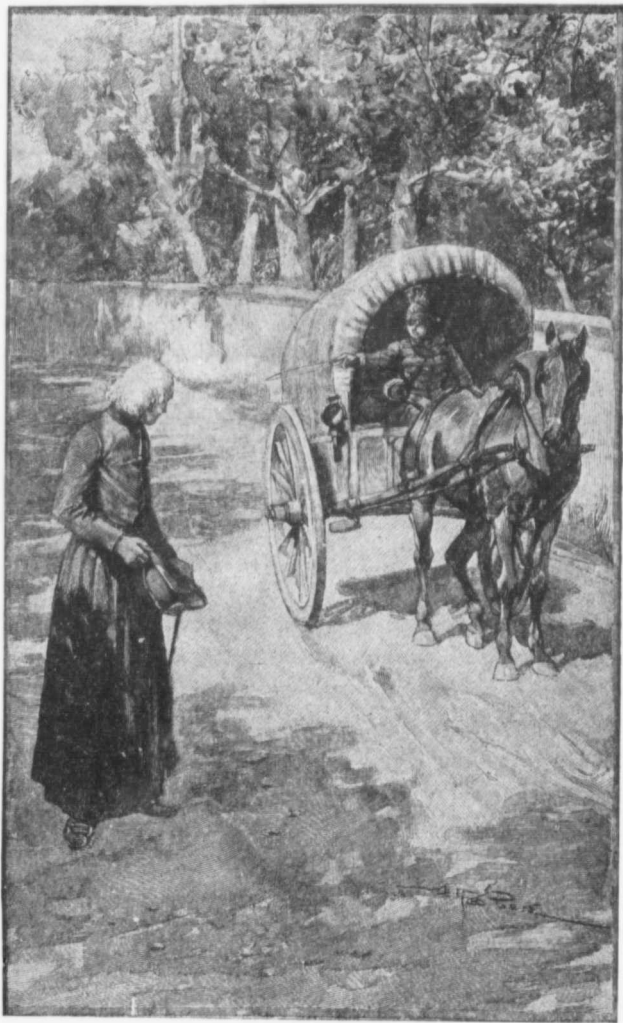




THE
PILKINGTON HEIR

ANNA T. SADLIER



“Is Your Reverence going my way? Can I give you a lift?” (See p. 30.)

THE PILKINGTON HEIR.

Le hériero de

BY

ANNA T. SADLIER

AUTHOR OF

"The True Story of Master Gerard." "A Summer at Woodville," etc., etc.

NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO:

BENZIGER BROTHERS,

PRINTERS TO THE
HOLY APOSTOLIC SEE

PUBLISHERS OF
BENZIGER'S MAGAZINE

PS
8487
A4P5

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THE PILKINGTON HEIR.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH THERE IS A TRAGEDY.

THAT brief and eventful struggle between the United States and Great Britain, which marked the earlier years of the century just closed, and coincided with the downfall of Napoleon and the triumph of the allied Powers on the continent of Europe, was in progress.

The American navy had covered itself with glory, while many gallant and successful maneuvers on land had sustained the high character gained by the Colonial troops during the war of 1776.

A gay and gallant squadron of cavalry rode along the Kings-bridge Road one mild evening in early September. It had but recently formed a part of General Macomb's division, which, in cooperation with Commodore Macdonough, had defeated Sir George Prevost and the British naval commander, Pring. They rode along jesting, as men are wont to do who take their lives in their hands every day. One was giving imaginary toasts to the great Napoleon, whose eagles still perched above the Tuileries, and who had not yet met his Waterloo. Another would have drained his glass, had a glass been anywhere convenient, to saucy

“Jack Barry,” or to that equally irrepressible Irishman, the reckless Commodore Barney, who was even then performing hairbreadth exploits.

“Stick to your own branch of the service,” cried another; “the navy men are getting too much of the glory as it is. Give us the immortal George, or our Maccomb, who has just put a damper on the Britishers—or anybody you like in this arm of the service.”

“I’ll give you Morgan with his merry volunteers, fighting the British regulars at the Creek Side near Black Rock. And Brown getting hold of Fort Erie, and—But stay! What’s that?” The leader of the troop reined in his horse. His first fear was that they had fallen into an ambush. The shadowy outline of two or three men became visible, and that there were more was soon evident. But all remained silent, and some seemed to be in the act of stooping. One stood erect in an attitude of fear or horror. As the commander of the squadron looked more closely he discovered still another figure, lying face upward, partly supported by a dismantled gun-carriage. For the spot was the scene of a recent skirmish, in the course of which this ordnance wagon had been deserted.

There was a pause, and all those reckless and dashing cavalymen held their breath. The face of the man who lay thus upon the ground and seemed to be dead was very distinct in the light of the moon, which, occasionally overclouded, threw out fitful gleams. That was a noble countenance, soldierly and handsome in the repose which had fallen upon it, and the dress was a military one. The group of riders sitting still upon their horses were strangely moved, though it was part of their trade to look upon death every day and every hour.

Suddenly one of the two who seemed to be in attendance upon the dead or wounded man turned. The soldiers recognized him at once. It was Father Aubril, the French missionary, well known in the American ranks for many a kindly deed. He had served as chaplain until an illness, caused by exposure, had forced him to take up his residence for the time being in the neighborhood of Kingsbridge, where he exercised his ministry in the surrounding country. For in those days priests were few and far between, and the need of their services was often keenly felt. He had always retained the dress which he was accustomed to



"They rode along jesting, as men are wont to do who take their lives in their hands every day."

wear in France, and the soldiers and civilians as well had grown to love his cassock and his three-cornered hat. The cavalry officer saluted.

"Is he dead, Father?" he asked.

"Yes, my son; yes, monsieur, he is dead."

"Have you discovered his identity?"

"Alas, yes! It is the brave Captain Pilkington."

"Pilkington! Great heavens!" cried the soldier, aghast.

"Harry Pilkington?"

The priest made an affirmative gesture.

"Why, I danced at his wedding scarce two years ago in York town—and his bride—why, she was the fairest of the fair, the beautiful Mary Clinton."

"Yes, it is of her I think," said the priest, sadly. "When these good souls came to tell me that a man lay wounded by the roadside, I ran hither in all haste, only to find my young friend."

He paused a moment, as if he feared his emotion might overcome him.

"Well, gentlemen," he said at last. "Captain Pilkington died as a soldier and a Christian. It has been a happy end, and so I tell you, I, who have knelt at many bedsides. But that fair young bride . . . I saw them but lately, so happy among the flowers, with smiling faces, as children who look but on the morning side of life. Alas! God's holy will be done!"

"How did this occur? There has been no fighting hereabouts for weeks," said the officer, in perplexity, while the others turned in their saddles to hear.

"It is a mystery. He knew not himself. He was riding with dispatches—a shot struck him, and killed his companion, an orderly."

The faces of the men who listened grew dark with anger.

"Some cursed treachery," said their leader.

"The body must be brought home," said the priest, "but not till to-morrow, till I have told *her*. Meantime I am taking it to my house."

"I would we could escort that gallant soldier," said the officer, "but we are under orders and must ride on to New York."

They saluted and withdrew, leaving the priest and the laborers in charge of the dead.

Only the evening before Henry Pilkington sat with his wife

in their terraced garden. Their supper was served there, in that loveliest of spots, with steps ascending from the graded walk below. They were full of hope and happiness, jesting and careless, when there was a step upon the gravel and the tread of a soldier ascending the stairs.

The husband and wife exchanged glances. Captain Pilkington had been through many of the chief battles of that campaign, serving at the head of his company or on the staff of the com-



"There was a step upon the gravel and the tread of a soldier ascending the stairs."

mander-in-chief. He had been at home but a few days on sick leave, and to await orders. He had turned his ankle when springing from a horse and was just able to walk again. The wife turned her head and regarded the orderly, who stood respectfully at the head of the steps, with a sense of coming trouble. Noting this her husband laughed.

"Duty is ever the marplot of a soldier's life, sweetest Mary," he said, bending over her chair an instant. "But would you

have it otherwise? And now my excuses for ten minutes, till I glance over this precious document."

He bade the servant who waited at the table to take the orderly round to the housekeeper's room for refreshments, and then he went into the library, whence he emerged a few moments later with a countenance of the deepest gravity. He drew Mary aside into a shaded path, where often before the breaking out of this deplorable war they had been wont to walk, in careless exuberance of spirit, laughing at fortune and plucking her favors.

"I must ride forth at once," said the husband; "here are immediate orders."

"Where are you to go?"

"I may not tell you. My orders are secret."

Mary, who with all her lightness of heart was a woman of sense, did not question farther. She knew that the times were critical and that her husband was a soldier. She parted bravely from him, watching him ride away, a gallant figure, and kissing her finger-tips to him as she caught a last glimpse of him in the avenue below. He turned and waved his hat to her, bowing low, and then he was out of sight. She hummed a verse of a song they used to sing together, and went away up to the nursery to console herself with baby. Baby was a charming boy who had inhabited this world for barely six months, and not yet having learned its ways, believed that he could be absolute master of the universe if only he used his lungs sufficiently, with some additional force of hands and feet.

Mrs. Mary sat down with him on her knee at a latticed window, and pointed out to the nurse each of his separate attractions. The hair, already a rich shade, between amber and chestnut, so uncommon in babies, beginning to curl as his papa's did when

he was an infant; the blue, blue eyes, so very like the paternal eyes.

Mrs. Pilkington sighed. "He shall not be a soldier, my little Wilfrid," said she to the nurse. "I will not have him leaving me to go off with the troopers. He shall stay and take care of me, won't you, my sweetest?"

The baby, as if in answer, crowed up into her face with eyes of mischief, while the nurse demurely remarked:

"But, madam, if he does not go a-soldiering, he will go, perhaps, a-courting, and leave you either way."

A cloud passed over the mother's fair young face. She clasped the baby to her heart, crying:

"He shall not leave me, my baby, my baby! I am glad he is not big and strong, but only weak and helpless and can not go a-soldiering nor yet a-courting."

Then she fell into a happy reverie, wondering when her soldier should have finished with this tiresome business of war and come a-riding up the avenue again. If only peace would come! What cared she for grievances against Great Britain, though her liege lord had explained them to her at such length? She could only look forward to the time when Harry and she should sup together on the lawn, and she would let him talk as he liked about the rights of American citizens and the tyranny of impressing men for the British navy, and all the other complaints that were set forth by Congress or by Mr. Madison.

As she sat thus and crooned to her baby, she little guessed that before many hours should have passed Father Aubril would be advancing toward her with news that would darken her life forever, or that the threads of a double tragedy were already being woven about her.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH LUCY LOOKS INTO THE WELL.

LUCY, the nurse, somewhat wearied of the lady's raptures over her little son, and always full of envy at the prosperous lot of this favored child of fortune, escaped from the nursery as soon as possible and strolled out into the air, looking very pretty in her smart cap and apron. She was reflecting as she went that fortune's goods were very unequally divided; that it was hard that Mrs. Pilkington should have youth, beauty, wealth, a splendid house, with the richest of appointments, a handsome and devoted husband, and no trouble of any sort, while she, Lucy Lawless, had had to work hard almost from her childhood up, and to humor a fine lady's whims, and mind a squalling brat, and slave and toil for the bread she ate and the clothes she wore. If matters were inquired into her slavery was not a very galling one. Mrs. Pilkington had no whims at all, being a remarkably sensible and sweet-tempered young woman, and the baby, who was healthy and happy, squalled as little as any baby could reasonably be expected to do.

In this frame of mind, which was very common to her, Lucy strolled on to a favorite haunt, the well, which stood at a certain point outside the garden wall, under the spreading branches of an ancient tree. It was a charming spot, and one of its great attractions for Lucy was that she could see the reflection of her

own pretty, foolish face in the clear water. Besides, as she looked down into the clear depths, she knew very well that she should soon hear some one approaching, some one who, like herself, had begun to frequent this place of late. She did not turn her head. Her attitude, she thought, was graceful, but the water reflected a smile, which broke over her face as she heard the expected step and the familiar voice, saying:

“Miss Lucy!”

She turned ever so slightly.

“Miss Lucy!”



“She heard some one approaching, some one who, like herself, had begun to frequent this place of late.”

She turned a little more.

“Aren’t you goin’ to speak to me this evenin,’ when you’re a-lookin’ prettier than ever, as I’m a sinner.”

The smile deepened, but she tossed her head.

“Go along with you for a flatterin’ rogue,” she cried. “You’ve not been a-soldierin’ all this time without learnin’ how to palaver us poor women.”

“Flattering! Palavering!” repeated Jim Hollis. “My, Miss Lucy, I can’t say a quarter of what I thinks as to your good looks and the like.”

Miss Lucy, thinking she might as well let him have a full view of the countenance he praised, turned fully toward him, and the conversation became brisk. The man was a knave, but gifted with a ready tongue and a rare power of lying. Moreover, he had really a fondness for this girl, while he hoped to make her useful in a certain little affair which had been entrusted to him. If that succeeded he would marry her and settle down for good and all.

So when Lucy began to air her grievances and to exclaim against rich folks who had everything their own way, and to declare that she hated poverty, Jim Hollis said to her, slowly and deliberately, that she might weigh every word:

“You needn’t be poor, Lucy, my dear, a day longer than you wants to.”

Lucy looked at him in astonishment.

“And you can marry me, too, if that pleases you. Leastways you’ve only yourself to blame if you don’t, Lucy my dear.”

“But you h’aint got no money!” she cried, point blank in her amazement.

“I will have some, and you, too, if you’ll do as I says.”

Lucy’s eyes sparkled. She had always had the bright, glittering dream of wealth before her eyes. She saw herself riding in a carriage, dressed in a silken gown such as my lady wore to Madam Madison’s reception, with ruffles of lace, and jewels. From this dream she was rudely, if unconsciously, awakened by Jim Hollis.

“We could take the inn at Tarrytown or set up shop at Myers’ Corner.”

“An inn? A shop?”

The wealth Jim spoke of was not that of which she had been



"Her slender figure, in a soft white gown, outlined against the window,"

dreaming. But still it would be comparative riches and perhaps a stepping-stone to higher things. She was fond of Jim, too. The swagger he had acquired in the army, his smooth tongue, and his speech, somewhat above that of the country louts in the vicinity, had won her heart. So she asked, after a moment's pause:

"But what am I to do to get this money?"

Jim was wily, and made up his mind that he would not tell her any more just then. Curiosity, he knew, was very potent with a woman.

"You just think over what I have been a-sayin'," he replied, "and meet me here to-morrow evenin' at the same hour. Then I'll tell you."

Lucy sulked and pouted, but it was no use, and knowing that she would be needed in the nursery she bade Jim good night, saying that she didn't know at all whether or no she would be at the well next evening.

"I may be here, or I mayn't," she called back, defiantly.

"Oh, yes you will, Lucy, my dear," said Jim to himself. "Oh, yes you will."

As the girl went upstairs to the nursery she had to pass Mrs. Pilkington's boudoir, a charming little room overlooking the garden. Lucy saw her mistress sitting there, her slender figure, in a soft white gown, outlined against the window, her arm resting on the table with its alabaster vase of fragrant flowers and her head bent as if in dejection.

Mrs. Pilkington looked up as Lucy passed.

"You were long," she observed.

"I just strolled out to take the air for a minute, ma'am," said the girl, with a touch of impertinence in her tone.

"It was a long minute. But there, there, it doesn't matter," Mrs. Pilkington said, languidly. "I put Master Wilfrid in his crib and rang for Mary Anne to sit with him. You can relieve her now."

"She soon tires of the nursery herself, does my fine madam," muttered Lucy, "for all her nonsense about the baby."

And she repeated this remark to Mary Anne, a fine and faithful Irish girl of the best type, who had come straight from Limerick to the Pilkington household two years before.

"Sure the mistress was tired," said Mary Anne, "and she's worrying about the master some way or another, and she never left the little one till he fell sound asleep in her arms."

Lucy tossed her head. Mary Anne and she hadn't an idea in common. She hated these Irish, anyway.

"He's a dear, good baby, too," said the warm-hearted Irish girl, "not the least trouble and as sweet-tempered as the mistress herself."

"Sweet-tempered when he's asleep," said Lucy, emphasizing the rudeness of her remark by a loud yawn, "and as for her, I'd like to know why she wouldn't be sweet-tempered, with folks waitin' on her and every wish gratified."

Mary Anne said nothing. Lucy continued. "You can go now, if you have a mind. I'll stay here like the slave I am."

For she wanted to be rid of "this stupid thing," as she mentally called her fellow-servant, and think over what Jim had said and try to guess what he meant by saying she could be rich if she wished.

Meanwhile Mrs. Pilkington's uneasiness and depression increased every moment. She arose and paced the room. She plucked half a dozen of the flowers from the vase to pieces with

nervous, aimless fingers. She listened at the window and looked out into the growing darkness, straining eyes and ears. There was no sound but the distant rumble of some belated wagon and the wind stirring in the elms outside. Above in the sky stars were peeping out shyly from the blue, and the tall poplars seemed stretching upward, upward, as if they would reach those worlds of light or that great, calm vault of azure.

"My husband! My husband!" cried Mary Pilkington, repeating the words again and again. "Oh, Harry, my Harry, God watch over you. Blessed Mother of God, helper of those in affliction, pray for me. Thy human heart knows the grief, the indescribable anguish of ours. And thou knowest these foolish fears and vain imaginings. Mary, Mary, ask thy Son to help me, to protect him."

Then she made an effort to throw off her fears as idle fancies that came with the darkness and would disappear with the morrow's sunshine. She tried to think of her pretty boy asleep upstairs in his crib, safe from all harm. But again she caught herself praying with strange intensity, as though the words were wrung from her by a power stronger than herself.

"Tender Jesus, spare me this trial. Spare me that precious life. I was too happy. I know, I feel it. Thou dost not give us unbroken happiness here below. But a few more years, only a few more years."

She sank upon her knees in an agony of supplication, hiding her face in her hands and rocking to and fro in the strange fervor of that prayer. And, if truth must be told, Mary Pilkington, since leaving the convent, had not prayed as much nor thought as much of the spiritual world beyond this as she might have done. The world was very fair, the land of youth was all smil-

ing, sorrow had not even touched her with the lightest of fingers. God would wait, He was so patient, for the turning to Him some time, somehow. She was not actually neglectful of any duty, and was even rigidly conscientious in many things, but this cry of the heart was the product of suffering, of that anticipated suffering which fine and delicate natures sometimes experience before the actual calamity.



CHAPTER III.

OUTSIDE THE ORCHARD FENCE.

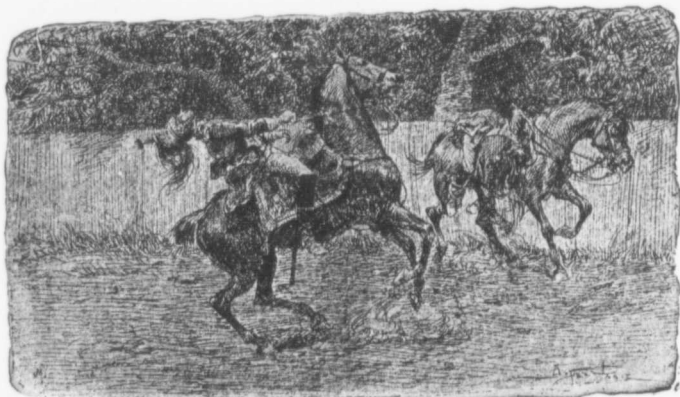
At that very hour, while Mrs. Pilkington prayed and wept, and struggled, as it were, against the blow that was impending, while Pilkington Manor lay sleeping, with all its vast estate silent, on a dark road not two miles away two horsemen were riding swiftly. They rode silently, too, with a stern determination about them as of men who go on a life and death enterprise. The trees waved over their heads, the katydid gave out its monotonous drone of affirmation and negation, the selfsame stars on which Mrs. Pilkington had looked, glowed and burned in the sky above. What their thoughts were no one could tell. Was it entirely of the enterprise on which they rode, or were deeper and stronger human feelings stirring in their hearts? Was Henry Pilkington, who rode first, followed by the orderly, recalling the wife and child he had so lately left, and carelessly speculating, as men do, as to when he should return home and what he would have to talk about, or what Mary would have to tell him?

They had reached a point in the road which was particularly dark. A fence shut in an orchard, where the branches met, making an impenetrable gloom. Henry Pilkington knew it well. He had often climbed these trees, as a lad, to reach the red-cheeked apples. Not that he cared about the fruit, for they had much finer growing on the estate. But it was a change and a

novelty, and once when the farmer had come out with a shotgun to pop at him, he had promptly discovered that it was Master Harry from the hall, and had saluted him and jested with him, and offered him a hatful of apples to take home, which Master Harry declined.

"I just wanted to steal one or two for the fun of it," Harry said. "Not really steal them, because I'd pay you after."

"Pay me! As if I'd take pay from a Pilkington! You can have as many as you like and welcome."



"Without a moment's warning came the report, first of one pistol and then of another."

This little episode is an apt illustration of a certain side of human nature. Had the farmer caught a poor lad at his apples, who scarce tasted one in a twelvemonth, he would have peppered him, or taken a switch to him. But the young gentleman from the Manor, surfeited with apples and other fruit, must needs have as many as he wants. And Mr. Pilkington, the father, said as much to the farmer.

"Don't show him any mercy, Farmer Griffith, if you catch him. What excuse has he for being in your apple-trees, with scores of them at home? Treat him worse than you would any ragamuffin by the roadside, who, poor devil, wants the fruit."

"La, sir, as if I'd lay a hand on Squire Pilkington's son," urged the farmer.

"As if that wouldn't be half the fun of it, farmer," said the father, "trying to elude you and escape the punishment."

But such reasoning never had any effect, and Harry lost his taste for the apples. Mr. Pilkington, the father, had been dead a half-score years, and neither he nor the farmer, nor the young culprit himself, could have guessed that a shot should be fired one day from among those trees, not from the gun of honest Griffith, but from a more deadly weapon. Not in the glow and glory of an autumnal morning, but in the silence and darkness of night. Without a moment's warning came the report, first of one pistol and then of another, and a moment later two horses were galloping riderless along the Kingsbridge Road.

Two prostrate figures were discovered near dawn by some men going to work in the fields. Among them was no other than Farmer Griffith, grown old now, but still adhering to the habits of his youth. Raising the bodies, one was found to have life in it, and Griffith, peering at it in the dim light, cried: "God a mercy, it's the young Squire!" and then with tears falling fast down his rugged cheeks he added:

"I mind when he used to come stealin' my apples out of this very orchard."

With the assistance of the others they raised him and carried him away from the scene of those boyish freaks into a neighboring field, laying him down with his head supported by the gun car-

riage, while one of Farmer Griffith's laborers hastened to bring Father Aubril to the spot.

"I mind how he used to steal my apples," wailed the farmer, "and oh, he was the fine lad, then."

Was it fancy, or did a smile of recognition pass over the face as the dying eyes opened an instant to rest upon the farmer's rugged features? And did, perchance, this favorite of fortune imagine himself again a boy, detected by the farmer in the branches of his trees?

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH FATHER AUBRIL GOES ON A PAINFUL MISSION AND ENCOUNTERS MOLLY DEEGAN, THE PEDLER.

FATHER AUBRIL did not lose much time in setting out for the Pilkington homestead. It was one of the most painful missions of his life. He walked slowly at first, leaning painfully on his stick. He was vaguely aware of a salute from Molly Deegan, who had once been a canteen-woman to one of the English regiments, and who still wore a species of semi-military costume, having a curious pride in her former profession. She had turned pedler now, and was just harnessing up her cart with the aid of old Peter, the ex-hostler of the Merry Dogs' Inn, when the priest approached.

He returned her salute absently. He was musing on the instability of human happiness, a theme which has been brought home sooner or later to every child of Adam. He could not help recalling husband and wife as he had last seen them together, full of joyous youth, living in the present altogether, the husband's jest and merriment bringing responsive laughter into the face of the wife.

"Do you know, Father," Captain Pilkington had said, "I think I shall have to get you to marry us over again. This little woman here dropped her wedding-ring and it rolled under a chair, so that she was without it for a whole hour. She is quite

sure the marriage ceremony was invalidated and that misfortune will ensue."

"How can you talk such nonsense?" the wife had laughed. "Father Aubril, you will really have to give him a lecture. He is not half dignified enough to be Wilfrid's papa. Wilfrid, who will be growing big and strong one of these days."

"To be a crutch for my old age," cried Harry.

And the priest remembered how it had occurred to him that it was impossible to associate the idea of old age with that face and figure. Perhaps the wife thought the same, so fond and proud was the glance she had bestowed upon her husband. The old priest shuddered as he thought of the look that would come into the face of the young wife when she heard the ghastly news he had to tell.

Father Aubril had a very tender human heart, and he never grew accustomed to the sorrows of others. He was familiar with them, as one of his calling must be who was nearing his three score and ten. He looked beyond and saw clearly with the eyes of faith, as the priest and the Catholic must do, the ultimate reason of all human misery. But he still pitied the sufferer who was undergoing the process of purification and being fitted for that higher life.

He was, therefore, but vaguely conscious of the people he met or the things he saw upon his way. Ox-carts heavily laden, laborers with farming implements upon their shoulders, children, barefooted and bareheaded, carrying baskets of apples or pails of red plums plucked from the laden trees. Some cows, with shining backs of brown, coming lazily along, began to trot as they saw him, and to make way for him, clumsily, in a very panic of terror. A rustic pair, whom he had but lately wedded, came

toward him arm in arm, the swain grinning sheepishly, and the young woman dropping him a bashful curtesy.

All life was going on his way; people were marrying and being given in marriage, children were playing, farm workers were making hay, men everywhere were waking up to the several occupations that engross them during the petty day of existence, while at the cottage which he had just left a pulseless form was lying, done with this human life forever. And up there in that house was a woman to whom he was about to deal a death blow. His heart sank as he thought of the tears that would dim those brown eyes, which but yesterday held the laughter of a child in their depths. He turned nervously from side to side, as if he were seeking some loophole of escape from this direful duty, this mission of charity. But there was none, as he knew well, and he set himself to praying earnestly.

"God is very merciful," he kept repeating. "He sends the trial, but He gives grace to meet it, the grace of the hour. Alas, my poor Madam Pilkington, so lately the envy of every one!"

Just then he heard the rattle of a cart and the canteen woman drew up beside the road.

"Father Aubril," she called out, in her rough, hearty voice, "is Your Reverence going my way? Can I give you a lift?"

The priest took off his hat with the courtesy of his race.

"No, my good Molly," he said, "a thousand thanks, but my journey ends with this garden wall."

"You are going, then, to Pilkington Manor?" she inquired.

"I am," said the priest.

"And a real lady is Madam Pilkington. No nonsense. No despising of the poor, nor giving herself airs, though we all know what a grand old stock she's of. And the master, too! He

ought to be a prince, he's that handsome and kind and generous, with the laugh of a boy out of him, and the spirit of a gentleman in every inch of him. God bless him and her every day they rise."

"Molly," said the priest, "I see you don't know, and you will be sorry from your heart to hear on what errand I am going."

"Good lands, Father, don't tell me that there's anything amiss with Captain Pilkington!" cried the woman, in a tone of such genuine grief and alarm that the priest found it difficult to master his own emotion as he replied:



"She was just harnessing up, with the aid of old Peter, when the priest approached."

"He was shot through the right lung last night in the darkness by some unknown person. May the Lord be merciful to his soul."

The woman at this news dropped the reins and fairly sobbed aloud.

"And she up there!" she wailed. "Oh, the pity of it! Oh, the Lord help her, up there!"

She could say no more for some minutes, then she asked:

"Does she know?"

"I go, alas! to tell her. I go with a most heavy heart," said the priest, sorrowfully.

"And look a-here, Father," said the woman, "not that you need go and mention anything like that to her now, for there's only one thing this day she'll listen to, poor lamb, and that's *his* name. But keep this in mind and let her know it some day. If she ever has need of me, I'll be ready. I'm rough and ignorant, I'm poor and she's rich. But the world's full of sharks, Father, and she's young, God help her, and—"

Here the poor woman's emotion got the better of her. She whipped up her horse abruptly and drove off, only shouting back the one word:

"Remember."

The priest, much touched, sped on, arriving presently at the dwelling. Entering, he sent up his name to Mrs. Pilkington. She came down at once, charming as ever, in a summer gown of blue, with a broad cottage bonnet shading her face.

"We shall sit in the garden, Father—unless you prefer to go indoors. It is so seldom I see you."

"My duties take up much of my time," said Father Aubril, glancing at her as she took a seat on one of the rustic benches under an oak. He fancied that he already saw the first shadow he had ever perceived upon that fair face. And yet her troubles had fallen from her as a mantle, and in the morning light she was ready to laugh at her fears of the night before. If aught had happened, why she would have heard it, and though Father Aubril's visit was unusually early she did not by any means connect it with her forebodings of the previous evening.

"Mrs. Pilkington," said the priest, "this is a scene for happiness, is it not?"

"Yes," she assented, lightly, "it is charming. There is nothing wanting to it, Father, except, of course, the presence of those who give it value. For after all, don't you think that human sympathy and companionship are needed to complete the fairest scenes?"

She spoke rapidly, uneasily, as though she were striving to ward off a blow. The grave and sorrowful aspect of the priest had already struck her.

"I think that divine sympathy is needed most of all, and that always, everywhere," said Father Aubril, slowly.

"Oh, most true," Mrs. Pilkington agreed, still more nervously, "that, of course, is the higher view. But for me, Father, I need, oh, I must have, human sympathy."

Her tone was piteous. It went to the old priest's heart.

