretty, and her large, well-shaded eyes seemed to flash with animation as she spoke.

"Antony Grace and I are going for a walk, Linny, and we shall come back hungry as hunters. Don't make any mistake in the cooking."

She nodded and laughed, and her fair curls glistened in the light, while Mrs. Hallett sighed again; and it struck me that she was about to say something in disparagement of the dinner, but she did not speak.

"Come along then, Antony," said Mr. Hallett; and, after kissing the invalid, he led the way down stairs, and we strolled off towards Regent's Park.

As we left the house, the shadow seemed to come down again over Mr. Hallett's face, and from that time I noticed that he seemed to lead a double life—one in which he was bright and merry, almost playful, before his mother and sister; the other, a life of stern, fixed purpose, in which his soul was bent upon some pursuit.

He shook off his gloom, though, directly, and we had a good walk, during which he strove hard to make himself a pleasant companion, chatted to me of myself, hoped that I made use of my spare time, and read or studied in some way, promising to help me with my Latin if I would go on.

"It wants an effort, Antony," he said; "especially after a hard day's work at the office."

"Yes," I said, with a sigh; "I do feel tired of reading when I get back."

"Never mind," he said; "make an effort and do something. It is only the first start. You'll soon grow interested in what you are doing; and recollect this, my boy, learning is a treasure that no one can take away."

"Yes, my father used to say so, Mr. Hallett," I said thoughtfully, as I glanced sidewise at my companion's face as we lay on the turf close by the water.

"What an imitation of the country this is, Antony!" he said, with a sigh. "I love the country. I could live there always."

"Yes, I don't like London, Mr. Hallett," I said; "but—but do you study anything in your spare hours?"

He turned round upon me sharply, and his eyes seemed to look me through and through.

"Did my mother say anything to you?" he exclaimed. "Oh no! of course not—you were not alone. Yes, Antony, I do study something—a great deal—in my spare hours."

"Oh yes, of course. I know you do, Mr. Hallett," I cried. "I've seen you take out your pocket-book and draw and make calculations."

He looked at me again in a curious, suspicious way that set me wondering, and then, jumping up:

"Come, Antony," he cried, with a forced laugh, "it is time we were off. Linnny will be wanting to go to church, and we shall be punished if we are late for dinner."

He chatted merrily all the way back, and I had no opportunity of asking him what he studied. Dinner was waiting, and a very pleasant simple meal it was, only that Mrs. Hallett would sprinkle everything with tears. I noticed that really, as well as metaphorically, she dropped a few into her glass of beer, a few more into the gravy, of which she had the best share, soaked her bread with others, and still had a few left to drop into her portion of red-currant and raspberry tart. Nothing was nice, poor woman—nothing was comfortable; and while Linnny took her complaints with a pettish indifference, Mr. Hallett left his place from time to time, to attend to her at her little table in front of her easy chair, waiting upon her with the tenderness of a woman, smoothing back her hair, and more than once kissing her on the forehead before resuming his place.

"No, Stephen," she said, several times; "I have no appetite—nothing tempts me now."

He bent over and whispered to her, evidently in a tender, endearing way, but her tears only flowed the faster, and she shook her head despondently.

"Cheese, Stephen?" she said in her peevish way, towards the end of the repast. "You know my digestion is such that it will not bear cheese. At least," she said, "you would have known it if you had had ambition enough to follow your father's profession."

"Ah! I ought to have known better, dear," he said, smiling pleasantly; "but doctors starve in London, mother. There are too many as it is."

"Yes, of course, of course," said the poor woman tearfully; "my advice is worthless, I suppose."

"No, no, dear, it is not," said Mr. Hallett, getting up and laying his hand upon that of the invalid. "Come, let me take your plate. We'll have the things away directly, and I'll read to you till tea-time, if Antony won't mind."

"Is Linny going out this afternoon?" said Mrs. Hallett querulously.

"Yes, mamma, and I shall be late," said Linny, colouring, apparently with vexation, as she glanced at me, making me feel guilty, and the cause of her disappointment.

"We won't keep you, Linny," exclaimed Hallett; "go and get ready. Antony, you will not mind, will you? My sister likes to go to church of an afternoon; it is nicer for her than the evening."

"Oh no, I won't mind," I said eagerly.

"All right, then: be off, Linny. Antony and I will soon clear away the pie—eh, Antony?"

I laughed and coloured at this *double entendre*, which Mrs. Hallett did not comprehend, for as Linny with a grateful look hurried out of the room, the invalid exclaimed fretfully:

"I wish you would say *tart*, Stephen, my son. If you will persist in working as a mechanic, and wasting your time in fruitless schemes——"

"Hush, mother!" said Mr. Hallett, with an uneasy glance at me.

"Yes, my son; but I cannot bear you to forget all our old genteel ways. We may be poor, but we can still be respectable."

"Yes, yes; of course, dear," said Mr. Hallett hastily, as he saw that his mother was about to shed tears. "Come, Antony, let's be waiters."

I jumped up to assist him, just as Linny, looking very rosy and pretty in her bonnet and jacket, hurried out of a side room, and kissing her mother, and nodding to us, hastened downstairs.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Hallett, with another sigh, "we ought not to be reduced to that."

"To what, dear?" said Mr. Hallett, as he busily removed the dinner things.

"Letting that young and innocent girl go about the streets alone without a protector, offering herself as a prey to every designing wretch who casts his eyes upon her fresh, fair face."

"My dear mother," said Mr. Hallett, laughing, "London is not quite such a sink of iniquity as you suppose, and you have tutored Linny too well for there to be any occasion for fear. There, come, lean back and rest till we have done, and then I will read you one of your favourites."

Mrs. Hallett allowed herself to be gently pressed back in her seat, and lay there still complaining that a son of hers should have to stoop, and also ask his visitor to stoop, to such a degrading toil.

"Oh, Antony doesn't mind, dear," he said cheerfully. "We do worse things than this at the office—eh, Antony?"

"That we do, Mr. Hallett," I cried, laughing.

"Yes," said Mrs. Hallett, "at the office. Ah, well, I suppose it is of no use to complain."

She complained all the same, at everything, while Mr. Hallett bore it with a most patient manner that set me wondering. He was never once irritable, but took every murmur in a quiet, resigned way, evidently excusing it on the score of his mother's sufferings.

Then he got out a book to read to her, but it would not do. Then another and another one, supposed to be her favourite authors: but nothing would do but Dodd's "Thoughts in Prison," and the reading of this cheerful volume went on till Linny came back, as I noticed, looking hot and flushed, as if she had been hurrying; and she glanced, as I thought, suspiciously at me, her brother not raising his eyes from his reading.

Then followed tea, and a walk with Mr. Hallett, and after that supper, when he walked part of the way home with me.

"Good-night, Antony," he said. "I hope you have not found your visit too gloomy an one to care to come again."

"Will you ask me again?" I said eagerly.

"To be sure. My poor mother is a little fretful, as you saw; but she has been an invalid now these seventeen years, and she misses some of the comforts of the past. Good-night, my boy."

"Good-night, Mr. Hallett;" and we parted—he to walk slowly away, bent of head and serious, and I to begin thinking of his unwearying patience and devotion to his invalid mother: after which I recalled a great deal about Linny Hallett, and how pretty and petulant she seemed, wondering at the same time that neither mother nor brother took any notice of her flushed and excited look as she came in from church.

"Hullo! got back, then?" said Mr. Revitts, rather grumpily, as I entered the room. "Had a pleasant day?"

"Oh yes, Bill, very!" I exclaimed.

"Oh yes! It's all very fine, though, and it'll be all Hallett soon. But you have got back in decent time. Well, I'm tired, and I'm off to bed."

An example I followed directly after.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LINNY'S SECRET.

My visit to Great Ormond Street was the first of many. In a short time the office labours with Mr. Jabez Rowle were merely the mechanical rounds of the day; and, like Stephen Hallett, I seemed to live only for the evening, when I took my Latin exercises and translations to him, he coming down from the attic, where he worked at some project of his own, concerning which poor murmuring Mrs. Hallett and her daughter were forbidden to speak, and then returning, after making the corrections.

I felt a good deal of curiosity about that attic, but Mr. Hallett had told me to wait, and I waited patiently, having, young as I was, learned to school myself to some extent, and devoted myself to my studies, one thought being always before my mind, namely, that I had to pay Mr. Blakeford all my father's debt, for that I meant to do.

I had grown so much at home now at the Halletts', that, finding the door open one evening, I walked straight up, knocked twice, and, receiving no answer, tried the door, which yielded to my touch, swung open, and I surprised Linny writing a letter, which, with a flaming face, she shuffled under the blotting-paper, and held up a warning finger, for Mrs. Hallett was fast asleep.

"Where's Mr. Hallett?" I said.

"In Bluebeard's chamber," cried Linny playfully; "I'll go and tell him you are here."

I nodded, thinking how pretty she looked with her flushed cheeks, and she went softly to the door, but only to come back quickly.

"Antony, dear," she whispered, laying her hand on my shoulder, "you like me, don't you?"

"Of course I do," I replied.

"Did you see what I was doing?" she continued, busily readjusting my neckerchief, and then looking me full in the face.

"Yes; you were writing a letter."

She nodded.

"Don't tell Stephen," she whispered.

"I was not going to."

"He would want to know who I was writing to, and ask me such a lot of questions. You won't tell him, will you?"

"No," I said, "not unless he asks me, and then I must."

"Oh, he won't ask you," she said merrily; "no fear. Now I'll go and tell him."

I sat down, wondering why she should want to keep things from her brother, and then watched Mrs. Hallett, and lastly began

thinking about the room upstairs—Old Bluebeard's chamber, as Linny playfully called it—and tried to puzzle out what Stephen Hallett was making. That it was something to improve his position I was sure, and I had often thought of what hard work it must be, with so little time at his disposal, and Mrs. Hallett so dead set against what she openly declared to be a folly, and miserable waste of money.

My musings were brought to an end by the reappearance of Linny, who came down holding her pretty little white hand to me.

"There, sir," she said, "you may kiss my hand; and mind, you and I have a secret between us, and you are not to tell."

I kissed her hand, and she nodded playfully.

"Now, sir, Bluebeard's chamber is open to you, and you may go up."

"Go? Upstairs?"

"Yes, sir," she said, stroking her pretty curls; "the ogre said you were to go up."

"Are you—sure?" I said.

"Sure? Of course. There, go along, or you'll wake mamma."

I went softly upstairs, with my heart beating with excitement, turning my head, though, as I closed the door, and seeing Linny drawing her letter hastily from under the blotting-paper.

It was before the shabby door of a sloping-roofed back attic that I paused for a moment to knock, Stephen Hallett's clear, calm voice uttering a loud "Come in," and I entered to find him seated before a large old deal kitchen table, upon which were strewed various tools, pieces of iron and brass, old clock-wheels, and spindles. At one end was fitted a vice, and at the other end what seemed to be the model of some machine—or rather, a long, flat set of clock-works, upon which Hallett was evidently engaged.

"Well, Antony," he said, looking up at me in a weary, disappointed way; "glad to see you, my boy."

"Why, you are busy," I exclaimed, looking with all a boy's curiosity at the model, or whatever it was before me.

"Yes," he said, "I generally am. Well," he added, after a pause, as he seemed to derive rest and amusement from my curiosity, "what do you think of my sweetheart?"

"Your sweetheart?"

"Yes, my sweetheart, of which poor mother is so jealous. There she is."

"I—I don't understand you," I said.

"Well, the object of my worship—the thing on which I lavish so much time, thought, and money."

"Is—is that it?" I said.

"That's it," he replied, enjoying my puzzled looks. "What do you think of it?"

I was silent for a few moments, gazing intently at the piece of mechanism before I said:

"I don't know."

"Look here, Antony," he said, rising and sweeping away some files and pieces of brass before seating himself upon the edge of the table: "do you know why we are friends?"

"No, but you have been very kind to me."

"Have I?" he said. "Well, I have enjoyed it if I have. Antony, you are a gentleman's son."

I nodded.

"And you know the meaning of the word honour?"

"I hope so."

"You do, Antony: and it has given me great pleasure to find that, without assuming any fine airs, you have settled down steadily to your work amongst rough boys and ignorant prejudice men without losing any of the teachings of your early life."

I looked at him, wondering what he was about to say.

"Now look here, Antony, my boy," he continued; "I am going to put implicit faith in your honour, merely warning you that if you talk about what you have seen here you may do me a very serious injury. You understand?"

"Oh yes, Mr. Hallett," I cried; "you may depend upon me."

"I do, Antony," he said; "so let's have no more of that formal 'Mr.' Let it be plain 'yes' and 'no;' and now, mind this, I am going to open out before you my secret. Henceforth it will be our secret. Is it to be so?"

"Yes—oh yes!" I exclaimed, flushing with pride that a man to whom I had looked up should have so much confidence in me.

"That's settled, then," he said, shaking hands with me. "And now, Antony, once more, what do you think of my model?"

I had a good look at the contrivance as it stood upon the table, while Hallett watched me curiously, and with no little interest.

"It's a puzzle," I said at last.

"Do you give it up?"

"No; not yet," I said, leaning my elbows on the table. "Wheels, a brass table, a roller. Why, it looks something like a mangle."

I looked at him, and he nodded.

"But you wouldn't try to make a mangle," I said. "It might do to grind things in. May I move it?"

"No; it is out of gear. Well, do you give it up?"

He rose as he spoke, and opened the attic window to let in the pleasant, cool night air, and then leaned against the sloping ceiling gazing back at me.

"I know what it would do for," I said eagerly, as the idea came to me like a flash.

"What?"

"Why, it is—it is," I cried, clapping my hands, as he leaned towards me; "it's a printing machine."

"You're right, Antony," he said; "quite right. It is the model of a printing machine."

"Yes," I said, with all a boy's excitement; "and it's to do quickly what the men do now so slowly in the presses, sheet by sheet."

"Yes, and in the present machines," he said. "Have you noticed how the machines work?"

"Oh, yes!" I said; "often. The type runs backwards and forwards, and the paper is laid on by boys and is drawn round the big roller and comes out printed."

"Exactly," he said. "Well, Antony, you have seen the men working at the presses?"

"Yes."

"It is hard work, and they print about two hundred or two hundred and fifty sheets an hour, do they not?"

"Yes; I believe so."

"And the great clumsy machines print six or seven hundred an hour. Some a thousand."

"And will your machine do more?" I asked.

"Antony," he cried, catching my arm in his—and his face lit up as we stood by that attic window—"if my machine succeeds it will be the greatest invention of the age. Look, boy; do you see what I mean to do?"

"N—no," I said; "not yet."

"No; of course not," he cried. "It has been the work of years to think it out, and you cannot grasp it yet. It has grown month by month, my boy, till it has assumed so great a magnitude that I shrink at times, half crushed by my own offspring. There seems to be too much—that I attempt to climb too high—and when I give up almost in despair it lures me on—beckons me in my dreams, and points to the success that might be achieved."

I looked at him wonderingly; he seemed to be so transformed.

"I began with quite a small idea, Antony," he continued. "I will show you. My idea was this. You see now, my boy, that with the present machine the type is laid on a table, and it goes backwards and forwards under a great iron cylinder or roller, grinding continually, and being worn out."

"Yes, I know; the type gets thick and blurred in its fine up-strokes."

"Exactly," he said, smiling. "Well, Antony, I tried to invent a simple process of making a mould or seal, when the type was ready, and then —"

"Making a solid block of fresh type in the big mould. I know," I cried.

"Right, my boy, right," he cried; "and I have done it!"

"But does it want a machine like that?"

"Oh no," he replied: "that grew out of the idea. I was not satisfied then with my solid block of type, which might be used and then melted down again. It struck me, Antony, that it would be better if I made that solid block curved, so as to fit on a big cylinder, and let it go round instead of the paper. I could then print twice as many."

"Ye—es," I said, "but I hardly see it."

"I will show you presently, my boy," he replied. "Well, I worked at that idea till I felt satisfied that I could carry it out, when a greater idea came."

He paused and wiped his forehead, gazing now, though, out at the starry night, and speaking in a low earnest voice.

"It seemed to me then, Antony, that I ought to do away with the simple, clumsy plan of making men or boys supply or lay-on paper, sheet by sheet, as the machine was at work."

"What could you do?" I said.

"Ah, that was the question. I was thinking it over, when going through St. Paul's Churchyard I saw in one of the draper's shops a basket of rolls of ribbon, and the thing was done."

"How?" I asked.

"By having the paper in a long roll, a thousand yards upon a reel, to be cut off sheet by sheet as it is printed between the cylinders."

"But could you get paper made so long?"

"To be sure," he said: "the paper-mills make it in long strips that are cut up in sheets as they are finished. In my machine they would be cut up only when printed. Now, what do you say?"

"It's like trying to read Greek the first time, Mr. Hallett," I said. "My head feels all in a muddle."

"Out of which the light will come in time, my boy. But suppose I could make such a machine, Antony, what would you say then?"

"It would be grand!" I exclaimed.

"It would make a revolution in printing," he cried enthusiastically. "Well, will you help me, Antony?" he said, with a smile.

"Help you! May I?"

"Of course. I shall be glad; only, remember, it is our secret."

"You may trust me," I said. "But it must be patented."

"To be sure. All in good time."

"It will make your fortune."

"I hope so," he said dreamily. "For others' sake more than mine."

"Yes," I cried: "and then you could have a nice place and a carriage for Mrs. Hallett, and it would make her so much happier."

"Yes," he said, with a sigh.

"And you could be a gentleman again."

He started, and a curious look came over his face; but it passed away directly, and I saw him shake his head before turning to me with a smile.

"Antony," he said quietly, "suppose we build the machine, the castles in the air will build themselves. I tell you what; you shall work sometimes and help me to plan; but, as a rule, while I file and grind you shall read some Latin or German author, and you and I can improve ourselves as we go."

"Agreed!" I cried, and then the rest of the night was spent—a very short night, by the way—in examining the various parts of the little model, Hallett seeming to give himself fresh ideas for improvements as he explained the reason for each wheel and spindle, and told me of the difficulties he had to contend with for want of proper tools and the engineer's skill.

"I want a lathe, Antony," he said; "and a good lathe costs many pounds, so I have to botch and patch, and buy clock-wheels and file them down. It takes me a whole evening sometimes wandering about Clerkenwell or the New Cut hunting for what I want."

"But I can often help you in that way," I said, "and I will."

We went down soon after to a late supper, Hallett jealously locking up his attic before we descended. Mrs. Hallett had gone to bed and Linny was reading, and jumped up as if startled at our entrance.

Hallett spoke to her as we sat down to supper, and I noticed that he seemed to be cold and stern towards her, while Linny was excited and pettish, seeming to resent her brother's ways, and talked to me in a light, pleasant, bantering manner about Bluebeard's secret chamber.

I noticed, too, that she always avoided her brother's eye, and when we parted that night Hallett seemed a good deal troubled, though he did not tell me why.

CHAPTER XXV.

SEVEN-AND-A-HALF AND A BONUS.

It was the common talk at the office that Mr. Lister was going to be married soon to the rich Miss Carr; and one day, when I was busily reading to Mr. Jabez Rowle—who, snuff-box before him, kept drawing in his breath, hissing viciously, and sometimes smacking his lips as he dug his pen into some blunder in the slips before him—Mr. Grimstone came bustling in, with his spectacles shining as much as his bald head, his scanty hair standing straight up, and, what was very rarely the case, a smile upon his face.

"Well, Rowle," he said, rubbing his hands, "how is it this morning?"

"Foul—foul—foul," said Mr. Jabez, with a dab at a stop he had missed before. "Those fellows of yours make more literal every day."

"I'm always telling them of it, Rowle, always," said Mr. Grimstone, nodding his head sharply. "How does this boy get on?"

"Fairly—fairly," said Mr. Rowle, screwing himself round upon his stool, and gazing full in the overseer's face. "Now, then, Grimstone, what is it?—what's on the cards?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing. I only looked in. Give me a pinch!"

Mr. Rowle handed his little brown box, and Mr. Grimstone refreshed himself with a pinch before handing back the snuff to Mr. Rowle, who also took a pinch loudly, and with a defiant flourish, while I took up a slip and a pen, and began to practise reading, and correcting, a thing Mr. Rowle always encouraged.

Grimstone had evidently come in for a gossip, business being rather slack, following a good deal of night-work and the finish of an important order; and after another pinch and an allusion to the political topic of the day, they seemed to forget my presence and went on talking.

"When's the happy day to be?" said Mr. Grimstone.

"What, Lister's? Oh, I don't know: soon, I suppose. Seen her?"

"Yes, twice," said Mr. Grimstone, giving his lips a smack: "beautiful!"

"So I hear," said Mr. Jabez Rowle; "plenty of money too, I suppose."

"£50,000, and more to come. I never had such luck."

"I never wanted it," said Mr. Jabez Rowle with a growl. "I don't know why a man should want to tie himself up to a woman."

"Not with £50,000 and more to come, eh?" said Mr. Grimstone waggishly.

"Might have tempted me twenty years ago," growled Mr. Jabez; "it wouldn't now."

"S'pose not. You're too warm, Rowle—much too warm. I say, though," he continued, lowering his voice, but quite ignoring me, "is a certain person safe?"

"A certain person?"

"Yes, you know. Suppose, for instance, he quietly asked you to let him have £500 for a few months at seven-and-a-half and a bonus, would you, always considering that he soon touches £50,000 and more to come, would you let him have it?"

Mr. Jabez took a pinch of snuff curiously, shut the box with a loud snap, and, evidently completely thrown of his guard, exclaimed:

"Hang him for a fool! Curse me if ever I do so again."

"What do you mean?" said Mr. Grimstone, ruffling up. "Do you mean to say I'm a fool?"

"No, no: he is, to go and blab."

"Blab?"

"Yes, to let it out to you."

"I say! What do you mean?" said Mr. Grimstone again.

"Mean? Why, you as good as said he told you I had let him have £500 at seven-and-a-half and a bonus. Lent on the strength of his going to marry a woman with £50,000 and more to come."

"I didn't."

"You did."

"Whew!" whistled Mr. Grimstone, snatching the snuff-box out of Mr. Jabez Rowle's hand, taking a vigorous pinch, and scattering so much of the fine brown dust in the air that I should have had a violent fit of sneezing if I had not become hardened to its effects.

The two stared at one another for a minute, and Mr. Jabez now snatched the box back and took a hearty pinch, some of which went on to his shirt-front and some upon his sleeve.

"Why, you don't mean to say that he has borrowed £500 of you?" said Mr. Grimstone, in a whisper.

"But I do mean to say it," replied Mr. Jabez. "How came he to tell you? I never told a soul."

"He didn't tell me," said Mr. Grimstone thoughtfully.

"Then who did?"

"No one."

"Then how came you to know?" said Mr. Jabez, passing his box. "Why, you don't mean to say he has been to you for five hundred?"

Mr. Grimstone nodded.

"And offered you seven-and-a-half, and a bonus of thirty pounds?"

Mr. Grimstone nodded again, and this time it was Mr. Jabez Rowle's turn to whistle.

"He wanted it done quietly, and I, after a bit, agreed to do it. But though we ain't friends over business matters, Jabez Rowle, I know you to be a man of strong common-sense and integrity, and I thought you would give me a good bit of advice. But this seems to alter the case. Would you lend it?"

"Humph! Two five hundreds are not much out of fifty thousand," said Mr. Jabez; "but what does he want the money for? 'Tain't for the business."

"No," said Mr. Grimstone, "because he said he didn't want Mr. Ruddle to know. I say, what would you do? I shouldn't like to offend Lister."

"Do? Well, I've lent the money," said Mr. Jabez, taking a savage pinch.

"And would you do the same if you were me?" replied Mr. Grimstone. "It's a lot of money; years of savings, you know, and——"

He made some kind of gesticulation, and I fancy he pointed with his thumb over his shoulder at me.

"Look here, Grace," said Mr. Rowle, "go downstairs and ask Mr. Ruddle to send me up Mr. Hendry's letter about his book."

I got down off my stool, and left them together in the glass-case, going straight down to the office, where, in place of Mr. Ruddle, I found Mr. Lister, and told him my business.

"I don't know where it is," he replied. "Leave it till Mr. Ruddle comes in. But look here, Grace, I wanted you. Miss Carr was asking how you got on. Take this note there—you know where she lives—and give it to her herself. But before you go up there take this note to Norfolk Street, Strand. No answer."

He took four written slips of stamped blue paper from his pocket, and I saw him write across them, blot them hastily, and refold and place them in a letter, which he carefully sealed. After which, I noticed that he tore off and destroyed the piece of blotting-paper that he had used. I thought no more of it then, but it came up in connection with matters that afterwards occurred.

I hurried upstairs, and told Mr. Jabez Rowle that Mr. Lister wanted me to go out, Mr. Grimstone being still in close conference with him in the glass case.

"Where are you going, boy?" said the latter.

"To Miss Carr's with a note, sir," I said; and the two old men exchanged glances of intelligence.

"All right, Grace," said Mr. Jabez, nodding; "we're not busy. You can go."

I hurried away, thinking no more of them or their conversation; but I was obliged to go into the composing-room below, to hurry up to Mr. Hallett's frame, where, stern-looking and half-repellent, he was rapidly setting a piece of manuscript.

"I'm going to Miss Carr's," I whispered, while my face glowed with pleasure.

"Indeed!" he said, starting; and my bright face might have been reflected in his, such a change passed over his speaking countenance.

"I've to take a note from Mr. Lister and to wait for an answer," I said; and I felt startled at the rapid change as he heard these last words. "Are you ill?" I cried anxiously.

"No—no," he said hastily, and his voice sounded hard and harsh. "Go away now. I am very much pressed for time."

I left him, wondering, for I could not read him then, and

bounding down the stairs, I was soon in Fleet Street, and soon after in Norfolk Street, Strand.

I quickly found the number and the door, with a large brass plate thereon bearing the name "Brandsheim," and in small letters in the corner "Ground Floor."

A boy clerk answered my knock, and I was told to sit down in an outer office while the clerk went in with the note and to see if Mr. Brandsheim was at home.

Mr. Brandsheim was at home, and I was ushered into his presence, to find him a dark, yellow-looking man with a wrinkled face and very keen eyes. He quite startled me for the moment, for, though not in personal appearance in the slightest degree resembling Mr. Blakeford, there was a something about him that suggested that worthy and his ways.

He was dressed in the first style of fashion, a little exaggerated. He might have been a slave of the great Plutus himself, for round his neck and lashing his chest was a thick gold chain; diamond rings were on the fingers of each hand; a great opal and diamond pin was in his black satin stock; at his wrists were jewelled sleeve-links that glistened and sparkled when he moved. There was nothing sordid about him, for he sat in an easy-chair at a polished secretary; there was a Turkey carpet beneath his feet, and the furniture of the room was massive and good; but, all the same, I had no sooner entered the place than I began to think of Mr. Blakeford and Mr. Wooster, and I involuntarily wondered whether this man could be in any way connected with my late employer, and whether I had unconsciously walked into a trap.

As my eyes wandered about the room in search of tin boxes containing different people's affairs, of dusty parchments and sale bills, I felt better; for they were all absent. In their place were large oil pictures against the walls, hung, and leaning back, resting on the floor. On a sideboard was a row of little stoppered bottles with labels hanging from their necks in a jaunty fashion, and in the bottles were richly tinted liquids—topaz, ruby, purple, and gold. They might have been medicines, but they looked like wines, and I felt sure they were, as I saw piled upon the floor some dozens of cigar-boxes.

Mr. Brandsheim might have been a picture dealer, a wine merchant, or an importer of cigars, for in those days I had yet to learn that he was a bill-discounter who contrived that his clients should have so much in cash for an acceptance, and the rest in old masters, Whitechapel Havanas, and Hambro-Spanish wines.

Mr. Brandsheim's words somewhat reassured me, as he nodded pleasantly to me and smiled.

"Sit down, my man," he said; "sit down, and I'll soon be ready for you. Let me see—let me see."

He busied himself behind his secretary, rustling papers and

making notes, and now a~~nd~~ then looking at me and tapping his teeth with a heavy gold pencil-case, while I furtively watched him and wondered how he managed to make his jet black hair so shiny, and why it was he spoke as if he had been poking cotton-wool up his nose, till it suddenly occurred to me that he must be a German.

"Ah!" he said, at last; "let me see—let me see—let me see—see—see. Mr. Lister quite well?"

"Yes, sir; quite well, thank you."

"That's right. Let me see—let me—how's business?"

"Oh! we've been very busy, sir. The men have often had to stop up all night to get things finished."

"Have they really, though?" he said, nodding and smiling; "and did you stay up, too?"

"No, sir; I read for Mr. Jabez Rowle, and he said he wouldn't sit up all night and upset himself for anybody."

"Mr. Jabez Rowle is quite right, my lad."

"He said, sir, his work was so particular that after he had been correcting for twelve hours his eyes and mind were exhausted, and he could not do his work properly."

"Mr. Jabez Rowle is a man of business, my lad, evidently. And Mr. Lister, is he pretty busy?"

"I think he comes to the office every day."

"Have a glass of wine, my lad," he said, getting up and taking a decanter, glass, and a dish of biscuits from a cellaret. "No? Good sherry won't hurt you. Take some biscuits, then."

I took some of the sweet biscuits, and Mr. Brandsheim nodded approval.

"I won't keep you long," he said; "but I must compare these papers. You are not going anywhere else, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir; I am going up to Westmouth Street, Cavendish Square."

"Indeed! Hah! that's a good walk for you; or, no, I suppose Mr. Lister told you to take a cab?"

"No, sir," I said colouring; "I am going to walk."

"Oh, absurd! Too far. Lawrence," he cried, after touching a bell, and the boy clerk appeared, "have a cab to the door in ten minutes."

"Yes, sir."

"That will pay for the cab, my lad," continued Mr. Brandsheim, slipping a couple of shillings into my hand. "I must keep you waiting a little while. Let me see—let me see—you didn't go to the races, I suppose?"

"Oh no, sir."

"Mr. Ruddle and Mr. Lister did, eh?"

"Mr. Lister did, sir, I believe. Mr. Ruddle never goes, I think."

"Doesn't he, though? How strange! I always go. Let me see—five hundred and sixty-six is—is—— So Mr. Lister's going to be married, eh?"

"Yes, sir, I believe so."

"That's right. Everybody should marry when the time comes. You will some day. I hope the lady's young and rich."

"She's beautiful, sir," I said, with animation, feeling sorry, though, the next moment, for I did not like the idea of this man being so interested in her.

"Is she, though?" he said insidiously. "But you've not seen her."

"Oh yes, sir, more than once."

"Have you, though? Well, you are favoured. Let me see," he continued, consulting a little thick book which he took from a drawer. "Seven hundred and fifty and two hundred and—er—er—oh, to be sure, yes; I think I heard who it was to be. Beautiful Miss Wilson, the doctor's daughter. Let's see, she's very poor, though."

I did not want to say more, but he seemed to lead me on, and get answers from me in an insidious way that I could not combat: and in spite of myself I said:

"No, sir, it is Miss Carr; and she is very rich."

"You don't say so!" he exclaimed, staring at me in surprise.

"You don't mean the Carrs of Westmouth Street?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I am surprised," he exclaimed. "Lister's a lucky dog. Why, I see, you dog!" he said, in a bantering way, "you carry the love-letters backwards and forwards."

"Oh no, sir, I——"

"Hush, hush, hush! Not a word. I won't listen to you. Don't betray your master's secrets, my lad. You're a confidential messenger, and must clap a seal upon your lips."

"But, sir, I——"

"No, no. How much?" he said, with mock severity. "Don't speak, don't interrupt me; I'm reckoning up. Let me see—let me see—ha! that's it exactly. There we are!" he continued, fastening down a note and banding it to me. "Run along, my young Mercury, and if I were you I should make cabby drive me to Oxford Street for a shilling, and save the other. That's the way to grow rich. Off you go. Take care of this."

He thrust a letter into my hands, and almost pushed me out of the room, so that I had not time to speak; and before I had quite recovered from my confusion, I was in the cab, and heard the boy clerk say:

"Put him down at Oxford Circus."

Then the wheels began to rattle, and the door to jangle, and I felt angry with myself for saying so much about Mr.

Lister and Miss Carr, as I recalled William Revitts' advice, often given, to "let other people talk while you make notes."

The thought of where I was going soon drove my interview with Mr. Brandsheim out of my head, and getting out of the cab at the Circus, I made the best of my way to the great imposing house in Westmouth Street, rang, and asked to see Miss Carr.

The man-servant looked at me rather dubiously, and asked my name. Then, bidding me sit down in the great sombre-looking hall, he went up the heavy staircase, and came back to bid me follow him.

I noticed as I went upstairs that the place was heavily but handsomely furnished. There were pictures on the walls of staircase and landing, and the stone steps were covered with a rich thick carpet. The wealthy look of the place, however, did not seem to abash me, for the atmosphere of refinement in which I found myself recalled old days: and the thoughts of the past seemed strengthened, as I was ushered into a prettily furnished little drawing-room, all bright with flowers, water-colour drawings, and books, from a table strewn with which latter Miss Carr arose to welcome me.

And again the feeling was strengthened at her first words:

"Ah, Antony!"

For the printing-office, Mr. Revitts' shabby room, Hallett's attic, my own downfall, were forgotten, and, bright and eager, I half ran to meet her, and caught her extended hand.

Her sad face brightened as she saw the eager pleasure in my eyes, and retaining my hand, she led me to a couch and seated herself by my side.

"Then you had not forgotten me?" she said.

"Forgotten you!" I cried reproachfully, "I have been so long—ing to see you again."

"Then why did you not come?"

"Come!" I said, with the recollection of my present state flashing back; and my heart sank as I replied, "I did not dare; I am so different now. But I have a note for you, Miss Carr."

I took Mr. Lister's note from my pocket, and gave it to her, noticing at the time that she took it and laid it quietly down, in place of opening it eagerly.

"I shall always be glad to see you, Antony, that is, so long as you prove to me that you have not been unworthy of my recommendation."

"I will always try," I cried eagerly.

"I feel sure you will," she said. "Mr. Ruddle tells me you are rising fast."

I coloured with pleasure, and then reddened more deeply as I saw that she noticed me, and smiled.

"But now, come, tell me of yourself—what you do and how

you get on ;” and by degrees, almost without questioning, I told her all my proceedings. For somehow, it seemed the highest delight to me to be once more in the society of a refined lady. Her looks, her touch, the very scent emanating from her dress and the flowers, seemed so to bring back the old days that I felt as if I were once more at home, chatting away to my mother. And so the time slipped by till I imperceptibly found myself telling Miss Carr all about my old pursuits—our life at home and my favourite books, she being a willing listener, when, suddenly, a clear, silvery-toned clock began to strike and dissolved the spell. The old drawing-room, the lawn beyond the French window, the scent of the flowers, seemed to pass away to give place to the great printing-office and my daily work, and with a choking sensation in my throat, I remembered what I was—the messenger who had forgotten his errand, and I started to my feet.

“Why, Antony !” exclaimed Miss Carr, “what is it ?”

“I had forgotten,” I said piteously ; “I brought you a note ; Mr. Lister will be angry if I do not take back the answer.”

The aspect of Miss Carr’s face seemed to change from a look of anxious wonder to one of sternness. There was a slight contraction of the handsome brow, and her voice was a little changed, as she said quietly—

“Sit down again, Antony ; both you and I much to say yet.”

“But—the letter, ma’am ?” I faltered.

“The letter can wait,” she replied. Then, smiling brightly as she took my hand once more, “You cannot take back the answer till I write it ; and come, I am alone to-day ; my sister is away upon a visit ; you shall stay to lunch and dinner with me, and we’ll read and talk till we are tired.”

“Oh !” I ejaculated.

“Do you not wish to stay ?” she said smiling.

I could not speak, for the old childish weakness that I had of late nearly mastered was almost conqueror again. It did get the better of my voice, but I involuntarily raised her soft white hand to my lips, and held it there for a few moments ; while her eyes, even as they smiled upon me, seemed half-suffused with tears.

“I will write to Mr. Lister presently,” she said at last, “and tell him I detained you here. That will, I am sure, be quite sufficient ; so, Antony, you are my visitor for the rest of the day. And now tell me more about yourself.”

I could not speak just then, but sat thinking, Miss Carr watching me the while ; but we were soon chatting away pleasantly till the servant came and announced lunch.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SUNSHINE.

As we went down into the handsome dining-room I seemed to be in a dream, in the midst of which I heard Miss Carr's voice telling the servant he need not wait; and as the door closed she laid her hand upon my shoulder and led me to the front of a large picture of a very beautiful woman, standing with her arm resting upon the shoulder of a grey-haired massive-looking man, not handsome, but with a countenance full of intelligence and force.

We stood silently before them for a few moments, and then Miss Carr spoke:

"Can you tell who those are, Antony?" she said.

"Your papa and mamma," I said, looking from the picture to her face.

"My dear father and mother, Antony," she said, in a low, sweet voice; and her lips moved afterwards while she stood gazing up at them, as if saying something to herself.

I remember feeling well satisfied that I had on my best clothes that morning. I had reluctantly taken to them, but my others had grown so bad that I had been obliged. Then, too, there was a feeling of gratification that my hands were clean, and not stained and marked with ink. I remember feeling that as I took up the snowy table-napkin. All the rest was so dreamy and strange, only that I felt quite at home, and troubled by no sense of awkwardness. Moreover, Miss Carr's behaviour towards me, as she intently watched my every action, became more and more warm, till it seemed to me as if I were in the society of some very dear sister; and a couple of hours later I felt as if we had known each other all our lives.

Upstairs once more she played to me, and smiled with pleasure as I picked out my favourite old pieces from the various operas; and at last she swung herself round upon the music-stool, and rose to draw my arm through hers, walking me thoughtfully up and down the room.

"What should you like to be, Antony?" she said half-playfully, "a soldier?"

"There's something very grand about being a soldier," I said thoughtfully, "when he fights to save his country; but no, I'm afraid I should be a coward."

"A sailor, then?"

"No, Miss Carr," I said, shaking my head. "I should either like to be a barrister or a doctor. I think I should like to be a doctor. No, I should like to be an engineer, and help Mr. Hallett with his——"

I stopped short and coloured, for I felt that I had nearly betrayed my friend.

"Well?" she said in a strange, hesitating way, "Mr. Hallett's what?"

"Please don't think me ungrateful, Miss Carr," I said, "but I cannot tell you. Mr. Hallett trusted to me the secret of what he is making, and I cannot say more. Yes, I may say that he is busy over a great invention."

I fancied she drew her breath as if it caught and gave her pain, but her face was like marble as she went on.

"Antony, you are quite right," she said; "and if I had ever had any doubts about your being a gentleman's son, these words would have removed it. So you would like to be an engineer?"

"Yes," I said, "very much."

She continued walking up and down the room, and then went on:

"You lodge, you say, with a Mr. Revitts, a policeman. Is he respectable and nice?"

"He's the dearest, best old fellow in the world!" I said with animation.

"Old?"

"No, no," I said, laughing. "I meant good and kind by old."

"Oh," she said, laughing. "But tell me, Antony; is he particular with you?"

"Oh yes; he quite watches me, to make sure what I do, and where I go."

"Would you like to go to different and better lodgings?"

"Oh no," I said. "He is going to be married soon to Mary, who was so good to me at Mr. Blakeford's, and they would be so disappointed if I left."

"He watches over you, you say?"

"Yes, Miss Carr. He was very angry that night when I stopped out late with Mr. Hallett, when we had to walk part of the way back."

"And—and this Mr. Hallett, is—is he a proper companion for such a boy as you?"

"Mr. Hallett is a gentleman, although he is now only a common workman," I said proudly.

"But a youth like you would be easily deceived."

"Oh no!" I cried: "don't think that, Miss Carr. I would not give up Mr. Hallett for anything. You don't know him," I said almost indignantly. "Why, when his father died, he, poor fellow, had to leave college, and give up all his prospects to gain a living anyhow, to keep his poor sick mother and his sister."

"He has a sister?"

"Yes: so very pretty: Linnny Hallett. I go there, and read Latin and German with Mr. Hallett, while he works at his—his

great invention. Oh, Miss Carr, if you could see him, so good and tender to his invalid complaining mother, you would say I ought to be only too proud of my friend!"

She was pressing my hand as she hastened her steps up and down the room. Then, loosing my hand suddenly, she walked quickly to the window, and threw it open, to stand there for a few minutes gazing out.

"The room was too warm, Antony," she said in a quiet, composed way; and her pleasant smile was back upon her face as she returned to me. "Why, we were quite racing up and down the room. So you read German, do you? Come, you shall read a bit of Goethe to me."

"I'm afraid——"

"That you are not perfect, Antony?" she said, laughing in a bright, eager way. "Neither am I. We will both try and improve ourselves. Have you well mastered the old, crabby characters?"

"Oh yes," I said, laughing. "My mother taught me them when I was very young."

"Why, Antony," she cried, snatching the book from my hands at the end of half an hour; "you ought to be my master. But come, it is nearly dinner-time, and we must dress."

"Dress?" I said, falling down from the seventh heaven to the level of Caroline Street, Pentonville, and bouncing back to the second floor.

"Well," she said, smiling; "you would like to wash your hands."

The rest of that evening was still more dreamlike than the day. I dined with Miss Carr, and afterwards she encouraged me to go on talking about myself, and present and past life. I amused her greatly about Revitts, and his efforts to improve his spelling; and she smiled and looked pained in turn, as I talked of Mary and my life at Mr. Blakeford's.

"I should like to know Mary," she said, laughing; "Mary must be a rough gem."

"But she is so good at heart!" I cried earnestly, for I felt pained at the light way in which she spoke of poor Mary.

"I am sure she is, Antony," said Miss Carr, looking at me very earnestly; and then I began to talk of Mr. Hallett, and how kind and firm he had been.

To my surprise, she stopped me, her voice sounding almost harsh as she said quietly:

"You are learning through a rough school, Antony, and are fast losing your homelike ways, and childlike—well—innocence: but you are still very impressionable, and ready to take people for what they seem. Antony, my boy, you will make many enemies as well as friends. Count me always among the latter, and as your friend I now say to you, do not be too ready to make friendships."

with men. I should rather see you with a good companion of your own age."

"Yes, Miss Carr," I said; "but if you knew Mr. Hallett——"

She held up her hand, and I stopped, for she seemed to turn pale and to look angry.

"Antony," she said, as the tea was brought in, "you will soon have to go, now, and I have not written the answer to the letter you brought."

"No, Miss Carr," I said; and I could have added, "neither have you read it."

"It is too late, of course, for you to take an answer back, so I shall send one by post. Do not be alarmed," she said, smiling, as she divined my thoughts; "no one will be angry with you for staying here. It was my wish."

"And your wish would be law with Mr. Lister," I thought.

"I shall expect you to write to me," she continued, "and set down any books you require. Do not be afraid to ask for them. I will either lend or buy them for you."

She was pouring out the tea as she spoke, and I took the cup from her hand, watching her thoughtfully the while, for she seemed to have grown strange and quiet during the last few hours; and it set me wondering whether she would ever be so kind to me again. In fact, I thought I must have done something to offend her.

That thought was chased away after tea, when we both rose, and she held out her hands to me with a very sweet smile, which told me the time had arrived when I must go.

"And now, Antony, you must come and see me again, often. Good-bye."

I could not speak, but stood clinging to her hands for a few minutes.

"Don't think me foolish," I said, at last; "but it has seemed so strange—you have been so kind—I don't know why—I have not deserved it."

"Antony," she said, laying one hand upon my shoulder, and speaking very softly and slowly, "neither do I know why, only that your simple little story seemed to go home to my heart. I thought then, as I think now, that when I lost both those who were near and dear to me, my sister and I might have been left penniless, to go out and struggle in the world as you have had to do. Once more, good-bye. Only strive on worthily, and you shall always find that I am your friend."

The next minute I was in the street, dull, depressed, and yet elated and joyful, while I ran over again the bright, sunshiny hours that had been so unexpectedly passed, as I hastened northward to join Revitts, for it was one of his home nights.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LINNY IS OUT LATE.

I NOTICED that there was growing trouble at the Halletts', and more than once, when I went up, I found Linny in tears, which, however, she hastily concealed.

This was the case on the night following my visit to Miss Carr: whose words, "that I need be under no uneasiness," were verified. The fact that I had been sent out by Mr. Lister was sufficient for Mr. Jabez Rowle; and when, during the next day, I encountered Mr. Lister himself, he nodded to me in quite a friendly way, and said, "How are you?"

Mrs. Hallett was asleep, and I went upstairs softly, tapped at Hallett's room-door, and went in, to find him deeply immersed in his task, over which he was bending with knitted brows, and evidently in doubt.

"Ah, Antony," he said, "here we are, as busy as usual. How did you get on last night?"

"With Revitts?"

"Yes; was it not your lesson-night?"

"Yes," I said; "but I thought perhaps you meant at Miss Carr's!"

He dropped the file with which he had been at work and stared at me.

"Where did you say?" he exclaimed.

"Mr. Lister sent me with a note to Miss Carr, and she kept me there all day."

He drew in his breath with a hiss, caught up the file and went on working, while I chattered on, little thinking of the pain I was causing the poor fellow, as I rapturously praised Miss Carr and her home, and told him by degrees how I had spent the day.

I was too intent on my narration to pay much heed to Hallett's face, though in fact I hardly saw it, he kept it so bent over his task, neither did I notice his silence; but at last, when it was ten o'clock, and I rose to go, he rose too, and I saw that he was rather paler than usual.

"Are you ill, Hallett?" I said anxiously. "How white you look."

"Ill? oh no, Antony. I have been sitting too much over my model. You and I must have another run or two into the country, and put roses in our cheeks."

He looked at me with a smile, but there was a weary, haggard look in his eyes that troubled me.

"Come, you must have a scrap of supper before you go," he said; and in spite of my protest he led me into the sitting-room, where Mrs. Hallett was seated by the shaded lamp reading, and the supper-cloth was laid half across the table.

"Yes," she said, looking up, as she let fall her book; "it's time

you came, Stephen. It's very, very, very cruel of you to leave me alone so long.

"My dear mother," he said tenderly, "I did not know you were by yourself. Where is Linny?" he said anxiously.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Mrs. Hallett querulously. "You are always either out or upstairs with your playthings."

"For Heaven's sake, mother, be just," Hallett exclaimed, with a burst of energy, such as I had not seen in him before. "Don't goad me at a time like this. Where, I say, where is Linny?"

"Goad you, Stephen! No, I don't goad you," whimpered the poor woman. "I cannot help myself; say what you will to me. You neglect me, and Linny is always running out."

"Has Linny gone out now, mother?" exclaimed Hallett.

"Yes, yes, and I am left all alone—a poor helpless invalid."

"Where has Linny gone, mother?"

"I don't know, Stephen. She said there was something to fetch. How can I tell?" and she burst into tears.

"Mother, dear mother," cried Hallett, bending over her and kissing her, "pray, pray don't think me unkind; I am working for you, and Linny too."

"But if you would only be more ambitious, Stephen—if you would only try your poor father's profession."

"I cannot—you know I cannot, dear," he said appealingly.

"No, no, no," sobbed the poor woman; "always some low mechanic's pursuit. Oh dear, oh dear! If it would only please God to take me, and let me be at rest!"

"Mother, dear mother," whispered Hallett, "be reasonable. Pray, dear, be reasonable, and bear with what does seem like neglect; for I am indeed working for you, and striving to make you a happier and better home. Believe this of me, and bear with me, especially now, when I have two troubles to meet that almost drive me mad. Linny, dear: think of Linny."

"Shall I go now, Mr. Hallett?" I said, for the scene was terrible to me, and I felt hot with indignation at one whom I looked upon as the most unreasonable of women.

"No, Antony; stay, I may want you," he said sternly. "Now, mother," he continued, "about Linny. She must not be allowed to go out at night like this."

"No, my son," said Mrs. Hallett piteously; "and if you had taken my advice the poor child would not have been degraded to such menial tasks."

"Mother," said Hallett, with more sternness than I had yet heard him use in speaking to her, "it is not the mere going out shopping that is likely to degrade your child. The time has come when I must insist upon knowing the meaning of these frequent absences on Linny's part. Has she gone out to-night on some necessary errand?"

"I—I don't know, Stephen; she said she must go."

"Tell me, mother—I beg, I insist," he exclaimed, "what you are keeping from me."

"Nothing, nothing, Stephen," sobbed the poor woman. "You'll kill me with your unkindness before you've done."

"Do you mean to tell me that you do not know where Linny has gone, mother?"

"Yes, yes, Stephen; I do not know."

"Has—has she gone to meet anyone?"

"I don't know, Stephen; I think so."

"Who is it, mother?" exclaimed Hallett.

"I don't know, Stephen; indeed I don't know. Oh, this is very, very cruel of you!"

"Mother," said Hallett, "is this just and kind to me, to keep such a secret from my knowledge? Oh, shame, shame! You let that weak, foolish child keep appointments with a stranger, and without my knowledge—without my knowing it, who stand to her in the place of a father. It must be stopped at once."

"Let me go, Hallett, please," I whispered.

"Yes; go, Antony; it is better that you should not be here when Linny comes back. Good-night—good-night."

I hurried downstairs, and let myself out, feeling miserable with the trouble I had seen, and I was just crossing Queen Square when I saw Linny coming in the opposite direction.

She caught sight of me on the instant and spoke.

"Where did you leave Stephen?" she said hastily; and I saw that she was flushed and panting with haste.

"With Mrs. Hallett," I said.

"Was he scolding because I was out?"

"Yes."

She gave her head a hasty toss and turned away, looking prettier than ever, I thought, but I fancied, as we stood beneath a lamp, that she turned pale.

Before she had gone half-a-dozen steps I was by her side.

"Well? What is it?" she said; and now I saw that she was in tears.

"Nothing," I replied; "only that I am going to see you safe home."

"You foolish boy," she retorted. "As if I could not take care of myself."

"Your brother does not like you to be out alone at night," I said quietly; "and I shall walk with you to the door."

"Such nonsense, Antony! Ah, well, just as you like;" and she burst into a mocking laugh.

I knew this was to hide from me the fact that she was in tears; and I walked beside her in silence till we had nearly reached the door, when we both started, for a dark figure suddenly came up to us.

"Oh, Steve, how you frightened me!" exclaimed Linny with a forced laugh.

"Did I?" he said calmly; and then he held out his hand to me and pressed mine.

He did not speak, but that pressure of his hand meant thanks, I thought, for what I had done; and once more I set myself to reach Caroline Street, thinking very seriously about Linny Hallett, of her mother's weakness and constant complaints, and of the way in which Stephen Hallett seemed to devote himself to them both.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WE COMPLETE THE MODEL.

MATTERS did not improve at Great Ormond Street as the months rolled on. There was evidently a serious estrangement between Linny and Stephen Hallett; and in my frequent visits I saw that she was as wilful as she was pettish, and that she was setting her brother at defiance. Mrs. Hallett was more piteous and complaining than ever, and her son grew haggard and worn with care.

Once or twice, when Linny went out, Hallett had insisted upon going with her, when she had snatched off her hat and jacket, exclaiming:

"It does not matter; I can go when you are away. I am not a child, Stephen, to be treated in such a way as this."

He stood looking down at her, more in sorrow than in anger, and beckoning me to follow, he went up to his attic and turned to his model, but sat down thinking, with his head upon his hand.

"Can I do anything to help you, Hallett?" I said anxiously; and he roused himself directly, and smiled in my face.

