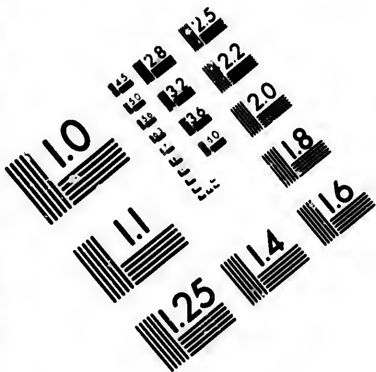
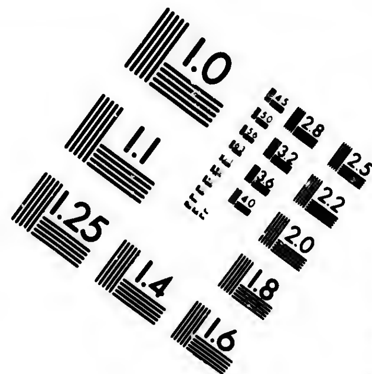

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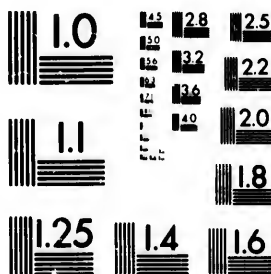
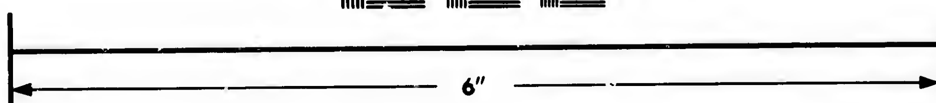

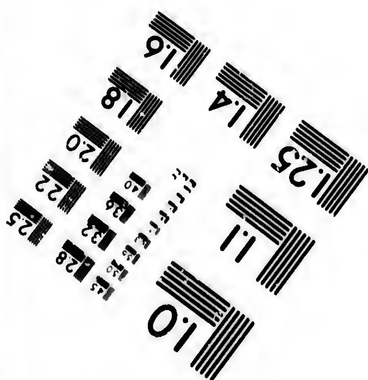
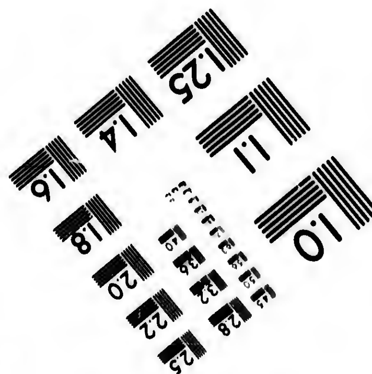

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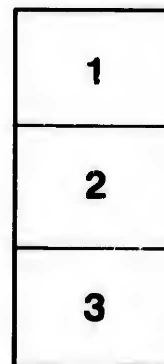

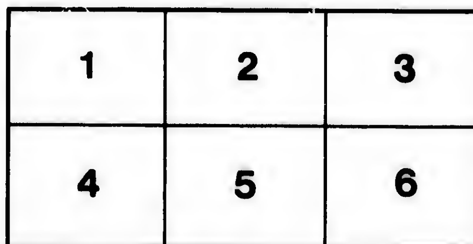

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KING OR KNAVE?

BY

R. E. FRANCILLON.

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KING OR KNAVE?

CHAPTER I.

"NOTHING COULD BE WRONG."

"Oh! what have I—what have *we*—done?" cried Marion in dismay; but a dismay so softly under breath that the breeze well-nigh blew the cry far away out to sea before it could make even so short a passage as from her lips to Guy's left ear.

"What a question!" said he, bending still nearer till she could see the joy in his eyes. "Don't you know?"

"Yes—no——"

It was not altogether easy to be alone on the deck of that floating world, the *Sumatra*; but there is always a way for two people to be alone in company when they will. It is only needful that the two wills should be one—as those were.