"My daughter," he began, very gently, "we shall all be called upon, sooner or later, to break the dearest of human ties."

"Oh, yes, dear Father, at our death—when, perhaps, we shall be very old."

Her face had grown ghastly and the expression of the eyes, full of a wild appeal, an eager supplication, caused Father Aubril to turn his away.

"Sometimes," he said, "the moment comes when we are young, when the journey has been only started."

"Father!"

"Then," said the priest, "it is martyrdom—the immolation of what is dearer than self."

She covered her face with her hands.

"My daughter, my poor, poor child. God is asking that sublime sacrifice of you. He has given you happiness. He wants you to give it back to Him and to rise to the heights."

"Tell me," the wife said in a hushed whisper. "I will try to bear it. I knew, yes, I knew last night. He is dead."

The tone in which she pronounced these words Father Aubril felt he should never forget.

"Yes, my child, dead as a soldier and a Christian, with absolution and Extreme Unction, and with words of resignation on his lips."

The priest stopped an instant. It was too painful. His poor old heart felt as if it must break. But that sacred duty, which in the exercise of his ministry he had so often performed, must be performed to the end now. "He sent you his dear love, the love which had been always your own, and he bade you look forward to meeting him again, somewhere that is far more beautiful than this."

"Somewhere?—but never here! Never the sweet life we have known together!"

The words broke like an agonized cry from her heart, then she sat still, her hands folded one above the other in the mute helplessness of a supreme grief. The priest did not break in upon her silence. He sat and waited patiently, suffering himself in her agony, which seemed to be mocked by the beauty and brightness of everything about them. At last he thought it better to break the strained silence, the tearless, awful agony, that was so oppressive.

"My child," he said.

She looked at him, another bitter cry breaking from her lips.

"Oh, Harry, Harry, if I could have seen you again but for one moment. Oh, my love, my love!"

"Try to repeat after me, God's holy will be done," said the priest, "even if it be mechanical, say the words. Make the sac-

rifice, it will be a great step nearer him, and you can offer it for his soul's welfare."

"Nearer him? For his soul? Yes, I will make the sacrifice," she cried. "Let me kneel, Father, to give him back to God."

She knelt with bowed head, Father Aubril bending his in unison. The song of the birds above seemed almost cruel, the beauty of the summer landscape untouched yet by autumn. Mary Pilkington arose with a strange energy that almost startled the priest. He had known how to give it the right impetus and he knew well that with such a grief as this, to bring it into touch with the Divinity was all that remained.

"Everything in my life will now be done to bring me nearer to him," she said, firmly.

"Your life will be for your child," said the priest, "his child."

The hard, stony expression, which had transformed her face, changed and softened.

"You are right, Father, for our child. I am going now to my baby."

She held out her hand and the priest took and pressed it with a sympathy which he could not speak.

"Courage—patience," he said.

"Yes," she said, "Father, courage—patience."

And she turned and sped away over the lawn, a pathetic figure in that bright blue gown, which she was never to wear more. The old priest breathed freely. One of the most trying moments of his life had just come to an end.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH FATHER AUBRIL HAS A STRANGE ENCOUNTER.

THE priest sat still for some moments after Mrs. Pilkington had left him, his hands clasped on his stick, while he looked out over the landscape. Green meadows stretching below, far as eye could reach, trees touched by the hand of autumn to the intensifying of their beauty, as sorrow touches a life and crowns it; skies, with that peculiar brightness and softness in them which distinguishes September, a breeze which had in it the breath of the hives and of innumerable orchards. All was peace, all was brightness, everywhere the evidence of prosperity, of wealth, of luxury.

Yet the priest could only think of that tragedy which had so lately confronted him, and of the blasting of those two lives. Not the meanest cottager on the estate, blessed with the presence of those she loved, could have envied Madam Pilkington then. The ache in her heart, the blankness that shut out all life from her, the clutching at faint shreds of consolation, Father Aubril could comprehend it all, even to the first natural turning away from what was spiritual.

He arose at last, the old priest weighed down with the burdens of others' sins and sorrows and cares. He went toward the house, desiring to have information of Mrs. Pilkington before he returned to his cottage. He passed inside, recalling at every

step some word or look or gesture of its late master, and meeting only silence. He had not told her yet, and by a strange omission she had never asked where the body lay. No doubt she had supposed it to be at a distance. He wanted to suggest that it had better be brought home without delay, and if he could not see Mrs. Pilkington herself, he would have a talk with Mrs. Brown, the housekeeper, and Wills, the butler. They had been long in service and would know with whom it was best to communicate.

There was a strange stillness in the broad entrance-hall. A latticed window stood open up above, letting in a flood of sunshine, and the soft air that gently moved the palms and other plants which stood about in great pots, while the carved and polished stairs seemed to reflect the sunlight. There was a picture or two, of exceeding value the priest had heard, and a tall vase of costly china occupied a niche and was filled with scarlet gladioli.

All at once, as Father Aubril had reached the foot of this stairway, he heard a foot descending it, above the turn. He paused and waited. It was a heavy tread and startling. The priest knew the butler would not use this staircase, and there was no other man about the place. Presently he saw a tall dark form, appearing as a blur on that fair scene. The stranger had a sinister look, despite his elaborate toilet, and he stood still and surveyed the quaint figure in the cassock an instant. Then he descended hurriedly, with a careless bow, seeming as if he were about to pass out the door. Father Aubril went on up the stairs, determined if he met no one on the landing above to ring for the footman. He reached the passage, and, changing his mind, thought he would proceed at once to the housekeeper's room and get her advice.

He was just about to knock at her door when hurrying footsteps reached him, and he was confronted by the same tall stranger he had encountered below.

"On second thought, Reverend Sir," said this man, "I would like to put you a question."

"I am at your service, sir," said the priest, bowing coldly. He liked neither the man nor the tone he chose to assume.

"Can you tell me anything concerning the indisposition of Mrs. Pilkington," he asked, bluntly. "She was found lying in a faint near the front entrance. The butler reports that he last saw her in conversation with Your Reverence."

The priest regarded the man with a scrutiny so keen and piercing that it served momentarily to disconcert him.

"I would ask," he said, in a more courteous tone, "what news you have brought which has so upset her?"

"I brought, sir," said the priest, gravely, "the news of her husband's death."

To Father Aubril's astonishment the stranger seized his arm with so rude and violent a grasp that, involuntarily, he drew back a pace or two.

"Tell me that again!" shouted the stranger. "Harry Pilkington dead! When, where? Is it a certainty? No, it can't be true!"

Again the priest looked sternly into the face of this strange visitor to that household of mourning, the while he shook himself loose from his grasp, and again the man's eyes fell abashed before that piercing gaze, which had read many a dark history.

"I am in the habit, sir, of speaking only the truth, in so far as I know it," said Father Aubril, very coldly.

"But that is just it," said the other, with sudden good humor,

speaking almost jovially, "you might be mistaken. I might be mistaken. What you believe to be fact may be but idle rumor."

"It is no rumor nor am I mistaken," said Father Aubril. "But I take the freedom of asking why the death of Captain Pilkington should be a subject to you of so great interest, I was about to say of joy."

"Joy? Why, you are wrong! Pilkington was my cousin, the same name and all. People used to call me 'the other Pilkington.'



"Tell me that again! Harry Pilkington dead! When, where?"

Not a very distinguished appellation, was it? But there's only one Pilkington now."

A dark look had come into his face as he spoke, but it had cleared with the last words.

"Your Reverence has a strong imagination, I should say. Joy! Who would be joyful for the death of this most popular gentleman whom every one loved?"

The irony under these words struck Father Aubril painfully.

"Your language, sir," he said, "is very strange, very unusual."

"Not at all, Reverend Sir, not at all," replied the other, still with that suspicion of mockery under the gravity of his tone. "You will hear it from the whole country. They all unite in a chorus of praise. It will reach the very skies, now that death has snatched him from us."

Father Aubril was silent.

"And as for her, for the beautiful Mary, your news has all but killed her, too."

A strange look came into his face. Something of hate, something of triumph, a close observer might have said, as he muttered, bitterly:

"Yes, he is dead, Mary Pilkington, and no power will ever bring him back to life; while I am alive and—in excellent health, though profoundly afflicted," he concluded, catching the priest's eye. His tone changed, however, as he read something of honest indignation in Father Aubril's countenance.

"And what do you mean to insinuate," he cried, in a bullying voice. "Do you think I will be browbeaten because you see fit to wear a gown?"

"Sir," said Father Aubril, "I have made no insinuations, nor do I seek to browbeat any one. But I will tell you that I was the friend of Captain Pilkington, who is dead, and of his wife, who is living, and it is my right to know something of those who enter this house."

"Well, know then," said the stranger, returning to his sneering voice and manner, and making the priest a bow, "that I am Arthur Morehead Pilkington, at your service, cousin of the deceased, and that I but called this morning to offer my compli-

ments to the mistress of the house, quite unaware of any unusual occurrence."

Having said this he walked away, leaving Father Aubril standing still, full of a vague uneasiness, while Mrs. Brown, having heard voices, suddenly opened her door and came forth. She hastened to tell the priest of her mistress' sudden indisposition, while he threw her into a panic by his news of the master's death.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH FATHER AUBRIL'S SUSPICIONS ARE AROUSED.

As Father Aubril passed through the corridor his name was suddenly called in a tone of agitation. He turned hastily. It was Mary Anne, who was calling after him, her eyes red with weeping.

"O Your Reverence, Father Aubril, come quickly. I'm afeard the mistress is dying."

Father Aubril turned and followed the girl without a word. When he arrived at the door of Mrs. Pilkington's bedroom he stood a moment to gaze at the face, marble face, resting upon the pillows. The eyes were closed and the features had almost the rigidity of death. Father Aubril approached the bed.

"My daughter!" he said, repeating the words two or three times, as though he would summon the spirit back from the threshold of the other world. But the closed eyes did not reopen, the lines did not relax.

"It were an easy end to her troubles, poor heart," said the priest, raising his hand to give conditional absolution. "She may never recover consciousness."

Then he turned to Mary Anne, who stood weeping quietly beside him.

"Can you send a messenger for me, my good girl?"

"Yes, Father," answered she.

"I will write a line, which can be given to my man at the cottage. I want my case containing the holy oils, lest they should be required."

"O Father, for the love of God don't say that the mistress is going to die, too."

"I say nothing, my child. She has had a fearful shock, and she is not too robust. So that she may recover her senses and rally, or she may fade away, as it were, in her sleep. It is well to be prepared for the worst. I will stay here as long as possible, to be at hand in case of need."



"The priest prayed from the depths of his heart."

He wrote a few hasty lines in pencil on a leaf torn from his memorandum book, and while the faithful Mary Anne hurried off to dispatch the messenger, the priest sank upon a prie-dieu and prayed from the depths of his heart.

He asked God if it were His holy will to preserve this life for the sake of the child, or if in mercy He deigned to shorten the pilgrimage, to grant to this soul all the death-bed graces. How long he prayed he knew not, for the saintly old man became absorbed in contemplation. At last he was aroused by a faint

movement. He turned and saw that Mrs. Pilkington had opened her heavy eyes. They rested with scarce a gleam of consciousness on the face of the priest as he drew near. The pale lips parted and he heard the words:

“My baby! I want my baby!”

“He shall be brought to you,” said the priest, “but first I shall order some restorative.” He stepped into the ante-chamber, and ringing, gave an order that Mrs. Brown should send up some wine and other nourishment.

Then he asked her how she felt, and if there was anything troubling her conscience, in case God should will to call her to Himself.

“I fear He will not, Father,” she said, faintly. “I feel that I must live for my child. But I shall prepare myself and make my confession shortly. First, I would like to see my Wilfrid.”

“And so you shall when you have had some nourishment, and then you shall think of your confession, if you feel able.” The priest left her and paced up and down the ante-room, reading his breviary. He saw that rest and quiet were what she most needed, and he would not let her excite herself by talking of painful things.

A bird was twittering without on one of the elm trees, the hum of drowsy insects was plainly perceptible, and all those subdued noises which seem to blend with the stillness of a summer's day in the country, while within upon the bed lay that half-conscious life, careless of all sounds, hovering on the threshold of death. Father Aubril glanced in now and again. It seemed to him that the face grew paler each time, while the eyes remained half open and the lips parted. The priest thought, in his impatience, that Mrs. Brown was an unpardonable time in sending



"She was in the very act of draining a glass which she had taken from the tray."

up the restorative, and he determined to tell her that she must remain with her mistress or leave a competent person in charge.

He closed his breviary and resolved to go himself to Mrs. Brown and explain to her the gravity of the situation. He passed hastily through the door of the ante-chamber, and as he did so he was the witness of a little scene which left a distinctly unfavorable impression upon his mind. There was a great window in that corridor which let in a flood of sunlight, and in the very center of its radiance stood an old negress, long in the service of the Pilkingtons, as Father Aubril knew well. She held a tray, upon which were arranged the refreshments which he had ordered. But beside her was a girl in a neat print dress and trim cap and apron.

Father Aubril at once recognized her as the girl he had so often seen with the baby in her arms. It was the nurse, Lucy, and to the priest's astonishment she was in the very act of draining a glass which she had taken from the tray, and he caught the words which she had spoken as she raised it to her lips.

"You go on down again, Diana, and tell old Brown to fill the glass. Say she drank it, or the priest, or any one."

"Fore God, Lucy, you oughter be ashamed to drink the wine Mrs. Brown sent up for Missis," protested the old negress.

Here Lucy caught sight of the priest's stern face and very nearly dropped the glass.

"I—I was takin' a drink of milk," she said, curtsying and trembling.

Father Aubril's glance continued to search her face, but he said not a single word to her. He addressed the negress instead.

"Make all the haste you can in getting that wine for Mrs.

Pilkington. She is all but fainting and I was on my way to Mrs. Brown's room to find out the cause of so much delay."

The negress was frightened, too, and hurried off.

"Yes, sah," she said, "I'll be quick, sah!"

She was a Methodist, and had a vague idea that this "Cat'lic" priest might in his anger cast some sort of spell over her. The priest watched her trotting away as fast as her old feet could carry her, and could scarce repress a smile, so quaint a figure was she. Lucy fled, too, in all haste, never daring so much as to glance at Father Aubril. He, left alone, stood near the window and reflected. This incident, slight as it was, filled the mind of the priest with mistrust of the girl Lucy. He reflected that she was by no means the sort of person to intrust with the care of a young baby. He thought of the Irish girl whom he had seen that morning. Honesty was written in every line of her broad, open face.

"I wish it had been she who had the care of the child," he reflected, with a sigh. "She is of the Irish, the faithful Irish, and she loves her mistress, as is very plainly seen."

Still he did not feel called upon to interfere, nor would he mention to Mrs. Brown the scene he had just witnessed. There was trouble enough in the house and he did not wish, moreover, to deprive this girl of her place without graver reason. Perhaps he thought the fright she had got, in seeing him, might be punishment sufficient for the offense.

Mrs. Brown came hurrying herself this time with refreshment for her mistress, and apologizing to the priest for not having been up before by the fact that she and the butler had been talking over the arrangements for the sad event of that afternoon,—the arrival of the body, and the still sadder one to come,

the funeral of the deceased. Father Aubril having notified the commanding officer of Captain Pilkington's regiment, all details were left in their hands.

"What a pity, sir," cried Mrs. Brown, "that Mr. Graystone is away off there in France."

"It is indeed a pity," said Father Aubril. "His presence would have been such a comfort to poor Mrs. Pilkington."

"Aye, that it would, for he is the best of uncles," cried Mrs. Brown.

"The other relatives must be notified, however," said the priest.

"Wills has done that, sir, already," said Mrs. Brown. "We have had a busy morning, sir, him and me."

"Well, now, when you have given the wine to your mistress, she would like to have Master Wilfrid brought to her."

"Poor lamb! poor lamb!" sobbed Mrs. Brown.

And, indeed, it was a touching sight when the unconscious infant, laughing and playing in its buoyant health and spirits, was placed in those poor, frail arms, which had seemed at one blow deprived of all their strength. The wan face of the mother brightened faintly and she gazed with a long, wistful look into the big eyes of the child. She said no word, no lament escaped her lips, but the deepest pathos lay in this uncomplaining acceptance of a sorrow beyond speech and in the effort to concentrate her thoughts upon this only object of her love. The priest, seeing her so much stronger, went away, saying he would come that evening.

"To hear my confession?" she inquired, in her weak, languid voice. "Yes, it will be better. But I am not going to die—not for a long, long time."

After this the eyes closed again, and leaving the child beside her, Mrs. Brown darkened the room, drew the bed curtains, and sat down herself to watch beside the patient.



CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH LUCY GIVES JIM A PROMISE AND A CHILD IS FOUND
IN A CRÊCHE.

LUCY, terrified at having been detected by Father Aubril in such an act, flew up to her own room to think it over. Her reflections were far from pleasant.

"The priest will never rest now till he gets me out of here," she said. "He knows, I suppose, that I never go to Mass, and he's down on me for that. Perhaps he's told Mrs. Brown already, and the spiteful old thing will be for putting me out with no notice. It's a good place, too, and I suppose the Missis is better than some fine ladies. I used to hate her for bein' too lucky. She's not in luck just now, though. For the Captain was took off awful sudden and she was fond of him, I will say, and he just the same of her."

She roused herself presently, and went to the glass to gaze at herself, which was a favorite occupation of hers.

"Not that I'd mind bein' a young and pretty widow myself," she said, trying to imagine the effect of widow's weeds on her pink and white complexion. She knew that Jim Hollis would soon be waiting for her near the well, and she added a bright ribbon to her costume and practised before the mirror what she thought was a very bewitching smile.

Jim was considerably more communicative that night. Indeed, he seemed excited, as if by a sudden stroke of luck.

"Lucy," he said, in a whisper husky from emotion, "don't you want to be rich, girl? Don't you want to be like other folks? The way's clear, my dear, only do as I ask you."

Lucy was somewhat frightened at his manner, but he drew closer and whispered more eagerly still:

"It's another game we're playin' now, since the last time I seen you. The stakes is changed. They're higher. 'Cause why?



"She carried it to where some of the Sisters were pacing up and down at recreation."

'Cause the Captain's out of the way, and we're playin' now for the whole estate, not for any reward for bringing back the child or the like of that. We're playin' for hush money, my lass, that'll be paid us regular."

Lucy looked at him to see if he had been drinking. There was a touch of horror in the glance she gave him as she shrank back.

"What's that you say about the Captain?" she said.

"No, I hadn't no hand in *that*," Jim cried. "I guess it was just the fortune of war. But if you could hook the brat and get him out of the way you'd never have to work no more, Lucy, my dear."

"I'll do no such thing," cried Lucy, indignantly. "What do you take me for?"

She had been really shocked in so far as her light nature permitted by the tragic death of Captain Pilkington and the prostration of his wife. It seemed to bring home to her, too, the fact that none need be envied here on earth, for the blow may be impending over their heads when they seem at the zenith of fame, of happiness, or prosperity.

"Take the child away!" she cried, as Jim stood silent. "Why, you might just as well kill her outright, so you might, Jim Hollis."

Jim concealed a sneer by putting his hand to his face.

"I always knew as you was tender-hearted, Lucy, and it does you credit. But after all, you may be only standin' in the lady's light. After a time she might have the chance to marry a handsome gentleman that had this estate or some other. Now the child, it would be only in the way and she better off without it."

"How can you speak of her marryin' again, and the poor Captain not even buried," said Lucy, with a corner of her apron to her eyes. She felt bound to live up to the character her lover had given her and to show that she was tender-hearted. "Indeed, it isn't marryin' that's in her mind. She thinks of nothin' but the child, as Mrs. Brown was a-tellin' us at supper this very evening. And she never will think of nothin' else. I wouldn't be the one to take it from her; no, not if you was to kill me, Jim Hollis."

"Well, we'll say no more about it, Lucy, my lass," said Jim, in his most persuasive tone. "It was all to please you that I fell in with the plan. I had a notion you wanted to be rich—and that you and I might get married." He heaved a deep sigh.

"It puts that off indefinite," he said. "I can't marry as things is. It's hard, but there's nothing to be done but go away from here and try my luck elsewhere."

He watched the girl narrowly as he spoke, with eyes close together. He saw that his words had made an impression.

"Good-by!" he said, holding out his hand. "I guess you're right and I'm all wrong. But it's no use in my comin' here again, only jest to harrow up my feelin's."

Lucy did not give him her hand, but turned away her head instead to reflect.

"Good-by, my lass," he repeated.

"It wouldn't be no use anyway," she said. "What could you and me do with the child?"

A sinister smile passed over the man's face, unobserved by the hesitating Lucy. The smile had a twofold meaning. He smiled because he saw the girl was yielding, and also because the difficulty she made was a small one. He stood still and watched her.

"We'd only be caught and given to the police," went on Lucy, "and I'd get the worst of it. Besides, who's to give us the money for the job?"

Hollis was still silent. Lucy turned upon him and stamped her foot.

"Why don't you speak? Why do you stand staring there?"

"Listen, my girl," said Hollis, "we'd better throw up this job. I see your heart's not in it and maybe you'd no mind to

marry me anyway. So things is best as they be, and I'm blame glad that you are satisfied with your lot, as the parsons bid us to be. Let it be good-by once and for all, Lucy." He turned with a rapid stride, pretending to be overcome with emotion. When he got two or three yards away he stopped:

"I might as well tell you," he said, "that the child would ha' been provided for beautiful. I don't want you to go and think ill of me. There's a gentleman who might be crossin' to France about the same time that a decent widow woman would be goin', and he'd have no objection in life to seein' that the woman acted fair, and that the child was given to the kind nuns when the ship arrived. And as for the gentleman, why, he wouldn't mind one bit providin' for you and me to the end of our days, or, if the worst came to the worst, and it leaked out as how he'd been on the same outgoin' vessel as the child, why he'd have to buy you and me off, Lucy, my dear. I thought I'd put all that straight in your mind before I bid you good-by, my lass, hopin' as how you'll find another sweetheart and advisin' you to say nothin' up yonder of what you've heard."

Lucy did not guess it, but the fellow was very sure of her indeed when he revealed so much. As he began to walk rapidly away Lucy called after him:

"Jim! Jim!"

And when he did not answer she put her handkerchief to her eyes, and began to cry real tears at last.

"O Jim," she sobbed, "don't leave me like that. I can't bear it."

"It's got to be done," said Jim, obdurately. "I ain't got the means to marry, and I couldn't ask you to starve, could I now, my girl?"

"Jim," said Lucy, in a very low voice, "I've been thinking over what you said. The Missis up yonder is so low that the priest tells Mrs. Brown he fears she's goin' to die. Now if she's that low, it'll be a relief to all concerned to have the baby disposed of, and as you say it'll be well cared for, why maybe it's for the best. So give me till to-morrow night to think it over, and then, I'll give my answer."

"Lucy," said Jim, "I'm out of it. I won't think of it no more."

"For my sake, Jim," she pleaded. "Think how nice and cozy 'The Sun' would be and how much more money we might make there."

"Don't tempt me, Lucy."

"But I thought you wanted to be rich and to marry me," said Lucy, fairly sobbing.

"Oh, hang it all!" said Jim, "I can't bear tears. If you really wants to try your luck, I won't stand in your way, and I'll help you as much as I can."

"You're sure no harm will come to the child?" asked Lucy, with a last twinge of conscience.

"Sure as that I see your face."

"And some time when we'd got the money and all was safe, we might let the mother have the baby back," went on Lucy.

"To be sure!" said Jim, turning away his head to wink at some imaginary fellow conspirator. "Only I thought she was going to die."

He could not resist throwing this mischievous dart at the girl, who reddened as she hastily replied:

"Oh, well, I mean if she should live, of course."

"And you'll really hook the brat?" asked Jim.

"To-morrow night," said Lucy. "The funeral will be just over then, and she'll be more than ever broke up with grief, and I'm certain to have the child in the nursery all to myself."

"And to-morrow night will answer us first rate," said Jim Hollis. "There's a ship that sails with the first tide in the morning, and a gentleman what has remained over for the funeral and sets out next day for the coast of France."

"To-morrow night, then, I give him to you here," said Lucy, her face hardening into a look of determination, as she thought that she might be getting notice to leave in any case on account of the occurrence of that morning.

She waved her hand and nodded to Jim as she tripped away, reflecting that she could wind Jim Hollis round her little finger, while he stood looking after her musing.

"Women is soft critters," he said to himself. "Easy to catch, particularly when your bait's money."

For Jim judged womankind and mankind, too, by his own standard.

And so it came about, through those meetings at the well of a vain and shallow girl with an unscrupulous man, that the funeral of Captain Pilkington was coincident with a second and in some respects a heavier blow dealt to the fair young mistress of the Manor, who had lately been the envied of all observers. And so it chanced that as the shadows were falling over a great French city, a stirring commercial mart, the bell of the crèche at the Foundling Hospital was heard to ring violently. The Sister Portress who opened the door lifted the child from the crib, surprised at its weight and general appearance. She carried it to where some of the Sisters were pacing up and down at recreation. They gathered about to look at the baby.

"My, but he is beautiful," they said. "A boy, with a face of intelligence—and at least six months old!"

"Strange, is it not?" cried one who had not before spoken. "We are usually left new-born babes."

"Yes," said an older Sister, "it is very singular that he should be brought here at an age so advanced."

"Perhaps," ventured the youngest and most timid, who had but recently made her vows, "there is something wrong, something dishonest in the affair."

"Alas!" said the elder, "Crime is so common, ambition, dishonesty, fraud, what you will. My Sisters, we should keep near to God. And there is the *Angelus*, the voice of peace."

They knelt to say the prayer, after which the baby was hurried away to the vacant cot which awaited it, after the usual formalities had been complied with. But the Sisters continued their walk, being joined by others in groups of two or three. The solemnity of late autumn was in the air, a sadness which comes in the fall of the year. But to these quiet souls of peace, who recked little of the seasons and their changes, there was a sort of perpetual spring. So that they laughed gaily, and conversed of all that had reached their ears during the day, the simple happenings of convent-life or the deeper events which had touched it from without. The newly arrived baby, with the unusual circumstances of its being, at least, a half year old, excited fresh comment as it was passed from mouth to mouth, and the Sisters wondered who had brought it. For the Sister Portress had got no glimpse of the tall man, who, having laid the infant in the crèche, had slunk hastily away lest the light of the lamp should betray him.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH SISTER MARGARET HAS A THEORY.

NEXT morning the Superior of the convent sat with her great registry book before her, receiving the report of the Sisters, and that concerning the latest arrival was very seriously considered. The age of the child, his development, his health, were all taken into account and entered in the record, which was carefully kept, so that in after years there would be little difficulty in identifying any child.

"You are, then, inclined to think, Sister Margaret," observed the Superior, "that this child is not of French parentage?"

"That is what has occurred to me," said Sister Margaret, a stout and middle-aged Religious, who stood very high in the councils of the Order for merit as well as for experience.

"Upon what do you base your theory?" inquired the Superior.

"Upon the color of his eyes, his complexion—everything about him," declared Sister Margaret.

"Would you suppose him to be Irish or Scotch?" asked the Superior.

Sister Margaret shook her head as she replied:

"Of neither, I should say."

"English, then, perhaps?"

Sister Margaret hesitated.

"It may be," she remarked, "but in truth I have got it into my head that this infant may be an American."

"An American!" cried the Superior, in astonishment, "and why?"

"From various indications, Reverend Mother, and you know I have lived among those people before entering religion and have seen something of them since."

"That is true, Sister, but I should like much to have some definite basis for this theory of yours."

"And that is what I can not give you, Mother," said the good-humored Sister, "but should my theory be correct we may hold the key to a mystery."

"It might be the child of American parents residing here," objected the Superior.

"True—but would it not, then, have been sent to the Hospital sooner? The age of the child appears to me to support my theory," said Sister Margaret.

"And yet it remains a theory, dear Sister," smiled the Superior. "But you say that there were no signs of identification upon the child?"

"Absolutely none. It appeared to me that they had been deliberately removed."

"Strange!" murmured the Superior, "and yet we see so much that is strange. You will cut off a lock of the hair, keep a fragment of each of its garments, and note even the smallest circumstances connected with it."

"I have already done so, Mother."

"In that case I will make the official entry here; nothing remains but to await the event."

When Mother Immanuel was left alone she sat deep in thought

for some moments. She was a woman of great penetration, of rare discernment. "In this case it may possibly not be the parents at all," she reflected. "The child may have been stolen. Yet I can do nothing. I can neither advertise nor make the matter public. But I will inquire discreetly, and first of all I shall speak to Father Christian when he comes to-day for the baptisms."

After that she had to dismiss the matter from her mind, as many cares and duties came crowding upon her. For she visited that great establishment from garret to cellar every day, suggesting improvements here, commending what had been done there, and, in general, finding as little fault as possible. She loved to see the little ones safe and snug in their cots as she passed through the several wards, or the older children in the infant class or at play out in the grassy yard. She was as a mother to all these helpless ones thrown upon her care, and she had to keep order as well, which was a more difficult matter, among the bevvies of nurses, who in each ward were under control and supervision of a Sister. Then there were the kitchens and the larders to be visited, and the accounts to be overlooked and the resources to be considered.

As she passed through those wards or classes in which were the older children, there were always half a dozen or more clinging to her skirts and trying to lisp her name. She always said that one of her greatest trials was when she had to send these little ones away to distant homes and to parents who adopted them.

