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THE LION IN THE PATH

(From the Publisher's advanced sheets.)

Continued from page 276.)

CHAPTER LII.—COOMBE VALLEY.

The wives of the workmen in the silk mill belonging to Coombe Brothers were busy gossiping, one fine warm October evening at their doors, some of them engaged in hand labours connected with the silk, others scolding their noisy children, and all looking to see the smoke cease to pour out of the factory chimneys—the usual signal for the speedy return of their husbands—when an incident occurred to disturb the ordinary placidity of life in Coombe Valley.

A farmer's light cart drove up to the door of the only house that had the word "Lodging" displayed on a card in the window, and an aged-looking gentleman in a violet suit, and wearing a light wig, asked if he could be accommodated there for a few weeks, as he had been told the spring waters, for which the valley was famous in the neighbourhood, though unknown

to strangers, would be good for a special complaint.

The woman of the house came to the cart, her handsome face looking flushed, for she had been toasting Yorkshire cakes ready for her good man, and said, with a curtsy—

"Oh, please, sir, we only let a room for workmen, or poor, but decent travellers. I should be ashamed to show it to a gentleman like you!"

"My good dame," was the reply, "if I am a gentleman I am a very poor one, I am sorry to say—too poor to go to fashionable watering-places; and therefore I hope you'll take me in, for I am sure—I see it in your face—you would make me comfortable."

The woman looked pleased, and asked him at all events, before the farmer put down his bundle, to come in and see the room.

"Yes, that will be best," said the gentleman.

The room was up-stairs, was long, of very old shape, through the slopes of the roof, but, on the whole, convenient enough if the tenant would only mind not to knock his head against the beams of the ceiling, or suddenly precipitate himself down a flight of stairs by overlooking

the precise point where they began to descend almost from the middle of the floor.

It was scrupulously clean, had a faint smell of apples, which the hostess apologised for, and said she would remedy—she would take the apples away, as they were over the ceiling, and the roof at one part was open. He (the gentleman) said he liked apples, and that they might remain on the understanding that he was, in revenge of the smell, to be at liberty to taste. And then they both laughed heartily at this harmless joke.

The white bed looked quite luxurious to the late traveller, who said he was tired, and was a bit of an invalid besides, so the bargain was soon made: the gentleman in violet was to be boarded and lodged for twelve shillings a week, and find his own ale, and have the use of the common sitting-room whenever he pleased.

The new comer went to bed early that night, and in came one neighbour after another, each with the pretence of some little bit of business to transact, but really to gossip about the strange gentleman.

Everybody liked his appearance; everybody



Away went the dogs, soon leaving Butcher behind.

sympathised with his ailments; everybody wished him good out of the waters. But while these comments were passing, an odd incident occurred up-stairs: the strange gentleman was lying as if in a fit, with his head just at the top of the stairs.

He had not fallen, for if he had he would have been heard. He did not call for succour, and yet he was by no means incapable of raising an alarm, for when he heard the voice of his hostess say something that interested him, he half rose on his arm, listened intently, smiled, got up, and went to bed.

Altogether a strange and unaccountable proceeding on the part of the gentleman in violet.

What was it the woman had said to interest him? Merely this: that the gentleman didn't seem so old after all as she first fancied him. His voice was so cheery when he joked, and his eye so bright when he laughed; but there! some men always do look youthful: her grandfather's eye, everybody used to say, looked as roguish at seventy as most men's at twenty-five.

Next morning the gentleman was offered his meals in his bed-room if he liked.

"Oh, no," said he; "it will be a comfort to me to see what's going on—in a family way like."

"Isn't he affable?" said the wife to her husband.

"Don't much like the looks on 'un," growled the husband in answer, who, when he spoke, was rather afraid his own home comforts would be sacrificed by extra care for the stranger.

But when the man—who was one of the principal workmen in the mill—found the stranger after breakfast produce a lot of good tobacco and offer him some, and when he found that the stranger told capital stories, and didn't seem too proud to eat just what they ate, and chat just as they chatted, he began to like him immensely; and before that day closed the gentleman in violet was on the fair way to as decisive a popularity among the artisans of the mill, as among the artisans' wives and daughters.

When the sun came out a bit towards noon, the invalid ventured out to look at him and whatever else there might be to see at the same time.

Coombe Valley, though pretty enough on account of its grassy slopes and its mill pond for the use of the factory, had but one single object of sufficient importance to arrest the eye of a gentleman and a traveller—namely, the mill itself. Of course, therefore, he went to look at and to walk round it, and once or twice he made himself uncomfortable by fancying he was trespassing, though nobody met him to say so.

When he went back to dinner the man said to him quietly enough—

"Didn't I see you moving about between those two walls?"

"Really I don't know; but I thought once I was getting too near the buildings, and tried to make a short cut, and I found it was a short cut right into them, so I retreated."

"Ah! that's right. I ought to have told you, sir, that our masters are very jealous about strangers. One of them came to me just now and asked me who my new lodger was, and I told him, and he said he should give you a call."

"Very happy to see him, I'm sure," said the gentleman in violet. "Did you tell him my name?"

"Not exactly, seeing as I don't know it myself," said the man, with a grin.

"Oh, indeed! Faithful—George Faithful; or, I suppose I should say, Mr. George Faithful; though, if letters come to me addressed George Faithful, Esq., you will understand they are for me."

"Yes, sir; we'll take care of 'em."

Richard Coombe did not make his threatened visit after all, to the great disappointment of Mr. Faithful, who could not help dropping a sort of bitter sarcasm as to his being too poor, he supposed, for such visitors.

Day after day passed on, and while nothing occurred to injure the popularity of the new comer, something did happen that greatly in-

creased it. One evening he said to his host and hostess—

"Are you fond of music? Would you like me to play to you?" and with the words he produced from his pocket a flageolet.

Of course the answer was a delighted, "Oh, yes!" And the stranger began.

His listeners were no very good judges, perhaps, though the husband believed he was rather a 'cute critic in such things. But, however that might be, nothing so ravishing had ever before been heard in Coombe Valley.

He played melancholy tunes, and they were so full of pathos that the tears stood in the eyes of the handsome wife. He played spirit-stirring ones, and the man "couldn't stand it," meaning he couldn't sit still, so rose from his chair and strode about, feeling as if he—a militia man, and proud of his training—was ready to fight any number of French or rebels.

He played dance-tunes, and lo! there was heard outside the house the shuffling of many feet followed by loud, happy laughter; and then only did the musician know what an audience he had collected outside.

It was wonderful how this new incident affected the dwellers in Coombe Valley. They had so few amusements, that when one like this came in their way, they looked upon the musician with almost as much of respect, and wonder, and admiration, as the peasantry of Greece in the old fabulous days looked upon Orpheus and his doings.

The strange gentleman was very fond of wandering about, particularly in the very early mornings—for the sake of the healthy air, he said—and also in the late evenings, because, as he said, he then grew contemplative.

He thus became familiar with every lane, and field, and gate, and cottage, and could find his way, as he said, blindfold.

But his wanderings disturbed no one, for his flageolet was his constant companion. People heard its soft, sweet tones now borne down from the hill, now ascending from the hollows—heard it at all times and seasons. Even the Brothers Coombe began to take an interest in this melancholy invalid, and discuss the advisability of sending him an invitation. Obviously, this was no conspirator against their commercial peace.

Besides, their thoughts were turned in quite other directions about this time.

CHAPTER LIII.—SIR MOSES MAJOR.

One day a handsome hired chariot drove up to the mill, and the servant brought a card to the manager, bearing the name of Sir Moses Major, and politely asking if Sir Moses might see the mill.

"Certainly," was the reply of the manager.

Sir Moses—an extremely aged, tottering person, but with a vivacious eye, and intelligent, though furrowed-looking face, and wearing a sky-blue coat and dark wig—was conducted through the mill. In doing so, he noticed that twice the manager passed a certain door that was iron-plated, and he heard machinery in motion inside.

"What have you there?" Sir Moses asked, carelessly.

"That's a part never shown to strangers."

"Aha! Secret, eh?" laughed Sir Moses.

"What! Do you find people try to discover them, eh?"

"We did, Sir Moses, some years ago, when we introduced certain improvements. We were never safe for a week without finding something or somebody suspicious. Now it was a vagabond lurking in an outhouse, or secreted in the chimney. One poor wretch was nearly killed in this way before he could be extricated from the heat and smoke, for a fire was lighted while he was in it."

"Then we had hawkers trying to sell things to our men, but always wanting to do their bargains within the works. We had clever artisans suddenly knocking up while on the tramp, and in our valley wanting jobs. We had one impudent rascal—and he looked, Sir Moses, almost as much a gentleman as you do—caught trying

skeleton keys on our locks while somebody had gone to fetch him a glass of water!"

"Really! He was like me! Flattering!" said Sir Moses, laughing heartily. Then he added:

"And how did you stop the nuisance at last?"

"I will show you, Sir Moses. You see those fire-arms?"

The manager was pointing to a range of three tremendous blunderbusses hung up in the ante-room over a fire-place, and flanked on each side by a long row of leathern buckets.

"Yes," responded Sir Moses.

"They were our safeguards for a time, and did no good whatever. We don't pretend anything by them now; but at first we fancied they would deter. They didn't. Allow me now to show you what we did!"

He led the way along a narrow passage, then opened a door, and the two men stood in a kind of long kennel made of high stone walls covered over, so that nothing could reach the inside from without. There, one at each end, Sir Moses saw two of the most ferocious-looking dogs he had ever seen in his life. They had just been fed, and the mouth of one was dripping with blood. Their very eyes seemed to be constituted of blood. Sir Moses could not resist a shudder as he asked—

"And how do you use these?"

"They are never loosed except at nightfall, when I myself see them unchained. I don't do it myself—in fact, I couldn't. They are such brutes that only human brutes, bad or worse than themselves, can manage them. We have a man of that kind—offspring, I sometimes say, of monstrous parents. And even that fellow, whose fist strikes like an iron bar, and who uses it upon them pretty freely, even he gets an ugly grip every now and then."

"Pretty creatures! I'd like to get outside, if you please!" said Sir Moses.

As they went back into the mill, the manager continued—

"Yes, Sir Moses! As I was telling you, we turn them loose into the mill at night—that is, we just open this door, and the whole range of the place is open to them."

"But surely they don't trouble, night after night, to go hunting about! Depend upon it, they just lie down after a growl or two—perhaps, after a bite or two exchanged between 'em, to keep up a good feeling—and then wait till morning."

"Well, even then, they'd be alive at the slightest noise, and then they'd be lively enough, I promise you. But we don't trust to that," said the manager, with a knowing look.

"Really! How interesting, all this! Good as a play! And what do you trust to?"

"Hunger! We make 'em so hungry before they get loose at night, that they go about like mad things, exploring everywhere for the chance of picking up a scrap of bread, or meat, or cheese, or bone, left by a workman in some old corner. One poor fellow had got drunk on one occasion, been up all night, and in consequence was so sleepy all day that towards evening he got into a waste closet, and dropped off asleep."

"I shall never forget my horror to hear that poor creature's screams! What made it more horrible was the devilish silence of the dogs. We saved him—just saved him—but he's a cripple for life, and he's allowed eightpence a day by the firm as pension money!"

"So you see, Sir Moses, they are not at all untrustworthy. Ever since that incident, which soon spread abroad, we have had no night visitors—and as to day visitors—why we care little about them. Even if they got in—which they never did—they wouldn't have time to do harm. Our machinery is so complicated that I would defy a man to understand it without a good many hours of quiet and uninterrupted study, and then he'd have to make careful drawings of it; so you may judge what reason we have to fear from a mere casual inspection."

"No doubt! And that remark emboldens me to ask you, Don't you think Messrs. Coombe would let me have a peep if you were to tell them; I once went over the very mill in Italy from which people say they got their valuable knowledge?"

"Did you really go over that mill?"

"I did, and had a most interesting talk with the owner. He knew a little of me—enough to know that I didn't care a button about all the commercial secrets in the world—and that my amusement is only in the sight of ingenious things, and in gossiping about them."

"What might he talk about?" asked the manager, whose eyes were open to the possibility of picking up yet fresh facts likely to be useful.

"Why, he said that when they first heard of what your people had done, they were in such a towering rage, they half thought of giving you a specimen of an Italian's wild justice, by dispatching somebody to this place, who, I gather, was to have dispatched you! Not you personally!" again laughed Sir Moses. "but you—the firm!"

"Was that all?" asked the manager, after he, too, had enjoyed a hearty laugh at these harmless threats.

"Well, no; he showed me with great glee a new improvement they had made, which, he said, would again take the wind out of your sails."

"Ah! what was that?"

"Well, I don't think I carry it in my mind clearly enough to explain. If I saw yours it might possibly recur to me—I think it would!"

"Would you mind, Sir Moses, waiting here just for a couple of minutes, while I run over to Mr. Richard Coombe's house? he lives here. Perhaps he might show you."

"No, I don't mind waiting, if you won't be longer than two minutes. But I haven't much time; and I beg you to tell Mr. Coombe that it's not the slightest consequence to me, if he has a rale, and wishes to keep to it."

"Very well, Sir Moses. Take a chair; I'll be back immediately."

The manager went away.

Sir Moses followed him with his eye from where he sat on the chair till he was no longer visible. Then he rose with the alertness of a youth of twenty, took one rapid, searching glance round, saw there was not a soul visible from that little ante-room—the men were mostly away at dinner, so happily had Sir Moses timed his call—then he began operations.

The place where he was—a long, narrow room—was connected at each end with ranges of greater rooms; while at the sides were the iron-plated door on the right, and opposite this door, on the left, another door, similarly strengthened.

He ran to this first, opened it, saw it did, as he had fancied it would, open to the outward air; then he took from his capacious pockets some preparation of wax, forced it into the key-hole of that external iron-plated door, took it out, looked at it, knecaded it up again, again forced it into the lock, and again removed it. Putting this in his pocket, he repeated the process on the other and more important door opening to the sanctuary, and he finished just in time to drop the impressions into his pocket, as the manager returned to say—

"I am sorry, Sir Moses, but Mr. Coombe cannot admit any one to see more than we have shown you."

"Give my compliments—Sir Moses Major's compliments—and say I am perfectly satisfied."

CHAPTER LIV.—SLIPS BETWEEN THE CUP AND LIP.

Putting a half-sovereign into the manager's hand, Sir Moses took his leave; both gentlemen seemingly pleased with the meeting.

Unluckily, Sir Moses had occasion, in an indiscreet moment, to use his handkerchief, and, in taking it from his pocket, as in advancing towards the outer door, the manager politely following behind to see him out, he drew something with it that fell.

Sir Moses heard the fall, but was too much master of himself to turn round, guessing only too well what it was that fell. He passed on, hoping most anxiously to hear the manager still following.

No; he has stopped.

Sir Moses can only, in politeness, now turn to see what is the matter.

The impression of the door—the door to the commercial holy of holies—is in the hands of the manager; and how he looks at it, and what he thinks, we leave our readers to judge.

Poor Sir Moses! He turns pale, red, black, even while vainly striving to turn off the discovery with a laugh and a lie.

"Oh, you've picked up something I dropped. Ah, yes; that's a good story. I'll tell it you."

"Stay, Sir Moses," said the manager, taking one of the blunderbusses from the rack, "I think it is probable Mr. Richard Coombe would like to hear the story too."

"Ha, ha, ha! Very good, very good. Is he so fond of a jest?"

"Very Particularly, when there's an element of the grim in it."

The manager pulled a bell-rope that Sir Moses had not previously noticed, and a loud ring was heard in some distant quarter.