"No, Antony," he said, "nothing. I could only ask you to follow her, and be a spy upon her actions, and that would degrade us both. Poor child! I cannot win her confidence. It is my misfortune, not my fault. I am no ladies' man, Antony," he continued bitterly. "Here, let us try the model. I meant to have finished to-night: let us see how my mistress behaves."

He often used to speak in a laughing way of the model as his mistress, after Mrs. Hallett telling him one day that it was the only thing he loved.

It was then about nine o'clock, and putting aside reading for that evening, I helped him to fit together the various parts. The framework had been set up and taken down and altered a score of times, for, as may be supposed in such a contrivance as this, with all its complications, it was impossible to make every part

at first in its right proportions. In fact, I found out that for quite a couple of years past Hallett had been slowly and painfully toiling on, altering, re-making, and re-modelling his plans. It was always the same. No sooner had he by patient enterprise nearly finished, as he thought, than he would find out that some trifle spoiled the unity of the whole machine, and he had had to begin nearly all over again.

"There, Antony," he said, on the night in question, as he laid down the last wheel, one that he had had specially made for the purpose, "I have got to the end of my thinking to-night. I have looked at the model in every direction; I have tried it from every point of view, and if it is not a success now, and will not work, I shall throw it aside and try no more. What are you smiling at, boy?"

"Only at you," I said, laughing outright, for we were now, when at his house, on the most familiar terms.

"And why?" he said, half amused, half annoyed.

"I was thinking of what you so often say to me when I am discouraged and can't get on."

"What do you mean?"

"Never say die!" I replied, laughing. "I know you'll try again, and again, till you get the thing right and make it go."

"Should you?" he said, looking at me curiously.

"Of course I would," I cried, with my cheeks flushing. "I never would give up with a puzzle at home, and this is only a big puzzle. It seems, too, as if we always get a little bit nearer to success."

"Yes," he said, nipping his lips together; "that's what makes it so enticing. It seems to lure me on and on, like a will-o'-the-wisp in a marsh. You're right, Antony, my lad; never say die! I must and will succeed."

"Hurray!" I cried, pretending to throw up my cap. "Success to Hallett's great invention! Patent, of course?"

"Yes," he said, with a sigh; "but where is the money to come from for the patent?"

"Suppose we finish it first," I said, laughing.

"Right, my young wise-pate," he cried: "but, good heavens! it's eleven o'clock. Come, sir, pack off home to your lodging."

"Why, I thought we were to set the model going to-night?" I said, in a disappointed tone.

"Yes, I did mean it," he said, fitting a couple of cog-wheels one into the other. "But it is too late now."

"Let's try for another hour," I said eagerly.

"No, no, my boy. I don't like you to be out so late. Mr. Revitts will be annoyed."

"He's away on duty," I said. "Just another hour, and then you can walk part of the way home with me."

"Well, just an hour," he said, with his pale face flushing with pleasure; and we set to at once, he fitting together, while I polished and oiled wheels and spindles, and handed them and the various screws to him to fit in their places.

The model was as intricate as a clock, and there were endless little difficulties to combat; but there was something so fascinating in the task as the bright brass wheels were placed in order, and it begat such an intense longing to see it in motion, executing in miniature the great desire of Hallett's life, that we forgot all about time, and kept steadily on till there were only a few screws to insert and nuts to tighten, and the task would be done.

Hallett looked up at me as he re-trimmed the lamp by which we worked, and I across the table at him, laughing at his puzzled face, for we had unconsciously been at work over three hours, and it was past two.

"This is dreadful, Antony," he exclaimed, with a comical look of chagrin on his face. "I seem fated to lead you into all sorts of dissipation. What are we to do? I cannot let you go home so late as this. You must lie down here."

"I'm not a bit sleepy," I said, "but I am hungry."

"Then you shall have some supper," he said dreamily, and with his eyes fixed upon his model, forgetting me the next moment, as with his dexterous fingers he tried the action of one or other of the wheels.

"It's a pity to leave it now," I cried.

"Yes, yes," he said with a sigh; "it is a pity: but it must be left. I dare——"

He ceased talking, becoming completely abstracted in his task of screwing on a nut, and without speaking I helped and watched and helped until quite an hour and a half more had glided by, when with a look of triumph he stood erect, for the task was done.

"She's finished, Antony," he cried, and in the elate eager face before me I seemed to see some one quite different to the stern, quiet compositor I met daily at the great printing-office by Fetter Lane.

I was as delighted as he, and together we stood gazing down at the bright, beautiful bit of mechanism—the fruit of years of toil and endless thought; but as I gazed at it a strange dull feeling of anxiety came over me, and I glanced timorously at Hallett, for the thought flashed across my mind:

"What will he say now if it fails?"

I literally trembled with dread as this thought forced its way home, and with a choking sensation at my throat I watched his eager, elated face each moment becoming more joyous and full of pride; and the more I witnessed his pleasure, the more I feared lest his hopes should be dashed.

"Why, it's daybreak, Antony," he said, drawing up the blind. "My poor boy, what a thoughtless wretch I am. It is cruel to you. Come and lie down directly."

"No," I said eagerly, "I want to see the model going."

"And so do I, Antony," he cried passionately; "but now the time has come, my boy, I dare not try. I feel a horrible dread of failure, and I must cover it over with a cloth, and leave it till I feel more calm."

He took up the large black cloth with which he had been in the habit of covering it from the dust, and stood gazing down at the bright brass model which had begun to glisten in the soft pure morning light now stealing in from amidst the London chimney-pots, while a couple of sparrows seated upon the parapet set up a cheery chirp.

I felt that I dared not speak, but as if I should have liked to lead him away from the infatuation of his life. Somehow I knew that it would break down, and the anguish he must feel would be something I could not bear to see; and yet, combined with this, I shared his longing to see the model at work—the beautiful little piece of mechanism that was to produce a revolution in printing—turning easily, smoothly, and well.

As I gazed at his eager, anxious face, the pale light in the sky changed to a soft warm flush; bright flecks of orange and gold sent their reflections into the dingy garret, and seemed to illumine Hallett's countenance, as with straining eyes and parted lips he stood there cloth in hand.

"Antony," he said, in a low hoarse voice, "I am a coward. I feel like a gambler who risks his all upon a stake, and dare not look upon the numbers—upon the newly cast dice. No, no, I dare not try it now; let it rest till to-night."

As he spoke he covered it carefully with the black cloth, but only to snatch it away, apostrophising it the while.

"No, no," he cried; "it is like covering you with a pall and saying you are dead, when, you, the birth of my brains, are ready to leap into new life—new life indeed—the life of that which has had no existence before. Antony, boy," he said exultingly, "what time could be more fitting than the birth of a new day for my invention to see the light? Throw open the window and let in the glow of sunshine and sweet fresh air. It is unsullied yet, and it will give us strength for our—for our——"

He hesitated, and his exulting tone changed to one of calm resignation. It was as if he had felt the shadow of failure coming on, and he said softly:

"Our triumph, Antony; or, God help me, fortitude to bear our failure!"

I had opened the window, and the soft, refreshing morning air floated into the room, seeming to bring with it a suggestion of

the scents of the sweet, pure country: and now, in the midst of the silence, broken only by the chirping of the sparrows, and the distant rattle of the wheels of some market-cart, I saw Hallett's countenance grow stern as he placed a little reel of thin paper, narrow as a ribbon, upon a spindle, and then, motioning to me to go to the handle which was to set the model in motion, he stood there with set teeth, and I turned.

There was a clicking, humming noise, the whirring of wheels, and the rattle of the little cogs; the ribbon of paper began to run off its spool, and pass round a tiny cylinder: and at that moment the little model seemed illumined by a brilliant ray of sunshine, which darted in at the open window. Then the light seemed to be glorifying Hallett's face, and I was about to utter a cheer, when I felt a jar, and a shock from the fingers that held the handle run right up my arm. There was a sharp, grating noise, a tiny, piercing shriek as of tortured metal; and in place of the busy glistening, whirring wheels an utter stillness. A cloud crossed the rising sun, and with a bitter sigh Hallett stooped down and picked up the black cloth, which he softly and reverently drew over the wreck of his work, as I stood with dilated eyes looking at him aghast.

"Poor model," he said softly, "dead so soon!" and with a sad, weary air of resignation as he smiled at me: "it was a very short life, Antony. Let us go down, my boy. You must be wearied out."

I followed him on to the landing without a word, and after he had locked up the attic he led the way softly to the sitting-room, where he lit a fire and we had some breakfast, for it was too late to think of bed. Shortly afterwards we walked down together to the office, and I saw him no more till the day's work was done.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ANOTHER WAKFUL NIGHT.

STEPHEN HALLETT was in too much trouble to speak to me about the model that evening. Mrs. Hallett was in tears, and full of repinings, and Lenny was out, it seemed, when her brother had returned.

I soon found that he did not wish me to stay, and being tired out, I made the best of my way back to Caroline Street, and went to bed to sleep heavily, dreaming that Hallett and I were working away at the model, but as fast as ever we got it nearly to perfection, Mr. Blakeford came and stood by to throw in the

pieces of the stick with which he had been beaten by Mrs Wooster, and every time he did so the little model was broken.

Then the whole scene of the flogging seemed to take the place of Hallett's attic, and I saw Mr. Blakeford sit down in a chair, panting, bloody, and exhausted, and he kept on saying in a low hoarse voice, "Antony, lad, water!"

It was very terrible to see him sitting there by the light of the office gas, for though I wanted to help him, the power was not there, and, strive how I would, I could not get to his side, or fetch what he asked for.

"Antony, lad, water!"

His voice sounded like a groan, and I knew he must be very bad; but still I could not help him, and the bitter moan with which he appealed to me seemed to cut me to the heart.

"Antony, lad, water!"

There it was again, and I started up to find myself in bed, with a candle burning in the room, and Revitts, with his hat on the floor, his coat torn open, and his face besmeared with the blood flowing from a cut in the forehead, was seated close beside his bed, evidently half fainting.

"Antony, lad, water!" he moaned; and leaping out of bed and hurrying on some clothes, I tried to give him what help I could, but in a strangely confused way; for I was, as it were, in a dream, consequent upon the deep sleep succeeding a night without my usual rest. I held a glass of water to his lips, however, from which he drank with avidity. And then, awakening more to the state in which he was, and realizing that it was not a dream, I set to work and sponged and bound up the cut with a handkerchief, to find, however, to my horror, that there was another terrible cut on the back of his head, which was also bleeding profusely.

My next idea was to go for a doctor, but I reflected that I ought to first bind up the other wound, and this I did, leaving him in the chair, with his chest and head lying over on the bed, looking so white that a chill of horror shot through me, for I fancied that he was dying.

I knew there was a doctor's two streets off, and I ran to where the red bull's-eye in the lamp shone out like a danger signal; rang the night-bell; heard a window above me open, and, after explaining my business and what was the matter, the medical man promised to come.

I ran back to find that Revitts had not moved, but that my attempts to bandage his wounds had proved to be ineffectual. I did what more I could, though, and then sat horror-stricken and silent, holding the poor fellow's hand, speaking to him at intervals, but eliciting nothing but a moan.

It seemed as if the doctor would never come, and I was about to

rouse up some of the people in the house when I heard the bell, and ran to admit him.

He looked curiously at me as I stood there, candle in hand, and as I closed the door he said gruffly:

"A drunken fall, I suppose?"

"Oh no, sir," I said hastily. "Mr. Revitts never drinks."

"Humph!" he ejaculated; and I led him up to where Revitts sat.

"Policeman, eh?" said the doctor; "this is a job for the surgeon to the division, my man. Mustn't leave him to bleed to death, though."

He slipped off his coat, and, exerting his strength, lifted poor Revitts on to the bed, after which he removed my bandages and made an examination.

"Hold the candle nearer, boy, nearer still. That's right. You won't singe his hair. If you do it won't matter, for I must clip it off short. Humph! some one has given him a pretty topper with a thick stick, and he must have fallen with his head on the edge of a step. Terrible cuts!"

"But will they kill him, sir?" I faltered, feeling quite sick at the sight of the wounds.

"We won't let them, my man. Come, hold up, you mustn't let that turn you faint."

"I—I won't, sir," I said.

"That's right, my man. Nothing like a little will and determination. We men must leave fainting to the girls. That's right; basin and sponge and towel. We'll soon put him straight. Now that case out of my pocket. That's well. Hold the candle nearer. No snuffers? Well, use your fingers. Dirty trick, but handy—fingery, I ought to say."

He kept on talking—half-playfully, while with his bright scissors he clipped the hair away close from Revitts's forehead, and then, cutting up some plaister in strips, he rapidly bandaged the cuts, after bringing the edges of the wounds together with a few stitches from a needle and some silk.

"Poor fellow! he has got a sad knocking about," the doctor said kindly, for now the annoyance at being called out of bed was over he was deeply interested in his case. "I wonder some of his fellow-constables did not take him to the hospital. Where did you find him?"

I told him how I was astonished by finding Revitts at my bedside.

"Ah yes, I see," he said. "Hurt and half-insensible, and nature intervenes. Education says, Take him to the hospital; instinct bids him, animal-like, creep to his hole to die."

"To die, sir?" I cried, catching his hand.

"Die? No; nonsense, boy. I was only speaking metaphorically. Don't you see?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"No, you don't, you young humbug," he retorted sharply.

"You don't know what a metaphor is."

"Yes, sir, it's a figure of speech in which one idea is used instead of another."

"Hallo!" he said; "why, how do you get your living?"

"I'm a reading-boy at a printer's, sir."

"Oh! Are you? I should have thought you were reading-boy to a professor of language. Well, we musn't forget our patient. Give me a glass, boy."

"Will a teacup do, sir?"

"Oh yes, and a teaspoon. That's right," he said; and, emptying a little phial into the cup, he proceeded to give poor Revitts some of the stimulus it contained.

"There," he said, "he's coming round, poor fellow; but I dare say he'll be a bit shaky in the head. He musn't get up, and you must give notice at his station as soon as it's light, or to the first policeman you see."

"But you don't think he'll die, sir?"

"Die, my man? No. A great stout fellow like that is not likely to die from a crack or two on the head."

I drew a long breath of relief, and soon after the doctor left, bidding me not be alarmed if I found his patient slightly delirious.

It was no pleasant task, sitting there alone, watching by my poor friend, and many times over I felt so alarmed at his condition that I rose to go and rouse up some of the people of the house; but whenever I reached the door the doctor's reassuring words came back, and, feeling that he must know what was right, I sat by the bedside, holding Revitts' hand till towards morning, when he began to move uneasily and to mutter and throw about his arms, ending by seeming to wake from a troubled sleep.

"Where am I?" he said sharply.

"Here at home, in bed," I said.

"Who's that?"

"It is I, Bill, don't you know me?"

"Yes, yes, I know you!" he said. "Oh, my head, my head!"

"What was it? How was it done?" I said.

There was a pause, and then, in a weary way:

"I don't know—I can't recollect. Everything's going round. Yes, I know: I heard a little girl call out for help, and I saw a fellow dragging her towards an open door, and I went at him."

"Yes, Bill. Well?"

"That's all. I don't know anything else. Oh, my head, my head!"

"But did he hit you?" I asked.

"Yes, I think so, and I went down," he groaned; "and I don't

know an'—any more, but I should know that fellow out of a thousand, and——"

He began muttering to himself, and as I bent over him I fancied I made out the word "staff," but all else was unintelligible, and the poor fellow sank into a heavy sleep which seemed likely to last.

Soon after seven I got the landlady to come and sit with him while I ran to the police-station, and told the inspector on duty about Revitts' state.

"There," he exclaimed to another officer, "I told you so. He's too steady a fellow to have gone wrong. All right, my man, I'll send on the surgeon, and we'll see what's to be done. You don't know how it was?"

I told him all I knew, and then ran on to Hallett's to ask him to get me excused at the office.

I found him looking very pale, but Linny was not visible; and then I told him about Revitts' state.

"It's very strange," he exclaimed. "Linny came home in trouble last night. She said some man had insulted her, and when she called for help a policeman ran up; and she left them struggling together while she made her escape and came home."

"Then it must have been Revitts who helped her," I said; and I then told him that I wanted to stay with the poor fellow.

"I'll arrange all that for you, Antony," he said quietly; and I made the best of my way back to Caroline Street, to find that poor Revitts had not moved, only kept on muttering where he had been laid by the doctor; and I took the watcher's place, made tea for him, and spoke to him again and again, but without result.

The police surgeon came soon after with the inspector I had seen, asked me a few questions as he examined the injuries, and then I saw him tighten his lips.

"Hadn't he better be taken to the infirmary, sir?" the inspector asked.

"No," was the reply: "he must not be moved." Then, turning to me: "You had better get some one to come and nurse him, my lad," he said; "mother, sister, or somebody. I'll call in again in the evening."

I knew from this that the poor fellow must be seriously hurt, and had I wanted confirmation, I had it in the delirious mutterings that now came from his lips.

I sat by him in great trouble, wondering what I should do, when the doctor I had fetched called in, who, on learning that the divisional surgeon had been, nodded his satisfaction and turned to go.

"Please tell me, sir," I said, "is he very, very bad?"

"Well, bad enough, my lad; you see, he has got concussion of

the brain, and I daresay he will be ill for some time, but I do not anticipate anything serious. He must have a nurse."

As soon as he had gone I sat and thought for a few minutes what I ought to do. Miss Carr was very kind and generous. If I asked her she would pay for a nurse; but no, I would not ask her without first consulting Hallett. He would help me in my difficulty, I felt sure, especially as it was probable that Linny was the girl poor Revitts had protected. But Hallett would not be back till evening, and then perhaps he would—no, he would be sure to come in.

I sat thinking, and the landlady came up, full of bewailings about her injured lodger, and in her homely way promised to come and wait on him from time to time. Then a bright thought occurred to me. I would write and tell Mary that Revitts was hurt, for I felt that she ought to know, and hastily taking pen and paper, I wrote her word that my friend was very ill, and asked her to tell me the address of some of his relations, that I might send them word. I did not forget to add a postscript, urging her to secrecy as to my whereabouts, for my dread of Mr. Blakeford was as great as ever.

Seizing my opportunity when Revitts was more quiet, I slipped out and posted the letter, running back panting to find that a lady had come—so the landlady said—during my absence, and, rushing upstairs I stood staring with amazement on finding Linny in the room taking off her jacket and hat.

"You here, Linny?" I exclaimed.

"Yes," she said quietly. "Why not?"

"Was it you, then, that poor Revitts helped last night?"

"Yes," she said, with a shiver, and she turned white. "Yes, poor fellow. It was very brave of him, and I have come to help him in return."

"But does—does Stephen know?"

"How can he," she said meekly, "when he is at the office?"

"But I am sure he would not approve of your coming," I said stoutly.

"I can't help that," she replied quietly. "He will think it his duty to find fault, and I think it mine to come and help to nurse this poor fellow who was hurt in serving me."

"But your mother—Mrs. Hallett?"

"I have arranged for some one to go in and wait upon her till I go back," said Linny quietly. "Now, what had I better do?"

I could think of nothing better than to suggest some beef-tea, and she snatched at the notion, running out to fetch the material; and soon after having it simmering by the fire, while she tidied the room in a way only possible to a woman; and as she busied herself in a quiet, quick fashion, I could not help noticing how pale and subdued she seemed. It was very evident that her

nerves had had a severe shock on the previous night, and as I gazed at the pretty, soft little face and figure, bending themselves so earnestly to the task in hand, I could hardly believe it was the same giddy, coquettish girl who caused her brother so much concern.

The day wore slowly by, and in spite of my efforts and real anxiety, I could not keep awake, but caught myself dozing off sometimes to start up, feeling horribly guilty, and ready to excuse myself to Linny on the plea that I had had hardly any sleep for two nights.

"The more need for me to come, Antony," she said quietly, and bidding me lie down for an hour or two, she took out her work and seated herself by the sick man's pillow.

She woke me up at last to have a sort of tea-dinner with her, after I had seen that Revitts remained perfectly insensible, and then the evening wore on, the surgeon came and nodded his satisfaction at finding a nurse there, said that the patient was going on all right, but must have time, and took his leave.

At half-past eight, just as I had anticipated, Hallett arrived, and started with surprise on seeing his sister.

"You here?" he said, with an angry look upon his brow.

"Yes, Stephen," she said quietly; "I have come to help nurse him."

"It was an ill-advised step," he said sternly. "You did not know that this was the man who protected you."

"I felt so sure of it that I came to see," she replied. "Don't be angry with me, Stephen," she whispered. "I owned to you last night that I was in fault, and meant to do better."

"Yes, and refused to answer my questions," he replied. "You do not tell me whom you went to see."

"Is it not enough that I have promised you I'll go no more?" she replied with quivering lips.

"Yes, yes, my child," he said tenderly, as he took her in his arms and laid his cheek against her forehead. "It is enough, and I will not press you. Dear Linny, indeed I strive for your good."

"I know that, Stephen," she cried with a wild burst of tears, and, flinging her arms round his neck, she kissed him again and again. "My own brave, good brother," she said; "and I've been so ungrateful and selfish! Oh, Stephen, I'm a beast—a wretch!" she sobbed.

"Hush, hush, little one," he said; and then, starting, he held her at arm's length and gazed full in her eyes. "Why, Linny," he exclaimed, as a light seemed to have flashed across his mind, "it was that man—you went to meet—who insulted you."

She turned away her face, and hung her head, shivering as he spoke, and weeping bitterly.

"It was," he cried; "you do not deny it. The villain!"

"Please, please don't, Stephen," she sobbed in a low, piteous voice.

"Linny!" he cried hoarsely; and his face looked terrible. "If I knew who it was, I believe I should kill him!"

"Stephen," she wailed, "pray—pray! We are not alone."

"There is only Antony here," he said, "and he is like a brother." Then, making an effort over himself, he strained the little panting figure to his breast, and kissed her tenderly. "It is all past, my darling," he said to her softly, and he smoothed her hair with his hand, as if she had been his child. "I'll say no more, dear, for you have promised me."

"Yes; and I will keep my word, Stephen."

He kissed her again, and loosed her, to stand with brows knit with trouble.

"I do not like your coming here, Linny," he cried at last.

"Why not, dear?" she said, laying her hands upon his shoulder. "It is an earnest of my promise. He came to me when I was in trouble."

"Yes," he said; "you are right," and after looking at the patient he sat down and talked to us in a low tone.

"Is it not nearly time for you to go back, Linny?" Hallett said at last.

"Back!" she said; "I am going to sit up with Antony; the poor fellow must not be left. The doctor said so."

Hallett took a turn up and down the room, and then stopped.

"You have had no sleep for two nights, Antony," he said. "Lie down. I will sit up with my sister, and watch by poor Revitts' side."

I protested, but it was in vain; and at last I lay down in my clothes to watch the faces of brother and sister by the shaded lamp, till my eyes involuntarily closed, and I opened them again to see the two faces in the same positions, but without the lamp, for there was the morning light.

CHAPTER XXX.

REVITTS' NURSE ARRIVES.

HALLETT left quite early, to see that Mrs. Hallett was properly attended to, and he moreover undertook to speak to either Mr. Ruddle or Mr. Lister about my absence, as, joined to my desire to stay with poor Revitts, Hallett wished me to bear his sister company.

Our patient was on the whole very quiet, but at times he moved

his head to and fro and talked loudly, much being unintelligible, but I saw Linny's countenance change several times as she heard him threaten the man he looked upon as an enemy.

"Can I do anything for you?" said Linny to him on one occasion, as he tried to raise himself upon his arm and stared at her wildly.

"Taint as if I'd got my staff out to him, you know," he said in a whisper. "He's a coward, that's what he is, and I shall know him again, and if I do come acrost him—ab!"

Linny shrank away, with her eyes looking wild and strange, so that I thought she was frightened by his words, and I interposed and put my arm under the poor fellow's head.

"Lie down, Bill," I said. "Does your head hurt you?"

"I don't mind about my head," he muttered. "but such a coward; treat a little bit of a girl like that. Where's my notebook? Here, it's time I went. Where's that boy?" he cried angrily; "I know what London is. I won't have him stop out of a night."

He sank back exhausted, and as I turned from him to speak to Linny, I saw that she was in tears.

"He frightens you," I said; "but you needn't be afraid."

"Oh no! I'm not," she cried; "it's only because I'm low and nervous. I shall be better soon."

The surgeon came twice that day, and said the case was serious, but that there was no cause for alarm.

"He gives no clue, I suppose, to who struck him, my boy?" he said.

"No, sir," I replied; "he talks about some man, and says he would know him again."

"The police are trying hard to find out how it was. If they could find the girl it would be easy."

I was just going to say, "Here she is, sir!" when I happened to glance at Linny, who was pale as ashes, and stood holding up her hand to me to be silent.

This confused me so that I hardly understood what the surgeon said, only that he wanted a stronger and more mature person to attend to Revitts; but when I told him that the landlady came up to help he was satisfied, and left, saying that he should come in again. He was no sooner gone than Linny caught me by the arm.

"Oh, what an escape!" she cried; "Antony, you know how wilful and cruel I have been to poor Steve?"

"Yes," I said, nodding my head.

"And you know how I have promised him that I will always do as he wishes?"

"Yes, I know that too," said; "and I hope you will."

"I will—indeed I will, Antony," she wailed; "but please promise me, pray promise me, that no one shall ever know besides us that it was I whom Mr. Revitts here—a—protected."

"But the wretch of a fellow who behaved so badly to you, and beat poor Revitts like this, ought to be punished."

"No, no—no, no!" she cried excitedly; "let it all pass now. Antony—dear Antony, for my sake."

"I like you, Linny," I said; "but I like dear old Revitts, too. He has been the best of friends to me, and I don't see why a friend of yours should escape after serving him like this."

"He—he is not a friend of mine now," she said, half hysterically; "but, dear Antony, I could not bear for him to be punished. It was in a fit of passion. I had made him angry first. Please, please don't say any more—I cannot bear it!"

She sank down on the hearth-rug, covering her face with her hands and sobbing bitterly, while I felt, boy-like, powerless to say anything to comfort her, till I exclaimed:

"Well, I won't tell or say anything I know, Linny, if you will keep your word to Stephen."

"I will—indeed I will, dear Antony," she cried, starting up and catching both my hands. "I was very, very foolish, but I know better now, and it—it—it is all past."

She said those last words in such a piteous, despairing way, looking so heart-broken, that my sympathies were now all on her side, and I promised her again that I would not tell Revitts or the police that she was the girl who had been in question. I repented of my promise later on, but at my time of life it was not likely that I should know how ready a woman who loves is to forgive the lapses of him who has won her heart, and of course I could not foresee the complications that would arise.

The surgeon came again, as he had promised, and after the examination of the patient, ordered some ice to be obtained to apply to his head, and directly he had gone I started off to fetch it, thinking as I did so that Hallett would soon be with us.

I was not long in getting a lump of bright, cold, clear ice, and on hurrying back, I heard voices in the room, when, to my surprise and delight, there stood Mary, but looking anything but pleased. She had thrown a large bundle on the floor, her large Paisley shawl across the foot of the bed, her umbrella on the table, and a basket crammed full of something or another was on a chair.

As for Mary herself, she was standing, very red in the face, her arms akimbo, her bonnet awry, and a fierce angry look in her eyes, before poor Linny, who was shrinking away from her, evidently in no little alarm.

"Oh, Antony!" she cried, "I'm so glad you've come! Who is this woman?"

"Who's this woman, indeed!" cried Mary, now boiling over in her wrath; "'this woman,' indeed! Perhaps you'll tell her that I'm a poor deceived, foolish, trusting creature, who left her place at a moment's notice to come and nuss him, and then find as I ain'

wanted, and that he's already got his fine doll of a madam to wait on him."

"Oh, Mary!" I cried; "you dear foolish old thing!"

"Yes, of course, that's what I said I was, Master Antony, and even you turn agen me. But I might have known that such a fellow as William Revitts would have half-a-dozen fine madams ready to marry him."

This was accompanied by pantings, and snorts, and little stamps of the foot, and a general look about poor Mary as if she were going to pull off her bonnet, jump upon it, and tear down her hair.

"Oh, you foolish old thing!" I cried, flying at her and literally hugging her in my delight at seeing her so soon, in the midst of my trouble.

"Be quiet, Master Antony," she cried wrathfully, but throwing one arm round me as she spoke, in reply to my embrace. "But I won't stand it, that I won't."

"But, my good woman," faltered Linny.

"Don't you 'good woman' me, slut!" cried Mary furiously "I was going to give up and let you nurse him and kill him, for ought I cared, but I won't now. He's engaged to me these four years, and he's mine, and this is my place and room, and out you go, and the sooner the better; and—as for B—B—B—Bill—do take your hand from before my mouth, Master Antony! You're a boy and don't understand things. Now, then, madam, you pack!"

"Mary, be quiet!" I cried; "this is Mr. Hallett's sister, who kindly came to help nurse poor Bill till you could come. Bill does not know her; he never saw her before, but once."

"Only once?" said Mary suspiciously.

"No, and then only for a minute. How 'could you be so foolish?"

"Because—because—because——" said Mary, bursting out into a passion of sobbing, "because my heart was half broke about my boy, and I only stopped to pack up a bundle and came—and then—when I found that pretty darling here, I—I—oh, my dear—my dear—my dear!" she cried, flinging herself on her knees at Linny's feet, clutching her dress, and burying her wet face in the folds; "please—please—please forgive me, and don't take no notice of my mad, foolish words. I've—I've—I've got such a temper! It's a curse to me—and I was nearly distracted. Some day, p'raps, you'll feel as bad and jealous as I did. Please—please forgive me!"

"Oh, yes, yes, yes!" cried Linny, whose tears now began to flow, and who, kneeling down in turn, drew poor Mary's face to her breast, and the two remained thus, while I went and looked out of the window.

"Please—pray—forgive me!" sobbed Mary.

"Oh yes, yes, I do, indeed!" whispered Linny. "Antony is right: I never saw Mr. Revitts but once, and I believe he is a very good man, and loves you dearly."

"That he is, and that he does," cried Mary, raising her red face, and throwing back her hair. "Though I don't know why he should care for such a crooked-tempered, rough-tongued thing as I am."

I thought I could understand why, as I saw Mary's lit-up face, with her bonnet fallen back, and in spite of her distress looking quite as handsome as she was warm-hearted.

"But you do forgive me, dear?" she faltered, kissing Linny's hands again and again.

"Forgive you!" cried Linny, kissing her ruddy cheek, "of course I do; you couldn't help making the mistake."

And, as if feeling that she was the cause of the trouble, Linny gave her such a look of tender sympathy that poor Mary was obliged to crouch down quite low on the floor again, and hug herself tight, and rock to and fro.

Immediately after, though, she was hastily wiping her eyes on the silken strings of her bonnet, which she tore off and sent flying to the other end of the room before dashing at me and giving me a hug, and then going down on her knees by Revitts' pillow, and laying her cheek against his bandaged forehead.

"My poor old boy," she whispered softly, "as if I could stay a minute from him!"

The next moment she was up, and giving a great gulp, as if to swallow down the emotion caused by Revitts' appearance, she forced a smile upon her face, completely transforming it, and quickly but quietly dashed at her basket.

"I hadn't time to do much, my dears," she said to Linny and me collectively: "but I thought a pair o' soles and a chicken must be right for the poor boy. Now, if you'll only tell me where he keeps his pepper and salt, and the frying-pan and saucepans, I can get on. My sakes, poor boy, what a muddle he did live in, to be sure!"

We had to stop Mary in her culinary preparations by assuring her that the doctor had ordered only beef-tea.

"Then he may have chicken-broth, my dears," she said: "I'm an old nuss, you know, though I wouldn't attend to Mr. Blakeford—eh, Master Antony?—for fear I should give him his lotion for outward application inside. But I can nuss, and not a step do I stir from this floor till I've made my poor old Bill well. Oh, if I only knew who done it!" she cried, with a flash of fierce rage; and as she glanced at Linny, the latter shrank away guiltily. Mary read her action wrongly, and plumped herself once more at the poor girl's feet.

"Don't you mind me, my dear!" she cried kissing her hands

and her dress. "I'm a stupid, rough, jealous thing, and I was al' on fire then, but I'm not now, and I humbly ask your pardon; a. I says, God bless you, for coming to help my poor dear boy!"

There was another burst of sobbing here, and another embrace, when Mary jumped up again, all smiles, to apply a little fresh ice to the patient's head, and gently coo over him, as if he were a baby.

After which, and having satisfied herself that the chicken-broth was progressing favourably, poor Mary felt it her duty to plump at Linny's feet again, but she jumped up in confusion, as she heard the stairs crack as if some one were coming, and then she looked inquiringly at me, as the door softly opened and Hallett came in.

"Mr. Hallett," I said, "this is my dear old Mary, Mr. Revitts' friend, and she's come up to nurse him. Mary, this is Miss Hallett's brother."

"Which I'm glad to see him," said Mary, making a bob, and then growing redder in the face as she glanced at Linny, as if afraid that her late ebullition would be exposed.

"And I'm very glad to see you, Mary," said Hallett, smiling and holding out his hand, which Mary took after interposing her clean pocket handkerchief, on the score that she had been cooking. "Antony often talked to me about you."

"Have he, though?" said Mary, darting a gratified look at me.

"Often, of your great kindness to him. Your coming has helped us out of a great difficulty."

"And your dear sister's coming's put my heart at rest, for I didn't know, sir, what gin-drinking wretches might be neglecting my poor boy."

"And how is the patient?" said Hallett, going to the bedside.

"The doctor says he is going on all right," I replied.

"Is he a good doctor?" said Mary sharply.

"He is certain to be an eminent man," said Hallett quietly; and his words partially pacified Mary.

"Because if he ain't," said Mary, "money shan't stand in the way of his having the best in London."

"Mary," said Hallett, in his quiet telling way, and with a look that made poor Mary his firm friend, "a good surgeon will tell you that he can do much, but that the recovery of a patient principally depends upon the nurse. I see that Mr. Revitts is safe in that respect, and I shall be only too glad to hear of his getting well."

Mary seemed to have a ball rising in her throat, for she could not speak, and this time she forgot to place her pocket handkerchief over her hand, as she caught that of the visitor and kissed it.

"You can be quite at rest, Antony," Hallett said then. "Mr. Ruddle said he was sorry to hear about your friend, and he

should leave it to your good sense to come back to work as soon as you could. Mr. Lister is away—ill."

I fancied that he knit his brows as he spoke, but it may have been fancy. Then, turning to Linny, he said :

"I am glad you are set at liberty, Linny. Our mother is very unwell. Shall we go now?"

Linny nodded her assent, and put on her hat and jacket; but before they went Mary found it necessary to go down on her knees again, and in a whisper to ask Linny's pardon; all of which Hallett took as an expression of gratitude, and shook hands warmly as he left.

I went with him down to the door to say good-night, and as we parted I asked him not to think I was neglecting him, now he was in such trouble with his model.

"I do not, my dear boy; and I never shall think ill of you for being faithful to your friends. Good-night; the model is buried for the present. When you can come again, we'll try once more to bring it back to life."

I stood watching them as they went together beneath the street lamps, and I was glad to see Linny clinging trustingly to her brother's arm.

"Poor Linny!" I thought to myself. "She's very fond of somebody who behaves badly to her. I wonder who it can be."

CHAPTER XXXI.

HOW MARY BROKE DOWN.

FEW as the minutes of my absence had been, Mary had done a good deal towards tidying up the room, and as I entered I could see her bonnet and shawl hanging lovingly up against the wall, side by side with poor Bill's hat and greatcoat, just as if they had newly entered into the holy state of matrimony. There was beginning to be an appetizing odour of chicken in the room, the bundle was tucked out of sight, the chairs in order, and it was plain to see that a clever housewife had been at work.

"Oh my, how you have growed, my dear!" whispered Mary ecstatically. "I never did see a boy improve so. And only to think of your running away from old Blakeford and finding out my pore Bill, bless him!"

She ran here to the bed to see if her sweetheart was all right, and then turned to me with open arms.

"Give us a kiss, dear," she cried, and in a moment I was hugged tight in her arms and kissed and fondled again and again.

"I am glad to see you, you can't tell how glad," she cried softly.

"and it was good of you to write. No sooner did I get your letter, than I ups and tells Mrs. Blakeford as I was going away directly, because my friend in London was ill."

"But you did not say I wrote, Mary?" I cried in agony.

"Do you think I was such a silly, my dear? No, I'd got the letter safe in here," she said, thrusting her hand inside her dress. "Well, as I was saying—stop a moment—let me look at the broth."

She raised the lid, shut it again, had another look at Revitts, and then went on:

"Who should come in but old Blakeford, and he said gruffly that they couldn't spare me, and, 'Can't spare me!' I says; 'well, you jest must, for I'm going.'

"Then we shan't pay you your wages," says old Blakeford. "Then I will make you," says I, "So now then. I'm not going to have people die for want of help, to please you."

"Who is it then as is dying?" says Mrs. Blakeford.

"It's my sweetheart, mum, if you must know, I says.

"Then all I can say is, that it's very indelicate of you, a young unmarried woman, to go up and nurse a single man."

"No more indelicate, mum," I says, "than for you to want me to nuss Mr. Blakeford when he was ill."

"But you didn't do it," she says.

"No, mum," I says, "but you wanted me to, and what's more, if the whole world and his wife come to me and told me it wasn't right for me to go, I should go; so now then."

"But when will you come back then, Mary?" says Mrs. Blakeford.

"Not at all, mum," I says, "for after going and nursing a single man as is dying for aught I know, I shan't be fit company for the folks in this house. I'm going now directly, mum, and I shall leave my box and send for it and my wages too."

Here Mary had another look at the patient and the cooking.

"I wasn't long getting off, I can tell you, and glad enough I was to get away. I'd ha' left long enough ago, only I didn't want to make any more changes till the big one, and there was only one as I minded leaving."

"And that was little Hetty," I said, as I understood her big change to mean her marriage.

"Yes, my dear, you're right—little Hetty; and she came and sobbed and cried ever so, with her dear arms round my neck, till I told her that perhaps I might see you, and asked her if I might take you her love; and she sent it to you, and said she a'ways wore your brooch."

"And is she quite well?" I said, with sparkling eyes.

"Yes, and grows the neatest, prettiest, best girl that ever was. And now, my dear, I'm come to nuss my pore William till he's well, and then——"

"Yes, Mary?" for she had paused.

"I shall get a place somewhere in London; for I shan't go back."

Then, after another look at the patient, she came back to me.

"Could you drink a cup o' tea, dear?" she said.

"Yes, Mary, and you must want something."

"Well, my dear, I do begin to feel a bit faint, for I hadn't only just begun my breakfast when your letter came, and I haven't had nothing since."

The result was that the kettle was soon made to boil, and Mary seemed quite delighted to be pouring out for me and making the toast.

"Lor', my dear, now it do seem like old times!" she cried.

"Only you've grown to look so handsome and well, Mary," I said.

"Do I, my dear? Well, I am glad. Not as I care myself, but some people might. But, Lor', I never looked well down at old Blakeford's. My! what a row there was because you run away."

"Was there?" I said with a shudder, half pleasure, half delight.

"Warn't there?" said Mary, who kept running to the bedside at the slightest movement. "Bless your 'art, old Blakeford was nearly mad, and Miss Hetty 'most cried her eyes out, till I told her you'd be happier away, and then she cried 'em out more than ever, for fear her par should catch you. He was out days and days, until his leg got so bad he was really obliged to go to bed. The dog bit him, you know, the night you run away. Then there was the upset before the magistrates, and that Mr. Wooster somehow managed to get the day, because master—I mean old Blakeford—hadn't got the right witness. And that made master—I mean old Blakeford—worse. And now I don't think I've any more to tell you, only you ain't half eating your toast. My sakes! it do put me in mind of old times, for it was precious dull when you was gone."

"Were you cross with me for running away, Mary?"

"I was then, for not telling me, but I soon got to think it was quite right."

"I hope it was, Mary," I said; "but did you ever see old Mr. Rowle?"

"What, that yellow little man? oh, oftens; he used to come and talk to me about you, and when I said you was very ungrateful for running away, he used to stick up for you. He didn't come very often, though," continued Mary, correcting herself. "because he couldn't smoke in my kitchen, else I believe he'd have come every night to talk about you."

A slight moan from poor Revitts took Mary to the bedside, and very soon after she insisted upon my lying down and going to

sleep a bit, and when I awoke the next morning, Mary was looking as fresh and wakeful as ever.

I don't know to this day how Mary managed, for she never seemed to close an eye, but to be always watching over her "pore boy." When I talked about her going to bed, she only laughed, and said that "a good nuss never wanted no sleep."

"And now, my dear, you've been kep' away from your work," she said; "so, as soon as you've had your breakfast, you be off. I can manage till you come back. I don't hold with neglecting nothing."

She would not hear of opposition, so I left her the field, and went down to the office, where I saw Mr. Hallett looking very pale and stern, and soon after I was at my old work, reading to Mr. Jabez Rowle, who seemed very glad to see me back, complimenting me on my reading, by saying I was not quite so stupid as my substitute had been.

When I returned to Caroline Street, I found Mary in consultation with the landlady, who then descended, and, to my great delight, Revitts was, if anything, better.

Mary was very glad to see me back, and began to unfold her plans, to wit, that she had found that the front room was to let furnished, and she had taken it of Mrs. Keswick, the landlady, for my use.

"It will be better for all of us, my dear," she said, "so just you hold your tongue."

I sat up late with Mary that night, and the next, and the next, talking about the past and the future, and still she seemed to get no sleep; but she always laughed about it, and declared that she went to sleep with one eye at a time. Be that as it may, a more patient, untiring nurse man never had, and right through poor Revitts' weary state of delirium she was always by his pillow, always smiling and cheerful through the worst crisis, till, one night, when I returned to be met by her on the stairs; and, finger on lips, she led me into the front room, to fall on my neck, and silently sob as if her heart would break.

"Oh, Mary, Mary!" I said, "he's worse; and I thought he seemed so much stronger this morning."

"No, no, dear," she sobbed, "he's better. He opened his eyes this afternoon and knowed me, and said: 'Ah, Mary, old gal, is that you?'"

Poor woman! The pent-up suffering that had been longing to burst forth, and which had all been hidden behind her mask of smiles, had come pouring out, and for the next half-hour Mary sobbed and wept in a quiet way till I was in despair. Then, to my surprise, she got up in a business-like manner, wiped her eyes, and smiled once more.

"There!" she exclaimed, "I'm better now."

CHAPTER XXXII.

COMING OFF.

WITH Revitts better there was no occasion for me to stop in of an evening, and as soon as I could I went on to the Halletts', where I was warmly welcomed by the whole family. Mrs. Hallett had a string of troubles to tell me, and interspersed with them I had narratives of how different matters used to be.

Linny was very affectionate and kind, but I could see that she looked pale and troubled. Her pretty face lighted up though, whenever her brother spoke, and I noted the air of satisfaction in Hallett's face as he realized how his sister was keeping to her promise.

"Well, Antony," he said cheerily, as soon as Mrs. Hallett had retired, which was always before nine, Linny going away to attend upon her. "What do you say: shall we go and look at the model?"

"Yes," I said eagerly; "I've been longing to have another turn at it."

"You are not wearied out then?"

"Wearied out?" I cried, laughing; "no, and I never shall be till I see it a success."

He sighed, but there was a smile upon his lip at the same time; and leading the way upstairs, we were soon busy over the model.

I saw at a glance that it had remained untouched, covered with the black cloth, ever since that unfortunate morning, so that I did not need his confirming words as he spoke:

"I thought I would leave it till you came."

That night and many more were taken up in separating and repairing the broken parts of the little piece of mechanism, and then came the difficult task—how to contrive so that it should not again break down.

The days flew by and became weeks, and the weeks months, but still the problem was not solved. Experiment after experiment was tried without effect, and it seemed as if Hallett's clever brain could only bring the work up to a certain point. Then it required the powers of a second brain to carry it on to perfection.

Meanwhile Revitts had gradually recovered, and more than once related to Mary and me how, on that unfortunate night, he had been attracted by a slight scuffle and a woman's cry; that he had run up, and the woman had clung to him, which so enraged the man that he had struck him with the heavy stick that he carried, and that was all.

"Should you know the woman again?" I asked, feeling very guilty as the possessor of Linny's secret.

"No," he said. "She was only a little thing, quite a girl, and she had her veil down; but I should know the man, and if ever I do get hold of him, if I don't give him a wunner my name ain't Revitts."

He was still too ill to resume his duties, but he used to go out for a walk every day, leaning on Mary's arm, Mary herself now taking to the room that had been engaged ostensibly for me.

"It's a-coming off, Antony," said Revitts to me one night, when I had returned from the office in high glee; for I had received a note from Miss Carr, saying that she wished to see me the next day, she having just returned to town with her sister from a long round of visits, following a tour on the Continent.

"Coming off?" I said, looking from him to Mary and back.

"Don't you take any notice of his nonsense," cried Mary, running her arm up to the elbow in one of Revitts' stockings.

"Tain't nonsense," said Revitts, rubbing his hands softly; "it's a-coming off soon as ever I'm quite well."

"Tain't," said Mary tartly. "I'm going to take another place as soon as ever you're fit to leave."

"Yes, my dear, so you are," said Revitts, smiling at me in a soft, smooth, sheepish way; "a place as you won't never leave no more."

"It's all stuff, Master Antony, and I'm not," cried Mary.

"Tantrums won't save you from it now, my dear," said Revitts, shaking his head and pointing to the wall. "I says to myself as soon as ever I began to be able to think again, and see that there shawl and bonnet a-hanging so comfortable-like up again my great-coat and hat—I says to myself, I says, she's hung up her bonnet now and give in, and it can be Mrs. William Revitts as soon as ever I like."

"It's all stuff and nonsense, I tell you. Don't listen to him, Master Antony."

"That ain't a real tantrum," said Revitts, rubbing his hands; "she's give in—she's give in."

"I declare I wouldn't have come a-nigh you, Bill, if I'd knowed you'd go on like that before Master Antony," cried Mary, who was perfectly scarlet.

"Master Antony's a gentleman," said Revitts, "and he bears witness that you've give in; and, tantrums or no tantrums," he cried, bringing his hand down upon the table with a bang, "you don't go away no more. Look at that!"

He took a blue official envelope from his pocket and opened it, took out a letter, and smoothed it upon his knee.

"That's dictation, that is, Antony. That's what that is," he cried, holding up his chin, and giving his head an official roll, as if to settle it in a stock that he was not wearing.

"Why, where did you get that letter?" cried Mary.

"Brought me this afternoon while you was out shopping," said Revitts triumphantly. "Look here, Antony, that ain't directed to P.C. Revitts, that ain't;" and he handed me the envelope, which I read aloud:

"To Sergeant Revitts, VV Division, Caroline Street, Pentonville."

"Sergeant Revitts!" he said, rising and buttoning up his coat, but pausing to reach down his stiff, shiny stock and buckle it on. "Sergeant Revitts, if you please; and if," he said, walking up and down the room excitedly, "it ain't Inspector Revitts some day, and after that Superintendent and a sword, my name ain't Bill."

"Hurrah!" I cried; "I am glad;" and then I caught his arm, for, poor fellow, he was very weak yet, and needed the chair Mary placed for him to sit down.

"And you so ill and weak still, and talking about such stuff," she cried hastily.

"I'm getting round fast enough," said Revitts; "it was only the 'sergeant' took my breath away a bit; that's all. It's all right, Antony. It's a-coming off, ain't it, Mary, my dear?"

"I am glad, Bill. But they couldn't have made a better man a sergeant if they'd tried," said Mary evasively.

"I said it was a-coming off," said Revitts. "ain't it?"

He leaned forward, and looked at Mary; she, with the stocking on one arm, and the long darning-needle in her hand, held it as if to keep him off. I saw Mary's scarlet face gradually raised till her eyes met his, and then a soft, foolish-looking smile began to dawn upon one corner of her lips, pass over to the other, and gradually make them open to show her white teeth, before running right up, and half-closing her eyes. The same kind of smile, but much larger, appeared on Revitts' face; and there they sat, smiling at one another, till I took up my cap and went out—even my exit being unnoticed—for another good servant was veritably lost to society. Mary's "tantrums" were at an end.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

I HAVE ANOTHER LESSON IN LOVE.

I FELT rather nervous about asking for leave, but summoning up courage the next day, I knocked at the principal's door, and Mr. Ruddle's voice bade me come in.

"Well, Grace," he said, nodding to me pleasantly, "I wanted to see you."

I looked at him wonderingly.

"Only to say how glad I was to hear such a good account of you from Mr. Rowle."

"Thank you, sir."

"But Mr. Grimstone doesn't give you much praise," he continued, with rather a droll look in his eyes: "so I'm afraid you are a very ordinary sort of boy after all. Well, what do you want?"

"I had a note from Miss Carr, sir, saying she would like to see me to-day. Can I be spared?"

"Oh yes, certainly—certainly," said the old gentleman. "And look here, my man, you've made a good friend in that lady. Try and deserve it—deserve it."

"I will try, sir," I said.

"That's right," he said; "and try hard.—Well, Grimstone, what is it?"

The overseer looked from me to his principal and back again, before rustling some papers in his hand in an ill-used way.

"It's very hard on me, sir, that more attention isn't paid to the business. Here are you and me toiling and moiling all day long to keep the customers right, and Mr. John at races and steeple-chases, and Lord knows what—anything but the business!"

"You're always grumbling, Grimstone," said Mr. Ruddle testily. "Here, let me see.—You needn't wait, Grace, you can go."

I thanked him and hurried off, leaving the two immersed in some business matters, and thinking of nothing else now but my visit.

There was a warm welcome for me at Westmouth Street, and Miss Carr's eyes looked bright and satisfied, I thought; but I could not help seeing that she was paler and thinner than when I saw her last.

"Well, Antony," she said, after seating me beside her; "it seems an age since we met. What have you been doing?"

I told her—busy at the office, and also about Mr. Revitts.

"Yes," she said thoughtfully. "I was in the neighbourhood of Rowford last month, and I—"

"You were down there?" I said eagerly.

"Yes, Antony, and I had a long chat with the old clergyman there, when he visited my friends. He knew your father and mother."

"Oh yes," I said, as a flood of recollections came back.

"And he asked me very kindly about you, saying he thought Mr. Blakeford had behaved very badly to Mr. Grace."

"I mean to pay Mr. Blakeford every penny my dear father owes him," I said, flushing, and getting up from the couch. "He shall not dare to speak ill of the dead."

Miss Carr looked at me curiously, and I thought her manner

was more tender to me as she took my hand and once more drew me to her side.

"About this Mr. Revitts, Antony," she said; "I think the time has come now when you should have different lodgings."

"Oh, Miss Carr!" I exclaimed, "he has been so kind to me, such a good friend; and now poor Mary has come up, and they are going to be married, and Mary would be terribly disappointed if I went to lodge anywhere else. He's Sergeant Revitts now: he has been promoted."

"If Mr. and Mrs. Revitts set up a home of their own, that would be different," she said thoughtfully. "But in your new position, Antony, you ought to be better provided for than while you were at the office."

"In my new position?" I said, hesitating.

"Yes," she said, smiling; and as I gazed in her face I thought what a happy man Mr. Lister must be. "You said you would like to be an engineer, when I saw you last."

"Oh yes," I said, "and then I could help Mr. Hallett with his model."

There was a little spot of colour in each of her cheeks as I spoke, and a slight knitting of her brows; but she went on:

"I have consulted Mr. Ruddle, who has spoken to the proprietors of a large engineering firm, and they have engaged to take you as a pupil."

"Oh, Miss Carr!" I cried.