That afternoon, after the entry had been made in the great book concerning the newcomer, Father Christian, the chaplain, came to baptize as many of the little waifs as seemed destined



"Father Christian came to baptize the little waifs."

for heaven, as well as those who were known to be of Catholic parentage. There were twelve in all, and the tapers in the great chandeliers cast a luster upon each Sister as she advanced in turn with her little charge to the holy font, seeming a very personification of its good angel. Names were selected, needless to say from the calendar of the Church or from among the choirs of angels, and the twelve new Christians who had come into possession of their kingdom showed their appreciation of that fact by a most unearthly yelling and a simultaneous kicking and struggling. So that the nuns laughed and said that all the dozen would be sure to survive after all, having cried at the pitch of their lungs when the devil was being driven out.

But as Father Christian took off his stole in the sacristy, the Superior came to him, bringing the newcomer, who had been called for convenience Pierre. She told the priest what they knew of its coming and asked what he thought of baptizing it.

"It is in no immediate danger of dying," he said, with a smile, "but if you hear nothing farther about it, I may give it conditional baptism when I come again."

"Of course," he added, glancing a second time at the child, "if it is of Catholic parents, be assured that it had long since had the holy water poured upon its head."

The Superior told him of Sister Margaret's theory that the child was an American.

"Truly!" cried the priest, interested at once—for had he not a brother in America who was a priest, Father James Aubril, from whom he heard just as often as it was possible?

"I will write to Father James and tell him of this," said Father Christian.

"The very thing!" cried the Superior, "for if Sister Mar-

garet's suspicions should be correct you may be able to hear something about the child from your brother."

"I will do my best," said Father Christian, warmly, "to get news, if there is any to be got, and you can depend on Father James. He is always ready to help in any good cause."

As he took leave of the Superior and went out on the steps to await the carriage, he saw two of the nurses carrying infants in their arms up and down in the sunshine, and he could not help thanking God who had provided so good a refuge for these waifs of humanity.



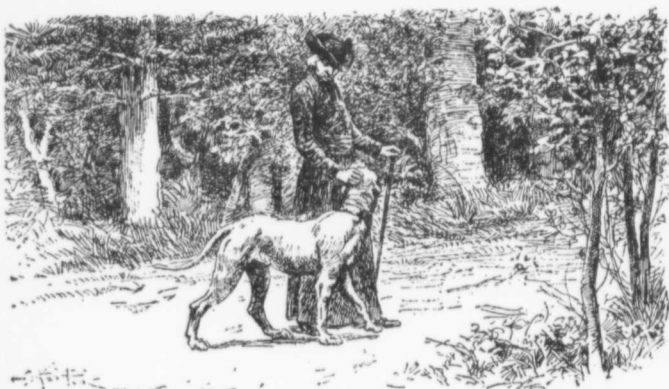
CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH FATHER AUBRIL'S SUSPICIONS ARE STRENGTHENED AND
IN WHICH HE CONFERS WITH CARLO.

ALMOST at this very time Father James Aubril was on his way home from a visit to the unfortunate Mrs. Pilkington. He had found her in a calm, which was almost a stupor. She was sitting in the old place on the terrace, which the priest had formerly associated with all that was joyful and prosperous in life. The widow's dress and cap seemed to shut her from that lovely landscape as within a circle of sorrow, marking her amid all its beauties as the bereaved. Of course he had seen her more than once since that second and still more terrible bereavement, the loss of her child, under circumstances the most mysterious. In the one case her husband was at rest in that old burying-ground where she could visit his grave. In the other her child had disappeared into the vast gulf of the world's wickedness, if, indeed, it were still alive.

The whole police of the country had been on the alert. Rewards had been offered, skilled detectives had gone to work for the mere desire of fame, but none had hitherto traced the whereabouts of the child. Sometimes Father Aubril feared that the crime of murder had been added to that of theft. But the mother seemed to have a constant hope that her boy was still alive somewhere, and that some time, somehow, it might be restored to her. This hope, indeed, seemed to keep her alive. The servants had,

of course, been examined, one and all. In vain. Lucy had seemed completely prostrated by the occurrence, and her grief had seemed so genuine that she could scarcely be suspected. The rigid questioning which she had undergone from the police had elicited nothing. Some weeks after the disappearance of the child she had told the mistress, with a very pretty embarrassment that she would have to be leaving her to get married.



“I wonder if you have anything against that girl, my poor Carlo,” said the priest.”

“Indeed, ma’am,” she had added, “we have been promised, Jim and I, this long time, and were to have been married a month ago, but I told him I couldn’t have the heart, just after—”

Here her words became indistinct, the apron going to her eyes. Then she blurted out:

“My precious baby—and yours, ma’am! Oh, no, I couldn’t leave you in grief like that.”

“You are very good, Lucy,” said the mistress, in the apathetic

voice which had become habitual to her, "and I am grateful. But pray don't postpone your marriage again upon my account. No one can help me."

On the present occasion, the first storm of grief, of terror, of suspense, had passed, and it was a marble image that greeted the old priest.

"I have reached the limit of suffering," she said, quietly, "there is nothing else left. My own death would be a boon."

"But you have accepted this second cross like the first?" asked the priest, with that note of tender sympathy in his voice which made his ministrations so acceptable to poor and rich alike.

Mrs. Pilkington bowed her head.

"I have tried to accept it," she said, "and to say His will be done."

"That must surely bring a blessing, that beautiful resignation," said the priest. "Oh, be sure that somewhere, some time, a great grace is coming to you."

As the priest left her and walked homeward, he was thinking how he used to see the nurse, in cap and apron, carrying the baby to and fro upon the lawn, and what a pretty picture the sight had made, framed by that landscape. The nurse? Some half memory, a something unpleasant leaped into his mind, swift as a poisoned dart. The nurse was that same Lucy whom he had surprised drinking her mistress' wine and whom he had set down as being untrustworthy for the care of a child.

Preoccupied with these thoughts he passed through the woods. It was late November now, and there were traces of the coming desolation of winter. All at once he heard a crackling of leaves and a breaking of boughs, and presently a woolly head was thrust into his hand. It was Carlo, the great house-dog of the Pilking-

tons, who was more than ever the inseparable companion of the lady, and who had devotedly loved the lost infant.

"Eh, Carlo, is it you, my friend?" cried the priest, and as he patted his head, he went on to say: "But why, why, old dog, did you let the baby be stolen? The baby, you know, the little Wilfrid?"

The dog stopped, pricked up his ears, and looking up into the face of the priest gave a low whine.

"He all but speaks," said the priest, "he understands what I say and would express his sentiments."

Almost instantly the dog's humor changed. His hair bristled and stood erect, he drew back his lips, showing his teeth in a savage growl. Father Aubril following the direction of the dog's glance, perceived that it was that same Lucy, the nurse, of whom he had been himself so lately thinking. She was speeding toward the village, probably on some errand for her mistress, as the priest thought. But there was that in her face which he disliked, a furtive avoidance of his eyes—and there was the dog's pronounced antagonism to her; her terror of the animal seemed to form another link in the chain of suspicion.

Here the priest pulled himself up short. This would not do. Whither were his thoughts tending, where was the long-suffering charity he had preached? Because he had detected this young woman in a petty act of dishonesty, because she had a vain and foolish face, with shifty eyes, and because Carlo, who, it was true, was usually gentle with every one, had taken such a dislike to her, was he, then, to conclude that she was to be suspected of greater evil? Why, her mistress had told him half an hour before of the girl's devotion, giving as an instance that she had voluntarily postponed her marriage at the time of the last great

trouble. But here again, and the priest's thoughts, despite him, were off at a gallop. She was going to be married, though it did not seem that her mistress had been previously informed of it. There was a sweetheart, and what kind of man was he? Was the marriage a sudden affair? These were questions which Father Aubril promised himself he would answer. Meanwhile, he managed to pacify the dog and let the girl pass on. Once she had gone Carlo was as gentle as ever. He came very close to his good friend, the priest, being evidently resolved to see him safe home.

"I wonder if you have anything against that girl, my poor Carlo," said the priest, apostrophizing the dog, "or if you are idly suspecting her as I have done."

The dog wagged his tail and looked up, as if saying: "I wish I could speak!"

"Yes, I wish you could, my canine friend," said the priest, "for then would I consult you on many things. For you are wise and brave and faithful and discreet."

The dog gave a short, joyous bark, as if he knew he were being praised.

"Perhaps you wouldn't be so discreet, though, if you had the gift of speech," continued the priest. "Is that a twinkle I see in your eye, you rogue? Ha! ha! mayhap you'd be as great a chatterbox as the worst of us. But I wish you could tell me if I have been misjudging this girl."

The dog, not being in a position to give such information, and feeling, no doubt, the sudden return to gravity in his friend's voice and manner, walked soberly beside him, with ears erect and slow steps. He licked the hand with which the priest caressed him, as if to assure him of his sympathy and to regret

his inability to be of any service in the matter. Could either the priest or the dog have seen the flying figure of a man rushing away from the Manor by unfrequented paths, in his eagerness to catch up with Lucy and warn her to be on her guard at that place whither he knew she was proceeding, there would have been more cause for questioning. And the dog, at least, might have demanded an explanation of the man, who was none other than Jim Hollis.

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH FATHER AUBRIL ASKS MOLLY'S HELP AND SARAH SLATER
CONFRONTS LUCY.

BEFORE reaching home Father Aubril met Molly Deegan, leading her horse after her own unceremonious manner. By a sudden impulse he slackened his pace and walked beside her.

"Molly," said he, "of course you have heard long before now of the disappearance of the Pilkington child?"

"Heard, Father? I should rather think so, for isn't the whole country talking about it? And it breaks my heart," added impulsive Molly, "to think of her a widow, childless, that young thing! O Father, isn't it hard to bear?"

"It is," said Father Aubril, "and her resignation is heroic. Now I know your good heart, and I ask you if you can help in any way to do it."

"But what can any of us do?" asked Molly. "We can't bring the dead to life."

"No," said the priest, "but we might restore a child to its mother."

Molly looked at Father Aubril, half in amazement, half in pity.

"O then, Father," she said, "it's dead, and there's no use keeping up hope, or breaking her heart with the thought that somewhere it may be alive. Why, Father, dear, you and me that

know the world as it is ought to hope and pray that it's dead."

"Stop!" cried the priest, in a tone of authority. "You have no right to put up such a prayer. God is the Master of life and if He has seen fit to keep this child alive, He will protect it and return it in His own good time to be its mother's joy. Besides, the mother hopes, nay feels certain that it lives."

They both fell silent then, thinking, while the sun g'inted about them on the pale remnants of grass and the fast thinning leaves skirting the self-same orchard wall, where the priest had



"Molly drew very close to the priest."

before met this humble friend. Molly's horse joggled on patiently behind them.

"What I would ask of you is this," said Father Aubril: "In your business of peddling you travel much about the country, and keep your eyes and ears open. Molly, tell me, did you ever see or hear anything which struck you as suspicious?"

Molly fell into deep thought—then, as she drew very close to the priest she said very slowly and deliberately, and in a very low voice, as if she were afraid to speak at all:

"Now, it's only to you, Father, that ever I'd open my lips, but I want to know what Lucy from the Manor is wanting to be visiting so often that ould rap, Sarah Slater, for."

The priest started. Lucy again!

"And who is Sarah Slater?" he asked, quickly.

"Not one that you would know or that would be asking your ministry," said Molly, somewhat evasively. "She is an ugly customer to fall foul of. Some do say that she's mixed up with thieves and smugglers, and the Lord knows what. But I don't know anything for certain—it's all hearsay."

"Let us keep to the facts," said the priest, "I don't like hearsay, especially when it tells what is evil about my neighbor. The woman Slater is suspected. Lucy visits her. Why? Is she a relative?"

"Not a bit of it, Father."

"Were they old acquaintances?"

"Not that I know of. Lucy comes from up Albany way."

"It is only of late that she goes to see the woman?"

"I never saw them in company till within the past three months."

"Now," said the priest, "another question before I leave you. What about this man whom Lucy is going to marry?"

Molly gave a long whistle, an accomplishment which she had learned in her regimental days.

"Oh, she's going to marry him, is she? Well, I couldn't wish her worse luck. He's a rascalion, and any one in the country hereabouts will tell you the same. He was once servant to another bad one, that betrayed his country and disgraced his regiment. He went to England or somewheres for a bit, and I hear he's back now again in Canada, calling himself a loyalist

and holding a commission in some regiment, which he got by the dirty work he done."

The priest scarcely listened. Tales against the reputation of others were as gall and wormwood to him. He cared nothing about this officer, in whom he had no interest. But it was important to learn something of Lucy's sweetheart. Justice demanded that, for it might throw the strongest light on dark places.

"There, there," said the priest. "Spare the master—it's the man we have to do with."

"Like master, like man," persisted Molly. "How that rascal of a master ever came to be a drop's blood to Captain Pilkington—"

The priest interrupted.

"To Captain Pilkington? What? Why? You say the master of this worthless man is a kinsman of the dead gentleman?"

"To be sure, Father, they're brothers' sons, the two of them."

"Then that must be the gentleman I met in the hall," thought Father Aubril to himself, but he did not say this aloud. Instead he warned the pedler:

"Not a word of this, I implore you, to any one, my good Molly. I must think of it much. I must gather the threads together. It may be only the vaguest suspicion, but it may be more, and if so, God willing, we shall trace it out."

He strode off in great excitement, leaving Molly and the horse far behind. If his suspicions should take form, then there might be a hope of recovering the child, or that failing, there might at least be certainty of its death.

Now it was about that time that Lucy had determined, by the advice of Jim Hollis, to keep away from the house of Sarah

Slater. She had some reason to think that Father Aubril was watching her, and when she had informed Jim, he had at once realized the danger of allowing her connection with the notorious old woman to be known. It was part of their agreement with Sarah that Lucy should visit her at stated times, keeping her posted as to what was going on at the Manor and bringing with her all sorts of good things from the abundant larder there to propitiate this irascible person. Now Sarah Slater, having once got her claws upon "that minx Lucy," as she called her, was by no means disposed to let her shake them off. She wanted to keep the girl under her thumb, as well as have herself provided with delicacies from the big house. So that Lucy's absence having prolonged itself beyond its wont, Sarah Slater, who was then living in the neighborhood, for she frequently changed her place of residence, strolled up toward the Manor one serene twilight.

She did not stop to add anything to the costume which she wore in the house, only pinning her shawl tight about her shoulders, for it was chill, and arranging her cap firmly upon her head. This she did with a purpose. Were she to be discovered by any of the other servants she could say, without incriminating Lucy, that she had just run in from a neighboring cottage to beg for a couple of eggs or a sup of milk for a sick child. She counted on being unknown to the servants in general, as her mode of life kept her in obscurity and out of the way of honest folk.

She took a short cut through the woods, her somber figure a discordant element in the calm of the twilight. Her heart, full of evil purposes and dark with sinister memories, was out of harmony with the tranquil birds, who had just completed the task appointed of song and cheerfulness; with the busy insects, who had likewise followed the divine law; with all animate and in-



"Sarah, with incredible swiftness, was at her side."

animate things that had served their part in the one grand scheme.

Evil is always disorder, and the peace of that quiet spot seemed in a fashion disturbed by the advent of this schemer. Hardened of feature and expression, dark of coloring, there was something of force and energy in the face and figure of Sarah Slater that impressed the weak. It seemed strange to think that she, too, had once been young, and had walked in innocence in green woods, and had known what it was to pray and to be happy. But that was long ago, and she would not recall that time; she would not let the light whisper of the leaves tell her of it, nor the murmuring grasses, nor the leaping, laughing brook, sporting on its way. She hardened her heart, and in bitterness of soul went on, an avenging fate following the vain and heartless Lucy up yonder at the Manor.

"It was not I who brought her into this," said Sarah Slater, sternly to herself. "She came to me and begged me to help her and Jim Hollis in this devil's work. That was Jim's doin', and he was put up to the whole job by another. But the girl will pay for it to the last farthing, too, or I'll land her in the penitentiary."

Lucy was busy that evening in the great larder, close to the cellars. It was part of her duty to go over the stores there and report every evening to Mrs. Brown, who made a weekly visit there herself. This special function of hers had enabled Lucy to cater to Sarah Slater's experienced palate in a variety of ways. On this particular evening the girl threw open the iron door to let in plenty of air, and stood upon the hard cement floor looking complacently out into the woods. She had not to trouble her head that night to pick and choose for Sarah Slater.

That had been a dangerous game, and she was glad to be done with it. Besides, to her indolent nature, it was no small trouble to fetch and carry for that "horrid old thing." Sarah might not like it, but Jim would settle that with her, and what could she do? She dared not expose them without bringing herself into the affair. So Lucy laughed easily and drank in the breezes from the forest, and did not know that up those paths, already strewn thickly with the fallen leaves, her evil genius was advancing.

Lucy was in no hurry to be gone. She had nothing to do above stairs. The place was ever so much easier since that blessed baby had been gone. She had not to sit upstairs in the gloomy nursery. And the Missis, after all, had taken it very well, and after the first grief was not so ill-pleased to be rid of it, so that when her mourning for Captain Pilkington was done she might be free to travel abroad; and who knew but what some fortunate man might again win the hand of the pretty widow?

Such were the amiable Lucy's reflections as she stood in the doorway. She half expected Jim. She had hinted to him that this was a far more retired spot than the well if he had anything particular to say. And as she stood and so reflected, she saw emerging from the woods, and advancing swiftly toward her, stern and menacing as fate, Sarah Slater.

She could not be deceived. There were no other face and figure like those. She had often thought with a shudder how terrible they were, and wished that Jim had chosen some one else than this woman to help them in their enterprise. But he had replied that Sarah Slater was worth a dozen ordinary women. Lucy looked helplessly about her, and stepping out from the doorway, took a few hurried steps in the opposite direction from that in

which this terrible figure came. But Sarah, with incredible swiftness was at her side, holding her by the arm.

"Go back in there, you simpleton," she exclaimed, in her deep, hoarse tones, that Lucy knew so well, "unless you want me to denounce you before them all and have the constable after you this very night."

Lucy, completely cowed, passed under shelter again, and Sarah, entering too, confronted her.

"Now," said she, "I must hear what you have to say, and no quibbling, no lying, girl, for if it's necessary I'll lock myself in here with you and take from now till morning to get at the truth. Why didn't you come to me these three weeks back?"

"I couldn't get out," quavered Lucy.

"Lie the first," said Sarah, clenching her fist in wrath.

"I was afraid to go to you any more," Lucy faltered.

"That sounds more like the truth, at any rate," said the old woman, "but fear or no fear, you can't shake me off like a withered leaf."

Lucy had resort to her usual resource, tears, but the stern woman dried them very quickly.

"If I see but a drop of those crocodile tears on your lying cheek," said she, "I'll lodge you in jail for that offense alone. Now tell me in two words why you were afraid to come to my house when you've been there twice a week these three months?"

"I thought the priest suspected," whimpered Lucy.

A slight change passed over the stony countenance of the woman. Was it fear or anxiety? Slight as it was, Lucy detected it and pressed the advantage.

"You know what the priest is when he gets on a scent," she said, with a persuasive gesture of her arm.

"Yes," said Sarah Slater, "I know what the priest is, though he doesn't know me. At least, he hasn't known me these forty years."

"Well, then, you see I couldn't come," said foolish Lucy.

"I see no such a thing," cried the old woman, so fiercely that Lucy involuntarily threw out her hand in alarm. "For come you must, or send you must, or better still, I'll come here."

"Oh, no," cried Lucy; "that would be the most dangerous of all."

"Dangerous, my girl," said Sarah Slater, with her evil sneer, "and who put it into your foolish head that you could play with fire and not get hurt? Who told you that you could do evil and play good?"

Lucy had no answer to make. She only stood and trembled.

"For let me tell you, my fine lady's maid, my viper warmed in a soft nest," the hag continued, "you've committed an ugly crime, which might send you to jail for your life, or, supposing the child were found to be dead, might bring you to the gallows."

Though this was, perhaps, a flight of rhetoric on Sarah's part, it terrified the weak girl, so that but for her greater terror of this evil woman she would have gone into hysterics.

"Listen, my jade. Folks say that I'm bad—and bad I am, but I didn't do what you've done. Who was ever kind to me, as your master and your mistress were kind to you—aye, kind and generous, heaping favors on you. You had a good home and no temptation to evil. You saw nothing but good around you. And at a time when your mistress was all but dead from the loss of her husband, what did you do, you heartless minx? You stole her child, to please that devil's limb, Jim Hollis, and you sent it where the mother's eyes will never look on it again."

"But it was you that helped us," put in Lucy, tremulously, "you didn't think it so bad then."

"I did think it bad. I thought it devilish. But it is part of my trade to help all evildoers. I had never been kindly treated by Mrs. Pilkington or any other. Never, never, from my babyhood up."

There was a kind of despair in the woman's tone, and some shadow of a feeling which could never have touched the shallow nature beside her.

"But," she went on, "I took the child in the way of business and sent it—well, where it won't come back in a hurry."

Even in her fright Lucy gasped out:

"But you didn't kill it?"

"You might have asked that question sooner," snarled the old woman. "But I didn't kill it. It was safer in my hands than in yours, if once your vanity and greed were played upon."

These were awful words and caused the girl to tremble.

"I know you better than you know yourself, Lucy Lawless, and I won't spare you," went on this terrible censor. "But I came here now to let you know once for all that you made a bargain with me, and that bargain you'll have to keep."

She raised a warning finger.

"Yes, every iota of it," she said. "You'll come when I call and you'll fetch when I bid you. You and that cur Jim Hollis will crawl before me, or I'll send you both to feed the gallows."

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH LUCY RECALLS THE PAST.

BEFORE Lucy could answer, if, indeed, she had any answer to make, the old woman was gone, and her figure, as she plunged into the woods, seemed part of the chill and ghastliness that were creeping on with the night. A crow, startled by her advent, rose above the tree tops with a shrill cry, and a bat or two aroused swung back and forth, aimlessly, meeting and striking together with a sharp sound, like the crackling of metal in the fire. Lucy stood still, framed in the doorway, afraid to move, and a prey to a thousand terrors. The snapping of a bough, the insects in the grass, caused her to start. Her awakened conscience was peopling every nook and corner about her with strange shapes. It filled the gloom and hush with its horror. The iron doors behind her were as those of the prison in which Sarah Slater had threatened to cast her. The cold touch of the key which she took mechanically from a hook upon the wall made her shrink, with its suggestion of fetters upon her wrists.

The moaning sound in the wind seemed as weird voices lamenting, the distant call of the night-bird as some omen of evil. She wished for Jim Hollis and yet shrank with an indescribable loathing from the thought of him who had involved her in all this network of wickedness.

She mechanically drew the iron door of the larder into posi-

tion, and then stood still in the passageway outside and trembled all over at the echo it made. Then she stepped over the threshold of the outer door, and was thankful to feel the soft, cool grass under her feet. Before she stirred again, however, she looked about her in all directions with a hundred new apprehensions. She took a few steps and stood still again, certain that she heard something. Do the dead ever walk and talk? Was that the master's genial voice calling her out of the darkness and reproaching her for the loss of his child? She began to creep homeward at last, round the wall of the house. How far it seemed! Oh, she would never come here any more. Even the light of the pale stars, as they came out dimly, obscured by a faint mist, increased her agony. For they brought to mind, with a sudden, sharp pain, a certain evening when she had been walking about with the little Wilfrid in her arms. The child had been laughing up into her face and playing with her, making helpless grabs with his dimpled hands at her hair, or clutching the border of her cap. She was laughing, too, for she felt particularly gay and light-hearted just then. It was before Jim Hollis had begun to exert his baleful influence over her.

When far enough away from the house, she had begun to sing a cheerful little song, about a blue ribbon and a merry maid:

" My merry, merry maid, she walks so free,
And she sings so gay, 'neath the chestnut tree,
My merry, merry maid with the ribbon blue,
Why, yes, she's the very, very maid for me."

This verse seemed to haunt her now, and she looked over her shoulder to be sure that no one was singing it. Just as she had finished the first verse, on that evening which now seemed so

long ago, she had caught sight of Father Aubril and had stopped abashed. But he had smiled pleasantly, crying out :

“Go on, my girl. A light heart and a merry song bespeak a good conscience.”

Then he had stopped and signed the forehead of the child with the sign of the cross. After which, still looking at the baby and with a kind of solemnity he had said :



“Who can tell what will be the future of this little one? The fairest flower may be soonest blasted by the storm.”

“Who can tell what will be the future of this little one? The fairest flower may be soonest blasted by the storm. But, my daughter,” he added, fixing his grave, penetrating eyes upon the girl, “this child’s future, the future of his soul, is put in some measure into your hands. The mother is compelled to confide it to you very often. Guard well your trust, for there is much happiness in a trust well fulfilled.”

Then he had passed on with a kindly gesture of farewell.

This priest, people said, was a saint, and he had looked so solemn then that he had frightened her, even though it was a bright afternoon in the early summer time, with the Manor showing through the trees gay and cheerful, catching the sunshine upon its tops.

And now, now, in this awful darkness, the words of the priest frightened her still more. Was he a prophet, and had he, indeed, read the future? How had her trust been fulfilled? Where was that child who had been confided to her care? What would become of its soul? Its soul? She had never thought of that when she had let Jim Hollis take it away. What if Sarah Slater had kept it and the talk about the nuns had been all foolishness? She could scarce repress a shriek as she began to run, pausing half fainting, near the familiar kitchen door. She must regain her breath. She could not appear before Mrs. Brown and the other servants "all in a flutter," as she said to herself. But her terror was not so easily banished, and she seemed to hear ringing in her ears, even above the terrible tones of Sarah Slater's voice, the calm, grave accents of the priest.

"Oh, I am afraid of him," she muttered to herself. "He can read right into one and he knows the future and the past. I guess the folks are right that say he's a saint."

CHAPTER XII.

THE MASTER AND THE MAN.

"SIR, Major Pilkington, your humble servant."

The gentleman so addressed turned quickly.

"It's only Jim Hollis, sir, Your Honor," repeated the man, bowing low before his former employer.

"Oh, it's only Jim Hollis, is it? Then it's as infernal a blackguard as I'm acquainted with," said the Major.

"Except yourself, you devil's limb," growled Jim, under his breath. But he bowed lower than ever, as he said aloud:

"Your Honor's as merry as ever, and as fond of his jest."

"Well, what's your business with me—and be quick about it. I have an appointment."

"It's only about that little matter, sir. I make bold to remind you that the child's been gone these three months and—"

Pilkington cast a hasty glance about him.

"What do you mean, you ill-conditioned lout, talking out loud after this fashion?"

And he supplemented his remark with an oath which can not be here set down, for this Major added to his other virtues a foul and blasphemous tongue.

"Well, you know what I mean, sir. And I'm thinking of getting married."

"I pity the member of the female sex that's about to unite herself to you."

Jim forced a laugh.

"So I thought," he went on, "if Your Honor could spare me a little of that money—"

"Money!" cried the villain, with another oath. "I beg to remind you, sir, that I have not yet come into possession of my estate, and shall not for months to come—till a certain time has elapsed and certain formalities have been complied with. Our bargain was the estate first, your claim after."

"Was it so, sir? I didn't understand it that way," ventured Jim, keeping his eyes lowered that the other might not see the gleam of hatred in them.

"Oh, didn't you? Well, it's my belief, Jim, that there's quite a number of things you don't understand. Your understanding is not your strong point." Then dropping his sneering tone for the moment, the Major cried out: "But this much must penetrate your thick skull—that I'm not going to be dunned in this way."

"O Your Honor! O Major Pilkington," whined Jim, "neither Lucy nor I would dream of such a thing."

"Lucy? Oh, ho! I remember," cried the Major, with a roar of laughter. "She's the wench who stole the child for you. Well, she's worthy of you. You'll make a precious couple. But mind this—if you or she plague me any farther, I'll expose you both."

"Your Honor might be mixed up with us in an awkward sort of way," cried Jim, gaining courage from the threat.

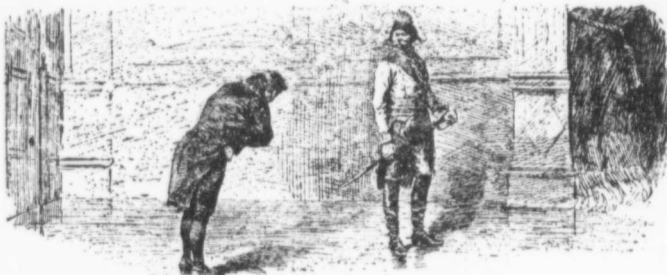
"You hound!" cried the Major, advancing upon him. "Do you dare threaten me?"

As Jim covered before him, he added in a tone cold and cutting as ice:

"I'll add blackmailing to the charge, that's all."

The words and tone chilled Jim. He realized that he had to do with a villain of superior mold.

"And furthermore," said the Major, "if you don't get out of here in two minutes I'll thrash you now into the bargain, and it will be a fine piece of evidence for me on the trial, showing how an officer and a gentleman treated a wretched blackmailer who ventured to make a vile insinuation against him."



"Sir, Major Pilkington, your humble servant."

Jim, bending low, removed himself to a sufficiently safe distance, but his face was white with passion and he could scarce articulate, as the Major added: "Faugh! you worm, you sicken me," and turning on his heel, he was walking away when Jim said, desperately:

"I defy you! I tell you the evidence is too strong to be got rid of in this way. I have put your name in Sarah Slater's books, and—"

Major Pilkington took a flying leap toward him, and there is

no doubt that if he had reached him there would have been a very strong piece of evidence at the trial. But Jim took to his heels, and the Major, left alone, muttered:

“Sarah Slater on the scent! There might as well be a beagle. I must look sharp and get these law proceedings through. The owner of the Pilkington estate will be able to carry matters with a high hand. For one thing, I must get out of these infernal army togs. I have had enough of soldiering, first with the patriots—”

He laughed scornfully.