Sir Moses seemed to grow sidgety, to try to speak, to try to smile, to try to feel the money in his pocket, as if to try a bribe, but he seemed to feel it would not succeed, so said, with a certain recovery of his audacity—

"Well, come, my friend, tell me—what are you going to do?"

"Send for Mr. Richard Coombe."

"And what'll he do?"

"Set the dogs on you!"

"Murder me?"

"No, not exactly murder. We don't call it murder if you should be killed."

"And you really mean you'd serve a poor fellow like that, who, after all, has only wanted to make a bit of a start for himself at the outset—I mean, at the decline of life, having been always one of the most unlucky devils under the sun? Hang it, man, let me off for once. Take a five pound note—my whole capital—and I'll swear never to come here again in this way as long as I live."

"Can't be done," said the manager.

"Well, old fellow, mind one thing—Mr. Richard Coombe will think not of me alone, but of you."

"What d'ye mean by that?"

"Haven't you let me take these impressions?"

The manager changed colour a little at this, and there was a pause, during which the mock Sir Moses urged his suit again. At last the manager said—

"Come, I will give you a chance while doing my duty. I've got the impressions, and I'm smashing 'em together in my pocket while I speak—and see there?"

He opened a window, and threw the lump of wax out, and it was heard to fall in the waters below.

"Now you may say what you like, my noble Sir Moses, and who'll believe you?"

"Well, that's magnanimous, I confess," observed Sir Moses, with increased audacity.

"Magnanimous?" said the puzzled manager.

"Certainly, if you are going to give me a chance for my life and limbs, my soul and body, my skin and bone."

The manager could not help a dry laugh at the impostor's good humour and confidence, even under such trying conditions.

"Well, look you; you see where you now are. There is the door ready open for your escape. I am going to the kennel. I shall open the door. You will be then a good hundred yards in advance, for you may start at once!"

"Hold, I entreat you, one moment!" said the anxious Sir Moses. "You are armed; you—you'll fire at me if I attempt to escape before you give me leave. Give me, then, one boon, and I ask no more. Let me have one look outside, that I may not rush instantly into destruction."

"Well, that's fair. Go, then; but take my word for it, I'll fetch you down if you start; and then, if I miss you, there'll still be the dogs!"

That last argument penetrated, and was accepted as final in Sir Moses' brain. So he walked very slowly out, arranging his dress, handling matters in his pockets, and so on, and then took a good look out.

He seemed so familiar with the scene as not to have the smallest need of instituting the ex-

amination he had spoken of. But his attention seemed to be directed to the question of the people likely to be met, for the dinner hour was nearly over.

"One rapid glance satisfied him, and then he turned, and said coolly to the manager—

"Age has its privilege. I am an old man in constitution, if not in years. You cannot want those brutes to tear me in pieces. You want to frighten me. I deserve it I own. But I am frightened. Won't that do, without your taking any more trouble?"

The manager could scarcely resist an answering smile to the smile that accompanied these words, but he said—

"Well, if you can escape to that hill there are many chances for you, and the dogs don't care to go much further. If you go to the edge of the pond, you ought to be able, even though you are not very active, to reach the hill. Fear, my friend, is a fine incentive. Good-bye. I'm off for the dogs! I'll go slow, and advise you to go fast!"

Sir Moses needed no further hint. In an instant he sprang out like a shot from a bow, and the manager, seeing the movement, was aware that he had been twice humbugged. His pity and gentleness vanished. He really had meant to take care no harm should happen beyond the horrible fright, for he had ordered the human brute who led them to be ready to go with them, and restrain them; but seeing this second deception—the old man change into a young one—his whole spirit soured, and he ran, with a real thirst for vengeance, to the kennel, shouting aloud—

"Now, Butcher, now! Unchain them! There's an interloper here!"

The door was opened and the dogs unchained simultaneously. Butcher ran out, the dogs with him, till they were all in the open air, and saw the fugitive career along at a great pace, leaping every obstacle in his progress—fences, ditches, water-courses.

Away went the dogs, soon leaving Butcher behind.

Sir Moses cast out one glance behind him; saw nothing just for one moment, then saw the two black monsters, side by side, crossing a little knoll, and obviously rapidly gaining on him.

There was no cry from either of them, and the unhappy Sir Moses remembered vividly just then the story the manager had told him of their silence while worrying the sleepy artisan in the mill.

On, however, he sprang, determined to make yet one effort more, before giving it up, to win upon the dogs in speed. He had as yet purposely avoided putting forth his whole power. At first he fancied he was gaining a little, and that gave him new courage to attempt more severe efforts. Now he grew sure of it. He does not see them; he does not hear them. He will rest for one moment.

"Ha! He hears their deep breathing—they are panting within a few yards. He is lost! He stops! All is over!"

"No! He had forgotten himself in the anguish of the moment. He draws forth a double-barrelled pistol, and murmurs to himself—

"Even with this I am lost, unless I can take deliberate aim one at a time."

The first dog is upon him. Sir Moses fires. The dog rolls over on his side. The other is but a second or two behind the first. He, too, leaps on the fugitive, who meets him, open mouthed, and not having time, or perhaps coolness, to fire properly, misses him, or seems to do so.

He has no time to strike with the pistol. He can but thrust it right into the dog's red throat, while with the other hand he grasps at the animal's neck. An instant more, and he has instinctively quitted the pistol, leaving it in the mouth, and is grasping the throat with both hands.

The animal gives way, pulls Sir Moses upon him, and then the explanation of the easy victory is perceived—the shot had fatally injured him, though not for the moment; then the pistol thrust into the mouth had caused a great

loss of blood, and the nervous grasp of the struggling man at the throat had done the rest.

A few minutes later Butcher and the manager were wandering about in the direction they had seen the fugitive take, but could discover nothing of him. They found the dead dogs, and that sight inflamed them to make still further search. But the only intelligence they could get was when they came, in a little dell, upon the strange middle-aged gentleman in violet, who was playing on his flageolet—

"Tell me, shepherds, have you seen?"

and who, when told of what had happened, said he had seen a man run very fast past the spot where they now were; and when asked to describe his dress, it was evident, that though he had had, as he said, but a slight glimpse of it, it was the dress worn by the false Sir Moses.

CHAPTER LV.—THE GENTLEMAN IN VIOLET ACCEPTS A RESPONSIBLE POST AT THE MILL.

The story of Sir Moses, of course, furnished a rich subject for comment for many a day to the dwellers in Coombe Valley. Mr. Richard Coombe went riding about the country in every direction to find another pair of dogs, and if any fresh "interloper" had reckoned on impunity, through the absence of the dogs, he was soon undeceived, for Mr. Richard came back on the fifth day, accompanied by the charming Butcher, leading a pair of brutes still more hideous and strong and fierce than the former pair.

Butcher patted them lovingly, and gloated in their good looks; but even he was obliged to keep the muzzles on, for in an incautious moment they got loose, were missed on the next morning Mr. Richard had presented to him for the slaughter of more than a dozen sheep.

But what was all this to Mr. George Faithful, who piped away as if there were nothing in the world for him to care for but his piping.

He was to be interrupted. One day there came a gentleman to the cottage, who introduced himself as Mr. Richard Coombe, who said his wife had been quite struck to hear his music on a recent occasion, when he had been playing in the woods round his mansion, and was desirous to hear him nearer. He then ended with an invitation.

There was something about the manner of this which would hardly have satisfied any ordinarily fastidious gentleman, it was so decidedly patronising. Not at all in this light did the gentleman in violet look upon the matter. He took rather an opposite view, and said, with a certain winning frankness—

"Mr. Coombe, I am much indebted to you and to your lady for this kindness, and it is always gratifying to me to have my music liked. But you mustn't mistake me. I cannot exactly say I am not a gentleman—I hope I am; but I came here very poor, and since I came I have become still poorer—so much so that I have been half thinking I must do something to supplement my very small income."

"That's frank. I like it. I like you, Mister—what's your name?"

"Faithful."

"What can you do?"

"Very little, I fear. I am an old soldier, and I have as good a testimonial here as a man need desire, from my superior officer. I was in Flanders, and was wounded, but got no pension through some sad informality."

"Some sort of place with little active exertion, and where confidence and care were required, would, perhaps, suit you?"

"I should like it, of all things; and I should be glad to take an exceedingly small salary, if the job was a light one."

"How much?"

"May I ask how much you give your watchman? He does nothing in the day, I think?"

"No. And it's very odd—that's the very place I meant to offer you!"

"Really?" And Mr. Faithful's eyes sparkled wonderfully at this proof of the increasing confidence felt in his character, after only a few weeks' residence.

"Yes. I give him ten shillings a week."

"I would take the same!"

"Very well. Then you shall begin to-night. I shall require you to go on with him for a week or two, to get familiar with the place, and during that time I will have inquiries made about you."

"If you please. But allow me to ask one favour. It is," he said, with a kind of shame on his face, "a declension for me, so I should like to try it before saying anything to my friends, while your watchman alone is responsible, for I am not sure that even my health will stand the change of habit."

"Very well—that's a sensible arrangement. Permit me to look at the testimonial you spoke of."

The testimonial was produced—was obviously genuine, official, and from the Horse Guards, and Mr. Richard Coombe was quite satisfied.

"You won't mind coming up to my house now and then, when we ask you, to amuse my wife and the little ones?"

"Oh dear no—I shall esteem it an honour!"

Strange that Mr. Richard Coombe did not wonder at the ease with which the gentleman in violet put off and put on at pleasure his dignity as a gentleman. Perhaps it was because Mr. Richard Coombe was not himself a particularly happy or sensitive specimen of the genus gentleman.

But Mr. Coombe did this. Though he had made rather an injudicious arrangement, considering how recent was his knowledge of Mr. Faithful, yet he was not quite so thoughtless as he seemed. For, in the first place, he had often wished to get hold of an old military veteran, half superannuated, for the post; and in the second place, he had something to say on the subject which Mr. Faithful did not hear, to the watchman who had so long filled the post.

To him Mr. Coombe said, when he had called him up to his house to have a glass of Hollands and bitters—

"Marks, I am going to please you at last. I've got a new watchman for you, and you shall go back to the old post in a week or two's time. But till then, mind me, don't trust the new man an inch further than you can see him. I have a very good opinion of him, but I want you to tell me what you think of him after trial."

"Who is it, master?" asked the man.

"Well, it's that stranger who plays the flageolet, he's an old soldier, and is now a decayed gentleman."

"Humph!" growled Marks, "gentleman! 'Taint very likely I shall like him."

"Oh, yes, you will, if only he's honest. Don't seem to suspect him; that's the way. Draw him out a bit. If he shows any kind of dangerous symptoms don't you frighten him, but come secretly—secretly, mind, and tell me."

Marks was flattered at his employer's good opinion, and so, on the whole, took up the business in a willing spirit.

CHAPTER LVII.—ON TRIAL.

The first night of the double watch nothing more important occurred than that the new watchman disgraced himself and almost ruined his chances by falling asleep a little before day-break, when he ought to have been making a certain designated round.

Marks accordingly went to his employer to say he knew he wouldn't do from the first, and then adduced this damaging fact in testimony.

Mr. Coombe laughed, then became grave, acknowledged the seriousness of the incident, but suggested that as the new man had not yet assumed actual responsibility, nor got used to such hours, he (Marks) must indulge him yet awhile.

The report after the second night was more serious. The watchman said he had come upon him, in the machine-room, busy writing or drawing something upon a scrap of paper, and that when he saw Marks approaching he had hastily put the paper in his pocket—or tried to do so—but had dropped it unconsciously.

He (Marks) had instantly put his foot upon it, and so concealed it till Mr. Faithful had moved away, then picked it up, and now brought it for perusal.

He couldn't read it himself, but the master would know what it all meant, he said, with a knowing shake of the head.

Mr. Coombe took the paper with some alarm: read it, and burst into such loud laughter that his wife came from the adjoining room to see what was the matter. Her husband told her what had occurred, and then read aloud the portentous document:—

"Mr. Faithful begs to inform Mrs. Mangle that he sent two shirts to the wash, and has received only one back."

Again there was mirth at poor Marks' expense, but he only grew angry, while also growing more dogged.

"That's his cunning! That's his cunning! I know he's a spy."

"Nay, Marks, do not get prejudiced against him, or you may have to hold the post yourself for a long time to come."

"I don't care, master, if I do, rather than let you be imposed on. For my part, I believe it's Sir Moses over again, only he's got a fresh wig and coat."

Seeing it impossible to convince his too faithful servant of the necessity of giving a fair trial, Mr. Coombe was obliged to say—

"Marks, you are a good servant, but you must let me be master. This man must have a fair trial, even if I put him in the post at once, and alone. Now, you wouldn't like to make me do that, would you?"

"No, master," was grumbled forth; and away went Marks to try a third night.

That night changed the whole course of things.

"Mightn't I play a bit?" asked the assistant on trial, when he found himself once more growing very sleepy, towards three o'clock. "You know I am not a watchman—not yet. When I am, I know I mustn't do anything of the kind. I shall make you my model, of course. But now, I do get so confoundedly sleepy! And I don't want you to report me a second time. Mayn't I play?"

Marks was puzzled. He didn't know any precise reason why the thing mightn't be done, though it seemed to rather shock his notions of the proprieties.

While hesitating, Mr. Faithful produced some tobacco and some usquebaugh, and offered him a share. Marks took some, and the ice between them was melted. After a few whiffs on both sides, Marks condescended to say—

"Tune up, if you like, but don't pipe too loud!"

Mr. Faithful put down his tobacco pipe, and after learning what sort of tunes his principal favoured, played to him so successfully that, before the night was over, the two became sworn friends.

Faithful, however, to the mission, Marks carefully repeated this incident of the flageolet, with a sort of half protest against its absurdity.

"Well, now, Marks, I like that. Men who are plotting important and dangerous schemes—and you know it is only such men I fear—don't amuse themselves in that way. They can't do it. They haven't the lightness of heart—the spring, the elasticity. I am quite satisfied. He shall go on till you say the same; but I myself am quite satisfied."

CHAPTER LVIII.—DRAWING NEAR.

Tobacco, usquebaugh, and piping, made the midnight hours pass pleasantly with the two watchmen. Marks made his rounds carefully, as usual, giving his sub a lesson, at the same time, in prudence.

"You play on while I am doing it; then, if anybody fancies it is I who play the pipes so finely, they'll think they know where I am, and so try it on, if they are meaning robbery, arson, or carrying off, and so I'm down upon 'em. I shouldn't mind keeping up that game always, for the only time I've ever been caught napping was when two rogues conspired, the one to watch for the sound of my step, while the other broke into master's guinea bags."

This led to fresh talk, and ended by Marks

proposing to give up the duty the very next night.

Strange to say, Mr Faithful determinedly refused. He wasn't ready for so much responsibility; hadn't got wakeful enough; and he ended with a jest about his liking his companion too well to part with him.

However, a kind of compromise was hit upon. Mr Marks was to tell his master the new man was ready, but that he (Marks) should look in upon him now and then for a few nights. Sly Marks! He wanted the tobacco and usquebaugh.

The next night he got so much of both, that before twelve o'clock had struck, he was lying half drunk and wholly asleep in his master's easy chair in the counting-house.

Where was his associate?

Why, the gentleman in violet, the worthy Mr. George Faithful, the romantic wandering flageolet player, was at that moment trying to find the right key, on a bunch he had taken from Marks' pocket, wherewith to open a certain room—sacred place!—the home of the great secret which was making the fortune of Coombe Brothers—in a word, he was just penetrating at last into the machine-room.

He had a lantern with him, which cast only a dim light, and that light flickered, as if with the agitation of the hand that held it, as the eventful moment approached when the long-coveted prize would be made visible.