Everybody who really knew the ancient city of Marchgrave was familiar, not only with its cathedral and its docks, but with an unpretending house in Chapter Street—a narrow and crooked backlane, requiring some local experience to find without at least one blunder at starting, and one more on the road. For there are dozens of cities with cathedrals, and scores of towns with docks; and it is not an altogether unique distinction to possess both together. But Marchgrave was the only city in the whole world that owned Heron's Bank, and Heron's Bank returned the compliment by owning, directly or indirectly, a considerable portion of Marchgrave—of its flesh and blood, as well as of its bricks and mortar.

For it must be confessed that Marchgrave was like many an ancient family—poor, and not long ago had been growing poorer. The ships that used to make their uncertain and difficult way up the Aske had become provided, by a mushroom rival, with better accommodation down the river, and the railway had abjectly followed, like a sycophant and slave. Marchgrave had also boasted, with good reason, of its manufactures, cloth being the staple; but herein also it had been left behind by less venerable places that knew how to "go." Nevertheless, Marchgrave was not payed out yet; and Heron's, *the* bank, seemed monopolising the remainder of the game.

It was really Heron's Bank, for there was really a Heron—John North Heron, the third of those names. And, for all that he was but a country banker, he was no ordinary man; he might have played no inconsiderable part on a much larger stage than was afforded by Chapter Street, Marchgrave.

Of his youth his fellow-townsmen knew little; for, though born among them, he had not been bred in his native town. An elder brother was to succeed to the bank, and John (though the home-nest could have found plenty of room for two) went forth after his school-days to seek his fortune in a wider world, very seldom visiting Marchgrave after he had once begun to breathe a less sleepy air. He must have been about five-and-thirty years old when the successive deaths, first of his father, then of his elder brother, brought him back to the town, almost in the capacity of a stranger—the last of the Herons of Chapter Street, for his brother had died a bachelor. Whether he had prospered or not during his absence there was no need to ask; if not, the bank was good enough to make up for a much longer course of failure. If, however, it ever entered the head of the most suspicious of his fellow-citizens to ask what John North Heron the third had been doing with himself all this while, the question very soon lapsed into silence, and was forgotten. Prosperity was written all over him in capital letters of the largest size—all L's, and S's, and D's; but mostly L's. He had not been away from Marchgrave for nothing, that was clear. He brought back with him not only new capital, but new ideas; and these of a vigorous kind.

The bank in Chapter Street, which had certainly been taking to nod and drowse over its own obeseness, and to refuse any business that threatened to become a little troublesome, or to compel the departure of an inch from the strictly hereditary groove, suddenly lifted up its sleepy head and threw open its doors with a clatter when its new representative came from nobody knew where.

Taking to himself no partner, he remained his own master; and he was thus able, moreover, without having to bestow dangerous confidences, to enter upon enterprises calculated to give his ancestors the nightmare in their very graves. The clothiers, of whom some were reduced nearly to the ends of their means and their wits, received such unexpected backing that they, in their secret hearts, sometimes suspected Heron's Bank of having gone crazy, until they found out that no mistake was ever made. This, however, was but one beam in the general burst of golden sunshine that gradually stole from that dusty corner in Chapter Street over all the town. Nor was the sunshine made wholly a matter of business. Never was right hand less ostentatious in its works; but such matters are bound to ooze out, and it presently became a proverb that no man or woman whose thrift and honesty deserved a helping hand need fear unmerited misfortune so long as John North Heron had a finger left him. Before he was forty, public-spirited projects were as plentiful as blackberries in a good season; while John Heron of the bank was always to the fore with his counsel in any case, and his seemingly unweariable energy and bottom-

less purse if he approved—which he mostly did, seeing that nine out of every ten projects were his own.

Rich, distinguished-looking, generous, honourable, it would clearly be his own fault if the Herons of Chapter Street ran any further risk of coming to an end. And, as if to crown to overflowing the measure of his popularity, he fell in love with a Marchgrave girl. That he married her, I need not say; for his choice did not fall upon a mad woman. And he imported a pleasant dash of romance into the affair by giving his hand—unquestionably with his heart in it—to the sixth of the nine living and unmarried daughters of the curate of one of the parish churches; a pretty and amiable girl, but, naturally, without the possession or expectation of a penny. Everybody in Marchgrave, from the Bishop himself downward, gave the bride a wedding present or subscribed to one. That which received the place of honour, above even the Bishop's, was a hideous and unwearable pair of worsted mittens, knitted by a nearly blind old woman, who had no other means of showing gratitude. His own present to his bride was a newly-built house, large and comfortable, without being ostentatious, standing in quite a fair-sized park running down to the Aske, built from cellar to gable by Marchgrave hands, and furnished all through by Marchgrave tradesmen.