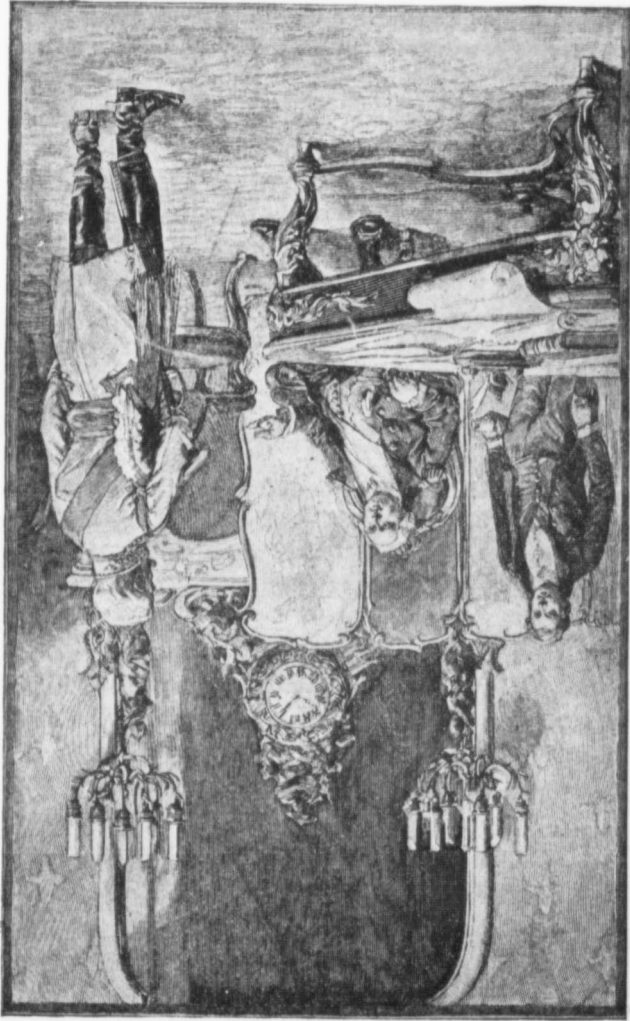
“And next with the loyalists. Oh, I’m very loyal. It will be a profound grief to me to sever my connection with His Majesty’s service and to return to the land of Uncle Sam. But duty, the care of an estate, the necessity of a few loyal men endeavoring to leaven the mass, that’s the cue. I must wait on His Ex. this morning—double X it ought to be, if his size were considered.”

Major Pilkington, having made a careful toilet, sought and obtained an interview with Charles, Duke of Richmond, acting Governor of Canada. That functionary, seated in his chair of state, had before him upon a table a quantity of maps and other documents. A single gentleman was in attendance. The great man received his visitor with marked coldness, so that the air in that stately apartment seemed glacial. No doubt he had heard of the various steps by which the quondam American had attained his present rank.

The Duke begged to be informed what had procured him the honor of a visit from Major Pilkington.

“Your Grace,” began the Major, striving to retain his self-possession in that icy temperature, “I have come upon a most painful errand.”

"You wish to resign your commission?"



"Indeed, sir!" ejaculated the Duke.

"To explain my reasons for resigning my commission."

The Duke raised his eyebrows.

"You wish to resign your commission? I confess that that surprises me."

"The resignation is forced upon me by circumstances over which I have no control."

The Duke, tapping slightly with his fingers on the arm of the chair, awaited further explanation.

"My cousin, an officer," began Pilkington, "in the rebel army—"

"The American," suggested the Duke. "The Treaty of Ghent has been signed."

Pilkington bit his lip.

"My cousin, Captain Pilkington, was killed in a mysterious manner by a stray shot."

"A deplorable affair, sir. I heard of it and deeply regretted it, having known Captain Pilkington in a somewhat casual fashion, but having followed his career with interest."

The Duke spoke warmly and heartily, presently adding: "He was a gallant gentleman of stainless honor and a brave soldier, though fighting on the wrong side."

Pilkington crimsoned. The innuendo contained in this speech was galling indeed. However, he controlled himself and continued:

"In the second bereavement which has fallen upon the widow, in the loss of an only son, the estate devolves upon me. A burden, Your Grace, a most cruel burden."

The expression upon the Duke's face was that of scarcely veiled incredulity.

"I was about to congratulate you," he observed, more drily than ever.

Again the color of the villain's face deepened, but he went bravely on:

"It is far less for my own sake than for that of the widow, who finds the care of such an estate too onerous, that I consent to abandon the career of arms and to enter into possession. My young kinswoman implores me to do so without delay."

The Duke said no word at all, merely gazing at his visitor.

"But Your Grace can imagine with what reluctance I abandon the service of our beloved Majesty. May he long live and reign."

The Duke gave a plainly ironical nod of assent.

"It cuts me to the heart to be obliged to dwell once more among a people who have dared for the second time to raise their regicidal hand against their liege lord and king."

The warmth was very well assumed indeed, the indignation of a loyal subject just a shade, perhaps, overdone.

"A residence in your own country will be, no doubt, somewhat unpleasant for you, under the circumstances, sir. But as to your resignation, it shall be accepted, and I have now the honor to wish you good morning."

He rang. A servant appeared.

"Attend Major Pilkington to the door," the Duke said, briefly.

Pilkington, with a feeling of baffled rage in his heart, and hatred against the Duke somewhat resembling that with which he had himself inspired Jim Hollis only that morning, followed the servant to the door with hasty strides, fancying as he did so that he heard laughter after being shut out from the ducal presence.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH ARTHUR PILKINGTON PAYS A VISIT TO HIS KINSWOMAN.

MAJOR PILKINGTON, having shaken off the service of His Majesty, under less dishonorable circumstances, however, than those under which he had previously renounced allegiance to his own country, made up his mind to return without delay to New York. The effects of war were visible there, commerce was still depressed, the city, as it seemed to the newly arrived, bearing traces of disorder. Business men talked of the ruinous taxes and deplored the evil results of the long depression in trade. Property holders looked grave and shook their heads about the decrease in the value of land. The poor complained of high prices and low wages. There was grumbling at Congress and complaints of the administration. Society had suffered, too, and was just beginning to regain something of its former tone and gaiety.

Old soldiers compared the War of the Revolution to the recent flash in the pan with undisguised contempt; old sailors called back the days of John Paul Jones, and of Barry, ignoring the really brilliant exploits which had astonished the world. Pilkington saw all and heard all, commenting upon everything with his customary cynicism. He kept himself in the background, not daring to present himself to his former associates.

But at length, when he deemed the time propitious, he set out one day for a visit to Pilkington Manor and to the widow of

his cousin. He found her seated, as usual, on the terrace, near the orchard wall, as he had so often seen her in the olden days. The rigidity of her attitude struck him, and the gloom of the widow's dress was a totally unfamiliar element in that atmosphere where all had been brightness. At her feet lay Carlo, looking up into her face with an expression of canine devotion and mute sympathy that added considerably to the pathos of the scene.



"At her feet lay Carlo, looking up into her face."

Mary Pilkington's eyes were fixed upon some far-off point in the landscape, and she seemed to be lost in reverie.

That which most alarmed the wretch who drew near unperceived in all that peaceful scene was the appearance of the nurse, Lucy, carrying an infant in her arms. She was apparently soothing it, and talking in an undertone that gibberish which is supposed to be understood by the infant mind. This particular baby lay still, as though it cared very little what was being said or in what language. It looked up, blinking seriously at the

air above its head, and the midges in the sunshine, as if it were wondering what sort of a world this was it had come into.

An awful thought struck the onlooker. Could the lost child have been by any means recovered, and if such should be the case, what was his position? He had voluntarily given up that rank in the British army which it had cost him so dear to obtain, and what remained? Disgrace, poverty, misfortunes of all kinds.

Might not Jim Hollis and the girl, Lucy, in a hasty fit of revenge after the late interview, have played him this trick? Sarah Slater, he knew, would be quite capable of dealing out such a trump-card, driving him out of the game. His sensations for a few moments were intolerable, and he was conscious of a feeling of such awful rage against the unoffending child that he could willingly have killed it then and there. He vowed within himself that if this trick had been played upon him he would yet in some manner compass its destruction.

But as he looked and pondered thus, shaking as in an ague fit, he was struck anew by the widow's attitude and by the expression of her face. This was no rejoicing mother, gladdened by the return of a son that was lost, and triumphing over the downfall of the wicked. No; it was evident that the sight of that infant was painful to her, and that she was compelled to avert her eyes from it, ever and anon. So argued this shrewd observer, and upon the strength of that assumption he emerged from the shelter of the wall in which he had stood, and presented himself before Mrs. Pilkington. The sight of him was very evidently a shock to his cousin's widow. She straightened herself in her chair and replied to his low bow by a slight inclination of the head. He made a half offer of his hand, but Mrs. Pilkington-

ton appeared not to see it, while Lucy changed color from pale to red and from red to pale. For "conscience doth make cowards of us all," and she had a fear that this fine gentleman might have come hither to denounce Jim and her.

"Your servant, madam," said the visitor to his kinswoman. "I have felt it only right to call upon you and offer my humble service. Absence from the country prevented me from doing so before."

Mrs. Pilkington merely bowed.

"You may have heard that I was abroad for a short time, having obtained leave from my regiment, then stationed in Canada."

Mrs. Pilkington was amazed at the effrontery with which he made this statement, referring thus to a matter which was held to be disgraceful by all their circle. Her fair face flushed, and she could scarcely control herself sufficiently to reply.

"I believe I heard something of the kind."

"On my return to Canada," said the ex-Major, coolly, "these unfortunate hostilities between the men of the same race, who should be brothers, having come to an end, I thought it my duty to resign my commission in the British service. And this I did, my dear cousin, my dear Mary—"

He bent forward as Mrs. Pilkington drew back in disgust at his audacity, and the freedom with which he had used her name.

"This I did," he continued, "that I might be entirely at your command in settling the unhappy complications which have arisen from your twofold loss."

A look of intense pain crossed the widow's face at this blunt reference to the bereavement which she held sacred. But her tone was as repellent as she could make it when she answered:

"Your aid, sir, will be totally unnecessary. The solicitors

are the best agents in such matters, and I have, moreover, assurances of the speedy return of my uncle, Mr. Graystone—my only relative.”

She emphasized the word, but the man before her was not to be touched by such puny shafts.

“Mrs. Pilkington—Mary,” he said, “why this formal tone? I am come to serve your best interests, to do all that a brother might. Why treat in such a manner the only near kinsman of your late husband, and one who held him so dear? Besides, it is necessary that we should go over this matter together. There is so much that had better be said in private, and that is scarcely appropriate for the ears of even so faithful a domestic as Lucy.”

He gave an ironical glance at the nurse, whom it pleased him to feel that he was alarming by his mysterious manner. Lucy reddened under the glance and felt “all of a tremble,” as she afterward said to Jim, “and as if she must drop the brat she was holding.”

Mrs. Pilkington rose.

“There are seats over yonder,” she said, indifferently, “if you really feel convinced that a business interview between us is advisable. I confess that I consider it both painful and unnecessary.”

She turned to Lucy.

“Keep the little creature out here in the fresh air as long as possible.”

For she had no mind to be left quite alone with this man, whom she both feared and distrusted.

“And by the way,” she added, turning back, “have Wills send the footman to the Pines to inquire how is the poor mother.”

And she remarked to Arthur Pilkington as she walked away a few paces in his company:

“My neighbor, Mrs. Wilson, is dying; so we have assumed here the care of her child.”

“As ever, thoughtful for others,” said the ex-Major, with a bow which he thought most fascinating.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH ARTHUR PILKINGTON HAS AN UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCE.

AT some little distance from the place where Mrs. Pilkington had been sitting, and where Lucy still walked with the infant, seats were provided under the shadow of the trees. Mrs. Pilkington, having sat down upon one of these, motioned her visitor to one opposite. He retreated thither with visible mortification. She was treating him as she might have treated a menial who had offended her. But this woman, he thought, had always had power to make him feel small and mean. Even in the days when she was the beautiful Mary Clinton, and a mere school girl, she had flouted his pretensions when he had ventured to enter the lists with his cousin, and had looked him through and through with those clear, brown eyes of hers, so quick to detect falsehood, so pitiless to meanness.

He thought of all this as he sat where he had been bidden, with Mary Clinton erect before him, her hand resting on the head of the dog, who had followed her and stood protectingly beside her. He felt that there was a change in this woman. To any one but himself he felt sure that she would have been much softer and gentler than of old. Sorrow had uplifted her, touching her face, and adding attraction to her once resplendent beauty. It had lent a sweetness to the corners of the mouth, it had given depths to once laughing eyes. He did not know as yet how this

change had been felt throughout the country. Always kind and generous to the poor, Mrs. Pilkington was now their good angel. Father Aubril rejoiced, while he marveled at the wonders which had been wrought spiritually and mentally.

The conversation began with a conventional civility at first. Mrs. Pilkington, who disliked giving pain, and had read the man's annoyance in his face, tried to put some slight tinge of cordiality into her voice and manner, while he, on his part, exerted himself to appear at his best. But there was so much at stake, and his nerves were so strained with the long suspense, that his natural brutality could not be kept long in check. Besides, she had angered him, and he was determined that she should pay for it, even now before he left her.

"Your child, little Wilfrid, has now been gone some six months, I believe. I was absent at the time of that unfortunate affair, but I am told it took place very shortly after your husband's death."

Every word struck Mrs. Pilkington as the thrust of a dagger. But she was not going to allow this man to see her weakness. She bent her head.

"Your information is correct," she observed, "only that it took place at the very time of my husband's death."

"Indeed! How shocking! How very painful," cried the visitor. "I marvel you could have borne up so well."

"We can bear a great deal more than we think for, Mr. Pilkington," she said. "Sorrow does not kill."

"Now to make a very frank and brutal statement of fact," said Arthur Pilkington, with a business-like air, which suited ill his ordinary swagger. "This deplorable loss makes me, without offense, the heir-at-law to the Pilkington estates."

It was, indeed, a brutal statement, but undeniably true.

"You are the heir-at-law in the event of my son's death," said Mrs. Pilkington, "which my solicitors are of opinion can not be proved."

"I can only repeat, madam," he said, doggedly, "that I am the heir-at-law, and as such have been, you will admit, most forbearing."

Mrs. Pilkington's indignation rose high.

"May I ask, sir," she said, "why you so confidently assume that my child, his father's heir, is dead?"

There was something piercing in the glance with which these words were uttered, and for a moment it staggered him. He answered hastily:

"I assume nothing. The facts to an unprejudiced mind would point in that direction."

"I would be infinitely obliged, sir, if you would detail these facts as they are known to you."

"Known to me?" he cried, arising from his seat with a threatening gesture. "Have a care, madam, or you may be called upon to explain these insinuations."

The calm eyes were upon him, the eyes of Mary Clinton, the deeper, stronger eyes of the widowed Mrs. Pilkington. For the first time he fancied that there was suspicion in them, and he quailed before their quiet power.

"You are very unnecessarily exciting yourself," said Mrs. Pilkington, "and wasting your threats on one who has no fear of them."

Overcome by her manner, he sat down with a muttered apology.

"As no facts whatever with regard to the disappearance of my son have reached me," continued Mrs. Pilkington, "I

should be glad, indeed, to hear them, if you are in possession of any."

She strove to speak in the same cold tone as heretofore, but there was a warm and vibrant note of pain in her voice as she thus referred to this direst of calamities.

The wretch before her, having recovered his self-possession, resumed:

"Of course I mean such facts as were made public."

"But none have been made public," cried Mrs. Pilkington, "none are known to any of us."



"*'Do you dare,' he cried, 'accuse me?'*"

"Oh, come," said the ex-Major, good-humoredly; "one fact, at least, was known—that the child disappeared while you were ill. Another, that all efforts of the police have failed to discover any trace of his existence after six months' diligent search."

"The efforts of the police are still concentrated upon one point—the motive for such a crime."

Mrs. Pilkington spoke very calmly; her eyes were full upon the face of the man before her, and it cost him a tremendous effort to preserve his coolness. Nor was he entirely successful.

"The motive?" he stammered.

"Yes—for such a crime as you suggest," said Mrs. Pilkington, "the murder of an innocent child. It is somewhat difficult, is it not, to assign a motive? Surely you will admit it could not be for the mere pleasure of such an act."

Mrs. Pilkington spoke in the low, unimpassioned voice that seldom changed its cadence. Her hearer was visibly moved and alarmed.

"That is why I still hope that the child was stolen for the sake of gain. The vigilance of the police has made these miscreants fear to come forward and claim a reward."

She stopped and her visitor was still silent. Mrs. Pilkington, leaning slightly forward, said suddenly:

"Unless, indeed, Mr. Pilkington, you have some private information to give me, or can assign a more likely motive for killing the Pilkington heir."

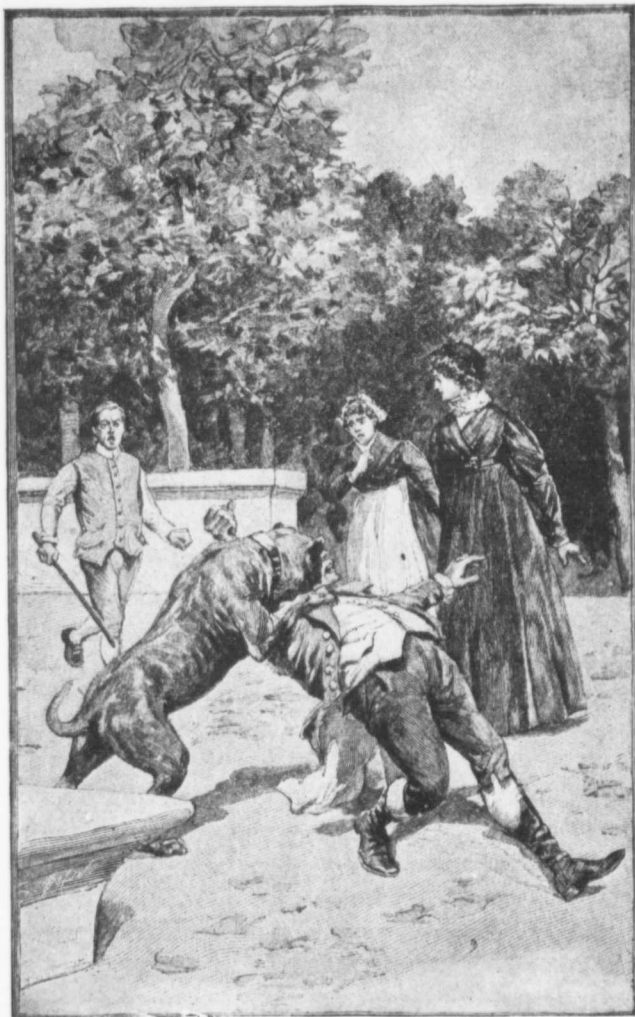
He started to his feet, advancing toward her threateningly.

"Do you dare," he cried, "accuse me?"

He was beside himself with rage. The ungovernable passion which had caused him to commit so many violent acts in the course of his life urged him now to lose sight of all discretion. For a moment the brave heart of Mary Pilkington quailed within her as she looked at his distorted countenance and beheld his upraised hand. Was he about to murder her and so destroy the last obstacle to his possession of the property? But she spoke fearlessly:

"Who has accused you? Is it conscience, Arthur Pilkington?"

He made a hurried step or two nearer to where she sat, and it seemed as if that upraised arm must descend and fell her slight figure to the earth. But in a second he was down, with Carlo's teeth in his throat. He might have been warned by the menacing growls which the animal had been giving, but in his



"In a second he was down, with Carlo's teeth in his throat."

excitement he had overlooked him altogether. Mrs. Pilkington cried aloud for help, and Lucy came running to the spot with one of the grooms whom she had summoned, and who now rushed upon Carlo with the butt end of a whip.

It was no easy task to make the dog relinquish his prey, and the efforts of Mrs. Pilkington herself, together with her soothing voice, had more to do with his pacification than the groom's blows.

As for the ex-loyalist of His Britannic Majesty's forces, he picked himself up as best he might, swearing that he would have a warrant for the shooting of the dog, and declaring that this attack upon his life had been premeditated in order to get rid of the heir-at-law.

"I take these servants to witness the fact," he cried furiously to Mrs. Pilkington, who vouchsafed him no reply.

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH ARTHUR PILKINGTON IS MADE PRISONER.

THOUGH Arthur Pilkington had refused the offer of a carriage, which the mistress of the Manor had sent a groom to make,



"A man in a great coat was asking some trivial question of the driver."

he felt himself quite unable to walk. So that having made his way to "The Merry Dogs," he hired a coach there which should convey him to the city.

As he was being driven down the Kingsbridge Road, just at the point where it intersected with Bloomingdale, familiarly known as Myers' Corner, the carriage came to a standstill. A man in a great coat was asking some trivial question of the driver, taking at the same time careful note of the occupant of the carriage. This, indeed, Arthur Pilkington facilitated by thrusting out his head to swear at the Jehu, asking him at what hour of the night he meant to get him to Doctor Wallace's surgery. The man stepped aside, so that Pilkington did not observe that he jumped into a fly which stood in waiting and drove rapidly off, taking a short cut cityward.

Now, as Doctor Wallace lived on Christopher Street, Greenwich village, some two miles outside of the actual New York, which scarce ascended above the Lispenard Salt Meadows, the wounded man had quite a long drive before him. Every once in a while he put forth his head to urge on the driver, usually in language more forcible than polite. At such times the man would whip up his horses and the lumbering vehicle would go on at a fair rate of speed. But very soon the old jog-trot was resumed, and Arthur Pilkington had no other resource than patience. He was landed at last at the physician's door, dismissing the coach. Doctor Wallace, having examined the wound made by the dog, declared that it was in nowise serious, the animal having been in a healthy condition. He applied some simple dressing, bade his patient keep it covered, and took leave of him, with some jesting allusion to the fine gentlemen who would keep their hounds.

As Pilkington came out of the doctor's house and walked rapidly toward his own lodgings, he had to pass the carriage archway at the rear of Mr. Rivington's house. Hard by was a small edifice, which might have been a porter's lodge or the coachman's dwelling. It seemed to Arthur Pilkington that a man stood in the shadow of this doorway, the outlines of whom seemed vaguely familiar. But as the individual was bareheaded, the ex-Major presumed that it was the coachman himself taking the air. After a careless glance in that direction he would have passed on, when suddenly he was confronted by three other men in top-coats and high hats. In one of these he thought he recognized the man who had conversed with his driver on the Bloomingdale Road. It also seemed to him that he distinctly heard a voice from within the doorway:

“That's him! That's the wolf in sheep's clothing.”

No other word was spoken, but two of the men placed themselves one on each side of the heir-at-law and began to hurry him on at a rapid pace, the third man leading the way. Again Pilkington fancied that he heard a chuckle from the doorway, and this aroused him to some attempt at resistance. He stopped, and with a vigorous effort to free himself from the detaining hand upon each shoulder, demanded the meaning of this outrage. None of the three men answered. Their policy



“That's him! That's the wolf in sheep's clothing!”

seemed to be a determined silence. Tightening their grasp, they hastened on the more. Pilkington, who was no coward, began to offer a desperate opposition to their farther progress, when the leader of the party, speaking at last, said in a low tone:

“You'd best come quietly. No harm will be done you if you don't resist. But if you do—”

The man significantly showed a pistol.

"Besides," he continued, "it's the best of your play not to make this thing too public, and we're all well armed."

The man relapsed into silence. Pilkington saw that resistance was useless, and was moreover impressed by the hint which the man had thrown out. If these fellows were constables, what was the charge? Could it be that Mrs. Pilkington or Sarah Slater or Jim Hollis had laid information to secure his arrest? Or was it merely for debt? Some impatient creditor, who had need of his money, or feared for his security?

In any case, as they were still to all intents and purposes in the country, for the city proper did not by any means extend so far, he was entirely in these men's power. And even should the watch appear, Pilkington would not have felt safe in attracting attention to himself till he better understood his situation.

In any event his reflections were far from pleasant, and he inwardly raged and fumed as he was hurried along under the starlight, which was clear and cold. For there was a touch of frost in the air and the wind from the East River was sharp and stinging.

He was hurried along so fast through that sparsely settled district that he could scarcely observe whither they were going. Once he thought he recognized the dwelling of Colonel Aaron Burr on Richmond Hill, and that the street down which they were hurrying was Charlton. He was only certain of his whereabouts when his captors stood still for an instant to take breath at a plank stretched over a ditch.

He knew now in what vicinity he was. This ditch had been cut through the Lisperard Salt Meadows and the plank had been thrown across for the convenience of those who went from the business resorts to the rural district just left behind. After this

the men made a sudden turn, following a path which led eastward till they reached a spot known as "the Collect," and which was, in point of fact, a rubbish heap, somewhere in the neighborhood of Canal Street, New York. It was very badly lighted, lamps being few and far between, so that Arthur Pilkington could scarcely see the big frame house into which he was hurried.

The house was dark and silent, but his captors evidently knew their way, and it was not until they had reached the head of a flight of steps that they struck a light. Pilkington was then forced downward, though he made another attempt at resistance, with less prospect of success than ever. He was thrust into a species of outhouse, with hard bricked floor, probably used as a cellar, and the door was instantly locked. There was scarcely a gleam of light, but he felt a slight current of air coming, as he afterward discovered, from a couple of gratings. He heard the heavy tread of his captors crossing the floor of the house and going upstairs again. After that there was silence.

Rage as the captive might, he could get no response from the silent walls around him. He beat on the door with frantic fists. Only a dull echo came back to him. He paced the floor with furious steps, only to come in sharp contact with a stone wall, for his prison was very small. What could it mean? One thing came clear as a flash to his mystified brain: He was not in the clutches of the law. This was not a jail nor any official place of captivity.

Who, then, had seized upon him? Not his kinswoman, of that he felt certain. Villain as he was, he knew her high character too well to admit of such a possibility. He felt that if she proceeded against him at all, it would be in the regular way and in a court of justice.

It must, then, be Sarah Slater! Without her Jim Hollis and Lucy would be powerless. He knew they were a very cheap kind of villains and would not venture upon so audacious a step. Was she acting in concert with those other two or independently of them? He knew a good deal about the woman. She was a money-lender, a receiver of stolen goods, and the confederate of thieves. He knew that she would stop at nothing to gain an end she had in view, and his rage redoubled at the thought of how easily he had been trapped. If he had only stayed in Canada till there had been some prospect of a settlement!

"But I'll be even with you yet, Sarah Slater," he cried, clenching his fists. "You may lay heavy odds on that."

He began to feel about to see if there were any possibility of escape, though he was convinced that the astute Sarah would never have allowed her myrmidons to put him in any place from which there was the remotest chance of his making an exit. No; the walls were of stone, the floor of brick, and the gratings so close that not a mouse could have passed through them. It was evident that he must stay here and await Sarah's pleasure. In his researches he came upon a bench or shelf and sank down in utter weariness. It was an exasperating situation, and in the gloom and darkness he began to review his past life. His boyhood, when he used to come from college to spend his holidays with the Pilkingtons, his uncle, and aunt, then living. His uncle had always given him a sovereign and he had ridden one of Harry's ponies and roamed with him through the country lanes. His young manhood came before him, when he went to summer festivals at the Belvedere Club House and saw Mary Clinton dancing with her future husband. Often he had gone out upon the gallery, looking down upon the wide ex-

pause of the East River all about, fuming with rage at his Cousin Harry.

Then his entrance into the American army, and his exit thence, after many questionable transactions. That part of his life he did not care to dwell upon overimuch. Thenceforth he was eligible no more, and he knew it, for the Belvedere Club or for any private drawing-room. He was a pariah and an outcast, though the final exploits which had won him his rank in the British army were not suspected. He was a pariah and an outcast in his native land, and, despite his commission, he had met with little better fortune in Canada.

Socially he had been an exile there as well, for a part of his story had gotten out, so that not only his comrades-in-arms, but citizens of repute shunned him. But one chance remained, the Pilkington estate. If he procured that, he fancied he would be in a position to defy fate. For surely, he would then regain his lost ground, and, failing that, he could raise money and go abroad.

Therefore, he must make terms with this atrocious Sarah Slater. He must have her for an ally, not an enemy, and he felt that he had made a mistake in not going to her direct instead of allowing Jim Hollis to negotiate for him. No doubt she would visit him in this prison-house, where an alliance, offensive and defensive, might be entered into. He would know how to manage her if only he had speech with her.

Worn out, he fell asleep, and dreamed that he was again being hurried through the streets with a hand on each of his shoulders, the hand of a silent man, and preceded by a third, who was equally reticent.

CHAPTER XVI.

AT THE FARM OF YVES KERONAC.

It was in a small and isolated village on the Canadian frontier that a very miserable lad lay in the long grass by the roadside, weeping as if his very heart would break. And as he lay and as he sobbed, a tiny dog put its head out of the basket which the boy had set down in utter discouragement, and looked with canine sympathy at its companion. It seemed to say, almost as plainly as if it had made use of human speech:

“Is it you, my friend, and why do you give way to discouragement?”

For it was far more accustomed to see this playfellow bounding through the grasses and plucking the flowers or chasing the butterflies, with a laugh upon his lips or a merry whistle. For Pierrette, as the lad was called, was in general well treated, though the people with whom he lived were rough folk enough. He had been adopted by Yves Keronac, a small farmer of Brittany, some time before that worthy had decided to emigrate to the new world, where he had now been living full seven years at least. Yves Keronac was a blunt, plain-spoken man, with a heavy hand which did not very often strike, though Pierrette had felt it occasionally, and a string of rough words on his tongue when provoked. His wife was a good, easy-going woman, who did not trouble herself very much about the boy, though she was fond



“He stumbled, and the bowl fell in a hundred pieces on the floor.”

of him in her own way and proud, as he grew older, of his good looks.