"But understand, Antony, that it is not merely sitting in an office and handling pen and drawing instruments: as I understand, the pupils have to learn to use lathe and tool, so as to thoroughly understand their profession. Shall you mind that?"

"Mind it?" I said. "Do you think I mind dirtying my hands? Why, my father had a regular workshop, where we used to make and mend. Besides, if I learn all that, I can help Mr. Hallett."

"Antony," she said, in a weary, half-annoyed way, "don't talk to me of Mr. Hallett. My dear boy, you must not be a hero-worshipper."

"I don't know what a hero-worshipper is," I said, feeling hurt; "but Mr. Hallett has been so good to me that it would be ungrateful if I did not love and respect him."

The two little spots of colour came in her cheeks again, and there was a strange twitching of her brows.

"Kinder to you than Mr. Revitts?" she said softly.

"Oh, he's not like William Revitts," I said eagerly. "I can't quite explain it; he's so different. I like Revitts, but I always seem to have to teach him. Mr. Hallett teaches me, Miss Carr. I think he will be a great man."

"You foolish boy!" she cried, in a nervous, excited way.

"There, then: it is settled. You will go and see Mr. Girtley, at his office in Great George Street, Westminster, and you may bid adieu to the printing-office, and make your first start towards being a professional man as soon as ever you like."

"I—I can never be grateful enough to you, Miss Carr," I said, in a trembling voice.

"Oh yes, my dear boy, you can. Work on and succeed, and you will more than repay me."

"Then I shall soon be out of debt," I said joyfully.

"I hope so, Antony," she said sadly; "but don't be too sanguine.—Yes?"

"Mr. Lister, ma'am," said the servant who had entered. "He would be glad if you would see him for a few minutes."

"Did—did you tell him I was not alone?" said Miss Carr, whose face seemed to have turned cold and stern.

"No, ma'am, I only took his message."

"Show Mr. Lister up," she said, in a quiet dignified way; and, as the footman left the room—"Go in there, Antony, and wait until Mr. Lister has gone. He will not stay long."

She pointed to the folding-doors that opened into a larger drawing-room, followed me, and pointing to a table covered with books, returned, leaving the door ajar.

The various illustrated books were no little attraction, but the thought of becoming an engineer, and perhaps being of service to Mr. Hallett, kept me from looking at them; and the next moment I heard the little drawing-room door open, and Mr. Lister's voice, every word being perfectly audible.

"Ah, my dear Miriam!" he exclaimed; "why, my dear girl, you look quite pale."

I felt very guilty, and as if I were listening purposely to the words passing in the next room; so, taking up a book, I tried to read it, but in spite of my efforts every word came plain and clear, and I heard all.

"I have been a little unwell," said Miss Carr quietly.

"My poor girl!" he said tenderly. "Ah, you have been away too much! Miriam, dear, I want you to listen to me to-day. When am I to make you my prisoner, and keep you from these errant ways?"

There was no reply, and a dead silence seemed to fall.

"Why, Miriam, darling," said Mr. Lister, in a tender voice, "you are more unwell than I thought for; why not have advice?"

"No, no," she said hastily. "I am quite well, indeed, John."

"Then why are you so cold and strange and distant? Have I offended you, darling?"

"Oh no, John; indeed, no."

"I could not visit you more frequently, Miriam. I could not

join you abroad, for, as you know, my circumstances are only moderate, and I have to keep very, very close to the business. Ruddle does not spare me much. Are you annoyed because you think I slight you?"

"Oh no, no, John—indeed no."

"Yes, that is it," he cried: "you think I ought to have come down when you were staying at Rowford."

"Can you not believe me, John," she said coldly, "when I tell you that there are no grounds for such a charge? You ought to know me better now."

"I do know you better, my own, my beautiful darling," he cried passionately; "but you drive me nearly mad. We have been engaged now so many weary months, and yet I seem to occupy no warmer position in your heart than when I first met you. It is dreadful!"

I heard him get up and walk about the room, while she sat perfectly silent.

"You rebuff me," he cried angrily. "You are cold and distant; my every advance is met by some chilly look. Good heavens! Miriam, are we engaged to be man and wife, or not?"

"You are unjust, John, in your anger," said Miss Carr in her low, sweet voice. "I do not rebuff you, and I am never intentionally cold. Indeed, I try to meet you as the man who is to be my husband."

"And lover?" he said, with an almost imperceptible sneer.

"As my husband," she said quietly; "a holier, greater title far than that of lover. We are not girl and boy, John Lister, and I do not think that you would love and respect me the more for acting like some weak, silly school-girl, who does not know her own mind."

"She would at least be warmer in her love."

"But not nearly so lasting," said Miss Carr, in a low, almost pathetic voice. "I look upon our engagement as so sacred a thing that I think we ought not to hurry on our marriage as you wish. Besides, was it not understood that we should wait awhile?"

"Yes; that was when some tattling fool told you about my losses over that race, and I suppose made out that I was in a hurry to win the heiress, so as to make ducks and drakes of her money."

"You hurt me," she said softly; "no one ever hinted at such a degrading idea."

"Just when a fellow had gone into the thing for once in a way. Of course I was unlucky, and a good job too. If I had won I might have been tempted to try again. Now I have done with racing and betting and the rest of it for ever."

"I had not thought of that affair, John, when I spoke as I

did. I promised you I would forget it, and I had forgotten it, believe me."

"Oh yes, of course," he said bitterly.

"I am speaking frankly and openly to you, John," continued Miss Carr gently; "and I want you to think as I do, that, in taking so grave a step as that which joins two people together for life, it should be taken only as one makes a step from which there is no recall."

"Miriam!" he exclaimed, and he seemed to stop short in front of her, "I am a hot, impetuous fellow, and I love you passionately, as you know, and have known since the day when first we met. Have I ever given up the pursuit?"

"No," she said, half-laughingly. "You did not let me rest, nor did our friends, until we were engaged."

"Of course not. There, come now, you look more like your own dear self. I want to ask you a question."

"Yes, John. What is it?"

He cleared his voice and hesitated, but only to speak out firmly at last.

"Do you think—have you ever thought me such a cur that I wanted you for the sake of your money?"

"John, this is the second time that you have brought up my fortune to-day. There is no need to answer such a question."

"But I beg—I desire—I insist upon knowing," he cried passionately.

"You have your answer in the fact that you are standing before me talking as you are. If I believed for an instant that you had such sordid thoughts, our engagement would be at an end. I would sooner give you the money than be your wife."

"Of course, yes: of course, my own dear, noble girl!" he cried excitedly. "Then why all this waiting—why keep me at arm's length? Come now, darling, let us settle it at once."

"No, John," she said calmly. "I cannot yet consent."

"Your old excuse," he cried, striding up and down the room.

"I never held out hopes to you that it would be soon," she replied; and I felt that she must be looking at him wistfully.

"But why—why all this waiting, dear?" he said, evidently struggling with his anger, and striving to speak calmly.

"I have told you again and again, dear John, my sole reason."

"And what is that?" he said bitterly; "it must have been so trifling that I forget it."

"You do not forget it, indeed," she said tenderly. "I ask you to wait, because I wish, when I marry you, to be sure that I am offering you a true and loving wife."

"Oh, if that's all," he said laughingly, "I'm satisfied as you are; and on my soul, Miriam, I wish you had not a penny, so that all ideas of self-interest might be set aside!"

"They are set aside, dear John," she said calmly.

"Well then, love, let there be an end to this miserable waiting and disappointment. If I did not know thoroughly your sweet disposition, and that you are so far above all silly coquettish ways, I should say that you were trifling with me, to make me more eager for the day."

"You know me better."

"I do, my darling," he said in a low impassioned voice, which I heard quite plainly, though I had gone to the window and was looking out into the street. "Then let us settle it at once. I am in your hands, Miriam, as I have been from the day I first set eyes upon you. At present I am wretched—miserable—my whole thoughts are of you, and I feel at times half-mad—that I cannot wait. Do you wish to torture me?"

"No."

"Then be my dear honoured wife in a week's time—a fortnight? What, still shaking your head? Well, then, there: I am the most patient of lovers—in a month from to-day?"

"No, no, I cannot," she said; and in place of being so calm she spoke now passionately. "You must wait, dear John, you must wait."

"Then there is something," he cried, in a low, angry voice. "Some wretch has been maligning me."

"Indeed no."

"You have been told that I am wasteful and a spendthrift?"

"I should not have listened to any such charge."

"Then that I am weak, and untrustworthy, and gay?"

"I should have told anyone who hinted such a thing that it was a lie."

"Then," he cried hoarsely, "there is some one else; you have seen some one you like better!"

"John! Mr. Lister! You hurt my wrist."

"You do not answer me," he cried, his voice growing more hoarse and intense, while I stood there with my heart palpitating, feeling as if I ought to run to Miss Carr's help.

"I will not answer such a question," she said angrily; "but I will tell you this: that I have looked upon myself as your betrothed wife; do not make me think upon our engagement with regret."

"Forgive me, Miriam, pray forgive me," he said in a low, pleading voice. "It is my wretched temper that has got the better of me. Say you forgive me, Miriam, or I shall be ready to make an end of myself. There, there, don't take away this little hand."

"Leave me now, I beg of you," she said in a low, pained voice.

"Yes, directly, sweet," he whispered; "but let there be an end of this, my darling. Say—in a month's time—you will be my wife, and then I shall know I am forgiven."

"I forgive you your cruel, passionate words, John," she said, in such a tone that I began once more to look out of the window, wondering whether Mrs. John Lister would be as kind to me as Miss Carr.

"And, in a month to-day, you will make me a happy man?"

"I cannot promise that," she said after a pause.

"Yes, yes, you can, dearest—my own love!" he cried; and I felt now as if I should like to open the window and step out on the balcony.

"No, I cannot promise that, John," she repeated. "You must—we must wait."

"Then it is as I say," he cried, evidently springing up from her feet, and stamping up and down the room. "You are a cruel, cold, heartless girl, and I'll come begging and pleading no more. Our engagement holds good," he said bitterly; "and you shall name the day yourself, and we shall be a happy pair, unless I have blown out my brains before we're wed."

I heard the little drawing-room door close loudly, descending steps, and then the front-door shut almost with a bang, and from where I stood I saw Mr. Lister, looking very handsome and well dressed, with a bouquet in his button-hole, stride hastily down the street, cutting at imaginary obstacles with his cane, and as he turned the corner I heard from the next room a low moan, and Miss Carr's voice, saying:

"God help and teach me! I am a wretched woman! How shall I act?"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

I TAKE THE NEWS TO MY FRIENDS.

"WRETCHED!" I thought, "in the midst of wealth, and loved by that passionate, handsome man." Then I recalled how I had often heard of lovers' quarrels, and supposed that this was one that would soon be made up.

I felt very uncomfortable, and wondered what I ought to do. There was a deep silence in the next room that became painful, and I wondered whether Miss Carr had gone; but directly after I heard such a low bitter sobbing that it went to my heart, and, unable to bear it longer, I went to the door, looked in, and saw her half-lying on the couch, with her face buried in the pillow, weeping bitterly.

I hesitated for a moment, and then went in unheard over the soft thick carpet, and kneeling down, I took the inert hand hanging down, and kissed it.

In a moment she stood up with pale and angry face, flinging me off as if I had stung her.

"Oh, Antony, my boy; is it you?" she cried; and flinging her arms round me, she let her head fall upon my shoulder, and wept passionately and long, while I tried to utter some feeble platitude to soothe her.

The storm passed off suddenly, and she wiped her swollen eyes.

"I had forgotten that you were there, Antony," she said. "I have had a great trouble."

She spoke with her face averted, and she was trying now to remove the traces of her tears.

"You could not hear what was said?" she asked.

"Yes, Miss Carr. I did not wish to, but I heard every word."

"Oh!"

She turned her wild eyes upon me, and her pale face flushed crimson as she rose to leave the room, hurrying away and leaving me wondering whether I ought to go.

I had just concluded that I ought, and, taking up a sheet of paper, I had written a few lines saying how very sorry I was that I had been an unwilling listener, when she came back with her hair re-arranged, and looking pale and calm.

"Were you writing to me, Antony?" she said.

"Yes, Miss Carr."

"Let me see."

She read that which I had written, and smiled sadly. Then, tearing up the note, she took my hand and led me once more to the couch.

"I am sorry that you heard what passed, Antony," she said; "but since I have known you, I have gradually grown to look upon you as a friend as well as a *protégé*; you have told me your little history, and every time I have seen you, you have shown me the fruit of the teachings of those to whom you were very dear. I feel quite happy in knowing that you, as the son of a gentleman, Antony, will hold all that you have heard quite sacred."

"If you will only believe in and trust me," I cried.

"I do believe in and trust you, Antony," she said warmly. "Now I am going to ask you to leave me, and come again tomorrow, after you have been to the engineer's office. I am not well, and I should be glad to be alone."

I rose, and as she held out her hand I took it and kissed it reverently—so reverently, that she drew me to her, and touched my forehead with her lips.

"Go now, Antony," she said, "and I think it will be better that you should not return to the printing-office. I will arrange with Mr. Ruddle about that. A letter from me will be sufficient. And look here, Antony: you will come here to me every Saturday, and

Sunday too, if you like. You need stand upon no ceremony—but come. You will not be sorry to leave the office?”

“Oh no,” I said; “but I shall regret leaving Mr. Hallett.”

I thought it was fancy then, as I seemed to see a spasm shoot through her. She said no more to me, but pressed something into my hand, and I went downstairs.

I felt very proud as I made my way along the streets, wondering what was in the packet Miss Carr had given me, and longing for an opportunity to open it.

The park seemed the most suitable place, and, making my way there, I lay down on the soft turf in a secluded place, opened the packet, and found in it a letter and a purse containing two five-pound notes.

The letter was dated the night before, and it was very brief:

“MY DEAR ANTONY,

“I have thought that you may need several things in commencing your new life, and as I wish you to appear as a gentleman’s son who means to work earnestly, I should provide serviceable clothes. I leave the rest to your common sense and discretion.

“Yours affectionately,

“MIRIAM CARR.”

“My dear Antony,” “yours affectionately,” I repeated to myself; and as I lay there, after safely placing the note and purse in my pockets, I wished earnestly that the dead could know and thank one who had so evidently my welfare at heart.

Mary soon knew of my good fortune, but did not seem at all surprised.

“No, my dear, it’s nothing more than nateral,” she said, as I partook of tea with her; and in her affection for me she tried very hard to make me bilious with the amount of butter in which she soaked my toast. “You being a gentleman’s son, and having had a par and a mar, it was no more than one might expect, for gentlefolks to take notice of you. That Miss Carr’s a real lady, and I shouldn’t wonder if she was to leave you no end of money when she died.”

“Oh, Mary!” I cried, “just as if I wanted Miss Carr to die and leave me her money. I mean to earn some for myself, and when I get rich, you and Revitts shall come and live with me.”

“That we will,” said Mary. “I’ll be your cook, Master Antony, and Bill shall be—shall be—”

“Bailiff and steward.”

“Or else gardener,” she said. “So you’re going to buy some new clothes, are you?”

“Yes, Mary; I must go well dressed to the engineer’s.”

"Then I should buy two more suits," said Mary eagerly. "Have a good dark blue for Sundays, with gilt buttons, and for every day have invisible green."

I shook my head.

"No, I must have black still, Mary, and grey," I said.

"I wouldn't dear; I'd have blue, and as for invisible green, you wouldn't know as it wasn't black."

However, Mary came to my way of thinking, and my choice of new things was in no wise *outré*.

I seemed to be plunged into a perfect atmosphere of love just then, for I left Revitts smiling foolishly at Mary, whose face reflected the lover as perfectly as a mirror, and went on to Hallett's, where I unconsciously found myself mixed up with another trouble of the kind.

I have grown wiser since, but in those days it was a puzzle to me why people could not be friends and fond of one another without plunging into such heart-breaking passionate ways, to their own discomfort and that of all whom they knew.

I was rather later than usual at the Hallett's, and on going upstairs, full of my good news, I found that Mrs. Hallett was in bed, and Linny with her brother.

I ran up, tapped, and went in according to my custom, and then drew back for it was evident that something was wrong, but Hallett called me to stay.

"We have no secrets from you, Antony," he said excitedly. "You know what has taken place from the first, and you are as much Linny's friend as mine."

"Then if he is," cried Linny, stamping her little foot, "I'll appeal to him."

"Why, Linny," I said, "what is the matter?"

"Matter!" she cried, sobbing passionately, "have I not given up to him in all he wished? have not I obeyed him and been more like a prisoner here than his sister? And now he is not satisfied."

"I am satisfied, my child," he said kindly. "But go on: what have I done?"

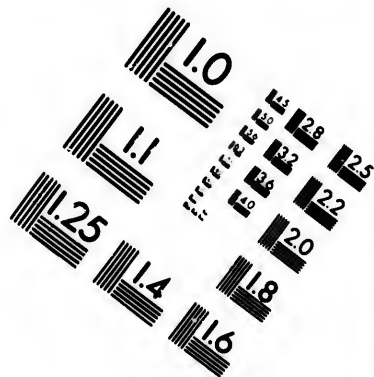
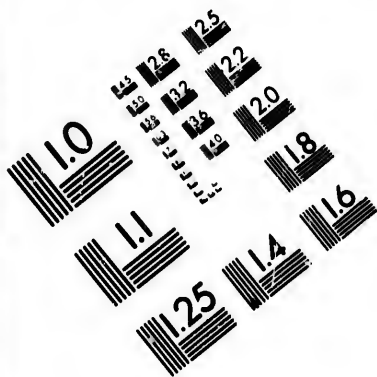
"Done?" cried Linny; "wounded me where you knew my heart was sore; looked upon my every act with suspicion."

"No, my child," he said quietly, as he watched the pretty, wilful little thing more in grief than anger. "You know how happy we have been, these last few weeks, since you have had confidence in me, and listened to my words."

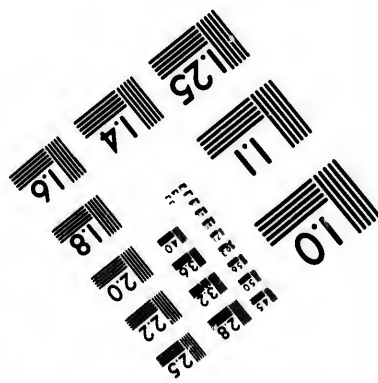
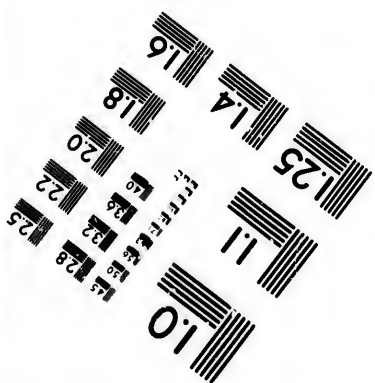
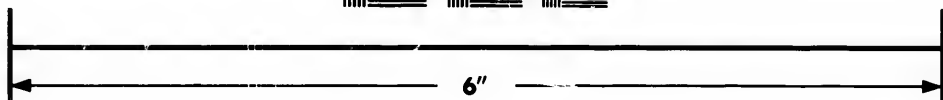
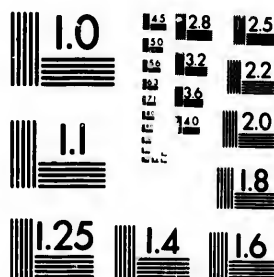
"Happy!" she cried piteously, and with her hand upon her heart.

"Yes," he said; "happy till this letter came to-day—a letter that has swept all your promises to the winds, and sown dissension between us. Once more, will you show me the letter?"





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"Once more," cried Linny passionately, "no! You assume too much. Even if you were my father, you could do no more."

"I stand to you, my dear child, in the place of your dead father. Your honour is as dear to me as it would have been to him."

"My honour!" echoed Linny. "Stephen, you degrade me, by talking in this way before a comparative stranger."

"Antony Grace is not a comparative stranger," said Hallett quietly. "If he were your own brother he could not have acted better to us both. I speak out before him, because I look to Antony, boy though he be, to help me to watch over you and protect you, since you are so weak."

"To act as your spy?"

"No," he said sadly, "we will not degrade ourselves by acting as spies, but you force it upon me, Linny, to take stern measures. You refuse to show me this letter?"

"I do. I would die first!" cried Linny.

"My poor child," he said sadly, "there is no need. I can read it in your transparent little face. You thought, I believe, in the first hot sting of your wrong that night, that you had plucked this foolish love from your breast; and so long as he remained silent you were at rest. But now he writes to you and says——"

"Hush, Stephen! You shall not before Antony Grace."

"Why not?" he cried. "He says in this letter that he has been wretched ever since; that he begs your pardon for the past; that upon your forgiveness depends his future; and he implores you, by all you hold sacred, to grant him an interview, that he may be forgiven."

"Stephen!" cried Linny, but he went mercilessly on.

"And the foolish, trusting little heart, unused to the wiles of this world, leaped at the words, forgave him on the instant, and a brother's words, her own promises, the vows of amendment, all are forgotten," he said angrily, as his face now grew white and his hands clenched, "and all for the sake of a man who is an utter scoundrel!"

"How dare you!" cried Linny, and the hot passionate blood flashed to her little cheeks. Her eyes flamed, her teeth were set, and, in an access of rage, she struck her brother across the lips with the back of her hand. "How dare you call him a scoundrel?" she cried.

"Because," said Hallett—while I stood by, unutterably shocked by the scene, which was the more intense from the low voices in which brother and sister spoke, they being in unison on the point that Mrs. Hallett should not hear their quarrel—"because," said Hallett, "his conduct is that of a villain. While professing love for you, he insults you. He tells you you are more dear to him than life, and he skulks like a thief and does not show his face. If he loved you——"

"Love! What do you know of love?" cried Linny passionately. "You—you cold-blooded groveller, without soul to worship anything greater than that!"

As she spoke, she stood with her head thrown back, looking the picture of scorn and rage, as she contemptuously pointed at poor Hallett's model; while he, weak, nervous, and overwrought, stung almost to madness, caught her sharply by the shoulder, and in her fear she sank on her knees at his feet.

"My God!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

I BUILD A CASTLE IN THE AIR.

IF ever words were uttered with a wild intensity of fervour, it was that awful appeal; and, in the interval that followed, I felt my heart beat painfully, while Hallett, with the great drops standing on his knotted brow, clutched the little shoulder, so that Linny flinched from him.

"I cold-blooded—I know naught of love!" he whispered hoarsely; "when, for a year past, my life has been one long-drawn agony! I know naught of love, who have had to crush down every thought, every aspiration, lest I should be a traitor to the man whose bread I eat! Love? Girl, my life has been a torture to me, knowing, as I did, that I was a groveller, as you say, and that I must grovel on, not daring to look up to one so far above me, that—Heaven help me, what am I saying?" he cried, looking from one to the other. "Linny, for our dead father's sake—for the sake of that poor, pain-wrung sufferer below, let there be no more of this. Trust me, child. Believe in me. I know so much of what you must suffer. that if he, whoever he be, prove only true and worthy of you, he shall be welcome here. But why raise this barrier between us? See, I am not angry now. It is all past. You roused that within me that I could not quell, but I am calm again, and, as your brother, I implore you, tell me who is this man?"

"I—I cannot," said Linny, shaking her head.

"You cannot?"

"No," she said firmly; "I gave my promise."

"That you would not tell me—your own brother? Your mother then?"

"No, not now," she said, shaking her head. "After a time I will."

Without another word she turned and ran from the room, leaving Hallett gazing vacantly before him, as if suffering from some shock.

I went up to him at last. "Can I help you, Hallett?" I said; and he turned and gazed at me as if he had not understood my words.

"Antony," he said at length, "a time back I should have thought it folly to make a friend and confidant of such a boy as you; but I have no man friend, I have shut myself up with those two below there, and when I have not been with them my hours have been spent here—here," he said, pointing mockingly at the model, "with my love, and a strange, coquettish jade she is—is she not? But somehow, my boy, we two have drifted together, and we are friends, badly coupled as we may seem. You have heard what Linny said. Poor child, she must be saved at any cost, though I hardly know what course to pursue. There," he said wearily, "let it rest for to-night; sometimes, in the thickest wilderness of our lives, a little path opens out where least expected, and something may offer itself even here."

"I am very, very sorry, Hallett," I said.

"I know it, my boy, I know it," he said hurriedly; "but forget what you heard me say to-night. I was betrayed into speaking as I did by a fit of passion. Forget it, Antony, forget it."

I did not answer, and he turned to me.

"I meant to have had a good work at the model to-night, but that little scene stopped it. Now about yourself. You are getting a sad truant from the office."

He said it in a hesitating manner, and turned his face away directly after, but only to dart round in surprise at my next words.

"I am not coming back to the office any more—but don't think me ungrateful."

"Not coming back?"

"No, Hallett; Miss Carr sent for me—she has been away—and I am to go at once as a pupil to an engineer."

He turned his back to me, and I ran to his side:

"Oh, Hallett," I cried piteously; "don't be angry with me. I told her I was sorry to go, because you were such a good friend."

"You told her that, Antony?"

"Indeed, indeed I did; but I thought in being an engineer I might be some day such a help to you, and that it was for the best; and now you are vexed and think me ungrateful."

He was silent for a few moments, and then he turned to me and took my hands, speaking in a low, husky voice:

"You must not heed me to-night, Antony," he said. "You saw how upset and strange I was. This affair of Linny's, and her letter, trouble me more than I care to own. No, no, my dear boy, I am not vexed with you, and I do not for a moment think you ungrateful."

"You do not!" I cried joyfully.

"No, no, of course not. I rejoice to find that you have so good and powerful a friend in—Miss Carr. She must be—a truly good—woman."

"She's everything that's good and beautiful and kind," I cried, bursting into raptures about her. "I'm to have books and to go there every week, and she trusts to me to try and succeed well in my new life. Oh, Hallett, you can't think how I love her."

He laid his hand on my shoulder and gazed with a strange light in his eyes upon my eager face.

"That's right," he said. "Yes—love her, and never give her cause to blush for her kindness to you, my boy."

He sat listening to me eagerly as I went on telling him her words, describing her home, everything I could think of, but the one subject tabooed, and of that I gave no hint, while he, poor fellow, sat drinking in what was to him a poisoned draught, and I unwittingly kept on adding to his pain.

"I'm only afraid of one thing," I said with all a boy's outspoken frankness.

"And what is that, Antony?"

"I'm afraid that when she is married to Mr. Lister——"

His hand seemed to press my shoulder more tightly.

"Yes," he said in a whisper, "she is to be married to Mr. Lister."

"Yes, I knew that the first day I came to the office."

"It is the common talk there," he said with knitted brows.

"And what is your fear, Antony?"

"That when she is married to Mr. Lister she will forget all about me."

"You wrong her, boy," he said almost fiercely; and I stared at his strange display of excitement, for I had not the key then to his thoughts, and went on blindly again and again tearing open his throbbing wound.

"You wrong her," he said. "Antony, Miss Carr is a woman to have won whose esteem is to have won a priceless gem, and he who goes farther, and wins her love, can look but for one greater happiness—that of heaven."

He was soaring far beyond my reach, grovelling young mole that I was, and I said in an uneasy way that must have sounded terribly commonplace and selfish:

"You don't think she will forget me, then?"

"No," he said sternly. "There is that in her face which seems to say that she is one who never forgets—never forgives. She is no common woman, Antony; be worthy of her trust, and think of her name in your prayers before you sleep."

I gazed at him curiously, he seemed so strange; and, noticing my uneasy looks, he said in a cheerful voice:

"There, we will not talk so seriously any more. You see how I trust you, Antony, in return for your confidence in me. Now let's talk of pleasant things. An engineer, eh?"

"Yes," I said, delighted at the change in his conversation.

"I am glad of it—heartily glad of it," he said with kindling eyes. "Linny is right; I do love and idolize my model, and you shall share her love, Antony. Together we will make her the queen of models, and if in time, perhaps years hence, I do perfect her—nay, if we perfect her—there, you see," he said playfully, "I have no petty jealousies—you will then be engineer enough to make the drawings and calculations for the machines that are to grow from the model. Is it a bargain, Antony?"

"That it is," I cried, holding out my hand, which he firmly clasped; and that night I went back to Revitts' walking upon air, with my head in a whirl with the fancied noise of the machinery made by Hallett and Grace, while, out of my share of the proceeds, I was going down to Rowford to pay Mr. Blakeford all my father's debt; and then—being quite a man grown—I meant to tell him he was a cowardly, despicable scoundrel, for behaving to me as he did when I was a boy.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MR. JABEZ ROWLE'S MONEY MATTERS.

SOMETHING like the same sensation came over me when I made my way to Great George Street, Westminster, as I had felt on the morning when I presented myself at the great printing-office. But my nervousness soon passed away on being received by Mr. Girtley, a short, broad-shouldered man, with a big head covered with crisp, curly grey hair.

"Ah," he said, speaking in a great hurry, "you're Antony Grace, our new pupil, are you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Miss Carr's young friend. Knew Carr: clever, wealthy man."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes, only had one fault—died twenty years too soon. Been a millionaire and a modest man combined. *Rara avis*, eh? Ha, ha, ha! Tom!"

"Yes, father."

The answer came from an inner office, and a good-looking youth, wonderfully like Mr. Girtley, came out with a pencil across his mouth, a pen behind his ear, a scale in one hand, and a pair of compasses in the other.

"This is Antony Grace; you take charge of him and show him

about. Take it coolly. *Festina lente*, you know. I say, Antony Grace, what does *rara avis* mean?"

"A rare or strange bird, sir."

"Good lad. And *festina lente*?"

"Hasten slowly, sir."

"Good lad. You're all right with your Latin, then. I wasn't when I began. Had to learn it after I was twenty. Well, I'm busy, Tom; you understand; he'll be a bit nervous and strange, so don't worry him. Let him take in spoonfuls first. He'll learn to drink big draughts later on."

"I'm very busy over those syphon plans, father."

"Ah, the new syphon. Yes, that must be done. Well, I'll set Browning to do them."

"I'd—'d much rather finish them myself," said the youth.

"Of course you would. Well, then, I'll give you a fortnight's extension; then you can finish them and have plenty of time for Antony Grace as well. Take him round the works, and then you can go down the river for a run. And, by-the-way, Tom, go in one of the new boats, and tip the engineer. Have a good look at those fresh oscillating cylinders, and see whether you think they beat ours. I'm off. You were quite punctual, Antony Grace, or you wouldn't have seen me. Always keep your appointments exactly. Good morning; glad to see you. Hope you'll get on and like the business. Work hard at it, and mind this—steady application wins. Bring him home to dinner to-night, Tom. Eh? yes."

"Mr. Williamson to see you, sir," said a clerk.

"My compliments to Mr. Williamson, and he must make another appointment. He is an hour after the time he named, and I am engaged for the rest of the day. Lesson in punctuality. Antony Grace," he said, nodding. "I'm off."

The door closed after his retreating figure, and Tom and I stood staring, probably thinking the same thing, whether we should like one another. The result of the scrutiny was satisfactory to me, for there was something very pleasant in the young fellow's frank open countenance, and I longed to meet with a companion nearly my own age.

"Well," he said quietly, "suppose we have a look round. I shan't work any more at my plans this morning. This is my place," he continued, taking me into the inner office, where a great broad mahogany desk was covered with papers. "You'll have that one; it was Bailey's; he was father's pupil; he's gone out to India on the Great Central."

I said, "Has he?" but I had no idea whether the Great Central was a ship or a great engine.

"There are my plans for a self-acting syphon. Those parts coloured red are where the vacuum valves will come in, and, of course, this lower part takes the place of a steam-pump."

"Does it?" I said, laughing. "But I don't understand it a bit."

"No, of course not," he said, laughing too. "Well, you'll soon learn. You'll like father, and we'll like you if you'll work well. Bailey and he did not get on at all."

"Didn't Bailey work well?" I said, as a vision of the idle apprentice came before my eyes.

"Father used to say he was like an engine with a bad stoker. He was either racing, or there was no steam up. He'd work furiously for two days, and then he'd idle for a week."

"Mr. Girtley is fond of work, then?"

"Father says everyone was meant to work, and life's too short for all we have to do. But he likes play, too. We have a cricket-field at home, and a billiard-table, and bowls—all sorts of games. Father plays at all of them when he's at home and isn't gardening. He calls it oiling his machinery and slackening his bands. Come along, I'll show you the factory, and our workshop, where you and I will have to work, making models, and then we'll oil our machinery."

"Shall we have to make models?" I cried eagerly.

"You will, of course. I'm going to be a lawyer. Father thinks the man who is a good engineer is sure to have to invent, and if so, he ought to be able to take the tools out of his men's hands, and show them how they should be used. Shall you like that? It makes your hands black."

"Oh, I shan't mind that," I said, laughing. "I shall like it."

We went over the office, and then, taking our caps, he showed me the way over Westminster Bridge to the great works in Lambeth, where steam was puffing and panting, wheels whirring, and iron and steel were shrieking as they were being tortured into shape.

It was a confusing place, and, after passing the timekeeper's box at the entrance, we seemed to plunge into a kind of Pandemonium, where fires glared, and white-hot masses of metal were being dragged out and beaten till they sent sparks of brilliant fire flying in all directions. From there we ascended to a floor where wheels were whirring and great machines were at work, with men tending them, and pouring oil in the wounds made by mighty steam-worked chisels, or bored in pieces of black iron. In one place, shavings of iron were curling off before a plane like so much soft wood; and on touching them I found them rigid, and hot with the friction necessary to tear them away. Next we were in a higher shop, where lathes were at work, and iron, steel, and brass were being turned like so much ivory. Out of this great floor was a smaller workshop, whose walls were covered with tools; and on shelves around were dozens of strange models, which took my attention strongly as I thought of Hallett's patient work, and longed to begin at something on the spot.

Here, too, there were lathes, vices, and all the necessary paraphernalia for the constructing engineers, and I left the place unwillingly to join young Girtley in his run down the river, where, the right steamer being chosen, we had our ride; the oscillating engines were examined, and we were back and down at Dulwich in good time for dinner and a look round the spacious grounds afterwards.

I returned to Caroline Street full of my day's adventures, and ready to tell Mary of my progress towards prosperity, but, to my disappointment, she seemed in nowise dazzled. It was quite a matter of course to her, only a question of time before I should be a great engineer, and in that faith she was a strong believer.

Time glided on, and the half-work, half-play system, upon which I had commenced business at Great George Street had in the course of a month settled into regular hours, but the work did not trouble me, for I led so pleasant a life with Tom Girtley, and found his father so eager and willing a teacher, that I quite enjoyed the toil. There was the one idea, too, always before my mind that some day I should be able to help Hallett, whom I joined nearly every night, to pore over and try to scheme something new for the machine.

I could see that matters were in anything but a happy state at the Halletts'—Mrs. Hallett being more complaining and querulous than ever, and, it seemed to me, rather disposed to side with Linny in her rebellion against her brother's authority.

For they were not at one: Linny was pale, excitable, and troubled: Hallett, loving, kind, and firm. But from hints he let drop, I found that Linny was as obstinate as ever, and that she was still carrying on a correspondence with her unknown admirer.

One night, after leaving Great George Street, I made my way to Hallett's, but he was out, and Linny assured me that he would not be back for hours. She evidently wanted me to go, and the reason was plain—she was busy writing a letter; and as I went away, wondering where to go, I bethought me of Mr. Jabez Rowle, who lodged in the neighbourhood, and as it would be his time for being home, I determined to go and see him.

I easily found his lodgings, at a little grocer's shop in a by-street, where he had the first floor, the front window being turned into quite a garden with flowers, and some scarlet-runners twining up strings on either side.

I heard the familiar snap of his snuff-box as I tapped at the door, and in reply to his "Come in," I entered, to find the old gentleman taking his leisure by poring over a long slip, and, pen in hand, darting in corrections with a grunt of satisfaction.

"Ah, young Grace," he cried, "you here! I thought you were lost. Glad to see you, boy. Here, sit down—no, stand up; catch hold of that bit of manuscript, and read it to me—only a dozen

sides." And to my great astonishment I found myself reading away to him in the old style for quite half-an-hour before he reached the bottom of the slip proofs and laid his pen down with a satisfied grunt and took a pinch of snuff.

"Quite a treat, Grace—quite a treat," he cried. "Sit down. I haven't had a bit of copy read to me like that since you left. Boy I've got's a fool, and I could knock his head against the wall. Shake hands. How are you?"

I replied that I was quite well, and could see that he was.

"No, I'm not," he said tartly. "Much bothered. Money matters!" and he took another pinch of snuff. "So you've called to ask me to say a word for you to come back to the office, eh? Well, I'm glad, boy—I'm glad! Take it as settled. You can come back to-morrow morning! I will have you, or I'll know the reason why."

I stared at him aghast.

"Oh no, Mr. Rowle," I said, "I only came to see you. I thought I should like to. I'm getting on so well."

"Are you, though? Engineering, eh? Well, I'm sorry for it. No, no: I'm glad of it, my lad. I hope you will get on. But I liked you for a reading-boy. You were the only chap I ever had who could stand by me when I took snuff without sneezing all over the slips, and that's a great thing. Have a pinch?" he said, offering me his box. "No, no: of course not, I forgot. Glad you came to see me, Grace—very glad. Here, Mrs. Jennings," he cried, going to the door, and shouting down the stairs; "I've got a young friend here: bring up some sugar-candy and biscuits and cinnamon; anything nice you've got."

"I really don't want anything, Mr. Jabez," I said.

"Oh, yes, you do, boy. Ho, hi! Mrs. Jennings, bring up some figs."

He toddled back to his chair, but was up again directly, to shout down the staircase.

"Bring up some almonds and raisins, and candied peel, Mrs. Jennings."

"Lor' bless the man, do you want the whole shop?" shouted a sharp voice.

"No, I don't," said Mr. Jabez grumpily, as he toddled back. "I was an out-and-outer for candied peel when I was a boy," he said, rubbing his hands. "Those dried apples, too, that look as if they had been sat upon by old women, Grace. Ah, I spent a lot of pennies on them when I was a boy."

A red-faced woman here made her appearance with a plateful of the sweets that Mr. Jabez had named, and she rather scowled at me, and banged the plate down hard enough almost to break it as she whisked out of the room again and slammed the door.

"Now, Grace, fall to, as they say in copy about feasts. See that woman?"

"Yes, Mr. Jabez."

"She's a Tartar, she is. I live here because that woman acts as a lighthouse to me."

"A lighthouse, sir? Because she has got such a red face?"

"Get out! No, you young joker. A warning, a beacon, a bell-buoy, a light-ship, to warn me off the rocks and shoals of matrimony. I should have married, Grace, years ago, if I hadn't seen what a life a woman can lead a man. She has nearly made her husband a lunatic."

"Indeed, Mr. Jabez?"

"Well, say imbecile. Peg away, my boy," he continued, laughing; "these figs are beautiful. Peel's good, too."

So it seemed, for Mr. Jabez was feasting away with great gusto, and eating two of everything to my one.

"Yes, sir, I should have been married and a poor man, instead of comparatively rich--at least, was. Money matters are rather awkward just now."

"I'm very sorry to hear it, Mr. Jabez," I said.

"I'm sorry to feel it," said Mr. Jabez, with a fig in one hand and a piece of candied peel in the other. "Come, you don't eat. By Jingo, there's Grimstone," he cried, as a step was heard upon the stairs; and in his excitement and dread of being seen engaged in eating sweets, he stuffed a fig into one breeches-pocket, some peel into the other, and snatched up his snuff-box, while I felt terribly discomposed at the idea of meeting my old tyrant.

"Is it Mr. Grimstone?" I faltered.

"Yes, but you don't eat. Take another fig," cried Mr. Jabez, as, without knocking, Mr. Grimstone entered the room.

"Hallo," he said, without taking off his hat, "what the deuce are you doing here?"

"I've come to see Mr. Jabez, Mr. Grimstone," I replied.

"Oh, have you? So have I. How long are you going to stop?"

"Oh, hours yet," said Mr. Jabez. "Sit down, Grim. He doesn't matter; speak out. He doesn't belong to the shop now. Well: what news?"

"Bad!" said Mr. Grimstone, throwing himself into a chair.

"Here, boy, take my hat."

I took it quite obediently, and resumed my seat, while Mr. Grimstone wiped his bald head with a bright orange handkerchief.

"You don't say so?" said Mr. Jabez uneasily.

"Yes, I do," said Mr. Grimstone, taking the box out of the reader's hand and helping himself to a pinch; "I said it quite plain."

"It's a bad job."

"Have you just found that out?" snarled the overseer. "Pretty pair of fools we've been. Look here, send that boy away."

"No, no; no, no. Sit still, Grace. Eat some more figs, boy."

"I'll call Mrs. Jennings when you've eaten them. There, go on, Grim. Antony Grace isn't a chatterer."

"Just as you like," said Grimstone. "Well, if he doesn't get married to that gal right off, and bank her money, the game's up, and your £500 and my £750 are gone to the deuce."

"Is it £750, Grimstone?"

"Yes, curse him! he got round me with all sorts of promises."

"Of bonus, Grim, eh?"

"Yes, I suppose so," growled the overseer. "That bill-discounter chap, Brandysheim, or Braudyman or something's, cornering him. He was at the office to-day, and there was a regular shine."

"Was Ruddle there?"

"No, but I hear that Brandysheim threatened to come down on him if he wasn't paid."

"And what then?"

"What then?" growled Grimstone, with a show of his teeth; "why, Lister's smashed up—bankrupt, and you and I may sit and stare at each other for a pair of fools."

"But it won't hurt Ruddle."

"No, only bother him. If Lister's bankrupt, he's partner no longer, and Ruddle will have to find out what share he has in the business."

"Yes, that's what I thought," said Mr. Jabez dolefully.

"And we shan't get a penny!"

"Not even interest," said Mr. Jabez.

"Not even interest," echoed Grimstone.

"Not even bonus," said Mr. Jabez.

"Not even bonus," echoed Grimstone again.

"What's he done with his money, that's what I want to know?" said Mr. Jabez.

"Wine—women—horse-racing—foolery! He's been carrying on like mad, and what I suspect is this—Miss Carr begins to smell a rat, and I shouldn't be a bit surprised if the wedding didn't come off."

Mr. Jabez stared dolefully at Mr. Grimstone, and the overseer kept on taking pinches of snuff till the box was empty; and, after searching round with finger and thumb, threw the box impatiently down.

"Well, I don't see that we can do anything," said Mr. Jabez at last, "except wait."

"No," said Grimstone, "unless we can see the lady, and make her consent to pay us our £1,250."

"And interest," said Mr. Jabez.

"And bonus," said Grimstone, "down on the nail."

"Which we can't do," said Mr. Jabez, shaking his head.

"Of course we can't," said Grimstone. "All I wish is that I

hadn't let you persuade me into lending him the money—the savings of a whole life."

"Oh, I like that!" said Mr. Jabez, catching up a pen, and making a mark as if he were correcting Grimstone.

"Like it or not, I don't care," said Grimstone, "there it is. Here! boy, my hat."

"Going?" said Mr. Jabez.

"Going! of course I'm going. Think I'm going to stop in this dog-hole, smelling of red-herrings and oil?"

"Won't you take something? Try a fig."

Mr. Grimstone snatched his hat from my hands, gazed at me as if he would have liked to set me to pick up pie, and bounced out of the room.

"I don't know which is most unpleasant, Grace," said the old man, "Grimstone or his news. Well, he's gone. Of course, you won't talk about what you've heard. It's a very bad job, though, for me—very—very. Hi! Mrs. Jennings," he cried at the top of the stairs, "half an ounce of best Scotch and Rappee."

He tapped with his box on the handrail as he spoke, and having had it replenished, he came back to sit and take pinches, becoming so abstracted and ill at ease, that I rose to go when he was a quarter through the half-ounce.

"Going, Grace?" he said. "Ah, I'm bad company to-night, but come again. Let me see, though," he said, fumbling at some letters in his breast-pocket, "I've got a letter here from that bad boy, Peter. Just the same as usual. Tut--tut—oh, here it is. 'Remember me to that boy'—ah, blunder: call it boy—'Antony Grace. Tell him I shall come to see him if ever I get two London.' There's a fellow for you," said Mr. Jabez, "spells 'to' like the figure 2. But he always did want a deal of correcting, did Peter. Good-night, good-night."

And I went my way, sadly troubled at heart about Miss Carr and Mr. Lister, and wondering whether she would, after all, refuse to be his wife.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AN ANGRY PARTING.

I HAD four days to wait before going to Westmouth Street to receive my usual welcome—at least, not my usual welcome, for though she seemed to grow more sad and pale, Miss Carr's reception of me increased each time in warmth, till at last, had I been a younger brother she could not have been more kind.

I was a good deal troubled at heart about what I knew, and

puzzled myself as to my duties in the case. Ought I to take Mr. Halle't into my confidence, and ask his advice, or ought I to tell Miss Carr herself? It was hard to settle, and I have often thought since of how strangely I was brought at so young an age into the consideration of the weighty matters of life of those with whom I was in contact.

It seemed to me that my patroness ought to know what people said about Mr. Lister, and that if it were true she ought not to marry him. Certainly, at the interview at which I was an unwilling listener, there had appeared to be no probability of the wedding taking place soon, but all the same, Miss Carr had seemed to me terribly cut up, consequent upon the parting with Mr. Lister.

I was so strange and quiet that afternoon that Miss Carr noticed it, and had just asked me what was the matter when the servant brought up a card and I saw her change colour.

"Show him up, Edward," she said quietly; and though I did not see the card I felt sure from her manner that I knew who had come, and I looked up at Miss Carr, expecting to be told to go into the next room, but to my surprise she did not speak, and the next moment Mr. Lister came in.

"Ah, Miriam!" he exclaimed; "how well—You here, Grace?"

"Yes, sir," I said, feeling very much in the way, as I stood where I had risen.

"Sit down, Antony," said Miss Carr quietly; and as I obeyed I saw an angry flush cross Mr. Lister's countenance.

"Will you give me a few minutes in the next room, Miriam dear?" he said in a low voice.

"In my last answer to your letters, John," she replied, "I begged that you would not come to see me for a month or two. Why are you here now?"

"Why am I here now?" he said in a low, deep voice. "Can you ask me? Because I want to speak to you—particularly—come in the next room."

I could not help looking hard at him as he spoke, and thinking about what I had heard concerning his affairs, and as I thought that he was to marry Miss Carr to pay off his debts, a strong feeling of resentment against him made me almost determine to utter some word of warning.

"He is so handsome, and has such a way with him," I thought, "that she will do just as he wishes her;" but as the thoughts were in my mind, I was surprised and pleased by finding Miss Carr take quite a firm standing.

"You can have nothing more to say to me, John, than has been said already. I have told you that at least six months must elapse before I can consent to what you ask."

"Will you come into the next room, or send away that boy?" he said in a low voice, but one which showed that he was fast losing his temper.

"No," she said firmly; "and after my last letter I think it cruel of you to press me."

"I cannot help whether it is cruel or not," he said, growing white with anger at her opposition, "and you are forcing me to speak before this boy."

"I leave that to your common sense, John," she said calmly, and with no little dignity in her manner. "I don't know that I wish to hide anything from Antony Grace. He knows of our engagement."

"Are you mad, Miriam?" he cried, unable to contain himself, and indirectly venting his spleen upon me. "You pick up a poor boy out of the gutter, and you take him and make him your bosom friend and confidant."

Miss Carr caught my hand in hers, as I started, stung to the quick and mortified by his words.

"Shame, John Lister!" she said, with a look that should have brought him to his senses. "Shame! How can you speak like that in Antony Grace's presence, and to me?"

"Because you make me desperate," he cried angrily. "I can bear it no longer. I will not be trifled with. For months now you have treated me as a child. Once more, will you send away this boy, or come with me into another room?"

"Mr. Lister," she said, rising, "you are angry and excited. You are saying words now which you will afterwards grieve over, as much as I shall regret to have heard them spoken."

"I can't help that," he exclaimed. "Day after day I have come to you, begging you to listen to me, but I have always been put off, until now I have grown desperate."

"Desperate?" she said wonderingly.

"Yes, desperate. I do not wish to speak before this boy, but you force me to it."

"What is there in our engagement that I should be ashamed to let the whole world hear?" she said proudly. "Why, if I listened to you, it would be published to every one who would hear."

Mr. Lister took a few strides up and down the room.

"Will you hear me, Miriam?" he cried, making an ineffectual effort to command his temper.

"John Lister," she replied, "I have given you your answer. Come to me in six months' time."

"Am I to take that as final?" he said hoarsely.

"Yes. How can I reply otherwise to your violence?"

"Violence! It is enough to drive a man mad! But, once more, Miriam, give me your verbal answer to the note I sent you this morning. Yes or no. Pause before you answer, for you do

not know how much depends upon it. You have made me desperate. Don't leave me to repent of what I have done."

"John, dear John!" she said softly, "I am alone in the world, with none to guide me, and I have prayed for help that I might give a right answer to your request."

"Yes," he said, with his lip curling, "and it is——"

"It is for both our sakes, John," she said softly; "I could not in justice to us both say yes, now; it must be *no!*"

He did not speak, but stood glaring at her for a few moments; then, looking very white, and drawing in his breath with a long, low hiss, he turned upon his heel and left the room.

For a few minutes Miss Carr sat gazing at the door through which he had passed; and then, turning and seeing my hot, flushed face, she seemed to recall Mr. Lister's words about me, and she took my hand, sitting very quietly for a time.

"When people are angry, Antony," she said quietly, "they say things they do not intend or mean. You must forgive Mr. Lister his words about you—for my sake."

"I will do what you wish," I said, and then I began wondering whether I ought to tell Miss Carr what I knew about Mr. Lister's affairs, for it seemed to me that the words I had heard must be true, and that this was the explanation of his great anxiety to fix the day.

A dozen times over the words were on my lips, but I felt that it would seem as if I took advantage of my position, and were trying to blacken Mr. Lister to gain her favour. More likely, I thought, it would make her bitter and angry against me, and, reflecting that she had determinedly insisted that he should wait six months for her answer, I remained silent.

Miss Carr strove very hard to make me forget the unpleasantness of the early part of my visit, but she was at times very quiet and subdued, and I believe we both looked upon it as a relief when the time came for my departure.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

▲ WEDDING TRIP.

'You're getting such a fine gent now, Ant'ny,' said Revitts to me one morning; "but, if so be as you wouldn't mind, Mary and me's made up our minds to have a bit of a trip out, a kind of s'rimp tea, just by way of celebrating my being made sergeant, and getting well again."

"Why, my dear old Bill," I cried, "why should I mind your having a trip? Where are you going?"

"Well, you see, it's a toss up, Ant'ny; Gravesend's best for srimps, but Hampton Court's the nicer sorter place for a day, and Mary ain't never been."

"Then go to Hampton Court," I said.

"Hampton Court it is, Mary," he said. "That settles it."

"And I hope you'll both enjoy yourselves."

"What, won't you come?" said Revitts blankly.

"Come! what—with you?" I said.

"Why, of course, Ant'ny. You don't suppose we should care about going alone. Won't you come?"

"You didn't ask me."

"Oh, come now; that I did!" he exclaimed.

"That you did not," I said stoutly. "Did he, Mary?"

"He meant to, Master Antony," said Mary, looking up with a very red face, and one hand apparently in a grey boxing-glove, though it was only one of Revitts' worsted stockings, in need of another darn.

"Well, I'll ask you now, then," exclaimed Revitts. "Will you come along with us?"

"When?"

"Sat'day next, being your half-holiday."