The door was not opened till he had tried many keys, though when he found the right one, he did not at once enter the room, but put down his lantern, took a piece of wax from his pocket, and took a careful impression, which he placed in his tobacco-box.

Then he entered the moonlit room.

It looked strangely unlike anything he had fancied. It was a large and beautifully proportioned room, with covered ceiling, and light, elegantly papered walls, as if originally fitted up for the drawing-room of one of the brothers, who had, in fact, once lived here, occupying two or three apartments.

The windows were very long, and there were no less than four of them; but they were all lined perpendicularly with straight iron bars, only a few inches apart, which had not only an extraordinary effect in itself with the light seen beyond, but when the light was at all considerable—as now, the moon being at the full—the effect of the windows and these long slender numerous divisions throwing a shadow right across the picturesque machine in the centre of the room, and thence to the wall beyond, was as quaint as it was inexplicable. The whole place seemed like a magic prison; and the machine itself, with strange contorted limbs, appeared like the enchanted prisoner who was here held in durance.

The fact was, that the spectator saw nothing clearly at first, and his imagination ran riot.

When the first feeling of wonder and awe had passed away, he shut up his lantern, lest it might be noticed outside, and began to pace round the room to try to understand it, feel for its doors, and so on.

Again and again his heart seemed to rise into his mouth, as he unexpectedly touched something, or, what was much worse, when something unexpectedly touched him, as happened once, when passing under the limbs of the machine, there fell a blow upon his head as if struck with a living hand.

He could not help a slight gasp, and a half cry, as his own hand rose to strike in return, but he found it was something that had been balanced across the top of the limb, and that he had touched some string that loosened it, so that it fell.

He paused for a full minute after this slight incident, feeling more shaken by it than he liked to confess, and trying to laugh it off in his own inner thoughts, but eventually he murmured to himself—

"Let it have its own course. I am scared, and I don't see the good of denying it. I'll rest a bit, and then go on.

He sat down, just where he was, on the floor,

and bent his head on his knees, and, there sitting, tried to realise to himself the fruits of all his long scheming, so that he might waste no time in aimless efforts, but begin and go on, straight as a cannon-ball, to his mark.

What a picture it would have been for certain persons to gaze on! that recumbent figure on the floor in such a dead silence, the full light of the moon upon him on one side, and sending his half figure across the floor on the other in distorted perspective—the intense quiet of the place, the intense bustle in the busy, agitated, but already half triumphant brain.

Dimly his plan grew before his eyes as he gazed round, half in awe, half in admiration, on the changeable lights and shadows, and on their fantastic play with the machine, which, under their influence, continually altered its aspect.

He could not attempt to work more than half an hour at a time. He must have artificial light, therefore he must close up the windows, so that he and his light could not be seen from the outside.

Where and what was that outside? What if it were in connection with the residence of Mr. Richard Coombe? That must be seen to before he ventured any further.

As to his work, must he wait till he could understand the machine, or begin at once to draw and describe every part of it, and then leave it to wiser mechanical heads to wring out the solution?

He decided to begin by actual drawings and descriptions of that which he saw, whether he understood or not.

He must secure each drawing and description as he finished it, so that it could not be discovered, and so that, if interrupted, there might still be a chance that the secret sought might be suggested in these earliest drawings.

Finally, he would roughly map out the machine into what he would call front, back, and sides—so as to have some principle of order and organisation in his drawings—to take him safely through the maze.



"Wait a bit, my love-sick Gamsel," said Maria, grasping her arm. (See page 276.)

He got up to examine this maze. Drawing near to it with extreme precaution, he felt for its most prominent parts, then let his fingers glide along all sorts of delicate cords he found stretching away from him. He put out his arms to their utmost length, but still the intricate network went far away beyond him, and he himself was now stopped by the more solid parts of the machine, which he felt to be of wood and iron, and in parts of great size and strength.

He tried to feel his way round the machine, but it was a difficult task, unless he went so far off that he could scarcely touch it at all, for when he kept near he was continually advancing against something that seemed like outlying portions of the network, and which the moonlight rather helped to hide than reveal.

He stopped at last, afraid lest an accidental false step might cause him to fall against the machine and break something which of course he, in his ignorance would find it impossible to repair.

Still, his curiosity was so great that he could not tear himself away. Where was the place of moving the machine? Would he be able to find that out? Would he dare to set it going? Could he do so, without the aid of the water-power by which the works of the mill, as a whole, were carried on?

He fancied he saw something that looked like a place for a man to stand and set the machine going. There was a sort of strange-looking minor machine, on the principal machine, at the spot in question, which he fancied must be connected with the moving power. Dare he put his hand upon it?

Strange, tremors seemed to shake him just then; but he laughed them off, and attributed them to the ghostly effect of the light, the tall prison-like bars and their reflections, and the weird shapes that floated every now and then about the ceiling and walls.

What could this inexplicable-looking thing be? It seemed like a great round jar, a brass chain coming out of its mouth, which feebly glittered in the moonlight. There were strangely-shaped pillars round it, and horizontal pieces raised like a mimic aerial bridge. But he was not sure that these surroundings had anything to do with the jar and chain.

He looked at the jar, trying vainly to pierce its mystery by the aid of his eyes and thoughts alone, as if afraid of trusting to it his fingers, remembering that in some kinds of machinery sharp knives, and stiletto points, and other awkward things of that kind had a place.

But, so far as he could see, there was no need to fear anything of the sort. He would, then, venture an attempt to fathom the mystery. He was losing the night, and nothing in effect had been done.

Suddenly he touched something, perhaps an unseen wire, what, he himself then knew not, for he instantly received a shock so terrible that he could only utter a feeble cry and fall on the floor as if convulsed—dying!

(To be continued.)

A SUNSET IDYL.

I WAS gazing on the sunset,
Leaning on a rustic stile,
With a young and dainty maiden
Standing near me all the while.
We were under apple-blossoms,
Pealed with gleaming drops of rain,
And we heard the dreamy music
Of a brooklet in the lane.

And the dying sunset linger'd,
Round this maiden queen of girls;
Won a brightness from her glances,
Gave a sparkle to her curls.
Then I spoke of summer evenings,
And of rambles in the dells;
But I only thought of wooing,
And the sound of marriage-bells.

And I dream'd of all the gladness
That a wedding-morn would bring,—
Of a round and rosy finger
Circled with a golden ring.

In the warm and purple distance,
Ivy-clasp'd, the church was seen:
With the maiden there I'd wander'd,
Often there—in dreams—had been!

Midst the lilies and the lilacs,
In the summer's lustrous eyes,
Have our whispers oft been mingled
With the fluttering of the leaves.
In such moments love and beauty
Fill the heart—there linger long;
Like the charm for ever present
In the poet's sweetest song.

When no longer glow'd the sunset,
Still I lean upon the stile,
And the maiden gave her promise—
Yes, her promise—with a smile.
Memory still turns to that sunset,
Of that evening fondly tells,
And the morning when we listen'd
To the sound of marriage-bells.

QUALLON.

The Saturday Reader.

WEEK ENDING JANUARY 12, 1867.

THE CLUB SYSTEM.

THE Publisher, in order to extend the circulation of the READER, offers the following liberal inducements to persons who will interest themselves in forming clubs. Any one sending him the names of three new subscribers, with cash in advance for one year's subscription, will receive by return mail a copy of Garneau's History of Canada, 2 vols., originally published at \$2.50. Any one forwarding the names of ten new subscribers, with one year's subscription each in advance, will receive, in addition to the above, a copy of Christie's History of Canada, 6 vols., just published at \$6.00. With a slight expenditure of effort, hundreds of our country friends may thus become the possessors of one or both of these excellent histories of the land of their birth or adoption.

THE FATE OF MEXICO.

THE accounts from this unfortunate country are of so conflicting a character, that it is utterly impossible to form anything like a correct judgment of the present state of affairs there. It seems now certain, however, that the French forces will return to their own country before many months. and it is supposed that Maximilian will remain, at the desire of the more conservative portion of the nation, who fear that his departure would revive the reign of anarchy, which was the chronic condition of Mexico ever since it exchanged Spanish despotism for a mockery of freedom and independence. Maximilian evidently is both a man of resolution and a man of sense; but what hopes he can entertain of maintaining his position, after Napoleon has left him to his own resources, it is not easy to imagine. How a people, whose history for the last fifty years has been a succession of revolutions, are to subside into peace, order, and good government, we have to learn; and we suspect it will prove a feat beyond his power to effect. It is still more difficult to conceive how Napoleon expects to get out of the Mexican muddle with clean hands, or with undamaged reputation. To say nothing of his duty to one whom he inveigled into the enterprise, the fate of the unhappy partisans of the empire, including thousands of French residents of Mexico, ought to lie heavy on his conscience, if anything can. No one knows better than he that their lives and property would be at the mercy of their enemies, and enemies, too, who never spared a political or personal opponent. Why, it is more than a probability; it is almost a certainty, that the first Republican pronouncement would consign them to death or to exile,

and to robbery, at a matter of course. Napoleon's situation, in connection with this business, is most pitiable; and we should not be surprised if it were, in the end, to prove the Waterloo of the Second Empire—with this difference, that his uncle's fall was not accompanied with disgrace.

The French Emperor, ever since he seized power, nearly twenty years ago, has acquired an extraordinary reputation for sagacity in the eyes of the world, which always admires success, and is often apt to mistake cunning for wisdom. But assuredly, Napoleon's Mexican adventure has not exhibited him in the light of a wise man or a great statesman. Yet we are still told that he has overreached the United States, by some legerdemain, in having entered into an agreement that the French and American governments shall assume a neutral position towards Mexico. But if this be as stated, he is not unlikely to find himself grievously in error. As no treaty between the United States and a foreign power is of force until confirmed by the Federal Senate, and as no such assent has been given in this instance, we suspect that any concession or arrangement made by Mr. Seward in the premises will be treated by the men now all-powerful in the Federal Legislature with very little respect.

All things considered, then, we have small hope of Maximilian's success. The influence of the Church party is great, and has once been greater; but they have of late years been less than a match for the Liberals and Anarchists, and we cannot perceive how they can be much strengthened by Maximilian continuing in the country, without money or aid from European troops. That he may be secretly assisted by Napoleon is possible; but then, the Republicans are quite as likely to receive similar help from the United States, and thus the troubles of Mexico will be aggravated. On the whole, we are inclined to believe that the result of all the French Emperor's fine schemes will be to drive the country into the arms of the United States, either by means of a Protectorate or by annexation; and this would, perhaps, be the best thing for the Mexicans, whatever it might to the other party to the transaction.

THE SHADOWS OF COMING EVENTS.

IT is seldom safe or prudent to prognosticate the course of future events; but it requires no great sagacity to foresee that we are approaching one of those great revolutions which have frequently marked the providential government of the world. Revolutions which influence the destinies of a single country may spring from causes incidental to itself, and may not extend beyond its own limits; but there have been others more universal in their character, and more extensive in the changes they have produced. These last especially, have been produced by a conflict of opinions, systems and creeds, and the mental was the forerunner of the physical struggle. Neander and several ecclesiastical writers have pointed out the circumstances which, humanly speaking, prepared the way for the advent of Christianity, and which are palpable to all students of history. The Greek and Roman religions had gradually lost their old hold on the masses, while the educated classes regarded them chiefly as engines of government and an aid to the enforcement of the laws which bind society together. It was not the Roman augurs only that laughed in each other's faces at the solemnization of their mysteries; the statesmen and the philosophers held these mysteries and those who practised them in still greater contempt. Then again, the Jewish church was not only divided by the two great sects of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, differing widely on the most vital doctrines; but the Jews of Alexandria, Asia and Greece, had introduced the doctrines of Plato into their religion, and swarms of ægeic sects sprang up in Judea, sapping the foundations of the national creed. The introduction of Christianity had, therefore, become comparatively easy, and was received as a light from

Heaven, in whose radiance the old superstitions disappeared for ever from the earth. This is, far above all, the most striking instance of the "Providence of History." Nearly similar circumstances produced a second important revolution, in the spread of Mahometanism over a large portion of the Christian world. The saint-worship of the Eastern and Western Churches had given birth to the sects of the Gnostics, Arians, and others, whose dissensions in the eighth and ninth centuries culminated in the sanguinary struggle of the Orthodox party and the Iconoclasts. The disastrous result was that the Arians of Asia, Africa, and Spain, offered little resistance to the Arabian followers of the prophet of Mecca, finding some of his dogmas more to their taste than those of their Christian opponents. The Protestant Reformation of the fifteenth century, and the French Revolution of the eighteenth, were heralded by similar intellectual commotions; and, if there be truth in signs and auguries, we expect that the world is on the eve of one more mighty change in human affairs. The indications are everywhere perceptible; in religion, in politics, in science, in literature, and more than all, in the restlessness and discontent of the European peoples.

BIRDS OF PREY.

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

Book the First.

FATAL FRIENDSHIP.

Continued from page 274.

CHAPTER V.—THE LETTER FROM THE "ALLIANCE" OFFICE.

Upon the evening of the day on which Mrs. Halliday and the dentist had discussed the propriety of calling in a strange doctor, George Sheldon came again to see his sick friend. He was quicker to perceive the changes in the invalid than the members of the household, who saw him daily and hourly, and he perceived a striking change for the worse to-night.

He took care, however, to suffer no evidence of alarm or surprise to appear in the sick chamber. He talked to his friend in the usual cheery way; sat by the bedside for half-an-hour; did his best to arouse Tom from a kind of stupid lethargy, and to encourage Mrs. Halliday, who showed the task of nursing her husband with brisk Nancy Woolper—an invaluable creature in a sick-room. But he failed in both attempts; the dull apathy of the invalid was not to be dispelled by the most genial companionship, and George's spirits had been sinking lower and lower all day as her fears increased.

She would fain have called in a strange doctor, she would fain have sought for comfort and consolation from some new quarter. But she was afraid of offending Philip Sheldon; and she was afraid of alarming her husband. So she waited, and watched, and struggled against that ever-increasing anxiety. Had not Mr. Sheldon made light of his friend's malady, and what motive could he have for deceiving her?

A breakfast-cup full of beef-tea stood on the little table by the bed-side, and had been standing there for hours untouched.

"I did take such pains to make it strong and clear," said Mrs. Woolper, regretfully, as she came to the little table during a tidying process, "and poor dear Mr. Halliday hasn't taken so much as a spoonful. It won't be fit for him to-morrow, so as I haven't eaten a morsel of dinner, what with the hurry and anxiety and one thing and another, I'll warm up the beef-tea for my supper. There's not a blessed thing in the house; for you don't eat nothing, Mrs. Halliday; and as to cooking a dinner for Mr. Sheldon, you'd a deal better get and throw your victuals out into the gutter, for there there'd be a chance of stray dogs profiting by 'em, at any rate."

"Phil is off his feed, then; eh, Nancy?" said George.

"I should rather think he is, Mr. George. I roasted a chicken yesterday for him and Mrs. Halliday, and I don't think they eat an ounce between them; and such a lovely tender young

thing as it was too—done to a turn—with bread-sauce and a little bit of sea-kale. One invalid makes another, that's certain. I never saw your brother so upset as he is now, Mr. George, in all his life."

"No?" answered George Sheldon thoughtfully; "Phil isn't generally one of your sensitive sort."

The invalid was sleeping heavily during this conversation. George stood by the bed for some minutes looking down at the altered face, and then turned to leave the room.

"Good night, Mrs. Halliday," he said; "I hope I shall find poor old Tom a shade better when I look round to-morrow."

"I am sure I hope so," George answered mournfully.

She was sitting by the window looking out at the darkening western sky, in which the last lurid glimmer of a stormy sunset was fading against a background of iron gray.