Meanwhile, he had the good taste and the good sense to leave the old bank in Chapter Street alone. Not by so much as a fresh coat of varnish or by the expatriation of a single money-spider did he insult the spring of his fortunes and of his power to do all manner of good things with them.

It was, therefore, into no very imposing parlour that young Guy Derwent, the shipbroker, ushered himself a day or two after that little episode on board the *Sumatra*. On the contrary, the private room of John Heron, through which passed in one way or another all the business of Marchgrave, was almost prudishly plain and free from any suggestion of luxury. There was a large writing-table with many complicated shelves and drawers, which the oldest inhabitant remembered; a great armchair, with gouty legs and an upright back, saying much for the powers of slumber under difficulties enjoyed by a past generation, and apparently a lost art in our own; a smaller and still less indulgent armchair for the visitor for the time being; a buffet of black oak; a Turkey carpet; and a banker, whom Guy on this occasion found busy over a large map with an important-looking stranger.

John Heron and Guy were as good friends as some seventeen years' difference in age allowed. There could be no intrusion on the part of the younger; and the elder's quick nod was quite enough to say, "I'm busy; wait a minute till I'm disengaged," Guy did not mind waiting; he happened to be in that frame of mind when nobody minds anything, and when one's own thoughts are the second best company in the world.

Had he been less pleasantly engaged he might have learned a great deal from the conversation that was proceeding. But he was only conscious of a buzz in that quiet room, in which words were heard that

conveyed no particular meaning. At last the important stranger moved importantly to the door, accompanied by the banker, who then threw himself back into his chair, so far as the stiffness of its back would allow, stretched out his legs, and glowed genially upon Guy.

He was a man of middle height, whose bearing gave the impression of his being tall, broad-shouldered, muscular, and rather heavily built, with the first symptoms upon him of a portly future. He was dressed like a gentleman—that is to say, neither so ill nor so well that anybody could possibly notice what he wore. It is questionable how far he could be called handsome. The features were regular—almost too regular to agree with the strength of character and purpose he undoubtedly possessed; but then, as all sensible people soon learn, physiognomists are the only class of people who are always, and without exception, irreclaimable fools. Otherwise it would be needful to call certain points about John Heron positively unprepossessing. The eyes were too close and too deep set; the lips at once too hard and too full—an abnormal combination; the chin and lower jaw too deep and heavy to match with the calm and philosophic forehead, over which a strong growth of dark and slightly frizzled hair was beginning to grow thin. All these things should, according to accepted rules, signify some sort of discord; but there was no discordance about the man's deeds, and certainly none about the opinion entertained of him in Marchgrave. Possibly—by way of a sop to the physiognomists—the want of harmony was between his active, even speculative, enterprise, and the prudence that carried the seemingly rashest of enterprises to a fortunate issue. In which case the discord would be expressed by impulse *plus* self-restraining wisdom, or by benevolence *minus* credulity—which latter is a rarer formula still.

"So you're back again?" he asked cordially, bringing his hand down upon the map that still lay open. "I'm glad to see you! But upon my soul, when you came in I forgot to shake hands. It seems as if it was only yesterday you were sitting in that very chair ——"

"And it's six months to-morrow," laughed Guy.

"Six months! Well, time does fly."

"That's because time's money, I suppose."

"Ah, you're learning that, are you? It's wonderful what six months will do! If they've taught you to be a man of business, Master Guy Derwent, they ought to do even this thing here."

"What thing—where?"

"Why, where have your ears been all this while? If your ears are no good to you, give your eyes an innings. Look there!"

"I see a map," said Guy.