"Yes," I said, "but I must write and tell Miss Carr I'm not coming till Sunday."

"That's settled, then," said Revitts, holding out his big hand for me to shake; and I could not help noticing how thin and soft it was; but he was fast recovering his strength, and was again on duty.

We walked down from Pentouville together, and as we went along, he introduced the subject of his accident for the first time for some weeks.

"You wouldn't think as I'm a-trying hard to conjure out who it was fetched me that crack on the head, Antony?"

"No," I said; "I thought you had forgotten all about it."

"Not I," he said, shaking his head. "What, me, a sergeant just promoted, and let a case like that go by without conjuring it out! Why, it couldn't be done! I should feel as if I was a disgrace to the force. That's speaking 'ficially," he said. "Now, speaking as a man, I've got this here to say, that I shan't rest comfortable till I've put something on that there fellow's wrists."

"And shall you know him again?" I asked.

"Know him! Out o' ten thousand—out o' ten millions o' men. I only wish I knew the gal. It would be such a clue."

"It's no use to be revengeful, Bill," I said. "Let it go. It brought Mary up to town."

"Yes, it did: didn't it?" he said, with the sheepish, soft look coming over his face for a moment. But it was gone directly, and he was the officer once more. "Taint revengeful," he said;

"it's dooty. We can't let outrageous outrages like that take place in the main streets. No, Antony: I feel as if my reputation's at stake, to find out who did that, and I shan't rest till I do."

We parted then, and the rest of the week passed swiftly away. I told Hallett that I was going to spend the afternoon out on the Saturday, so that most likely I should go to Miss Carr's on the Sunday, and he was not to expect me for my usual walk with him, one which had grown into a custom; and being thus clear, I went off in the morning to Westminster, it being understood that I was to meet Revitts and Mary at the White Horse Cellar, Piccadilly, and go down to Hampton Court at midday by the omnibus.

Punctual to my time, I went across the park and up St. James's Street and saw Revitts and Mary, long before I reached them, by the show they made. Mary was in white book muslin, with a long black silk scarf, and a bonnet that I could not pretend to describe, save that over it she carried a blue parasol shot with red; and Revitts was in black frock-coat, buff waistcoat, and white trousers, with a tremendous show of collar standing bolt out of a sky-blue watered-silk stock, while his hat shone as if it was a repetition of the patent leather of his shoes.

I instinctively felt that something was the matter as I drew near them, and, but for my genuine love and respect for them both, I believe I should have run away. I rebuked my cowardly shame directly after, though, and went up and shook hands.

There was not a vestige of tantrums left in Mary's countenance, for it had softened itself into that dreadful smile—the same that was playing upon Revitts' face, as he kept looking at her in a satisfied, half-imbecile way, before giving me a nudge with his elbow, covering his mouth with his hand, and exclaiming in a loud whisper,—

"We've been and done it, Ant'ny! Pouf!" This last was a peculiar laugh in which he indulged, while Mary cast down her eyes.

"Done it!—done what? What does he mean, Mary?"

Mary grew scarlet, and became puzzled over the button of one of her white kid gloves.

"Here, what do you mean, Bill?" I said.

"Done it. Pouf!" he exclaimed, with another laugh from behind his hand. "Done it—married."

"Married?" I echoed.

"Yes. Pouf! Mrs. Sergeant Revitts. White Sergeant. Pouf!"

"Oh, Mary," I said, "and not to tell me!"

"It was all his doing, Master Antony," pleaded Mary. "He would have me, and the more I wanted to go back to service, the more he made me get married. And now I hope he's happy."

There was no mistaking William Revitts' happiness as he helped his wife on to the outside of the omnibus, behind the coachman—he sitting one side of Mary, and I next him; but try

as I would, I could not feel as happy. I felt vexed and mortified; for, somehow, it seemed as if it was printed in large letters upon the backs of my companions—"Married this morning," and this announcement seemed reflected upon me.

I wouldn't have cared if they could have sat still and talked rationally; but this they did not do, for every now and then they turned to look in each other's faces, with the same weak, half-imbecile smile,—after which Mary would cast down her eyes and look conscious, while Revitts turned round and smiled at me, finishing off with a nudge in my side.

At times, too, he had spasmodic fits of silent laughter—silent, except that they commenced with a loud chuckle, which he summarily stifled and took into custody by clapping his great hand over his mouth. There were intervals of relief, though; for when, from his coign of vantage, poor Bill saw one of his fraternity on ahead—revealed to him, perhaps, by a ray of sunshine flashing from the shiny top of his hat—for, of course, this was long before the days of helmets—the weak, amiable look was chased off his face by the official mask, and, as a sergeant, though of a different division, Revitts felt himself bound to stare very hard at the police-constable, and frown severely.

At first I thought it was foolish pride on my part, that I was being spoiled by Mrs Carr, and that I was extra sensitive about my friends; but I was not long in awakening to the fact that they were the objects of ridicule to all upon the omnibus.

The first thing I noticed was, that the conductor and driver exchanged a wink and a grin, which were repeated several times between Piccadilly and Kensington, to the great amusement of several of the passengers. Then began a little mild chaff, sprinkled by the driver, who started with—

"I say, Joey, when are *you* going to be married?"

"Married? oh, I dunno. I've tried it on several times, but the parsons is all too busy."

The innocent fit was on Revitts just then, and he favoured Mary and me with a left and right nudge.

"Do adone, William," whispered Mrs. Sergeant; and he grinned hugely.

"Shall you take a public, Joey, when you do it?" said the driver, leaning back for another shot.

"Lor', no; it won't run to a public, old man," was the reply.

"We was thinking of the green and tater line, with a cellar under, and best Wallsend one and six."

I could feel that this was all meant for the newly wedded couple, and sat with flaming cheeks.

"See that there wedding in Pickydilly, last week, Bill?"

Revitts pricked up his ears, and was about to speak, but the driver turned half round, and shouted—

"What, where they'd got straw laid down, and the knocker tied up in a white kid glove?"

"No—o—o!" shouted the conductor. "That wasn't it. I mean clost ter' Arfmoon Street, when they was just going off."

"Oh, ah, yes; I remember now."

"See the old buffer shy the shoe outer the front winder?"

"No—o—o!"

"He did, and it 'it one o' the post-boys slap in the eye. Old boy had been having too much champagne."

"Did it though?"

"Yes. I say, Bill."

"Hal-low!"

"It's the right card to have champagne on your wedding morning, ain't it?"

"Ah! some people stands it quite lib'ral like, if they're nob; them as ain't, draws it old and mild."

I had another nudge from Revitts just then, and sat feeling as if I should like to jump down and run away.

"Drop o' Smith's cool out o' the cellar wouldn't be amiss, Joey, would it?"

"No, old man. I wish we could fall across a wedding-party."

A passenger or two were picked up, and we went on in peace for a little while: but the chaffing was commenced again, and kept up to such an extent that I longed for the journey to be at an end.

"Member Jack Jones?" said the driver.

"Ah! what about him?" said the conductor.

"He went and got married last year."

"Did he?"

"Yes."

"Who did he marry?"

"That there Mrs. Simmons as kep' the 'Queen's Arms' at Tunnum Green."

"Ah!"

"Nice job he made of it."

"Did he?"

"Yes; he thought she was a widdler."

"Well, warn't she?"

"No; she turned out a big-a-mee; and one day her fust husbar, comes back from 'Stralia, and kicks Jack Jones out, and takes his place; and when Jack 'peals against it, Mrs. Simmons says it was all a mistake."

"That was warm for Jack, wasn't it?"

"Hot, I say."

"Well," said the conductor; "when I makes up my mind again, and the parsons ain't so busy, I shall have the missus cross-examined."

"What for, Joey?"

"So as to see as she ain't a big-a-mee."

Revitts, who was drinking all this in, looked very serious here, as if the conversation was tending towards official matters. Perhaps it occurred to him that he had not cross-examined Mary before he was married; but he began to smile again soon after, for the conductor took a very battered old copper key-bugle from a basket on the roof, and, after a few preliminary toots, began to rattle off "The Wedding Day." The driver shook the reins, the four horses broke into a canter, and as we swept past the green hedge-grows and market-gardens, with here and there a pretty villa, I began to enjoy the ride, longing all the same, though, for Revitts and Mary to begin to talk, instead of smiling at each other in such a horribly happy way, and indulging in what was meant for a secret squeeze of the hand, but which was, however, generally seen by half the passengers.

The air coming to an end, and the bugle being duly drained, wiped, and returned to its basket, the driver turned his head again:

"Nice toon that, Joey."

"Like it?"

"Ah, I was going to say 'hangcore,' on'y we're so clost to Richmond. What was it—'Weddin' Day'?"

"That's right, old man."

"Ah! thought it was."

Revitts sent his elbows into Mary and me again, and had a silent laugh under one glove, but pricked up his ears directly, as the conductor shouted again:

"Ain't that Bob Binnies?"

"What, him on the orf side?" said the driver, pointing with his whip.

"Yes."

"Well, what of him?"

"What of him? Why, he's the chap as got married, and had such a large family."

"Did he, though?" said the driver seriously.

"Ten children in five years, Bill."

"Lor'! with only five-and-twenty shillings a week. How did he manage?"

Revitts looked very serious here, and sat listening for the answer.

"Kep' him precious poor; but, stop a moment, I ain't quite right. It was five children in ten years."

Revitts made another serious assault on my ribs, and I saw Mary give herself a hitch; and whisper again to her lord.

There was a general laugh at this stale old joke, which, like many more well-worn ones, however, seemed to take better than the keenest wit, and just then the omnibus drew up in front of an inn to change horses.

The driver unbuckled and threw down his reins, previous to descending to join the conductor, who was already off his perch. Several of the passengers got down, and after bidding Mary and me keep our places, Revitts prepared to descend, rather more slowly though, for his wedding garments were not commodious.

"Don't drink anything, William dear," whispered Mary.

"Not drink anything to-day?" he said, laughing. "Oh, come, that won't do!"

He jumped off the step, and I saw him join the driver and conductor, who laughed and nodded, and, directly after, each man had a foaming pint of ale, which they held before putting to their lips, till Revitts came round to our side with a waiter bearing two glasses of wine and another pint of ale, the driver and conductor following.

"Oh, I don't want anything," said Mary, rather sharply.

"It's only sherry wine, my dear," said Revitts magnificently; and, as if to avoid remark, Mary stooped down and took the glasses, one being for me, Revitts taking his shiny pewter measure of ale.

"Here is long life and happiness to you, mum, and both on you," said the driver, nodding in the most friendly way.

"Aforesaid," exclaimed the conductor, "and a bit o' chaff on'y meant as fun. Long life and a merry one to both on you. Shaver, same to you."

I was the "Shaver," and the healths being drunk in solemn silence, and I accommodated with a tumbler, and some water to my sherry, the driver mounted again, the conductor took out his key-bugle, the streets of pretty Richmond echoed to an old-fashioned air, and the four fresh but very dilapidated old screws that did the journey to Hampton Court and back to Richmond were shaken into a scrambling canter, so that in due time we reached the royal village, the chaff having been damped at Richmond with the ale, and ceasing afterwards to fly.

We learned that a return omnibus left the "Toy" at seven o'clock, and then started for our peregrination of the palace and grounds. But somehow that pint of ale seemed to have completely changed poor Revitts. The late injury to his head had made him so weak there, that the ale acted upon him in the strangest manner. He was excited and irritable, and seemed to be brooding over the remarks he had heard upon the omnibus.

The gardens, of course, took our attention first, and there being few people about, and those of a holiday class, the gay costume of my companions ceased to excite notice, and I began to enjoy our trip. There were the great smooth gravel walks, the closely shaven lawns, the quaintly clipped shrubs, and old-fashioned flower beds to admire. The fountain in the centre made so much spray in the pleasant breeze that from one point of view there was a

miniature rainbow, and when we walked down to the iron railings, and gazed at the long avenue of the Home Park, with its bright canal-like lake between, Mary was enraptured.

"Oh, do look, dear!" she exclaimed; "isn't it 'evingly, William?"

"Yes," he said stolidly, as he took hold of the railing with his white kid glove; "but what I say is this: Every man who enters into the state of wedlock ought fust to make sure as the woman he marries ain't a big-a-mee."

Here he unbuttoned his waistcoat, under the impression that it was his uniform coat, so as to get out his notebook, and then, awakening to his mistake, hastily buttoned it again.

"Haven't got a pencil and a bit o' paper, have you, Ant'ny?" he said.

"What are you talking about, William?" exclaimed Mary. "Don't be so foolish. Now, take us and show us the oranges Master Antony," she said.

This was on the strength of my having invested in a guide-book, though both my companions seemed to place themselves in my hands, and looked up to me as being crammed with a vast amount of knowledge about Cardinal Wolsey, Henry VIII., and those who had made the palace their home.

So I took them to see the Orangery, which Revitts, who seemed quite out of temper, looked down upon with contempt.

"Bah!" he exclaimed; "call them oranges! Why, I could go and buy twice as good in Gray's Inn Lane for three a penny. That there woman, Ant'ny, what was her name?"

"What woman?"

"Her as committed big-a-mee?"

"Oh, do adone with such stuff, William dear. Now, Master Antony, what's next?"

"I know," said Revitts oracularly, "Mrs. Simmons. I say she ought to have been examined before a police magistrate, and after proper adjournments, and the case reg'larly made up by the sergeant who had it in charge, she ought to have been committed for trial."

"Oh, William dear, do adone," cried Mary, clinging to his arm.

"Cent. Crim. Court——"

"William!"

"Old Bailey——"

"William dear!"

"Before a jury of her fellow-countrymen, or,—I say, Ant'ny ain't that wrong?"

"What?" I said, laughing.

"Oh, it ain't a thing to laugh at, my lad. It's serious," he said, taking off his hat and rubbing his head, exhaling, as he did so, a strong smell of hair-oil.

"What is serious?" I said.

"Why, that," replied Revitts, "I ain't sure, in a case like that, it oughtn't to be a jury of matrons."

"Oh do, pray, hurry him along, Master Antony," cried Mary piteously. "Whatever is the matter with you to-day, William?"

"I'm married," he said severely.

"And you don't wish you weren't, William, don't say so, please," exclaimed Mary pitifully.

"I don't know," said Revitts stolidly. "Go on, Ant'ny."

He went on, himself, towards the Vinery, Mary following with me, and looking at me helplessly, as if asking what she should do.

The sight of the great bunches of grapes in such enormous numbers seemed to change the course of William Revitts' thoughts, and we went on pretty comfortably for a time, Mary's spirits rising, and her tongue going more freely, but there were no more weak, amiable smiles.

At last we entered the palace, and on seeing a light dragoon on duty, Revitts pulled himself together, looked severe, and marched by him, as if belonging to a kindred force; but he stopped to ask questions on the grand staircase, respecting the painted ceilings.

"Are them angels, Ant'ny?" he said.

"I suppose so," I replied.

"Then I don't believe it," he said angrily. "Why, if such evidence was given at Clerkenwell, everybody in the police-court would go into fits, and the reporters would say in the papers, 'Loud laughter, which was promptly repressed'! or, 'Loud laughter, in which the magistrate joined.'"

"Whatever does he mean, Master Antony? I don't know what's come to him to-day," whispered Mary.

"Why, that there," said Revitts contemptuously. "Just fancy a witness coming and swearing as the angels in heaven played big fiddles, and things like the conductor blew coming down. The painter must have been a fool."

He was better pleased with the arms and armour, stopping to carefully examine a fine old mace.

"Yes, that would give a fellow a awful wunner, Ant'ny," he said; "but it would be heavy, and all them pikes and things ain't necessary. A good truncheon properly handled can't be beat."

Old furniture, tapestry, and the like had their share of attention, but Revitts hurried me on when I stopped before some of the pictures, shaking his head and nudging me.

"I wonder at you, Ant'ny," he whispered.

His face was scarlet, and he had not recovered his composure when we reached another room, where a series of portraits made me refer to my guide.

"Ladies of Charles the Second's Court," I said, "painted by Sir Peter Lely."

"Then he ought to have been ashamed of himself," said Revitts sharply; and drawing Mary's arm through his, he hurried me off, evidently highly disapproving of the style of bodice then in vogue.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WILLIAM REVITTS IS ECCENTRIC.

THE dinner we had at the inn was not a success. The waiters evidently settled that we were a wedding-party, and charged accordingly. Mary tried hard to keep Revitts from taking any more to drink; but he said it was necessary on a day like that, and ordered wine accordingly.

He drank slowly, and never once showed the slightest trace of intoxication; but the wine also produced a strange irritability, which made him angry, even to being fierce at times; and over and over again I saw the tears in poor Mary's eyes.

Ever and again that bigamy case—real or imaginary—of which he had heard as we came down kept cropping up, and the more Mary tried to turn the conversation, the more eager he became to discuss it. The wedding-day, his wife, my remarks, all were forgotten or set aside, so that he might explain to us, with a vast amount of minutiae, how he would have got up such a case, beginning with the preliminary inquiries and ending with the culprit's sentence.

We had it over the dinner, with the waiters in the room; we had it in *culs-de-sac* in the maze; and we had it over again in Bushy Park, as we sat under the shade of a great chestnut: after which Revitts lay down, seeming to drop asleep, and Mary said to me, piteously:

"I do believe, dear, as he's took it into his head that I've committed big-a-mee!"

The words were uttered in a whisper, but they seemed to galvanize Revitts, who started up into a sitting posture, and exclaimed sharply:

"I don't know as you ain't. I never cross-examined you before we was married. But look here, Mary Revitts, it's my dooty to tell you as what you say now will be took down, and may be used as evidence against you."

After which oracular delivery he lay down and went off fast asleep, leaving Mary to weep in silence, and wish we had never come away from home.

I could not help joining her in the wish, though I did not say so, but did all I could to comfort her, as Mr. Peter Rowle's moral aphorisms about drink kept coming to my mind. Not that poor

Revitts had, in the slightest degree, exceeded; and we joined in saying that it was all due to over-excitement consequent upon his illness.

"If I could only get him home again, poor boy, I wouldn't cure," said Mary; and we then comforted ourselves with the hope that he would be better when he awoke, and that then we would go to one of the many places offering, have a quiet cup of tea, which would be sure to do him good, and then go back home, quietly, inside the omnibus.

Revitts woke in about an hour, evidently much refreshed and better, but still he seemed strange. The tea, however, appeared to do him good, and in due time we mounted to our seats outside the omnibus, for he stubbornly refused to go within.

He did not say much on the return journey, but the bigamy case was evidently running in his head, from what he said: and once, in a whisper, poor Mary, who was half broken-hearted, confided to me now, sitting on her other side, that she felt sure poor William was regretting that they had been married.

"And I did so want to wait," she said: "but he wouldn't any longer."

"Are you two whispering about that there case?" he cried sharply.

"No, William dear," said Mary. "Do you feel better?"

"Better?" he said irritably. "There isn't anything the matter with me."

He turned away from her, and sat watching the side of the road, muttering every now and then to himself in a half-angry way, while poor Mary, in place of going into a tantrum, got hold of my hand between both hers, and held it very hard pressed against the front of her dress, where she was protected by a rigid piece of bone or steel. Every now and then, poor woman, she gave the hand a convulsive pressure, and a great sob in the act of escaping would feel like a throb against my arm.

So silent and self-contained did Revitts grow at last, that poor Mary began to pour forth in a whisper the burden of her trouble, while I sat wondering, and thinking what a curious thing this love must be, that could so completely transform people, and yet give them so much pain.

"It wasn't my doing, Master Antony dear," whispered Mary; "for I said it would be so much better for me to go back to service for a few years, and I always thought as hasty marriages meant misery. But William was so masterful. He said it was no use his getting on and improving his spelling, and getting his promotion, if he was always to live a weary, dreary bachelor—they was his very words, Master Antony; and now, above all times, was the one for us to get married."

"He's tired, Mary," I said: "that's all."

"That's all? Ah, my dear! it's a very great all. He's tired of me, that's what he is; and I shall never forgive myself for being so rash."

"But you have been engaged several years, haven't you, Mary?"

"Yes, my dear; but years ain't long when you're busy and always hard at work. I jessay they're a long time to gentlefolks as has to wait, but it never seemed long to me, and I've done a very rash thing; but I didn't think the punishment was coming quite so soon."

"Oh, nonsense, Mary; Bill will be all right again soon," I said, as I could see, by the light of a gas-lamp we passed, that the poor disappointed woman had been crying till she had soaked and spoiled her showy bonnet-strings.

"No, my dear, I don't think so; I feel as if it was all a punishment upon me, and that I ought to have waited till he was quite well and strong."

It was of no avail to try and comfort, so I contented myself with sitting still and pressing poor Mary's rough honest hand, while the horses rattled merrily along, and we gradually neared the great city.

I was obliged to own that if this was a specimen of a wedding-day, it was anything but a joyous and festive time; and it seemed to me that the day that had begun so unsatisfactorily was to be kept in character to the end.

For, before reaching Hammersmith, one of the horses shied and fell, and those at the pole went right upon it before the omnibus could be stopped, with the consequence that the vehicle was nearly upset, and a general shriek arose.

No harm, however, was done, and in a quarter of an hour we were once more under weigh, but Mary said, with a sigh and a rub of the back of my hand against the buttons of her dress, that it was a warning of worse things to come; and though very sorry for her, I could not help longing for our journey's end.

"Just you come over here, Ant'ny," said Revitts suddenly; and I had to change places and sit between him and his wife, of whom he seemed not to take the slightest notice.

"Are you better, Bill?" I said.

"Better?" he said sharply; "what do you mean by better? I'm all right."

"That's well," I said.

"Of course it is. Now look here, Ant'ny, I've been thinking a good deal about that there big-a-mee us we come along, and I'll just tell you what I should have done."

I heard Mary give a gulp; but I thought it better not to try and thwart him, so prepared to listen.

"You see, Ant'ny," he said, in a very didactic manner, "when a fellow is in the force, and is always taking up people and getting

up cases, and attending at the police courts, and Old Bailey sessions and coroners' inquests, he picks up a deal of valuable information."

"Of course, Bill."

"He do; it stands to reason that he do. Well, then, I ought to know just two or three things."

"Say two or three thousand, Bill."

"Well," he said, giving his head an official roll, as if settling it in his great stock, "we won't say that. Let's put it at 'undreds—two or three 'undreds. Now, if I'd had such a case as that big-a-mee in hand, I should have begun at the beginning.—Where are we now?" he said, after a pause, during which he had taken off his hat, and rubbed his head in a puzzled way.

"You were talking about the case," I said, "and beginning at the beginning."

"Don't you try to be funny, young fellow," he said severely.

"I said, where are we now?"

"Just passing Hyde Park Corner, Bill."

"Yes, of course," he said. "Well, look here, my lad, there's no doubt about one thing: women, take 'em all together, are—no, I won't say a bad lot, but they're weak—awful weak. I've seen a deal on 'em at the police-courts."

"I suppose so," I said, as I heard Mary give a low sigh.

"They're not what they should be, Ant'ny, by a long chalk, and the way they'll tell lies and deceive and cheat's about awful, that it is."

"Some women are bad, I daresay," I said, in a qualifying tone.

"Some?" he said, with a short, dry laugh; "it's some as is good. Most women's bad."

"That's a nice wholesale sort of a charge," said a passenger behind him, in rather a huffy tone.

"You mind your own business," said Revitte sharply. "I wasn't talking to you;" and he spoke in such a fierce way that the man coloured, while Mary leaned forward, and looked imploringly at me, as much as to say, "Pray, pray, don't let him quarrel."

"I say it, and I ought to know," said Revitts dictatorially, "that women's a bad lot, and after hearing of that case this morning, I say as every woman afore she gets married ought to go through a reg'lar cross-examination, and produce sittifikits of character, and witnesses to show where she's been, and what she's been adoin' of for say the last seven years. If that was made law, we shouldn't have poor fellows taken in and deloded, and then find out afterwards as it's a case of big-a-mee, like we heerd of this morning. Why, as I was a-saying, Ant'ny, if I'd had that case in hand—eh? Oh, ah, yes, so it is. I'll get down first. I didn't think we was so near."

For poor Bill's plans about the bigamy case were brought to

an end by the stopping of the omnibus in Piccadilly, and I gave a sigh of relief as we drew up in the bright, busy thoroughfare, after a look at the dark sea of shining lights that lay spread to the right over the Green Park and Westminster.

Carriages were passing, the pavement was thronged, and it being a fine night, all looked very bright and cheery after what had been rather a dull ride. Revitts got down, and I was about to follow, offering my hand to poor, sad Mary, when just as my back was turned, Revitts called out to me:

"Ant'ny, Ant'ny, look after my wife!" and as I turned sharply, I just caught sight of him turning the corner of the street, and he was gone.

CHAPTER XL.

HALLETT'S NEWS.

I WAS so staggered by this strange behaviour that I did not think of pursuit. Moreover, I was in the act of helping poor Mary to the ladder placed for her to descend, while she, poor thing, gave vent to a cutting sigh, and clung tight to my hand.

As we stood together on the pavement, our eyes met, and there was something so piteous in the poor woman's face, that it roused me to action, and catching her hand, I drew it through my arm.

"He has gone to get a glass of ale, Mary," I said cheerfully.

"Let's see if we can see him."

"No," she said huskily; "he has gone: he has left me for good, Master Antony, and I'm a miserable, wretched woman."

"Oh, nonsense," I cried. "Come along. We shall find him."

"No," she said, in a decisive way; "he has gone. He's been regretting it ever since this morning."

"Don't, pray; don't cry, Mary," I whispered in alarm, for I was afraid of a scene in the streets.

"No, my dear; don't you be afraid of that," she said, with a sigh. "I'll try and bear it till we get home; but I won't promise for any longer."

"Don't you be foolish, Mary," I said sharply. "He has not left you. He's too fond of you. Let's see if he is in the bar."

Mary sighed; but she allowed herself to be led where I pleased, and for the next half-hour we stood peering about in every likely place for the truant husband, but in vain: and at last, feeling that it was useless to search longer, I reluctantly turned to poor, patient, silent Mary, wondering greatly that she had not burst out into a "tantrum," and said that we had better go home.

"Go where?" she said dolefully.

"Home," I replied, "to your lodgings."

"My lodgings, Master Antony," she wailed. "I have no lodgings. I'm a poor, helpless, forsaken woman!"

"Oh, what nonsense, Mary," I cried, hurrying her along; "don't be so foolish!"—for I was in mortal terror of a violent burst of tears. "Come along, do. Here!" I shouted; "cab!"—and I sighed with relief as I got her inside, and gave the man directions to take us to Caroline Street, Pentonville.

But even in the cab Mary held up, striving hard, poor woman, to master her emotion—her pride, no doubt, helping her to preserve her calmness till she got to the happy home.

"I dare say we shall find him upstairs," I said, after giving the cabman a shilling more than his fare; but though there was a light burning, and the landlady had spread the table, to make the place look welcome to the newly wedded pair, there was no sign of Revitts, and we neither of us, in our shame, dared to ask if he had been back.

On the contrary, we gladly got to the rooms—Revitts' one having now expanded to three—and once there, Mary gasped out:

"Master Antony dear, shut and lock the door—quick—quick!"

I hastily did as she bade me, and as I turned, it was to see poor Mary tear off her bonnet and scarf, throw herself on the little couch, cover her face with her hands, and lie there crying and sobbing in a very passion of grief, misery, and shame.

It was no noisy outburst: it was too deep for that; but the poor woman had to relieve herself of the day's disappointment and agony, and there she lay, beating down and stifling every hysterical cry that fought for exit, while her breast heaved with the terrible emotion.

I was too young then to realize the full extent of the shame and abasement the poor woman must have felt, but all the same I sympathized with her deeply, and in my weak, boyish way did all I could to console her, but in vain. For quite an hour the outburst continued, till at last, quite in despair, I cried out:

"Oh Mary, Mary! what can I do to comfort you?"

She jumped up into a sitting position, then; threw back her dishevelled hair; wiped her eyes, and looked, in spite of her red and swollen lids, more herself.

"Oh, my own dear boy," she cried, "what a wicked, selfish wretch I am!" and, catching me in her arms, she kissed me very tenderly.

"There," she said with a piteous smile; "it's all over now, Master Antony, and I won't cry another drop. You're a dear, good, affectionate boy—that you are, and I'll never forget it, and you're as hungry as a hundred hunters, I know."

In spite of my protestations, she hastened to make that balm for all sorrows—a cup of tea.

"But I don't want it, Mary," I protested, "and I'm not hungry."

"Then I do, and I am," she said, smiling. "You won't mind having a cup with me, I know, Master Antony dear. Just like old times."

"Well, I will try," I said, "and I dare say Revitts will be back by then."

Mary glanced at the little Dutch clock in the corner, and saw that it pointed to eleven; then, shaking her head, she said sadly:

"No, I don't think he'll come back."

"But you don't think he has run away, Mary?"

"I don't know what to think, my dear," she said; "I only hope that he won't come to any harm, poor boy. It's his poor head, and that's why he turned so strange."

"Yes," I said joyfully, as I saw that at last she had taken the common-sense view of the case, "that's it, depend upon it, Mary; and if he does not come soon, we'll give notice to the police, and they'll find him out."

"No, my dear, don't do that," she said piteously; "it would be like shaming the poor boy; for if his mates got to know that he had run away like on his wedding-day, he'd never hear the last of it."

I was obliged to agree in the truth of this remark, and I began to realize then, in spite of poor Mary's rough exterior and ignorance, what a depth of patient endurance and thoughtfulness there was in the nature of a woman. Her first outburst of uncontrollable grief past, she was ready to sit down and patiently bear her load of sorrow, waiting for what more trouble might come; for I am fully convinced that the poor woman looked forward to no pleasure in her married life. In spite of her belief that her husband's strange conduct was in some way due to his late accident, she felt convinced that he was regretting his marriage, and, if that were so now, she had no hope of winning him to a better state.

We were both weary, and when the tea had been finished, Mary carefully washed up the things, saw that there was a sufficiency of water, and kept it nearly on the boil. Then she reset the tea things in the tidiest way, ready for Revitts if he should like a cup when he came home, and, on second thoughts, put out another cup and saucer.

"It will be more sociable like, Master Antony," she said, by way of excuse; "for, of course, I don't want no more, though I do bless them Chinese as invented tea, which is a blessing to our seck."

These preparations made, and a glance round the sitting-room having been given, Mary uttered a deep sigh, took up her work-basket, placed it on her knees, thrust her hand into a black stocking, and began to darn.

I sat talking to her in a low voice for some time, feeling sin-

cerely sorry for her, and wondering what could have become of Revitts, but at last, in spite of my honest sympathy, I began to nod, and the various objects in the room grew indistinct.

"Hadn't you better go to bed, my dear?" said a voice near me; and I started into wakefulness, and found Mary standing near me, with the black stocking-covered hand resting on one shoulder, while with the other she brushed my hair off my forehead.

"Bed? No!" I exclaimed, shaking myself. "I couldn't help feeling sleepy, Mary; but I shan't go to bed."

"But it's close upon twelve o'clock, dear, and you must be tired out."

"Never mind, Mary; to-morrow's Sunday," I said, with a yawn; and I went on once more talking to her about the engineer's office, and how I got on with young Girtley and his father, till my voice trailed off, and through a mist I could see Mary with that black stocking upon her hand poking about it with a great needle.

Then the black stocking seemed to swell and swell to a mountain's size, till it was like one huge mass, which Mary kept attacking and stabbing with a long, bright steel lance, but without avail, for it still grew, and grew, and grew, till it seemed about to overwhelm me, and in my horror I was trying vainly to cry to her to stab it again, when I started up into wakefulness, for there was the faint tinkle of a bell.

Mary, too, had leaped to her feet, and was clinging to me.

"Once!" she whispered.

There was another tinkle, very softly given.

"Twice!" whispered Mary.

Then another very faint ring.

"Three!" whispered Mary; "it's Jones."

"It's Revitts come home!" I said joyfully.

"No," she said, still clinging to me. "He has the latch-key."

"Lost it," I said. "Let me run down and let him in."

"No, no. Wait a moment," said Mary faintly. "I can't bear it yet. There's something wrong with my poor boy."

"There isn't," I cried impatiently.

"There is," she said hoarsely; "and they've come to bring the news."

She clung to me spasmodically, but loosed me directly after, as she said quietly: "I can bear it now."

I ran down softly, and opened the door to admit the wandering husband; but to my astonishment, in place of Revitts, there stood Stephen Hallett.

"Hallett!" I exclaimed.

"Yes," he said. "I saw a light in the rooms. Is Revitts there?"

"No," I said. "Not yet."

"On duty?"

"No; he was married to-day."

"Yes, yes," he said, in a strange tone of voice. "I remember now. Who is upstairs?"

"Mrs. Revitts—Mary."

"Let us go up," he said; "I'll step up quietly."

I was the more confused and muddled for having just awakened from a deep sleep, and somehow, all this seemed to be part of the dream connected with the great black mass that had threatened to fall upon me. I should not have been the least surprised if I had suddenly awakened and found myself alone, when, after closing the door, I led Hallett upstairs to the little front room where Mary was standing with dilated eyes, staring hard at the door.

"You, Mr. Hallett?" she exclaimed, as he half staggered in, and then, staring round, seemed to reel, and caught my hand as I helped him to a seat.

"Tell me," gasped Mary, catching at his hand; "is it very bad?"

He nodded.

"Give me—water," he panted. "I am—exhausted."

Mary rushed to the little cupboard for a glass, and the brandy that had been kept on Revitts' behalf, and hastily pouring some into a glass with water, she held it to him, and he drained it at a draught.

"Now, tell me," she exclaimed. "Where is he—what is it—have you seen him?"

"No," he cried hoarsely, as he clenched his fist and held it before him! "no, or I should have struck him dead."

"Mr. Hallett!" she cried, starting. Then, in a piteous voice, "Oh, tell me, please—what has he done? He is my husband, my own dear boy! Pray, pray, tell me—he was half mad. Oh, what have—what have I done!"

"Is she mad?" cried Hallett angrily. "Where is her husband—where is Revitts?"

"We don't know," I said hastily. "We are waiting for him."

"I want him directly," he said hoarsely. "I could not go to a stranger."

"What is the matter, Hallett?" I cried. "Pray, speak out. What can I do?"

"Nothing," he said hoarsely. "Yes; tell him to come—no, bring him to me. Do you hear?"

"Yes," I faltered.

"At any hour—whenever he comes," said Hallett, speaking now angrily, as he recovered under the stimulus of the brandy.

"Then there is something terribly wrong," I said.

"Wrong? Yes. My God!" he muttered, "that I should have to tell it—Linny has gone!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BRIDEGROOM'S RETURN.

"Oh, Hallett!" I cried, catching his hand, as the poor fellow sat blankly gazing before him in his mute despair. "It is a mistake; she could not be so wicked."

"Wicked!" he said with a curious laugh. "Was it wicked, after all her promises—my forgiveness—my gentle, loving words? I was a fool. I believed that she was weaning herself from it all, and trying to forget. A woman would have read her at a glance; but I, a poor, mad dreamer, always away, or buried in that attic, saw nothing, only that she was very quiet, and thin, and sad."

"Did she tell you that she would go, Hallett?" I asked, hardly knowing what I said.

"No, Antony," I replied, in a dreary tone.

"Did you have any quarrel?"

"No; not lately. She was most affectionate—poor child! and her heart must have been sore with the thought of what she was about to do. Only this evening, before I went up into the attic to dream over my invention, she crept to my side, put her little arms round my neck, and kissed me, as she used when she was a tiny child, and said how sorry she was that she had given me so much pain. Antony, lad," he cried passionately, "I went up to my task to-night a happy man, thinking that one heavy load was taken off my shoulders, and that the future was going to be brighter for us both. For, Antony, in my cold, dreamy way, I love her very dearly, and so I have ever since she was a little wilful child."

He sat gazing at me with such a piteous expression in his face that his words went to my heart, and I heard Mary give quite a gulp.

"But, Hallett," I said, "you are not sure; she may have gone to some friend's. She may have come back by this time."

"Come back?" he said fiercely. "No; she has not come back. Not yet. Some day she will return, poor strayed lamb!" he added, gazing straight before him, his voice softening and his arms extending, as if he pictured the whole scene and was about to take her to his heart.

"But are you sure that she has really gone?" I cried.

"Sure? Read that."

I took the crumpled paper with trembling fingers, and saw at a glance that he was right. In ill-written, hardly decipherable words, the poor girl told her brother that she could bear it no

longer, but that she had fled with the man who possessed her heart.

I stared blankly at poor Hallett, as he took the note from my hand, read it once more through, crushed it in his hand with a fierce look, and thrust it back in his pocket.

"Is it—is it your poor dear sister who has gone?" said Mary excitedly.

"Yes," he cried, with his passion mastering him once more: and his hands opened and shut as if eager to seize some one by the throat—"yes; some villain has led her away. But let me stand face to face with him, and then——"

He paused in his low, painful utterance, gazing from me to Mary, who stood with her hand upon his arm.

"And I thought my trouble the biggest in the world," she sobbed; "but you've done right, sir, to come for my William. He'll find them if they're anywhere on the face of this earth, and they shall be found. Poor dear! and her with her pretty girlish gentle face as I was so jealous of. I'm only a silly foolish woman, sir," she cried, with the tears falling fast, "but I may be of some good. If I'm along with my William when he finds 'em, she may listen to me and come back, when she wouldn't mind him, and I'll follow it out to the end."

"You're—you're a good woman," said Hallett hoarsely, "and may God bless you. But your husband—where is your husband? We must lose no time."

"Master Antony!" cried Mary, and then, as if awakening once more to her position, and speaking in tones of bitterness—"Oh, what has come to my William? He must be found!"

"Send him on to me," said Hallett. "I'll go back now. Antony, will you come?"

"Why, there's your poor mother, too," cried Mary, "and all alone! I can help her, at all events!"

As Mary spoke, she hurried to get her work-a-day bonnet and shawl, while Hallett stood gazing at her in a dazed and helpless way.

"Your pore sister did come and help my pore boy when he was bad, and—— Oh!"

Mary uttered a fierce, angry cry. Bonnet and shawl fell from her hands, her jaw dropped, her ruddy face grew mottled with patches of white, and her eyes dilated. Her whole aspect was that of one about to have a fit, and I took a step towards her.

She motioned me fiercely back, and tore at her throat, as if she were suffocating.

"I see it now!" she cried hoarsely, "I see it now! Oh, the wretch, the wretch! Only let me find him again!"

"Mary!" I cried, "what is it?"

"I see it all now!" she cried again. "Then I was right. She

come—she come here, and poisoned him with her soft looks and ways, and he's left me—to go away with her to-night!"

Mary made a clutch at vacancy; and then, tottering, would have fallen, had not Hallett been close at hand to catch her and help her to the couch, where the poor woman lay perfectly insensible, having fainted for probably the first time in her life.

"What does she mean?" cried Hallett, as he made, with me, ineffectual efforts to restore her.

"She was angry and jealous the night she came and found Linny here attending on Revitts," I cried in a bewildered way, hardly knowing what I said. "And now she thinks, because he has left her to-night, that he has gone away with Linny."

"Poor fool!" he said sadly.

"Revitts was very strange to-day," I said, "and—and—and, Hallett—oh, forgive me," I said, "I've kept something from you."

"What!" he cried, catching me so fiercely by the arm that he caused me acute pain. "Don't tell me that I have been deceived, too, in you!"

"No, Hallett, I haven't deceived you," I said. "I kept something back that I ought to have told you."

"You kept something back!" he cried. "Speak—speak at once, Antony, or—or—speak, boy; I'm not master of myself!"

"Linny begged me so hard not to tell you, and I consented, on condition that she would mind what you said."

"Then—then you knew that she was carrying on with this man," he cried savagely, neither of us seeing that Mary had come to, and was watching us with distended eyes.

"No, no, Hallett," I cried. "I did not—indeed, I did not; I only knew it was he who so beat poor Revitts."

"Who was he—what's his name?" cried Mary, seizing my other arm, and shaking it.

"I don't know; I never knew," I cried, faring badly between them. "Linny begged me, on her knees, not to tell that it was her friend who beat Revitts when he interfered, and when she promised me she would always obey you, Hallett, I said I would keep her secret."

"Then Linny was the girl—poor Revitts saved," said Hallett hoarsely.

"Yes!" cried Mary. "The villain! he likes her pretty face. I was right; and I've been a fool to faint and go on. But that's over now," she cried savagely. "I'll wait here till he does come back; for I'm his lawful wife; and when he does come—Oh!"

Mary uttered that "Oh!" through her closed teeth, and all the revenge that was in her nature seemed to come to the surface, while Hallett walked up and down the room.

"You have no idea, Antony, who he is?"

"No, on my word, Hallett," I cried; "I never knew. Pray forgive me! I thought it was for the best."

"Yes, yes, lad," he said; "you did it from kindness. It has made no difference. I could not have borne it for you to deceive me, Antony," he said, with a sweet, sad smile lighting his face as I caught his hand. "Come, let us go. Mary, my good soul, you are labouring under a mistake. Good-night!"

"No, you don't!" cried Mary, setting her back against the door. "You don't go till he comes back. He'll come and bring your sister here. And you may take her home. I'll talk to him. What?" she cried triumphantly; "what did I say?"

She turned, and threw open the door; for just then a heavy step was heard below, and, as if expecting some strange scene, Hallett and I stood watching, as step after step creaked beneath a heavy weight, till whoever was coming reached the landing and staggered into the room.

"You——"

Mary's sentence was never finished; for her husband's look, as he strode in with Linny in his arms, seemed to crush her.

"I couldn't get him, too, but I marked him," he said, panting, "and I've stopped his little game."

"Linny!" cried Hallett to the half-insensible girl, who seemed to glide from Revitts' arms, and sink in a heap at his feet, while I stood gazing in utter amazement at the turn things had taken.

"Mary, my lass! a drop of something—anything—I'm about done."

Mary's teeth gritted together, and she darted a vindictive look at her husband; but she obeyed him, fetching out a bottle of gin and a glass, which he filled and drained before speaking.

"Not so strong as I was," he cried excitedly. "Glad you're here, sir. I ketched sight of him with her from the 'bus as we come in. I'd a know'n him from a thousand—him as give it me, you know. 'Look arter Mary,' I says to Master Antony here, and I was after him like a shot, hanging on to the hansom cab he'd got her in, and I never left 'em till it stopped down at Richmond, at a willa by the water-side."

"Richmond?" said Hallett blankly.

"Richmond, as I'd been through twice that very day. When the cab stops—I'd made the man right with half-a-crown, and telling him I was in the police—my gentleman gets out, and I had him like a shot. I might have got help a dozen times, but I wanted to tackle him myself, as I allus swore I would," cried Revitts savagely; "but he was too much for me again. I'm stronger than him, but he's got tricks, and he put me on my back after a good tussle—just look at my noo things!—and afore I could get up again, he was off, running like a coward as he is. But I brought her back, not knowing till I had her under the

gas-lamp as it was Master Ant'ny's friend and your sister, and she'd told me who she was, and asked me in a curious crying way to take her back to Master Ant'ny, as she said was the only one who'd help her now."

"You—you brought her home in the cab?" cried Mary hoarsely.

"Yes, my lass, and it's cost me half-a-sov. altogether; but I've spoilt his game, whoever he is. Poor little lass, she's been about mad ever since I got into the cab, a-clinging to me."

"Yes," hissed Mary.

"And crying and sobbing, and I couldn't comfort her, not a bit."

"No!" said Mary softly, through her teeth.

"It was rather rough on you, Mary, my gal," said Revitts; "but you would marry a police-officer, and dooty must be done."

Mary was about to speak; but he held up his hand, for Linny seemed to be coming to, and Hallett was kneeling on the floor by her side.

"Mary—Bill," I whispered; for the right thing to do seemed to be suggested to me then. "Let us go and leave them."

"Right you are, Master Ant'ny, and always was," said Bill hoarsely; and, passing his arm round Mary's waist, he drew her into the other room, by which time the scales seemed to have fallen from poor Mary's eyes, for the first thing she did, as soon as we were in the room, was to plump down on her knees, clasp those of her husband, lay her cheek against them, and cry, ready to break her heart.

Probably the excitement of his adventure had had a good effect upon Revitts; for the strange fit of petulance and obstinacy had passed away, and he was all eagerness and smiles.

"Why, what a gal you are, Polly!" he exclaimed. "Don't cry, my lass; I was obliged to go off. Pleecemen ain't their own masters."

"Oh, Bill dear," sobbed Mary, "and I've been thinking sich things."

"Of course you have, Polly," he said; "and I've been wishing myself at home, but I knew Ant'ny would take care of you. Poor little lass! I've had a nice job, I can tell you. I say, Ant'ny, is she quite right in her head?"

"Oh yes," I said.

"Well, she don't look it then, poor little woman. One minute she was begging and praying me to take her home, the next she was scolding me for interfering. Then she'd be quiet for a few minutes, and then she'd want to jump out of the cab; and it's my belief that if I'd let her go, she'd have throwed herself into the river."

"Poor soul!" murmured Mary.

"Then she'd take a fit of not wanting to go home, saying that she daren't never go there any more, and that I wasn't to take her home, but to you, Ant'ny; and that sorter thing's been going on all the time, till she seemed to be quite worn out, and I was so puzzled as to what to do, that I thought I would bring her on here, and let Mary do what she thought best."

"Did you think that, Bill?" said Mary eagerly.

"Of course I did. I don't understand women-folk, and I hate having jobs that puts 'em in my care. 'Mary'll settle it all right,' I says, 'and know what's best to be done.'"

"Antony," said a voice at the door just then, and I went out to find Hallett looking very pale, and Linny lying insensible upon the couch.

"Oh, Hallett!" I exclaimed. "Shall Mary come?"

"Yes—directly," he said hoarsely; and there was something very strange about his manner. "Shut the door, boy," he continued. "Look here, Antony; this note was inside the neck of her dress, as I opened it to give her air. You need not read it; but look at it. Tell me whether you have ever seen the handwriting before."

I took the letter from him, and looked at the bold, free, rather peculiar hand, which I recognized on the instant.

"Oh yes!" I exclaimed, "often."

"Whose writing is it?" he said, pressing his hand upon his breast to keep down the emotion that seemed ready to choke him. "Don't speak rashly, Antony; make sure before you give an answer."

"But I am sure," I exclaimed, without a moment's hesitation. "I have often seen it—it is Mr. Lister's writing. What does it mean?"

"Mean?" cried Hallett, in a low, deep voice, as if speaking to some one across the room, for he was not looking at me. "My God, what does it not mean, but that John Lister is a villain!"

CHAPTER XLII.

A QUESTION OF LAW.

STEPHEN HALLETT'S model was still at rest; for, poor fellow, he had now a fresh trouble upon his hands.

The excitement had been too much for Linny, and he got her home to find her delirious; a severe attack of brain fever came on, and her life was, for many days, hanging by a thread.

I was there every evening, to find that Mary had installed herself head nurse, and whenever Hallett spoke to her, she was always ready with the one reply:

"Didn't she come and tend my pore Bill?"

This went on for a time, but Hallett insisted, and Mary proving obdurate, he talked to Revitts about remuneration.

"Oh, never mind about that," said the bluff fellow. "She says she's got plenty of time on her hands, and we've both saved a bit, and as long as she gets what I want, and is at home when I come, it don't interfere with me; and bless your heart, Mr. Hallett, what would life be if one on us wouldn't do a good turn to another?"

"Yes, but I cannot feel satisfied to let your good wife work for me for nothing."

"Ah," said Bill sagely. "That's the worst of eddication, it makes a man so uppish. No offence, Mr. Hallett, sir, but you being a highly eddicated man——"

"Tut—tut! nonsense!" said Hallett, smiling.

"Oh, but you are, you know," said Revitts. "Ant'ny says you are, and it's wonderful what a power o' stuff that there young chap's got in his head. I come the top-sawyer over him when he first come up to London; but, Lor' bless you! I give in to everything out o' the ornerary in no time. It's on'y nat'ral that eddication should make a man uppish. I've felt a deal more so since Ant'ny's give me a lift in spellin'. I always was a good writer, but my spellin', Mr. Hallett, sir! Ha—ha—ha!" he cried, bursting out in a guffaw; "I know now when I looks back at some of my old books, it was a rum 'un. Them big words was just like so many forty-barred gates to my getting promoted."

"I suppose so," said Hallett; "but about payment for your wife's services?"

"Why, you do pay me," said Revitts sturdily. "She gets braxfuses, and dinners, and teas—no end."

"Yes, but that counts for nothing."

"Oh, don't it," said Revitts, laughing. "You ask Ant'ny about that, and how him and me used to dodge to make the money run to good meals. Look here, Mr. Hallett, sir, I'm only a humble sort of a chap, but you've always been kindly to me, and I hope it ain't no disrespect to you to call you a friend."

"I'm only too glad to call you 'friend,' Revitts," said Hallett, holding out his hand, which the other gripped like a vice, "and I thank Antony Grace for making me known to two such good hearted people as you and your worthy wife."

"Thanky, sir, for Mary—thanky," exclaimed Revitts, nodding his head. "She's a good one, and no mistake: and as for her bit of temper, Antony," he said, speaking as if he were very much moved, as he turned to me, "that bit of rough is like ballast to her, and keeps her down; for, if it wasn't for her tantrums, I believe she'd have been an angel long ago, and then—what should I have done? Lor' bless you both, they call us pleecemen lobsters,

raw lobsters, to distinguish us from the soldiers, and because we're dark blue and so hard; but I'm soft enough inside, and that woman knows it, too. Well, sir, about this remooneration—as you call it. Look here, she won't take no money, so I'll tell you what you do by-and-by when she's nursed Miss Linny back to health—as she will, you mark my words if she don't—better than any doctor. It's a treat to be ill under her. Lord's truth!" cried the great fellow, smiling and looking as silly as a fat boy, "the way she'd wash my face and neck, and go in an' out o' my ears with the sponge and towel without hurting, was 'eavenly."

Hallett could not forbear a smile, and I roared.

"Ah, you may grin, Ant'ny my lad, but you'll see, some day when you're on your back, she's the best nuss that ever lived. There!"

"She is, indeed, Revitts," cried Hallett, "and—Heaven bless her! my poor mother has not been so well for months as she has been since your wife has tended her."

"There, Ant'ny, hear that!" cried Revitts. "She's a woman to be proud on—that she is."

"That she is, Bill," I echoed, clapping the dear old fellow on the shoulder.

"Well, as I was saying," he exclaimed, "just you give her a noo gownd, something bright and with some colour in it, and if so be as she isn't at home when I get back, p'raps you wouldn't mind my coming in for a snack here, for if I don't get my corn reg'lar I'm nowhere."

"My dear fellow, I shall never be able to thank you enough," cried Hallett.

"Oh, that's all right among friends, ain't it, Ant'ny? He knows me better, and Mary, too, than you do, so let's drop all that, sir; and now I want to talk serious to you about this here affair. I feel, sir, as a sergeant of police, that I oughtn't to rest till I've brought that chap to justice."

I saw Hallett start and change colour. Then, getting up, he began to walk up and down the room, ending by coming and laying his hand upon Revitts' shoulder.

"Revitts," he said, "that man has done you a very serious injury."

"Never mind about that, Mr. Hallett, sir; I dare say I shall put that square. I was thinking about you."

"Yes, and he has done me a deadly injury," said Hallett, in a low, dreamy voice; "but I cannot retaliate. You will think me strange and weak perhaps; but I cannot take any steps towards punishing this man."

Revitts looked disappointed.