This quiet figure by the window, the stormy sky, and ragged hurrying clouds without, the dusky chamber with all its dimly significant litter of medicine bottles, make a gloomy picture; a picture which the man who looked upon it carried in his mind for many years after that night.

George Sheldon and Nancy Woolper left the room together, the Yorkshirewoman carrying a tray of empty phials and glasses, and amongst them the cup of beef-tea.

"He seems in a bad way to-night, Nancy," said George, with a backward jerk of his head towards the sick chamber.

"He is in a bad way, Mr. George," answered the woman gravely, "let Mr. Philip think what he will. I don't want to say a word against your brother's knowledge, for such a steady studious gentleman as he is had need be clever, and if I was ill myself, I'd trust my life to him freely; for I've heard Barlingford folks say that my master's advice is as good as any regular doctor's, and that there's very little your regular doctors know that he doesn't know as well or better. But for all that, Mr. George, I don't think he understands Mr. Halliday's case quite as clear as he might."

"Do you think Tom's in any danger?"

"I wot, say that, Mr. George; but I think he gets worse instead of getting better."

"Humph!" muttered George, "if Halliday were to go off the hooks, Phil would have a good chance of getting a rich wife."

"Don't say that, Mr. George," exclaimed the Yorkshirewoman reproachfully; "don't even think of such a thing while that poor man lies at death's door. I'm sure Mr. Sheldon hasn't any thoughts of that kind. He told me before Mr. and Mrs. Halliday came to town, that he and Mrs. George had forgotten all about past times."

"Oh, if Phil said so, that alters the case. Phil is one of your blunt outspoken fellows; and all ways says what he means," said George Sheldon. And then he went down stairs, leaving Nancy to follow him at her leisure with the tray of jingling cups and glasses. He went down through the dusk, smiling to himself, as if he had just given utterance to some piece of intense humour. He went to look for his brother, whom he found in the torture-chamber, busied with some mysterious process in connection with a lump of plaster-of-paris, which seemed to be the model of ruined battlements in the Gothic style. The dentist looked up as George entered the room, and did not appear particularly delighted by the appearance of that gentleman.

"Well," said Mr. Sheldon the younger, "busy as usual? Patients seem to be looking up."

"Patients be—toothless to the end of time!" cried Philip with a savage laugh. "No, I'm not working to order; I'm only experimental-sing."

"You're rather fond of experiments, I think, Phil," said George, seating himself at the table at which his brother was working under the glare of the gas. The dentist looked very pale and haggard in the gas-light, and his eyes had the dull sunken appearance induced by prolonged sleeplessness. George sat watching his brother thoughtfully for some time, and then produced

his cigar-case. "You don't mind my smoke here?" he asked as he lighted a cigar.

"Not at all. You are very welcome to sit here, if it amuses you to see me working at the cast of a lower jaw."

"O, that's a lower jaw, is it? It looks like the fragment of some castle-keep. No, Phil, I don't care about watching you work. I want to talk to you seriously."

"What about?"

"About that fellow upstairs; poor old Tom. He and I were great cronies, you know, at home. He's in a very bad way, Phil."

"Is he? You seem to be turning physician all at once, George. I shouldn't have thought your grubbing among county histories, and tattered old pedigrees, and parish registers had given you so deep an insight into the science of medicine!" said the dentist, in a sneering tone.

"I don't know any thing of medicine; but I know enough to be sure that Tom Halliday is about as bad as he can be. What mystifies me is, that he doesn't seem to have had any thing particular the matter with him. There he lies, getting worse and worse every day, without any specific ailment. It's a strange illness, Philip."

"I don't see any thing strange in it."

"Don't you? Don't you think the surrounding circumstances are strange? Here is this man comes to your house hale and hearty; and all of a sudden he falls ill, and gets lower and lower every day, without any body being able to say why or wherefore."

"That's not true, George. Every body in this house knows the cause of Tom Halliday's illness. He came home in wet clothes, and insisted on keeping them on. He caught a cold; which resulted in low fever. There is the whole history and mystery of the affair."

"That's simple enough, certainly. But if I were you, Phil, I'd call in another doctor."

"That is Mrs. Halliday's business," answered the dentist, coolly; "she knows that if she doubts my skill, she is free to call in whom she pleases. And now you may as well drop the subject, George. I've had enough anxiety about this man's illness, and I don't want to be worried by you."

After this there was a little conversation about general matters, but the talk dragged and languished drearily, and George Sheldon rose to depart directly he had finished his cigar.

"Good night, Philip!" he said; "if ever you get a stroke of good luck, I hope you'll stand something handsome to me."

This remark had no particular relevance to any thing that had been said that night by the two men. Yet Philip Sheldon seemed in no wise astonished by it.

"If things ever do take a turn for the better with me, you'll find me a good friend, George," he said, gravely; and then Mr. Sheldon the younger bade him good-night, and went out into Fitzgeorge-street.

He paused for a moment at the corner of the street to look back at his brother's house. He could see the lighted windows of the invalid's chamber, and it was at those he looked.

"Poor Tom," he said to himself, "poor Tom! we were great cronies in the old times, and have had many a pleasant evening together!"

Mr. Sheldon the dentist sat up till the small hours that night, as he had done for many nights lately. He finished his work in the torture-chamber, and went up to the common sitting-room, or drawing-room as it was called by courtesy, a little before midnight. The servants had gone to bed, for there was no regular nightly watch in the apartment of the invalid. Mrs. Halliday lay on a sofa in her husband's room, and Nancy Woolper slept in an adjoining apartment, always wakeful and ready if help of any kind should be wanted.

The house was very quiet just now. Philip Sheldon walked up and down the room, thinking; and the creaking of his boots sounded unpleasantly loud to his ears. He stopped before the fire-place, after having walked to and fro some time, and began to examine some letters that lay upon the mantelpiece. They were addressed to Mr. Halliday, and had been forwarded for Yorkshire. The dentist took them up one by

one, and deliberately examined them. They were all business letters, and most of them bore country post-marks. But there was one which had been, in the first instance, posted from London; and this letter Mr. Sheldon examined with especial attention.

It was a big official-looking document, and embossed upon the adhesive envelope appeared the crest and motto of the Alliance Insurance Office.

"I wonder whether that's all square," thought Mr. Sheldon, as he turned the envelope about in his hands, staring at it absently. "I ought to make sure of that. The London post-mark is nearly three weeks old." He pondered for some moments, and then went to the cupboard in which he kept the materials wherewith to replenish or to make a fire. Here he found a little tin tea-kettle, in which he was in the habit of boiling water for occasional friendly glasses of grog. He poured some water from a bottle on the sideboard into his kettle, set fire to a bundle of wood, and put the kettle on the blazing sticks. After having done this he searched for a tea-cup, succeeded in finding one, and then stood watching for the boiling of the water. He had not long to wait; the water boiled furiously before the wood was burnt out, and Mr. Sheldon filled the tea-cup standing on the table. Then he put the insurance-office letter over the cup, with the seal downwards, and left it so while he resumed his walk. After walking up and down for about ten minutes he went back to the table

and took up the letter. The adhesive envelope opened easily, and Mr. Sheldon by this ingenious stratagem, made himself master of his friend's business.

The "Alliance" letter was nothing more than a notice to the effect that the half-yearly premium for insuring the sum of three thousand pounds on the life of Thomas Halliday would be due on such a day, after which there would be twenty-one days' grace, at the end of which time the policy would become void, unless the premium had been duly paid.

Mr. Halliday's letters had been suffered to accumulate during the last fortnight. The letters forwarded from Yorkshire had been detained some time, as they had been sent first to Hyley Farm, now in possession of the new owner, and then to Barlingford, to the house of Georgy's mother who had kept them upwards of a week, in daily expectation of her son-in-law's return. It was only on the receipt of a letter from Georgy, containing the tidings of her husband's illness, that Mr. Halliday's letters had been sent to London.

Thus it came about that the twenty-one days of grace were within a day of expiry when Philip Sheldon opened his friend's letter.

"This is serious," muttered the dentist, as he stood deliberating with the open letter in his hand; "there are three thousand pounds depending on that man's power to write a cheque!"

After a few minutes' reflection, he folded the letter and resealed it very carefully.

"It wouldn't do to press the matter upon him to-night," he thought; "I must wait till to-morrow morning, come what may."

To be continued.

THE THREE SISTERS.

I SAW three sisters hand in hand:
Yet one did seem to lead the way,
As with a steady eye she scanned
The path that bleak before them lay;
Nor blenched she at its ruggedness;
But at her look of simple trust,
The hills and rocks waned less and less,
And mingled with the common dust.
And thus my heart in quiet saith—
Her name is FAITH.

And nimbly on the second went,
Her face angelically bright
With Heaven's glory, and content,
That gomm'd her o'er with native light,
As, with her eager eyes upraised,
She saw the blessedness to be—
The goal; which, brightening as she gazed,
Made her soul throb with ecstasy.
Whose vision has so large a scope?—
Her name is HOPE.

She glided on with quiet mien,
The noblest of these sisters three,
With grace that would outshine a queen;
With love that conquered all degrees:
And at her tread the barren ground
Sprang into soft and living green;
Her smile, like sunshine, spreading round
A radiant bloom to light the scene.
Her gifts are common, she a rarity—
Her name is CHARITY.



The Three Sisters.



ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH.

This beautiful Church is situated on Beaver Hill, and may be classed among the finest ecclesiastical edifices in Montreal. The style of architecture, as our readers will observe, is Gothic, and the building is said to be a close imitation of Salisbury Cathedral in England, although of course on a greatly reduced scale; the interior is well arranged, and affords accommodation for upwards of one thousand worshippers. St. Andrew's Church is in connection with the established Church of Scotland.

BROUGHT TO LIGHT.

BY THOMAS SPEIGHT.

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Continued from page 283.

Going up to Jerry, he shook the unconscious lad roughly by the shoulder, and called him by name. But Jerry's sleep was far too sound to be broken by such simple means, or, indeed, by any earthly means whatever, as the chemist, with a horrible, sickening dread gnawing at his heart—a dread in comparison with which his

previous anxiety about the letter had been as child's play—was not long in discovering. Again and again he cried aloud, with a strange agony in his voice: "Jerry, Jerry! wake up, man—come, wake up!" but Jerry remained supremely indifferent to all such entreaties. Then the chemist tried to find his pulse, but there was no pulse to find; next, in hot haste he fetched a looking-glass out of another room, and held it over the lad's mouth; but obstinate Jerry refused to breathe ever so faintly: the glass remained un-sullied. Not even the weakest heart-beat was perceptible to the fingers that hungered so keenly to detect it; the delicate mechanism had

stopped for ever: Jerry was growing cold already.

Convinced at last that all his efforts at resuscitation were utterly useless, the chemist sat down with a bitter groan opposite poor dead Jerry; and taking his head between his hands, as though it were a loose portion of himself which might chance to fall off and get damaged, he contemplated his handiwork in silence. But presently he grew frightened. That same sweetly solemn look still rested on the face of the dead lad, and it troubled the chemist wofully; it spoke of something—a heavenly peace and serenity—so entirely beyond his ordinary experiences, that he could not bear to contemplate it any longer. With that instinctive desire which we all have to cover up our lost ones, he fetched a clean cloth out of a clothes-press in the next room, and spread it gently over the face of the dead boy. It may be that at that moment some pang of regret, pure and simple, for the friend he had lost—a friend, even if a simpleton—made its way to the chemist's hardened heart. If such were the case, it was quenched next moment in burning anxiety for his own safety; for suddenly, and without any preliminary warning, such as the swinging of the garden gate, or the noise of footsteps on the gravel, there came a loud single knock at the front door—a knock which echoed dully through the quiet house, but which fell like a sound of dire omen on the chemist's guilty heart. He staggered back as though smitten by an invisible hand. Who could possibly want him at so late an hour? Suppose he were to pretend not to be at home? But that would never do, because one of the windows of the room looked out at the front of the house, and the tell-tale lamp shining through the blind betrayed his presence to all who might pass that way. He was still considering within himself, when the summons came again, louder and more imperative than before. With a trembling hand he took up the lamp, and carried it into the next room; and turning the key softly on that terrible Thing lying there so mute and moveless, he advanced on tip-toe to the front door, and putting his mouth to the keyhole, called out in a strange hoarse voice: "Who's there? and what do you want?"

"Open the door, Brack, my boy, and you'll soon find out," replied a voice from the outside, in accents rendered slippery by the imbibition of more strong drink than the speaker could conveniently carry.

Brackenridge at once recognised the voice as that of a lame cobbler named Griggs, a man known to everybody as one of the most drunken reprobates in Normanford; and he at once opened the door, first taking the precaution to put up the chain. "Now, Griggs, what is it?" said the chemist, impatiently. "Why do you come bothering me at this time of the night?"

"Well, I'm jiggered if that ain't cool!" said the cobbler, with a hiccup, as he swayed slightly to and fro on the step. "Seeyhere. I don't want you, my buck, at any price; wouldn't have you a gift. The individle I want is m' friend Jerry Winch. Here have I been waiting, waiting, waiting more 'n half-an-hour, and no signs of Jerry yet. It's tarnation cold standing out here, I can tell ye; so I want to know how much longer you are going to keep the lad."

"Jerry Winch!" said the chemist, in a dismayed whisper. "You are mistaken; Jerry Winch is not here."

"Oh, fie now, Mister B. Very naughty to tell fibs," said the cobbler, with an emphatic smack of his drunken lips. "As if I didn't see him with my own blessed eyes come in at this very door! Seeyhere, now; this is how it is," he went on, adjusting his balance to a nicety against the doorpost. "I've been out 'n business this afternoon, and coming home, I found the roads uncommonly shlippery—so shlippery, that when I met my friend Jerry, who happened to be coming the same way, we agreed to walk arm-in-arm to keep one another up. Seeyhere, now, Jerry shlipped twice, but I picked him up and set him on his pins, and we were as right as ninepence when we got here. Says your Flybysky to me: 'I've got a letter for old B., and I must call and leave it. You wait here for me;

I shan't be long; and then we'll go down the hill together.' 'All right, my turnip,' says I; 'and away he goes, and I sees the door shut after him: and now you want to persuade me that he ain't here. It looks soapy.'

"Well, well," said the chemist, in a perfect agony of bewilderment, "I was perhaps wrong in saying that Jerry was not here."

"In course you was," interrupted the cobbler gravely.

"I ought to have said that I have got some important business to transact, in which I require Jerry's assistance. We shall not be done till a very late hour; in fact, Jerry will probably stay here all night; so it will be no use whatever your waiting for him any longer."

"That's straightforward—that alters the case altogether," said the cobbler. "If Flybysky can't come, I must go without him. Seeyhere, now. I've been waiting here so long that the frost has got to my vitals, and in such a case brandy's the only cure."

Anything to be relieved of this wretch's drunken maunderings! The brandy was quickly fetched, and eagerly drunk. After vowing that Brackenridge was a regular "brick," and insisting on a parting grasp of the hand, the cobbler turned to go. At the garden gate, he paused. "Seeyhere, now. It looked soapy at first, didn't it?" he said, and with a last tipsy nod of the head, he disappeared down the road.

Having refastened the door, Brackenridge went back into the little room where he had left the lamp, and sat down to think. He must get away at once, that was very evident. When Jerry came to be inquired for in the morning, Griggs would remember everything: there would be no lapse of memory with regard to overnight events with such a confirmed toper as the cobbler. But for the cursed accident of this man's presence, Brackenridge felt that he might have hidden away the body, where, even if found, no suspicion would have attached to him in the matter. But such a course was now utterly out of the question. He must get away at once and for ever. To this dark ending had his scoundrelly arts brought him. An outcast and a murderer, ever dreading to feel the touch of Justice on his shoulder, he must go forth into the world, and try to seek out a new and obscure home where himself and his crimes were alike unknown.