"See a map, indeed! No, my lad; this is no map—this is the standard of the resurrection of Marchgrave. This is what I've been working and waiting for; and now the time's come. . . . Those confounded docks at Askness! Now, look here. I'm going to cut a canal from the pool below the bar, that's a good five miles lower down, right up to Marchgrave, and make a real dock—not a puddle for a cockleshell. There!"

"You—you're going to do *that!*" exclaimed Guy.

"I, and of course others. But it's certainly going to be done. That fellow who's just gone out is Wilson, the engineer, and *he* didn't sit staring like an owl."

"But it'll be opposed tooth and nail. If I know Askness, it won't give in."

"There spoke Marchgrave! Of course if Marchgrave goes on giving in for ever, Askness won't; but if Marchgrave won't give in, Askness must, that's all. A fig for your opposition. Who's to oppose? The railway? Well, between ourselves, the railway is—I. The Askwell Dock Company? Between me and you, I again. The landowners? Between you and me, though I'm not all the landowners, I'm a good many of 'em. Why, this has been the dream of my life—and it's come to pass twenty years sooner than I looked for. . . . Just think of it, Guy; Marchgrave another Liverpool combined with another Manchester—who knows? The old mills set going again—you know I haven't let one of 'em die that I could help—and a hundred more. Work instead of charity. And all so easy—so easy! Why, it might have been done twenty years sooner, if—if —— "

He was speaking with real enthusiasm—not merely with that of a speculator who sees his way to a colossal fortune, not merely with that of a man who has cause for personal pride, but with that of one who rejoices in the prospect of a great work for the work's own sake, and for the good it will do. The tremor that came into his voice had nothing to do with greed, and not more than was right and honourable with pride.

"If," said Guy, catching his warmth, and adding that of admiration hereto, "if John Heron had been born twenty years sooner."

"Nonsense, Guy," he said, relapsing into a sudden smile. "If the people of Marchgrave had not been descendants of the Seven Sleepers, you mean, who wanted stirring up with an uncommonly long pole."

"You're wasted on a place like Marchgrave, Heron."

"Come, none of that. Nobody need be wasted anywhere. But I'm forgetting myself. How are things with you? And has the gorgeous East spoiled you for the last bottle of that brown sherry—*your* sherry, you know—that I've been hiding away in that bureau till you came back again?"

"Oh, I had no time to get orientalised. I just did my business, and came home again."

"That's an easy way of putting things for a young fellow whose first flight from home has been India. Either nothing must have happened or—something so big as to put everything else in the shade."

"Put it that way, then," said Guy, for his tongue was burning with news that to him was more than the conversion of Marchgrave into Manchester and Liverpool combined. "Something *has* happened. And —— "

"Ah! the P. and O. has much to answer for."

"The P. and O.!" exclaimed Guy with scorn. For who can bear to be told that his own story has ever been told before?—even of Adam

and Eve; though it is true that theirs had nothing to do with the P. and O. "Such things must happen somewhere. I suppose."

"Somewhere, indeed! Everywhere—especially at sea. But I don't mean to chaff. I congratulate you beforehand, whoever she may be. *You're* not the sort of man to go very wrong where business isn't concerned." No—he did not sigh: and yet it seemed as if a sigh were somewhere in the room. Well, every bank has its ghosts; and Heron's must have had many. . . . "Come and dine, and tell Kate. These things are her hobby, you know; and she'll listen to you for a week on end. But ten to four isn't over yet—for me; and I've rather crowded up my day. They've made me a city magistrate since you've been gone, and there's some justice work to do; and I've got to see a deputation about a candidate to oppose that old fossil, Barnes; and—in short, come and take pot-luck at seven, when you'll find us free as air. But you needn't hurry off like that. If you can tell a love-story in ten minutes, I'm your man. We've got to wet your welcome, and I mustn't be too punctual anywhere. Besides, now those docks are settled, I've earned ten minutes' holiday, I'm sure."

"I'll take them, then," said Guy selfishly, while Heron went to the black cabinet and slowly uncorked a dusty bottle of wine. "The fact is, mine is *not* a common story, you see, in spite of the P. and O. And, in fact, I came to tell it you here, before even seeing Mrs. Heron."