"I'd been hoping, sir," he said, "that you'd got to know who it was, and could give me a hint or two, so that I could put my hand upon him. You know who it is, sir?"

Hallett looked at him searchingly, and a deep frown came upon his forehead.

"Yes," he said, "I know who it is; but for many reasons I cannot stir in the matter. Besides, what could I do? He has committed no punishable offence against me."

"No, that's true," said Revitts quickly; "but he has against me. Assaulting the police is 'most as bad as high-treason, and if you'll give me his name, sir, or put me in the way of getting a hand on him, I'll give him a twelvemonths' imprisonment."

Hallett shook his head.

"No, Revitts," he said, "I look upon him as my most deadly enemy, and some day I may take the scoundrel by the throat, but I cannot help you here."

"Now, that's where you're wrong, sir, if you'll 'scuse me. A man mustn't take the law into his own hands. You think better of it, sir. You can't punish, though he richly deserves it, but I can; and if ever I get a chance, I will."

Revitts soon after rose to go, Mary having announced her intention of sitting up all night with Linny, and Hallett and I were left alone.

"No, Antony," he said, looking me in the face, just as if I had spoken to him on the subject. "My hands are tied: John Lister must go free. I can do nothing."

"He deserves flogging!" I exclaimed, "and I feel that I ought to tell Miss Carr."

He started, and half turned away.

"Have you told Miss Carr, Antony?"

"No," I said, "I can't be so mean; but she ought to know, for she believes him to be very true and honourable. I wish some one would tell her. Can't you?"

"I? Tell Miss Carr? Antony, are you mad?" he cried, with a show of excitement that I could not understand. "No, I could not tell her. What would she think of me?"

"Yes, she is so high-minded and good," I replied, "that she would think anybody a miserable talebearer who told her what a scoundrel Mr. Lister is. I don't think she would believe it, either."

"No," he said softly, "she could not believe such a thing of the man she loves."

"Do you know," I said, innocently enough, "I don't think she does love Mr. Lister very much."

His eyes flashed as he looked at me; but he made no reply, and only sat gazing before him in a wistful, saddened way that I did not comprehend then as I went on chatting to him.

"No, I shall not tell her—I couldn't," I said. "It would be too mean, and yet it would be horrible for her to marry such a man as that. Have you seen him, since, Hallett?"

"Seen him?—Since? No, Antony, I have not been to the office since that night. I could never go there again."

I looked at him anxiously, for his ways and looks were very strange; but I attributed everything to anxiety on Linny's behalf, and we very soon changed the topic; and after hearing the last account about Linny, I rose to go, Hallett coming downstairs, and out into the starlit street, walking a few hundred yards with me towards my lodgings, before finally taking his leave, and going thoughtfully away.

 CHAPTER XLIII.

A SCENE.

I HAVE often thought since upon the magnanimity of Hallett's character. Loving Miss Carr, as he did, with a passionate, hopeless love, he knew her to be engaged to John Lister, and feeling bound in honour to be just to the man he served, he crushed down his passion, and hid it in his breast. Hopeless he knew it was, from his position; but, however hopeless, it must have been agony to him to hear of his rival's success. How much greater, then, must his sufferings have been when he found that the man to whom the woman he adored had promised to give her hand was a scoundrel of the basest kind!

He loved her so well that her future happiness must have been his constant thought, and now he learned that she was bound to the man who cared so little for the treasure of her love that he was ready to engage in any intrigue; while the very fact that the object chosen for this cruel intrigue was Hallett's own sister must have been maddening.

He must have felt fettered by his position, for he could not accuse John Lister to the woman he loved. He felt that he was too full of self-interest, and besides, how could he speak words that would inflict such a sorrow upon the peaceful life of Miriam Carr?

No: he felt bound in honour to be silent, and, crushing down his love and his honest indignation against John Lister, he sought employment elsewhere, and spent his leisure in keeping watch over his home.

He took one step, though, that I did not know of till long afterwards; he wrote to John Lister, telling him that his perfidy was known, and uttering so fierce a warning against him if he pursued Linny, or even wrote to her again, that the careful watch and ward kept over the house in Great Ormond Street proved to be unnecessary, for the sensual tiger, foiled in his spring, had slunk away.

On the day after my talk with Hallett, and Revitts' visit to the house, I made my way after office-hours to Miss Carr's, to find my welcome warmer than ever; for she flushed with pleasure, and sat for some time talking to me of her sister, who had written to her from abroad.

"Now, Antony," she exclaimed, "you and I will dine together, and after that you shall be my escort to a concert at St. James's Hall."

"A concert!" I exclaimed eagerly.

"Yes; I was about to send the tickets away, but you have come in most opportunely."

I was delighted; for I had never heard any of our best singers, and we chatted through dinner of the music we were to hear, after which I was left in the drawing-room, to amuse myself, while Miss Carr went up to dress.

I took up a book, and began to read; but the thoughts of Liuny Hallett and Mr. Lister kept coming into my head, and I asked myself whether I ought not to tell Miss Carr.

No; I felt that I could not, and then I began wondering whether the engagement that had been extended might not after all come to nothing, as I hoped it would. It was horrible to me now, that John Lister should be allowed to keep up ties with my patroness, knowing what I did of his character; and yet I felt I could not, I dared not, tell. At last, in the midst of my contending thoughts, some of which were for telling, some against, I forced myself into reading the book I had taken up, striving so hard to obtain the mastery over self that I succeeded—so well that I did not hear a cab stop, nor the quick step of him who had occupied so large a share of my thoughts.

"Ah, Grace," said John Lister cavalierly, as he entered the room unannounced, completely taking me by surprise as I started up from the book. "You here again! Well, how's engineering? Like it as well as printing, eh? Why, you are growing quite the gentleman, you lucky dog! I suppose we must shake hands now."

I felt as if all the blood in my body had rushed to my face, and a strange sensation of rage half choked me as I drew back.

"Why, what's the matter with you, boy?" he exclaimed. "Hold out your hand."

"I'll not," I exclaimed indignantly; "how dare you ask me!"

"Dare I ask you—puppy!" he exclaimed, with an insolent laugh. "Why, what do you mean?"

"How dare you come here?" I cried, my indignation getting the mastery of me.

"Dare I come here!" he exclaimed, frowning. "Why, you insolent young upstart, what do you mean?"

"I mean that you ought to be ashamed to show your face here again after your behaviour to Mr. Hallett's sister."

"Hush!"

As he uttered that word he caught me by the throat, thrust his face close to mine, and I saw that he was deadly pale.

"You dog!" he whispered; "if you dare to utter another word, I'll——"

He did not finish, but gave me a vindictive look that was full of threatenings of ill.

But unfortunately for him, he had hurt me severely as he caught me by the throat, and the pain, instead of cowering me, filled me full of rage. With one quick wrest I was free, and turning upon him fiercely, I exclaimed:

"I will speak in spite of what you say. You are a coward, and treacherous, and no gentleman!"

"Silence, dog!" he cried, in a hoarse whisper. "Have you dared to tell Miss Carr lies about me?"

"I'm not a tell-tale," I cried scornfully, and I'm not afraid of you, Mr. Lister. I would not tell Miss Carr, but I dare tell you that you are a coward and a scoundrel!"

He raised his fist, and I believe that he would have struck me, but just then his hand fell to his side, and his lips seemed to turn blue as he stared straight over my shoulder, and turning hastily, I saw Miriam Carr standing white and stern in the doorway, dressed ready for the concert.

"Ah, Miriam," he exclaimed, recovering himself; and he forced a smile to his lips; "Grace and I were engaged in a dispute."

She did not answer him, but turned to me.

"Antony," she said sternly, "repeat those words you just said."

"No, no; mere nonsense," exclaimed John Lister playfully. "It was nothing—nothing at all."

"Repeat those words, Antony Grace," cried Miss Carr, without seeming to heed him: and she came towards where I stood, while I felt as if I would gladly have sunk through the floor.

For a few moments I hesitated, then a feeling of strength seemed to come to me, and I looked up at her firmly as I said:

"Don't ask me, Miss Carr! I cannot tell."

"Antony!" she exclaimed.

"My dear Miriam——" began John Lister; but she turned from him.

"Antony," she cried imperiously, and her handsome eyes flashed as she stamped her foot; "I insist upon knowing the meaning of those words."

I was silent.

"It was nothing, my dear Miriam," exclaimed John Lister. Then in a low voice to me, "Go: I'll cover your retreat."

Go, and run off like a coward? No; that I felt I could not do, and I looked indignantly at him.

"If you value my friendship, Antony," cried Miss Carr, "tell me, I insist, what you meant by that accusation of Mr. Lister."

"I do—I do value your friendship, Miss Carr," I cried passionately, "but don't, pray don't ask me. I cannot—I will not tell."

"I command you to tell me," she cried: and to my young eyes she looked queen-like in her beauty, as she seemed to compel me to obey.

Mature thought tells me that she must indeed have seemed even majestic in her bearing, for John Lister looked pale and haggard, and I saw him again and again moisten his dry lips and essay to speak.

"I cannot tell you," I said: "Miss Carr, pray do not ask me!" I cried piteously.

"Tell me this instant, or leave my house, ungrateful boy!" she exclaimed passionately; and, casting an imploring look at her, I saw that she was pointing towards the door.

I would have given the world to have obeyed her; but there seemed to be something so cowardly, so mean and despicable, in standing there and accusing John Lister before the face of his affianced wife, that, with a piteous look, I slowly turned towards the door.

It was terrible to me to be driven away like that, and I felt my heart swell with bitterness; but I could not speak, and as I once more looked in her pitiless eyes, she was still pointing at the door.

The handle was already in my hand, and, giddy and despairing, I should have gone, had not Miriam Carr's clear voice rang out loudly:

"Stop!"

Then, as I turned:

"Come here, Antony!" and the pointing finger was there no longer, but two extended hands, which I ran across the room and seized, struggling hard to keep back the emotion that was striving for exit, for I was but a boy.

"My dear Miriam——" began John Lister once more.

"Mr. Lister," she said, and her voice was very low and stern, as she placed one arm round my waist and laid her right hand upon my shoulder, "will you have the goodness to leave my house?"

"My dear Miriam, pray be reasonable!" he exclaimed. "That foolish boy has got some crotchet into his head. It is all a silly blunder, which I can explain in a few words. I assure you it is all a mistake."

"If it is a mistake, Mr. Lister, you have nothing to mind; I now wish to be alone."

"But, Miriam, dearest Miriam, grant me a few minutes' conversation. I assure you I can set myself right in your eyes."

"If it is all a mistake, Mr. Lister, why did you threaten Antony Grace, if he dared to tell me the words I heard?"

"Because I was angry with him for making such a blunder, and I feared that it would upset you. Let me speak to you alone. Miriam, dear Miriam, you force me to speak to you like this before Antony Grace. I tell you," he cried, desperately trying to catch her hand, "I swear to you—what he said is a tissue of lies."

"And I tell you," she cried scornfully, "that Antony Grace never told an untruth in his life. Mr. Lister, I am a woman, and unprotected. I ask you now to leave my house."

"I cannot leave you with that boy, and no opportunity for defending myself. I must have a counsellor."

"You shall have one, John Lister," she said in a low, dull voice. "I will be your counsellor when he accuses you."

"Heaven bless you!" he exclaimed excitedly. "Your loving heart will take my part."

"My womanly duty, John Lister, and my plighted faith will join to defend you from this grave charge."

"Let me stay and plead my own cause, dearest Miriam," he cried, stretching out his hands and fixing his eyes upon hers; but her look was cold, stern, and pitiless, and for answer she pointed to the door.

He made another appeal, but she seemed to be absolute, to master him, and at last, trembling, white with passion and disappointment, he turned and left the room, shrieking from that stern, pointing finger, and half-staggering down the stairs. I heard him hurry across the hall, and the door closed so loudly that the house seemed to be filled with echoes, while his steps were perfectly audible as he strode along the street.

CHAPTER XLIV.

I AM FORGIVEN.

"OH, Miss Carr," I cried at last, as I broke the painful silence, "what have I done?"

She did not answer for some moments. Then, leading me to the couch, she threw off her opera-cloak, and sat looking at me for a few moments before passing her hand across my forehead to brush aside the hair, and kissing me on the brow.

"What have you done, Antony? Show me that I was not mistaken in you when I thought you all that was honest and true."

I could not speak; only sat gazing at her face as she fought hard to conquer her agitation.

"Ring the bell, Antony," she said at last. "You must bear with me to-night, and not be disappointed. Do not let James enter the room, but meet him on the landing, and say that I shall not want the carriage."

I hastened to obey her, and then I returned, to stand before her, anxious and sick at heart; but she pointed to the seat at her side.

"Antony," she said, after some time had elapsed, "why did you not tell me this—this piteous story at once? Was I not worthy of your confidence?"

"Yes, yes," I said; "but how could I tell you? I dared not."

"Dared not?"

"I felt that it would be so cowardly and mean to tell tales of Mr. Lister, and I hoped that you might find out yourself that he was not so good a man as you thought."

She drew a long, deep breath.

"But you might have caused me the deepest misery, Antony," she said.

"But what could I do?" I cried passionately. "I wanted to tell you, and then I felt that I could not; and I talked to Mr. Hallett about it, and he said, too, that I could not speak."

"You must tell me now, Antony," she said, as she turned away her face. "Tell me all."

I drew a breath full of relief, and proceeded to tell her all, referring to Linny's first adventure and Revitts' injuries, and going on to all I knew of Linny's elopement, to the end.

"But, Antony," she exclaimed, as I finished, and she now turned her face towards mine, "can this be true? Is it certain that it was Mr. Lister?"

"Yes," I said: "certain. His letters to poor Linny show all that; and she talks about him in her delirium, poor girl!"

"I cannot believe it of him," she said; "and yet—How long is it since your friend was hurt?"

I told her the very night, from my pocket-book.

"His hands were injured from a struggle, he told me, with some drunken man," she said half to herself. Then aloud, "Antony, did you see either of these letters?"

"Yes; Mr. Hallett asked me to look at them, to see if I knew the handwriting as well as he; and, besides, in one of her intervals of reason, poor Linny clung to her brother, and begged him never to let Mr. Lister see her again."

"Did she say why?" asked Miss Carr hoarsely.

"Yes; she said he had such power over her that she was afraid of him."

A half-hysterical sob seemed to rise to Miss Carr's lips, but her face was very stern and unchanged.

Then, rising quickly, as if a sudden thought occurred to her, she

crossed the room to a little Japanese cabinet, and took out a short, thick cord, as it seemed to me; but, as she placed it in my hands, I saw that it was a short hair watch-guard, finished with gilded swivel and cross.

She placed it in my hands without a word, looking at me intently the while, as if questioning me with her eyes.

"That is Linny Hallett's chain," I said. "She made that guard herself, of her own hair. How did it come here?"

"Mr. Lister dropped it, I suppose," she said, with a look of scorn flashing from her eyes. "It was found by one of my servants in the hall after he was gone, and brought to me. I had forgotten it, Antony, until now."

There was again a deep silence in the room, but at last she broke it with an eager question.

"Tell me about this Linny Hallett," she said. "You have often told me that she is pretty. Is she good?"

"Oh yes, I am sure she is," I said; "but she is weak and willful, and she must have loved Mr. Lister very much to turn as she has from so true a brother as Mr. Hallett."

"And—Mr. Hallett—is he a good brother to her?"

"Good brother!" I exclaimed, my admiration for my friend carrying me away; "he is all that is noble and patient and good. Poor Hallett! he is more like a father to Linny than a brother, and then his patience with his poor mother! Oh, Miss Carr, I wish you knew him, too!"

She darted an inquiring look at me and then turned away her head, speaking no more, but listening intently as I told her of poor Hallett's patience under misfortune, relating the story again of his noble sacrifice of self to keep those who were dear to him; of the anxiety Linny caused him, and of his tenderness of the unreasonable invalid he made his care.

Then, being thus set a-going, I talked, too, of the model, and our labours, and again of my ambition to get to be an engineer in order to help him, little thinking how I had turned myself into a special pleader to the advancement of my poor friend's cause.

At last, half-ashamed of my earnestness, I looked inquiringly in my companion's face, to find that she was listening intently, and she looked up at me as I ceased.

"And this Mr.—Mr. Hallett," she said softly, "is still a workman in Messrs. Ruddle and Lister's employ?"

"Oh no! Miss Carr," I exclaimed: "he told me he could never enter the place again, and that he dared not trust himself to meet Mr. Lister face to face. He has not been there since, and he never will go there now."

Miss Carr seemed to breathe more freely as I said these words, and then there was another interval of silence.

"Is Mr. Hallett poor?" she asked then.

"Oh yes, very poor," I said. "He has been obliged to stop his work over his invention sometimes, because the money has to go to buy wine and little choice things for poor Mrs. Hallett. She is always repining and talking of the days when she had her conservatory and carriage, and, worst of all, she blames poor Hallett so for his want of ambition. Yes, Miss Carr," I said, repeating myself to willing ears, "and he is one of the truest and best of men. He was not always a workman, you know."

"Indeed!" she said; and I saw that she bent her head lower as she listened.

"No," I said enthusiastically, as I, in my heart, set up Stephen Hallett as the model I meant to imitate. "His father was a surgeon in Warwickshire, and Mr. Hallett was at college—at Oxford, where he was working to take honours."

Miss Carr's lips parted as she still sat with her head bent.

"He told me all about it one evening. He was sent for home one day to find his father dying; and, a week later, poor Mr. Hallett found himself with all his father's affairs upon his hands, and that he had died heavily in debt."

Miss Carr's head was slowly raised, and I felt proud then to see how I had interested her.

"Then," I continued, "he had to try what he could do. He could not go back to college; for it took everything, even the furniture, to pay off his father's debts, and then, one day, Miss Carr, he had to sit down and think how he was to keep his widowed mother, and his sister, and himself."

Miss Carr was now sitting with her head resting upon her hand, her elbow upon her knee, listening intently to all I said.

"Mr. Hallett and his father had some type and a little press in one of the rooms, with which they used to print poems and little pamphlets, and Mr. Hallett had learnt enough about printing to make him, when he had taken his mother and sister up to London, try and get employment in an office. And he did; and he says he used to be horribly afraid of being found out and treated as an impostor; but by working with all his might he used to manage to keep up with the slow, lazy ones, and then, by degrees, he passed them; and now—oh, you should see him!—he can set up type much faster than the quickest man who ever came into the office."

"And does he keep his mother and sister now?" she said dreamily.

"Oh yes," I said; "Mrs. Hallett has been an invalid ever since Mr. Stephen Hallett's father died."

Miss Carr had sunk back in the corner of the couch, closing her eyelids, and I thought I saw a couple of tears stealing down her cheeks; but directly after she covered her face with her hands, remaining silent like that for quite half-an-hour—a silence that I respected to the end.

At last she rose quietly, and held out her hand.

"Antony," she said softly, "I am not well to-night. Forgive me if I have disappointed you. Another time we must make up for this."

"Oh, Miss Carr," I said, "you have been so grieved."

"Yes, greatly grieved, Antony, in many ways—not least that I spoke to you so harshly as I did."

"But you are not angry with me?" I said. "You forgive me for not speaking out?"

"Forgive you?" she said softly—"forgive you, my boy?—yes. But go now; I do not feel myself. Good-night, Antony, my dear boy; go."

To my surprise, she took me tenderly in her arms and kissed me, leading me afterwards to the door, and laying her cheek against my forehead before she let me out.

"Come to me to-morrow, Antony; come again to dinner: perhaps the next day I may be leaving town."

CHAPTER XLV.

HALLETT'S NEW LANDLORD.

A YEAR slipped rapidly away, full of changes for some people, no doubt; but to me it was very uneventful. I worked away at my profession steadily, liking it better every day, and for nothing more strongly than that it gave me knowledge that I felt would be of advantage to Stephen Hallett, with whom I grew more intimate than ever.

The home at Great Ormond Street seemed now less sombre and desolate; for since her serious illness, from which poor Liddy had been literally nursed back into life by Mary and Hallett, the girl was completely changed.

As she began to mend, I used to find a great deal of time to go and sit with her; for her return to strength was very slow, and the poor worn face would light up and the great staring eyes brighten whenever I went into the room with some little offering or another that I thought would please her. Sometimes it would be flowers, or fruit, or any little delicacy that I thought she would fancy; but the greatest pleasure I could give her was to take some fresh book, and sit and read.

She used to lie upon a couch near the window, where she could look out upon the sky, and when I was not there I suppose she would lie like that, thinking, for hours, without speaking a word.

Mary had grown to be quite an institution at the place, and

the two invalids at last took up so much of her time, that a scheme was one day proposed by me, consequent upon an announcement made to me by Hallett.

"We shall be obliged to leave," he said. "The tenants of this house are going away."

"But it will be terrible work, Hallett," I said. "How will Lenny and Mrs. Hallett bear the change?"

"I hope patiently and well," he said quietly, and the subject dropped; but an idea had occurred to me which I hastened to put in force.

My first step was to write to Miss Carr, whom I had not seen for many, many months, as, directly after the meeting with Mr. Lister, she had gone on the Continent with her newly-married sister, whose husband had an official appointment at Marseilles, and had resided with her ever since.

I was grievously disappointed at having to part with so good a friend; but she promised to write to me every week, and gave me the strictest injunctions to send to her for advice or help whenever I should find myself in need.

I had no hesitation whatever, then, in asking her in my weekly letter for help to carry out my plan, and that was to find Revitts and Mary the money to buy the lease of the house in Great Ormond Street, so that Mary would be better able to attend to her friends, and, while acting as their landlady, supply me with better rooms as well.

I broached the subject to Revitts and his wife that very evening, and the former nodded.

"How much would it take, Ant'ny?" he said.

"The lease would be a hundred pounds," I said. "Then the rent is eighty."

"That's a deal of money, my dear," said Mary; "and then there's the rates."

"Yes," I said; "but then look here, Mary; I should like a sitting-room as well as a bed-room now, and I could pay you twenty-five or thirty pounds a year for that. I know Mr. Hallett pays twenty-six for what he has, and you could, as you often said you would like to, let another floor; for it is a large house. I think you would live rent-free."

"There," cried Revitts, giving the table a slap. "What do you think of that, Polly?"

"Think of what?" she said tartly; for the seriousness of the subject unsettled her.

"What he says. D'ye hear his business-like way of reckoning it up: so much for this here, and so much for that there? He couldn't have talked like that when he come up to London first, as green as a bit o' grass. That's my teaching, that is. I knew I could sharpen him up."

"Don't be so conceited, Bill," she exclaimed. "But a large house means lots of furniture, Master Antony. No, I don't think it would do. We haven't enough."

"But I've written to Miss Carr, to ask her to let me have the money for you."

Revitts got up out of his chair, where he was partaking of tea and bread and butter in a rather wholesale style, pulled himself together, buttoned up his coat, took a couple of official strides to where I sat, and, taking my hand, began shaking it up and down for some moments.

Then he gave Mary three or four wags of the head and nods, and went back to his tea, unbuttoning the while.

"That's very nice and kind of you, Master Antony," she said; "but that money would be only borrowed, and it would have to be paid back again, and sit upon us like lumps of lead till it was——"

"Oh, nonsense, Mary, I don't believe Miss Carr would ever want it back—I think she'll give me the money. And besides, I mean to furnish my own rooms, so that will be two less."

"Hark at that now!" said Revitts, giving his head a wag.

"I don't want to seem conceited, but I should like to improve my room, and have a place for my books, and be able to bring a friend home to have tea or supper with me when I liked."

"That's quite right," said Revitts approvingly; "but we should want close upon two hundred pounds, Master Ant'ny, you know."

"Yes, you ought to have two hundred and fifty pounds."

Mary shook her head, and seemed to tighten up her face, buttering the bread she had before her the while.

"Here, I say, come, Polly, I know we should have to begin saving," said Revitts, in tones of remonstrance; "but don't begin to-night. Stick a little more butter on that there bread."

Mary complied, the meal went on, and I left them at last to talk the matter over, thoroughly upset by my proposals.

They opposed them for some days to come; but when, at last, I received a kind letter from Miss Carr, bidding me tell Mary how glad she was to hear of her plans, and that they were to be sure and include a comfortable bed and sitting-room for me, the day was carried, especially as the letter contained a cheque for £250; though they would not take all this, the steady, hoarding couple being able to produce between them enough to pay in full for the lease, which was duly assigned and placed in Revitts' hands by Tom Girtley, who was progressing fast with the firm of solicitors to whom he had been articled.

The first intimation that Hallett received of the change was from Revitts himself, who called one day on his way home to announce with suppressed glee that he was the new landlord, and to ask if there was anything that Mr. Hallett would like done.

Hallett stared in astonishment, and then turned sharply to me—
 "This is your doing, Antony," he said.

I pleaded guilty.

"Well, what could be better?" I said; "I'm going to have two rooms, and Mary will be always at hand to attend upon us, and you will not have to turn out."

"But the money?" he said, looking at me searchingly.

"Revitts and his wife have been saving people," I replied, "and they had their savings to invest. I don't think they could have done better."

Hallett did not seem satisfied, but he was too much of a gentleman to push his questions home, and the matter dropped. The old tenant of the house moved out at once; Mary had a charwoman at work for a general clean up, and ended by dismissing her for smelling of gin, and doing the cleaning herself; and before a fortnight was over the change had been made, and I was able to congratulate myself on a capital arrangement.

"You think it is now," I said, "Hallett, don't you?"

"I do now, Antony," he said, "for more reasons than one."

"What do you mean?" I said; for he looked very peculiar and stern.

"I have seen that man hanging about here once or twice."

"Mr. Lister?"

He nodded.

"Oh, but surely that is all over. He would never dare."

"He hates me, I am sure, Antony," he replied, "and would do anything to injure me; and, besides, such a man as that would not lightly give up his plans."

"But Linny dislikes him now, I am sure," I said.

"I am not," he replied sadly; and no more was said.

CHAPTER XLVI.

LINNY AWAKES.

BUT those words "I am not," made no little impression on me, and a day or two later, when I had taken Linny in some flowers, I was thinking very deeply about them, and perhaps my thoughts may have influenced the mind of the poor girl, for she suddenly laid her thin white hand upon my arm and said:

"Antony, do you ever see Mr. Lister now?"

"No," I said; "I have never seen him since the day of that scene with Miss Carr."

"Tell me about it—all about it," she said sharply.

I stared at her aghast, and tried to excuse myself, but her eyes

looked at me so imploringly that I felt compelled, and related all that I had heard and seen.

She lay with her eyes half-closed during my recital, and when it was ended the poor, weak, wasted girl took one of my hands between both of hers, and held it to her breast, caressing it silently the while.

"Oh, Linny, dear," I said, "what have I done! I ought not to have told you all this. You are going to be worse. Let me call Stephen!"

"No, no, no," she wailed. "Hush, hush! You must not wake poor mamma!"

"Let me call up Mary."

"No, no," she sobbed; "sit still—sit still, Antony dear; you have always been to me like a brother, and you have known all. I have no girl friends of my own age, but I can talk to you."

"No; let's talk of something else," I said earnestly. "You must not think about the past."

"I must think about it, or I shall die," she said, adding pathetically, "no, no, don't get up. I shall be better now. There, you see, I have left off crying."

She seemed to make an effort over herself, and in a few minutes she looked up at me smiling, but her poor face was so wasted and thin that her smile frightened me, and I was again about to call for help.

"No, no," she said; "I am better now. Antony dear, I could not get well, but felt as if I was wasting away because I could not see him. Oh, Antony, I did love him so, and I felt obliged to obey him in all he wished. But it was because I thought him so fond and true. I have felt all these long months that he loved me very dearly, and that if I could only see him—if I could only lay my head upon his arm, and go to rest, I should wake up well. I always thought that he loved me very dearly, and that some day he would come and say I was to be his wife. Stephen thought I hated him for his cruel ways, but I did not, I could not. I do not even hate him now. I am only sorry."

"But you don't want to see him again, Linny?" I said.

"No, no: not now," she replied with a shudder. "I know now that he never loved me. I never understood it all before, Antony. I pray God I may never see his face again."

There was something very impressive in her words, and, closing her eyes, she lay back there so still that I thought she was asleep, but the moment I tried to withdraw my hand she clung to it the more tightly, and looked up at me and smiled.

"Antony," she said suddenly; and there seemed to be a new light in her eyes as she opened them wildly, "I am going to get well now. I could not before, for thinking about the past."

"I hope and pray that you will," I said, with a strange sensation of fear creeping through me.

"I shall," she said quickly. "I can feel it now. Last week I thought that I was going to die. Now talk to me about Miss Carr. Is she very beautiful?"

"Yes," I said eagerly, "very beautiful."

"More handsome than I used to be?" she said, laughing.

"Oh, she's very different to you, Linn," I said, flushing. "She is tall and noble-looking, and dark, while you are little and fair. One could not compare you two together."

"It was no wonder, then, that Mr. Lister should love her."

"Oh no," I said. "Any man who saw her would be sure to love her."

She sighed softly.

"Is she—is she a good woman?"

"Good?" I cried enthusiastically; "there could not be a better woman."

"And—and——" she faltered, moistening her dry lips, "do you think she will marry Mr. Lister?"

"I am sure she will not," I said indignantly.

"But she loved him."

"No," I said thoughtfully; "I don't think she did much."

"But he loved her."

"Ye—es, I suppose so," I said; "but he could not have loved her much, or he would not have behaved as he did."

There was a pause then, during which Linn lay playing with my hand.

"Antony," she cried suddenly, "Miss Carr will forgive him some day."

"Forgive him!" I said. "Yes, she is so good a woman that I dare say she will forgive him, but everything is over between them now."

"I am very glad," she said dreamily, "for I should be sorry if anything else took place."

"What! should you be jealous, Linn?"

"No," she said decidedly, "only very, very sorry for her. Oh! Antony," she said, bursting into passionate tears, "I was very ignorant and very blind."

"Linn, Linn, my child, what is the matter?" cried Hallett, entering the room, and flying with all a woman's solicitude to the couch, to take the light wasted form in his arms. "Heaven help me, she's worse. The doctor, Antony, quick!"

"No, no, no," cried Linn, throwing her arms round her brother's neck; "I am better, Steve, better now. It is only sorrow that I have been so blind."

"So blind, my darling?"

"Yes, yes," she sobbed excitedly, pressing her brother's dark

hair from his forehead, and covering his face with her kisses, "that I was so blind, and weak, and young. I did not know who loved me, and who did not; but it's all over now, Steve dear. Dear brother, it's all over now."

"My darling," he whispered, "let me send for help!"

"No, no," she cried, "what for? I am better--so much better, Stephen. That is all taken off my mind, and I have nothing to do now but love you, love you all, and get well."

Poor little thing! She lay there clasped in her brother's strong arms, sobbing hysterically, but it was as if every tear she shed washed away from her stricken mind a portion of the canker that had been consuming her day by day.

It was more than I could bear, and if it had not been that I was called upon to speak to and comfort poor, weak Mrs. Hallett, who had been awakened by Linny's passionate sobs, I should have run out of the room and away from the house: but somehow I had grown to be part and parcel of that family, and the weak invalid seemed to love me like her own son.

At last, to my inexpressible relief, I saw Linny calm gradually down and sink to sleep in her brother's arms, like some weary, suffering child.

Hallett did not move, but sat there fearing to disturb her, and as the evening wore on, his eyes sought mine inquiringly again and again, to direct my attention to her look: and as I watched her in that soft evening glow—a mellow light which told of a lovely evening in the country lanes—a soft, gentle calm seemed to have come upon the wasted face, its old hard angularity had gone, and with it that wistful air of suffering and constant pain. Her breathing was faint, but it was soft and regular as that of a sleeping child, and at last there was a restful smile of content upon her lips, such as had not been there for years.

"What had you been saying to her, Antony?" whispered Hallett sternly, as I sat there by his side.

"She asked me questions about Lister and Miss Carr," I said, "and I think that she woke up for the first time to know what a rascal he is."

Hallett looked anxiously at his sister before he spoke again, but she was evidently plunged in a deep sleep.

"You are very young, Antony, but you are getting schooled in nature's secrets earlier than many are. Do you think that is over now?"

"I am sure of it," I said.

"Thank God!" he said fervently, "for I was in daily dread."

"She would never—there," I said excitedly; "she prayed herself that she might never see his face again."

"But they say women are very forgiving, Antony," he said with a tinge of bitterness; and then, with his brow furrowing

but a cynical smile upon his lip, he said, "We shall hear next that Miss Carr has forgiven him, and that they are married."

"For shame!" I exclaimed indignantly. "You do not know Miss Carr, or you would not speak like that."

He half closed his eyes after glancing at where his mother lay back in her easy chair, asleep once more, for so she passed the greater part of her time.

"No," he said softly, "I do not know her, Antony."

I don't know what possessed me to say what I did, but it seemed as if I was influenced to speak.

"I wish you did know her and love her, Hallett, for she is so——"

He started as if he had been stung.

"Are you mad?" he exclaimed angrily.

"No," I said quietly, "but I think she likes you."

"How could she?"

"I have talked so much about you, and she has seemed so interested in all you do."

"You foolish fellow," he said, with his face resuming its old calm. "You are too young yet to thoroughly understand such matters. When you grow older, you will learn why it was that I could not play, as you seemed to wish, so mean a part as to become John Lister's accuser. It would have been contemptible in the extreme."

"I could not help feeling that Miss Carr ought to know, Hallett."

"Yes, my lad, but you shrank from telling her yourself."

He was silent for a minute.

"Ah, Antony," he said, "Fate seems to have ordained that I am always to wear the workman's coat; but I console myself with the idea that a man may be a poor artisan and still at heart a gentleman."

"Of course!"

"My father was a thoroughly honourable man, who left us poor solely from misfortune. The legacy he left to me, Antony, was the care of my dear mother and Linny."

He looked down tenderly on the sleeping girl, and softly stroked her hair; the touch, light as it was, waking her, to smile in his face with a look very different from that worn by her countenance the day before.

CHAPTER XLVII.

MISS CARR HEARS THE TRUTH.

I WAS surprised one morning by my weekly letter from Miss Carr containing the welcome news, that she was coming back;

in fact, that she was following the letter, and it expressed a wish that I should meet her at the terminus and see her home.

It was with no small feeling of pride that I found myself chosen for this duty, and quite an hour before it was possible for the train to come in, I was waiting at the station.

Soon after I saw the carriage drive up, and at last, after looking endless times at the clock, I saw the train come gliding in, and the next minute I was hurrying along the platform, looking eagerly at each carriage in turn, when I found myself brushing by John Lister, who started and scowled at me as I passed.

Just then I caught sight of Miss Carr, looking from one of the carriages, and handing a bundle of wraps to her maid.

I ran eagerly up, but only to find myself rudely thrust aside by John Lister, who, in his excitement, studied nothing so that he could reach her first.

"At last," he whispered passionately. "Let me be the first to welcome you back."

Flushed and angry, my fists involuntarily clenched, and I felt ready to strike him as I started forward once again.

I had my recompense, though, directly, for I saw Miss Carr draw down her veil, and, completely ignoring the extended hands, she beckoned to me, and, summoning up as much importance as I could, I said sharply:

"Will you have the goodness to stand aside?"

He was so taken aback by the determined refusal of Miss Carr to renew their acquaintance that he stood back involuntarily, recovering himself though, directly, and approaching once more: but he was too late: Miss Carr had taken my arm, and I led her to the carriage, the footman, who had seen her, taking the wraps and a case or two from the maid, whom he ushered to a cab, which was then being loaded with luggage, as I sprang in beside my patroness, and gave the word to the coachman. "Home!"

I was too young not to feel excited by the importance of my position, and as the horses started and the carriage moved forward, I think now that I must have been more than human if I had not darted a look of triumph at John Lister, as he stood there just beneath one of the swinging lamps, his brow furrowed and a furious look of disappointment and malice upon his face.

I heard Miss Carr draw her breath as if with pain, but the next moment her hands were in mine.

"My dear Antony," she exclaimed, "I am very glad to get back. Why, my dear boy, what a difference one year has made in you."

"Has it?" I said, laughing.

"Oh, yes! Why, Antony, you will soon be growing into a man."

"I hope so, Miss Carr; but I don't think you look well."

"No?"

"You look thin and careworn."

"Marseilles is a very hot place, Antony," she said evasively, "and does not suit English people. Of course, you are my property this evening, Antony. You have no engagement?"

"No," I said, smiling. "I should have gone to spend the evening with Mr. Hallett if I had been alone."

Her hand gave a slight twitch as I said these words, and her voice sounded a little hoarse as she continued:

"You must come and dine with me, Antony, and we will have a long, long chat. It seems like old times to be with you again."

I was delighted to have her back, and chatted on in the most unreserved way, until we reached Miss Carr's house, where the door flew open as the carriage stopped.

I jumped down, and was in the act of holding out my right hand and the carriage-door open with the left, when I started with surprise; for a swift hansom cab had brought John Lister there before us, and he stood on the other side, holding out his hand.

"I must speak to you, Miriam!" he exclaimed in a low voice, when, seeing her shrink back in alarm, and with an unmistakable look of horror in her face, boy as I was, I felt some sense of manhood flush to my cheek, and, feeling no fear of him for the moment, I placed my hand upon his chest, and thrust him with all my might away.

"Stand back, sir!" I cried, "or I call the police."

Ere he could recover from his astonishment, Miss Carr had lightly touched my hand, stepped out, and hurried in, while I, with my heart beating fast at my temerity, slowly closed the brougham-door, and stood facing John Lister.

"You insolent dog!" he cried threateningly; and I thought he was about to strike me, but at that moment, as I stood before him with my teeth set, I would hardly have run in to save my life.

"How dare you insult Miss Carr!" I exclaimed.

"Insult! Oh, this is too much!" he muttered. Then, half-raising his hand, he let it fall once more, turned upon his heel, and strode away.

The coachman seemed disposed to speak, but the field being now my own, I walked—very pompously, I'm afraid—into the hall, Miss Carr coming out of the dining-room as soon as the front-door was closed, to catch my hand in hers, and look eagerly in my flushed face.

"You have grown brave too, Antony," she whispered, as she led me upstairs. "Thank you, thank you; I did not know that I could look for a protector in you."

I had calmed down by the time Miss Carr had dressed; and

then followed one of those, to me, delightful evenings. We dined together; she chatted of her life in Southern France, and at last, over our tea in the drawing-room, as she was sitting back in her lounge-chair, with her face in the shade, she said, in what was meant to be a perfectly calm voice:

"Well, Antony, you have not said a word to me about your friends."

I did not answer directly, for I felt a strange hesitation in so doing; and a similar emotion must have been in my companion's breast, for she sat there for some minutes in silence, till I said:

"Linny Hallett seems to have quite recovered now, and is bright and happy again, though very much changed."

Miss Carr did not speak.

"Mrs. Hallett is precisely the same. I do not think she has altered in the least since I have known her."

Miss Carr seemed to turn her face more away from me, or else it was the shadow, and now, instead of speaking of Stephen Hallett, something seemed to prompt me to turn off, and talk of Revitts and Mary, and of how admirably the arrangement had answered of their taking the house in Great Ormond Street.

There seemed to be a slight impatient movement as I prattled on—I can call it nothing else. It was not from a spirit of mischief, but all the time I seemed to feel that she must want to know about Stephen Hallett, and somehow I could not mention his name.

"It is quite droll, Miss Carr," I said. "Mrs. Hallett says that it is such an admirable arrangement, having a police-constable on the premises, and that she has never before felt so safe since she has been in London."

"You have not spoken to me yet of your friend—Mr. Hallett."

I started, for it did not sound like Miss Carr's voice, and when I looked up I could not see her face.

"No; not yet," I said. "He is toiling on still as patiently and enduringly as ever."

"And the invention, Antony?"

"The invention," I said bitterly, "lags behind. It is impossible to get on."

"Is—is it all waste of time, then?"

"Waste? No," I said. "The invention is one that would carry all before it; but, poor fellow, he is tied and fettered at every turn. He has nearly got it to perfection, but, after months of constant toil, some wretched part breaks down, and the whole thing has to be done again."

"But is it likely to succeed?"

"Likely?" I said: "it must succeed; but it never can until it has been made and tried. It should be carefully constructed at some large engineering establishment like ours."

"Yes," she said, evidently listening intently.

"But how can it be? Poor Hallett earns about two pounds a week, and the demands upon his pocket, through his mother's and sister's illness, have been terrible. He is heavily in debt now to the doctors."

"Why do you not help your friend, then, Antony?" she said in tones of reproach.

"Because he will not let me," I replied quietly. "He is too proud."

Miss Carr was silent.

"What amount would it take," she said at last, in a strange tone, "to perfect the machine?"

"Amount?" I said eagerly; "an awful deal. It is impossible to say how much. Why, the patent would cost nearly a hundred Poor fellow! I wish sometimes he would give it up."

"Why?" she exclaimed softly.

"Because," I said, "it is breaking his heart."

"Is—is he so constant in his attentions to it?"

"Oh yes, Miss Carr. Whenever he can spare a minute, he is working or dreaming over it; he calls it his love—his mistress, in a half-mocking sort of spirit. Poor fellow, it is a sad life."

There was again a deep silence in the room.

"Antony," she said again, "why do you not help your friend?"

"I do," I said eagerly. "I have worked at it all night with him sometimes, and spent all my pocket-money upon it—though he doesn't know it. He thinks I have turned some of the wheels and spindles myself, but I set some of our best workmen to do it, and cut me the cogs and ratchets."

"And paid for them yourself?"

"Yes, Miss Carr. I could not have made them well enough."

"But why not help him more substantially, Antony? With the money that is required?"

"I help him?" I said.

She did not answer for a few moments, for a struggle was going on within her breast, but she spoke at last. Her pride and feminine shrinking had given way before the love that she had been striving these many months to crush, but which was sweeping all before it now.

"Antony," she said softly, "I can trust to you, I know; and I feel that whatever I help you in will be for the best. You shall help your friend Mr. Hallett. My purse shall be open to you, and you shall find the means to enable him to carry his project to success."

"Oh, Miss Carr!" I cried; and in my new delight I caught and kissed her hand.

She laid one upon my shoulder, but her head was averted still, and then she motioned me to resume my seat.

"Does that satisfy you, Antony?" she said.

"Yes—no," I cried, getting up and walking up and down the room. "He would not take the money; he would be a great deal too proud."

"Would not take the money, Antony? Why?"

"Because he would know that it came from you."

"And knowing that the money came from me, Antony, would he not take it?"

"No, I am sure he would not."

"Why?"

"Because—because—— Miss Carr, should you be angry with me if I told you the truth?"

She paused again, some minutes, before she replied softly, but in so strange a tone:

"No, Antony. How could I?"

"Because, Miss Carr, I am sure he loves you: and he would think it lowered him in your eyes."

She turned upon me a look that seemed hot with anger, but the next moment she had turned her face away, and I could see that her bosom was heaving with suppressed emotion.

A great struggle was evidently going on within her breast, and it was some time before she could master it. At last, however, she turned to me a face that was deadly pale and there was something very stern in her looks as she said to me:

"Antony, we have been separated for a year, but can you speak to me with the same boyish truth and candour as of old, in the spirit taught you, my dear boy, by the father and mother you have lost?"

"Oh yes, Miss Carr," I said frankly, as I laid my hand in hers, and looked in her beautiful eyes.

"Yes, Antony, you can," she said softly. "Tell me, then, has Mr. Hallett ever dared to say such a thing as—as that to you?"

"Never, Miss Carr."

"Has—has my name been made the subject of conversation amongst your friends?"

"Never, Miss Carr."

"Or been coupled with his?"

"Oh! no, no," I cried, "never. Mr. Hallett has rarely mentioned your name."

"Then how can you—how can you dare to make such an assertion as you did?"

"I don't know," I replied thoughtfully. "I could not tell you how it is, but I am sure he does love you as much as I do, Miss Carr."

"I believe you do, Antony," she said, bending forward and kissing my forehead. "But, you foolish boy, drive that other notion from your head, and if you do love me, Antony—and I

would have you love me, my boy, as dearly as you loved her who has gone—never speak to your dearest friend of our words to-night."

"Oh, you may trust me for that," I said proudly.

"I do trust you, Antony, and I see now that your ideas are right about the money. Still, I should like you to help your friend."

"So should I," I said; and I sat thinking dreamily over the matter, being intensely desirous of helping Hallett, till it was time to go, when an idea occurred to me which I proposed to Miss Carr, one which she gladly accepted, joining eagerly in what was, perhaps, a deception, but one most truly and kindly meant.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

AN INVITATION.

"HALLO, young Grace," said Mr. Jabez Rowle, as I was shown up one evening into his room, to find him, snuff-box on the table and pen in hand, reading away at his paper, and, as I entered, smiling with satisfaction as he pounced upon a literal error, and marked it in the margin. "How are you?"

I said I was quite well, and he pointed to several pen marks at the side of the column.

"There's reading," he said contemptuously. "I'm ashamed of these daily papers, that I am. Well, how are wheels and lathes and steam-engines, eh? Bah! what a contemptible young sneak you were to leave so good a business for oil and steam and steel-filings. I give you up now. Glad to see you, though; sit down. Have a pinch of snuff?"

"No, thanks," I said, smiling.

"Humph! how you grow, you young dog; why, you'll soon be a man. Better have a pinch; capital bit of snuff."

I shook my head, and he went on, smiling grimly at me the while.

"No business to have left me, Grace. I should have made a man of you. Well, how are you getting on?"

"Capitally," I said.

"Don't believe it. Better have stopped with me. Heard from Peter?"

"No," I said eagerly. "Have you?"

"Yes. Just the same as usual. Down at Rowford still, smoking himself to death. Ha! capital pinch of snuff this," he added, regaling himself again. "Sent his love to you, and said I was to tell you—tell you—where the dickens did I put that letter?" he continued, pulling a bundle of slip-proofs out of his breast-pocket,

and hunting them over—"said I was to tell you--ah, here it is--to tell you— Ah—"Tell young Grace I shall come up to town and see him some day, and I'll give you a look up too.' Bah! Don't want him: won't have him. We should be sure to quarrel. He'd come here, and sit and smoke all day—where's my—oh, here it is."

He took a couple of pinches of snuff in a queer, excited way, and snapped his fingers loudly.

"I shall be very, very glad to see him when he does come," I said warmly.

"Ah, yes, of course you will. He's got some papers or something, he says, for you."

"Has he?"

"So he says. Hang Peter! I don't like him, somehow."

There was a comical look of chagrin in the old man's face as he spoke; but it was mingled with a dry, humorous air that refused to be concealed, and I seemed to feel in my heart that if the brothers met, Mr. Jabez would be thoroughly cordial.

"Well, I'm glad you did condescend to call, young engineer-driver," he said at last; "as it happens, I'm not busy to-night. You won't take a pinch of snuff?"

I shook my head.

"What will you have, then? Have some almonds and raisins? Figs? Some oranges? Well, some sweetstuff? They've got some capital cocoa-nut candy downstairs! No? Well, have some candied peel?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Jabez," I said, laughing. "Why, what a baby you do think me."

"Well, so you are," he growled. "You don't want me to ask you to have beer, or grog, or cigars, do you?"

"Oh no!" I said, laughing.

"Good job, too, because you wouldn't catch me giving them to you. Well, how's your policeman?"

"Quite well."

"Ever see Hallett now?"

"Every day nearly."

"Humph! Decent fellow, Hallett; sorry he left us. Cleanest proofs I ever had. That man always read his stick, Grace. You always read yours?"

"But you forget I am not a printer now, Mr. Jabez."

"No, I don't, stupid. Can't you see I was speaking in metaphors? Always read your stick, boy, through life. When you've done a thing, go over it again to see if it's right; and then, at the end, you'll find your proof-sheets of life are not half so foul. Tell Hallett, when you see him again, to give me a look up. I rather liked him."

"Why, you never seemed to like him, Mr. Jabez," I said.

"Well, what of that, boy? Can't a man like anybody without always going about and grinning?"

He took another pinch of snuff, and then nodded and tapped his box.

"How's Mr. Grimstone?" I said, smiling.

"Oh, hard as a nut, and as awkward. Gives me a deal of trouble."

"And is Jem Smith with you still?"

"With me? No; but he's in a house close by, the great stupid lout! He's got whiskers now, and grown more thick-headed than ever. Grimstone had a sharp illness, though, over that affair."

"What affair?" I asked.

"Why, when the partnership was broken up—you know?"

"No," I said, wonderingly.

"Why, you must have heard. When John Lister was bankrupt. He was dead in with the money-lenders, and he had to give up, you know."

"What! was he ruined?"

"Ruined? yes, a gambling fool; and if Mr. Ruddle hadn't been pretty firm, the rascal would have ruined him too—pulled the house down."

"This is news," I said.

"Yes, and bad news, too," said the old fellow. "Five hundred pounds of my savings went—lent money—for him to make ducks and drakes!"

"Oh, Mr. Jabez," I said: "I am very sorry."

"Don't deserve it," he said, taking another pinch; "served me right for being such a fool. I don't mind now; I never cry over spilt milk, but it nearly broke poor old Grim's heart. Five hundred of his went, too, and it was very nearly being more."

"I remember something about it," I said. "You were speaking on the subject once before me."

"Ah, so we were. Well, it was a warning to me, Grace. Temptation, you know."

"Temptation?"

"Yes, to get bonus and high interest. Playing usurer, my boy. Serve us both right. Don't you ever be led on to lending money on usury."

"I'm not likely ever to have any to lend," I said, laughing.

"I don't know that," he said, making another reference to his snuff-box. "Peter said in one of his letters that he thought there was some money that ought to come to you."

"I'm afraid not," I said, laughing. "I've a long debt to pay yet."

"You!—you in debt, you young rascal!" he exclaimed angrily.

"I always said I would some day pay off my father's debts, Mr. Jabez," I said; and then my words brought up such a flood of

sad recollections, that I was about to eagerly change the subject, when Mr. Jabez leaned over to me and took my hand.

"Good lad," he said, shaking it up and down. "Good lad. I like that. I don't believe you ever will pay them, you know; but I like the sound of it all the same."

He kept on shaking my hand some time, and only left it to take another pinch of snuff.

"And has Mr. Lister quite gone from the firm?"

"Oh, yes, quite, my lad. He was up to his eyes in debt, and when he didn't marry that girl, and get her money to pay himself off clear, he went smash at once. Lucky escape for her. I'm afraid he was a bad one."

"And what is he doing now?"

"What, Lister? Set up a rival shop on borrowed money; doing all he can to cut down his old partner, but he'll do no good. Can't get on. Hasn't got a man on the premises who can read."

"Indeed!" I said.

"Not a soul, Grace. Why, you wouldn't believe it, my lad," he continued, tapping me in the shirt-front with his snuff-box, "but I had one of their Chancery bills in the other day—big quarto, you know, pica type—and there were two turned *n*'s for *u*'s in the second page."

"Never!" I said, to humour him.

"Fact, sir, fact," he said, taking another pinch of snuff and snapping his fingers triumphantly. "Why, I'd hardly forgive that in a daily paper where there's a rush on, and it's got up in the night; but in a thing like a Chancery bill it's inexcusable. Well, now about yourself, Grace. I'm glad you are getting on, boy. Never mind what I said, it's better than being a reader, and growing into a snuffy cantankerous old scarecrow like me. Read your stick well, my boy, and I hope—no, I'm sure you'll get on. But I say, what will you have to eat?"

"I'm not hungry, Mr. Jabez," I said; "and, look here, I haven't delivered my message to you."

"Message? To me?"

"Yes, sir. Miss Carr wished me to ask you if you would come and dine with her to-morrow."