After a time, he looked at his watch, and then he went upstairs, and hurriedly began to pack a small portmanteau. A few minutes were sufficient to accomplish this task; then he put on his overcoat, and a thick gray comforter, and a fishing-hat of brown felt; so dressed, no casual acquaintance whom he might chance to encounter would be likely to recognise him. This done, he took his portmanteau in his hand, and went quietly down stairs. He paused for a moment opposite the door of the room where the dead lad lay. His pocket-book was on the chimney-piece of that room; but not for the world dared he have gone in and got it. Leaving the lamp still burning, he stole out by way of the back-door, which he pulled to gently after him; and so away at a rapid pace down the snowy road. Already there was on him the sickening dread which would never utterly leave him again, and which every man feels when he first becomes a criminal—the dread of being taken.

CHAPTER XXXIX.—A SECRET EXPEDITION.

When the woman Marie, taking herself into her own confidence, after the fashion of most crazy people, told herself that Henri Duplessis was at White Grange, she stated nothing more than the truth. The Canadian was there in hiding; and there also, as a matter of course, was the faithful Antoine. Duplessis, in the first instance, on leaving Lilac Lodge, had really made his way to London, although the police were utterly baffled in their efforts to trace him, and had there lain up in lavender for a while, till the heat of the pursuit had in some measure died away. Marie had been shut up at White Grange all this time, to which place, as soon as his plans were ripe, Duplessis himself made his way, in the disguise of a Savoyard, with an or-

gan at his back; and there he was shortly afterwards joined by Antoine. This dangerous move had not been made without a purpose—a purpose over which the Canadian's mind had been brooding ever since his flight from Lilac Lodge, and which he was now prepared to put into execution. The carrying out of this design had been delayed for several weeks in consequence of the unavoidable absence of Clotilde, Lady Spence-laugh's French maid, who, as a great favour, had been lent by her Ladyship for a couple of months to a particular friend about to proceed to Paris for a short time, whose acquaintance with the French language was of a limited character. Clotilde's presence at Belair was necessary to the plans of Duplessis, and as Clotilde was now back again, further delay was unadvisable.

Hitherto, Duplessis had said nothing to Antoine as to the nature of the great scheme which had been ripening in his brain for so long a time; but now that the eve of the night itself which he had fixed upon for his secret expedition had arrived, there was no necessity for further reticence, more especially as he needed the assistance of that devoted servitor. The best room in White Grange, a room seldom used by the family, and considered in the light of a state-parlour, had been given up to Duplessis. He had swung a sort of hammock in one corner of it; and in this room he slept, read, smoked, and took his meals; and once and again played a greasy game of piquet with Antoine. Considered at its best, it was a mean and shabby little den, and the Canadian's refined tastes rose in revolt a hundred times a day against the dingy squalor by which his present life was envired. But all that would now be changed. So, as the afternoon waned, he summoned Antoine from the little loft close under the rafters, where that worthy was enjoying a comfortable after-dinner snooze, and bidding him close the door, and draw his chair up to the fire, he proceeded to unfold the details of his scheme.

Any one who had been acquainted with Henri Duplessis during his season of prosperity, would have found it a difficult matter to recognise that "fine gentleman" under the husk which adverse circumstances had of late compelled him to assume. In place of the drawing-room, exquisite, whose happy ease of manner, and unfailing supply of polite *periffuge*, he, perhaps, had secretly envied, he would have seen before him an olive-skinned and rather dirty-looking individual, with a crop of short black spiky hair, and a ragged black moustache; dressed in a suit of clothes whose best days had long been over. But the old fine manner was not to be hidden by a ragged coat; Duplessis was still a gentleman, though his supper might be nothing but bread and cheese and table-beer; and even surly old Nathan Orchard, who, as a rule, had scant respect for any one but himself, never addressed his singular lodger without first carrying a finger to his forehead; and it is almost needless to add that no change of circumstances could weaken in the slightest degree the devotion, and affectionate respect, with which Antoine regarded his master.

"Come here, my chicken, I want to talk seriously to thee," said Duplessis, as Antoine closed the door. "Nearer still, for we must have no eavesdroppers. That will do.—Thou seest these two bank-notes? They are of the value of ten pounds respectively, and are absolutely the last fragments of a once comfortable little fortune. Our old curmudgeon of a host will claim them as his due to-morrow, and when once they pass out of my fingers, one shilling and fourpence-halfpenny will be all that Henri Duplessis can call his own in the world. A pleasant prospect, is it not, my infant?"

Antoine's chubby face lengthened visibly; and there gradually crept over it such an expression of blank, but still comical consternation, that Duplessis could not help bursting into a hearty laugh.

"Our lucky star is hidden for a time behind the clouds, my Antoine," resumed the Canadian. "I must turn ambulatory musician for a livelihood, and watch the world and its doings over the green baize of a barrel-organ; in company

with a small monkey of many accomplishments."

"And what is to become of me, Monsieur Henri?" demanded Antoine in a pitiful voice.

"Écoutez in summer, and coffee in winter. Let them be good and cheap, and in a dozen years thy fortune will be made."

"Ah! Monsieur Henri, I don't want fortune; I don't want anything but to stay always with my dear master; to share his lot whatever it may be; to work for him now that he is poor, as"

"Enough, my dear boy—enough!" said Duplessis with a sigh. "Thy words stir strange feelings in my breast, such as better remain unawakened. Thou hast the finest heart in the world; and so long as thou art left to me, I cannot believe that my good star has deserted me entirely. My fortunes, truly, are at a desperate ebb; but listen, my cabbage, listen with all thine ears: I have a scheme, a splendid scheme, which, if it only succeed, will make us both rich men for life!"

"Ah! Monsieur Henri, I knew your genius too well to fear that you would ever have need to walk long in the gutter."

"It was to carry out this scheme that I came back from London into the very jaws of the lion, as one may say," resumed Duplessis; "and it would have been carried out weeks ago, had not Clotilde been away. At last I have succeeded in arranging everything for to-night. How are thy nerves, my Antoine? Does thy pulse beat steadily?—is there no lurking fear at the bottom of thy heart? The service is one of some danger; and thou mayst as well put thy revolver into thy pocket before we set out."

"Monsieur has proved my courage before to-day," said Antoine proudly. "He has no occasion to doubt me now."

"I do not doubt thee, thou pig-headed son of a hippopotamus. I know that when the moment comes, thou wilt be true as steel. Antoine, if only we are successful! Think what openings there are in the New World, in Mexico, in California, for men of enterprise, with capital at their back."

"But Monsieur has not yet favoured me with any particulars of his great scheme," said Antoine quietly.

"A merited reproof. *Écoutez donc*. In the first place, we leave here to-night as the clock strikes twelve, and then"—The Canadian's voice sunk to a whisper, and the two heads came together over the little table. Listening, Antoine took in all the details of the plot eagerly.

"It is a scheme worthy of the genius of Monsieur, and it cannot be otherwise than successful," said the glowing Antoine, as Duplessis sank back in his chair, and prepared to light a cheroot. "But has Monsieur decided what to do with *La Chatte*?"

"No, Antoine," said Duplessis, pausing in his occupation, while a deep frown darkened his face; "I have not decided. What can I do with her? To go on for ever paying her board and lodging at this place would ruin a millionaire. Our friend, Monsieur Orchard, does not grant us the asylum of his roof without charging us a heavy price for it. And yet, to attempt to take her with us out of the country, would be to run a thousand risks; more, I confess, than I have the courage to meet. What to do, I know not."

"A couple of pinches of that gray powder which Monsieur once shewed me, dropped into her chocolate some morning, and, pouf! her little candle is blown out for ever, and nobody but ourselves is any the wiser."

"A devilish scheme, Antoine, and one that I can never agree to. No; we must find some less objectionable mode of getting rid of her."

"Monsieur is over-particular," said Antoine drily. "In such cases, indecision is only another name for weakness. When this little Belair business is well over, let Monsieur go to Paris, and enjoy himself for awhile, leaving me still here. The claws of *La Chatte* must be clipped at once and for ever, and Antoine Gaudin is the man to do it. Monsieur has no

occasion to trouble his mind further in the matter."

Antoine twisted the waxed end of his moustache tenderly as he spoke, while an evil smile crept over his face, which brought into view his great yellow wolfish teeth; but Duplessis, smoking his cheroot thoughtfully, and gazing intently into the fire, answered never a word.

The comforting words whispered by Mrs. Winch in the ear of Lady Spencelaugh, as that person came back to consciousness in the little vestry, and reiterated again and again, as the two women sat together in the privacy of her Ladyship's dressing-room, were not without their effect on the mind of her on whose behalf they were spoken. Surely, what the widow said must be true! John English had sailed in the *Ocean Child*; the *Ocean Child* had been lost with all on board. Granting, then, John English to have been the real heir, of which there could no longer be much doubt, the title and estates, now that he was gone, would come, in proper legal sequence, to Gaston; and this horrible confession, which she had been driven by the force of circumstances to make, would, for the sake of the family, be hushed up by the few people to whom it was known. But even supposing that, by accident or design, some tittle of the truth were to leak out, and become the common property of that select circle in which her Ladyship lived and moved—the gossip of inferior people she held in utter contempt—no one knew better than she did how quietly but efficiently Time's busy fingers work at the cleansing of a soiled reputation, provided that the stain be not of too deep a dye to begin with; how patiently the old graybeard will strive to mend the flaws in your character, as though it were a piece of cracked china, only the porcelain on which he works must be of the finest quality, and not composed of inferior clay; and it is wonderful how much your patched porcelain will often stand in the way of wear and tear, if only common care be used in the handling of it. Three or four years, her Ladyship thought, spent not unpleasantly among the German apses, and the galleries of Florence and Rome, and then she might come back with safety, bringing with her a renovated reputation, which would never be too rudely questioned by the denizens of Vanity Fair, where so much base alloy is quietly winked at, and allowed to pass current as sterling coin.

Lady Spencelaugh, deriving what scraps of comfort were possible to her from these considerations, and from the cheering words of her humble friend, Martha Winch, allowed herself, after a time, to be put to bed. She lay quietly enough, so long as the landlady was with her; but no sooner had that indefatigable person taken her leave for the night, than her Ladyship arose. Utterly tired out as she was, both in body and mind, by the events of the day, her brain was yet far too excited for sleep; besides, the quietude of bed frightened her. Her restless fancy peopled the dusky chamber with all sorts of unwelcome visitors, till, unable any longer to bear their company, she crept, shawled and slipped, to the cosy companionship of the dressing-room fire; and there, crouched on the rug, between sleeping and waking, she allowed her mind to play at hide-and-seek with the distorted and ever-changing crowd of doubts, and hopes, and fears, which now claimed her as their own, and enacted over and over again, in fancy, the whole painful drama of the day just closed.

Midnight came and went, but Lady Spencelaugh never stirred. She still lay coiled on the rug, with white fingers tightly intertwined, her head resting on a bunch of rosebuds, cunningly worked with coloured silks on the cushion of a *fauteuil*. The silvery voice of the Sèvres clock on the mantel-piece had just told the hour of two, when she was roused from her state of semi-stupor by the noise of the opening door. She turned her head uneasily on its pillow, and said: "Is that you, Clotilde? You may go to bed. I shall not want"—The rest of the sentence died away in her throat at sight of two strange men, their faces covered with black crape, coming rapidly towards her. They were on her before she could scream or give any alarm.

"Speak, and you are a dead woman!" exclaimed one of the men, seizing her roughly by the shoulder, and presenting a pistol at her head. "O spare my life!" she contrived to gasp out. "Obey my orders implicitly, and no harm shall happen to you," said the man. "But dare to give the least alarm, and that moment you die!"

He then bade her rise and seat herself in an easy-chair; and with that, the second man whipped a coil of thin rope out of his pocket, and proceeded, dexterously and neatly, to tie her Ladyship in the chair, so that she could move neither hand nor foot; after which he proceeded to gag her with her own pocket-handkerchief, and a small strip of wood, which he had evidently brought in for the purpose. When he had done, had her life depended on it, Lady Spencelaugh could not have uttered anything beyond a faint moan.

"Await my return here," said the first man, as the other one stepped back a pace or two, to admire the neatness of his handiwork. "But first bolt both the doors, so that there may be no fear of intruders."

There was something in the tone of this man's voice which, even through the midst of her terror, seemed to strike familiarly on Lady Spencelaugh's ear. Certainly she knew the voice, she said to herself again and again; but where and when she had heard it before, was a question which, in the present perturbed state of her mind, she found herself utterly unable to answer. As before stated, the faces of the men were hidden by crape veils; their dress was homely and commonplace enough; and their boots were covered with some soft material, which deadened the sound of their footsteps.

The second man now seated himself on a chair close to Lady Spencelaugh, and proceeded to light a cigarette. Him her Ladyship regarded with indifference, now that she found her life was not in danger; but her gaze rested uneasily on the first man. Why had he come hither, and what was he about to do? He approached the chimney-piece, and she held her breath. His fingers seemed to be wandering, as if in quest of something, among the intricate scroll-work, and quaint old-world carvings, which the hand of some dead and-gone sculptor, making the hard marble plastic to his fancy, had carved with loving care and minuteness all over the snowy surface; and her eyes dilated as she watched him. Could it be possible that to this veiled midnight plunderer was known the precious secret guarded by her with such jealous watchfulness—the secret which, she had fondly hoped was known to no one among the living except herself and Martha Winch? Had the dead found a tongue to whisper it, or by what other occult means had her strange visitors become possessed of the knowledge? Her breath came in thick stifling gasps as she watched him; but when she saw his fingers press gently the fifth marble button from the top on the left hand side of the mantel-shelf, and at the same moment turn thrice to the left the small brass knob hidden behind the central scroll-work—when she saw one side of the chimney-piece roll gently back on hidden wheels, disclosing, as it did so, a narrow opening in the wall, evidently leading to some mysterious chamber beyond: when Lady Spencelaugh saw all this, knowing that the hoarded treasures of her life—all the gems and precious stones, the gatherings of many years, and which, next to her son, Gaston, she loved better than aught else on earth—were about to be snatched from her for ever, her heart gave way within her, and with a faint groan, that was stifled in her throat, her head sunk forward on her breast, and for a time she remembered nothing more. When Lady Spencelaugh recovered her consciousness, the two men were still there; one of them holding a small spirit-flask in his hand, which he had evidently been applying to her Ladyship's lips, in the hope of bringing her round more quickly.

"She will do now," said he who seemed the leader. "Put on the gag. We have no time to lose;" and with that he turned to a small table near at hand, on which were spread a quantity of gems and precious stones of various

kinds, some of them still uncut, while others were cut and set as necklaces, bracelets, rings, or other articles of personal adornment: a glittering throng truly. The gag was in her mouth, and Lady Spencelaugh looked on in dumb despair while the veiled man swept all her cherished treasures into a wash-leather bag, and then disposed of the same in some safe place about his person. They were lost to her without hope of recovery; all her precious hoard was gone, the slow, patient accumulation of twenty years. This hoarding of precious stones had been a monomania with her, secretly pursued, for not even Sir Philip himself, although aware of her weakness in this respect, had had any idea of the extent to which she had carried it. By means of what devilish arts had this white-handed thief learned the secret of the hiding-place? As her bright darlings slipped from her eyes for ever, she felt at that moment as though it would be a pleasant thing to die, and so end all this weary coil of calamities which was encompassing her around without any hope of escape. This brief, vivid drama in which she had been an involuntary actress, had had for her such an intensity of meaning as to cause her to forget for a little while that other dark drama of the day just done, in which she had played one of the leading parts; but now that this second act was consummated, the full weight of her misery flowed over her in a double wave, under whose accumulated force her very soul seemed to die within her, leaving her for a time powerless to suffer further. She had some dim sense of being left alone, and of hearing the key turned in the lock as the two men beat a hasty retreat—yes, alone; bound hand and foot, powerless to stir or speak, and without hope of release till morning should reveal her condition to some one—if, indeed, she could live thus till morning. To die would perhaps be best.