"You don't mean to say you want advice? My dear fellow, a man who wants advice in a love affair only deserves one answer—that he's not worth advising."

"Oh, that's all right. As if I wanted any advising that way But the story isn't exactly mine—that is to say, it *is* mine."

"Suppose, then, we begin in the middle, Guy. It's always the best way."

"She has a mother ——"

"Oh!"

"Heron, if there's one sort of joke more detestable than another, it's that stale one about mothers-in-law. Mine, anyhow, is a very charming woman, whatever other people's may be."

"By the way, the ten minutes were not for her mother, but for her."

"A very charming woman, Heron; intellectual, and all that sort of thing; and as good as gold ——"

"Welcome home!" interrupted Heron, having poured out the wine with the care it deserved. "And if you want a toast and a sentiment, make it good luck to Marchgrave Docks, and confound all their enemies."

"Amen—confound them—and as good as gold. But she has a husband, Heron. She told me everything when I asked her for her daughter on the *Sumatra*. She scorned to sail under false colours. She refused to listen to my offer till she had told me all. And yet there are idiots who say that women have no sense of honour! Why. that woman would put half the men I know to shame. Well, she has a husband. I have never heard of a prejudice against fathers-in-law; but mine is ——"

"*Is?*"

"Well, will be, the biggest scoundrel unhung. There's no milder way of putting it, Heron. I wish there were, for my sake and hers. The biggest scoundrel unhung. . . . And I'm not going to be less straightforward than a woman. I'm not going to—and she made it a condition ——"

"Which she?"

"The mother, of course—that I should hide nothing from my friends. I had spoken of you and Mrs. Heron as my best and only friends—my more than father and mother—who made me whatever I am or ever will be."

"Oh, hang that. Go on."

"And it was she who said you ought to know."

"To know what?"

"Don't think I'm ashamed of it, Heron! I will put it plainly, just to show that I am proud—not ashamed!—that I am going to marry a convict's daughter—and such a convict's! . . . Wait before you say a word. There is no reason why a soul in Marchgrave should know this excepting you. But I'm not quite a beast, I hope; and I can't, knowing what I know, ask Mrs. Heron to be my wife's friend without *your* leave. Her daughter has come in for a legacy of seventy thousand pounds."

"Seventy thousand pounds? On my word, Guy, your a better man of business than I ever hoped you'd be!"

Guy fired up.

"If I'd known that before I spoke to her, do you suppose I should have any story to tell?"

"Why not? It's true I didn't marry an heiress myself—poor Kate! But if she'd had millions I'd have married her all the same."

"And he's just the sort of man who is certain to get wind of a windfall. But there can't be much mischief done if *you* know all the circumstances beforehand, Heron. One may want all sorts of advice. and perhaps a backer besides. And that poor lady, the mother, wants all the friends and all the help she can find."

"Ah, Guy, my days of knight-errantry are over."

"Not a bit of it. They'll never be. Why, what's this Dock scheme but pure chivalry? Only wait till you see her, and she'll have gained the best friend a woman could pray for. Poor lady! she has had cruel wrongs."

"Do you know, you make me quite anxious to see them, Guy. An idea! I'll prove to you that since you enlist me as a champion I won't do things by halves. From what I can gather, there's likely to be some talk in Marchgrave about who the future Mrs. Derwent and her belongings may be; and I will say this about Marchgrave, that it never nods over other people's private affairs. Are these ladies coming to any friends or home of their own?"

"No. They have to make their friends in England. They are staying just for the present in London, at the Clarence, while they are looking round."

"Then look here. Your young woman must be married from *my* house—Kate's house. I think that will do? And meanwhile they shall come on a visit. You mustn't waste your time by running up to town three days a week, and writing long letters the other four."

Guy sprang up with glistening eyes.

"How can I thank you? What *can* I say?" he cried, holding out his hand.