"Me? Dine with Miss Carr—Carr—Carr? Why, that's the girl Lister was to have married."

"Yes—Miss Carr," I said.

"But me dine with her! Why, she hasn't fallen in love with me now, has she?"

"Oh no," I said, laughing. "She wants to see you on business."

"See me on business? Why, Grace," he said excitedly, "I was to be paid my five hundred out of her money, and wasn't paid. Is she repenting, and going to give it to me?"

"No," I said; "I don't think it's that."

"No, of course not," he said thoughtfully. "Couldn't take it if were. What does she want, then? Do you know?"

I nodded.

"What is it, then?"

"I am in Miss Carr's confidence," I said; "and I do not feel at liberty to speak about the matter till after you have seen her."

"Let me see," said the old man; "she's very pretty, isn't she?"

"Beautiful?" I exclaimed enthusiastically.

"Humph! Then I don't think I shall go, Grace."

"Not go? Why not?"

"These handsome women can wheedle a man out of anything. I've lost five hundred over Lister, and I don't want to be wheedled out of any more."

"You needn't be afraid, Mr. Jabez," I said, laughing.

"Think not?"

"I'm sure not. Miss Carr wants to advance some money to help some one."

"Well, then, let her do it."

"She cannot well do it herself, and she asked me if I knew anyone, and I named you."

"Hang your impudence, then," he said, taking snuff fiercely. "You know I was fool enough to advance money to Lister, so you recommend me as an easy one to do it again."

"No, no, Mr. Jabez; you don't understand me," I said, laughing. "Miss Carr wishes to find the money, but she wants it to seem as if it came through you."

"Oh!"

Here he refreshed himself with his snuff, looking at me suspiciously the while.

"Look here, young Grace," he said; "I'm not fond of doing things in the dark; so, as we are old friends, suppose you make a clean breast of what all this means. You know, I suppose?"

"Yes, I know everything," I replied.

"Well, then, out with it."

"That I cannot do without being guilty of a breach of confidence, Mr. Rowle," I replied. "If you will come up to Miss Carr's to-morrow evening at half-past six, you may be sure of a warm welcome, and I shall be there to meet you."

"Phee—ew!" he whistled, "how fine we have got to be, Grace. Do we dine late every day, sir?"

"No; nonsense," I said, laughing. "Miss Carr is very kind to me, though; and she wished me to be there to meet you."

"Well, but, Grace, you know," said the old man, "I'm such a queer, rough sort of a fellow. I'm not used to that sort of thing. I've read about it often enough; but I suppose—oh, you know, I couldn't come!"

"I shall tell Miss Carr you will," I said, rising; and after a few more words, the old man promised, and I went away.

CHAPTER XLIX.

MR. JABEZ UNDERTAKES A COMMISSION.

MR. JABEZ was got up wonderfully for his visit to Miss Carr. His white waistcoat might have been carved in marble, and his white cravat was the stiffest ever made; but there was a good deal of the natural gentleman in the old man, and he took Miss Carr down to dinner with all the ceremony of the old school.

Everything was expressly arranged to be very simple, and in a very few minutes Mr. Jabez was quite at his ease, while after a glass of sherry the old man became pleasantly chatty, and full of anecdote, but always treating his hostess with the most chivalrous respect, making a point of rising to open the door for her when she quitted the room, and we were supposed to be left to our wine.

"Hah, Grace," he said, coming back to the table, and taking a long pinch of snuff; "now I feel a man again. I'll just have three more pinches, and then we'll go upstairs to that angel. Good heavens!"

"What is the matter?" I said, as, instead of sitting down, he began to walk up and down the dining-room, taking pinch after pinch of snuff.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed again.

"Is anything the matter, Mr. Jabez?" I exclaimed.

"Good heavens! I say, Good heavens!" he repeated.

"What do you mean?" I said.

"Good heavens! Only to think of it, Grace!"

Another pinch of snuff.

"Only to think, my lad, that he might have had that woman—that lady! A girl as beautiful in her mind as she is in her face. Why, Grace, my boy, I'm an old snuffy bachelor because my opportunity never came, but if I could have married such a woman as that—Hah! some men are born to be fools!"

"And you think Mr. Lister was a fool?"

"Fool, sir? He was ten thousand times worse. But there! the sun don't shine on me every day, my boy! We'll go upstairs at once, and let it shine upon me again."

I never liked Mr. Jabez one-half so well before. It was delightful to me, who quite worshipped Miss Carr, to see the old man's genuine admiration. He seemed quite transformed, and looked younger. In fact, no sooner were we upstairs, where Miss Carr

was sitting with the urn singing on the tea-table, than he relieved me of a difficulty by opening the question of business himself.

"My dear young lady," he said, as he sat down, and began rubbing one thin little leg, "I know you'll excuse me for speaking so familiarly, but"—he smiled—"I'm over sixty, and I should think you are not more than twenty-five."

Miss Carr smiled, and he went on.

"Our young friend Grace here tells me that you would like me to perform a little commission for you. I only wish to say that you may command me in any way, and to the best of my ability the work shall be done."

"Thank you, Mr. Rowle," said our hostess. "Antony Grace said he felt sure I could not have a more suitable and trustworthy agent."

"I thank Antony Grace," said the old man, bowing to me ceremoniously, and taking out his snuff-box, which he hastily replaced.

"The fact is," said Miss Carr, hesitating, and her voice trembled and her face flushed slightly as she spoke, "I—oh, I will be plain," she said, as if determined to cast off all false shame; "Mr. Rowle, I trust to you not to put a false construction on this act of mine. I am rich—I am my own mistress, and I will do as I please, whatever the world may say."

"You are rich, you are your own mistress, and you have a right to do as you please, my dear young lady, whatever the world may say," assented Mr. Jabez, tapping the lid of his snuff-box, which seemed as if it would not keep out of his hand.

"The fact is, Mr. Rowle," continued Miss Carr, "there is a gentleman—a friend of Antony Grace here, who is struggling to perfect a new invention—a great invention."

Mr. Jabez bowed, gazing at her animated countenance with open admiration the while.

"To perfect this invention, money is wanted."

"Exactly," said Mr. Jabez, tapping his box softly. "Money is always useful."

"I wish this gentleman to have that money—as much as is necessary."

"You are rich; you are your own mistress; you have a right to do as you please, my dear young lady, whatever the world may say," said Mr. Jabez, harping upon her words once more. "It is easily settled. Give it him."

"No," said Miss Carr, speaking with animation, "it is not easy. You forget what I say. This inventor is a gentleman."

"And would be too proud to take the money?" said Mr. Jabez quickly.

"Yes," said Miss Carr. "He would not stoop to be under such

an obligation. He would feel insulted—that he was lowering himself. I wish to help him," she said excitedly. "I would do anything to help him; but my hands are tied."

"Humph!" ejaculated Mr. Jabez softly; "and you want me to help you?"

"Yes, oh yes! And you will?" cried Miss Carr.

"Of course I will, my dear young lady," said the old man; "but this requires thought. *Would* you excuse me if I took just one little pinch?"

"Oh, my dear Mr. Rowle," cried Miss Carr, "pray do not use ceremony here. I asked you to come to me as a friend. Pray consider that you are one."

"Hah!" sighed Mr. Jabez. "Now I can get on. Well, my dear young lady, surely we can find a way. In the first place, who is the gentleman?"

Miss Carr looked at me.

"Mr. Hallett," I said, coming to her help.

"What? Our Mr. Hallett?" said Mr. Jabez.

"Yes, Mr. Rowle."

"Hum! Well, I'm not surprised," he said. "He certainly always did seem to be a gentleman, and I was very sorry that he left our place. So he is working on a great invention, eh? Well, he is just the man who would. Then, the first thing is, how is it to be done?"

"Antony Grace thinks, Mr. Rowle, that as you have the reputation of being a wealthy man——"

"Wealthy! why I lost five hundred pounds slap the other day by——Dear me! Bless my soul! Oh, tut—tut—tut! What an ass I am!" he muttered, taking refuge in a tremendous pinch of snuff, half of which powdered his white waistcoat and cravat.

"I am very sorry to hear that," said Miss Carr quietly.

"Oh, it was nothing. Pray go on, my dear young lady."

"Antony Grace thought that you might seek him out, and get into his confidence a little, and at last, after a show of interest in his work, ask him to let you become a sharer in the affair, on condition of your finding the necessary funds."

"Of your money?" said the old man, with a slight show of suspicion.

"Of course, Mr. Rowle. Then, if he would consent, which he might do, thinking that he was favouring you, the matter would be settled."

"To be sure. Of course," said Mr. Jabez thoughtfully. "And how far would you go, my dear young lady—forty or fifty pounds?"

"As far as was necessary, Mr. Rowle. As many hundreds as he required."

Mr. Jabez tapped his box, and sat thinking, gazing wonderingly

and full of admiration at the animated countenance before him, as he softly bowed his head up and down.

"And you will do this for me, Mr. Rowle?" she said.

"If you will trust me, Miss Carr, I will be your steward in this matter," he said quietly.

"And keep my secret? He must not know."

"I will be as silent as the grave, my dear, and I thank you for placing so much confidence in me."

A few preliminaries and the thing was settled. Then, after tea, Miss Carr sang to the old man a couple of old-fashioned ballads, and he left soon after, I walking home with him, after arranging that I was to take him to Great Ormond Street the following evening, as if after a casual meeting and a desire to see Hallett again. The rest was to be left to chance.

The old man was very quiet and thoughtful, but I noticed that our leave-taking was a great deal warmer than it had ever been before, and I went back to my lodgings hopeful and eager, feeling that the sun was about to shine at last upon poor Hallett's venture, respecting which I, with him, would not own now that there could be such a thing as failure.

CHAPTER L.

MR. ROWLE BEGINS HIS TASK.

POOR Mrs. Hallett was, no doubt, a great sufferer; and as I grew older and knew her better, the annoyance I used to feel at her unreasonable ways dropped aside to make room for pity.

One thing always struck me, and that was, that though she was constantly murmuring about Stephen's wasting time over his schemes, and the wretched way in which he was constantly plodding on, instead of ambitiously trying to rise to some profession, it was dangerous for anyone else to speak of such a thing.

At the appointed time I called upon Mr. Jabez, and he accompanied me to Great Ormond Street, looking brighter and younger than I had ever seen him look before. His snuff-box was in constant use, and he on the way, after vainly trying to stand treat, as he called it, by stopping at the various grocers' windows, and wanting to buy me a box of candied fruits or French plums, went on talking about Miss Carr.

"Antony Grace," he exclaimed; "that fellow will wake up some day."

"What fellow?"

"Lister. The fool! the idiot! the ass! Why, an earthly

heaven was open to him, and he turned his back upon it. There's a life of repentance for him."

"I can't understand it," I said.

"Humph! No," he continued; and he kept glancing at me curiously, as if eager to say something—to ask me some question; but he refrained.

"I'm glad you liked Miss Carr," I said at last.

"Liked her, boy?" he exclaimed enthusiastically; and he stopped in the centre of the pavement. "There, I suppose I'm growing into an old fool, but that's no business of anybody. That young lady, sir, can command Jabez Rowle from this moment. Here, come along; the people are looking at you."

I thought they were looking at Mr. Jabez, but I said nothing, only kept step with him, as he thrust his arm through mine and hurried me on.

"Of course, what I say to you is in confidence, Antony Grace," he continued.

"Of course," I replied warmly; "and let me beg of you, Mr. Rowle, to be very careful. Pray don't let Hallett have any suspicion of how your interest has come about; and, above all, he must not think that I have talked to you about his model."

"Hold your tongue, tomtit," he exclaimed merrily, "trying to teach a croaking old raven, getting on towards a hundred. You leave it to me. But look here, boy, I'm not blind. This is all in confidence, of course. I can see as far into a mill-stone as most people. Have Hallett and Miss—— Bah, what am I saying?" he muttered, checking himself suddenly. "It's all in confidence, and I shall be as close as an oyster. I've got my part by heart, and you shall see what you shall see."

He gave my arm a tight nip, and soon after we reached the door, which I opened with my latch-key, and took him into my rooms, with which the old man seemed much pleased.

"Why, you reckless young hypocrite, this is the way you live, is it? Books, eh? And what are these whee's for?" he continued, picking up a couple from the chimney-piece.

"The model," I said quietly. "Now, what shall we do? Ask Hallett to come down here, or go up?"

"Send up word that you have an old friend with you, and ask if you may bring him up."

I took the hint, and Mary came back in a few minutes to say that Mr. Hallett would be only too glad to see us.

We went up, and I saw at once that Hallett had come down from the attic. Mrs. Hallett was asleep, and Linny, looking very pale and thin, but still restful and better, was in an easy-chair with a book.

"Ah, Hallett, how do?" said the old gentleman, in his abrupt way. "Your servant, ma'am," he added, with a profound bow.

Hallett looked stern and displeased, and his greeting was cold.

"My sister, Mr. Rowle," he said. "She has been ill."

"So I see," he replied. "I hope you are getting better, my dear child. You must take plenty of fresh air. I came to see my young friend, Antony Grace here, and he suggested that as we were under the same roof, I should come and see you. Sorry you ever left us, Mr. Hallett."

Hallett bowed.

"Ah," he continued, taking the chair coldly offered, "lots of changes since. I suppose you know the partnership's dissolved?"

"Yes, I had heard so," replied Hallett, glancing uneasily at Linny.

"I stick on with the senior branch," the old man continued, as his eyes wandered about the room, for he was evidently at a loss, and I did not know how to help him, so crossed over to sit down by and talk to Linny.

But fate favoured us, for in his hurried descent Hallett had brought with him a portion of the mechanism of the model.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Mr. Jabez sharply; "what have you got there? Have you, too, turned engineer?"

"Oh, no," said Hallett, who was annoyed. "I—that is—it is a portion of a little contrivance of mine."

"Oho!" exclaimed Mr. Jabez, "I've found you out, have I, Master Hallett! Why, you were always making sketches of machinery at the office."

"How do you know that?" said Hallett sharply, while my heart sank, for I felt that our attempt would be a failure.

"Old Grim told me. That young scoundrel, Jem Smith, used to carry him scraps of paper upon which you had been drawing."

Hallett's brow grew more cloudy, but he brightened up directly, saying frankly:

"Well, yes, Mr. Rowle, I am engaged upon a little invention."

"That's right," said the old man warmly; "that's right; I wish I had begun something of the kind when I was young. It takes the mind away from the daily mill-horse work. But somehow, Hallett, I never could drag my mind away from it, but used to amuse myself reading proofs at home. Grace," he continued, turning to me, "why don't you take to something? You being an engineer, now, you ought to do something, say, in our line. There's plenty of chances there. I know one man," he said, taking up his thin leg and nursing it, "who has been trying for years to perfect a machine."

"Oh, Mr. Jabez," I thought, "you have spoiled all!" for Hallett darted a quick glance at me.

"The idea occurred to him," continued Mr. Jabez, tapping his snuff-box thoughtfully, as if it contained the machine, "that he

could make a contrivance that would do away with the necessity for setting type."

"Indeed!" said Hallett, who drew a long breath of relief.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Jabez; "his idea was to get the type set up in long pipes above a keyboard, like a piano, and every time a key was touched with the finger, it pushed out a letter, which ran down an inclined plane to an opening, where a tiny hammer gave it a tap and drove it along a channel in which the letters formed one long line, which was afterwards made into pages and justified."

"And did it answer?" said Hallett eagerly.

"No," said the old man, taking a pinch of snuff, as Liunny and I now listened to him attentively. "The idea was clever, but it was too crude. He set up his stick full, Antony Grace, and neglected to read it afterwards. He failed at first."

"But you said it was a good idea, Mr. Jabez," I exclaimed.

"A capital idea," said the old man, "but it was full of faults."

"Faults?" said Hallett dreamily.

"Yes, sir," said the old man, growing animated. "For instance, he would only have been able to set one kind of type—one size. He couldn't use italic. He wanted a clever, sensible woman or man to work the keys, another to make the type up into lines. And he was obliged to have a boy to work the little hammer, or beater, to drive the letters along. Then the type would get stuck if the letters were not sent down exactly to the time; for two would meet in a lane, and then there was no end of confusion, and, after all, the type had to be distributed, and afterwards set up in sticks to fill the machine."

"Exactly," said Hallett, with animation, for the ice was broken.

"I had thought of something similar."

"But you did not do it."

"No; oh no! Composition always seemed to me to require the mind of man—the brain to guide it. It seemed to me that invention should be applied to something of a more mechanical nature."

"Exactly," said Mr. Jabez. "You couldn't make a machine to read and correct proofs, or revise a slip."

"Of course not," said Hallett.

"Of course not," said Mr. Jabez. "But, mind you, I'm not one of those idiots who rise up in arms against machinery, and I don't say but what our friend might not have gone on and greatly improved his machine. For instance, he might have contrived another, to do away with the distribution and re-setting up of the type."

"Yes," said Hallett thoughtfully; "it might have been recast and replaced by mechanism."

"And always have new type," said Mr. Jabez eagerly. "To be sure: a capital idea; but I don't know, Hallett, I don't know."

They say you can buy gold too dearly. In the same way, you can make a time-saving process too expensive."

"Certainly," said Hallett thoughtfully; and I was glad to see now that he was pleased to meet the old man.

"It seems to me," said Mr. Jabez, passing his snuff-box, which Hallett received, and, to humour his visitor, partook of a pinch, "that an inventor ought to devote his attention to making machinery for doing away with a great deal more of our labouring mechanical work, and not the careful processes that require thought."

"Printing, for instance?"

"Ye—es," said Mr. Jabez; "but that ground has been pretty well taken up. We have some good machines now, that do a lot of work by steam. Why, when I was a boy we used to have the clumsiest old presses possible to conceive. I don't think they had been much improved since the days of Caxton."

"And yet there is great room for improvement," cried Hallett, with animation. "Mr. Rowle, we saw very little of each other beyond business encounters, but I believe, sir, that I may place trust in your word?"

"Thank you, Mr. Hallett, I hope so. I'm sure I always placed confidence in yours. I am proud to say, Miss Hallett, that if your brother promised me a slip by a certain time, my mind was always easy, for I knew it would be done."

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense," said Hallett, smiling. "Look here, Mr. Rowle, I feel that you will not betray my confidence, and I ask you as a favour to keep private what you see here to-night."

"What I see here?" said Mr. Jabez, looking around with an assumed look of puzzle, while I felt the colour coming in my face as I thought of the part I was playing.

"I mean what I am about to show you, Mr. Rowle," said Hallett, smiling.

"Trust me? Oh yes, of course, yes—of course," said the old man warmly; "here is my hand."

"Thank you," said Hallett, taking it. "Linny, my dear, you will not mind being left alone?"

"Oh no," she said, smiling; and lighting another lamp, Hallett led the way up to the attic, Mr. Jabez finding an opportunity to give me a solemn wink before we stood by Hallett's bench.

"I have spent so much thought and labour over this model," said Hallett, "that you must not be surprised at the jealousy with which I watch it."

"Oh no," said Mr. Jabez, who proceeded, snuff-box in hand, to examine carefully every point in the invention.

"Well," said Hallett, at last, "do you think it will answer?"

In place of replying, Mr. Jabez went all over it again, his interest growing fast, and being, I was glad to see, evidently sincere.

"I tell you what," he exclaimed at last, taking a tremendous pinch of snuff, "that thing would be splendid if you got it right."

"You like it, then?" said Hallett.

"Like it? I think it's grand. Why, man, it would make quite a revolution in the news business. You must get on—get it perfect."

Mr. Hallett shook his head.

"It takes time and money," he said sadly. "It is slow work."

"Yes, but—hang it all, sir! you should get help. With such an important thing in hand you should work on."

"I do not know yet that it would answer," said Hallett sadly.

"But it must answer, sir," said the old man sharply. "If that machine did not answer, it would not be the fault of the principle, but of some blunder in the mechanism."

"Do you think so?" cried Hallett, whose eyes lighted up with pleasure.

"No, sir: I am sure so," said the old man. "The principle is as grand as it is simple; and what I like in the invention is this—you have taken up a part of the trade where it is all hand-labour—all mechanical. You are not trying to do away with brain-power."

"I am very glad you like my idea, Mr. Rowle," said Hallett, proceeding to cover his model, which, when set in motion, ran easily and well.

"I am delighted with it," said Mr. Jabez, poking him in the chest with his snuff-box. "Now, then, go ahead, and have the thing made on a workable scale."

"But I have not perfected it yet," replied Hallett.

"Never mind; perfect it as you go on. You are sure to find some weak spots. If I were you, sir, I should set a good firm of engineers to work on that at once."

Hallett smiled sadly.

"You are proposing impossibilities, Mr. Rowle. This has been one of my great troubles, sir: how I was to carry on my project when I had completed my model. During the past few days I have been thinking of trying to sell the idea for what it is worth."

"What! and let some fellow without half an ounce of brains in his skull reap all the profit? Don't you do anything of the kind. There's a fortune in that contrivance, Mr. Hallett. Sir, it is a great invention."

"What would you do, then?" said Hallett, smiling.

"Do, sir? I'd—I'd——"

Mr. Jabez paused, and took a pinch of snuff.

"Do, sir, I'd—I'd—I'll tell you what I'd do. I'd take a partner who had money."

Hallett shook his head sadly.

"Who would advance money to such a dreamer as I am?" he said sadly.

"Lots of people, as soon as they saw money in it."

Hallett shook his head.

"You take a very sanguine view of the matter, Mr. Rowle."

"Not half so sanguine as you, sir. Why, you must have spent years of labour, and a great deal of money, over that model."

"I have," said Hallett sadly.

"Then don't call me sanguine," cried Mr. Jabez, flying to his snuff-box again. "I ask, here, Hallett, how much would it take to produce that thing, patent it, and the rest of it?"

"I cannot say," replied Hallett quietly, and with the same sad smile upon his face. "It is one of those things which keep on crying, 'More! more!' I dare say it would require £300 or £400 to produce the first machine, and then I have no doubt more would have to be spent in perfecting it."

"Yes, I dare say," said Mr. Jabez coolly, as he uncovered and once more began to examine the model; "I tell you what, Hallett, I think I know your man."

"What, a capitalist?"

"No, sir; a man with a selfish desire to share in the child of your brains."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; he hasn't much money, but I'll be bound to say that he would find enough to carry out your plans for, say, one-third of the profits."

"Mr. Rowle, are you serious?" said Hallett earnestly.

"I never joke about business matters, Mr. Hallett. As I said before, sir, that's a great invention; and if you'll let me, I'll find the money for carrying it on, conditionally that I take one-third of the profits the invention makes."

"You will! Mr. Rowle!" cried Hallett incredulously.

"I will, sir; and there's my hand upon it."

"But do you understand the magnitude of the affair, sir?" cried Hallett, whose face flushed and eyes glittered with excitement.

"Quite so," replied the old gentleman, diving again into his snuff-box. "The first thing is, sir, to draw out a proper document between us—we can do that without the lawyers. Then proper drawings must be made, with description, and the thing must be patented."

"But that will take nearly a hundred pounds!" cried Hallett, panting; while I sat there hugging myself with delight.

"You can have my cheque for a hundred pounds, Mr. Hallett, as soon as we have settled the preliminaries; and I bind myself to go on finding the necessary cash for construction as you go on. And now, sir, it's pretty well my bed-time, and I want to be off.

Do nothing rashly. This day week I'll come here again for your answer, which I hope will be *yes*; for I think it will be a good stroke of business for both of us. Now good-night. Antony Grace, will you show me the way down to the door?"

They shook hands, and I saw the old gentleman to the street.

"There, my boy, wasn't that done well?" he chuckled. "But look here, Antony Grace," he added seriously; "I'd have done it without Miss Carr, that I would, for I believe in that machine. Good-night, boy, I'll come on next week and—hang it, look at that fellow who just passed. He's as like John Lister as two peas."

The old man went off, and I returned to my room, where I found Hallett waiting for me in a state of intense excitement.

"Antony," he exclaimed, "it is too good to be true. It is fortune at last—success. Good heavens! it makes me turn giddy. Mother—Linny," he cried, in a low passionate wail, "at last there is sunshine breaking through the clouds."

"I pray Heaven there may be, Hallett," I exclaimed; "but I have something to say to you."

"What is it?" he cried. "Has the old man repented?"

"Oh, no; you may be sure of him, Hallett. He is delighted at the opportunity, and thinks it will lead to fortune."

"What do you mean, then?"

"John Lister is hanging about this street."

"Why? How? what makes you say that?"

"I saw him pass the door, just now."

His brow darkened, and involuntarily he uttered his sister's name.

"No," I said; "I don't believe it of her. He is only trying to meet with her once more. I am sure Linny does not know it."

"You are right, Antony; she cannot know it. We can trust her now. Let us go and sit upstairs."

As we entered the room, Linny raised her eyes from the book which she was reading, and her calm ingenuous look was sufficient to disarm suspicion; but, all the same, Hallett and I both felt that the wolf was prowling about the fold, and that it behoved us to see that he had no further chance of carrying off our lamb.

CHAPTER LI.

MR. LISTER IS MOVED ON.

WE had good reason to know that John Lister was hovering about the place, for I saw him several times, and found that in Hallett's absence and mine he had called and endeavoured to

see Linny; but she had always refused, and on Mary being warned, he received such a rebuff that he did not call again. Still, however, he hung about, making the poor girl's life wretched, for at last she dared not go to the window for fear of being seen.

Both Hallett and I wondered whether his pertinacity would make any impression. While we were in a state of doubt, it fell to my lot one evening to become Linny's escort to a distant part of London, and we were on our way back, when suddenly I felt her hand tighten upon my arm.

"Quick, Antony," she whispered, "he is there!"

"He is there?" I said wonderingly, for I did not comprehend her; but the next moment I caught sight of Lister coming towards us, and evidently fixing her with his eyes.

There was a meaning smile upon his lip, and, apparently intending to ignore me, he was about to speak, when, with a gesture of horror, she shrank from him, turned her head aside, and begged me to hurry home.

"We'll go home," I said; "but we will not hurry;" and I turned and met Lister's contemptuous stare, as he followed us at a little distance till we had reached the house.

I was annoyed and distressed about this pertinacious pursuit, and I had just made up my mind to consult Hallett on the best way to put a stop to it, when an idea occurred to me.

"It is very evident," I thought, "that Lister does not know who lives here;" and I laughed to myself as I quietly determined to put my plan in force.

That evening, while Hallett was busy in his attic, slaving away with redoubled energy at his model, giving it what he looked upon as the final touches before proceeding with the patent. I went down as soon as I heard Revitts come in, his broad face expanding with pleasure as I followed him below to his own particular sanctuary, where, while he was enjoying his after-tea pipe, I opened my business.

"Revitts," I said, "I'm going to take you into my confidence, and ask you to keep faith."

"Which you may be sure I shall do, Master Antony, if so be I can."

"Well, you can, Bill," I replied; and I proceeded to tell him how Linny was annoyed.

"That's very unpleasant," he said thoughtfully; "but is it by that same chap?"

"Yes."

"That'll do," he said, drawing a long breath; "and lookye here, Antony, my young friend, I'm sergeant, and have to set an example now to them as is under—them, I mean—no, I don't—I mean those as—who—are under me—that's right! One's

obliged to be partic'lar now. Use of the truncheon forbidden except when obliged; but if I do meet that fellow annoying Miss Linny, I shall be obliged to give him a topper—a hanged couldn't help it."

"No, no, Bill—no, Mr. Sergeant," I began.

"Stow that, Antony, no larks. Bill, please, as afore."

"Well, then, Bill, that is one of the things you must not do. All I want is for you to let him see that you live here, and that Miss Hallett is under your protection. He won't face you, and as soon as he finds that you are here he will keep away."

"But he must be taken for his assault on the police, Antony."

"No, no: let him go on in his own way. If you take him, there will be a great deal of inquiry and exposure that would be most painful to all my friends. We should have to go into the witness-box and be cross-examined, and it would be extremely painful to me, both on my own behalf and that of others."

"You wouldn't like it, Antony?" he said.

"No, indeed I should not," I replied.

"That's enough, dear lad," he exclaimed, giving the table a rap with his fist. "That's settled; but I may give him a word or two of a sort, eh? Just show him I know him, and move him on pretty sharp?"

"As much of that as you like," I said; "I leave it in your hands. What I ask of you is, as an officer, to see that we are not pestered by that man."

"It's as good as done, Ant'ny," he exclaimed, stuffing some more tobacco in his pipe.

"It's better than done, my dear," said Mary decisively. "When my William says a thing's as good as done, you may make yourself comfortable about it."

Revitts said no more about it in the future, only once when he met me at the door, chuckling to himself, and shaking his head.

"What are you laughing at?" I asked.

"Only about him," he replied. "I just run again him at the corner, and said about six words to him."

"Well?"

"That's all," said Revitts, chuckling. "He showed me the back seams of his coat directly: but I followed him up and moved him on. I don't think he'll show himself much more about here, my lad."

Revitts was right. Lister did not hang about our neighbourhood so much after that interview: but it had the effect of sending him back to annoy Miss Carr: so that, day by day, his actions formed a problem that it became very difficult to solve, and we little knew then how malignantly he was fighting against Hallett, whose love he must have suspected.

Time glided on. Mr. Jabez used to come regularly to Ormond Street. The model and its progress seemed to give a fresh interest to the old man's life, and, in addition, he took a remarkable liking to Linnv. Mrs. Hallett, too, showed a fancy for him, after a few tearful words of opposition to the way in which he encouraged Hallett in his folly.

"Folly, ma'am? it's no such thing. He'll be a great man yet, and a benefactor to his kind. Spread of knowledge, you know."

"I don't understand you, Mr. Rowle," said the poor woman plaintively; "but you may be right. All I know is, that it takes up a great deal of his time."

"Couldn't be better spent, my dear madam. Do you know what it means?"

"No," said Mrs. Hallett, "only neglect of his poor suffering mother."

"Patience, my dear madam, patience," said Mr. Jabez. "I'll tell you what it means. Pleasant changes for you; seaside: a nice invalid-carriage; silk attire for little Miss Linnv here, and servants to wait upon you. Bless my soul, ma'am!" he cried flourishing his snuff-box, and taking a liberal pinch, "you ought to be proud of your son."

"I am, Mr. Rowle," she said, plaintively; "but if you would kindly oblige me by not taking so much snuff. It makes—makes me sneeze."

"My dear madam," exclaimed the little man, closing his box with a snap, "I beg your pardon. Bad habit—very bad habit, really."

Linnv burst out into a merry, bird-like laugh that made me start with pleasure. It was so fresh and bright, and it was so long since anything but a faint smile had been seen upon her face, that it was like a pleasant augury of happier days to come.

The old man turned round and smiled and nodded at her, evidently enjoying it too; and when, some ten minutes after, he was going up with me to Hallett's attic, he stopped on the landing and tapped my arm with his snuff-box.

"Grace," he said, "I am waking up more and more to the fact that I have been an old fool!"

"Indeed! Why?"

"Because I've shut myself up all my life, and grown selfish and crusted. I don't think I'm such a very bad sort of fellow when you get through the bark."

"I'm sure you are not, Mr. Rowle," I said.

"Humph! Thankye, Grace. Well, you always did seem to like me."

"But what do you mean about being an——"

"Old fool? There, say it if you like. I mean about women—
—young girls—ladies, you know. 'They're very nice.'"

"Yes, that they are," I cried eagerly.

"Yah! stuff! How do you know—a boy like you? No, no—I mean yes, of course, so they are. I've been thinking, you know, what might have been, if I'd met with such a lady as that Miss Carr, or our pretty little bird there, thirty or forty years ago. Hah! I should have been a different man. But I never did, my boy, I never did."

He took a pinch of snuff very thoughtfully here.

"It's too late now, Grace, too late now. You can't make winter into summer; and it's getting to the winter with me now. That's a very nice little thing downstairs. Has she—has she any—any——"

"Lover, Mr. Rowle?"

"Yes."

"Not now," I said. "There was one, but it ended unhappily. He was a blackguard," I said warmly.

"Was he, though?" he said eagerly. "That's right, Grace, I like to see you have some spirit. Poor little lassie! No father, either."

"Mr. Hallett is more like a father to her than a brother," I replied, as I thought it would be better not to mention John Lister's name.

"Father—father——" said the old man dreamily. "How curious it must be to feel that one is the father of anything; that it is your own, and that it loves you. Now, do you know, Grace, I never thought of that before."

"You have always been such a business man, Mr. Rowle," I said.

"Yes—yes, grinding on every day, without a thought of anything but other people's mistakes, and none about my own. You like little Miss Libby there—downstairs?"

"Oh yes," I cried; "she always seems to have been like a sister ever since I knew her."

"Hah! Hah! Yes! Like a sister," he said thoughtfully. "Well, she's a very nice little girl, Grace, and I like her; but you need not tell her so."

"Oh no, of course not, Mr. Rowle," I said, laughing. "Shall we go upstairs?"

"Yes, my boy, directly. "But look here, Grace," he continued, fumbling in his pocket, and bringing out a newspaper slip. "Hum! hah! oh, here it is. Read that."

He pointed to an advertisement of an elderly couple without children, wishing to adopt a young girl; and I read it, and then looked at him wonderingly.

"I suppose that sort of thing is done sometimes, eh?" he said.

"I don't know, Mr. Rowle," I replied.

"Hum! No, of course you don't," he said thoughtfully, after

another pinch. "Come along upstairs, my boy, and let's look at the machine."

CHAPTER LII.

MR. JABEZ HAS A SPASM.

THERE had been some little dispute about the drawing up of the terms between Hallett and Mr. Rowle. The former would not listen to the old gentleman's proposition that it should be settled by a letter between them, saying that it ought to be a proper legal document, for both their sakes; and the knot was solved, as they did not wish to consult a solicitor, by my proposing to bring Tom Girtley home with me some evening, when the legal training he was undergoing might prove sufficient for the purpose.

It was settled to be so, and a few evenings later, I called in Lincoln's Inn Fields, at the offices where Tom was now engaged, and he accompanied me to Great Ormond Street.

Mary had had her instructions to have a "high tea" ready for us, and her ideas of delicacies took the form of hot baked potatoes and cold lobsters; and upon these, with shouts of laughter, we made an attack, for it was wonderful in those days what the youthful digestive organs would conquer without fail. Tom Girtley had several times been to my apartments, but I had never introduced him to the Halletts, for there had been too much trouble in connection with Linny's illness for their rooms to be attractive to a casual visitor.

But now times were altered; Hallett looked brighter, Linny was nearly her own merry pretty self again, and Mrs. Hallett, perhaps, a little less weak and despondent, which is not saying much.

Tom Girtley had altered very much since we had become friends, having started ahead of me, and a year had changed him from a boy into quite a man, at whose hirsute appendages I used to look with perhaps just a trace of envy. There was something very frank and manly about him, and he had all a boy's love of a bit of fun; but at the same time, he was full of shrewdness and common sense, the former being rubbed daily by his profession into a keener edge.

All in good time Mr. Jabez arrived, according to what was fast growing into a regular custom, and he favoured Tom Girtley with a short nod and a very searching look. Then together we went upstairs, where I saw Mr. Jabez frown as our legal visitor was introduced to Mrs. Hallett and Linny, the latter blushing slightly at Tom's admiring gaze.

The old man uttered a sigh of relief then as Linny rose and

helped Mrs. Hallett to leave the room during the transaction of the business, and I noted that he was very snappish and abrupt while the arrangement went on.

It was very simple, and soon done, Tom Girtley drawing up first on foolscap a draft of the arrangement, which was agreed to on both sides, and then transferred to a couple of stamped papers, signed and witnessed, one being kept by each party to the transaction.

All this was done in so satisfactory a manner to Mr. Jabez that he became somewhat less abrupt to my companion, and even went so far as to say that he had never seen a legal document which pleased him so well.

"Not so many heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns, young gentleman," he said gruffly. "You lawyers have made a lot of money out of those parties in your time. Now, don't you think we might ask the ladies to step back?"

This was done, and we had a very pleasant evening, Tom Girtley winning golden opinions for his merry ways, even bringing a smile to Mrs. Hallett's pale face; and at last, when it was time to go, Hallett exclaimed:

"Of course, we shall see you again, Mr. Girtley?"

"May I come?" he said eagerly.

"If you can find any pleasure in our rather dull home," replied Hallett. "Good——"

He was going to say, "gracious," but he refrained, and looked in a puzzled and amused way at Mr. Jabez, who had kicked out one leg under the table, and his foot had come in contact with his host.

"Spasm!" said Mr. Jabez abruptly; and when Tom Girtley went down with me the old man remained.

"Well, Tom, what do you think of my friends the Halletts?" I said, as we went down to the door.

"I'm delighted with them," he cried. "I like Hallett; and as for his sister—— I say, Tony, are you making play there?"

"Making play?"

"There, don't be so innocent, man alive! Are you in love with her?"

"What nonsense! No."

"Then I am," he said. "I wouldn't have poached on your preserves, but it's all over with me now. Alas, poor me, I'm old, and I am barely twenty. Good-night, old boy, and thank you for a pleasant evening."

"Don't be in such a hurry," I exclaimed. "I'm going to stay with you."

He was in high spirits, and we were just crossing the door when we came suddenly upon John Lister—so suddenly, that I observed my start.

"Who's that?" he said quickly.

"One of our black clouds," I said bitterly.

"Black clouds?" he said, in a puzzled tone.

"And yours, too," I said, "if you talk like you did just now."

"I like solving knotty points," he said; "but you must give me a clue."

"Not to-night, Tom," I said. "Say good-night now. Some other time."

"All right, my mysterious youth," he cried, laughing; and after shaking hands, I hurried back, to find Mr. Jabez standing at the door.

"Oh, here you are," he said. "I am just waiting to say good-night. I say, Grace, is that fellow square?"

"I believe him to be a thorough scoundrel," I said angrily.

"He seems quite taken with little Linny there."

"I know that," I said bitterly.

"And yet you brought him here, sir."

"I? Brought him here?" I exclaimed. "It was going on before I knew them."

"What! that boy—that parchment slip!" he exclaimed.

"No, no," I said hastily. "I meant John Lister."

As the words were leaving my lips, he of whom I spoke passed by on the other side, and turned his face to look up at the second floor, the light from a gas-lamp making his countenance perfectly clear.

"Oh!" said Mr. Jabez softly; and, after standing watching the retiring figure, he too went his way.

CHAPTER LIII.

MY VISITOR.

Two years of hard work rapidly passed away, during which, I suppose, I made rapid progress in my profession, and also had the satisfaction of seeing Hallett's machine grow towards perfection.

It had progressed slowly, in spite of the energy brought to bear, for Hallett toiled at it patiently and well; but the work was for the most part out of his hands now.

I had introduced him to Mr. Girtley, who at once took a great deal of interest in the scheme, but who rather damped us at first by pointing out weaknesses, not of principle, but of construction, and at once proposed that before the great machine itself was attempted, a working model, four times the size of that so laboriously constructed by Hallett, should be made.

"It means time and expense, Mr. Hallett," he said, "but over

new things we must be slow and sure. For instance, there will be great stress upon certain parts—here—here—and here. I can say to you now that these parts must be greatly strengthened, and I could make certain calculations, but we can only learn by experience what is to be done."

There was so much good sense in this, that Hallett at once agreed, and Mr. Jabez of course nodded approval; and though it took a long time, the trial of the little machine fully bore out Mr. Girtley's prophecies; so that great modifications had to be made.

"Yes," said Mr. Girtley, after the trial, "it is discouraging, certainly; but is it not better than having a breakdown just when your hopes are highest?"

"Yes, but new moulds can be made, and you will go on at once," said Hallett eagerly.

"Yes, the moulds shall be made, and we will go on at once."

"Mr. Girtley thought me very impatient, Antony," said Hallett, as we walked steadily back from Great George Street, where the little machine had been set up; "but there are bounds to every one's patience, and I feel sometimes as if the idol I have been trying to set up will not be finished in my time."

"Nonsense!" I cried cheerily, "I guarantee it shall be. I'm to have a lot of superintending to do, Hallett, and I'll leave no stone unturned to get it on."

"Thank you, Antony," he said, "do your best. I grieve for poor Mr. Jabez more than for myself. Two hundred and fifty pounds of his money gone, and he has nothing yet before him in return but an unsubstantial shadow."

Miss Carr had been a good deal away from England during this time, visiting her sister, who twice over returned with her to stay at Westmouth Street. I had, however, kept her fully informed about the progress made by Hallett. In fact, she knew my innermost life, and as much of the Halletts' as I knew myself. Those were pleasant days, though, when she was at home, much of my time being spent with her; and though I found that Lister had made several attempts to see her, and had written continually, he had never been successful.

I learned, too, that Mr. Ruddle had interfered in concert with some distant relatives of Miss Carr, and they had pretty well coerced Lister into more reasonable behaviour.

He evidently, however, lived in the hope of yet resuming his old relationship with Miss Carr, little dreaming how well acquainted she was with his character, for, in no tale-bearing spirit, but in accordance with her wish, that she should know everything in connection with my daily life, I had told her of Lister's continued underhanded pursuit of Linny, news which I afterwards found had come to her almost in company with improving letters, full of love, passion and repentance.

When I look back upon that portion of my life, it all seems now like a dream of pleasure, that glided away as if by magic. I had no troubles—no cares of my own, save such as I felt by a kind of reflex action. I was young, active, and full of eagerness. Hallett's enterprise seemed to be almost my own, and I looked forward to its success as eagerly as he did himself.

The house at Great Ormond Street was a far less solemn place now than it used to be, and many and bright were the evenings we spent together. Hallett seemed less sad and self-contained, as he saw his mother take a little interest in the group that used to form about her chair. For Mr. Jabez appeared to have become quite a new man, and there were not many evenings that he did not spend at the Halletts'.

"Business, you see, Grace," he used to say, with a dry chuckle. "I must be on the spot to talk over the machine with Hallett;" but somehow very little used to be said about business: for very often after the first introduction by the old man, there used to be a snug rubber at whist, in which he and Mrs. Hallett would be partners against Linny and Tom Girtley.

For Tom used to come a great deal in those days to see me. He used to tell me, with a laughing light in his eye, that he was sure I must be very dull there of an evening, and that it was quite out of kindness to me. But, somehow or another, I suppose through my neglect, and the interest I took in Hallett's work, he used to be driven upstairs, where his bright, hearty ways made him always welcome. For after what looked like dead opposition at first, Tom quite won Mr. Jabez over to his side; and, save and excepting a few squabbles now and then, which Mrs. Hallett took seriously, and which afforded Linny intense amusement, Mr. Jabez and Tom became the best of friends.

"I don't think he's such a very bad sort of fellow, as boys go, Grace," Mr. Jabez said; "but look here, my boy, do you see how the land lies?"

"What do you mean, Mr. Rowle?" I said laughing; "that Tom and Linny seem to be getting very fond of one another?"

"Yes," he said, tapping me on the breast-bone with his snuff-box. "I spoke to Hallett about it last night, and he said he was not sorry."

"Of course not. I am sure he likes Tom," I said thoughtfully, as I saw how great an alteration had come about at the house, for Linny used to sing about the place now like a bird, and Mary watched over her like a dragon. In fact, Mary was a wonderful institution at Great Ormond Street, and even Mrs. Hallett was afraid of her, in so much that Mary's practical ways seemed quite to silence her murmurings, and make her take a more cheerful view of life.

"But look here, Grace," said Mr. Jabez, "don't you be a young

fool. You don't want to grow into an old bachelor like I am."

"I don't know that I do," I said.

"Then about Linny: does it suit your book for that big child to be coming here and cutting the ground from under your feet?"

"Cutting the ground from under my feet?" I said merrily. "Why, what do you mean, Mr. Jabez?"

"I mean, don't you be a young noodle, and play with your opportunities. Linny's a very nice little girl, and I shouldn't be a bit surprised if some day she had a few—perhaps a good many hundreds of her own. I tell you what it is, Grace, my boy, I shouldn't be a bit displeased if you were to play your cards right, and make a match of it with that little girl."

"And I hope, Mr. Rowle, you would not be a bit displeased if I did not do anything of the sort?"

"H'm—m! No! I don't know that I should, boy. But, hang it all, you are not—— You have not any one else in your eye. You are not thinking about Miss Carr, are you, you puppy?"

I burst out into a hearty fit of laughter.

"No, Mr. Rowle," I said merrily. "I never think about such matters, and between ourselves," I said with much severity, "I am surprised to find a quiet elderly gentleman like you taking to match-making."

"Get out, you young dog!" he cried. "There, just as you like, only I thought I'd see how you felt about it, that's all."

Mr. Rowle's words set me thinking, and I could not help seeing that though there was no love-making, or anything out of the ordinary way in their every-day intercourse, Linny's old sorrow had been completely swept away, and she evidently looked upon Tom as a very great friend.

I was in my own room one evening reporting progress to Hallett, who had just come in from the office where he still worked as an ordinary journeyman. Mr. Jabez was upstairs with Tom Girtley, and a quiet rubber of whist was in progress, when Mary came up into the room to announce that there was some one downstairs who wanted to see me.

"Who is it, Mary?" I said.

Mary glanced at Hallett, who saw the look and rose to go.

"Don't you run away, Hallett," I cried. "I've no one to see me whom you need not know."

I stopped there, for the thought flashed across my mind that it might be some one from Miss Carr, or perhaps it might be something to do with John Lister.

He saw my hesitation, and said quietly:

"I shall be upstairs if you want me, Antony. I think I will go now."

He left the room.

"Well, Mary, who's the mysterious stranger?" I said.

"Oh, Master Antony," she cried excitedly, "whoever do you think it is? I hope it don't mean trouble. Some one from the country."

"Not Blakeford?" I exclaimed, with all my budding manhood seeming to be frozen down on the instant, and my boyish dread ready to return.

"No, my dear, not old Blakeford," she said; "but that other old Mr. Rowle."

"Old Mr. Rowle!" I cried excitedly, as, like a flash, all my former intercourse with him darted back—the day when he came and took possession of our dear home; our meals together; the bit of dinner in the summer-house; and his kindly help with money and advice when I was about to run away. Why, I felt that it was to him that I owed all my success in life, and my heart smote me as I thought of my ingratitude, and how I seemed to have forgotten him since I had become so prosperous and well-to-do.

"Yes," said Mary, "old Mr. Rowle. He's standing at the door, my dear; he said he was so shabby he wouldn't come in."

Thank God, I was only a boy still, and full of youthful freshness and enthusiasm! I forgot all my dandyism and dress, everything, in the excitement of seeing the old man again; and almost before Mary had done speaking, I was bounding down the stairs to rush through the big hall and catch hold of the little old man standing on the steps.

He seemed to have shrunk; or was it that I had sprung up from the little boy into a young man? I could not tell then. I did not want to tell then; all I knew was that the childish tears were making my eyes dim, that there was a hot choking sensation in my throat, and that I dragged the old man in. We had a struggle over every mat, where he would stop to rub his shoes. I could not speak, only keep on shaking both his hands; and I seemed to keep on shaking them till I had him thrust down by the fire in the easy-chair.

"Why, young 'un," he said at last, "how you have grow'd!"

"Why, Mr. Rowle," I said, as soon as I could speak, "I am—I am glad to see you."

"Are you—are you, young 'un?" he said, getting up out of his chair, picking his hat off the floor, where he had set it down, and putting it on again, while in a dreamy way he ran his eye all over the room, making a mental inventory of the furniture, just as I remembered him to have done of old.

He seemed to be very little, and yellow, and withered, and he was very shabbily dressed, too; but I realized the fact that he was not much altered, as he fixed his eyes once more on me, and repeated:

"Why, young 'un, how you have grow'd!"

"Have I, Mr. Rowle?" I said, laughing through my weak tears; for his coming seemed to have brought back so much of the past.

"Wonderful!" he said. "I shouldn't have know'd you, that I shouldn't. Why, you've grow'd into quite a fine gentleman, that you have, and you used to be about as high as sixpen'orth o' ha'pence."

"I was a little fellow," I said, laughing.

"But you'd got a 'awful lot o' stuff in you, young 'un," he said. "But, I say, are you—are you really glad to see me, young 'un—I mean, Mr. Grace?"

"Glad to see you?" I cried. "I can't tell you how glad. But sit down. Here, give me your hat."

"Gently, young 'un, there's something in it. Pr'aps I'd better keep it on."

"No, no," I cried, catching it from his hands, and forcing him back into the easy-chair.

"Gently, young 'un," he said, thrusting one hand up the cuff of his long brown coat, which, with its high collar, almost seemed to be the same as the one in which I saw him first—"gently, young 'un," he said; "you've broke my pipe."

I burst out laughing, and, weak as it may sound, the tears came to my eyes again, as I saw him draw from up his sleeve a long clay pipe broken in three, and once more the old scenes in the deserted rifled house came back.

"Never mind the pipe, Mr. Rowle," I cried. "You shall have a dozen if you like, twice as long as that. But you must be hungry and tired. I am glad to see you."

"Thankye, young 'un," he said, smiling; and the old man's lip quivered a little as he shook my hand. "I didn't expect it of you, but I thought I'd come and see if you'd forgotten me."

I ran to the bell, and Mary came up directly, and smiled and nodded at my visitor.

"Mary," I said, "let's have some supper directly—a bit of something hot. And, I say, bring up that long pipe of Revitts'—the churchwarden, you know. I've got some tobacco."

"I've got a bit of tobacco," said Mr. Rowle, "and—you've taken my hat away—there's something in it. Thankye. I thought, maybe, they might come in useful. They're quite fresh."

As he spoke he took out a great yellow silk handkerchief, and from underneath that, fitting pretty tightly in the hat, a damp-looking paper parcel, that proved to contain a couple of pounds of pork sausages, which Mary bore away, and returned directly with a kettle of hot water and a long churchwarden clay pipe, which Mr. Rowle proceeded to fill from my tobacco-jar, lit, sat bolt-upright in his chair, and began to smoke.

All the intervening years seemed to have slipped away as I saw

the old man sitting there, a wonderfully exact counterpart of Mr. Jabez in shabby clothes; and, as his eyes once more wandered round the place, I half expected to see him get up and go all over the house, smoking in each room, and mentally making his inventory of the goods under his charge.

I went to a little cellaret, got out the glasses, spirit-stand, and sugar, and mixed the old man a steaming tumbler, which he took, nodded, and sipped with great satisfaction. Then, puffing contentedly away at his pipe, he said:

"Not all your own, is it?" And his eyes swept over the furniture.

"Yes, to be sure," I said, laughing at his question, for I took a good deal of pride in my rooms, which were really well furnished.

"You've grow'd quite a swell, young 'un," he said at last; and then stopped smoking suddenly. "I ain't no right here," he said. "I hope you don't mind the pipe."

"I'm going to have a cigar with you presently," I said, laughing, "only we'll have some supper first."

"Only fancy," he said; "just a bit of a slip as you was when you made up your mind to cut, and now grow'd up. I should have liked to have seen what come between. You are glad to see me, then?"

"Glad? Of course," I cried; and then Mary came bustling in to lay the cloth.

"She's altered, too," said the old man, who went on smoking away placidly. "Got crummier; and she don't speak so sharp. Think o' you two living in the same house."

"Mary's my landlady," I said. "But this is a surprise."

"Ah! Yes," he said; "I've often thought I'd come up and see Jabez, and look you up same time. I had a bit of a job to find you, for Jabez wasn't at home."

"Mr. Jabez is here," I said.

"Yes; they said he'd come to see you, and they wouldn't give me the address at first. I'd lost it, or forgotten it, but here I am."