CHAPTER XL. THE EAST WING.

It was quite dark by the time Jane Garrod got home from Belair, which place she had left immediately after it had been decided to visit the family vault; with the result of which visit she would of course remain unacquainted till the following morning. The snow was coming down fast as Jane plodded homeward along the solitary by-paths which she knew so well; and when she turned a corner of the road, and while still some distance off, saw the ruddy glow of fire-light that streamed across the white road from the window of her own little home, her heart felt glad within her to think that her lot in life was cast in humble places, such as the sweet flower of Content loves best to haunt.

Jane scraped her feet, and shook some of the snow off her gown and shawl; and wondering whether Abel would have had sufficient forethought to have the kettle boiling against her return, she quietly opened the door and went in—went in, to find a bearded, stalwart individual sitting by the chimney-corner, who no sooner caught sight of her than he started up, and crossing the floor in a couple of strides, seized her by both hands, and shook them heartily, and then stooped and kissed her just as heartily on the cheek.

"Thank Heaven, you are come back safe and sound!" were Jane's first words when she had recovered in some measure from her surprise, and had further refreshed herself with a quiet fit of crying. "But, oh, what a deal of pain and anxiety you would have spared both Miss Frederica and me if you had only written to tell us you were about to leave Pevsey Bay!"

"I did write to you," said John, "only an hour before the train started, telling you that I was going to America to try and hunt up some proofs of my identity."

"Certainly your letter never came to hand," said Jane. "As I've many a time told Miss Frederica, there was some treachery at work in the case, of which we knew nothing. But we need not mind that now. May I ask, sir, whether you have succeeded in finding what you went so far to look for?"

"I have—beyond my utmost expectations," answered John. "But not another word shall

you drag out of me till you have told me all the news about a certain young lady."

"A certain young lady is quite well, and that is all I can tell you about her at present," said Jane with a smile. "I have been with her all day, and when I left her this afternoon, her last words were: 'Oh, if he would but come!' Whom she meant by *he*, I could not of course imagine."

John thanked his stars that just then the fire gave too dim a light to allow of the hot flush that rose to his forehead being seen even by Jane's friendly eyes.

"And Sir Philip?" said John interrogatively, after a little pause. "I ought to have asked after him first, but even now, I almost dread to put the question."

"Sir Philip is dead; and you are now Sir Arthur Spencelaugh," said Jane solemnly; and with that, she got up from her chair, and swept John a stately old-fashioned courtesy, full of obeisance and respectful homage, and stood to hear his commands.

John turned away his head with a groan, and Jane knew that his tears were falling fast.

"If I had only come in time!" he murmured at last—"in time to see him and tell him who I am, and ask his blessing! I loved him, Jane Garrod, loved him and revered him from the first moment I saw him, as I never loved and revered any other man. And now, I shall never see him more on earth!"

Jane, leaving him alone in the twilight with his grief, went softly out into another room. In about half an hour, she came back, carrying a lighted lamp. "It is needful, Sir Arthur, that you should go up to Belair at an early hour tomorrow," she said; "there is so much to do, and"

"Hush!" said the young man gently, laying his hand on her arm. "You must not call me by that name—at least, not till the world shall have acknowledged my right to bear it; and even then, to you, to whom I owe more than I can possibly repay, let me never be other than plain John English!"

"Miss Frederica, sir, has fought your battle bravely while you have been away," said Jane, as she went deftly about her preparations for tea. "God bless her for it!" said John heartily.

"But to-day was the hardest time of all for her—almost more than she could bear."

"How so? I do not understand you," said John with reawakened interest.

Jane was burning to tell her guest all that had happened, affecting his interests, since his departure from Pevsey Bay; and now that his curiosity was aroused by her last words, she took care that it should not flag again till she had said all that she wanted to say; and John himself, when once Jane had begun her narrative, was as eager to hear as she was to tell.

Tea was an hour later than usual that evening at the little station-house, a want of punctuality on the part of his wife which surprised Abel Garrod even more than the return of John English had done, or the narrative of the strange events which had happened that day at Belair. When tea was over, John produced his meerschaum, and Abel his yard of clay; and then, in order to satisfy Jane's evident curiosity in the matter, John entered into some details of what had befallen him after leaving Pevsey Bay; mentioning, among other things, how he had secured a berth on board the *Ocean Child*, and had even gone on board her preparatory to sailing, when, hearing accidentally, at the last moment, that a brother of the Mr. Felix who had so nobly befriended him some years before, had just arrived in Liverpool from Australia, he had at once gone on shore again, preferring the risk of losing his passage to missing the opportunity of seeing the brother of his dead friend, for whose ear he had certain private messages, which Mr. Felix had charged him to deliver in person, should a possibility of doing so ever arise.

As it happened, fortunately for himself, John English did miss his passage on board the *Ocean Child*, which vessel was lost a few days after sailing, with all on board. John had been tracked by Brackenridge on board the ill-fated ship, and when news came of the wreck, the

chemist at once concluded that Mr. Jakeway's late lodger was one of those who had perished.

John English lay on the night of his return in the same cosy little room in which he had passed so many weary days and nights during the time that Jane Garrod was nursing him of his wound; but his brain was far too busy to allow of sleep coming near him. He drew up the blind before getting into bed, and then lay staring out at the dark cloud-squadrons hurrying brokenly across the sky—no unmeet emblem, it seemed to him, of the hurrying throng of broken thoughts coursing so restlessly, just then, across his brain, all darkened and solemnised by the knowledge that nevermore on earth would he see that face which he had learned to love and reverence before even his wildest dreams had pictured it as the face of his father. Two or three hours passed away, and John's eyes were as wide open as ever; when suddenly he leaped out of bed, attracted to the window by a glare of reddish light in the western horizon, which he had been vaguely watching for some time, but which was now rapidly growing so bright and lurid as to claim his serious attention. Suddenly there came a tap at his door, and then Abel Garrod spoke: "For Heaven's sake, get up, sir, quickly as you can! *Belair is on fire!*"

Leaving Lady Spencelaugh bound and gagged so that it was impossible for her either to stir or speak, the two men locked the door of the room behind them, and then stole noiselessly along the corridor leading from her Ladyship's apartments, and so down the broad shallow stairs, at the foot of which they were met by Clotilde, thanks to whose good offices they had obtained such easy and unopposed access to the interior of the Hall. The French girl carried a small lamp in her hand, and, after laying a warning finger on her lips, she beckoned the two men to follow her, and so led the way across the entrance-hall, and then through one or two winding passages, till she brought them to a little door at the back of the house, which opened into the kitchen-garden.

"All safe, so far," said Clotilde in a whisper: "you must go back by the same way that you came. The garden-walk has been trodden by half-a-dozen people since the snow ceased falling, so that there is no danger of your footsteps being tracked."

"Thou hast been a good child, and thou shalt not be forgotten," said one of the men, as he chucked the waiting-girl under the chin. "But the most difficult portion of thy task is yet before thee. When the discovery comes, be careful not to over-act thy part. Don't be too much surprised—too much horrified. Call up thy tears once or twice—tears look so genuine—in commiseration of my Lady's sufferings; but avoid being noisy. And now, *au revoir*; thou shalt hear from me shortly by a sure hand."

"Such a girl as that is!" said the second man in an oily whisper, as he came up behind the other a minute or two later. "She would have kept me there till—"

"Silence, babbler!" said the other one with a snarl. "Reserve thy *contes d'amour* for another season. Half an hour ago, Henri Duplessis was a gentleman; now, he is a common thief."

Clotilde left alone, felt far too happy to go to bed just then, for Antoine had spoken loving words, and she wanted to muse over all that he had said. She drew her thick woollen shawl over her head, and gliding back noiselessly through the hushed house, softly unfastened a door on the opposite side of the hall, which admitted her on to the terrace, one portion of which was sheltered by a verandah; and here she paced backwards and forwards for nearly an hour, lost in a vague, rosy love-dream, till the piercing cold of the frosty night began to make itself felt. Breaking out of her reverie, she went indoors, and after refastening the door, she proceeded to the little anteroom where she had left her lamp before going out. Opening the door, she started back in terror at finding the room full of smoke—nay, there was more than smoke, there was actual live flame; red quivering tongues licking the wood-work greedily; great lurid blotches, like some terrible eruption, momentarily spreading, and merging one into

another, and gathering strength and fierceness as they spread, and already far beyond any curative means at command of the French girl. She understood it at a glance; the lamp had flared up for want of snuffing, and the flame had caught the tapestry with which the walls in part were lined, and had so spread to the panelling behind, which age had rendered almost as dry and inflammable as tinder. This anteroom was situated in the east wing, and the east wing was by far the oldest part of Belair. True, it had been renovated and repaired at different periods, but always in keeping with the original idea, which had apparently been to make as much use of timber and plaster, and as little of stone and brick, as possible. Lady Spence-laugh's apartments were situated in the east wing, her sitting-room and boudoir on the ground-floor, and her bed and dressing-rooms immediately over them. Of the remaining rooms in the wing, one was the anteroom, where the fire originated; another, a great desolate billiard-room; while the rest were seldom used except on those rare occasions when Belair was full of guests. In the whole of the east wing, only two people ordinarily slept, namely, Lady Spence-laugh and her maid.

Stupefied with fear at sight of this new and terrible enemy, and utterly deserted by her usual *sang-froid* and presence of mind, Clotilde rushed back through the passage, and so into the entrance-hall, screaming: "Fire! fire!" and then, unbolting one of the doors, she rushed out into the park, and hurried off in the direction of White Grange, in the vague hope of overtaking Antoine.

Clotilde's screams had been heard by no one except by the miserable woman who had been left bound and gagged by the two men, and on her ears the warning words fell with a terrible significance. In all that great house, she was the only person not asleep, and she could neither stir nor speak. The fire was spreading rapidly. It was no longer confined to the anteroom, but had fiercely laid hold of the great oaken staircase that led from the entrance-hall to the upper floors of the east wing; and was having a merry game to itself in the billiard-room; and would soon force its way into the empty chambers overhead. The pungent odour of the burning wood came in hot heavy puffs under the door of the room in which Lady Spence-laugh sat helpless, and gave a dread confirmation to the words of Clotilde. She listened as she never seemed to have listened before, for some voice or other token of the vicinage of human beings; but she heard nothing save the crackling of the flames as they seized on the wood-work at the end of the corridor, and seemed to be testing its quality with their teeth.

To be continued.

STAGE JEWELS.

BY DUTTON COOK.

THE playbills affixed to the door-posts of the theatre in Lincoln's-inn-fields announced a performance of Mr. Crown's admired comedy of *Sir Courtly Nice, or It cannot be*; the character of Sir Courtly—"a fop over-curious in his diet and dress"—to be supported by Mr. Knevit; while the favourite actress Mrs. Askew was to appear as Leonora—"Lord Belguard's sister, in love with Farewel."

"I would it had been a tragedy, for thy sake, Sir Geoffrey," said one of two gentlemen—a town mouse and a country mouse—who had stood for some few minutes perusing the bill. "It would have afforded us rarer sport."

"Nay, friend," replied the other, "I care not what the players may call their play. Tragedy or comedy, 'tis all one to me. I cry with them or laugh with them, the rogues, just as they would have me. Yet, methinks, I'd rather be laughing than crying just now. One has not so much cause or reason for merriment in these days. There's nothing like the jesting and the funning, and the roaring merriment that used to be. Things are not as I can remember them.

Times are changed, my friend: times are changed. I doubt these players are not the men they were; nor the women neither, for that matter."

"You wrong them, Sir Geoffrey; they are pretty players enough; of much the same pattern and flesh and blood, I fancy, as those who have gone before them. This Knevit, now, is accounted a fellow of parts and promise. He is not a Betterton, I grant you—"

"Nor a Mohun, nor a Hart, I warrant," interposed Sir Geoffrey; "they were players indeed. I remember them well, both of them; and, as a younger man, have seen them play times and oft."

"He is somewhat light in the graver parts of tragedy, it may be," pursued the other; "but increase of years will give him weight and dignity. He is but a young man; still he is the most affecting lover on the stage, and a most exquisite fine gentleman. Then he is of very elegant port and handsome person, with a voice of silver—a clear counter-tenor, with a melodious warbling throat and happy elocution. He has played havoc with the women's hearts, this Knevit. There are many tales told about him, Sir Geoffrey, that are common talk and town gossip; yet none the truer on that score, possibly."

"Well, well, let us see the dog. Do with me as thou wilt, Ned."

"He comes of a good stock, moreover. His grandfather fought and bled at Marston Moor, and was held high in honour by his master, the Royal Martyr. Still, if you would rather that we went to Dorset Gardens—"

"No; we'll see this Knevit, Ned. If his grandsire fought for the good cause, it is fit that we should clap hands for the grandson, let him play never so vilely. But, good lack, what times are these, Ned, when a gentleman of family consents to figure on a public stage!"

"We must take the times as we find them, Sir Geoffrey."

"True, Ned, true. But we old fellows can't help looking back at the past; we've but a brief span of life to look forward to, you see, Ned. You'll be doing much the same at my age, though you've many a long year to jog through before you arrive at that. I pray they may be happy years to you, good friend. But you'll count me a gloomy old put to be talking in this preacher fashion. We'll to dinner at the Three Tuns, and crack a bottle of the best; nay, two bottles, if the drawer can give us a good account of his Burgundy."

"And then, if your humour lasts, Sir Geoffrey, we'll to the theatre, to see pretty Mrs. Askew and George Knevit."

"Ay, lad, we'll to the playhouse. Since this troublesome lawsuit of mine has brought me to London, and keeps me here, I must see what I may, and so have wherewithal to amuse them in relating my adventures when I'm safe back among my dear ones at the old house in Wiltshire again. My eldest wench, Mistress Deborah, charged me to keep my eyes open, and take note of the fashions and the new modes in London, and give a good account of the same to her when I get home again. She'll tease me with question upon question as to this and that; she's never tired of listening to news of the town. A shrewd, forward jade, tall of her hands; yet a winning and a good girl too, Ned, with her mother's eyes and her mother's smile, God bless her!"

The country mouse who thus delivered himself was one Sir Geoffrey Lyddal, a Wiltshire baronet, somewhat advanced in years, with whom visits to town were matters of rare occurrence, and who was in London now but for a few days by reason, as he had explained, of certain legal business that he had on hand. His companion, the town mouse, was Mr. Edward Hervey of the Middle Temple: a young gentleman who set up for being something of a wit,—not so much among wits, perhaps, as among Templars,—who claimed to be a critic of plays and players, books and poems; took his seat in the pit night after night with much regularity and gravity, as though he were in some sort a judge upon a bench, about to condemn or to acquit according

as the merits or demerits of the case to be brought before him might seem to require; and who, moreover, was inclined to pride himself upon his acquaintance with the town and its doings, its tattle and scandals; being rather a spectator of than a sharer in its malefactions, however. Not that it would have been distasteful to Mr. Hervey to have imputed to him a knowledge of the current naughtiness of the times, derived as much from its inside as from its out, from personal experience as from disinterested contemplation. In Mr. Hervey's day vice was rather gentlemanly than not. And to be always looking on and never taking part in the proceedings of the world of *ton* and quality was to be something like a timid speculator, who incessantly studying and vexing himself concerning the doings in the money-market, yet abstains from risking an investment, however insignificant.