Altogether Pierrette might have fared much worse. For these people gave him enough to eat, and clothed him comfortably and made him go to church and attend to his religious duties. Nothing of evil was to be learned in the Keronac house, humble as it was. So that, generally speaking, Pierrette was not unhappy. Sometimes it came home to him that he was an orphan and a foundling, with no one to care for him in the wide world. And then he felt downcast.

But there were bright, sunshiny days, when he was helping Madame Keronac to pick apples in the little orchard or aiding her husband at the plow, when life seemed very happy and the boy had not much left to desire. He loved the autumn, when he could go a-nutting, and the early summer, when the berries were in season. He was allowed to pick them, not only for the use of their own little household, but to sell at the houses of the wealthier people or at the hotel, which was some distance away. On such occasions Madame Keronac usually gave him a penny or two for himself, which he could spend as he chose, or hoard away for that mysterious future to which every lad looks forward.

But on this particular day Pierrette was in disgrace, and part of his grief was on account of the very dog which he was carrying, with its brother, in that basket. On the previous day two cronies of Yves Keronac had come in, and he invited them to partake of some fresh milk, which he had bade Pierrette seek in the dairy. Pierrette, whom, it must be owned, was giddy at times, turned his head as he came in at the threshold to say something to his friends, the puppies, who were without. In so

doing, as ill-luck would have it, he stumbled, and the bowl fell in a hundred pieces on the floor.

Yves Keronac cast a look at the boy which convinced him that he should presently feel the weight of that heavy hand, whereas the two who sat at table began to jest at the misfortune, saying:

“Ha, ha! Pierrette, you will catch it this time, and no mistake.”

“No,” said M. Keronac, slowly, “*he* won’t catch it this time, but instead he shall put both the dogs in a basket and take them this very day to the English lady who has been long wanting to buy them. For they help this lad to idle his time, and have just caused this misfortune. But now, Pierrette, quick, to fetch more milk, and no accidents this time.”

The hot tears were chasing each other down the boy’s face, so that he could hardly see where he was going, and feared lest he should drop the milk again.

“Cease that childish blubbering,” said the farmer, as he saw the lad’s tear-stained face, “lest you have better cause for it.”

Pierrette tried to keep back the tears, but it was hard when he thought that he was about to lose his playmates, his only friends.

Early the next morning indeed, under madame’s careful supervision, the boy was forced to put his dogs into a basket and start for the place of sale. He was to leave the dogs and let the lady come over to make her own terms with M. Keronac; for she was one of his best customers for farm produce, and he wanted to oblige her.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH PIERRETTE IS PUNISHED.

BUT Pierrette had not gone far when he cast himself down by the roadside in a futile paroxysm of weeping. And as he lay he had formed the resolution to brave the farmer's anger and carry the dogs back to the farm. Anything was better than to lose them. He planned it all out. He would hide them away in an unused barn where he could himself feed them. Then he would work very hard and try to please the farmer, and when his anger had died out he would confess all and beg permission to keep his pets.

It chanced, as Pierrette had hoped, that for the first couple of days Yves Keronac was taken up with other matters, and madame was engaged in her favorite occupation of house-cleaning. So that the boy went unquestioned. But on the third day, just as they were taking their early breakfast, at five o'clock, the farmer said to his wife:

"It is strange that that lady has never come to pay for the dogs."

"Most strange," the wife had replied, while Pierrette grew crimson, and the milk he was drinking nearly choked him.

"What did she say?" asked the farmer, turning abruptly upon the boy.

"Yes, tell us, Pierrette," echoed Madame Keronac, with some curiosity.

"I—I did not see her," stammered Pierrette.

"You did not see her? Who, then, took the dogs from you?" cried Yves, angrily.

There was a pause, then Pierrette answered bravely,
"No one."

M. Keronac raised his hand.

"Gently, gently, my friend," said the farmer's wife, who hated violence.

"What sort of work is this?" cried M. Keronac, stamping on the ground, and bringing down his hand on the table so that the crockery danced.

"Gently, gently," repeated the farmer's wife, but her husband only made a gesture of impatience, and repeated the inquiry.

"Did you turn them loose on the grounds?"

"No, sir," said Pierrette.

"What, then?" cried the farmer, rising, and approaching the boy's chair. Pierrette trembled violently. He was very much afraid of the farmer when he was angry.

"Tell me this instant what you did with the dogs, and take that to loosen your tongue," cried Yves Keronac, dealing the poor lad a sound cuff.

"My friend," said madame, deprecatingly, holding back the avenging arm, "remember he is fatherless."

Keronac did not repeat the blow, and the boy, who was truthful, gathered up his courage.

"I didn't take them to the lady's house at all," he blurted out.

"And you dare to sit there and tell me that you disobeyed me?" cried the farmer.

"O, sir, I couldn't, couldn't part with them," cried Pierrette, beginning to sob. "I'd rather you'd do anything to me rather

than send them away. So I thought I'd come back and beg you to let me keep them. Only, when I got here, I was afraid."

"And well might you be," cried the farmer. He was terribly angry and shook the boy by the shoulder. "Tell me where you have put them."

"In the old barn," sobbed Pierrette.

The farmer turned away without a word and strode off toward the barn, Pierrette running after him. But the man got there first and presently emerged, holding a puppy in each hand.

"Now," said he, "to the stream, and in they go. I'll have no more of this folly. No whining puppies to make you waste your time and disobey me!"

Pierrette gave a great cry.

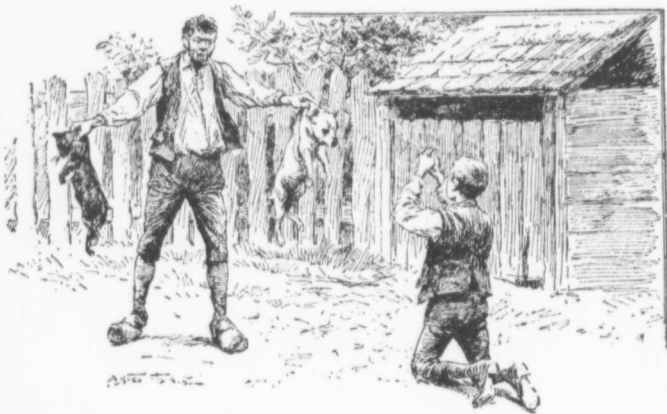
"O, sir," he said, falling upon his knees and putting up his hands in supplication, "I'll really take them to the English lady's this time if only you'll spare their lives."

The farmer was inexorable. He marched on toward the stream, a tributary of one of the great northern rivers, with the dogs howling and kicking in each hand. Arrived at the edge of the water, he threw them as far as he could reach into the middle of the current. After which he drove Pierrette home, cuffing him at intervals to make him stop crying, and bidding him get to his work as quickly as possible.

It was on that very evening, near sunset, that a pedler woman, all the way from New York, stopped at the farm. Madame Keronac bought a few articles from the cart and invited the pedler to remain overnight, according to the hospitable custom of her race. Molly Deegan accepted the invitation, and by this providential circumstance found the key to what had been so long a mystery. For the years had gone by at Pilkington Manor with alternate

gleams of hope or intervals of blank despair. Father Christian had written to his brother, but it chanced that Father Aubril had been away on missionary work among the Indians; for priests were few, and their services were often utilized in various parts of the country, so that it was a long time before he received the letter.

He had replied at once, but communication was slow, and



"Pierrette gave a great cry. 'O, sir,' he said, falling upon his knees, 'I'll really take them this time.'"

Father Christian had to report when he wrote next that, if the child had been in reality the Pilkington heir, it had been adopted by Breton folk, who had afterward emigrated to America. The Sisters would make every effort to discover the farmer's present whereabouts, but it seemed difficult. Now Mrs. Pilkington, whose hope was revived by Father Christian's letter, was convinced that sooner or later the child would be found. Efforts had been made

to trace him, but in vain. The Keronacs lived obscurely, and had seen no advertisements, met with no detectives.

Father Aubril had urged Molly to keep forever on the alert. Her wandering life might enable her to discover what the shrewdest detectives had hitherto failed to do. Now Molly, installed in the farm-house kitchen, took note of the fair and delicate features and coloring of Pierrette, so unlike his parents, and something in the outline of his face seemed vaguely familiar. She heard the story of the dogs, too, and was able to give the boy some consolation. That afternoon, as she drove along by the bank of the little river, she had observed two dogs endeavoring to scramble up the river bank, and had been much amused at their appearance and efforts. Indeed, her suggestion that they might prove to be Pierrette's two friends was correct, for later, when the boy went out to the byre to see that all was secure, he found the two dogs scratching at the door. They gave him a tumultuous welcome, which he returned by kneeling down and embracing the faithful beasts, though their coats were still wet, and letting his tears fall upon their rough hair.

Partly at the request of the pleasant guest, who gave Madame Keronac a very nice present from among her wares as a return for her hospitality, and partly because, his anger over, the farmer felt sorry for Pierrette, the dogs were allowed to remain, on condition that there should be no more idling.

Then when Pierrette, forgetting his late grief, went to bed as happy as a lark, Molly questioned her hostess about the lad and drew his story from her. To Molly's amazement this story tallied in almost every particular with that of the child whom they had so long thought dead. Madame Keronac knew nothing of his parentage, but the Sisters, she said, had believed him to

be of gentle birth. M. Keronac had made this an objection to taking the child, lest it should prevent him later on from being useful for work. But she herself had been pleased with his chestnut hair and blue eyes, and had prevailed upon her husband to chose him and no other. Furthermore, she declared that one of the Sisters believed him to be an American, but was rather laughed at for the conjecture. Molly Deegan's heart leaped within her as she listened. Little doubt remained that she had happened upon the very people with whom had dwelt all these years the Pilkington heir.

"Surely the finger of God is here," she said to herself. "He brought me to this place, praise be to His holy name."

She did not, however, think it wise to say anything to the Keronacs. She would make known her discovery to the priest and let him act. She hurried away soon after dawn, having first displayed her wares to gladden the heart of Pierrette. She brought forth combs, brushes, pins, needles, Indian baskets and bead-work, tiny mirrors in brass frames, dolls, bright-colored pictures, religious and otherwise, strings of beads, dress goods, tins, and groceries. To Pierrette that cart and its contents were marvelous. He was delighted, moreover, when Molly, by the farmer's permission, took him for a drive a piece of the road, with the resuscitated dogs barking and leaping on each side, joyous and exultant, as if they knew they had been saved from a cruel death. They forgave the farmer, too, and whined at his feet and licked his hand as he came out to see the party off, with many a good-by to the cheery pedler, who had amused them with many tales of her life and adventures. Both husband and wife declared that it was as good as a book to hear her talk.

Pierrette could not understand why, as they drove, the woman

looked at him so long and earnestly, muttering: "Well, well! To think of it!" And again, "Why, he'll be the very moral of his father when he's twenty years of age. His eyes and his hair are proof enough for me."

Molly was so interested in her discovery, and so eager to give joy to the poor mother, that she turned her cart homeward, forsaking the route she had laid out for herself.

"But the ways of God are wonderful!" cried Father Aubril when he heard Molly's news. "How He confounds the plans of the wicked!"

It was one of the most joyful moments in the life of that good priest, who had known so many painful ones in the exercise of his sublime vocation. Not that he had ever regretted that fair morning long ago in Paris when he had given up his life to the service of God, "his feet upon the mountain-top, preaching peace." Meanwhile Pierrette remained at the farm.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN WHICH YVES KERONAC VISITS THE MANOR.

Mrs. PILKINGTON had kept with her all these years the child of her neighbor who had died, and the self-same infant whose appearance upon the lawn had so alarmed her wicked kinsman.

It was upon a day of early April, when the trees were just budding and the leaves coming out a tender green, that Mildred stood with her adopted mother, awaiting an arrival which was of interest to both. For this child had identified herself in a special manner with the joys and sorrows of her kind protectress.

Mrs. Pilkington was in a fever of suspense. Molly had undertaken to explain the situation to the farmer and bring him back with her in her cart. At last there was the sound of wheels in the avenue below, and Molly deposited at the steps leading to the terrace a man in the garb of a Breton peasant. Molly did not wait for the prospective interview; she rattled away again in her cart, leaving the astonished peasant to gaze with wonder-stricken eyes at the beauties of the place. Mildred, at Mrs. Pilkington's suggestion, had also retired to the house and sent Lucy to her mistress. It was singular that this girl had contrived to retain her place in her mistress' esteem. Mrs. Pilkington even felt a kind of affection for her, holding her to be a link with the past. For was it not she who had cared for the lost Wilfrid and held him oftenest in her arms? Some years before Lucy had married

Jim Hollis, but their life had been one of misery. He had never succeeded in getting much from Arthur Pilkington, who had indeed, spent considerable in the effort to establish his claim upon the estate. Jim Hollis would never work, living always upon the hope of plucking his patron and former master.

So it was that Lucy had begged Mrs. Pilkington to take her back, while Jim drifted about and lived upon his wits. It was always understood between the precious pair that, if ever they came into their own, out of which that villain of a fine gentleman was keeping them, they should carry out their plan of setting up an inn.

Sarah Slater, as shall presently be seen, had taken hold of the matter earnestly, but neither Jim nor Lucy had ever profited much by their connection with her. On the contrary, she had contrived to obtain more or less from both of them and kept them in terrified submission to herself. She fed them, as she did Arthur Pilkington, with false hopes, and instructed Lucy to lose no opportunity of collecting information at the Manor.

So Mrs. Pilkington unconsciously lent herself to the evil designs of all these persons by permitting her trusted Lucy to hear every word of her interview with Farmer Keronac. Mrs. Pilkington received the man very graciously, so that he was charmed with the great lady from the first. Bidding him be seated, she questioned him closely as to the orphan he had adopted. Her own emotion almost overpowered her at times, and her color came and went as the blood seemed to flow back and forth from her heart. All things in the story seemed to point to the identity of the child with her lost Wilfrid. But there was one mark by which she could most certainly identify him, a scar upon the back of his neck, where he had been allowed to fall in babyhood.

"You remember, Lucy?" asked Mrs. Pilkington.

"Yes, ma'am. It was my fault, too, ma'am. I left him just an instant on the side of the bed and he fell, striking his neck against the corner of a stool. It sickens me yet, ma'am, when I think of how I felt as I seen the blood flowing."

She said at the same time, within herself:

"I remember well what a fuss they made about that scratch;



"Mildred stood with her adopted mother, awaiting an arrival which was of interest to both."

the doctor sent for and me gettin' warning from Captain Pilkington and the mother here cryin'."

Keronac said that he had never noticed such a mark, but that he would look when he went home. The interview terminated, Mrs. Pilkington sent him in Lucy's charge to be entertained by Mrs. Brown, and Lucy on the way obtained some information on her own account.

Yves Keronac was, altogether, very much pleased with his visit. Mrs. Pilkington had promised him a compensation for the loss of his adopted son, he had had a gala day at the Manor, with a prospect of more, should Pierrette come into his own. He

could not help rejoicing, too, in the joy of the mother, with whom he had been much pleased, and in whom Molly had previously interested him. For he was a good man in the main, with a warm heart under his rough exterior.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN WHICH MRS. PILKINGTON GOES ON A SECRET EXPEDITION.

MRS. PILKINGTON had now but one consuming desire, and that was to see the boy known as Pierrette, whom she firmly believed to be her lost Wilfrid. Father Aubril, who had been absent on the occasion of Yves Keronac's visit, endeavored to dissuade her from any such attempt. The affair, he said, was still uncertain. She might expose herself and the lad to a cruel disappointment, and at the best, the Sisters would have to be communicated with and legal formalities would cause delay. But the heart is ever stronger than prudence, and so it came about that Mrs. Pilkington, accompanied by Mildred, stole away from the Manor one morning and started for the North. By an instinct she said no word to Lucy of her intention, nor to any of the other house servants.

The faithful Mary Anne was long since the wife of a farm laborer and lived quite comfortably in a little house upon the estate. Mrs. Pilkington stopped there to tell Mary Anne whither she was going and why. She broke down and cried sympathically as poor Mary Anne began to sob.

"Oh, ma'am dear," she said, "after all these years! oh, if God should give him back to you!"

"I feel in my heart that I am going to see my child now," said Mrs. Pilkington, "but don't tell any one of my intention.

I have tried to be resigned—don't you think I have, Mary Anne? So perhaps God will have pity on me at last. I wanted to tell you and ask your prayers. Your strong Irish faith will help me."

"If any prayers of mine can help you, ma'am, you will have them," said Mary Anne, the tears streaming down her cheeks.

Then the warm-hearted woman gathered Mildred into her arms. She had been her nurse from infancy, having early asked Mrs. Pilkington to let her assume that office instead of Lucy, who, as she said, "hated squalling brats."

"For your goodness and kindness, ma'am, to this orphan child, if it were nothing else, you deserve that reward," said Mary Anne, almost solemnly.

"No, no," said the mistress, "nothing that I have done could deserve such mercy. But pray, pray for me, dear Mary Anne." Then she added, looking back with something of her old bright smile:

"There will be great rejoicings for us all if the Pilkington heir is found."

It was a strange moment in the life of Mary Pilkington, who had gone through much that was out of the common, when she sat in the farmhouse kitchen, with its broad hearth, so spotlessly clean, confronting the slim, pale lad whom she believed to be her son. She never had any doubt of it from the moment she looked into his face. The eyes and the hair, the expression, the whole bearing was that of Harry Pilkington. The very sight of the boy set her heart a-beating and she had to put her hand upon it to brace herself by a strong effort. For she felt as if she must have fallen. All the heart-weariness, all the hunger of those long years was in her face. But she had to keep her feelings under control and to talk to this lad in a strained voice about common



*"Mrs. Pilkington permitted her trusted Lucy to hear every word of her
intercourse with Farmer Keronac."*

things. She saw, again, her dead husband, as he rode away on that last night and waved his hand to her from the avenue. Oh, those last nights and those last days, how they haunt the human heart, and sometimes how hard it is to know when they have arrived!

Pierrette replied to all her questions, telling his simple tale, finding no fault with his adopted parents, who, in truth, had ordinarily treated him well. But to the mother's heart there was a thrilling pathos in the story of his lonely youth.

"I was an orphan," he said, simply. "I never knew my parents. Madame Keronac got me at the Asylum."

He spoke, incidentally, of his dogs, and at once Mildred begged to be allowed to go to see them. The friendship between the girl and boy was instantaneous, though Pierrette felt a little shy of this young lady in her fine clothes. But presently Mrs. Pilkington smiled with pleasure as she heard their voices outside in the free and joyous intercourse of childhood, mingled with the cheerful barking of the dogs.

The mother could only sit still and pray and thank God. She was already sure, though she had not applied the final test of examining the scar at the back of the neck. This, however, she did before leaving, and then she tenderly embraced the boy, telling him that she hoped he would soon be coming to live with her and Mildred.

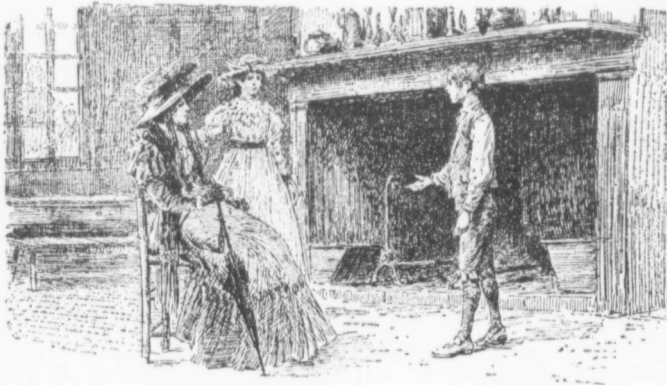
"And you will have to be sure and bring the dogs," said Mildred.

"If Monsieur Keronac will let me," he said.

"Oh, he will," said Mildred; "so don't forget. They are beauties. I love them and you, too, Pierrette."

They left the poor lad in a glow of delight. He already loved

the beautiful lady with a boyish worship such as he had never known before, and he was charmed with his playmate and rejoiced at the prospect that they would soon be all together. Once the visitors had gone Madame Keronac, who had wept copiously all day, told Pierrette much more than perhaps was quite prudent as to his early history and future prospects. After that he went about as in a dream, while Mrs. Pilkington looked back upon those rude farm buildings as on a place of delight.



"'I was an orphan,' he said, simply. 'I never knew my parents. Madame Keronac got me at the Asylum.'"

For there she had experienced the first moment of happiness since the tragedy of that awful year had blotted out joy forever. In that humble place, she had looked once more into the eyes she loved, listened once more to the voice that thrilled every fiber of her being, and called all her mother soul to respond to its boyish accents.

CHAPTER XX.

IN WHICH SARAH SLATER VISITS THE MANOR A SECOND TIME.

It was almost coincident with Mrs. Pilkington's visit to the farm that she received an unsigned scrawl saying that there was a certain person who could throw some light on past events, and that if Mrs. Pilkington desired to see her, she would come to the Manor on Wednesday after nightfall, on condition that no one knew of her visit and that she was paid for the trouble.

Mrs. Pilkington stood by the window with this note in her hand and pondered. She determined finally that she would see this person and hear her story. She wrote a line, bidding her come at the appointed time, promising secrecy and a fitting reward, and then she waited. As soon as it was dusk on Wednesday evening she caused a lamp to be lighted in a certain little sitting-room in a remote part of the house, especially retired from the servants' quarters. After that she went to walk in the garden, as had been arranged. For she meant to bring the unknown herself into the house through the conservatory.

As she watched and waited there was a deep, dead silence over all which oppressed her. The scent of the roses was too heavy almost to be borne, the air was close, for not the slightest breath stirred the tree-tops. All at once she saw the figure of a woman, spectral it seemed to her, advancing along one of the walks. A sudden nervous tremor seized upon Mary Pilkington,

and it cost her quite an effort to stand still and let that figure approach.

A sinister face to match that sinister figure presently confronted the shrinking lady, who had come so little into contact with what was evil that it oppressed her, even as did the dark clouds in the southern sky.

"We must go in out of this," said a harsh voice, abruptly. "The darkness has eyes and the silence has ears; the trees tell tales and the grass whispers secrets."

This singular address startled Mrs. Pilkington more than ever, and her repulsion to that evil figure increased. But she had a strength and firmness of her own, and this interview had to be carried to a conclusion. It might have some bearing on the approaching restoration of her son.

"I have thought of that," she said, "follow me."

And the strange being, like some evil genius, followed the footsteps of that other fair, sweet woman, who had held herself unspotted from the world. So they passed along the garden walk between the rose-bushes, white and crimson and pink and yellow, and the oleander trees bending their graceful shapes in the wind of night. And as Sarah Slater went, her reflections were as somber as her face.

"I hate her," she said to herself, "for the beauty of this place, which is hers, and for her wealth; and most of all, I hate her for the goodness that is written so plain upon her face. Shall I help to give her back her child? No. I will take her money, and sell her again. Her very goodness shall work her evil."

For that dark and storm-tossed soul was seized with a kind of despair at sight of this virtue which had passed unscathed through years of suffering as it had risen above the temptations of wealth.

Once seated in the exquisite little room the lamplight fell full on the shrunken figure and hardened face of the old woman. Mrs. Pilkington felt a kind of pity for her; she could scarce have told why.

"Before I speak," said the visitor, "I want the price of my trouble."

"How much?" said Mrs. Pilkington, simply, taking a silken, knitted purse from her pocket.

"Two guineas just for coming here. My terms is high, but I must have them."

Without a word Mrs. Pilkington counted into her hand some shining coins, over which the crone fairly gloated. Gold was her master passion.

"But," she said, suddenly, "this is but for my trouble in coming here and the reason for it, which I will tell you. Any more information must be bought and paid for."

Mrs. Pilkington nodded. She felt an indescribable loathing for this mercenary wretch, who traded, as she felt sure, in evil. But as the other sat silent, counting the coins over and over, she forced herself to speak:

"You say you can throw light on the past?" she said. "I suppose that means on the affair of my child's disappearance?"

"Aye, that, and other things, too," said the strange being. "I was near-by when midnight shots were fired and some fell never to rise again."

"My God!" murmured Mrs. Pilkington. Was this old wound to be reopened, too?

"The whole thing was planned, well planned, too. It was Blackbird and his redskins did the firing. You know who Blackbird is?"

Mrs. Pilkington shook her head.

"Well, he's just an Injun that was mighty serviceable to the Britishers during the troubles. Some one you know tipped them the wink that the despatches were being sent."

Mrs. Pilkington, guessing at once who was meant, covered her face with her hands. The horror of it seemed to overcome her. Why, they had been boys together, those two men, brothers in all but the name.

"You wrong him, though, in this," said Sarah Slater, slowly. "He knew the despatches were going, but he didn't know who was bringing them. Not that he wasn't mighty glad, though," she added, with a chuckle, "for often he had murdered his cousin in his heart, and Blackbird did him a service. Those despatches had to be got by the Britishers, and the one you know put them on to how to get them; it's for that he got himself made a Major. It was planned in my back parlor and I heard every word they said, though he didn't know that."

She laughed again, her horrible, grating laugh, which made Mrs. Pilkington shudder, and then she resumed, while the lady sat silent, feeling as if she were in some horrible dream and regretting that she had allowed this old creature to cross her threshold.

"Well, even before that happened," Sarah Slater said grimly, "he was after the child."

Mrs. Pilkington started.

"He thought if nothing else could be done a reward might be offered, which would put him on his feet again. But once the father was gone he seen his way straight. 'It isn't a brat will keep me out of my own,' says he."

Here Mrs. Pilkington started to her feet.

"I will not listen to anything further," she cried. "You shall not make these horrible accusations against my husband's kinsman. I will not believe them."

"And I'm not asking you to believe them nor anything else, Madam Pilkington," said the old woman, looking at her with a strange sort of admiration, "but they're true, all the same, and if you want to hear the rest of my story, which may be will please you better, I'll tell it. And if not, I'll go my way."

Mrs. Pilkington involuntarily sat down.

"Leave that person out of your narrative, if possible," she said.

Sarah went on:

"The child was got and took away. The police was mighty active, but they didn't take notice that a ship was sailing very early on the morning after the stealing—the *White Swan*, Morrison, master, and on board of it there was a Mrs. Lewis with a very sick child, which caused her to keep to the cabin. Aboard of her, too, was a gentleman who, on account of the recent death of his cousin, had but little to do with the other passengers. Oh, it was well planned. Who but me would have thought of getting the child so quick out of the country, over to France to the kind nuns?"

Mrs. Pilkington here interposed, and there was a new sternness in her voice.

"Woman," said she, "if you have any further business with me, let it be spoken briefly. I will not hear these sickening details of your fiendish crime."

A dull red crept all at once into the withered face.

"Fiendish!" she repeated.

"Yes, fiendish!" said Mrs. Pilkington; "to have robbed a

lately widowed mother of her child; to have left her all these years in ignorance of its fate. I tell you, woman, it is only the all-merciful God who can pardon, or make me pardon, such a wrong."

Sarah Slater was strangely moved. It seemed as if a contest were going on between the evil within her and the good which opposed her in this other woman. She felt, too, an odd desire to justify herself.

"And yet," she said, "I might have killed it."

"Killed an innocent child? Oh, no," cried Mrs. Pilkington, putting out her hand as if to ward off a blow. "Oh, no, you couldn't have done that."

"Many another besides me has done it, and some there were who would have had me do it. Well, I didn't, but I can tell you them that took away the child, and I can help you to get it back."

"For the first," said Mrs. Pilkington, standing up, "I do not care to know. What purpose can it answer now to learn the names of the heartless wretches that committed such a crime?"

"Then you shall know, my fine madam," cried Sarah Slater, rising, too, in a sudden transport of anger. "The first and foremost in it, as you know already by what I have said, was Arthur Pilkington, your husband's cousin, and the heir-at-law to the estate. Besides him—"

"Stop!" cried Mrs. Pilkington, raising her hand for silence. "I will hear no more. I leave you and all concerned to God. And as for your help in the recovery of my child, I do not need it. I spurn such help. For through the mercy of God, my child is virtually found."

"Are you so sure of that?" screamed Sarah Slater, in a fury. "I know about the brat you mean, and I bid you be not too sure."

She shook her withered hand menacingly at Mrs. Pilkington as she spoke.

"You'll have need of Sarah Slater and what she could tell you before you're done."

"I do not fear for the future," said Mrs. Pilkington, steadily; "good must conquer evil."

Sarah Slater's face grew dark with rage, and a cold chill fell upon the mother's confident spirit, while the words, "I bid you be not too sure," seemed as an omen of evil. Could some new ill befall, just when the cup of happiness was at her lips? It might be better, after all, to propitiate this Sarah Slater. But the woman had gone noiselessly out of the door, without another word, her features convulsed with rage, and a tempest of anger in her heart. Mrs. Pilkington, from the window, saw her turn in the garden path to shake her fist menacingly at the house. The poor lady trembled with terror and excitement. She would have given worlds to call for assistance, but she believed it better to let the woman depart silently as she had come. While she stood and watched the outline of her figure grow fainter, the moon burst suddenly out from a cloud, and it seemed to the watcher as a confirmation almost of her words:

"Good must triumph over evil."

Next day she was kept busy, as her uncle, Mr. Graystone, brought four or five officers with him to dine at the Manor. Mrs. Pilkington went forth to meet them as far as the archway which led into the stable yard, where their horses were to be cared for, and they all stood still chatting for a few moments and complimenting the lady of the Manor on the beauty of the place.

"One of the finest in the country, I should say, as well as the oldest," remarked a colonel who had visited many of the Mary-

land and Virginia homesteads, as well as those of the old Bay State.