"I'll go up and tell him you are here," I cried; and before my visitor could say a word, I had run upstairs and completely upset all Mr. Jabez Rowle's calculations, which might or might not have ended in his gaining the odd trick, and was soon taking him downstairs on the plea of important business.

"Anything the matter, Grace?" he said—"anything wrong with Hallett?"

"No," I said; "he's in his bedroom. Come in here."

If I had expected to startle or surprise Mr. Jabez, I should have been disappointed, for, upon entering my room, where his brother was composedly smoking the long clay pipe, with his yellow silk handkerchief spread over his knees, he only said:

"Hallo, Peter, you here?" and went and sat down on the other side of the fire.

"How do, Jabez?" said my old friend, without taking his pipe out of his mouth; and then there was silence, which I did not care to break, but sat down, too, and looked on.

"Come up to-day, Peter?" said Mr. Jabez.

"Yes."

"When are you going back?"

"Don't know."

"Oh!"

Then there was a pause.

"Stick to your pipe still," said Mr. Jabez, taking a loud pinch of snuff.

"Yes; never could manage snuff."

"Oh!"

Here there was another pause, broken once more by Mr. Jabez.

"Where are you going to stay?"

"Long o' you."

"Oh!"

A great many puffs of smoke followed here, and several pinches of snuff, as the two old men sat on either side of the fire and stared hard at each other, their likeness being now wonderful, as far as their heads were concerned.

"Hard up?" said Mr. Jabez at last.

"No. Want to borrow a sov.?"

"No," said Mr. Jabez shortly; and there was again a silence.

"I'll have a drop of gin and water, Grace," said Mr. Jabez, after a very long and awkward pause for me.

I mixed it for him with alacrity.

"You two friendly?" said Mr. Peter at last, making a strenuous effort to thrust one finger into the bowl of his pipe without removing the waxed end from his lips, but finding it impossible, without apparently swallowing a goodly portion, from the length of the stem.

"Friendly? of course we are. Can't you see?" replied Mr. Jabez snappishly.

"No! How should I know? Like him to know anything about your affairs?" said Mr. Peter, turning to me.

"Oh yes," I said. "Mr. Jabez Rowle is a very great friend of mine."

"Right!" said that individual, giving his head a nod.

"I didn't come up on purpose to see you, Jabez," said Mr. Peter.

"Who said you did?" snapped Mr. Jabez. "What did you come for? About what you said?"

"Yes."

There was another awkward pause, fortunately broken by Mary,

who entered with a tray odorous with hot rump-steak and onions; and as soon as he smelt it, Mr. Peter stood his pipe up in the corner of the fireplace, and softly rubbed his hands.

His brother made no scruple about joining the meal, and as the brothers rose, Mr. Jabez held out his hand with—

“Well, how are you, Peter?”

“Tidy,” said Mr. Peter, and they shook hands as if they were cross with each other, and then they each made a hearty meal.

“Got a latch-key, Jabez?” said Mr. Peter, as, after supper, we all drew up round the fire and the visitor from Rowford refilled and lit his pipe, causing Mr. Jabez to draw off from him as far as was possible.

“Yes,” he said shortly.

“That’s right,” said Mr. Peter; “don’t want to go to bed, do you, young ’un?”

“Oh, no,” I said; “I’m too glad to see you again.”

The old man’s eyes twinkled, as he looked at me fixedly.

“Been a good boy, Jabez?” he said at last.

“Who?—me?”

“No, no; young ’un here.”

“Oh, yes. Can’t you see?”

“Thought he would be, or I shouldn’t have sent him.”

“Humph!”

I wanted to talk, but I found that it would be of no use now, so I contented myself with studying the brothers, and, just then, Tom Girtley came in.

“Won’t disturb you,” he said quickly; “just off. Good-night, Mr. Rowle, good-night, Tony.”

“Who’s he?” said Mr. Peter, as the door closed.

“A friend of mine—a young solicitor.”

“Any good?—Trust him?” said Mr. Peter quickly.

“Yes, he is very clever in his profession,” I said wonderingly.

“Call him back, then,” said Mr. Peter. “I’ve got something for him to hear.”

CHAPTER LIV.

PETER ROWLE’S BARGAIN.

I WAS just in time to call Tom Girtley back as he reached the corner of the street, and he came up into my room, wondering, for the hour was getting late; but he took a chair quietly, and waited for what Mr. Peter had to say.

“Well, it ain’t much,” said the latter; “but it may mean a good deal. S’pose, sir, you just cast your eye over them there?”

He took a packet of papers, tied with red tape, and docketed.

out of his pocket, and passed them over to Tom Girtley, who immediately opened them in a very business-like way, and proceeded rapidly to mentally summarise their contents.

This took him some little time, during which we all sat very still, Mr. Peter giving me a very knowing look or two in the interval.

"These are very important documents, sir," said Tom Girtley quietly. "I must, of course, warn you that I am only a young member of my profession, and wanting in experience; but, as far as I can judge, these are the private memoranda and certain deeds and documents of Mr. Edward Grace, of——"

"My father!" I exclaimed excitedly. "How did you get these papers, Mr. Rowle?"

"Bought 'em," said the old gentleman quietly.

"You bought them?"

"To be sure I did. Old Blakeford thought he'd taken possession of all your father's papers, my boy, after his death, but he didn't."

"How did you get them, then?" said Mr. Jabez sharply.

"Bought 'em, I tell you. It was like this: old Blakeford put me in possession at the house of a man who had borrowed money of him, and he was going to sell him up—you know his ways, young 'un—I mean Mr. Grace. Well, I went there one night, and very wild the poor fellow was, and he went straight to a bureau, that I seemed to have seen before, and began to go over his papers, tying up some and burning others, and going on and calling old Blakeford names all the while. 'Ah,' he says, all at once, 'I bought this writing-table and drawers at Grace's sale, when Blakeford sold the furniture. Look here,' he said, 'this lot of papers was in one of the back drawers. They belonged to old Grace, I suppose,' and he was about to pitch them into the fire with his own letters and things, of which there was quite a heap.

"Don't do that," I says; "they may be of value."

"Not they," he says; "if they'd been worth anything old Blakeford wouldn't have left them. They aren't worth tuppence!"

"I'll give you tuppence for them," I says.

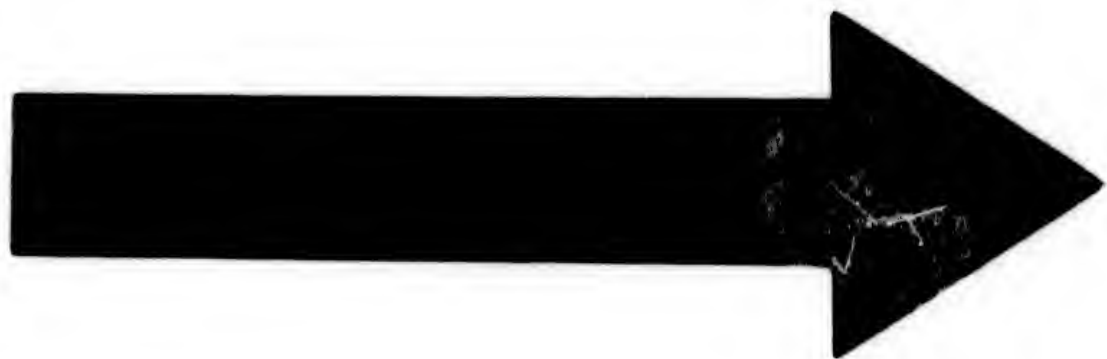
"Pay up," he says, and I handed him the twopence, and took the papers. I've read 'em, and think they're worth the money."

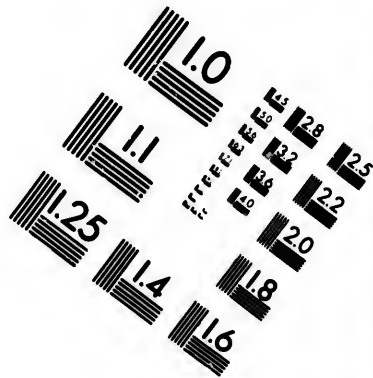
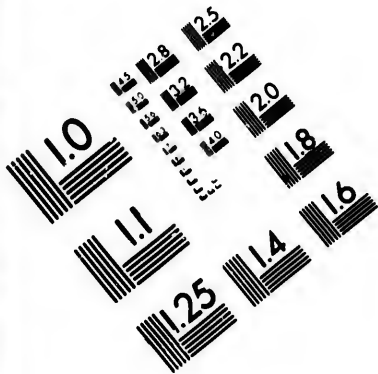
"Worth the money!" cried Tom Girtley; "why, they may be worth ten thousand pounds; but I can say nothing till I have gone into the case; and I daresay it would be necessary to make Mr. Blakeford supply some of the connecting links."

"Which he won't do," said Mr. Peter quietly.

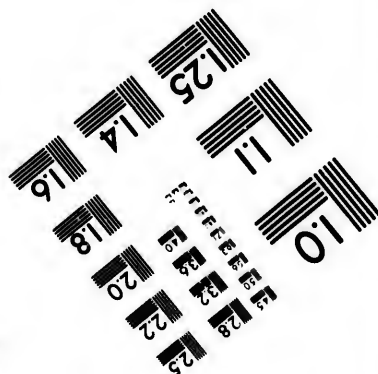
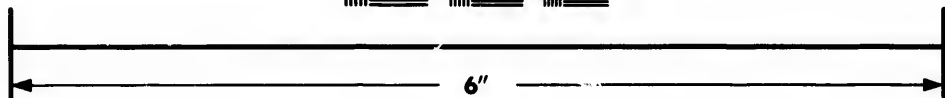
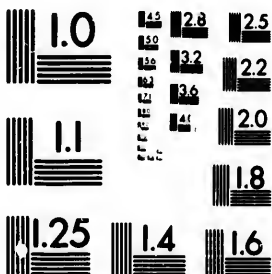
"Unless he's obliged," said Tom Girtley. "There are means of making even a solicitor speak, Mr. Rowle," he continued. "Will you take these papers?"

"No," said Mr. Peter; "give 'em to Mr. Grace there. They





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were his father's. Blakeford's pitched me over, because I got old and useless, so I shan't try to screen him in the least."

Tom Girtley folded and tied up the papers, and handed them to me; but I refused to take them.

"Keep them and study them," I said; "perhaps they will not prove to be so valuable when you have given them a fresh perusal."

He nodded and placed the packet in his breast-pocket, all three then rising to go, for it was past twelve, and as Tom Girtley and I stood at the door, we saw the two old men go down the street, arm-in-arm, till they passed by the lamp-post and disappeared. Then, after a hearty good-night, Tom Girtley took his departure, and I went up to bed, to lie for hours thinking about my life with Mr. Blakeford, and wondering whether he had defrauded me over the question of my father's property. I had always felt that I was in his debt, and meant some day to repay him all he said that my father owed; in fact, Miss Carr had been so liberal to me in the way of pocket-money, that I had forty pounds saved up for that purpose; but now this came like a revelation, and there was a delightful feeling of triumph in the idea that I might perhaps bring a thorough scoundrel to book. Then all at once I began to think about Hetty—pretty, gentle little Hetty, who had been so kind to me when I was a miserable unhappy boy, and the hours when I saw her seemed like gleams of light amongst so much darkness.

What would Hetty be like after all these years, I wondered; and then I began to blame myself for not asking Mr. Rowle more about her, and at last, with the memory of the bright affectionate child filling my thoughts, I dropped off to sleep, to dream once more about Mr. Blakeford, and that I was on the road, with him in full chase.

It was quite a treat to get out of bed and away from the nightmare-like dreams of the past, and after a sharp walk and breakfast, I made my way round by Mr. Jabez Rowle's lodgings, to have a few words with Mr. Peter, before going to Lambeth.

I found the old man alone, smoking a long pipe with his hat on, and his brother gone.

His face lit up as he saw me, and after a little conversation about the past—

"When are you going back to Rowford?" I said.

"Want to get rid of me?" he replied.

"No, no, of course not."

"Don't know that I'm going back at all," he said. "Jabez and I haven't seen much of each other lately. Think I shall stay."

"Did—have—did you ever see nuch of Miss Blakeford?" I said, feeling conscious as I spoke that I was growing hot.

"Often," said the old man, looking at me intently. "She often asked about you."

"About me?" I said.

"Yes: how you got on, and whether you were coming back."

"What is she like now?" I said. "Of course she is not a little girl now."

"Little girl? No: I should think not. Grow'd into an angel, that's what she is."

I could not ask any more, but promising to go in and see him in the evening, I hurried off to the works, thinking that I should very much like to see Hetty Blakeford again, and wondering whether she would see much change in me.

In another hour Rowford was forgotten, and I was deep in the preparations for Hallett's machine, which was rapidly approaching completion; while a fortnight later I was dining with Miss Carr, and bearing her the news of the successful point to which Hallett had climbed, making her flush with pleasure, as I told her that the machine was to be set up at Mr. Ruddle's place of business, and be tried there.

"Send me word the day and hour of the trial, Antony," she said, in a low voice.

"Will you come?" I said eagerly.

"No, Antony, no," she said softly. "I could not come, but I shall pray for a triumphant success."

She spoke warmly, for she seemed off her guard, and then hurriedly changed the conversation.

CHAPTER LV.

THE DAY OF TRIUMPH.

THE day of trial came at last; and after a sleepless night, I was trying to make a good breakfast before going down to Mr. Ruddle's with the inventor.

I believe I felt as nervous and excited as Hallett himself; for Mr. Ruddle had spoken to me the night before about some unpleasant suspicions that he had.

"I don't like to accuse anybody, Grace," he said; "but I'm afraid a certain person who shall be nameless has been setting some of the ignorant, drunken loafers of the trade against the machine."

That was all then, but it was enough to make me uneasy, though I did not believe in the possibility of any trade outrage in the middle of London.

Hallett looked very pale, but I never saw him seem more manly, thoughtful, and handsome, as he stood there in his mother's room, holding her hands.

"I shall come back, dear," he said, kissing her tenderly, "tell-

ing you of my success. No, no, don't shake your head. Good-bye, dear, wish me success. Good-bye, Linny, darling! Ah! Mr. Girtley, you here?"

"To be sure," cried Tom Girtley: "I've come to wish you success. Linny and I are going to throw old shoes after you. Mind! a champagne supper if you succeed. Tony and I will find the champagne. Hallo! here's Papa Rowle."

There was no mistaking that step, without the sound of the old man taking snuff, and he entered directly after; got up in grand style, and with a flower in his button-hole.

He had a bunch of flowers, too, for Mrs. Hallett, and a kiss for Linny; and then, shaking hands all round, he began to rub his hands.

"It's a winner, Hallett—a winner!" he exclaimed. "Come along, Girtley, you'll make one. We want some big boys to cry 'Hooray!'"

"I'll come, then," said Tom merrily; and directly after we went off, trying to look delighted, but all feeling exceedingly nervous and strange.

Hallett and Girtley went on in front, and Mr. Jabez took my arm, holding me a little back.

"I'm glad Girtley's coming, Grace," he said; "he's a big strong fellow, and we may want him."

"Why?" I said excitedly.

"I don't know for certain, my boy, but I'm afraid there's mischief brewing. I can't swear to it, but I believe that devil, John Lister, has been stirring up the scoundrelism of the trade, with stuff about the machine taking the bread out of their mouths, and if the trial passes off without a hitch, I shall be surprised."

"Mr. Ruddle hinted something of the kind, last night," I said.

"Yes, but don't let Hallett know, poor fellow! He's weak and ill enough already. He might break down. Ruddle had men watching the place all last night, so as to guard against any malicious attempts."

"But do you think they would dare to injure the machine?" I exclaimed.

"Fools will do anything if they are set to do it," said the old man, sententiously.

"If Lister is at the bottom of any such attempts he deserves to be shot," I cried indignantly.

"And his carcase given to the crows," said the old man. "But I say, Antony Grace, my boy, is Miss Carr likely to come to see the trial?"

"No," I replied; "she asked me to let her know the time, but she said she could not come."

"Humph! I should have liked her to see it," he said. "But

come along ; don't let's lag behind ; and mind this, my ideas may only be suspicions, and worth nothing at all."

There was a group or two of men hanging about the rival office, bearing Lister's name, at the end of the street, as we went up to the great building, and as I passed the timekeeper's box I could not help thinking of the day when, a shivering, nervous boy, I had gone up only to meet with a rebuff ; while now one of the first persons to come bustling up, looking very much older, but as pugnacious and important as ever, was Mr. Grimstone, who was quite obsequious as he shook hands first with me, and then with Hallett.

"Very, very proud, gentlemen," he exclaimed, "very proud indeed. Great changes since you used to honour us with your assistance."

"Yes, Mr. Grimstone," I said, laughing as I wondered how I could ever have trembled before him, "and time hasn't stood still."

"No, indeed, but we wear well, Mr. Jabez Rowle and I, sir. Ha-ha-ha ! Yes, old standards, sir, both of us, and we stand by the old establishment. We don't want to go away inventing great machines."

"Oh, Grimstone ! the men are still there with the machine ?" said Mr. Ruddle, coming up.

"No, sir, not now. They went off when I came, but I've put the new watchman on."

"Confound it all, Grimstone ! You've never put a stranger there ?" exclaimed Mr. Ruddle furiously.

"But I have, sir," said the overseer importantly. "Here he is, sir. Bramah lock," and he held out a bright new key.

"Oh, I see," said Mr. Ruddle, laughing. "Here's Mr. Girtley, senior."

The great engineer came up, nodded to his son and me, shook hands with Hallett, and then we all went to the room where the machine had been set up, glistening, bright, and new, with the shaft and bands of the regular engine gear passing through above it.

The first thing noticed was that the window was open ; and annoyed that the mist of a damp morning should be admitted, I hurriedly closed it, thinking then no more of the matter.

It wanted quite an hour to the time appointed, and the interval was employed in superintending the alteration of a few bolts and nuts, which Mr. Girtley wanted tightened, and as I watched the great engineer, a man whose name was now an authority throughout Europe, and who was constantly refusing contracts, pull off his coat, take a spanner, and help his men, I began to realize that it was his personal attention to small matters and his watchful supervision that had raised him to his present position.

"Nice hands!" he said, laughing, as he held them out all over blacklead and oil. "Wise lad, you were, Tom, to leave it, and take to your parchment and pounce."

There was a covert sneer in his words, which Tom seemed to take, for he said quickly:

"Perhaps, father, I may help you as much with my brain as I used to help you with my hands."

"Yes, yes, of course, my boy, and we must have lawyers. Well, Grace, how do you feel about it now?"

"I think I'd ease that nut a little, sir," I said, pointing to one part of the machine.

"Why?" he said sharply.

"I fancy that there will be so much stress upon that wheel that it will be better to give it as much freedom as we can, and, perhaps I am wrong, sir, but it strikes me——" I glanced at Hallett, and felt the blood flush to my face, for I felt that what I was about to say must sound very cruel to him.

"Go on, Antony," he said kindly; but I saw that he was very pale.

"It strikes you?" said Mr. Girtley.

"That this is the weak part of the contrivance. Here falls the stress; and, when it is running at full speed, I feel sure that the slight structure of this portion will tell against the machine doing good work, and it may result in its breaking down."

"Go on," said Mr. Girtley bluntly; for I had stopped, feeling uncomfortable at the dead silence that had fallen upon the group.

"It is not a question of efficiency," I said, "but one of detail,—of substantiality and durability. At first sight it seems as if it would make the machine cumbersome, but I feel sure that if we made that shaft and its wheel four times the thickness—that is to say, excessively massive, we should get a firm, solid regularity in the working, a fourth of the vibration, and be able to dispense with this awkward fly-wheel. My dear Hallett," I exclaimed hurriedly, as I saw how his pallor had increased, "pray forgive me. I was quite led away by my thoughts. These are but suggestions. I daresay I was wrong."

"Wrong!" exclaimed Mr. Girtley, catching my hand in his, and giving it a grip that made me wince. "Every word you have said, my boy, is worth gold. Tom, I'd have given ten thousand pounds to have heard you speak like that."

"But then, you see, I could not, father," said his son good-humouredly. "Antony Grace here is a born engineer, and you'll have to make him a partner one of these days."

I hardly heard their words, for my anxiety about Hallett. I seemed to have been trampling upon his hopes, and as if I had been wanting in forethought after having the superintendence of the manufacture for so long.

"I ought to have suggested these alterations before," I faltered.

"How could you?" said Mr. Girtley gruffly. "You only saw the failing just now. I can see it, of course, when you point it out. We only climb by our falls, Grace. Locomotives were only got to their present perfection after no end of failures. Well, Mr. Hallett, what do you say?"

"Antony Grace is quite right," he replied. "That is undoubtedly a failing spot, and where, if driven at high speed, the machine would break down. I have had no training as an engineer, and have had to work blindfold, and in the midst of difficulties."

"Mr. Hallett," said the great engineer, "I have had training as an engineer—a long and arduous training—and I tell you that if you had had twice as much experience as I, you would not have succeeded with your contrivance the very first time. I threw myself into this affair as soon as I saw it, for I felt that it was one of those machines that make their mark in history; and now that we are going to try it, even if it does not come up to our expectations, I say, don't be discouraged, for I tell you it must and will succeed. I'm not a proud man, as a rule, but I am proud of my reputation, and if money is wanted to bring your great invention to perfection, the cash shall be forthcoming, even if we have to borrow."

"Hear, hear!" cried Mr. Jabez, and a slight flush appeared in Hallett's pale face.

"I'm very sorry I spoke, Hallett," I whispered to him, as I took his hand.

"What, for giving me such great help?" he said, smiling. "You foolish fellow, Antony, I am not a spoilt child, that I cannot bear to listen to my mistakes."

Our conversation was broken off here; for just then a couple of gentlemen arrived, and these were followed by others, till the room was quite full. For invitations had been sent out to some of the principal printers and newspaper proprietors to come and see the testing of the new machine.

Hallett, as the patentee, had to throw off his reserve, and come, as it were, out of his shell to answer questions, and point out the various peculiarities and advantages of his machine, all of which I noticed were received with a good deal of reserve; and there was a shrug of the shoulders here, a raising of the eyebrows there, while one coarse-minded fellow said brutally:

"Plaything, gentlemen, plaything. Such a machine cannot possibly answer. The whole principle is wrong, and it must break down."

I was so annoyed at this bitter judgment, delivered by one who had not even a superficial knowledge of its properties, that I said quickly, and foolishly, I grant:

"That is what brainless people said of the steam-engine."

"O!" he said sharply, "is it, boy? Well, you must know: you are so old and wise. Well, come, gentlemen, I have no time to waste. When is your plaything to be set going, Mr. Ruddle?"

"Now," said Hallett quietly, as he silenced me with a look, just as, like the foolish enthusiastic boy I was, some hot passionate ruffian was about to escape my lips.

Mr. Girtley nodded, and he gave a glance round the machine. Then he looked up at the shaft that was revolving above our heads, and took hold of the great leather band that was to connect it with our machine, and I noticed that everyone but Hallett and myself drew back.

I was so angry and excited that if I had known that the whole machine was about to fly to pieces, I don't think I should have stirred. Then, biting my lips, as I heard a derisive laugh from the Solon who had annoyed me, I saw Mr. Girtley give the band that peculiar twitch born of long custom, when an undulation ran up the stout leather, it fitted itself, as it were, over both wheels; there was a rapid whirring noise, and the next instant the great heavy mass of machinery seemed as it were to breathe as it throbbed and panted, and its great cylinders revolved.

There was the glistening of the polished iron and brass, the twinkling of the well-oiled portions, the huge roll of paper began to turn, and I saw its virgin whiteness stamped directly after with thousands of lines of language. My doubts of success died away, and a hearty cheer broke forth from the assembled party; and then, as I felt a fervent wish that Miss Carr had been present to see our triumph, there was a horrible grinding, sickening crash; broken wheels flew here and there; bar and crank were bent in horrible distortion; there was an instantaneous stoppage of everything but the great fly-wheel, which, as if in derision, went spinning on, and there lay poor Hallett stunned and bleeding upon the floor.

"Foul play—foul play!" roared Mr. Girtley, in a voice of thunder, in the midst of the ominous silence. "I was too late to stop the machine. Some scoundrel had placed a great pin underneath, and I saw it fall. Here, look! Here!" he roared, as he stamped with rage; and he pointed to a round bent bar of iron, such as is used to screw down a paper press. "There it is. It was placed on that ledge, so that it might fall with the jar. Mr. Ruddle, this is some of your men's work, and, blast them! they deserve to be hanged."

CHAPTER LVI.

JOHN LISTER'S TRIUMPH.

As Mr. Girtley roared those words a sudden thought flashed through my mind, and I ran to the window, threw it open, and, as I did so, there beneath me, reaching down to the low roof of a building below, was a ladder, showing plainly enough the road by which the enemy had crept in.

From where I stood I looked out upon the backs of a score of buildings; printing-offices, warehouses, and the like, and at the window of one of these buildings I saw a couple of men, one of whom I felt certain was some one I had seen before, but where, I could not tell.

I was back and beset the poor Hallett directly, giving both Mr. Girtley and Tom a look which sent them to the window, to see that there was no doubt how the misfortune had occurred; but I was too much taken up with Hallett's condition to say more than.

"Is he much hurt?" cried first one and then another.

"Looks like a judgment on him," said the heavy, broad-faced man with whom I had had my short verbal encounter.

"Why?" said Tom Girtley sharply.

"Inventing gimcrack things like that," said the fellow in a tone of contempt, "to try and take the bread out of honest men's mouths."

"Good heavens! man, leave the room!" cried Mr. Girtley in a rage. "Go and take off your clothes; they've been made by machinery! Go and grub up roots with your dirty fingers! don't dig them with a spade—it's a machine! Go and exist, and grovel like a toad or a slug, or any other noisome creature; you are not fit for the society of men!"

The brute was about to reply, but there was such a shout of laughter at Mr. Girtley's denunciation and its truthfulness, that he hurried out of the place, just as Hallett sat up and stared round.

"No," he said, "not much hurt; I'm better now. A piece of iron struck me on the head. It is a mere nothing. Stunned me, I suppose."

He rose as he spoke, and there was a silence no one cared to break, as he looked at the wreck of his machine.

"Another failure, Mr. Rowle," he said sadly; and he took the old man's hand, as if he were the one who needed all the sympathy. "I am very, very sorry—for your sake. I cannot say more now."

"One word, Mr. Hallett," said the great engineer. "Do you know that this is all through malice?"

"Malice? No."

"Some scoundrel has been here and thrust in this bar of iron. Gentlemen," he said, looking round, "this is an unfortunate affair; but I speak to you as leading members of the printing business, and I tell you that Mr. Hallett's invention here means success, and a revolution in the trade. This is a case of wanton destruction, the act of some contemptible scoundrel. You have seen the ruin here of something built up by immense labour, but I pledge you my word—my reputation—that before six months are past another and a better machine shall be running before you—perfect."

There was a faint cheer, and quite a little crowd gathered round the wreck while Mr. Girtley turned to speak to Hallett.

"Thank you," said the latter, smiling; "you will excuse me now; I feel rather faint and giddy, and I will get off home."

"I'll go with you, Hallett," I cried.

"No, no: I shall be all right," he said, with a sad smile. "I'll take a cab at the corner on the strength of my success. Come to me after you leave."

"I would rather go with you," I said.

"No, no, I want you to represent me here," he whispered. "Stay, Antony; it will seem less as if I deserted the ruin like a rat, and I am not man enough to command myself now."

"But you are not fit to go alone," I said earnestly.

"Yes, I am," he replied; "the sick feeling has gone off. It was nothing to mind. I am not much hurt."

I should have pressed him, but he was so much in earnest that I drew back, and after a formal leave-taking he left the room, and descended the stairs, while a burst of angry remarks followed his departure.

"Ruddle," said one grey-haired old gentleman, "I think, for your credit's sake, you ought to have in a detective to try and trace out the offender."

"I mean to," said Mr. Ruddle firmly, and he glanced at Grimstone, who seemed to shrink away, and looked thin and old.

"For my part," said another, "I believe fully in the invention and I congratulate the man of genius who—halloa! what's wrong?"

A burst of yells and hooting arose from the street below, and with one consent we hurried to the windows, to see poor Hallett standing at bay in a corner, hemmed in by about a hundred men and boys, evidently the off-scourings of the district, who, amidst a storm of cries of "Who robbed the poor man of his bread?"—"Who tries to stifle work?" and a babel of similar utterances, were pelting the poor fellow with filth, waste-paper full of printing-ink, mud, and indescribable refuse, evidently prepared for the occasion.

Heading the party, and the most demonstrative of all, was a fat ruffian, in inky apron and shirt-sleeves, whom I recognised as what should have been the manhood of my old enemy, Jem Smith, while in the same glance I saw, standing aloof upon a door-step, a spectator of the degrading scene, no less a person than John Lister, fashionably dressed, and in strange contrast to the pallid, mud-bespattered man who stood there panting and too weak to repel assault.

What I have said here was seen in a moment, as I cried out, "Tom Girtley, quick!" rushed to the door, and down the stairs.

It took me very little time to reach the street, but it was long enough to bring my blood to fever-heat, as, closely followed by Tom, I rushed past John Lister, and fought my way through the yelling mob of ruffianly men and boys.

Before I could reach Hallett, though, I caught sight of a carriage farther up the street, and just then the noise and yelling ceased as if by magic, while my efforts to reach Hallett's side became less arduous.

I, too, stopped short as I reached the inner edge of the ring which surrounded my friend, for there, richly dressed, and in strange opposition to the scene, was Miriam Carr, her veil thrown back, her handsome face white, and her large eyes flashing as she threw herself before Hallett.

"Cowards! wretches!" I heard her cry; and then, "Oh, help! help!"

For as, regardless of his state, she caught at Hallett, he reeled and seemed about to fall!

Then I was at his side.

"Don't touch me!" he gasped, recovering himself and recoiling from the vision that seemed to have come between him and his persecutors. "Miss Carr, for heaven's sake!—away from here!"

For answer she caught his hand in hers, and drew his befouled arm through her own.

"Come," she said, as her eyes flashed with anger; "lean on me. They will not dare to treat a woman ill."

"Antony," cried Hallett hoarsely. "Miss Carr—take her away!"

"Lean on me," she cried proudly. "Antony, beat a way for us through these curs."

I took Hallett's other arm, and as we stepped forward, Jem Smith uttered a loud "Yah!" but it seemed as if it was broken before it left his lips, and he went staggering back from a tremendous blow right in the teeth, delivered by Tom Girtley.

Then there was an interlude, for some one else forced his way to the front.

"Miss Carr! great heavens! what is all this?" he cried "Give

me your hand. This is no place for you. What does this outrage mean? Quick! let me help you. This is horrible."

"Stand back, sir!"

"You are excited," he cried. "You don't know me. I see now; there is your carriage. Stand away, you ruffians. How thankful I am that I was near! Take this man away. Is he drunk?"

As he spoke, John Lister, with a look of supreme disgust, pushed poor fainting Hallett back, and tried to draw Miss Carr out of the crowd.

"Coward! Villain! This is your work!" she cried in a low, strange voice; and as he tried to draw her away, she sharply thrust him from her.

The crowd uttered a cry of excitement as they witnessed the act; and, stung almost to madness with rage and mortification, Lister turned upon me.

But I again found a good man at my back, for, boiling with rage, Tom Girtley struck at him fiercely and kept him off, while in the midst of the noise, pushing, and hustling of the crowd, a confusion that seemed to me now as unreal as some dream, we got Hallett along towards the carriage, he, poor fellow, seeming ready to sink at every step, while the true-hearted woman at his side clung to him and passed one arm round him to help him.

The coachman now saw that his mistress seemed to be in need of help, and he shortened the distance by forcing his horses onward through the gathering crowd.

But the danger was past, for those who now thronged out from the buildings on either side were workpeople attracted by the noise, and they rapidly outnumbered John Lister's gang of scoundrels, got together by his lieutenant, Jem Smith, for the mortification of the man he hated, while his triumph had been that the woman they loved had come to his rival's help, glorified him, as it were, by her presence, and rained down scorn and contempt upon his own wretched head.

As I said before, it seems now like some terrible dream, in which I found myself in Miss Carr's carriage, with her sister looking ghastly with fear beside me, and Hallett in the back seat, nearly unconscious, beside Miss Carr.

"Tell the coachman to stop at the nearest doctor's, Antony," she said; and I lowered the glass and told Tom Girtley, who had mounted to the driver's side.

"No, no," said Hallett, faintly, for her words seemed to bring him to. "For pity's sake. To my own home. Why have you done this?"

She did not speak, but I saw her take his hand, and her eyes fix themselves, as it were, upon his, while a great sob laboured from her breast.

"Mr. Grace," faltered Miss Carr's sister, "this is very dreadful;" and I saw her frightened eyes wander from the mud-besmeared object opposite her to her sister's injured attire, and the sullied linings of the carriage.

"Antony," said Miss Carr then, "do what is for the best."

For answer, I lowered the window again and uttered to Tom Girtley the one word, "Home."

Fortunately, Revitts was on night duty, and ready to come as the carriage stopped at the door, where we had to lift the poor fellow out, and carry him to his bed, perfectly insensible now from the effects of the blow.

I was rather surprised to find the carriage gone when I descended, but my suspense was of short duration, for it soon came back with a neighbouring doctor, whom Miss Carr had fetched.

Mary was at hand to show him up, while I ran down to the carriage-door, where Miss Carr grasped my hand for a moment, her face now looking flushed and strange.

"Come to me to-night, Antony," she said in a low voice—"come and tell me all."

She sank back in the carriage then, as if to hide herself from view, while in obedience to her mute signal, I bade the coachman drive her and her sister home.

CHAPTER LVII.

I FIND I HAVE A TEMPER.

I WENT to Miss Carr's nearly every evening now, to report progress for her instructions to me, after a consultation between Mr. Jabez, Mr. Ruddle, Mr. Girtley, and myself, were that neither expense nor time was to be spared in perfecting the machine.

We had gone carefully into the reasons for the breakdown, and were compelled reluctantly to own that sooner or later the mechanism would have failed; for besides the part I named, we found several weak points in the construction—faults that only a superhuman intelligence could have guarded against. The malignant act had only hastened the catastrophe.

It was a cruel trick, and though we could not bring it home, we had not a doubt that the dastardly act was committed by Jem Smith, who was the instrument of John Lister. A little examination showed how easily the back premises could be entered by any one coming along behind from Lister's, and there was some talk of prosecution, but Hallett was ill, and it was abandoned.

For the blow he had received from a piece of the machinery had produced serious injury to the head, and day after day I had

very bad news to convey to Miss Carr. The poor fellow seemed to have broken down utterly, and kept his bed. He used to try to appear cheerful; but it was evident that he took the matter bitterly to heart, and at times gave up all hope of ever perfecting the machine.

It was pitiful to see his remorseful looks when Mr. Jabez came to see him of an evening; Mr. Peter, who always accompanied his brother, stopping in my room to smoke a long pipe I kept on purpose for him, whether I was at home or no, and from time to time he had consultations with Tom Girtley, who kept putting off communication that he said he had to make till he had his task done.

I used to notice that he and Mr. Peter had a great deal to say to each other, but I was too much taken up with my troubles about Hallett and the machine to pay much heed; for sometimes the idea forced itself upon me that my poor friend would never live to realize his hopes.

Time glided on, and I used to sit with him in an evening, and tell him how we had progressed during the day; but it made no impression whatever; he used only to lie and dream, never referring once to Miss Carr's behaviour on that wretched day; in fact, I used to fancy sometimes that he was in such a state from his injury that he had not thoroughly realized what did occur.

It was indeed a dreary time; for poor Mrs. Hallett, when, led by a sense of duty, I used to go and sit with her, always had a reproachful look for me, and, no matter what I said, she always seemed to make the worst of matters.

But for Linny and Tom Girtley, the place would have been gloomy indeed, but the latter was always bright and cheerful, and Linny entirely changed. There was no open love-making, but a quiet feeling of respect seemed to have sprung up between them, and I hardly knew what was going on, only when it was brought to my attention by Mr. Jabez, or Revitts, or Mary.

"I should have thought as you wouldn't have liked that there friend of yours cutting you out in the way he do, Ant'ny," said Revitts, one day; "I don't want to make mischief, but this here is my—our—house," he added by way of correction, "and I don't think as a young man as is a friend of yours ought to come down my stairs with his arm round a certain young lady's waist."

"Go along, do, with your stuff and nonsense, William," exclaimed Mary sharply. "What do you know about such things?"

"Lots," said Bill, grinning with delight, and then becoming preternaturally serious; "I felt it to be my dooty to tell Ant'ny, and I have."

"You don't know nothing about it," said Mary, tittering; "he don't know what we know, do he, Master Antony?"

"I don't know what you mean, Mary," I replied.

"Oh no, of course not, Master Antony; but I shouldn't like a certain young lady down at Rowford to hear you say so."

"Phew!" whistled Revitts, and feeling very boyish and conscious, I made my retreat, for I was bound for Westmouth Street, and had stopped to have ten minutes' chat downstairs with my old friends on the way.

I found Miss Carr looking very thin and anxious, and she listened eagerly to my account of how I was progressing at the works.

"Mr. Girtley tells me that you are doing wonders, Antony," she said, in a curious, hesitating way, for we both seemed to be fencing, and as if we disliked to talk of the subject nearest to our hearts.

She was the first to cast off the foolish reserve though, and to ask after Hallett's health.

"The doctors don't seem to help him a bit," I said sadly. "Poor fellow! he thinks so much about the failure of his hopes, and it is heart-breaking to see him. He toiled for it so long. Oh, Miss Carr, if I only knew for certain that it was John Lister who caused the breakdown, I should almost feel as if I could kill him."

"Kill him with your contempt, Antony," she said sternly; and then, as we went on talking about Hallett's illness, she became very much agitated, and I saw that she was in tears, which she hastily repressed as her sister entered the room.

The next evening when I went, I found her alone, for her sister had gone to stay a few days with some friends. My news was worse than ever, and there was no fencing the question that night, as she turned very pale when I gave my report.

"But the invention, Antony," she exclaimed excitedly; "tell me how it is going on."

"We are working at it as fast as possible," I replied; "it takes a long time, but that is unavoidable."

"If you love Stephen Hallett," she said suddenly, and she looked full in my face, "get his invention finished and perfect. Let it succeed, and you will have done more for him than any doctor. Work, Antony, work. I ask you for—for— Pray, pray strive on."

"I will—I am striving," I said, "with all my might. It was a cruel blow for him though, just as success was in his grasp."

"Mr. Lister is here, ma'am," said the servant, entering the room.

"I have forbidden Mr. Lister my house," said Miss Carr sternly.

"Yes, ma'am, but he forced his way in, and——"

Before the man could finish his sentence, John Lister was in the room, looking flushed and excited, and he almost thrust the servant out and closed the door.

As he caught sight of me his face turned white with rage, but

he controlled himself, and turned to where Miss Carr was standing, looking very beautiful in her anger.

I had started up, and stepped between them, but she motioned me back to my seat, while he joined his hands in a piteous way, and said in a low voice :

"I could not help it. I was obliged to come. Pray, pray, Miriam, hear me now."

"Mr. Lister!" she said, with a look of contempt that should have driven him away—"Mr. Lister! and once more here?"

"Miriam," he exclaimed, "you drive me to distraction. Do you think that such a love as mine is to be crushed?"

"Love!" she said, looking at him contemptuously.

"Yes; love," he cried. "I'll prove to you my love by saying that now—even now, knowing what I do, I will forgive the past, and will try to save you from disgrace."

"Mr. Lister, you force me to listen to you," she replied, "for I will not degrade you by ringing for the servants and having you removed. Pray say what you mean. Hush, Antony, let him speak. Perhaps after he has said all he wishes, he may leave me in peace."

"Leave you in peace—you will not degrade me!" he cried, stung to madness and despair by her looks and words. "Look here, Miriam Carr, you compel me to speak as I do before this wretched boy."

"Hush, Antony, be silent," she cried, as I started up, stung in my turn by his contemptuous tone.

"Yes: sit down, spaniel, lap-dog--miserable cur!" he cried; and I felt my teeth grit together with such a sensation of rage as I had never known before. "And now, as for you—you blind, foolish woman," he continued, as I awakened to the fact that he had been drinking heavily, "since fair means will not succeed, foul means shall."

"Say what you wish to say, Mr. Lister," she replied coldly, "for I warn you that this is the last time you shall speak to me. If you force yourself into my presence again, my servants shall hand you over to the police."

"What!" he cried, with a forced laugh, "me?—hand me over to the police? You—you think I have been drinking, but you are wrong."

No one had hinted at such a thing, but he felt it, and went on.

"I came to tell you to-night, that I will ignore the past, that I will overlook your disgraceful intimacy with this low, contemptible compositor, the blackguardly friend of this boy—the man who has obtained a hold upon you, and who, with his companions, is draining your purse—I say I will overlook all this, and, ignoring the past, take you for my wife, if you will promise to give up this wretched crew."

There was no answer, but I sat there feeling as if I must fling myself at him, young and slight as I was, in her defence, but she stood there like a statue, fixing him with her eyes, while he went on raving. His face was flushed, and there was a hot, fiery look in his eyes, while his lips were white and parched.

"You shall not go on like this," he continued. "You are my betrothed wife, and I will not stand by and see your name dragged in the mire by these wretched adventurers. Even now your name has become a by-word and a shame, the talk in every pot-house where low-class printers meet, and it is to save you from this that I would still take you to be my wife."

Still she did not speak, and a look from her restrained me, when I would have done something to protect her from his insults, every one of which seemed to sting me to the heart.

"I know I am to blame," he said passionately, "for letting you take and warm that young viper into life; but I could not tell. It shall end, though, now. I have written to your brother-in-law, and he will help to drag you from amongst this swindling crew."

"Have you said all you wish to say, Mr. Lister?" she replied coldly.

"No," he cried, stung into a fresh burst by her words; "no, I have not. No, I tell you," he cried, taking a step forward, as if believing in his drunken fit that she was shrinking from him, and being conquered by his importunities; "No, I tell you—no: and I never shall give up till you consent to be my wife. Do you take me for a drivelling boy, to be put off like this, Miriam?" he cried, catching at her hand, but she drew it back. "Do you wish to save your name from disgrace?"

She did not answer, while he approached closer.

"You don't speak," he said hoarsely. "Do you know what they say about you and this fellow Hallett?"

Still she made no reply.

"They say," he hissed, and thrusting out his face, he whispered something to her, when, in an instant, I saw her countenance change, and her white hand struck him full across the lips.

Uttering an oath, he caught her tightly by the arms, but I could bear no more. With my whole strength called up I leaped at him, and seized him by the throat, believing in my power of turning him forcibly from the room.

The events of the next few moments seem now as if seen through a mist, for in the brief struggle that ensued I was easily mastered by the powerful man whom I had engaged.

I have some indistinct memory of our swaying here and there, and then of having a heavy fall. My next recollection is of feeling sick and drowsy, and seeing Miss Carr and one of the servants bending over me and bathing my face.

For some few minutes I could not understand what it all meant but by degrees the feeling of sickness passed away, and I looked hastily round the room,

Miss Carr, who was deadly pale, told the maid to fetch some brandy, and as soon as we were alone, she knelt by me, and held one of my hands to her lips.

"Are you much hurt, Antony?" she said tenderly. "I did not send for the doctor. That wretched man has made sufficient scandal as it is."

"Hurt? No—not much," I said rather faintly. "Where is he?"

"Gone," she said; and then she uttered a sigh of relief, as I sat up and placed one hand to my head, feeling confused, and as if I had gone back some years, and that this was not Miss Carr but Mary, and that this was Mr. Blakeford's again.

The confusion soon passed off, though, and after I had drunk the spirit that was brought me, I felt less giddy and strange.

Miss Carr sat watching me, looking very pale, but I could realize now that she was terribly agitated.

Before an hour had passed I felt ready to talk to her, and begged her to take some steps for her protection.

"If I had only been a strong man," I exclaimed passionately. "Oh, Miss Carr, pray, pray do something," I cried again; "this is horrible. I cannot bear to see you insulted by that wretch."

"I have decided to do something, Antony," she said in a low voice; and a faint colour came into her pale cheeks. "He will not be able to force his way to me again."

"I don't know," I said. "He is a madman. I am sure he had been drinking to-night."

"No one but a madman would have behaved as he did, Antony," she said. "But be at rest about me. I have, after a bitter struggle with myself, decided what to do."

"But you will not go away?" I said.

She shook her head.

"No; my path lies here," she said quietly. "Antony, I want your help to-morrow."

"Yes: what shall I do?" I asked.

"Will you ask Miss Hallett to come here to me—will you bring her?"

"Bring Linny Hallett here?" I exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes: bring her here," she said softly; and there was a peculiar tone in her voice as she spoke. "And now about yourself. Do you feel well enough to go home? Shall one of the servants see you safely back?"

"Oh no," I said; "I am better now. I shall take a cab. But I do not feel comfortable to leave you alone."

"You need not fear," she said quietly. "The house will be

closed as soon as you leave. To-morrow I shall take steps for my protection."

I left her soon after, thinking about her request, and as far as I could make out she intended to keep Linny with her, feeling that Lister would not dare to face her again, when the woman he had sought to injure had been made her companion.

Still I did not feel satisfied, and the only consoling thing was to be found in Lister's own words, that he had sent for Miss Carr's relative; and, in the hope that he might soon arrive, I reached home and went up at once to see Hallett, who looked very ill, but smiled sadly, as I sat down by his side.

"Better," he said; "I think I'm better, but I don't know, Antony: sometimes I feel as if it would be happier if I could be altogether at rest."

"Oh, Hallett!" I cried.

"Yes, you are right," he said. "What would become of them? I must get better, Antony, better, but sometimes—sometimes—"

"Don't speak to him any more," whispered Mary; "he is so weak that his poor head wanders."

"But, Mary, the doctor; does he say there is any danger?"

"No, no, my dear. He is to sleep all he can. There, go down now. I'm going to sit up to-night."

I went down, leaving Mary to her weary vigil; for my head ached terribly, and I was very giddy.

Linny was in the sitting-room, and she uttered an exclamation.

"Why, how bad you look, Antony!" she cried.

"Do I?" I said with a laugh; "I had a bit of a fall, and it has shaken me. But, Linny dear, I have a message for you."

"For me, Antony?" she said, turning white.

"Yes; Miss Carr bade me ask you to come with me to her house to-morrow."

"I go to her house!" faltered Linny.

"Yes, dear, you will—will you not? I am sure it is important."

"But I could not leave poor Steve."

"It need not take long," I said; "you will go and see what she wants?"

Linny looked at me in silence for a few moments, and there was something very dreamy in her face.

"If you think it right that I should go, Antony," she said at last, "I will. Shall I speak to Stephen first?"

"No," I said. "Hear first what she has to say."

She promised, and I went down to my own room, glad to lay my aching head upon the pillow; where I soon fell into a troubled sleep, dreaming of my encounter with John Lister, and feeling again the heavy blow as we fell, and my head struck the broad, flat fender with a sickening crash, that seemed to be repeated again and again.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE CRISIS.

By my advice, then, Linny said nothing to Hallett about where she was going, and as I had stayed at home from the works on purpose, we started in pretty good time for Westmouth Street, my companion's flushed cheeks making her look extremely bright and pretty. She was terribly nervous though, and when we neared the door I feared that she would not muster up courage enough to enter.

"I feel as if I dare not meet her, Antony," she faltered.

"What nonsense!" I said, smiling. "Why, she is gentleness and tenderness itself. Come, be a woman."

"It is not that," she whispered. "There is so much more behind. Take me back, Antony. Why does she want to see me?"

"I don't know," I replied; "but you may be sure that it is for some good purpose."

"Do—do you think she will be angry with me—about—about, you know whom I mean? Do you think it is to reproach me?"

"I am sure it is not, Linny. Come, come, make an effort. I don't know, but I feel sure it is to try and help poor Hallett."

"Do you think so?" she faltered, "or is this only to persuade me to go on? Oh, Antony, you cannot think how my heart beats with dread. I am afraid of this Miss Carr, and feel as if I ought to hate her."

"Come along, you foolish girl," I said; and, yielding to me, I led her up to the door, when we were admitted, and at once ushered into the drawing-room.

I did not at first see Miss Carr, but the door had hardly closed before I heard the rustle of her dress, and the next moment Linny was folded in her arms, and returning the embrace.

I stood for a moment listening to Linny's passionate sobs, and then stole softly away, going down into the dining-room to stand gazing out of the window, but seeing nothing of the passers-by, only in imagination the scene upstairs, and wondering why Miss Carr had sent for Linny.

I was kept in doubt for quite an hour, and then the servant came and asked me to step upstairs, where, to my surprise, I found Miss Carr dressed for going out.

She held out her hand to me as I entered, and pressed mine.

"Don't speak to me, Antony," she whispered, in a broken voice.

"I am going home with Linny Hallett."

"You—going home—with——"

The rest died on my lips as I saw her draw down her veil to

hide her convulsed face, and then, without a word, she rang the bell, the door was opened for us, and, feeling like one in a dream, I walked in silence by their side to the house in Great Ormond Street, where, as I placed my latch-key in the door, it was snatched open, and Mary, with her face red with weeping, stood there.

"Oh, Miss Linny! Oh, Master Antony!" she sobbed, "I'm so glad you've come. The doctor sent me out of the room, and I've been waiting for you."

"Is my brother worse?" sobbed Linny hysterically.

"Yes, yes, my dear, I'm--I'm afraid so;" and as she spoke, a hand clutched mine, and I heard Miss Carr moan:

"God help me! Am I too late?"

Linny was already half up the first flight, when Miss Carr whispered to me in agonized tones:

"Take me to him, Antony, quick. This is no time for pride and shame."

With my heart beating painfully, I led her upstairs, and, as we reached the first floor, we met the doctor coming down.

I felt Miss Carr's hand pressing mine convulsively, and I spoke, my voice sounding hoarse and strange.

"Is he worse, doctor?"

"I'm afraid he cannot last many hours longer," he said. "I have done all I can, but I have a patient a few streets off whom I must see, and I will return in a short time. He must not be left."

"Shall I go in and try to prepare him for your coming?" I whispered to Miss Carr, as we stood outside his door.

"No, no!" she cried. "Take me to him at once, or I cannot bear it. Don't speak to me, Antony. Don't let anybody speak to me; but you must not leave me for a moment."

Linny was at the door, standing with the handle in her hand, but she drew back as we approached, and then ran sobbing into the next room, where Mrs. Hallett was sitting helpless and alone.

I obeyed Miss Carr, leading her quickly inside, and closing the door, where she stood for a moment with one hand pressing her breast; then she hastily tore off bonnet and veil, gazing at the pale face and great dreamy eyes fixed wistfully upon the window.

The noise of our entry, slight as it was, seemed to rouse him, for he turned his gaze heavily from the light towards where we stood, and I saw that he held in his thin wasted hand a little grey kid glove, the glove we had found in Epping Forest that happy day when we met the sisters in our walk.

But that was forgotten in the change I saw come over the poor fellow's face. I seemed to light up; the dull dreamy eyes dilated; a look of dread, of wonder, of joy seemed to come into them, and then he seemed to make an effort, and stared wildly round the room, but only to gaze at Miss Carr again as she stood

with her hands half raised in a beseeching way, till, with a wild cry, his head seemed to fall back and he lay without motion.

I heard steps outside, but I darted to the door, and stopped Linny and Mary from entering, hardly knowing what I did, as Miss Carr took a step or two forward, and threw herself upon her knees by the bed, clinging to his hands, placing one arm beneath the helpless head, and sobbing and moaning passionately.