II.

Sir Geoffrey expressed his approval of the treatment he received from the host of the Three Tuns in Shandis-street. He pronounced the dinner admirable, the Burgundy excellent. He demanded a second bottle, and tendered his thanks to the landlord for his attention.

"Whom have you in the next room, drawer?" he inquired of the waiter. Sir Geoffrey's attention had more than once, during his meal, been arrested by the noise of loud talking and laughing and boisterous revelry proceeding from an adjoining chamber.

"In No. 7, Sir Geoffrey?" said the waiter. "The young Welsh baronet, Sir Owen Price, is entertaining a party of his friends."

"Ay, ay; Sir Owen Price," repeated Mr. Hervey, with a sagacious air.

"A noisy party," continued the waiter; "they'll be breaking heads anon, I fear. They've begun by breaking bottles. The house would be better without such customers; such a mad roystering set as they are! They scare away honest and peaceable folks with their oaths and their brawling and their drunkenness. They'll be doing grave mischief before long. Already they've a long account to pay for smashed glasses and shattered platters. But Sir Owen is a man of property; he must have his will, I suppose; and he pays his way. We can't show such a customer the door."

"He'll mend, man, he'll mend," said Sir Geoffrey charitably. "We must make allowance for the heat of young blood."—And then, the waiter having quitted the room, he demanded of his friend, "Do you know this Sir Owen, Ned?"

"Ay; I've heard tales of him, and seen him at the theatre," Mr. Hervey replied, rather evasively; and he lowered his voice mysteriously as he continued, "Tis said of him that he is the lover of the Mrs. Askew whom we are to see to-night."

"The jade!" said Sir Geoffrey; "will nothing less than a baronet content her ladyship? But it has ever been the same with these player women. They are true daughters of Moab, as the Puritans often said of them."

"Nay, this Mrs. Askew has borne a good repute hitherto; and there is little known against her now for a certainty. She has even been scoffed at for her prudery; and while she has kindled many a flame, is said to have remained ice-cold herself. Such is her friend's account of her. Half the theatre have been her lovers; yet none could boast that he had been more-favoured than his fellows. The story of Sir Owen's success may not be true, but set afloat by some rejected suitor in revenge for his own disappointment."

"We'll hope so, Ned. The players have little character to spare. We will not rob this poor creature of hers until the case against her be fully proven. And now let us discharge the reckoning, and move on to the playhouse."

The party in No. 7 were also breaking up. Sir Owen Price was calling aloud for coaches or chairs for his friends. As Sir Geoffrey and Mr. Hervey descended the stairs, the Welsh baronet was heard talking angrily.

"If that scoundrel Knevit dares to stand be-

think me and Mrs. Askew, let him look to it! I say, let him look to it! One way or another I'll be even with him, the dog, let who will try to hinder me."

"Well spoken, Owen," said one of his friends.

"Major Moxon's voice," Mr. Hervey whispered to his companion.

"Whom is he threatening?" asked Sir Geoffrey.

"Knevit the actor. He is Mrs. Askew's play-fellow, and is said, if any one has, to have won her love,—I know not with what truth. There has been much tattle on the subject. I will tell you more of it anon. There is a story there-
anent that is worth relating."

"These players! O, these players!" murmured Sir Geoffrey.

They proceeded on foot to the theatre in Lincoln's-inn-fields, and took their seats quietly in the pit.

III.

"Will the King be here to-night, do you think, Ned?" asked Sir Geoffrey, glancing towards the boxes.

"The King! Of what are you thinking, Sir Geoffrey? He never sets foot in a theatre."

"I forgot, I forgot. Times are changed. Perhaps he does well to hide his grim nut-cracker face at Hampton and Kensington, and such outlandish places. The players must speak High Dutch for him to understand them. Our English tongue is thrown away upon him."

"Hush, hush, Sir Geoffrey," interposed Mr. Hervey, looking over his shoulder apprehensively.

"Nay, man, I care not who overhears me. I wish King William no harm. But I can't forget old times. I've seen in those boxes, when Sir William Davenant was manager, his most gracious Majesty King Charles the Second, with his Queen and the Duke and Duchess of York, attended by all the rank and beauty of England — it was a sight worth seeing—with my Lady Castlemaine and Mistress Eleanor Gwyn glaring at each other from different sides of the house, as though ready to pull caps or begin a scratching match at a short notice. Ah, Ned, those were times to live in!"

Mr. Hervey was possibly a little wearied by the frequency of his friend's references to the past.

"I would we were to have a tragedy in lieu of this comedy," he said again, as he studied his playbill.

"Let us be content, Ned," said Sir Geoffrey; "I warrant the rogues will do their best to please us."

"But the story I promised to tell had reference to the tragedy in which Knevit and Mrs. Askew last appeared. We might have had some repetition of the scene to-night."

"Give me the story, Ned. 'Twill pass the time till the music begins."

"You are aware, Sir Geoffrey, that the players who appear as lovers on the stage do not always bear themselves so tenderly towards each other behind the scenes?"

"Doubtless that is true, Ned."

"Well, last night was performed the late Mr. Otway's beautiful tragedy of *Venice Preserved*, than which, I think, a finer work does not exist in the drama of the country. Shakespeare has not its equal in pathetic beauty and elegance of diction; he is content with a vulgar delineation of the passions. Well, Knevit was the Jaffier; Mrs. Askew the Belvidera. But they played together less happily than usual. There seemed some want of agreement between them. The lady's warmth sprang rather from her anger than her love. She glared resentfully when she should have gazed tenderly; a baleful fury stood in her eyes when they should have been streaming with tears. And Jaffier seemed rather to mock her sorrows than to pity them; at least so the spectators judged the performance. We arrived at the fifth act; and when, after she had said 'Bequeath me something—but one kiss at parting,' the lovers ran to each other's arms, Belvidera was seen to fairly bite her lord upon the cheek in lieu of kissing him! Jaffier could scarcely finish his part, he smarted so with the pain."

Sir Geoffrey laughed heartily at this narrative.

"The dog must have vexed her sorely, I doubt not. Very likely he deserved all she gave him. Though to bite a man's cheek—the vixen! It might have been a serious matter. A lovers' quarrel, I suppose; but it was sadly out of place in Mr. Otway's tragedy. I know the play. I saw Betterton and Mrs. Barry in it, years ago. And I cried like a child, I remember."

IV.

At the back of the play-house, behind the scenes, dimly lighted by tallow-candles, amidst much litter of theatrical properties and stage garniture, two of the players were engaged in an earnest and somewhat angry conversation. The one was Mrs. Margaret Askew—splendidly dressed in a pink-satin train—the Leonora of Mr. Crown's comedy; the other was Mr. George Knevit, the Sir Courtly Nice of the evening.

The lady was very handsome; though her beauty was of rather a haggard kind. In spite of her rouge, there was a hollow look about her wonderful black eyes. Her complexion—naturally dark, even to swarthy—was much aided and brightened by the candle-light of the theatre. She was still quite young, notwithstanding the rather deep lines upon her face; and, famed for her personal charms and her skill as an actress, was a favourite toast amongst the gallants of the day. At the present, however, she was hardly looking her best. She could smile most wittingly when she chose; but she was not smiling now. She was, indeed, very angry. Her forehead was clouded, and she had been biting her red lips until they were wet with blood.

Knevit was superb in Sir Courtly's dress. His Antinous profile looked out from a profuse blonde periwig that reached to his waist. The streaming curls on one side were tossed over his shoulder, after the fashion Kneller's portraits of the men of his time has made famous. His coat was of rich green velvet, with broad gold-lace edging, and shoulder-knots of scarlet satin ribbon. His long waistcoat was of white brocade; his stockings, with embroidered clocks, were scarlet, as were the high heels of his Spanish-leather shoes. His long lace neckerchief was worn in the studious unstudied fashion that had come in vogue since the battle of Steinkirk. A gold-hilted sword, a tall tasselled cane, and a beaver hat, thickly fringed with feathers and thrust beneath his arm, completed the costume of the magnificent fop he was to represent in the comedy.

"You've no heart, George Knevit," said Mrs. Askew passionately.

"Quite true," he answered, with a sort of gay scorn. "Still, I had one ounce; as good a heart for ordinary wear as a man need have. I must make shift now to do without it, I suppose. I gave it away—lent it, rather, to a woman who used it shamefully, and returned it, wounded, crushed, bleeding, worthless. No; I've no heart now."

"You never loved me."

"Did I not? And yet I thought I did. And you thought so too."

"You know you never did. If you had ever loved me, you would not mock me as now you do."

"The mocking has not been all on my side. Is one to go on loving for ever, whatever may betide?" He took snuff with a grand air. "I value *this*," he went on, tapping his box as he spoke. "'Twas given me for gold; I deem it gold; but if one day scratches should come upon it, and make clear to me past all mistake that it is but base metal, for all it wears so bright a lacquer, should I not be a dolt and a madman still to deem it gold, and value it as now I do? No, no; I am fool enough for most things; but not for that. If the idol we bow before is but simple clay, for all our faith in it and devotion to it, be sure we find out the fact some day, and topple the thing down from our altar, never to lift it up or to bow to it again!"

Something of both the manner and the matter of the theatre was in his speech. What wonder? Was he not an actor? And then in Mr. Knevit's day all conversation assumed a tone of

somewhat artificial elevation—being, as it were, surmounted by a tall periwig, and moving about on high-heeled shoes.

"If you knew all, George—if you knew all!" moaned Mrs. Askew.

"I thank you, mistress. I think I know enough," he said coldly.

"And you despise me?"

"I despise myself. It was not you that deceived me; I deceived myself. I have but myself to thank that my deception has cost me so dear. And it has cost me dear. Be assured of that." His voice trembled rather as he spoke.

"Try to think well of me, George."

"To what end? Do you want my heart mended, that you may rive it again, as children build up houses of cards for the pleasure of knocking them down? That cannot be. I was mad to think that you were better than the herd among which I found you. It was not your fault; it was my folly that I tried to find a diamond in a lead mine. You stood out for your price; that was all. You were not in truth better than the rest. Nay, let me value rather the reckless wench who lets herself go at the cheapest rate; there may be a grain or so of heart, of honest liking, in her bargain. There can be none in yours: a glass coach, with footmen to run in front and wax flambeaux to attend you; a black boy for your lapdog, and a plenty of money in your purse! Well, you've found a market; you've received the stipulated price; the transaction's closed. May you never see cause to repent it!"

"What right have you to address me thus, George Knevit?" she demanded fiercely.

"The right the love I once had for you has given me. It was a poor thing, doubtless. You thought so; you treated it so. But poor as it was, it was a thing you will never know again. Be happy with this boor who has bought you—this sot—this Welsh goat from the mountains! Will you weary first, or will he?"

"How dare you say this to me?"

"Nay, never scowl, mistress. The fire in your eyes has no terrors for me. You have not to love me to night as in yesterday's play." With a laugh, he raised his hand to his face. "The mark still shows, I fear. I must pile on the paint to hide it."

"I was mad last night! You goad me and torture me, and then marvel that I turn upon you. Your bitterness, your cruelty raise a devil in my heart I seek in vain to lay; and then—and then—my brain whirls, and I know not what I do! It shall not happen again; only be merciful to me, George. Your tongue wounds me like a knife."

"I have had my say, mistress. My tongue shall wound you no more."

"And—though all is over between us—" she paused, as though reluctant to believe that all was in truth over.

"For ever," he said firmly.

"Still we need not be enemies."

"Why should we be? We are simply players, that is all; followers of the same vagabond trade—now loving, now hating; now swearing devotion, now vowing vengeance; players always, our real selves never. If we are enemies, it shall only be on the stage—just as if we are lovers again, still it shall only be on the stage. For the rest, we are members of the same troop, bound to be loyal to our manager, to the public, and to each other. Ask my aid when you will—as an actress: I will give it you—as an actor. There's my hand upon it."

She took his hand with an effort, sighing and agitated, yet mastering her emotion.

"Is that the first music?" she asked. "Do I look disordered? Have my tears spoilt my paint? I have to begin the scene. Why, you've forgotten your rings! But you're not on in this act."

"I left them behind me at my lodgings by mistake. Never mind; I must play without them."

"What a pity! Stay; wear this. You must have a ring."

"It does not matter."

"Sir Courtly *must* wear a ring! Remember what you said but now. You're not too proud to accept this small aid from a fellow-player?"

"I'll wear it. A real stone?"
 "Nay, a bit of tinsel. Where are your eyes?"
 "Keep it, George; it fits you."
 "I must not."
 "It's worth nothing. Are you so proud?"
 "Keep it as a pledge of our new contract."
 "Well, as you will, mistress." And he slid the ring on his finger.
 She was called by the prompter; and tripped on to the stage as Leonora. A round of applause greeted the favourite actress.

v.

"'Tis a gay, sparkling, witty soul," said Sir Geoffrey, who, though he would every now and then pause to remind his companion that the entertainment was singularly inferior to the performances he had witnessed as a younger man, nevertheless appeared to derive more amusement from the efforts of the players than any other person in the theatre. He laughed loudly at the humours of the comedy—which were of rather an unrestrained kind—and applauded the comedians with most thorough heartiness. Mr. Hervey, on the other hand, seemed a little apprehensive that his character as a critic might suffer detriment from association with one who, in spite of his lamentations over the past, appeared to find matter to praise in all he saw and heard. For the benefit of the persons occupying the benches near him, therefore, the Templar from time to time delivered himself of many ingenious comments on the actors and the acting. He found reason to censure the redundant grotesqueness of the representatives of the comic characters of the play. "This is not nature," he would say; or, "This is only fit for a droll at Bartholomew Fair;" or, "For what does this fellow take us, that he treats us to such low buffoonery?" To Mr. Knevit, however, he awarded praise of a high order. "He is no longer Knevit," he remarked; "he is Sir Courtly himself! Observe his insipid, soft civility, his formal elegance of mien, his drawing delicacy of voice, the stately flatness of his address and the empty eminence of his manners;" and so on. Mrs. Askew, Mr. Hervey thought, was hardly herself on that evening: the part did not very well suit her, as it seemed to him. "Sdeath," said Sir Geoffrey, "'tis a very mirthful play; and the raps at the Puritans very pleasant and adroit. I have laughed till my sides ache."

In the course of the performance a slight disturbance occurred. Two gentlemen had passed from the pit to the seats on the stage. The money-taker had objected to admit them without their paying the usual increased price for this accommodation.

"Give me no words, fellow, or I'll slit your nose for you. Let me pass," bawled one of the gentlemen, with an oath.

"I dared not say him nay," the money-taker explained afterwards. "He is a parliament-man, and a roystering, scouring blade. It would be more than my life is worth to hinder him—in such a mood too."

"It is Sir Owen Price," Mr. Hervey whispered to his companion. "In liquor too, as usual; with his rake-hell friend Major Moxon by his side. I pray we may not have a brawl upon the stage."

Noisily, his dress disordered, his wig away, his eyes inflamed, his face smeared with snuff, Sir Owen Price staggered to his seat. He was pretty quiet for some time, beyond hiccuping occasionally. He gazed round him with dim vacant eyes, as though wondering where he was. The gallery tittered a little at the tipsy gentleman, and a wag in that upper region of the house hurled an orange at him, but not with very good aim; the fruit fell harmlessly into the orchestra.

Knevit was going through his chief scene with Mrs. Askew. Sir Courtly was simpering and drawing and taking snuff in his most exquisitely coxcombical manner.