"Thanks be hanged; and say nothing; and let anybody who likes say I'm doing a rash thing. Rash things are the only things I've never yet repented of, Guy. There's a confession for a banker; but its true, and what's more, everybody, if they told themselves the truth, would say the same. There—I take your word for your friends."

"And you may—till you see them, and then you won't need anybody's word."

"All right. Kate shall write and ask them down."

But the expiration of more than the allotted ten minutes was signalled by the entrance of a clerk, with the announcement that Mr. Alderman Sparrow and some other gentlemen had called by appointment.

"Oh, the deputation," said Heron. "You needn't hurry off, Guy; I have a dim suspicion that *I* may want a friend."

It did not seem so, however. To judge from the remarks of Mr. Alderman Sparrow and the three fellow-citizens who accompanied him, there was not a man, woman or child in Marchgrave who was not John Heron's friend; and, for once, these protestations contained scarcely a word of over-colour and none of flattery. And who but the man who was making the town, and restoring it to more than its ancient fortunes, was fitted to be its voice in Parliament in place of the obsolete Barnes?

Guy's own heart was so full of gratitude that it could scarcely find room for pride. "If Sparrow only knew John Heron as I know him!" thought he. But then the alderman's love-making days were long over and gone; and much after-dinner practice had given him the ability to put his feelings into words.

"Well, gentlemen," said the banker, "I'm much obliged, I'm sure . . . Honestly, I'm not eager to be in the House; but you know, as well as I do, that I'm always at the service of this city, here or anywhere."

It had seemed for a moment that Heron's public spirit was about to give way, and that he would refuse. For the banker, with all his energy, was a domestic man, who loved his home and his liberty, and had never sought, since his return, a wider field than Marchgrave. Guy sighed with relief: for a stroke of generous kindness had made his friend's career as dear to him as anything could be that was not Marion.

"And now for the justice work," said Heron, when they were left alone again. "So till seven—seven sharp, mind. By the way, it strikes me that I'm going to ask Kate to invite strange guests without being able to tell her their names!"

Even in the midst and thick of his affairs, public and private, he found time to think of Guy.

"What? Haven't I told you?"

"No. You never called her anything but 'she.' But that will be a trifle vague, I'm afraid, from Kate's point of view, and from the postman's also. It will hardly do to address, 'She, Clarence Hotel, London.'"

"Marion Furness," said Guy, dwelling on the name which, for the first time he spoke aloud in full.

At seven sharp Guy Derwent rang the bell at The Cedars, as Mrs. Heron's wedding present from her husband was called. A footman, who must have entered the banker's service within the last six months, asked his name, and led the way into the drawing-room.

"What, Guy Derwent!" cried a brisk and bright little woman, almost running forward to meet him. "Well, this is a famous surprise! Why, we began to think you were never coming home again! I *am* glad to see you. I wish John was at home!"

"Didn't he tell you he'd seen me? asked Guy, in some surprise on his side.

"You know what John is," said Mrs. Heron. "I haven't seen him myself since the morning—and isn't it provoking? He's had another of those telegrams that are always calling him off about something or another, heaven knows where. It's ungrateful, of course, but I do wish sometimes that John wasn't quite so much thought of, so that one could tell in the morning a little about what the day is going to bring. Here's his note, you see: 'Sudden business; only just time to catch the train.'"

"Ah, then it's nothing wrong. It's about the new docks, I suppose. And"—he was about to mention the deputation and its consequences, when it struck him that such a piece of news might have been intentionally reserved by Heron, in order to have the pleasure of telling his own wife in his own way.

Nevertheless, it seemed odd that John Heron should have forgotten a guest whom he had not seen for six months, and for whom he had shown himself so full of consideration. The business that called him off must have been very sudden and very absorbing indeed.

Guy did not lose his dinner; and an evening spent in talking of Marion to sympathetic ears was clear gain. No—surely nothing could be wrong.

CHAPTER II.

MADAM PLACID.

WHY good appetites and sound sleep should be regarded as incompatible with so perfectly healthy a condition as being in love, poets alone know. But then poets have, for the most part, obtained their knowledge of love literally at first hand—that is to say, through being desperately in love with themselves; so their boasted monopoly of all the science of the subject may be of but little account after all. This is by way of apology for Marion Furness, who slept so soundly the first night of her arrival in London that she woke in that strangely delicious condition of knowing neither where she was nor who she was—scarcely, indeed, if she was anybody at all.