"We are all very proud of it and like to show it off," observed Mr. Graystone, "but my niece is so devoted to her roof-tree that we can scarce persuade her to leave it."

"I am growing too old a woman for change and stir," Mary Pilkington said, smiling, at which the officers one and all protested. For she still looked both young and fair in the subdued gray gown which she had worn of late—since there had been



"Without a word Mrs. Pilkington counted into her hand some shining coins over which the crone fairly glowered."

prospects of getting back her child. When they were seated at table a half hour later Mr. Graystone said:

"And what is this I hear, Mary, as to the prospect of finding the Pilkington heir? That is, if these gentlemen will permit us to discuss family matters."

"It has been long an open secret, has it not?" said Mary, somewhat sadly, to the colonel, who sat at her right hand. "My misfortunes have been so widely known that my hopes may be properly made public as well. For I trust that it is not premature to speak of the probable recovery of my child."

She gave some account of the discovery made by the pedler, Molly Deegan, of her own stolen visit to the farm, and of the various tokens by which she had identified her son. The gentlemen were much interested.

"I vow to God, madam, 'tis like a romance," said the colonel, "and your son will be the most popular young gentleman in the State when he comes into possession."

"We must have a merry-making, niece. We must have a day of general rejoicing," said Mr. Graystone. "I hope, Colonel, you will be here, and you, too, sirs," he added, addressing the other officers.

They all hoped they would, to which Mrs. Pilkington added her own desire that they should be present, concluding with the words:

"Though I sadly fear my uncle is giving the invitations very far ahead."

And it did Mr. Graystone good to hear her laugh as she used to do in her girlhood.

"Never fear, gentlemen," he said, "but that soon or late, Pilkington Manor will do itself credit, when the heir comes home."

Before the party left, Mrs. Pilkington managed to draw her uncle aside, and the shadow was dark upon her face again as she said:

"Uncle, dear, how much wickedness there is in the world, and how near home it comes to us."

Mr. Graystone looked at her keenly.

"What have you heard, Mary?" he asked.

She had a reluctance to speak of it, and yet she felt that he ought to know. She must have some protection in future from

such danger. She told him briefly what she had heard, intimating that out of respect for the name she would not have it made public unless in case of absolute necessity.

"The villain! The double-dyed villain!" cried her uncle, hotly. "What we knew of him before was bad enough. No honest gentleman would touch his hand these ten years. But a child, a woman—and they of his own kin! You should have the law of him, niece, I tell you."

"Better not," said she, "and I must not keep you. I see your friends are waiting."

"In future, my dear, you will always have a protector near at hand, now that I know of this."

"I thank God for it," she said solemnly, as she kissed her uncle and saw him ride off with his friends.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN WHICH THE STORY GOES BACKWARD.

ON that bygone evening when Sarah Slater had so cleverly entrapped the heir-at-law, as he chose to call himself, Jim Hollis



“ ‘The swell’s in there—“the fine gentleman!”’
he chuckled.”

pointed out with glee to one of his associates the place of Arthur Pilkington’s imprisonment.

“The swell’s in there, ‘the fine gentleman!’” he said, with a chuckle; “that’s where she’s got him.”

“She! Who?” cried the other, with real or pretended ignorance.

“Why, Sarah, of course. Oh, she’s a clever one—she’s able for the best of them.”

“Clever she is and no mistake,” said the man addressed. “Sometimes I think to myself she’s too smart. She’ll overdo it one of these days.”

“Not Sarah Slater, not she!” cried Jim, with implicit confidence. “Why, if I was to tell you of the schemes she’s got on hand! Lor’! it makes me laugh only to think of them.”

The other, who knew a good deal of Sarah himself, was, of

course, curious to hear more. But Jim became suddenly reticent and soon managed to get rid of his associate. He would have dearly loved to look in at the grating and revile his former master, but he had a wholesome dread of that gentleman and he knew that Sarah could not keep him very long in durance vile. Therefore he refrained, and went on his way, merrily singing the stave of a song:

“If I were the Mayor of Boston town,
I'd toss for a shilling and I'd wager a crown,
I'd eat rare beef, with wine to wash it down,
And my wife, she should wear a silken gown.”

“Neat enough poor Lucy would look in it,” he said to himself. Lucy was not his wife at that time, and he occasionally threw her a sentimental thought. “And she's the very lady to be pleased with it.”

He did not see Sarah Slater, who was approaching the door which he had just left. Nor did she wish to be observed by him. She threw him a glance of contempt from her dark eyes and stood aside in the shade of a projecting wall till he had gone. Then she stepped to the door, at which she began to beat loudly, having found her key of no avail and perceiving that the prisoner must have secured the door by a bolt on the inner side.

At first there was no response and she stood still, having in her apron a bottle of wine and something to eat which she wanted to give Arthur Pilkington. As she waited a fear darted through her mind. Could this prisoner, this fine gentleman, be dead? A grim smile crossed her face.

“Asleep, mayhap,” she said; “shamming more likely.”

She called again. "You who are inside, come to the grating. There is one here to speak with you."

After some hesitation her quick ear caught a sound. It was the creak of a bench—some one arising. Then there was a step, and a peevish voice said:

"Is it you, you infernal hag?"

Sarah Slater made no reply.

"Is it you, I say? A devilish old hag called Sarah Slater?"

"Sarah Slater is here."

"Then open quickly, you old witch."

"They are quickest answered who call people and things by their right name," said Sarah.

"It would be hard to find one bad enough to fit you," cried the prisoner, with a coarse laugh, into which entered all the irritation and discomfort of the past night and day.

Then a sudden thought seemed to strike him.

"Sarah," he said, "be reasonable. We're too old friends to quarrel. But it passes a joke to keep one mewed up here."

"You don't come out till I say to you all that's on my mind," said Sarah, doggedly. "A bargain is best made between you and me by the help of locks and bolts."

He inwardly thought of how he should like to kill her. But he answered in a tone of conciliation:

"Come, then, Sarah, let us hear your bargain, for I want to get out of this hole as quick as I can."

"Well, you know how it's been from the beginning, promising and not performing to those you got into an ugly business and to me. From this time on it's different, for if you fail in what you undertake to do for me you shall die."

She said this quite calmly, as though it were an ordinary

matter of business, and the prisoner inside could not repress a start.

"You know I keep my word," she went on, "and this is no idle threat. Besides, you wouldn't want me to call on Madam Pilkington."

"You dare not do that," he cried, involuntarily.

"I'll dare anything that pleases me," she said, "and have a talk with her about the stealing of the child. A pretty sum I might get out of her, paid down on the nail, too."

"I don't believe she'd listen to nor pay you a single sixpence."

Sarah laughed scornfully.

"Well, I could try, any way. And there's other matters I might talk to her about."

She drew closer to the grating.

"You remember Blackbird, don't you?" she whispered, with a hissing noise like that of a snake.

He recoiled as if he had been struck.

"Are you witch or devil?" he cried; then added in a husky undertone, "but what has that to do with her?"

"I'll make it clear enough when I go there," cried she.

"Name your terms," said he; "it would take a demon to fight against you."

"Now you speak like a sensible man," she said, complacently, "and I'll tell you this much. To-night you'll be brought to my house, and you'll sign and seal a paper which will give me a lien on the Pilkington estate when it comes into your possession."

"Never!" he cried, excitedly. "Never that!"

"Oh, yes, my dear, it will be just that," she said, "and in the meantime, for the services I rendered in getting the child

away, you'll pay me regularly, mark you, and not as you've been doing, twenty-five dollars a month, which is little enough."

"But you know how devilish hard up I am," he cried. "Come, Sarah, be reasonable."

"I know, too, that you came into a nice little inheritance a month or so ago, from a maiden aunt in England, who, poor thing, must have been sadly deceived in you."

Pilkington swore under his breath.

"How did you know that?" he muttered.

"I know most things, my honey," she said, gleefully.

"But if I were to do all you say—"

"There's no ifs with me—"

"Well, suppose I do it—can I trust you?"

The woman laughed a cynical laugh.

"Trust me? Well, you know best. I can advance a friend or crush a foe with most women."

"That you can, Sarah Slater," said the prisoner, with ready admiration.

"Well, for the time being, I want to advance you."

"Advance me first then, by letting me out of this hole."

"Not to-night, Mr. Arthur Morehead Pilkington, late of His Britannic Majesty's forces."

He growled.

"To-morrow at dusk, my former Lieutenant in the American army, my negotiator with Blackbird."

He gnashed his teeth with the futile rage that consumed him at these insults.

"To-morrow evening, my heir-at-law, you shall come to my house, where all shall be signed and sealed in due legal form. And if any article of that contract be broken, there shall be first,

the fatted calf being killed at the Manor, for the lost baby's coming home; second, if Mrs. Pilkington so pleases, the prosecution of the late heir presumptive; thirdly, some information lodged with the American government, by Blackbird and company; and fourthly, if all else fail, and it be necessary, there shall be the death of Mr. A. M. Pilkington, quite sudden and mysterious like. Good night, sir, and play the game fair, if you want the stakes. And for your insolence you can go hungry this evening."



"Then she stepped to the door, at which she began to beat loudly."

He vouchsafed no answer, but mentally greeted her with many an abusive name, vowing to rid the country of her before he had done.

And so the night and the silence fell upon him once more in that improvised dungeon, where no light of any star penetrated. If but his conscience had awakened from its long sleep and caused him to put into practise the teachings of his youth, all might have

been well. But he had ever turned aside with deliberate purpose from the path which leads to duty and happiness, and laughed at religion and its ministers. So that his higher faculties had become deadened. He heard the steps of Sarah Slater retreating. How hollow they sounded, with something weird and sinister in the echo that came back to him, like the mockery of his hopes and dreams, a symbol of the emptiness of life as he had made it for himself. And so the night wore on with an hour or two of fitful sleep, and so broke the day.

* * * * *

This had happened some years ago, and that Arthur Pilkington kept his part of the bargain seemed very evident. After the lapse of these years he sat confronting Sarah in her dingy parlor, and as it chanced, it was a continuation of that former conversation at the dungeon grating. This time she proposed to him a new scheme, for which he was to pay still higher, but which she assured him would be an infallible means of coming at the property. She told him cynically of her late interview with Mrs. Pilkington, which has been recorded in our last chapter.

"If her price had been big enough I would have sold you," she said.

Arthur Pilkington flashed a glance upon her which might have annihilated her.

"Your payments are so slow," she observed.

"While you were plucking me of every farthing, you horse leech," cried he, choked with passion.

"Well, she would have naught to do with buying me, and she didn't want to hear anything about your precious self, even after I told her you had had the child stolen and that it was you who set Blackbird on—"

"That was a lie, an infernal lie!" cried Pilkington, springing up. "As God is my witness, I did not know that Harry Pilkington was to carry those despatches."

"I told her as much, so don't excite yourself," said Sarah Slater, her eyes fixed upon the man before her with a curious magnetism, which often quelled the most hardened sinner. "And you needn't threaten, for I'm not afraid of you. It's only goodness that frightens Sarah Slater."

She gave a peculiar laugh. She was thinking of that night at the Manor and of Mrs. Pilkington's face as she had defied her and said that good must triumph.

"And now to business. The child—"

"Oh, hang the child. Lucy Lawless heard *her* talk with the farmer fellow and that game's up. The last chance is gone."

"You should say our chance has come. That child will never come into possession."

Arthur Pilkington stared at her.

"I mean if you act right with me," said the woman, composedly.

"What would you do? Violence to this lad?" asked Pilkington, eyeing her uneasily.

"None!"

"What, then?"

"That's my secret. If my plan wins, there will be no heir of Pilkington, except yourself, of course. So let us to terms, if you care about the scheme."

CHAPTER XXII.

IN WHICH THERE IS A DINNER PARTY AT PILKINGTON MANOR, AND
ARTHUR PILKINGTON PAYS A VISIT THERE.

THAT was a rare occasion at Pilkington Manor and recalled the old pre-Revolutionary days when it was in its full glory, when the officers of the King met the best company of the Colonies there, when the brilliant Alexander Hamilton exchanged witty sayings with Aaron Burr at table, when Benedict Arnold, a sprightly young officer, laid wagers with Anthony Wayne, and the Livingstons, the Jays, the De Peysters drove in gay chariots or lumbering family coaches to the dinners and routs for which the Manor was famous.

This particular dinner party had been wholly Mr. Graystone's idea, nor had it quite met with the mother's approval. It was given on the very evening when the Pilkington heir was expected home. Only relatives of the family or very intimate friends were invited, for Mr. Graystone held that no time should be lost in presenting Wilfrid formally to them. Mr. Graystone himself had gone to see Yves Keronac, and had met his niece's son, being greatly struck by his resemblance to Harry Pilkington. The mother would have preferred having the boy to herself for a few days, but had yielded to her uncle's wish. And so she had reluctantly permitted Lucy to go to fetch him, in company with Mildred.

Yves Keronac had promised to accompany them as far as

Albany, in case of any mischance, and at Albany they were to be met by Mr. Graystone himself.

"If it were not for my confounded gout I'd have gone the whole way," said Mr. Graystone, "but I can't stand jolting, and there's a long wagon ride to reach there."

All minor details had been arranged, even to that of the wardrobe, for one of the best tailors of Gotham had sent a young man to take measurements for suitable garments, and Pierrette was already provided with a complete outfit of such clothing as befitted his new station. The travelers were expected to arrive quite early in the morning, so that the boy would have time to accustom himself somewhat to his new surroundings before the trying ordeal of the evening. Mrs. Pilkington congratulated herself that the guests were not likely to remain very late, for the fashionable world kept early hours long ago.

That memorable day dawned clear and bright, and Mrs. Pilkington was awake at sunrise, with a glow to match it of pleasurable expectation in her heart. Wilfrid was coming home. That room which she had decorated with such loving care would be occupied at last.

She sprang up, dressing hastily and going out to pace up and down the terrace and counting the hours till he could arrive. Then she looked about her, observing with new eyes every separate beauty of the place. Was it not well that so many flowers were still in bloom in the garden? The roses were gone, but there were so many others of the choicest varieties. Their fragrance was almost oppressive. How Wilfrid would revel in them, and what pleasure he would have in roaming over the estate with Mildred! There were a thousand delights in store for a healthy boy fond of outdoor life and of animals. The horses, the dogs,

the cattle, even the very pigs, so clean and beautifully kept, the fowl of every imaginable breed, the peacocks and guinea hens, the ducks on the pond, and the rabbits in the warren. There was a long-haired Shetland pony, to match Mildred's, waiting in the stable for Wilfrid, and as he grew older he should have his choice of horses.

So dreamed the mother, her thoughts going forward to the time when he would be a tall and graceful youth, riding out with the other gentlemen, handsome and admired, as his father had been, and popular with every one. Her reflections were interrupted by a servant announcing that breakfast was served. Had she then dreamed away that long midsummer morning? She smiled at herself.

Happiness, she thought, was new to her, and she was as a parvenu with lately acquired wealth. Presently, to her astonishment, Mr. Graystone was ushered in.

"I couldn't go to Albany after all, niece," he said, "but I sent a trusty fellow to meet them. For the fact is, that rascal Pilkington is coming here to-day."

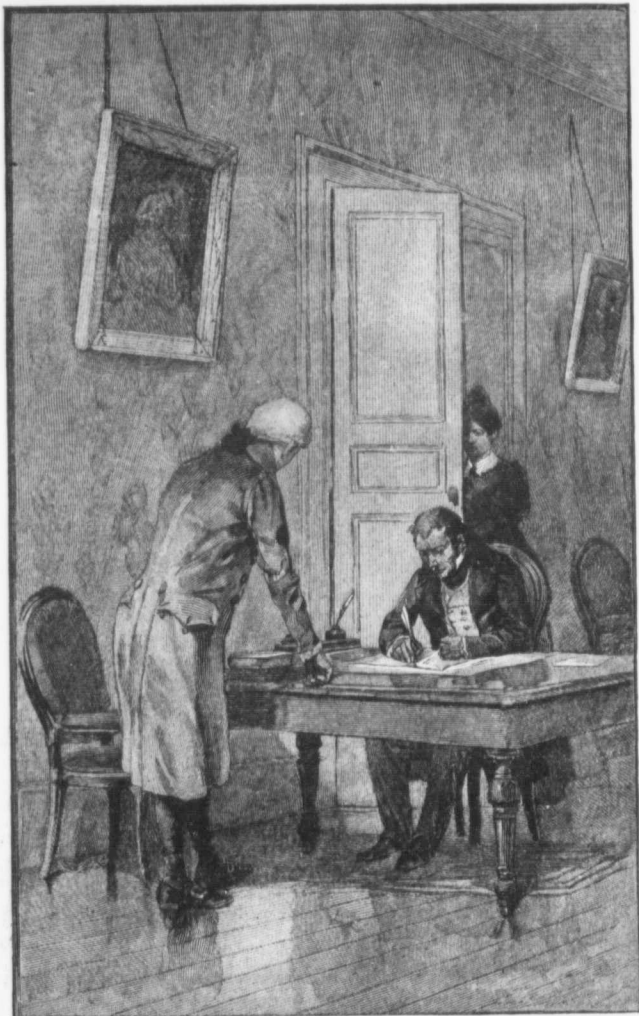
Mrs. Pilkington sank back in her chair. The announcement seemed like an omen of evil.

"I can not see him, uncle," she said.

"And yet it may be necessary, my dear, if only for a very short time. There is question of a paper to be signed."

"A paper?" said his niece, inquiringly.

"Yes. The fellow called on me to express congratulations to you on the recovery of your son, and further offered, which I must admit was handsome of him and quite unexpected, to sign a document renouncing all claim to the estate, once the heir has been put in possession. He said it would make your mind easy."



"Wills stood, prepared to sign, and Mrs. Pilkington lingered at the door."

"It is kind," said Mrs. Pilkington, thoughtfully, "and—very unlike him."

"Very. However, I had the document prepared and signed and attested and all that in presence of a notary. I got Bob Livingstone and young Beekman to put their names to it as witnesses. But I promised to give him a letter signed by you and me in his presence expressing our gratification and all that at his behavior in this matter. And he made a particular point of coming here to get it."

"I would gladly have avoided a personal meeting with him," said Mrs. Pilkington, "after the revelations made me or hinted at by that repulsive woman. Still, I suppose it is best."

"Come to think of it, my dear," said Mr. Graystone, "it may not be necessary. I will write the letter in your presence and in that of one of the lackeys, who can sign, with you, so as to have two witnesses."

"It will be an immense relief, dear uncle," she said, gratefully. "Only, if there seems any real necessity for me to meet this unfortunate man, I must do so."

"No, no, I think not," said he, "and I believe we had better lose no time in preparing this document."

"You will find writing materials in the flowered room," said Mrs. Pilkington, "and I will be with you there in a moment—when I have sent for Wills. He is very discreet, and fully acquainted with the family affairs."

So Mr. Graystone sat down in "the flowered room," so called from the paper on the wall, and began to write that strange letter to the degenerate scion of a race which had been in many respects a noble one. The portraits of one or two of them looked down from their frames on the wall with that look almost of human

interest which appears in pictured faces, while Wills stood, prepared to sign, and Mrs. Pilkington lingered at the door for the same purpose. It cost her something to express her gratification at any act of Arthur Pilkington's life, but justice seemed here to demand it.

Later in the day Mr. Arthur Morehead Pilkington was announced, Wills giving every syllable with the distinctness of a trained servant, showing not the slightest indication in his face of his knowledge of the man. Mr. Graystone, appearing, greeted him with formal courtesy, regretting that Mrs. Pilkington found herself unable that day to receive him. A dark flush mounted to the man's face. Even in these circumstances, which placed him in so favorable a light, Mary Pilkington could not forget. He cursed Sarah Slater in his heart. For even should the estate revert to him shortly, as he hoped, he would require the social countenance of the former lady of the Manor could he possibly obtain it. Here was point-blank disavowal of him, a refusal to meet him. He had heard, too, on his way thither, of the projected dinner party, at which all the Pilkington kin to the farthest degree were to sit down, while he himself was excluded.

Mr. Graystone ushered him into "the flowered room," with its brocaded walls and its pictured ancestors. Arthur Pilkington met their grim glances with a momentary wish that he had been worthy of his race and could have lived honored and honorable like the last Pilkington of the Manor.

"It's all my infernal luck," he said to himself. For seldom, indeed, does the wicked man, confronted with the consequences of his ill-doing, admit that he alone is to blame. He expressed himself, however, as perfectly satisfied with the contents of the letter, and begged Mr. Graystone to offer his thanks with compliments

and congratulations to Mrs. Pilkington, regretting that he had not seen her. He declined all refreshment, and acted, indeed, as Mr. Graystone had to acknowledge, with dignity and propriety.

That gentleman escorted him with the same cold courtesy he had shown throughout the interview to the head of the stairs, down which Arthur Pilkington passed with much the feeling of a beaten hound. He tossed a gold piece to the lackey who stood ready to open the door for him, with a curious wish to stand well with some one. On the terrace he turned to look back at the place, taking in its every detail, and as he did so his self-possession came back to him.

"It will be all right before long, I hope," he said, "but it was a master-stroke of Slater to send me here to-day for this letter, having previously signed a document of renunciation. It will put me beyond suspicion."

He laughed as he thought of the dinner party that night for the Pilkington heir.

"It will be Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark, I'm thinking," he muttered, "unless they'd like to present me to the company in that rôle."

The thought of the general disappointment put him in the best of humor.



"He tossed a gold piece to the lackey."

"I will have my revenge on this haughty Madame Pilkington," he said, "and it will be linked sweetness long drawn out. Every hour of delay in the coming, the bitterness of having to explain to the guests, and then, the dénouement."

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN WHICH THE PILKINGTON HEIR FAILS TO REACH THE MANOR.

LUCY and Mildred arrived at the farm in due time. They were to remain overnight with the Keronacs and proceed next day to Albany, stopping there again for a rest of some hours, and reaching the Manor on the morning of the appointed day. Pierrette took Mildred all over the place and they had a very merry time of it. Lucy announced after the midday meal that she was going to the woods to look for herbs and ferns for Madam Pilkington. As she expected, both children cried out at once that they must go, and Lucy, of course, consented.

Now on their way home again, they passed a field wherein had been set up the tents of a circus, with huge posters concerning the "Great World Show," and the manifold attractions it offered.

"Oh, we must go in," cried Mildred. "I never saw a circus."

Pierrette dared not add his entreaties, for he was far from feeling the young lord of the Manor as yet, or as being in a position to give orders to the fine lady's maid.

"But, Miss Mildred, what would mamma think?"

"She wouldn't think anything. She'd like Wilfrid to have that amusement."

"But here am I in my cap and apron and this basket," hesitated Lucy.

"Oh, they'll know you're with us—it doesn't matter, and you can hide the basket," cried Mildred.

And so after an affected resistance, for Lucy had brought them to this spot on purpose, the children went in. They wandered about the grounds, visiting the menagerie in the first place, and buying peanuts and gingerbread horses, most of which they gave to the elephants, delighted to see them catch them in their trunks, or to the monkeys, who snatched morsels and ran away, as if they had been stealing. After which they went into the tent, charmed with the tinsel delights of the place, and pointing out to each other the clown and the lovely ladies in tarlatan, who leaped through hoops to the backs of horses, and the wild riders of the West, and the performing animals, all with unaffected applause and audible comments, which caused the bystanders to smile. Pierrette spoke English with a French accent, though he spoke it reasonably well, as M. Keronac had taken pains to have him taught and to practise with their English-speaking neighbors, for practical reasons.

Just as the children and Lucy had left the tent and were crossing the open field a middle-aged man stopped them. Pierrette recognizing him as one who had exercised authority in the ring, whispered to Mildred:

“It’s the showman!”

But the person so designated addressed himself wholly to Lucy, with strange agitation and a voice hoarse from some emotion.

“For the love of heaven, my good girl, tell me,” he cried, “who is this boy? I have been watching him during the performance and I know, I feel that he is my own son, lost in infancy.”

Mildred drew back in dismay from this man, clinging closely to Lucy. Pierrette had no other sensation than that of surprise and an uneasy idea that the man might be mad.

Lucy, apparently terrified, stammered out that he was the son of a great lady.

"He is not the son of any lady at all. He has been living with Farmer Keronac and is, I believe, my lost child."

"The farmer brought him from France," argued Lucy.

"Precisely—from Brittany, and procured him from the Sisters' Hospital," cried the showman. "I knew it must be he as soon as I beheld him."



"Hoity-toity, my little man!" said the showman. "You are an unnatural son."

"Go away at once," cried Lucy. "He has just been identified as the child of Mrs. Pilkington and I am taking him to her."

"Never!" cried the man. "But stay; I will convince you."

He seized upon Pierrette excitedly, pointing out to Lucy a tiny scar upon the back of the neck.

"Does that convince you?" he cried. "It was the clown let

him fall in a trick he was doing. Why, he has the very features of my wife, Flora. I tell you he shall come with me."

He took a firm grasp of the boy's arm as he spoke. Lucy shrieked and sobbed, saying that she would call for the police. One or two men upon the grounds looked curiously in the direction of the group, but made no attempt to interfere.

"But I shall not go with you," said Pierrette, with sudden self-assertion. "You are an impostor."

"Hoity-toity, my little man!" said the showman, "there is a law which compels a boy to go with his father and to obey him. Once under my control, I promise you, I will make you obey. But you are an unnatural son. You draw tears from my eyes."

He wiped his organs of vision with a great red handkerchief.

"I never saw you in my life," cried Pierrette, stoutly.

"Not since babyhood, alas, no!—and you could not remember. Why should I condemn you? But you must come with me now. I have every proof at hand, for I have been studying the case for many months and would have claimed you formally from M. Keronac before leaving here had not my feelings overcome me to-day. I could no longer wait. Flora, your mother, is sick with waiting. So come, my lad, do not grieve your parents by your heartless conduct. Do not let your head be turned by the thought of this fine lady, who has taken a fancy to you. You are the child of humble, but honest folk."

Under all the man's smoothness of speech there was a menace, and Pierrette felt it. His experience even with the worthy M. Keronac in his angry moments had taught him that much. Still he repeated, stoutly:

"I will not go with you."

"Then I must call upon the constable yonder," said the man,

firmly. "This foolish notion of being the son of great people has turned your head. You will soon forget all that."

He began to drag the lad along with so strong and masterful a grasp that there was no resisting. Mildred, however, began to scream aloud.

"You are a bad man. You must not take away our Wilfrid."

A constable strolled up.

"What's all this outcry, Mr. Hobson?"

"A disobedient son," said the showman; "but I shall know how to manage him."

"He isn't his son at all," said Mildred.

"I never saw the man till to-day," added Pierrette.

But the constable was already strolling away with a nod to the showman and the remark that he had a troublesome lad to deal with. Lucy Lawless, meantime, with face buried in her apron, wept aloud.

"Lucy," cried Mildred, as Pierrette was forced away. "How dare you let that man take our Wilfrid?"

"How can I help it, miss?" cried Lucy. "He says he has the law on his side, and the proofs, and he might have us all took to prison! How can we ever tell poor, dear missis? How can I ever go back without the boy? I wish I had let the pedler woman come for him."

Mildred stood after that as one dazed, nor would she stir while there was a sight of Pierrette. Then she cried out to Lucy:

"Let us go back to M. Keronac. Perhaps he can help us."

Lucy, sorrowfully shaking her head, led the way to the farm, whence Yves himself set out straightway to see the showman. This latter declared that his circus was to move on the morrow, but that he desired nothing better than to settle matters at first with

the farmer. He was firm in the stand he had taken and would not allow M. Keronac to see the lad.

"It will only unsettle him," he said. "He is mine, I tell you. I have all the proofs and would have been at your house with them to-day, in any case. This fine lady has merely got a notion into her head about the boy, as such folks will. She is no more his mother than your wife is, nor so much, because it is your missis has had the care of him."

The farmer was staggered by the other's confident bearing.

"I tell you," the showman went on, "I haven't made no mistake in this business. For apart from natural affection, this lad will be of use to me in my profession, and he'll have it all some day when I'm gone."

"But how does it happen," asked the farmer, "that this claim of yours comes up just when the lady has established hers?"

"My dear sir," said the showman, "I need not tell a man of your experience"—he paused to give this stroke of flattery its full effect, knowing very well that the farmer's experience had been a limited one—"I need not tell you that such coincidences happen every day. I will show you all the papers. I will go with you before any magistrate you name. But it must be done quickly. My professional engagements admit of no delay."

"Why not leave the boy with me till the lady can be brought here?" suggested M. Keronac.

"Because, between you and me, I don't trust these rich folks. They put their whims before the very lives of the poor. I have found my boy and I will not let him out of my sight again. No offense to you, my friend, to whom I owe a thousand thanks for your care of my son. I can say no more, except that you will not find me ungrateful. You shall be compensated."

"It is not an affair of money," said the farmer, gravely, for he was an honest man. "It is a question of right. If the lady is this boy's mother, she should have him."

"And I being his father beyond doubt, and needing his help, must have him. You are a man of justice and of heart."

"The law must decide," said the farmer, "but you must remain here till the lady comes."

"At great inconvenience I will do so," assented the showman, "for the matter must be settled now and forever."

Poor M. Keronac went home in great trouble and perplexity to his wife. He found her weeping with Lucy and Mildred. The farmer's wife was altogether against Mr. Hobson and his claims.

"I am sure he is an impostor," she cried, over and over. For her heart had gone out to the gentle Mrs. Pilkington and she pitied her long suffering. Moreover, it had seemed a fine thing to have her adopted son transported to so grand a place, whence he would not fail to lavish favors on them.