"Blood!" Sir Owen said, with a sudden start, to his comrade; "do you mark what the scoundrel wears on his finger?"

"Hush!" whispered Major Moxon; "not a

word now. I'll see to it. You shall have your vengeance, Owen."

Knevit and Mrs. Askew finished their scene amidst a tumult of applause.

"Mrs. Askew is certainly not herself to-night," noted Mr. Hervey.

"What was the matter with you, mistress?" Knevit inquired of his play-fellow as they stood in the wings. "How you trembled! How pale you turned! And you missed your cues."

"George, for God's sake, take off that ring!" she said, with a scared look on her face.

"Why?"

"I'll tell you all another time. Mischief will come of your wearing it. For God's sake, take it off!" He stood for a moment irresolute, amazed; glancing from her to the ring, from the ring to her.

"I understand," he said at length, with a flash of scorn in his eyes. "It is a real stone! Fool that I was! I might have guessed as much. It was a present from the Welsh sot, your lover; and you fear lest he should recognise it! You would have me share in the wages of your shame! Out on you, wanton!"

He tore off the ring from his finger, flung it at her feet, thrust her from him, and turned away.

vi.

On his way home, after the play, to his lodgings in Howard-street, Strand, George Knevit was confronted by two men.

"What would you with me, Sir Owen?" he demanded.

"I'd send my fist down your throat, vagabond."

"I have no quarrel with you, Sir Owen. Let me pass."

Sir Owen, by way of answer, dashed his hat in the player's face.

"Coward and brute!" cried Knevit, as he sprung back and drew his sword. "Defend yourself!"

"Nay, a gentleman can't cross weapons with a mountebank, though he may wear the finest diamonds in the world," said Major Moxon.

"Stand away, sir; you have no share in this quarrel. It was none of my seeking; but being begun, it shall go on. My blood's up now. Draw, Sir Owen, as you are a man!"

Major Moxon pulled away his friend.

"Poltroon as well as sot!" cried the actor.

"Nay, you don't escape me. Sure a blow will kindle your dull boor's blood." And with the flat of his sword he struck Sir Owen on the shoulder.

"Let me fight him!" bawled the baronet.

"Nay, we've a better card than that to play!"

The major whistled. Three men sprang from the shadow of a doorway. "We cudgel players; we don't cross swords with them. That's your man. At him, you dogs! don't spare him!"

Knevit was surrounded. He sought to defend himself with his sword; but a savage blow broke his wrist, and his weapon fell from his grasp.

"Help!—help!—watch!" he screamed. Sir Owen and his friend made good their escape.

The blows rained down upon the face and head and shoulders of the devoted player. Streaming with blood, he fell in the roadway.

"O God, I'm blind!" he said feebly. "I'm a dead man!"

A few more cowardly blows as he lay senseless on the ground, and his assailants hurried away.

The watch came up slowly, after their manner, recognised the suffering man, and bore him to his lodgings. "They had suspicions," they averred, "as to the guilty persons. Sir Owen Price and Major Moxon had been seen loitering about, swearing to have George Knevit's blood. They (the watch) knew that no good would come of it all. They had said so from the first."

vii.

George Knevit never spoke more. A skilful chirurgurgeon was called in; but he at once pronounced the case hopeless. The poor player's wounds were mortal.

He still breathed; that was all that could be said. For the rest, he lay stretched upon his bed, motionless, inanimate, a light napkin hiding

the bruised, disfigured, maltreated face: once so handsome!

Mrs. Askew had been sent for, and was admitted to the chamber in which he lay. She was trembling in every limb, white as a ghost, sick with terror and anguish. How she shivered and turned away as she beheld the napkin hiding the features she was never more to look on!

"I may speak to him?—I may take his hand?" she asked faintly.

"Yes, if you will have it so, mistress, said the doctor. "It little matters what is done now. Only don't remove the cloth from his face!"

She knelt down by the player's bedside, and took his hand between hers. She trembled—his hand was so cold.

"If he could only hear me!" she moaned. And the tears streamed down her face. She was left alone with him.

Presently she was moved by a sort of crazy fancy that she would speak to him, even though he could not hear, even though he was wholly dead to her.

"I have loved you—loved you ever, George," she began in a low soft voice; "God knows I have! and you have misjudged me—misjudged me cruelly. Yet it was not your fault, dearest. I ought to have told you all, all, from the first; but shame kept me silent. My father is in prison on a charge of coining. I shrunk from telling you. I feared you would think me also involved in the disgrace, and so, unworthy of your love. When I listened to this dreadful man,—this Welsh fiend, this monster, who has brought death upon you, dearest, and misery worse than death upon me—and I *did* listen to him, yet not as you thought,—it was to win him over—for he is powerful, and has powerful friends at court—to obtain my father's pardon. Was it so great a sin? Could I refuse his presents? I did not dare. To offend him was to lose all hope of saving my father's life. Yet never, never, George, was I guilty in deed, or word, or thought of the sin you charged me with! For that most miserable ring—I gave it you because I loved you, because I thought its value might cause it to be of use to you some day. For no other reason, George, dearest—for no other reason. Heaven is my witness! O, if you could hear me, you would pardon me! I know, I am sure you would, my love—my life—my own dear one!"

As she spoke, she started. The cold hand she pressed in hers seemed to grow less cold—stirred—then ever so lightly and tenderly closed round her fingers and returned their pressure.

She knew then that she had been heard, and that she had been forgiven. She covered the hand with her kisses, sought to warm it in her bosom, moistened it with her tears: then fell in a sort of swoon by the bedside of her lover.

"The man is dead, stone-dead," said the chirurgurgeon presently, when he entered the room.

"For this poor woman, God help her! I think her mind has gone for ever."

viii.

"You remember my saying the other night, when we went to the theatre in Lincoln's-inn-fields, that I wished the comedy had been a tragedy?" said Mr. Hervey to his friend.

"Certainly, Ned; you made some such speech, I know," replied Sir Geoffrey.

"Well, that comedy had a most tragic and fearful ending. The same night poor Knevit the actor was attacked and most barbarously murdered."

"So young, so handsome, so accomplished! God rest his soul!"

"He was buried last night by torchlight in the churchyard of St. Clement Danes; many thousand people attending: all grieving deeply for the gallant young gentleman. I trust the villains that murdered him may be brought to justice. That Welsh baronet and his friend Major Moxon are suspected. Sir Owen has powerful influence; yet I pray heaven he may not escape! The officers are in quest of him; but he has disappeared."

"God will find him out," said Sir Geoffrey solemnly, "for all his influential friends, let him hide where he may! *Though hand join with hand, yet shall not the wicked go unpunished!*"

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

Letters intended for the Editor, should be addressed "Editor Saturday Reader, Drawer 401," and communications on business to "R. Worthington, publisher."

SCOTIA.—The thistle first appeared on the coins of James the Fifth. It was not until two reigns later that the motto "Nemo me impune lacessit" was added.

A CONSTANT READER.—The chairman of a committee is undoubtedly entitled to a vote as a member of the committee as well as a casting vote as chairman; but in the case stated by you, a decision was already arrived at, the numbers being three to four, and the chairman could not reverse that decision by giving his two votes. If he desired to vote as a member of the committee, he should have voted with the other members, and then, after the vote was taken, he could have given his casting vote as chairman.

J. W.—Paganini died in 1840. A. B. S.—The length of the Great Eastern is 680 feet, and her breadth 83 feet. We have seen it stated that she is to proceed to New York for the purpose of conveying visitors to the Paris Exhibition, but are not aware that a contract to that effect has been already signed. She can carry ten thousand passengers without difficulty.

ANNE H.—"Sofa" is derived from *Sophi*, a title given to the ruler of Persia.

GEORGIE.—If our correspondent should be returning from an evening party at a late, or rather an early hour, she would not be expected to invite the gentleman who accompanies her home to enter the house; neither should the gentleman accept an invitation if given. On ordinary occasions, however, it would be no breach of etiquette for a young lady to extend an invitation, or for a gentleman to accept it.

J. M. K., QUEBEC.—We beg respectfully to inform J. M. K. that we do not require contributions of the kind referred to.

PERICLES.—The article is reserved for more careful perusal; if accepted, it will appear in the course of a week or two.

R. V. R., JR.—We will communicate with you per mail.

SWINTON AND J. E. D'A.—Will please accept our thanks for contributions to our Pastime column.

J. H. O. N., CACOUNA.—Any contributions our correspondent may forward will receive our careful attention; and will, of course, be published, if accepted.

W. G.—The translation is respectfully declined; we shall nevertheless be happy to hear from you again.

Geo. B.—The prefix of *Fitz* in proper names is derived from the French *filz*, a son. *Fitzwilliam* therefore means "the son of William."

DAVID F.—Remember the advice of the great Duke of Wellington anent early rising: "Let the first turn in the morning be a turn out."

PASTIMES.

RIDDLES.

- 1. What is that we all drink, though it is sometimes a man and sometimes a woman?
2. What thing is that which is lower with a head than without one?
3. Why is a melancholy young lady the pleasantest of all companions?

CHARADES.

- 1. My first signifies opposition, 'tis true. My next varies much in size, texture and hue; May you live in my whole, and die in the same, 'Tis not a bad wish—now pray give me a name.
2. I'm a part of a column, as architects know; Of a plant I'm the stem, upon which no leaves grow. A title, a prayer, a vote, a decree, A favour, an elegance pleasant to see, When joined to my first, of my second deficient, For nothing that's good am I reckoned efficient.
3. My whole consists of 23 letters. My 16, 14, 15, 12, 6, 20, 5, 19 signifies a period of time. My 7, 5, 9, 5, 19, 6, 5 is the name of a city in British North America. My 18, 5, 19, 21, 8 is one of its principal streets.

My 4, 5, 19, 4, 8, 9, 3, 10 are often listened to with pleasure. My 4, 2, 12, 15, 17, 16, 3, 11 affords innocent amusement. My 5, 9, 21, 17, 19, 21, 15, 20, 19, 16, 3, 9 is a much abused character. My 22, 8, 12, 23, 2, 3, 9 is one of Scotland's emblems. My whole is the title of a celebrated poem by Burns. SWINTON.

SQUARE WOODS.

- 1 Not easily obtainable.
2 To declare.
3 To stray.
4 A vessel for water.

DOUBLE ACROSTIC.

The initials forward and finals backward will name two celebrated generals of the present century.

- 1. A bird.
2. An architectural order.
3. Prominence in figure.
4. A town in Ireland.
5. A plant.
6. Three-fourths of affection.
7. A Spanish title of royalty.
8. A town in Norfolk.
9. Common earth.
10. A defence for the body.
11. One of the heavenly bodies.
12. A dwelling.
13. A tree.
14. A title.
15. Two-thirds of a falsehood.
16. A city in France.

ANSWERS TO ARITHMOREM, &c.

No. 69.

- Arithmorem.—Charlemagne.—1. Constantius. 2. Herculeaneum. 3. Artaxerxes. 4. Rome. 5. Lepidus. 6. Euclid. 7. Messina. 8. Alexandriano. 9. Guagamela. 10. Numa Pompilius. 11. Evil Merodach.

Enigma.—A smile.

- Riddles.—1. Because he is generally lead. 2. Because it makes "ill" "will."

- Charades.—1. Tourney. 2. Stream. 3. Papa. 4. Basket.

Problems.—21 1/2 minutes past 4 o'clock.

The following answers have been received:

Arithmorem.—J. E. D'A., Folio, H. H. V., Camp, Argus, Grove.

Engma.—Folio, Argus, Camp, J. E. D'A., Grove.

Charades.—J. E. D'A., Arthur H., Violet, Grove, Argus.

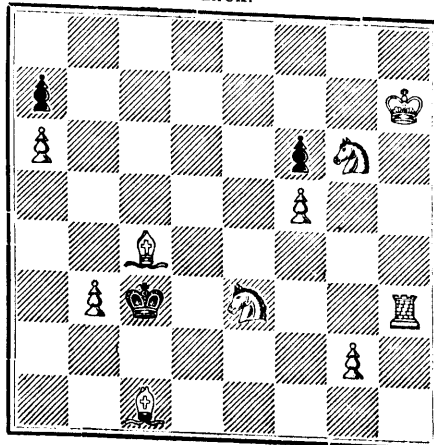
Problem.—J. E. D'A.

CHESS.

PROBLEM No. 50.

By J. A. GRAVES, BROOKLYN, L. I. (From Kingston (N. Y.) Journal.)

BLACK.



WHITE.

White to play and mate in four moves.

SOLUTION OF PROBLEM, NO. 48.

- WHITE. 1. B to K sq. 2. B to Q B 3 (ch.) 3. Q Mates. BLACK. B to B 4 or (a. b.) Any move. (a.) 1. K takes R. 2. Q to K Kt 3 (ch.) And mate next move. (b.) 1. K to Q B 4. 2. Q to Q B 7 (ch.) And mate next move.

A fine little partie, showing Herr Anderssen's great fertility of resource.

BISHOP'S GAMBIT.

Table with two columns: WHITE, (Schulten.) and BLACK, (Anderssen). It lists chess moves for both sides, such as 1 P to K 4, 2 P to K B 4, 3 K B to B 4, etc.

- (a.) P to B 6, would lose time, e. g.: 5. P to B 6. 6. K B to Kt 5 (ch.) 7. K Kt to B 3, &c. (b.) A very good move as the sequel shows. (c.) So hampered that he voluntarily sacrifices a P to relieve his cramped position. It is not a good move however; we should decidedly have preferred 14. Kt take K B P. (d.) K B to B 4 would have prolonged, but could not have saved the game. (e.) A pretty termination.

WITTY AND WHIMSICAL.

WHEN are Piesse and Lubin like a balloon?—When they are making a-scent.

A WORTHY Canongate Bailie, in days of yore, is said to have granted a warrant to search a soldier's knapsack for a cart-wheel.

OF course Napoleon was right when he said that "now-a-days bayonets think." Polished steel must be capable of reflection.

RIDDLE ME THIS.—"Sambo, can you tell me in what building people are most like to take cold?" "Why, no; me strange in de town, and can't tell dat." "Well, I will tell you—it is de bank." "How is dat?" "Because there are so many drafts in it." "Dat is good; but can you tell me, sah, what make dere be so many drafts in it?" "No." "Because so many go dere to raise the wind. Yah, yah, yah!"

A SCHOOLMASTER, who had an inveterate habit of talking to himself when alone, was asked what motive he could have in talking to himself. Jonathan replied that he had two good substantial reasons: In the first place, he liked to talk to a sensible man; and, in the next place, he liked to hear a man of sense talk.

NO BODY IN THIS.—The man who made a shoe for the foot of a mountain is now engaged on a hat for the head of a discourse.

IRREGULAR VERBS.—An American who was once teaching English to a German, and on being asked if there were no irregular verbs in English, replied by giving the following solitary example: "I go, thou wentest, he departed, we made tracks, you cutsticks, they skedaddled." But, on asking for a repetition of it, the German found that it varied every time, and he had at last to give it up in despair.

THERE was something exquisite in an American's reply to the European traveller, when he asked him if he had just crossed the Alps, "Wal, now you call my attention to the fact," said he, "I guess I did pass risin' ground."

A WIT says—"No Yankee is satisfied with the truth, unless you can prove to him that it is worth eight or ten per cent."

A GOUTY gentleman in Palace Yard one night sitting alone by his parlour fireside, a well-dressed man came very civilly into the room, and said, "Sir, I observe your servant is just gone to the alehouse, and has carelessly left your street door open; now how easy would it be for any rascal to come in, and blow out these two wax candles, thus! and thus! and run away with this heavy pair of silver candlesticks!" which he accordingly did, without waiting for a reply.