If some of us could only prolong those rare minutes of exquisite forgetfulness! But that unavoidable reflection has nothing to do with Marion. Everything had all of a sudden become delightful to remember—even those long nineteen years of struggle and poverty on the other side of the world, which were still nearly as close as yesterday, and yet seemed to concern another Marion, and not the one who was between waking and sleeping in London.

But as soon as she knew who she was, and where, she was out of bed in a flash, and before the looking-glass, so as to make quite sure. And what she saw was, on the whole, worth getting up for—a picturesquely irregular little face, bright all over, with hair almost brown enough to be called black, and large gray eyes full of such changing light and colour under their delicate black brows, that it would bewilder one to say of what tint they truly were. Her mouth, for all the fineness of its curves, was amply large enough to promise generous speech from an open heart; and she had what not one girl has in a thousand—a real chin. The sea wind had failed, or forgotten, to make her cheeks less pale; but they were healthily pale, such as a pure white rose may be that just dreams of being a damask one.

Such was Marion Furness when, at nineteen years old, she took captive, by her eyes, her voice, and her smile, the heart of Guy Derwent in the course of half a voyage. And, despite her sound and dreamless sleep, and her very decided appetite for breakfast, he had ample reason to be satisfied with the amount of heart she had given him in return—for it was a very large heart, and she had given him the whole, without (Love works greater miracles than triumphing over such a trumpery difficulty as arithmetic) depriving her closest and dearest friend, her mother, of a single atom—nay, rather multiplying what she had bestowed in that quarter before she had ever guessed that a Guy Derwent existed in the world.

"Shall I, or shall I not?" she, now dressed and ready for a new day of sunshine, asked the girl in the glass; and then smiled to see with what profound seriousness the question had been put and received. She had paid a good deal of attention to mirrors of late. For she had a great desire to see what Guy Derwent had seen in her, and was still puzzled by the problem; and in many ways she felt herself so changed from the Marion Furness of Melbourne, and a hundred other places, that it was as if she had to make her own acquaintance all over again. "No—I won't, then."

And so she went, along the dim and dusty passages, between infinite varieties of clustered boots, and down the creaking stairs, into the dingy sitting-room; for the Clarence, to which Guy had recommended them, had been the town-house of Marchgrave and its neighbourhood for many slumberous generations, and was appropriately quiet, dusty, and dull. When she entered the sitting-room, it was as if a sunbeam were bursting through a fog. The room had indeed opened its eyes—that is to say, the blinds were drawn; but the daylight they let in was thick and yellow-gray. In short, the room was not awake. Last night's ashes were still in the grate, and the smell of London in early morning, which some people find stimulating and grateful, was distinct enough for a blind man to tell in what spot of earth he was, though just dropped at random from the clouds.

"Why—oh, you wicked woman!" cried Marion, darting to the nearest window and seizing a shawled figure in her arms. "What's the good of my passing by your very door on tiptoe to find *you* down first, and *me* nowhere? It's too horribly mean and wicked of you—it is indeed!"

"Did you think I came to England to sleep, May?" asked a richer and fuller voice than Marion's, and with a tenderer note in it.

They were Lark and Nightingale.

"Then, indeed, I did, mamma. I'm sure you've had enough of getting up in the dark on the other side of the world—and the *Sumatra* doesn't count for resting. Why, the best of the castles I've been building is a great sleepy palace, all full of quiet and rest, and nothing else in it from top to bottom—for you! But why didn't *you* call *me?*"

"Oh, May, you silly child! as if ——"

"Yes; as if! As if I wanted to lose a minute of our first real day! Oh, dear! For all I know you may have been up for an hour. Perhaps you've never been to bed at all—while I've been sleeping like a top—no, like a pig—no, like a——"

"Like a happy girl, May; and I've been sleeping too, like a happy woman—who dosen't want to lose another waking hour for the rest of her days. . . . Yes, May; when I had to work for our bread, I used to fancy that just to go to sleep and stay asleep would be the very best thing in the world. But I don't want to sleep any more, now. I want to be awake every hour. There'll be plenty of time to sleep when—you're gone."