But M. Keronac was more doubtful. The showman had been very positive in his statements and was prepared to confront Mrs. Pilkington or any one else with his evidence. Lucy reluctantly came round to the farmer's way of thinking.

"I fear you are right, sir," she said. "Our poor, poor lady has been mistaken, and it will break her heart. How can I ever go back to tell her of it?"

Whereupon both the farmer and his wife set to work to console this faithful and tender-hearted domestic. But Mildred held coldly aloof.

"The law must decide," repeated the farmer, "and we must let the lady know without delay."

CHAPTER XXIV.

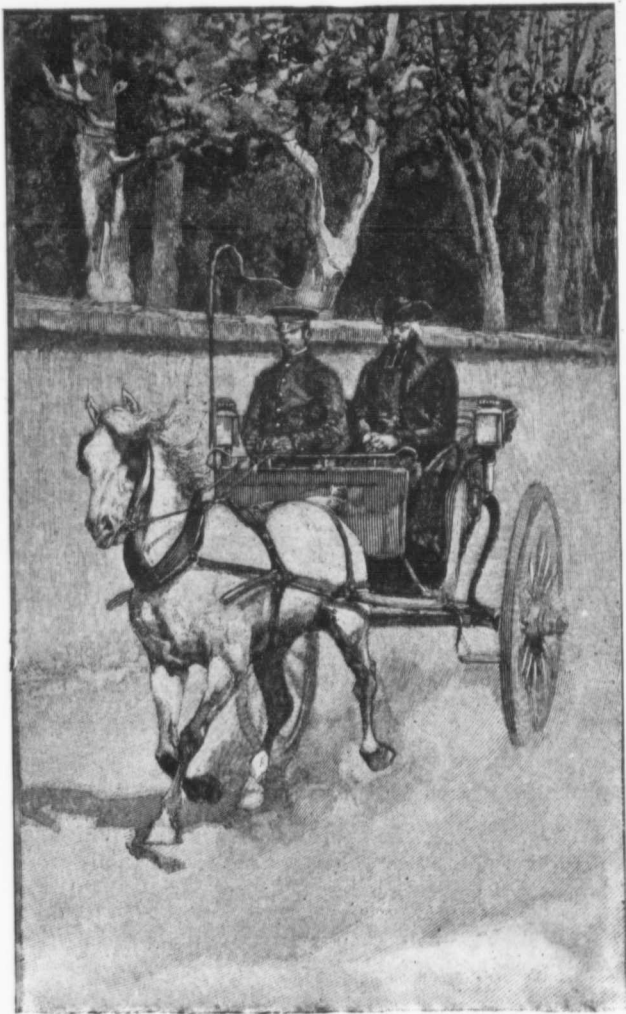
IN WHICH FATHER CHRISTIAN READS HIS LETTER.

A SPECIAL messenger was sent from the Prefecture of Police at Marseilles to the Foundling Hospital in answer to a letter which had been received there from the Mother Superior, who was now no other than Sister Margaret of long ago.

"I feel convinced," she had said, "that there is some roguery in all this, but I can not put my finger upon it. I want this showman to be located and watched. When our chaplain has heard again from his brother in America, other steps may have to be taken."

The Superior was well known at the Prefecture, and, indeed, throughout the whole city. Therefore the Commissary of Police sent out a special mounted messenger to inform her that the showman was within a short distance of the very city of Marseilles, and that the boy was with him, acting as a member of the troupe and known as the proprietor's son. Hobson made no effort at concealment, he added, even using his newly-found son as an advertisement for his show, declaring that powerful people in America had sought to rob him of his only child.

Though Mother Margaret had this matter very much at heart, she placed the Commissary's letter in the archives with all else bearing upon this case, and went serenely on with her duties, which were almost innumerable. She found it hard to dispute the show-



"She goes, Monsieur l'Abbé, as her wont is—not too fast, not too slow."

man's claim, as the evidence he had produced was equally as strong as that of Mrs. Pilkington. But the good Religious felt sure that the showman was not really the boy's father, and that he was acting with the connivance of others. The Commissary of Police had inclined to this opinion, but had been cautious in the expression of it.

"We shall see, Madam," he had said to the Superior, "we shall see; and you may count at all times, my Reverend Mother, on my readiness to serve you."

It was some time after this that Father Christian drove to the convent, which was a little way out of the city, to give Benediction and to bring the news. It seemed to the old priest that his mare, Suzanne, had never gone so slowly as upon that occasion, and he remarked upon this to his man, who replied:

"She goes, Monsieur l'Abbé, as her wont is, not too fast, not too slow."

The evening air was cool and bracing, the birds singing in the tree tops and the gray sky breaking here and there into deep crimson, orange, or purple. The priest was for once indifferent to these things, apostrophizing the horse.

"Thou art slow, my Suzanne, thou art slow. Why art thou not young?"

For he was impatient to read his letter to the Superior, and to talk over the whole affair. This, of course, was not till after Benediction. Then he sat down in the little parlor and spread out the letter, reading in a muttering tone such parts of it as were purely personal, and emphasizing all that related to the matter in hand.

"There is not much in the letter which we do not already know," observed the Superior, thoughtfully, "but you will per-

ceive that the mother dwells upon the peculiar color of the hair, between amber and chestnut. Now, that tallies with my own observation, for I remember remarking the very same thing when the child was brought to us, and can prove it by the lock of hair I then cut off."

Father Christian nodded approval and the Superior went on:

"When the man is confronted with me, which I intend shall be soon, I will ask him the color of the hair. Ten chances to one he will answer fair, as most infants are fair-haired. That is, of course, unless he has really seen this boy in infancy or has been instructed upon these minor details. Oh, we may convict him upon this very point, miserable impostor that he is," concluded the Religious.

"That has yet to be proved, my Reverend Mother," laughed the priest.

"And with God's help we shall prove it," cried the Superior.

"Well, my sanguine lady, keep the children hard and fast at prayer," said Father Christian. "I have no confidence in your own, you see."

"Just because I am fat and rosy," said Mother Margaret, with her cheery laugh, which it did one good to hear. "If I were like the pictures of your old-fashioned medieval saints now, or like our Mother John here," pointing to a thin and ascetic little Sister, who just then appeared, "you would be putting all your intentions in my hands."

All three of them laughed; for these nuns were like a parcel of merry children, and Father Christian was a schoolboy again when he got out to the convent, full of jests and laughter.

"And I haven't told you the greatest news of all yet," said he, adjusting his spectacles.

“What’s that?” inquired Mother Margaret.

“It’s just in a postscript and it reads thus: ‘Mrs. Pilkington sails from New York for France on Saturday next.’”

“Praise be to God!” cried the Superior; “that’s the very thing.”

CHAPTER XXV.

AT THE GREAT WORLD SHOW.

MEANTIME at the "Great World Show" of Henry Hobson there was a long list of attractions for that week as the posters and flaring hand-bills announced. The giant and his wife; the pygmies; the performing bear, who seated himself on a stool, rang a bell, and fanned himself; the learned dog, who, in gown and spectacles, told fortunes; the monkeys, who performed a pantomime, with harlequin, clown, and pantaloen. The marvelous elephant, Cosmos, supposed to be over a hundred years old, who performed astonishing feats; Victor de Meron, the boy acrobat, who climbed to astounding heights; the ladies, who rode with one foot on the back of a mustang, and the men-jockeys who did still more extravagant things. Last but not least on the list was the lost son, the victim of tyranny, rescued from the clutches of the wealthy and powerful, chiefly through the sagacity of the wonder-working Cosmos.

All the people of that village and many from the town itself poured out to see this circus. Even the vans had an unusual display of gilt and of bright coloring, with thrilling pictures of wild beasts. The menagerie, it was claimed, exhibited every animal which had survived with Noe. The chariots, the dresses of the ladies, the tight-rope dancers, the contortionists and the jugglers, with a complete list of freaks, were such as to set the rustic imagination on fire.

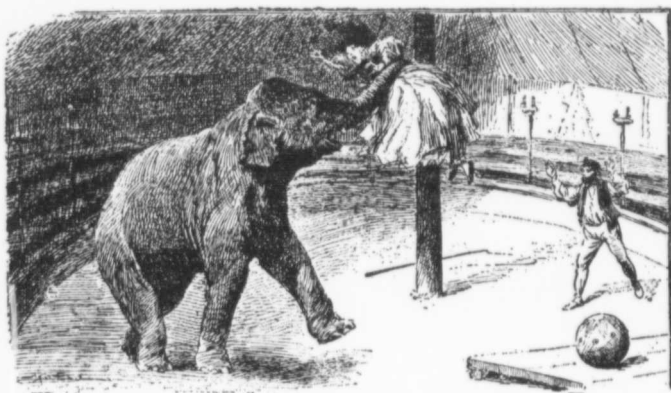
The tales that went about among the children concerning that elephant and those monkeys were marvelous in themselves, while bear and dog and lost boy excited them to the uttermost.

Mr. Hobson was reaping a harvest. For the report about the lad and his wonderful adventures brought thither many who would not have patronized an ordinary circus. Great people came from a distance, either from curiosity or in some instances from benevolence to do something to compensate the father for all that he had undergone.

The boy was still called Pierrette. Hobson scored a point by declaring that he retained the name out of gratitude to the good farmer, the protector of his child, and Pierrette was glad to keep the name, which was all that remained to him of his former life. By contrast with this it seemed an ideal one. At first he had enjoyed certain things about his new career with all a boy's zest for the marvelous, but it had all become flat, stale, and unprofitable. It was wearisome, indeed, to the last degree, and Hobson privately ill-treated the lad as much as was safe to do; he was badly lodged and worse fed. Pierrette had become familiar with all the deceptions of the trade, the precautions which surrounded the apparently reckless climber, the limited powers of the animals, whom he knew in the familiarity of daily life and loved for their natural traits, and the shabbiness of the tinsel decorations.

So that upon the particular evening when Father Christian had ridden over to the convent, he stood, weary and dispirited, watching through a peep-hole the performance of the wonder-working Cosmos, who was a particular crony of his, and with whom he often performed. In the scene he was watching the elephant seized Mademoiselle Viola round the waist with his trunk as she descended from a pillar and set her securely upon the ground,

the ringmaster, meanwhile, shouting and waving, dreading a catastrophe. The impression to be produced on the public mind was that the sagacious Cosmos, seeing the lady in a dangerous position, rescued her out of his own wisdom. Pierrette knew, on the contrary, what a weary time had been spent in training the poor animal to perform this feat, and in truth he thought that the tricks Cosmos did of his own accord were more amusing.



"He was watching the elephant seize Mademoiselle Viola round the waist as she descended from a pillar."

The applause, which was deafening, made the headache from which Pierrette was suffering worse. He moved away as far as possible from the noise and crowd, but presently, to his dismay, he heard the harsh voice of Mr. Hobson behind him.

"Quick! quick!" it cried. "The public want a special performance of your scene with Cosmos."

"My head aches," moaned Pierrette.

“Into your spangled suit on the instant!” cried the showman, giving Pierrette a few cuts with the whip he used in the ring to hurry him. The boy dared not refuse, and hurried toward the dressing-tent. When he reached there he encountered Mademoiselle Farnarelli, in a very bad humor, because her famous chariot scene had fallen flat, though she drove six wild horses, which, by the by, were worn hacks. The public did not want her. They kept calling for the lost boy and the elephant.

“Out of my way, little vagabond!” she cried, in pure Saxon, dealing Pierrette at the same time a sounding slap in the face. This caused the learned dog, who sat ready in cap and gown, to spring growling from the chair, his spectacles still on his nose. He was a special friend of Pierrette’s, and he did not let his costume interfere with a summary vengeance upon the Amazon. He frightened her thoroughly and left the mark of his teeth just above her ankle. The learned one, tripping over his gown, ran wagging his tail to lick Pierrette’s hand.

But the entrance of Mr. Hobson, whip in hand, brought thither by Mademoiselle’s scream, soon restored the animal cringing and fawning to his dignified position on the chair, while at the lady’s request the dog’s offense was visited upon Pierrette, who got several sharp cuts of the whip.

Mademoiselle Farnarelli was in bad luck that night, for the prize monkey, who had been asleep in the dressing-room when she entered, seized upon her false front and ran high up on the partition wall with it. He sat there, grinning and jabbering, clapping it at last on his own shaven poll, to the intense amusement of the mustang riders, men and women, who made audible jests about it and greeted the Farnarelli with a shout of laughter when she put her head out at the door, striving to reach the monkey with

her riding whip. But the beast eluded her cleverly, springing from point to point on his high perch.

At last the acrobat took pity on her distress, for the woman, abandoning the struggle, burst into tears. With Pierrette's assistance the animal was captured, looking inexpressibly comical in the blonde wig, which, indeed, he seemed loath to relinquish, growling and jabbering angrily when it was taken from him. Miserable as Pierrette felt, he was convulsed with laughter at the animal's appearance. Mr. Hobson reappeared just then to tell him that the Egyptian jugglers were about finishing, and that he was next on the bill. Pierrette, in a blue and scarlet suit covered with spangles, crowned by a cocked hat and completed by a sword, with wonderful jeweled hilt, passed hastily across the space occupied by the riders and other performers, who greeted him with a round of stale jokes. He was soon at the entrance to the ring, where he stood with a beating heart, hearing Mr. Hobson make his lying, preliminary speech.

The whole performance was distasteful to him, so that he hated forever after the very smell of the sawdust. The bell rang and he was in the center of the ring, with thunders of applause in his ears, with the two or three other personages who represented the tyrannical plutocrats, with the elephant, slowly advancing toward him. Pierrette could discern among the crowd the smiling, happy faces of children, charmed with the performance, and he remembered, with an indescribable pang, that he had so lately been like them.

On his way back to the tent he almost stumbled over and stopped to caress another friend, the tame bear, who was sitting erect on its haunches, with a huge nut between its paws.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN WHICH FATHER CHRISTIAN HAS A GUEST.

FATHER CHRISTIAN invited the Commissary of Police to dine with him at the vicarage. He wanted to discuss the whole of Pierrette's case with him and awaken his interest in the fortunes of the lad.

"The estate to which he would fall heir, if his identity can be proved," he said, "is a princely one, so they tell me. My brother describes the rich lands, the orchards, the gardens, the conservatories, the farm yard, the avenue, the chateau itself as magnificent. Now, my friend the Commissary, the mother of this boy will give a proportionate reward for his recovery."

"There are difficulties," said the Commissary, taking snuff and proceeding to dilate upon them.

"The evidence of this Hobson is very strong, my Reverend Father, very strong. His proofs seem as conclusive as those of Mrs. Pilkington. Even the smallest details are supplied and a doubt thrown cleverly on much that the lady has adduced in proof of her claim."

"And yet," said Father Christian, looking at the Commissary, "we are all convinced: the mother, my brother James, the pedler woman, the good Superior at the Hospital, and myself."

"You may enroll me in that worthy company," said the Commissary, "for I am almost convinced myself. But how to procure

it, or rather how to break down this man's evidence. There is some one more clever than our Hobson behind it. Is it, then, the heir-at-law?"

"My brother reports that he has acted well in this matter," said Father Christian, "renouncing his claim at the time it was supposed the boy had been found."

"Hem!" said the police officer.

"And refusing to press his claim now, though the very document he signed gives him the right, until this Hobson affair has been thoroughly sifted."

"He refuses, you say, to press his claim?"

"Till the showman has established his rights beyond question."

"Very generous and high-minded," said the Commissary, "but how does it fit in with his general character and antecedents?"

The priest hesitated.

"There speaks the police officer," he said with a smile. Like his brother, he hated to think evil of others, still more to put his thoughts into words. But justice was at stake here and he answered:

"Frankly, I understand that his character is bad, his antecedents dishonorable."

"Is he a very clever man?"

"I had not so heard him described."

"Something has to be explained," said the Commissary. "It is a quick wit, a good memory, and an understanding capable of directing a cabinet which has planned all this."

"My brother writes that the pedler puts it down to a woman."

"Ha! to be sure!" cried the Commissary. "The ingenuity

of detail would point to a woman's sagacity. Is it the nurse, Lawless?"

"No; though she is under suspicion, and has been at last dismissed from Mrs. Pilkington's service, of which my brother is glad. The pedler ascribes it to another woman, much feared in those parts."

"Could you by any chance get at her name?"

"Why, readily. It is written here in my brother's letter." And Father Christian read aloud: "Sarah—Sarah Slater."

The Commissary did not find any fault with the priest's pronunciation of this name, and repeated it with much the same accent.

"Sarah! Sarah Slater," he said. "I seem to have heard it somewhere. If I but had my notebook with me."

He lapsed into deep thought, presently counting on his fingers.

"The Marly murder case, international complications, woman involved. Yes; good. The Nancy diamond theft; thieves tracked to America; a woman receiver. Yes. Good again. The Paris stage-coach business. Yes. An affair in London. Good. I have it. Sarah Slater is of international reputation; bears a very bad name; has thrown the police off the track a score of times. She is known at the Prefecture of every town in France. She is familiar at Scotland Yard, and she keeps the American men on the jump. Between you and me, she is a marvel."

He spoke with something like admiration, which the priest could not share.

"Yes, believe me, Father, she it is who has this affair in hand, managing the heir-at-law and the nurse and all of them, and I can truly say I wish we had to deal with any other living criminal."

"You amaze me, sir," cried good, simple Father Christian, holding up his hands in horror. "A woman! Alas! Our human nature is perverse, and when a woman goes wrong, it is an angel that has fallen."

"This is rather a demon that has risen up," said the police officer, "and I would rather struggle against the cleverest lawyer at the bar."

Father Christian's face showed the trouble that he felt, and there was silence, the lamplight falling on the two men and on the modest dinner table at which they sat.

"Cheer up, Father. We may be able to buy her off."

The priest shook his head.

"I would rather, if it were possible, to have no compromise with evil," he said. "We have right on our side, and justice, which is eternal."

"Does it always triumph, Father?" asked the official, in a tone rather of despondency than of cynicism.

"Somewhere, somehow, it infallibly does," said the priest; "but I admit that we do not always see it here below. But events are surely made to fit into each other, providentially working for the better good."

"I trust it will be so in this case," said the Commissary, rising to take his leave. He had been so much interested by the mention of Sarah Slater's name that he was eager to hasten home and study up her record.

Meanwhile, at the circus, Pierrette had just finished his act with Cosmos, which had been more successful than ever. He was feeling unusually worn and weary, while his head ached painfully, and he was glad to creep away to the stalls, where he and the other boys slept, quite close to that of Cosmos and the rest

of the animals. For Hobson made a splendid display of impartiality, and declared that his own boy should lodge as did the others. They each had a mattress, comfortable enough, and sufficiently clean, stretched upon a low, wooden bed.

Pierrette sat down a few moments on the edge of a comrade's bed. This was the boy acrobat, who had been feverish, so that a doctor had been summoned, and had ordered him a cooling draught. Cosmos, hearing the sound of his favorite's voice, advanced as close as he might to the bar separating his stall from the lad's apartment, stretching out his trunk and striving to reach Pierrette.

"No, no, Cosmos, good Cosmos. I don't want to play to-night. I am tired."

And the beast, as if understanding, stood perfectly still, apparently interested in what the boys were saying, and watching them with his small eyes.

"I think I'm getting sick like you, Victor," said Pierrette. "I feel so hot and my head aches."

"It's that plaguey ring," said the other boy, suddenly bursting into tears, "and I hate it, and I ain't no Victor de Meron, but just plain Johnny Jones, from Marylebone."

"I hate the ring, too," said Pierrette. "I love the animals, but I just hate the performance."

"Let us cut and run," said the English lad, "when I get out of this 'ere bed."

Pierrette shook his head.

"It won't do for me," he said. "I must stay here till things are settled."

The sick boy burst into a discordant laugh, which caused the elephant to prick up its ears.

"Do you believe that yarn that the boss put up to gull the public?"

"No," said Pierrette. "I knew all about it before I ever set eyes on the boss, and if he hadn't come along just then I would have been in that lovely place all this while with my mother and Mildred."

"Don't you believe it, don't now," said the other earnestly, for he really liked his companion.

"But it's true," said Pierrette. "I often dream of it at night, the lovely house, with lots of trees and flowers; oh, how I wish I were there now to cool my head!"

"You go to bed," said the other boy, "and wet your 'ead with some of this 'ere water the doctor give me."

He pointed to a bottle on the table beside him, which Pierrette mechanically took up, wetting his handkerchief freely with the liquid it contained. As he got unsteadily on his legs, he said:

"Victor—"

"Call me Johnny," cried the other, peevishly.

"Well, then, Johnny, if ever I get there, you will have to come to see me. You've been good to me always."

As he was about turning away, with a miserable sense of lightness in his head, Cosmos stretched out his trunk to touch the lad, with almost human sympathy. Pierrette caressed it gently, saying:

"Good night, old Cosmos. You don't know how badly my head ached when I was in the ring with you to-night."

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN WHICH MRS. PILKINGTON AND MILDRED PAY A STOLEN VISIT.

To Mrs. Pilkington that voyage across the Atlantic seemed interminable. At last, having arrived at their destination, she drove straight to Father Christian's house, sending her luggage and Mildred's to the hotel. She had resolved to leave her young companion at the convent till there was some prospect of a settlement at least. But that was to come later, for the girl was all impatience to see Wilfrid, as she called him, again. They were both struck by the likeness of Father Christian to his brother, and he seemed to speak, in this foreign land, with the familiar accent of home. It was not until he had prevailed upon them to take some refreshment that he began, hesitatingly:

"The child, the boy—"

"My son," said Mrs. Pilkington, promptly. "It is of him I have been wishing to speak." Her whole heart was in her eyes, and the priest said gently:

"He is ill."

Mrs. Pilkington gave a cry.

"Has been seriously so," continued the priest; "but, thank God, he is better and in the way of recovery."

"Where is he?"

"I am sorry to say he is still at the tents of the showman," said Father Christian. "Mr. Hobson obstinately refused to allow

him to be taken to the hospital, where the Sisters would have cared for him. He said there was a plot to take him away from him."

"Let us go thither without delay."

"But, madam," said the priest, "reflect. It is late; it will be night before you reach there. The way is a lonesome one, nor can I even go with you. I am on duty for sick calls."

"Nevertheless I must go," said the lady. "I must make my way thither."

"But perhaps this Hobson may even refuse to let you see him," argued Father Christian.

"The more reason to surprise him, to go there by night and on foot."

"On foot!" cried the priest, in horror.

"Yes; by the help, of course, of a guide. Can you recommend one?"

"My servant shall go with you. He is an honest lad from the country. He shall take a dark lantern, lest the road be too dark."

And he added, after a pause:

"Your plan is, perhaps, after all, the best. Were you to arrive there in a carriage, he would perhaps raise an outcry and say that the great people had come to take his son. He would possibly deny you a sight of the lad, and make of the whole affair an advertisement."

"We shall reach the place as quietly as we can," said Mrs. Pilkington, "and try to make our way to the stall wherein you say my poor boy sleeps. I would much prefer that this Mr. Hobson should not know as yet of my presence in the city."

The priest highly approved of this plan, admiring the good judgment and energy of the woman, so fragile, so delicate in

appearance. For this last sorrow had aged her, touching her hair with gray and making lines on the exquisite ivory of her face, so miniature-like in its soft oval.

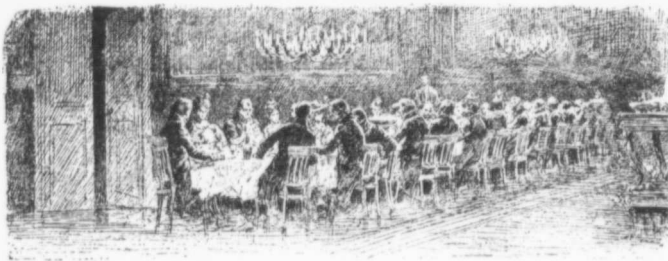
When that memorable dinner party of forty distinguished guests, all holding high places in the vicinity of New York, sat down at Pilkington Manor the hostess had been suffering indescribable agony. Only the courage of her high breeding had enabled her to preside conjointly with Mr. Graystone over that brilliant assembly, seeming to accept the congratulations of the guests on the recovery of her son as though he had been actually with her. They had seemed to consider his non-arrival as merely a delay occasioned by bad traveling; but the mother's heart told her there was more than that in the disappointment. As the day had worn on each hour had brought her a new pang, and long years after, recalling that evening at the Manor, she wondered at herself that she could have appeared at all.

The glare of the wax-lights, the splendor of the famous Pilkington silver, with chasings wrought by bygone silversmiths, had turned her sick and cold; the odor of the flowers, the rich and costly viands, the gorgeous gowns of the ladies, who had vied with each other in doing honor to the occasion, with the courtly politeness of the men, and the gay and witty conversation, all had seemed to her a phantasmagoria, behind which lurked the shadow of another tragedy.

She recalled that scene with curious vividness as she stumbled along the dark and stony road toward the tents of the Great World Show. She remembered, too, how Lucy had returned hysterical and, as it were, half crazed by this new misfortune. Despite her protestations, Mrs. Pilkington had never after doubted her guilty knowledge of the whole conspiracy, from first to last, and had then

and there dismissed her, declaring that the sight of her would forevermore be painful. After that there had been weeks and months of uncertainty and anguish, and now she was near her son at last. She dared scarcely hope that she would really see him, for disappointment had seemed to dog her footsteps.

It was a chill and starless night and there was a moaning wind, which struck painfully upon her overwrought nerves. She held Mildred's hand, and together they followed the guide.



"Only the courage of her high breeding had enabled her to preside over that brilliant assembly."

"With your ladyship's permission," the man said, stopping abruptly at one point of the road, "I will light my lantern. We are coming to the ruins now."

"Ruins?" inquired Mrs. Pilkington, though with but little interest.

"It was a castle once. A bad baron lived there, and he walks, they do say, at night, and so do his victims. For he killed many, and their bleached bones are still found hereabouts. The dead, they say, get up to count them by the witch fires that dance by night."

There was a tremor in the man's voice, so that it was evident that he believed what he said. Mildred gave a cry of fright.

"But these tales are not true," said Mrs. Pilkington, calmly. "Oh, if it were but the dead who troubled us, life would be very easy. The dead sleep—they disturb no one."

She could not altogether rid herself, however, of an uncanny feeling which crept over her, especially as strange gleams of light shot out of the darkness or through the crannies of the ruined walls.

"See, mamma dear, those are the witch fires," quavered poor Mildred.

"No, dear; they are but the phosphorescent lights from some marshy land, perhaps."

"But, madam, my neighbor Lenoir," broke in the man, "has seen in this very place shapes crowned with flames, and with flames bursting out of the eye sockets."

"I pray you, do not terrify the child," said Mrs. Pilkington, for she felt the tremor which passed over Mildred's frame as she clung close to her. After that the man was silent and went on swinging his lantern, so as to throw as much light as possible on the ruins, and presently they were on the high-road, with the circus tents of the Great World Show in full view, showing white through the darkness.

It was difficult for them to thread their way cautiously among the tents to the stalls of the animals, where they had been told Pierrette was lodged. At last they came to that where the elephant had his quarters, and saw the prodigious beast, evidently asleep, resting after the fatigues of the performance.

Here they found, too, the cot of a boy. Not *her* boy, as Mrs. Pilkington saw, with a fresh pang of disappointment. At first

the lad was alarmed at their appearance, and would have cried out had not Mrs. Pilkington put her finger to her lips.

"I thought as you was spooks," he said, tremulously.

"Listen," said Mrs. Pilkington, sitting down on the edge of the bed. "We are no spooks. We have come all the way from America to look for—"

"Pierrette!" interrupted the boy. "Then it wasn't a fairy



"I pray you, do not terrify the child," said Mrs. Pilkington.

tale after all. He's got a real mother—grander than mademoiselle or any of them. A regular topper."

"And you must help me," said Mrs. Pilkington, with her ready tact, laying her pink palm gently on the boy's rough hand. "First, by letting me know where to find my son, and next by keeping it secret that I came here at all. Will you do those two things for me?"

"You bet!" cried Victor de Meron, alias John Jones.

"Pierrette, he's not 'ere. He's sick, he is, and the doctor he come and made the boss take him away to another tent over there. He said he 'ad oughter be quiet."

"Over there?" repeated Mrs. Pilkington, inquiringly.

Johnny gave her as minute directions as he could, adding that if she didn't find the place, to send "that cove with the lantern" back for him and he'd be with them in two minutes—just as soon as he got dressed.

"Pierrette, he was real good to me, he was. I got sick first," went on the boy. "I like Pierrette first-rate. All the folks pretty much do, except mebbe the boss and mademoiselle. And as for the animals! My stars! he can manage them like as if he'd been a tamer all his life."

"You're a good lad," said Mrs. Pilkington, pleased by his praise of her son, "and if things come right, you will be remembered. What's your name?"

The lad hesitated.

"Victor de Meron, the acrobat, who climbs as 'igh as the towers of Notre Dame or the steeple of St. Paul's, and turns somersaults up there."

Mrs. Pilkington shuddered.

"It is tempting Providence," she exclaimed.

"That ain't my real name though. I'm jest Johnny Jones, from Marylebone. My father he was a huckster and I ran away to join this show, and I've been precious sorry since."

"Be a friend to my boy and to me, and you won't find us ungrateful," said Mrs. Pilkington, as she passed out of the door, leaving the boy so excited that sleep was banished, and golden visions danced before his eyes.