"I have killed him—I have killed him! and I came that he might live. Stephen, my love, my hero, speak to me—speak to me! God of heaven, spare him to me, or let me die!"

I was one moment about to summon help, the next prepared to defend the door against all comers, and again the next ready to stop my ears and flee from the room. But she had bidden me stay, and not leave her, and I felt it a painful duty to be her companion at such a time. So there I stayed, throwing myself in a chair by the door, my head bent down, seeming to see all, to identify every act, but with my face buried in my hands, though hearing every impassioned word.

"No," I heard him say softly; "no: such words as those would have brought me from the grave. But why—why did you come?"

"I could bear it no longer," she moaned. "I have fought against it till my life has been one long agony. I have felt that my place was here—at your side—that my words, my prayers would make you live; and yet I have stayed away, letting my pride—my fear of the world—dictate, when my heart told me that you loved me and were almost dying for my sake."

"Loved you!" he whispered faintly; "loved you—Miriam, I dare not say how much!"

His voice was the merest whisper, and in my dread I started up, and approached them, fearing the worst; but there was such a smile of peace and restfulness upon his lips as Miss Carr bent over him, that I dared not interrupt them, the feeling being upon me that if he was to die it would be better so.

There was a long silence then, one which he broke at last.

"Why did you come?" he said.

The words seemed to electrify her, and she raised her head to gaze on his face.

"Why did I come?" she whispered; "because they told me you were dying, and I could bear it no longer. I came to tell you of my love, of the love I have fought against so long, but only to make it grow. To tell you, my poor brave hero, that the world is nothing to us, and that we must be estranged no more. Stephen, I love you with all my soul, and you must live—live to call me wife—live to protect me, for I want your help and your brave right hand to be my defence. This is unwomanly—shameless, if you will—but do you think I have not known your love

for me, and the true brave fight that you have made? Has not my heart shared your every hope, and sorrowed with you when you have failed? And, poor weak fool that I have been, have I not stood aloof, saying that you should come to me, and yet worshipped you—reverenced you the more for your honour and your pride? But that is all past now. It is not too late. Live for me, Stephen, my own brave martyr, and let the past be one long sad dream: for I love you, I love you, God only knows how well!"

She hid her burning, agitated face in his breast, and his two thin hands tremblingly and slowly rose to clasp her head; and there the white fingers lay motionless in the rich, dark hair.

There was again a pause, which he was the first to break, and his voice was still but a whisper, as he muttered something that I did not hear, though I gathered it from her smothered reply.

"Oh, no, no: let there be an end to that!" she sobbed. "Money? Fortune? Why should that keep us apart, when it might help you in your gallant fight? Let me be your help and stay. Stephen—Stephen!" she wailed piteously, "have I not asked you—I, a woman—to make me your wife?"

"Yes," he said softly, and I heard him sigh; "but it cannot be—it cannot be."

"What?" she cried passionately, as she half-started from him, but clung to him still; "now that I have conquered my wretched, miserable pride, will you raise up another barrier between us?"

"Oh, hush, hush!" he whispered; "you are opening to me the gates of a worldly heaven, but I dare not enter in."

"Then I have done nothing," she wailed, as she seemed to crouch there now in shame and confusion by his bed. "Stephen, you humble me in the dust; my shameless declaration—my appeal—do I not ask you to take me—pray you to make me your wife? Oh, what am I saying?" she cried passionately; "it is too late—too late!"

"No," he panted; and his words seemed to come each with a greater effort, "not—too late—your words—have—given—me life. Miriam—come—hold me in your arms, and I shall stay. A little while ago I felt that all was past, but now, strength seems to come—we must wait—I shall conquer yet—give me strength to fight—to strive—wait for me, darling—I'll win you yet, and—God of heaven! hear her prayer—and let me—ah!—"

"Quick, Miss Carr, he has fainted," I whispered, as his head sank back. "Let me give him this."

His face was so ghastly that I thought he had passed away; but, without waiting to pour it out in a glass, I hastily trickled some of the strong stimulant medicine he was taking between his lips, and as Miss Carr, with agonized face, knelt beside him, holding his hand, there was a quiver in his eyelids, and a faint pressure of the hand that held his.

The signs were slight, but they told us that he had but fainted, and when, at last, he re-opened his eyes, they rested upon Miss Carr with such a look of rest and joy, that it was impossible to extinguish the hope that he might yet recover.

He was too weak to speak, for the interview had been so powerful a shock to his system, that it was quite possible for the change we saw in his face to be but the precursor of one greater, so that it was with a sense of relief that I heard the doctor's step once more upon the stairs, and Mary's knock at the door.

I offered Miss Carr my hand to take her into the next room, and as if waking out of a dream, she hastily rose and smoothed back her hair, but only to bend down over the sufferer, and whisper a few words, to which he replied with a yearning look that seemed to bring a sensation of choking to my throat.

The doctor passed us on his way in, and I led Miss Carr into the front-room, where Linny was sobbing on the couch, and Mrs. Hallett was sitting back, very white and thin, in her chair.

As we entered Linny started up, and in response to Miss Carr's extended hands, threw her arms round her neck, and kissed her passionately.

"Dear sister!" I heard Miss Carr murmur; and then she turned from Linny, who left her and glanced at me.

"Mrs. Hallett," I said simply, "this is Miss Carr."

I hardly knew what I said, for Miriam was so changed. There was a look of tenderness in her eyes, and a sweet smile just dawning upon her lip as she advanced towards the invalid's chair, and bent down to kiss her; but with a passionate look of jealousy and dislike, Hallett's mother shrank from her.

"Don't touch me!" she cried. "I knew that you were here, but I could not leave my chair to curse you. Murderess, you have killed him! You are the woman who has blasted my poor boy's life!"

A piteous look of horror came into Miss Carr's face, and she sank upon her knees by the great cushioned chair.

"Oh, no, no!" she said piteously. "Do not accuse me. You do not—you cannot know."

"Know!" cried Mrs. Hallett, whiter than ever with the feeling of dislike and passion that animated her; "do I not know how you have robbed me of my poor dying boy's love; how you have come between us, and filled his head with foolish notions to invent—to make money—for you?"

"Oh, Mrs. Hallett, for shame!—for shame!" I exclaimed indignantly.

"Silence, boy!" she cried, looking at me vindictively. "Do you think I do not know all because I sit helpless here? You, too, have helped to encourage him in his madness, when he might have been a professional man by now. I know all, little

as you think it, even how you, and this woman, too, fought against me. That child might have been the wife of a good man now, only that he was this wretched creature's lover."

"Mother," cried Linny passionately, "are you mad? How dare you say such things!"

"That's well," she cried. "You turn against me now. My boy is dying: you have killed him amongst you, and the same grave will hold us both."

"Mrs. Hallett," said Miss Carr, in her low, sweet voice; and the flush of pride that had come for a few moments into her face faded out, leaving nothing but resignation there, as she crouched there upon her knees by the invalid's chair, "you do not know me, or you would not speak to me like this. Don't turn from me," she said, taking one of the poor weak woman's trembling hands.

"Out of my sight, wretch!" she cried. "Your handsome face fascinated him: your pride has killed him! and you have come to triumph in your work."

"No, no, no," sobbed Miss Carr in a broken voice, "do not condemn me unheard; I have come to tell him how I love him. Mother, dear mother," she cried, "be pitiful to me, and join your prayers to mine that he may live."

Poor weak suffering Mrs. Hallett's face changed; her lips quivered, her menacing hands trembled, and with a low moaning wail she bent down, clasping Miriam to her breast, sobbing aloud as she rocked herself to and fro, while Miriam clung to her, caressing the thin worn face, and drawing herself closer and closer in a tight embrace.

How long this lasted I cannot tell, but it was interrupted by the entrance of the doctor, who came in very softly.

"He is in a very critical state," he said in answer to the inquiring eyes of all. "Hush, my good woman, you must try and be firm," he said parenthetically to Mary, who was trying hard to smother her sobs in her apron. "A nurse ought to have no feelings—I mean no sympathies. As I said," he continued, "our patient is in a very critical state, but he has now sunk into a very restful sleep. There is an access of strength in the pulse that, however, may only be due to excitement, but your visit, ma'am," he continued to Miss Carr, "seems to have wrought a change—mind," he added nastily, "I don't say for the better, but there is a decided change. I will come in again in a couple of hours or so; in the meantime, let some one sit by his bed ready to give him the stimulant the instant he wakes, but sleep may now mean life."

The doctor went softly away, and as he closed the door, Miss Carr knelt down once more by Mrs. Hallett's chair, holding up her face, and the poor invalid hung back for a moment, and then kissed her passionately.

"God forgive me!" she wailed. "I did not indeed know you, but you have robbed me of my poor boy's love."

"No, no," whispered Miss Carr softly. "No, no, dear mother, we will love you more and more."

Miriam Carr's place was by the sick man's pillow all that afternoon and evening, and right through the weary night. I had been to Westmouth Street to say that she might not return, and at her wish had brought back from Harley Street one of the most eminent men in the profession, who held a consultation with Hallett's doctor.

The great man endorsed all that had been done, and sent joy into every breast as he said that the crisis was past, but that on no account was the patient to be roused.

And all that night he slept, and on and on till about eight o'clock the next morning, Miss Carr never once leaving his side, or ceasing to watch with sleepless eyes for the slightest change.

I had gone softly into the room the next morning, just as he uttered a low sigh and opened his eyes.

"Ah, Antony," he said in a low whisper, "I have had such a happy, happy dream! I dreamed that—Oh, God, I thank Thee—it was true!"

For just then there was a slight movement by his pillow, and the next moment his poor weary head was resting upon Miriam's breast.

CHAPTER LIX.

MY INHERITANCE.

"Oh, Master Antony, ain't she a' angel!" exclaimed Mary.

This was one day during Stephen Hallett's convalescence, for from the hour of Miriam Carr's visit, he had steadily begun to mend. He showed no disposition, however, to take advantage of his position, and I was not a spectator of his further interviews with Miss Carr. She looked brighter and happier than I had seen her look for a long time, and by degrees I learned that with his returning strength Hallett had determined upon achieving success before he would ask her to be his wife.

He asked her, so she told me, if he had not her to thank for the assistance he had received, and she had confessed to the little deception, begging him to let her help him in the future; but this he had refused.

"No," he said; "let me be worthy of you, Miriam. I shall be happier if I try," and she gave way, after exacting a promise from him that if he really needed her assistance he would speak.

Hallett seemed rapidly to regain his strength now, and appeared

to be living a new life as he devoted himself heart and soul to the perfection of his invention.

I believe that I honestly worked as hard, but, in spite of all our efforts, nine months passed away, and still the work was not complete.

It was a pleasant time, though, and I could not help noticing the change that had come over Miriam Carr.

Her sister's husband had given up his appointment, and was now in town, residing with his young wife in Westmouth Street, where, about once a fortnight, there was a meeting, when Hallett would take Linny, and Tom Girtley, Mr. Ruddle, and several of our friends would assemble.

I look back upon it as a very happy time. The old sordid feeling of my wretched early life seemed to have dropped away, now that I was winning my way in the world; and Hallett had told me that I was to share in his success, even as I had shared his labours.

There was no love-making in the ordinary sense of the word, but when Miriam Carr and Hallett met, there would be one long earnest look, a pressure of the hand; and then—they waited. It was his wish, and she revered his noble pride.

One evening we were very few at Westmouth Street; only Linny, Tom Girtley, Mr. Jabez, Hallett, and myself, when I found that there was a surprise for me.

Tea was over, and I was just about to propose some music, when Tom Girtley took a black bag from under one of the settees, and opening it, drew out a packet of papers.

What was going to happen? I asked myself. Was it a marriage settlement, or some deed of gift, or an arrangement by which Hallett was to be forced to take what was needful to complete his work?

Neither. For at the first words uttered by Tom Girtley, I realized that it was something to do with the half-forgotten papers brought up by Mr. Peter Rowle.

"Miss Carr wished me to enter into the business matters here, Grace," he said; "and I should have talked to you more about it, only we thought it better to elucidate everything first, and to make perfectly sure."

"But—" I began.

"Wait a moment," he said, in regular legal form. "This has been a very intricate affair, and I was obliged to tread very cautiously, so as not to alarm the enemy. Before I had been at work a fortnight, I found that I needed the help of more experienced brains, so I consulted my principals."

"And ran up a long bill?" I said, laughing.

"Yes, a very long one," he said, "which Miss Carr, your friend and patroness, has paid."

"Oh, Miss Carr!" I exclaimed.

"Listen, Antony," she said, looking at me with a proud and loving look.

"Being sure, then, of our pay," said Tom Girtley, laughing, "we went to work with the greatest of zeal, making another long bill, and for result—after completely disentangling everything—after finding out, without his knowing it, that the enemy was well worth powder and shot—in short, after making the ground perfectly safe under our feet, I have the pleasure of announcing to you, my dear fellow, that not only is there a sum of five hundred pounds a year belonging to you in your lawful right——"

"Five hundred!" I ejaculated.

"But the same amount, with interest and compound interest, due to you for the past eight or nine years, and which that scoundrel Blakeford will be obliged to refund."

"Oh!" I exclaimed, as I realized my position.

"The rascal plundered your poor father of goodness knows how much, but of that we can get no trace. This five hundred pounds a-year, though, and the accumulation, is as certainly yours as if you had inherited it at once, and no judge in England can gainsay it. Let me be the first to——"

"No!" exclaimed Miss Carr, rising; "let me, Antony, my dear boy, be the first to congratulate you, not so much because of the amount, as that it will give you a feeling of independence, and take away that sense of obligation to pay your father's debts."

She took my hands in hers, and kissed me, and then, feeling giddy with surprise, I turned away for a moment, but only to falter out something in a disconnected way.

"Peter's delighted," cried Mr. Jabez: and he took a tremendous pinch of snuff. "I shall be turning out somebody's long-lost child myself before long, only we are twins, and I shall have to share it."

"I am very, very glad, Antony," said Hallett, shaking hands.

"And now, if you like, Grace," continued Tom Girtley, "we will set to work to-morrow to make that scoundrel Blakeford disgorge; and before a fortnight is passed, if he doesn't mind, he will be cooling his heels in prison, for I have undeniable proofs of his illegal practices. At the very least he will be struck off the Rolls. It is utter professional ruin."

I did not speak, for the scene seemed to change to that wretched office once more, and I saw the black, forbidding, threatening face gazing down into mine. I heard the harsh, bitter voice reviling my poor dead father, and a shudder ran through me. The next moment, though, I was dwelling on the soft sweet face of Hetty, and as I recalled the child's many gentle, loving acts, there was a strange choking sensation at my breast, and I walked into the little drawing-room to be alone.

"Antony, dear," said a soft, sweet voice, "you seem quite overcome."

"I shall be better directly," I said. "But, dear Miss Carr, this must be stopped. You all meant so kindly by me, but if proceedings have begun they must not go on."

"They have commenced, Antony, by my wishes," she said in a low voice, as she took my hand. "Antony, my dear boy, you have always seemed to me like a younger brother whom it was my duty to protect, and I have felt quite a bitter hatred against this man for the wrongs he did you."

"Not wrongs," I said. "It was through him I came to know you and Hallett."

"Yes, but he has wronged you cruelly."

"Miss Carr," I said—"let me call you sister."

"Always," she whispered, as she laid her hand upon my shoulder.

"This would be ruin and disgrace to Mr. Blakeford?"

"Which he richly deserves," she said warmly.

"And it would be ruin and disgrace——"

"Yes," she said, for I had stopped—"ruin and disgrace——"

"To his poor child?"

"Hetty?"

"Yes: to the tender-hearted little girl whose bright face is the only sunny spot in that time of sorrow. I don't know," I said passionately, "I may be wrong. I may see her now, and the fancy be driven away, but I feel as if I love little Hetty Blakeford with all my heart."

There was silence in the little drawing-room, where all was in shadow, while in the larger well-lighted room the others talked in a low voice, and as I glanced there once, and saw Linny Hallett gazing up in Tom Girtley's face, I wondered whether Hetty Blakeford would ever look as tenderly in mine.

It was a passing fancy, and I was brought back to the present by feeling Miss Carr's warm lips brush my cheek.

"We will wait and see, Antony," she said gravely. "Miss Blakeford's feelings must be spared."

CHAPTER LX.

AT LAST.

THE work of two years was complete, and I stood by Hallett as he watched the trial of the machine where it was set up at our great factory; and though we tried hard to find weak points, we were compelled to declare that it was as near perfection as human hands could make it.

Hallett was very pale and quiet; he displayed no excitement, no joy; and I felt rather disappointed at his apathy.

"Well," said Mr. Jabez, aside to me, "if I didn't know that the poor fellow was ill, I should have said that he didn't care *that!* whether the thing succeeded or not."

That! was the snap of the fingers which followed the taking of a pinch of snuff.

But he was ill. Poor fellow! He never seemed to have recovered from the shock his system had received during his late illness; and, though he had rallied and seemed strong and well, there had been times when he would turn ghastly white, and startle me by his looks.

I mentioned it more than once to Miss Carr, who begged him to see a physician; but he said it was nothing, and with a smile he used to tell her that the perfection of the machine and a change would completely restore him to health.

This we both believed; and I can honestly say that I strove with all my might to inspire the workmen with the spirit in which I toiled.

And now the new machine was finished. All that remained was to have it removed to Mr. Ruddle's place for a public inspection of its merits.

There had been something so depressing in the fate of the last machine that I strenuously advised that the trial should be made where the present one now stood, but Hallett was averse to it.

"No, Antony," he said quietly; "I am neither vindictive nor spiteful, and doubtless that man feels that he has good cause for hating me. Men of his stamp always blame others for their own failings. I am, I say, neither vindictive nor spiteful, but, feeling as I do, that he was the cause of our last breakdown, I am determined that the scene of our last failure shall also be the scene of our triumph."

This silenced opposition, and the workpeople were soon at work, taking down and resetting up Hallett's masterpiece at the old place.

For my part, I was regularly worn out. I had worked very hard, and felt as if I was so deeply interested in the success that I must make it this time a foregone conclusion. Hallett's health worried me a great deal too, and in addition to this, I was in more trouble than I can very well express about my affair with Mr. Blakeford.

My objections to the proceedings had come too late. As Tom Girtley said, it was quite within our province to withdraw, and leave him in possession of his ill-gotten gains, but the attack upon his character as a solicitor was one which he was bound to disprove—in other words, he could not afford to let it drop.

"And what is he doing?" I asked.

"Riding the high horse," said Tom. "Tony, my boy, I think you are wrong."

"If Linny's father were alive, and he had injured you, Tom, would you seize the first opportunity to ruin him?"

"Am I to answer that question as solicitor to client, or between friends?"

"As you like, only let's have the truth."

Tom Girtley rubbed one of his ears, and a dry comical look came into his countenance.

"Well, Tony, old fellow——" he began.

"Oh, come," I cried, "that form of address is not legal, so it is between friends."

"Just as you like," he said, laughing. "Well, Tony, old fellow, under the circumstances, I should put the screw on, especially if I knew him to be a scoundrel. First and foremost, I should have his consent to our marriage; secondly, I should inspect his money affairs, and if they were in a satisfactory state, I should make the sneak disgorge."

"But you would not ruin him, and blast his character, for his child's sake?"

"No, of course not."

"Then, suppose the young lady did not care for you?"

"Then I should fire at the old man hotter and stronger, so as to ease my wounded feelings."

"No, you wouldn't, Tom," I said; "so don't humbug."

"You're a rum fellow, Tony," he retorted, "and 'pon my word it's precious disappointing. Here's old Peter Rowle been hoarding this up for his 'dear boy,' as the smoky old cockorum calls you, and old Jabez in a high state of delight too. Then Miss Carr has spent no end over it, and thought she had secured you your rights, and now you kick us all over."

"I can't help it, Tom," I said. "I feel as if I should be a brute if I went on."

"I say, Tony," he said, after a pause, "how long is it since you have seen the young lady?"

"Nine years."

"What do you say to a run down to Rowford?"

"Run down?" I said eagerly. "No, I could not. I am too busy over the preparations for the trial."

"Nonsense, man. You told me only yesterday that you had done all your part, and that you meant to take a rest. I should like a run in the country."

"At Miss Carr's expense," I said spitefully, "and charge it in her bill of costs as out of pocket."

"Oh, that settles it," he cried, jumping up and stamping about the room, roaring with laughter. "You must go for a run. Why, my dear boy, your liver's out of order, or you, Antony

Grace, the amiable, would never have made a speech like that. Look here, Tony, you have overdone it, and nothing will do you good but a week's walking tour."

"Nonsense! Impossible!" I cried.

"Then you'll break down like the governor did once. Ever since, he says that a man must oil his wheels and slacken his bands. Now you've got to oil your wheels and slacken your bands for a week. When shall we start?"

"I tell you it's impossible," I said testily.

"I tell you that, so far from its being impossible, if you don't give in with a good grace—that isn't meant for a pun—I'll go and frighten Miss Carr, and see the governor, and tell him how bad you are."

"Rubbish, Tom," I cried. "Why, you couldn't go and leave Linny Hallett for a week," I added.

"Sneering, too," he said, with a mock assumption of concern. "My dear Tony, this is getting serious. You are worse, far worse, than I thought for."

"Don't talk stuff," I cried petulantly.

The result of it all was, that as he was pulling the string in the direction that pleased me, I began to yield, and a proposition he made carried the day.

"Look here, Tony," he cried, as if in a fit of inspiration. "A walking-tour is the thing! you told me all about your tramp up when you ran away from Blakeford's. Let's go and tramp it all down again, over the very road."

His words seemed to strike an electric chord, and I grasped eagerly at the plan. The result was, that after arranging with Hallett to keep an eye on the preparations, and after winning from him a declaration that he would not think I was forsaking him at a critical time, and also after receiving endorsement and persuasion from Miss Carr, I found myself one bright summer morning at Paddington, lightly equipped for the start, and together Tom Girtley and I strode along by the side of the dirty canal.

How familiar it all seemed again, as we walked on! There was the public-house where I had obtained the pot of beer for Jack's father, when I had to part from them at the end of my journey up; and there, too, directly after, was just such a boy in charge of a couple of bony horses, one of which had a shallow tin bucket hanging from the collar-hames, as they tugged at a long rope which kept splashing the water, and drew on Londonward one of the narrow red and yellow-painted canal-boats, covered in with just such a tarpaulin as that under which Jack and I had slept.

Resting on the tiller was just such another heavy, red-faced, dreamy man, staring straight before him as he sucked at a short black pipe, while forming herself into a living kit-cat picture was

the woman who appeared to be his wife, her lower portions being down the square hatch that led into the cabin where the fire burned, whose smoke escaped through a little funnel.

I seemed to have dropped back into the boy again, and half wondered that I was not tired and footsore, and longing for a ride on one of the bony horses.

And so it was all through our journey down.

Every lock seemed familiar, and at more than one lock-house there were the same green apples and cakes and glasses of sticky sweets, side by side with two or three string-tied bottles of ginger-beer.

Two or three times over I found myself getting low-spirited as I dwelt upon my journey up, and thought of what a poor, miserable little fellow I was; but Tom was always in the highest of spirits, and they proved at last to be infectious.

We had pretty well reached the spot at last where I had first struck the river, when we stopped to see a canal-boat pass through the lock, the one where I had stared with wonder to see the great boat sink down some eight or nine feet to a lower level.

The boat, which was a very showily painted one, evidently quite new, was deeply laden, and in one place a part of a glistening black tarpaulin trailed in the water. As the boat's progress was checked, and the lock-keeper came out, the short, thick-set man who had been at the tiller shouted something, and a round-faced girl of about twenty, with a bright-coloured cotton handkerchief pinned over her shoulders, came up the hatch, and took the man's place, while he slouched forward to alter the tarpaulin where it trailed.

He was quite a young man, and I noticed that his hair was fair, short, and crisp about his full neck, as he bent down, pipe in mouth, while a something in the way in which he shouted to the boy in charge of the horses settled my doubts.

"Jack!" I shouted.

He rose up very slowly, took the pipe out of his mouth, and spat in the water; then, gradually turning himself in my direction, he stared hard at me and said:

"Hello!"

"Don't you know me again, Jack?"

He stared hard at me for some moments, took his pipe out of his mouth again, spat once more in the water, said surlily, "No!" and bent down slowly to his work.

"Don't you remember my going up to London with you nine years ago this summer?"

He assumed the perpendicular at once, stared, scowled, took his pipe out of his mouth with his left hand, and then, as a great smile gradually dawned all over his brown face, he gave one leg a smart slap with a great palm, and seemed to shake himself free.

his shoulders to his heels, which I found was his way of having a hearty laugh.

"Why, so it is!" he cried, in a sort of good-humoured growl. "Missus, lash that there tiller and come ashore. Here's that there young chap."

To Tom's great amusement, Jack came ashore at the lock, and was followed by his round-faced partner, for whom he showed his affection by giving her a tremendous slap on the shoulder, to which she responded by driving her elbow into his side, and saying, "Adone, Jack. Don't be a fool!" and ending by staring at us hard.

"I didn't know yer agen," growled Jack. "Lor'! ain't you growed!"

"Why, so have you, Jack," I exclaimed, shaking hands with him; and then with the lady, for he joined our hands together, taking up hers and placing it in mine, as if he were performing a marriage ceremony.

"Well, I s'pose I have," he said in his slow, cumbersome way. "This here's my missus. We was only married larst week. This here's our boat. She was born aboard one on 'em."

"I'm glad to see you again, Jack," I said, as the recollection of our journey up recurred to me, strengthened by our meeting.

"So am I," he growled. "Lor'! I do wish my old man was here, too: he often talked about you."

"About me, Jack?"

"Ah! 'member that pot o' beer you stood for him when you was going away—upwards—you know?"

"Yes; I remember."

"So do he. He says it was the sweetest drop he ever had in his life; and he never goes by that 'ere house without drinking your health."

"Jack often talks about you," said "my missus."

"I should think I do!" growled Jack. "I say, missus, what's in the pot?"

"Biled rabbit, inguns, and bit o' bacon," was the prompt reply.

"Stop an' have a bit o' dinner with us, then. I've got plenty o' beer."

I was about to say *no*, as I glanced at Tom; but his eyes were full of glee, and he kept nodding his head, so I said *yes*.

The result was that the barge was taken through the lock, and half-a-mile lower down drawn close in beneath some shady trees, where we partook of Jack's hospitality—his merry-hearted, girlish wife, when she was not staring at us, striving hard to make the dinner prepared for two enough for four.

I dare say it was very plebeian taste, but Tom and I declared honestly that we thoroughly enjoyed the dinner partaken of under the trees upon the grass; and I said I never knew how good

Dutch cheese and new crusty country loaf, washed down by beer from a stone bottle, were before.

We parted soon after, Jack and I exchanging rings; for when I gave him a plain gold gipsy ring for his handkerchief, he insisted upon my taking the home-made silver one he wore; while his wife was made happy with a gaily coloured silk handkerchief which I used to wear at night.

The last I saw of them was Jack standing up waving his red cap over his head, and "my missus" the gaily coloured handkerchief. After that they passed on down stream, and Tom and I went our way.

I could not have been a very good walker in my early days, for my companion and I soon got over the ground between the river and Rowford, even though I stopped again and again—to show where I had had my fight; where I had hidden from Blakeford when the pony chaise went by; and, as if it had never been moved, there by the road was a heap of stones where I had slept and had my bundle stolen.

It was one bright summer's evening that we entered Rowford, which seemed to have shrunk and its houses to have grown dumpy since the days when I used to go out to post letters for Mr. Blakeford.

"There's his house, Tom," I said; and I felt my pulses accelerate their beat, as I saw the gates, and the wall over which I had climbed, and found myself wondering whether the same dog was in there still.

We were too tired with our long walk to take much notice, and made straight for the principal inn, where, after a hearty meal, we were glad to go early to bed.

Tom was sleeping soundly when I woke the next morning, and finding it was not yet seven, I dressed and went out for a walk, to have a good look round the old place, and truth to tell, to walk by Mr. Blakeford's house, thinking I might perhaps see Hetty.

We had made no plans. I was to come down to Rowford, and the next day but one I was due in London, for our walk had taken some time—though a few hours by rail would suffice to take us back.

It was one of those delicious fresh mornings when, body and mind at rest, all nature seems beautiful, and one feels it a joy only to exist.

I was going along the main street on the opposite side of the way, when I saw a tall slight figure in deep mourning come out of Mr. Blakeford's gateway, and go on towards the end of the town.

I followed with my heart beating strangely. I had not seen her face, but I seemed to feel that it was Hetty, and following her slowly right out of the town, and along the main road for

a time till she struck up a side lane, I kept on wondering what she would be like, and whether she would know me; and if she did—— What then?

Perhaps after all it was not Hetty. It might be some friend; and as I thought this, a strange pang of disappointment shot through me, and I seemed to have some faint dawning realization of what Stephen Hallett's feelings must have been at many a bitter time.

Is this love? I asked myself as I walked on, drinking in the deliciously sweet morning scents, and listening to the songs of the birds and the hum of the insects in the bright June sunshine.

I could not answer the question: all I knew was that I was in an agony to see that face, to be out of my state of misery and doubt; but though a dozen times over I was on the point of walking on fast and then turning back so as to meet her, I had not the courage.

For quite half-an-hour this went on, she being about a hundred yards in advance. We were now in rather a secluded lane, and I was beginning to fear that she intended to cut across the fields, and return by the lower road, when, all at once, she faced round and began to retrace her steps.

I saw her hesitate a moment as she became aware that she had been followed, but she came straight on, and as she drew near my doubts were set at rest. It was unmistakably Hetty, but grown sweeter looking and more beautiful, and my heart began to throb wildly as the distance between us grew short.

She did not know me—that was evident; and yet there was a look of doubt and hesitation in her face, while after a moment's wonder as to how I should address her, I saw her countenance change, and troubled no more about etiquette, but, carried away by my feelings, I exclaimed: "Hetty! dear Hetty!" and clasped her hands in mine.

CHAPTER LXI.

MY MEETING WITH MY ENEMY.

THESE things are a mystery. No doubt we two, parting as we did, boy and girl, ought to have met formally as strangers, perhaps have been re-introduced, and I ought to have made my approaches *en règle*, but all I knew then was that the bright, affectionate little girl who had been so kind to me had grown into a beautiful woman, whom I felt that I dearly loved; and as for Hetty, as she looked up in my face in a quiet, trusting way, she calmly told me that she had always felt that I should come.

back some day, and that though she hardly recognised me at first, she was not a bit surprised.

Terribly prosaic and unromantic all this, no doubt; but all young people are not driven mad by persecution, and do not tie their affections up in knots and tangles which can never perhaps be untied. All I know is that I remember thinking that when Adam awoke and found Eve by his side in Paradise, he could not have felt half so happy as I did then; and that, walking slowly back with Hetty's little hand resting upon my arm, and held in its place by one twice as large, I thought Paradise might have been a very pleasant kind of place, but that this present-day world would do for me.

We said very little, much as we wanted to say, but walked on, treading as it were upon air, till, as if in a moment, we were back at the town, when she said with a quiver in her voice:

"I must leave you now. Papa will be waiting for me to pour out his coffee. He will not touch it unless I do."

"You are in mourning for Mrs. Blakeford," I said, and my eyes fell upon the little shabby silver brooch I had given her all those years ago.

"Yes, and papa has not been the same since she died. He has very bad health now, and is sadly changed. He is in some great trouble, too, but I don't know what."

I did; and I walked on thoughtfully by her side till we reached the gate, where we stopped, and she laid her hand in mine.

But the next moment my mind was made up, and, drawing her arm through mine, and trying with a look to infuse some of my assurance, I walked with her into the house, and into the apparently strangely dwarfed sitting-room.

"Who's that?" cried a peevish voice. "I want my coffee, Hetty. It's very late. Has the post come in? Who's that, I say, who's that?"

I stared in astonishment at the little withered yellow man with grizzly hair and sunken eyes, and asked myself—Is this the Mr. Blakeford who used to make me shudder and shrink with dread?

I could not believe it, as I stood there five feet ten in my stockings, and broad-shouldered, while he, always below the middle height, had terribly shrunk away.

"Who is it, I say, Hetty? Who have you brought home?" he cried again in a querulous voice.

"It is I, Mr. Blakeford," I said—"Antony Grace; and I have come to see if we cannot make friends."

He sank back in his chair, his jaw dropped, and his eyes dilated with dread; but as I approached with extended hand, he recovered somewhat, and held out his own as he struggled to his feet.

"How—how do you do?" he faltered; "I've been ill—very ill. My wife died. Hetty, my dear, quick, Mr. Grace will have

breakfast with us. No, no, don't ring; fetch a cup yourself, my dear—fetch it yourself."

Hetty looked at him wonderingly, but she obeyed; and as the door closed upon her, Blakeford exclaimed, in quick trembling tones:

"She doesn't know—she knows nothing. Don't tell her. For God's sake don't tell her. Don't say you have."

"I have told her nothing, Mr. Blakeford," I replied.

"Don't tell her, then. Bless her, I could not bear for her to know. I won't fight, Mr. Grace, I won't fight. I'm a broken man. I'll make restitution, I will indeed; but for God's sake don't tell my child."

"Then he is not all bad," I thought, "for he does love her, and would be ashamed if she knew that he had been such a consummate villain."

And as I thought that, I recalled her brave defence of him years ago, and then wondered at the change as she entered the room.

I breakfasted with them, the old man—for, though not old in years, he was as much broken as one long past seventy—watching me eagerly, his hands trembling each time terribly as he raised his cup, while Hetty's every action, her tender solicitude for her father's wants, and the way in which she must have ignored every ill word that she had heard to his injury, filled me with delight.

He must have read my every word and look, for I have no doubt I was transparent enough, and then he must have read those of Hetty, simple, unconscious and sweet, for it did not seem to occur to her that any of the ordinary coquetries of the sex were needed; and at last, when I roused myself to the fact that Tom Girtley must be waiting breakfast, it was nearly eleven, and I rose to go.

"You are not going, Mr. Grace," said Hetty's father anxiously. "Don't go yet."

"I must, sir," I said, "but I will soon be back."

"Soon be back?" he said nervously.

"Yes, sir. And that business of ours. That settlement."

"Yes, yes," he said, with lips quivering, "it shall all be done but don't talk about it now, not before Hetty here."

"I think Hetty, Mr. Blakeford, will help the settlement most easily for us both, will you not, dear?" I said, and I drew her to my side. "There, Mr. Blakeford," I said, holding out my hand once more, "are we to be good friends?"

He tried to answer me, but no words came, and he sank back quivering with nervous trepidation in his chair.

He was better, though, in a few minutes, and when I left him he clung to my hand, his last words being:

"I will make all right, I will give you no trouble now."

Tom Girtley laughed at me when I rejoined him and told him where I had been.

"This is a pretty way of doing business!" he exclaimed. "You play fast and loose with your solicitor, and end by coming down and compromising the case with the defendant. Really, Mr. Grace, this is most reprehensible, and I shall wash my hands of the whole affair."

"Glad of it," said I, laughing. "A solicitor should always have clean hands."

We chatted on merrily as we walked, for we had started to go as far as my old home, where, as I pointed out to him the scene of many a happy hour, a feeling of sadness more painful than I had experienced for years seemed to oppress me, and it was not until I had once more left the old home far behind that I was able to shake it off.

When we returned to the hotel it was to find Mr. Blakeford waiting for us, and to the utter surprise of both, we were soon put in possession of all that was necessary to give me that which was my own by right, but which he saw plainly enough that his child would share.

"I don't like to turn prophet, 'Tony," said my companion, "but I should say that our friend Blakeford is putting his affairs in order on account of a full belief that a summons is about to issue that he is soon to meet. Well, I congratulate you," he said, "and I don't wonder now why it was that I did not find we were rivals."

This was after we had spent one evening at Blakeford's; and in the morning, after a tender leave-taking, we were on our way back to London.

My presence was needed, for the test of the machine would take place next day, and I found Hallett had been taken so ill that all prospect of his attending the public trial had been swept away.

"It does not matter," he said to me quietly, when I was sitting with him, propped up in an easy chair, beside Mrs. Hallett. "It is better as it is, Antony, my dear boy. I shall not be there for the miserable scamps to pelt when the poor old idol breaks down again."

"Breaks down!" I cried exultingly; "I was there last night till after twelve, and there will be no tampering this time, for a policeman is on the watch, and Mr. Jabez and Mr. Peter were going to take turn and turn in the room all night, the one with a box full of snuff, and the other with a couple of ounces of tobacco, and the longest clay pipe I could get."

"There's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip," he said, looking at me with a piteous smile upon his wasted face. "Antony, lad,

inventors do not often reap much from the crops they sow, but there is the unselfish pleasure of helping others. If I do not prosper from my work others may. God bless you, lad! I believe I have a trusty friend in you, and one who will be true to my poor mother here and Linny."

"Why, my dear Hallett," I exclaimed, "what a doleful tone to take on this, the day of success. Come, come, come, you want a dose of good news. I'm off now, and the fastest cab shall bring me back the moment the verdict is pronounced."

"There's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip," he said again softly; and there was a strange and meaning smile upon his face.

"Out upon you, raven!" I cried merrily. "In two hours I'll be here with such news as shall bring the colour back in those white cheeks; and to-morrow you shall come down into the country with me. I shall ask for another fortnight, and you shall wander with me in the green fields, and we'll idle and rest, for when the work is done there should surely be some play."

He smiled and nodded.

"Yes," he said, "some rest."

I hurried away at the last, leaving Linny with him, and a more easy cheerful look upon his countenance, and soon after I was at Mr. Ruddle's, to find all ready, our friends collected, and the invited people coming fast.

"*Festina lente* is a good motto, Grace," said old Mr. Girtley, taking me by the button. "A little more patience, and we should have had this right last time, though of course we could not guard against the accident. Ah, Tom," he continued, "how's parchment? I'd rather have seen you the schemer of this machine, than the winner of the most tangled legal case."

"Rather hard that, Tony, when I have just won you five hundred a year and a wite, eh?" said Tom, laughing; and then my attention was taken up in a dozen ways. There were the brothers Rowle to talk to; Mr. Grimstone to shake my hand; Mr. Ruddle to chat with about the success of the machine, and about Lister, concerning whom he made a significant motion, turning his hand into a drinking-vessel, and shaking his head.

Then there was a hitch. Everything was declared in readiness, when it was found that the shaft that ran through the building was ceasing to revolve.

It came like a black cloud over the proceedings, but it was only the stoker's neglect. Half an hour after, the steam was well up once more, and, with the room crowded, Mr. Girtley, just as on the last occasion, gave the long leathern band a twitch; shaft was connected with shaft; a touch from a long lever tightened the driving-wheel and its fellow portion; there was a whirring, clanking noise, the spinning of wheels, the revolving of cylinders; ink-rollers ran round; the great reel of paper began

to give its fair surface to the kiss of the type; the speed was increased, faster—faster—faster, and those who had shrunk back at first, as if expecting an accident, grew excited and drew in, while the ponderous machine, working as easily as a watch, turned off perfected newspaper sheets at a rate that seemed astounding.

There was no hesitation now; there were no doubting looks, but a hearty cheer arose, one that was taken up again on the staircase, and ran from room to room, till the girls, busy folding down below, joined their shrill voices merrily in the cry.

"Success, Tony!" cried Tom, catching my hand.

"And Hallett not here!" I cried.

The next minute I seized one of the printed newspapers that came from the machine, doubled it hastily, and dashed downstairs.

There was a hansom cab waiting, and as I gave my breathless order, "Great Ormond Street," the horse started, and panting with excitement, I thought I had never gone so slowly before.

"I shall be within three hours, though," I said to myself, as I glanced at my watch. "That want of steam spoiled me for keeping my word."

"Faster!" I shouted, as I thrust up the trap; "another half-crown if you are quick!"

The horse sprang forward, and I carefully redoubled my precious paper, holding the apron of the cab-door open, my latchkey in my hand, and being ready to spring out as the vehicle stopped at the door—not quite though, for the doctor's brougham was in the way.

No need for the latchkey, for the door was open, and, dashing along the hall, I sprang up the stairs, flight after flight, from landing to landing, and rushed breathlessly into the room, waving the paper over my head.

"Victory, victory!" I shouted. "Hur——"

The paper dropped from my hands, as my eyes lighted upon the group gathered round a mattress laid upon the floor, on which was stretched my poor friend, supported by Miriam Carr, upon whose arm his head was lying.

Doctor, Linny, Mary, Revitts, all were there, watching him in silence, while the poor stricken mother was bending forward like some sculptured figure to represent despair.

"Hallett! Stephen!" I cried, "my news."

My words seemed to choke me as I fell upon my knees at his side; but I saw that he recognised me, and tried to raise his hand, which fell back upon the mattress.

Then, making a supreme effort, he slightly turned his head to gaze upon the face bending over him, till a pair of quivering lips were pressed upon his brow.

There was a smile upon his countenance, and he spoke, but

so low that the whisper did not reach our ears, and then the smile seemed to grow fixed and hard, and a silence that was awful in its intensity fell upon that group.

I did not catch those words, but she told me afterwards what they were.

"At last! Now let me sleep."

Fallen when victory was won.

CHAPTER LXII.

MISS CARR HAS ANOTHER OFFER.

"ANTONY," said Miss Carr to me one day, "you are very young yet to think of marriage."

"But it is not to be yet for quite a year."

"I am glad of it," she said, laying her hand on mine; and as I took it and held it, looking up with a feeling akin to awe in her dark, far-off-looking eyes, I could not help thinking how thin it was, and how different to the soft, white hand that used to take mine years ago.

"We both think it will be wiser," I said, talking to her as if she were an elder sister, though of late there had grown up in me a feeling that she looked upon me as if I were her son.

"Marriage must be a happy state, Antony, when both love, and have trust the one in the other."

I looked at her, feeling in pain, for I dared not speak, knowing that she must be thinking of poor Hallett: and as I looked I could not help noticing how the silver hairs were beginning to make their presence known, and how much she had changed.

"You think it strange that I should talk like this, do you not?"

I could not answer.

"Yes, I see you do," she said, smiling. "Antony, I have had another offer of marriage."

"You have!" I exclaimed. "From whom? Who has asked you?"

I felt almost indignant at the idea; and my indignation became hot rage as she went on.

"John Lister has asked me again to be his wife."

"The scoundrel! the villain!" I exclaimed.

"Hush, Antony," she said quietly, as she laid her thin white fingers upon my lips. "He says that he has bitterly repented the past; that he is a changed man, and he begs me not to blight the whole of his life."

"You? Blight his life!" I exclaimed hotly. "He has blighted my ears."

She did not speak for a few moments, and then she startled me by her words.

"He is coming here to-day to ask for my answer from my lips. He begged that I would not write, but that I would see him, and let him learn his fate from me."

"But you surely will not see him?" I exclaimed.

"I have told him that I will. He will be here, Antony, almost directly."

I was for the moment stunned, and could do nothing but gaze helplessly in Miss Carr's face, for the question kept asking itself, "Will she accept him?" and it seemed to me like an insult to the dead.

She returned my gaze with a quiet look, full of mournfulness, and as the minutes flew on, I felt a kind of irritation growing upon me, and that I should be bitterly hurt if she should be weak enough to accept John Lister.

"She will consider it a duty, perhaps," I thought; "and that she does it to save him, now that he has repented and become a better man."

My ponderings were brought to an end by the servant bringing in a card, and I rose to go, but she laid her hand upon my arm.

"Going, Antony?" she said.

"Yes," I replied angrily, and I pointed to the card.

"Sit down, Antony," she said, smiling; "I wish you to be present."

"No, no, I would rather not," I exclaimed.

"I beg that you will stay, Antony," she said, in a tone of appeal that I could not have disobeyed, and I petulantly threw myself back in a chair, as the door opened, and John Lister was announced.

He came forward eagerly, with extended hands, as Miss Carr rose, but changed colour and bowed stiffly as he saw me.

Recovering himself, however, he took Miss Carr's extended hand, raised it to his lips, and then drew back as if waiting for me to go.

"I felt," he said, to put an end to our awkward silence, "that you would grant me this private interview, Miriam."

He emphasized the word "private," and I once more half rose, for my position was most painful, and the hot anger and indignation in my breast more than I could bear.

"Sit still, Antony," said Miss Carr quietly; "Mr. Lister has nothing to say to me that you do not already know."

"But you will grant me a private interview, Miriam," said Lister appealingly.

"Mr. Lister," said Miss Carr, after pointing to a chair, which her visitor refused to take, remaining standing, as if resenting my

presence, "you wrote and begged me to see you, to let you speak instead of writing. I have granted that which you wished."

"Yes," he said bitterly, "but I did not ask for an interview in presence of a third party, and that third person *Mr. Antony Grace*."

There was something so petty in his emphasis of the title of courtesy *Mr.*, that I once more rose.

"Miss Carr," I said, "I am sure it will be more pleasant for all. Let me beg of you to excuse me now," and as I spoke I moved towards the door.

"I wish you to stay," she said quietly; and as I resumed my seat and angrily took up a book, "Mr. Lister, Antony Grace is my very dear friend and adviser. Will you kindly say what you wish in his presence?"

"In his presence?" exclaimed Lister, with the colour coming into his cheeks.

"In his presence," replied Miss Carr.

"Am I to understand, Miriam," he said imploringly, "that you intend to go by Mr. Grace's advice?"

"No, Mr. Lister; I shall answer you from the promptings of my own heart."

"Then for heaven's sake, Miriam," he cried passionately, "be reasonable with me. Think of the years of torture, misery, probation, and atonement through which I have passed. Come into the next room, I implore you, if Mr. Grace has not the good feeling and gentlemanly tact to go."

He began his speech well, but it seemed as if, for the life of him, he could not refrain from being petty, and he finished by being contemptible in his spite against one whom he evidently looked upon as being the cause of his disappointment.

"I wish for Antony Grace to stay," said Miss Carr quietly; "Mr. Lister, you have resumed your addresses to me, and have asked me by letter to forgive you, and let you plead your cause; and more, you tell me that you bitterly repent the past."

"Miriam," he cried, "why do you humiliate me before this man?"

"John Lister," she continued, "I am but repeating your words, and it is no humiliation for one who repents of the wrong and cruelty of his ways to make open confession, either by his own lips or by the lips of others. You do repent the ill you did to me, and to him who is—dead?"

"Oh yes, yes!" he cried passionately; "believe me, dear Miriam, that I do. But I cannot plead my cause now before a third party."

"The third party, as you term him, John Lister, has been and is to me as a dear brother; but I grant that it would be cruel to expect you to speak as we are. I will, then, be your counsellor."

"No," he exclaimed, holding out his hands imploringly, "you are my judge."

"Heaven is your judge," she said solemnly; and as she spoke I saw a change come over John Lister's face. It was a mingling of awe, disappointment, and anger, for he read his sentence in her tones—"Heaven is your judge," she repeated, "but I will not keep you in suspense."

He joined his hands as he turned his back to me, but I could not help seeing his imploring act in the glass.

"John Lister, I have pleaded your cause ever since I received your first letter three months ago. You have asked my forgiveness for the past."

"Yes, yes," he whispered, gazing at her as if hanging on her lips for his life.

"And I forgive you—sincerely forgive you—as I pray Heaven to forgive the trespasses I have committed."

"God bless you!" he whispered; "Miriam, you are an angel of goodness."

"You ask me now to resume our old relations; to receive you as of old—in other words, John Lister, to become your wife."

"Yes, yes," he whispered hoarsely, as he bent before her, and in his eagerness now, he seemed to forget my presence, for he bent down upon one knee and took and kissed the hem of her dress. "Miriam, I have been a coward and a villain to you, but I repent—indeed I repent. For years I have been seeking to make atonement. Have mercy on me and save me, for it is in your power to make me a better man."

She stood there, gazing sadly down upon him; and if ever woman wore a saint-like expression on this earth, it was Miriam Carr as she stood before me then. She, too, seemed to ignore my presence, and her voice was very sweet and low as she replied:

"Take my forgiveness, John Lister, and with it my prayers shall be joined to yours that yours may be a better and a happier life."

"And you will grant my prayer, Miriam? You will be my wife?" he whispered, as I sat back there with an intense feeling of misery, almost jealousy, coming over me. I felt a terrible sense of dread, too, for I could not believe in the sincerity of John Lister's repentance, and in imagination I saw the woman whom I loved and revered torn down from the pedestal whereon she stood in my heart, to become ordinary, weak, and poor.

"You ask me to forget the past and to be your wife, John Lister," she said, and the tones of her sweet low voice thrilled me as she spoke, "I have heard you patiently, and I tell you now that had you been true to me, I would have been your patient, loving, faithful wife unto the end. I would have crushed down the strange yearnings that sought to grow within my heart, for I told

myself that you loved me dearly, and that I would love you in return."

"Yes, yes," he whispered, cowering lower before her; "you were all that is good and true, and I was base; but, Miriam, I have repented so bitterly of my sin."

"When I found that you did not love me, John Lister, but that it was only a passing fancy fed by the thought of my wealth——"

"Oh, no, no, no! I was not mercenary," he cried.

"Is your repentance no more sincere than that?" she said sadly; "I know but too well, John Lister, that you loved my fortune better than you loved me."

"Oh, Miriam!" he exclaimed appealingly.

"Hear my answer!" she said, speaking as if she had not caught his last words.

"Yes," he cried, striving to catch her hand, but without success. "It is life or death to me. I cannot live without your love."

"John Lister," she said, and every tone of her sweet pure voice seemed to ring through the stillness of that room as I realized more and more the treasure he had cast away. "You are a young man yet, and you may live to learn what the love of a woman really is. Once given, it is beyond recall. The tender plant I would have given, you crushed beneath your heel. That love, as it sprang up again, I gave to Stephen Hallett, who holds it still."

He started from her with a look of awe upon his face, as she crossed her hands upon her breast and stood looking upward: "For he is not dead, but sleeping; and I—I am waiting for the time when I may join him, where the weary are at rest."

She ceased speaking, and John Lister slowly rose from his knee, white with disappointment and rage, for he had anticipated an easy conquest.

He looked at her, as she was standing with her eyes closed, and a rapt expression of patient sorrow upon her beautiful face. Then, turning to me with a furiously vindictive look upon his face, he clenched his fists.

"This is your doing," he hissed; "but my day will come, Antony Grace, and then we'll see."

He rushed from the room, choking with impotent fury, and nearly running against Hetty, who was coming in.

I was frightened, for there was a strange look in Miriam Carr's face, and I caught her hands in mine.

"Send for help, Hetty," I cried excitedly; "she is ill."

"No, no," Miss Carr answered, unclosing her eyes; "I often feel like that. Hetty, dear, help me to my room; I shall be better there."

I hastened to hold the door open as Miriam Carr went towards

it, leaning on Hetty's arm, and as they reached me Miss Carr turned, placed her arms round my neck, and kissed me tenderly as a mother might her son. Then, as I stood there gazing through a veil of tears at which I felt no shame, the words that I had heard her utter seemed to weigh me down with a burden of sorrow that seemed greater than I could bear. I felt as if a dark cloud was coming down upon my life, and that dark cloud came, for before a year had passed away, Hetty and I—by her father's dying wish, young wife and young husband—stood together looking down upon the newly planted flowers close beside poor Hallett's grave.

It was soft and green, but the flowers and turf looked fresh, as the simple white cross looked new with its deeply cut letters, clear, but dim to our eyes as we read the two words—

“MIRIAM CARR.”

THE END.