"She's most as grand as the queen up there to Windsor," he

thought. "I seed her once when she was a drivin' with the king. Only this one's a heap better lookin'."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Pilkington had made her way, followed by Mildred and the gaping rustic, to the tent where her son lay upon a cot, a pale and emaciated figure, yet which she recognized at once as that of her own boy. She had never for a moment doubted his identity, and now as he lay in that deep sleep of exhaustion, the resemblance to his father struck her more forcibly than ever, especially as his father had looked upon that sad day when he had been brought home to the Manor with the repose of death upon him, the blue eyes closed, and the fair hair brushed back from the temples.

She motioned to the others to remain without and went in alone at first. She knelt softly down by the bed, fearing to wake him too suddenly, while her tears fell fast on his thin and wasted hands. Sometimes he muttered in his sleep, but she could catch no word. She touched him lightly at last, laying her hand on his forehead.

"Wilfrid," she said. He started. She almost feared she had been imprudent.

"Mother!" he said, softly, but with an infinite tenderness in the word.

Then he added:

"I knew you would come—some time."

He put his hand into hers, and with a sigh of perfect satisfaction, turned over on the pillow and went to sleep. So quietly do the great crises of life come and go for the most part. She sat by him, with a deep contentment upon her, bidding Mildred to enter quietly and the man to sit down upon a bench outside. She would willingly have sat there all night, but she knew she must

not venture. She was thankful when Wilfrid woke again. Then she said to him:

“I must go now, my love. Tell no one that I have been here. I will move heaven and earth to take you back with me to America.”

He nodded.

“I have been ill,” he said. “Fever, I heard them say, but I am better now. Good-by, mother.”

All hesitation in saluting her thus had vanished with his illness. It seemed as if in it had been swallowed all the miserable past. The mother, seeing a bright spot burning in his cheek, took her leave.

“Rest quiet, love,” she said, kissing his forehead. “All will now be well, please God.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FURTHER PROGRESS.

NEXT morning Mrs. Pilkington took the diligence to Paris, accompanied by Mildred, whom she was to leave at the convent there for a time, and in order to see the great lawyer, Maitre Arpin, who had been recommended to her by the Commissary of Police. She had seen Mother Margaret, and it was agreed that if the lawyer thought well of the proposal, Hobson and his wife, Flora, who was usually invisible, should be summoned to confront the mother and the Superior and to answer the most searching questions.

It was a busy, bustling scene as the diligence drew up to receive passengers, the guard standing respectfully watching to help them in, while the driver was busy with the horses. The usual loungers stood near, and the passers-by turned their heads to look into the stable yard and see the start, always a pleasurable excitement. The postilion presently cracked his whip and away they went. Under other circumstances Mrs. Pilkington would have found the journey a pleasant one. It gave her an opportunity to see the villages and towns—many of them world-famous and marked as by a trail of glory, as she observed to Mildred. But, indeed, the sad traces of the recent revolution, which Napoleon's strong hand had put down, were everywhere to be seen. Mrs. Pilkington's thoughts would revert to her own great anxiety, so that she could not enjoy the journey, and Mil-

dred, depressed by the approaching leave-taking, was silent for the most part.

* * * * *

When Mrs. Pilkington found herself seated in the great man's office the following day, it was with a beating heart and throbbing nerves. Her life had been a sheltered one, passed chiefly in the rural calm of Kingsbridge, and she had had but little contact either with the world at large (save in so far as she had mingled with the stream of fashion) or with the world of business. The lawyer appeared, courteous, reticent, professional to the last degree, with piercing, dark eyes, a pointed beard, coal-black hair, which matched his attire of scrupulous black, relieved by the whitest of ties.

She was amazed by the acuteness of his intellect, his instantaneous grasp of the whole subject, and his actual turning of her mind inside out, as it were. His questions were few, pointed, and immensely deferential. His terms would have staggered any less eager or less wealthy client. But his manner inspired confidence. It said plainly:

"I have been the leader in many battles. I have been vanquished but in few. Leave the fight to me, and do you, the weak one, sit down and fold your hands, till I call upon you for action."

Mrs. Pilkington, leaving his office, went to the convent to see Mildred, and who was, needless to say, very lonesome. The bare room, so simply furnished, enlivened only by the painted portraits of saints or dignitaries of the Church, said plainly: "Here you come to learn self-denial, poverty of spirit, evangelical simplicity. At least, the lesson is always before you."

Mildred had never known any nuns before, and the severity of their habit alarmed her. She had not yet learned to realize



“It will not be for long, dear. The lawyer has given me great hopes.”

the simple, unaffected gayety, the absence of austerity, the practical and genial common sense which characterize nuns as a class, and in which they often differ, be it said without offense, from certain pious persons of the world.

Mrs. Pilkington took leave of Mildred, embracing her tenderly and whispering:

"It will not be for long, dear. The lawyer has given me great hopes, and soon we shall all be returning home together. Meantime, study hard, and especially devote yourself to French."

Mrs. Pilkington's return journey in the diligence was vastly more pleasant than the former one had been. She could smile at the inevitable fat gentleman who snored and the inevitable thin lady who fussed. She accepted babies and bundles with a resignation so rare that it called for remark from some of the gentlemen passengers. She took note of many of the beautiful scenes which she before disregarded, and promised herself the pleasure of showing them to Wilfrid some day.

She called at the Foundling Hospital on the very morning of her return and sat long in conference with Mother Margaret.

"Come now, dear Mrs. Pilkington," said the genial Superior, "and take a little luncheon, which a Sister has prepared for you."

"Oh, this is too kind," said the lady, following her hostess through a corridor of surpassing cleanliness to a pretty room with cool, green blinds and palms and creeping plants in abundance, making a very labyrinth of greenery.

"This is where Father Christian takes his meals," said the Superior. "We call it the priest's room."

"How pretty it is! But then, everything is charming here," exclaimed Mrs. Pilkington; "so cool, so clean, so peaceful.

Mother, how calm you are, and what good you are doing, working for heaven, while we are all working for ourselves."

"Some of you people of the world will be very high in heaven," said Mother Margaret. "Our state is more perfect, but some of your lives are marked at every step by perfection."

They were interrupted by the arrival of Sister Josephine, who served a charming little meal. The Superior sat by and conversed with her guest, though she did not join in the meal, and the details of the coming interview with the Hobsons, husband and wife, were very freely discussed, Mrs. Pilkington giving the Superior a synopsis of the advice given by the lawyer.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN WHICH MR. GRAYSTONE MEETS ARTHUR PILKINGTON AT "THE MERRY DOGS" AND JIM HOLLIS OVERHEARS A CONVERSATION.

THE coach which ran between Albany and New York deposited Arthur Pilkington some weeks after Mrs. Pilkington's arrival in Paris at an inn contiguous to the Manor, which rejoiced in the name of "The Merry Dogs." This place of entertainment had, like many others of its class, changed its name more than once, as the fortunes of king or colony had been uppermost. The present landlord, who in the fourth generation from the original proprietor held the place, had deemed it prudent, the issue of the war of 1812 being doubtful when he came into possession, to give it such an appellation as should satisfy all parties, or at least offend none.

He was of that race of Bonifaces frequently to be met with in song and story, who have vanished from the things that be. He had grown very fat and very important and scarcely deigned a word to ordinary customers. But Mr. Graystone, of "The Homestead," own uncle to Madam Pilkington, was a person to be treated with consideration. And he it was who occupied the parlor, awaiting that very stage-coach which brought Arthur Pilkington to the door.

For the two were to meet by appointment, and Mr. Graystone in particular was very anxious to get it over and to see the last of that scoundrel, Arthur Pilkington.

The landlord ushered the first-comer into a room where there was a fire, with the remark :

“The air is chill, sir. The fire will be pleasant to your honor.”

“Ah, yes, quite so,” said Mr. Graystone, abstractedly, placing himself with his back to the stove, so that he very nearly set his coat-tails afire. The landlord put his head in the door to the annoyance of Mr. Graystone, who thought he had got rid of him.

“I would respectfully advise you, sir,” he said, “that you are a little, just a little, too near the heat. I thought I had smelled burning cloth, sir, but perhaps not; it might have been but a dish clout in the kitchen.”

Mr. Graystone made an impatient gesture, discovering as he did so that the left coat-tail of his best bottle-green coat was badly scorched and all but blazing.

“I perceive you are right, Bradley,” he said, stiffly. “I have approached too close to the stove.”

“A little, just a little,” said Bradley, deprecatingly.

“No, sir; much too close, very much too close,” cried Mr. Graystone, losing patience. “Another instant and I had been ablaze.”

“Oh, no, your honor; surely not so bad as that, sir,” cried Bradley.

“But I tell you it is, sir,” cried the now irate Mr. Graystone. “Look at my bottle-green coat, sir, just fresh from London, if you doubt my word.”

“Doubt your word!” said the landlord, glad of an opportunity to shift his ground. “Far be it from me to doubt your word, your honor.”

“And I wish you were far enough from me,” said the gentleman to himself, as he silently glowered at his injured garment,

and at the stove which had done it, breaking out upon the landlord in a new quarter.

"You don't need a fire here at this time of year. Bless my soul, sir! what do you want with a fire in October? That is how I came to scorch my broadcloth."

"But I told your honor there was a fire there," said the luckless innkeeper, "and you seemed glad of it, sir, and went straight to the stove. I thought your honor was warming himself."

"And I thought there was no fire in your cursed stove, sir!" cried Mr. Graystone.

"But, with all respect, your honor was standing there as gentlemen does that wants to warm themselves."

"Mere force of habit," cried Mr. Graystone; "but go away. I must really ask you to go away. I have much to think of—much to think of indeed."

Bradley vanished and almost immediately after Mr. Arthur Morehead Pilkington was announced. So old and careworn did he appear that Mr. Graystone would scarcely have recognized him. The elder man stood still, returning the other's salute as formally as was possible. Pilkington made a show of inquiring as to the health of his kinswoman.

"You will oblige me infinitely by proceeding at once to business," said Mr. Graystone. "I am constrained to remind you that my time is limited."

"You are impatient, sir," said Pilkington, with a sneer, "and I was about to confess that in another sense I am growing impatient, too."

"You are alluding now, I presume, to some claim of yours upon the Pilkington estate?"

"Precisely."

Mr. Graystone sat down, and, leaning back in his chair, said slowly:

"I have had recent advices from France."

"Oh, indeed. I trust my fair kinswoman is enjoying the Continent," said Pilkington.

"She has been kept busy by matters of importance, one of which is the exposure of the impostor Hobson."

Pilkington was a man of nerve, and he showed it by the manner in which he received this communication.

"Really?" he said, raising his eyebrows. "I did not follow the affair very closely, but I had been led to believe that it was quite impossible to upset his claim."

"Nevertheless it has been done, and my niece's solicitor, one of the most eminent members of the French bar, is in a position to cause your arrest and that of your accomplices."

Arthur Pilkington sprang to his feet in pretended anger, but he betrayed himself by the furtive glances he cast at window and door, as though he feared the presence of police officers.

"Be good enough to resume your seat," said Mr. Graystone. "You are dealing just now with a gentleman, and not with a police agent."

"But you have dared to make an accusation against me," cried Pilkington. "You have gone so far as to use the ugly term of accomplices. Have a care, Mr. Graystone. Your age is not sufficient to protect you, and gentlemen can still obtain satisfaction with their swords."

"So I believe," said Mr. Graystone, surveying his companion coolly, "but we are not just now discussing the doings of gentlemen. We are touching upon certain very questionable affairs, very far removed, indeed, from the pale of gentility."

His voice had grown sterner as he spoke, and he again pointed to a chair.

"Sit down, sir," he said, "and let me put the case before you. When I have finished, I think you will see that your wisest course is to avail yourself of the generosity of my niece. From respect to the name you bear she would prefer to avoid publicity and to save you from arrest."

Pilkington gave a sarcastic laugh.

"She is most considerate," he said; "but the bird would have to be bagged before the gentle lady gives it release."

"A truce to your folly, sir, lest my patience give out, and I send you to the common jail. For I disagree with Mrs. Pilkington altogether. I hold that you have so long disgraced the name that the family owe it to their own honor to expose you, and make public your crimes."

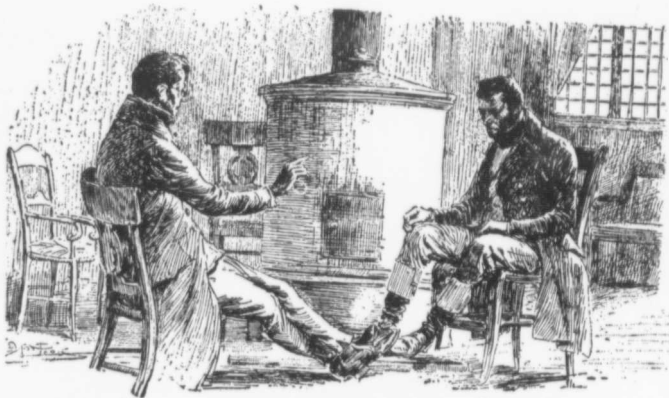
Pilkington was livid with rage, with fear, even with a kind of shame, which occasionally beset him, the last trace, perhaps, of his gentle birth. Mr. Graystone then put before him clearly and briefly the various links in that strong chain of evidence. The exposure of the man Hobson, who, in the interview with the Superior of the hospital and Mrs. Pilkington (during which he was cross-examined by the great lawyer), completely broke down. Correct upon most details, he wavered over the color of the hair, contradicted himself, admitting in the end that he did not know its color. That was but the first of his admissions. He finally deposed that he had been employed by one Sarah Slater, who had paid him a monthly sum, to be continued as long as the boy remained in his charge. He declared that the woman had so terrorized him that he dared not allow the lad out of his sight.

"Well!" cried Arthur Pilkington, with a final effort to brazen

it out. "I should like to be informed, sir, what the plottings of the Hobson fellow with one Sarah Slater has to do with me."

Mr. Graystone was fairly aghast at his effrontery, and Pilkington, pursuing the advantage, continued:

"I warn you not to go too far, respected gentleman though you be. There is such a thing as conspiracy, Squire Graystone,



"There is another who offers evidence to obtain pardon for herself."

and it would be highly convenient for you all to trump up an heir and to connect me with the cock and bull story of his abduction."

"You impudent scoundrel!" cried Mr. Graystone, springing to his feet and grasping his stick in a transport of rage, so that the other cowered in his chair. "I have a mind to thrash you where you sit."

Recovering himself, however, and wiping his forehead with his silk handkerchief, he exclaimed:

"I forgot myself quite, but really this dirty business had

much better have been left to the police. An honest man soils his hands with it."

Pilkington, still nervous, sat quiet. He was hoping against hope that Sarah Slater had kept her own counsel, for he knew that she could, if she wished, extricate him from this predicament. But he was also aware that she had been very angry at certain trickery of his and that she had been curiously impressed by her interview with Mrs. Pilkington, returning to it again and again, now in a furious burst of hate, now in an attempt at self-justification, and again with something like remorse. The simple power of goodness had appealed to some latent depth in this hardened woman's nature.

"Sarah Slater gave the police considerable trouble," resumed Mr. Graystone. "She could not, in fact, be discovered anywhere, or by any one."

"She is a trump," thought Pilkington, but he felt that his best policy was silence.

"So that the evidence of Hobson was worthless, or all but worthless."

A gleam came into Pilkington's eyes.

"There were some other pitiful confederates," said Mr. Graystone, "but they dared not speak for fear of this terrible Sarah. No power could induce them so to do."

"And then?" said Arthur Pilkington, leaning forward, his face eager.

"Then," said Mr. Graystone, "Sarah Slater appeared one day in my niece's room at the hotel and offered to prove every item of Hobson's confession, to substantiate young Pilkington's claim, and, in short, to restore the heir to his property."

Pilkington let his head fall forward on his hands.

"It was a curious interview, I am told. The woman made no terms, left everything to my niece's generosity, and said she did not care even if she had to go to prison. She made one condition, which Mrs. Pilkington refused to accept, that you should go to the penitentiary, or to the gallows, if possible."

"The serpent!" cried Arthur Pilkington, reckless now of self-betrayal. "When she had taken every farthing from me."

"There is another who offers evidence in order to obtain pardon for herself, one Lucy Lawless, late nurse in Mrs. Pilkington's service, who actually stole the child, with the aid of a worthless fellow named Hollis, whom she afterward married, and who stands convicted, like yourself, of this crime."

While these two talked neither had observed the latticed window with its hanging curtains. Therefore they did not guess that they had a listener, and one whose ears were sharpened by self-interest. Jim Hollis had been following his whilom master from place to place, always in the hope of getting some further instalment of the long-delayed reward. And, having learned that he and Mr. Graystone were to meet at the inn, had concealed himself behind the curtains in a recess of the window, and had so heard every word. He had but one thought now, to effect his escape and rejoin his dog, Bouncer, who waited for him without.

"So you see, sir," concluded Mr. Graystone, "that a confession from you is not precisely necessary, the more so that you have, in due legal form, relinquished all claim upon the estate on the finding of the heir."

Pilkington muttered a curse as he saw how he had overreached himself.

"But," went on Mr. Graystone, "your confession would facilitate matters—make assurance doubly sure."

"Then you shall never get it," cried Pilkington, springing to his feet with sudden passion. "I, who have been driven from post to pillar, treated as a pariah, scarce fit to wipe my feet on a Pilkington mat, shall I aid this haughty woman to keep possession of the property by the production of the heir, real or bogus, whichever he be! Shall I help her, who has been my life-long enemy, to attain her end? I tell you, no; I tell you, no. Could I prevent her, I would gladly do so."

His excitement was such that the sweat stood out upon his forehead in great drops. Something like pity was in Mr. Graystone's mind as he looked at this wreck of a life, once of sufficiently fair promise, wrecked, as he thought, by the absence of moral principle or religious conviction.

"I understand you, then, to refuse my request?" he said, when he had given the man time to recover himself somewhat. He was leaning on the back of a chair, pale and exhausted.

"I do refuse," he said, throwing back his head, with something that was almost pitiful in its futile despair.

"I fear it will, then, be my painful duty to put the police upon your track," Mr. Graystone said, averting his eyes, for the sight was painful.

"But if I follow the example of the virtuous Sarah, or that other fair conspirator, who has sold her own husband, and tell what I know, how shall it be then?"

He gave a cynical laugh.

"Shall we then put this—ah—crime upon the shoulders of Jim Hollis and let him hang, if it be a hanging matter, or be transported beyond the seas, or imprisoned for life?"

Jim shivered in his place of concealment. He could hear, whining without, the one true friend his evil life had ever allowed

him to make, his dog Bouncer. Mr. Graystone was silent. Jim softly undid one of the bolts as he heard his late master begin to speak. Then he undid the other. For the men were too earnest in their discourse to notice anything beyond it, and Pilkington had shifted his position so as to be no longer facing the window. They were in darkness, too, save for the glow from the door of the stove, Mr. Graystone having impatiently refused candles when the landlord had offered them.

"Yes," went on Arthur Pilkington, "let us whitewash the family name. My proud lady would not wish it tarnished. It can be done by the hanging of this Hollis. Hanging is too good for him. Did he not tempt a most trustworthy young woman to betray her mistress? Did he not help her to steal the lad and lend himself a willing instrument to the one and only Sarah Slater? Was he not in my employ? Therefore, let us hang Jim Hollis as high as may be, if the law allows."

Jim, who in the middle of this speech put one leg out of the window, at the end of it put out the other, landing safely beside Bouncer, who rejoiced to see him. Then he softly closed the window after him. He glanced for an instant out of the darkness at the indistinct figures of the two men, hissing between his teeth:

"Hang Jim Hollis when you catch him, and as for you, my fine master, may I live to get you hanged!"

He had not waited for Mr. Graystone's answer, which came short and stern:

"Have done, sir. Your cynicism revolts me. If the master villain go free, so, too, shall the tool. And now for your confession, which must be signed and sealed in the presence of witnesses."

"I am becoming quite an adept at the signing of documents,"

said Pilkington, laughing, as he seated himself to write at the other's dictation, and promising to meet Mr. Graystone at his lawyer's next day, for the formal signature. This done, he rose.

"My compliments to my fair cousin," he said, taking his hat and gloves with a jaunty air. "Compliments and regrets that I have not better played my part."

CHAPTER XXX.

IN WHICH JIM HOLLIS DISAPPEARS FROM THE STORY AND THERE IS
A SENSATION AT THE GREAT WORLD SHOW.

THAT night on the wharves, where the tall ships, like shrouded figures, showed gray in the mist, a hurrying figure, miserably clad, abjectly terrified, sped along, preceded by a dog. It was Jim Hollis seeking passage on an outgoing ship, that he might leave the port of New York forever and put the ocean between him and the man whom he feared.

The horrors of fear, remorse, and loneliness that were in his breast, outcast from all, betrayed, rejected, it would be impossible to depict.

Previous to Mr. Graystone's interview with the villain Pilkington, a strange occurrence took place at the tents of the Great World Show. Hobson had discovered Mrs. Pilkington's stolen visits to the boy, and, as that was before the time of his own confession, he determined to guard against the possibility of these visits being repeated. He had so raved and stormed at Pierrette as to cause a relapse of the fever, and he caused him to be moved back to his old quarters near the elephant's stall, where a watch could be kept upon him. When Hobson had been subsequently brought to bay and had confessed, Father Christian had gone with the Commissary of Police to take formal possession of the boy for Mrs. Pilkington, who sat without in the carriage. It is easy to imagine the horror of the two men, on reaching the

door, to behold the prostrate figure of the boy lying upon the floor with the mighty foot of the elephant upon his chest and the tremendous form of the beast towering above. Father Christian sobbed aloud.

“Is this to be the end of the mother’s long agony of waiting?”

Even the Commissary stood aghast. The animal turned his trunk in their direction, as if warning them away.

“The elephant has killed him!” cried the police officer.

“Perhaps our dear boy is not dead,” cried the priest, with desperate hope. “I must give him absolution on the chance. Oh, if we could make this savage beast move!”

The priest knelt down, soon to his joy to discover that the lad was not dead, though apparently unconscious, his eyes rolling, his hands clenched.

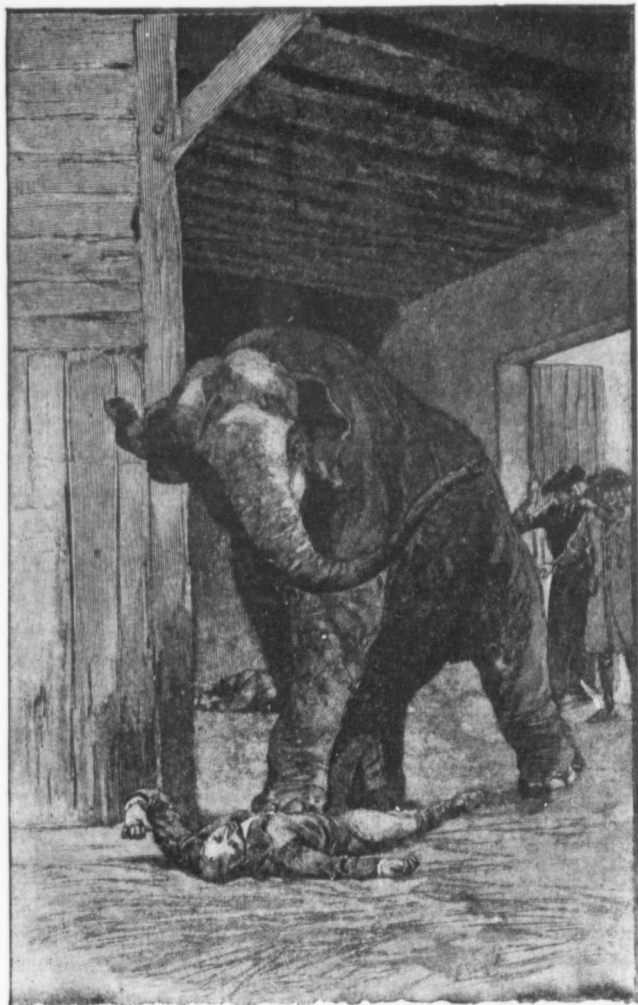
“The beast is crushing him,” cried the two men, making strenuous efforts to make him move.

But do as they could, the elephant stood still, his eyes fixed upon the boy, his foot still resting on his chest and his trunk waving defiance.

“I will call Hobson,” cried the Commissary, disappearing.

Hobson appeared, much agitated by the Commissary’s news. This would make complications for him and probably cause the mother to proceed against him. He looked in, saw the boy on the floor, and broke into a nervous laugh. Then he took from his pocket a small red flag and waved it. Instantly the beast removed his foot, oh, so gently, retiring a pace or two, and standing with lowered head, as if saluting. Father Christian and the Commissary, amazed, raised the lad and laid him on his bed, while Hobson explained:

“It is the trick the elephant Cosmos was in the habit of per-



"The prostrate figure of the boy lying upon the floor, with the mighty foot of the elephant on his chest."

forming with the boy in the rescue scene. But I can not imagine for what reason Pierrette, I mean, the young gentleman, has done it here and now."

Johnny Jones, who just then came running in, threw light on the situation. Pierrette had got up in high delirium, walking about and terrifying his companion by his wild talk and glaring eyes. He had run toward the open door, which Johnny had barely time to secure, saying that he was going to his mother. Then, resisting all attempts to make him return to bed, he had wandered at last into the elephant's stall, where he had swayed and fallen. The animal, seeing him upon the floor, had either supposed that the performance was to begin or had had an idea of keeping him safe. Johnny had run for help, and in the meantime the others had arrived. Needless to say that Cosmos after that was a greater hero than ever. Every visitor to the circus heard that tale with additions. It doubled Mr. Hobson's receipts in the nick of time, for the attendance had begun to grow slack through the want of new attractions. And so, in this man's case, wickedness was rewarded.

As for the other conspirators, Arthur Pilkington, on the eve of his departure for India, wrote his kinswoman a characteristic letter of farewell, throwing something of the blame on herself for the failure of his life and referring to those long past evenings at the Belvedere Club House, most fashionable of resorts, when Mary Clinton had made him feel his inferiority to his cousin.

"And so farewell Cousin Mary Pilkington," concluded this epistle. "When this reaches you, I shall have gone out of your life forever."

Mary Pilkington crumpled the paper in her hand with something of anger; but presently her eyes grew soft at the thought

of those evenings long ago and of her dead husband, her first and only love.

"No one could ever have caused him to commit an unworthy act," she thought, proudly. "The soul of honor, the knightly gentleman, the true Christian. As for the rest, I despise it."

Sarah Slater disappeared completely, even from the horizon of the police. Some said she had mended her way of life; others that her sinister figure and repulsive face were still to be seen in a dingy thoroughfare of London. Lucy Lawless lived in great poverty and destitution until aided by the bounty of her generous and forgiving mistress, who would never, however, see her face. And Jim Hollis was found by the river police, drowned, in an attempt to board an outward bound brig.



CONCLUSION.

IN WHICH ALL GOES AS MERRY AS A MARRIAGE BELL AND THE HEIR
COMES TO HIS OWN.

MRS. PILKINGTON carried out her intention of taking her boy to Paris, where both were anxious to see Mildred, who was in a fever of impatience for their coming. Mother and son together visited the churches and galleries, discoursing of the works of art in each and pointing out those which pleased them best. They lingered for a month or so in that wondrous capital, Mildred enjoying herself to the utmost; but in the heart of mother and son was the unspoken longing for America. The boy sighed for the beautiful home of his dreams, of which he had been so long deprived, and the mother was eager to show him its beauties.

They stopped again at Marseilles to bid good-by to Mother Margaret and Father Christian, while Wilfrid went to see the animals and any others who had been kind to him at the Great World Show. There was loudly expressed grief at this departure; the mustang riders, men and women, the clown, and even Farnarelli herself expressed regret. Cosmos seemed to understand that his friend was going, and put his trunk about him as if to keep him, while the tame bear rubbed his hairy head for the last time against Pierrette, and the dog professor showed such grief that, if Hobson would have sold him, he would have gone home to the Manor to make old Carlo jealous. But the professor had

a new value in the showman's eyes. He could now be exhibited as the loved and loving playmate of the Pilkington heir.

Needless to describe the home-coming nor the gathering of friends that took place there shortly. Not a brilliant dinner party this time—that came later, but the gathering of Father Aubril and the pedler, Molly Deegan, and Mary Anne and Johnny Jones, who had been brought to America by the Pilkingtons and



"Mother and son together visited the galleries."

sent to school, with the prospect of spending his holidays at the Manor, and Farmer Keronac and his wife, and Mr. Graystone. Not to speak of Carlo, already devoted to his young master, and the two puppies from the Keronac farm, now grown great dogs and honored members of the Pilkington kennels. They rejoiced to see their little playmate, though they recked not of his changed fortunes, and were just the same simple, affectionate friends as in his forlorn days.

Mary Anne was ever so little jealous on account of her favorite Mildred; but Mrs. Pilkington's affection for the girl was only less than that she felt for her own Wilfrid. Whereas to Mildred it was joy unspeakable to have this dear companion with her and to show him the beauties of the place and to ride out on their ponies together.

The festival was a great success, the table laid out on the terrace, on the self-same spot where Mrs. Pilkington had taken her last supper with her husband; for it was summer again. They all sat down at table, irrespective of class. Mr. Graystone proposed a toast to which Father Aubril responded, and after the banquet a letter was composed to send off on the instant to Father Christian and Mother Margaret, telling them how much they were missed.

But when it was all over Mrs. Pilkington took a walk in the moonlight with her boy, leading him in afterward to that boudoir where she had sat desolate on that night long ago, under the shadow of a coming tragedy. She told him more, as they sat there, than she had ever done, of his father, whom he resembled more and more every day, so that every friend of the family was struck with the likeness. She unfastened a miniature from her neck to show him, and together they gazed at it, the mother saying softly:

“I hope he is looking down upon us and rejoicing that my son has come back to his mother and the heir to the Pilkington estate.”

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