"*I* gone?"

"Of course, May. Aren't you going to—be Mrs. Derwent?"

"Your daughter is your daughter, all—the—days—of—her—LIFE! so there!"

Mrs. Furness was not one of those mothers who, by their likeness to their daughters, threaten the latter's lovers with evil auguries. She was one of the mothers of good omen—who promise an autumn lovelier in its own way than summer and spring. She had kept her figure; she had not lost all her bloom. The past life of labour, whatever it might have been, had evidently failed to break her down; whatever ill-treatment she might have suffered had left no apparent signs—at least outwardly. The first name that would occur to anybody to give her was Madam Placid; and nobody to look at her would dream of her having lived any sort of life but one of unruffled calm. There were, it is true, many silver threads in her hair that was a little less dark than her daughter's, but the effect of these was to soften rather than to age her more regular features; and she had a steadier light in her eyes, and, in her colouring, much of the rose.

She answered Marion's quick embrace with a slow smile.

"Of whose life?" asked she. "Well—for a few days more, any way, and then I shall be content with whatever is to be. No, no, May; I know what you mean, but Mr. Derwent won't care to be having an old woman always round. He isn't going to marry us both, you know."

"Isn't he, though! And as of course he won't want to have an old woman always round, he's to have one young one—that's me; and one younger one—that's you. It's all arranged."

"Oh, it's all arranged, is it?"

"Everything. You are going to be his mother, as well as mine."

"And my duties?"

"Oh, to sit quiet still, and never do anything you don't like, and everything you do, and tell us whenever we are making geese of ourselves."

"No, May. That place won't do for me. I could manage the sitting still; perhaps even I could manage to put up with always doing what I like, and never what I don't, though that's harder than people know till they've tried. But having always to tell two young people whenever they are geese—why, my poor tongue would be worn out in a day."

"I retract. It's you're the goose, mamma. However, seriously, it's all settled. He said it himself; and ——"

"The King must be obeyed. I see."

"Now, really and indeed you are the Queen of all the geese!" cried Marion, hiding a quick blush under a laugh of silver. "It's lucky you will have two people with heads on their shoulders to look after you—it is indeed."

"Oh, May," said Mrs. Furness, more gravely; "if in three years *He said it*" is still enough for you, you will be a happy girl."

"But then, you see, '*She* said it' is to be enough for him."

"Then he will be a happy man. Only what's to happen if He and She say contrary things?"

"Then the skies are to fall. That's all settled too."

Marion's mother breathed the least suspicion of a sigh, How often

have such things been settled ? she may have thought ; and how often have they held firm ? But it was no moment for reading lectures to Marion on the trite texts that make up what the world calls its wisdom.

"I think—I am sure, that Guy Derwent *is* good," said she ; and she did not add, As men go. "A ship isn't a bad place to judge people in. One can see people best in long days of little things—much better than in great ones, which the chances are neither you nor they understand. He is a gentleman. He has no secrets. He is not vain. He is not selfish. He talks sense. He can fall in love with a girl without asking what she is or what she has. And, above all, his digestion is of the first order. I've watched him eat and drink, and I never saw him anything but the better for his meals."

"Mamma !"

"Do you mean you'd like him to be the worse for them ? Or ought I to have said that he is Shakespeare, and Apollo, and the Archangel Michael, all rolled into one, with just a piquant touch of Lucifer ?"

"Don't laugh at me, please ! Of course not—only—only ——"

"I know ; and I'm not laughing, May. I dare say he is all that, and more, to you. And if you're a wise girl he'll remain so to the end ; and he'll never change in your eyes through me. But you and I shall be happy women if he's nothing more than what *I* have seen in him ; and if he is all that, his faults can't be very terrible ones—unless they should turn out to be weaknesses. Or mustn't I suppose that he has any faults at all ?"

"Of course he has faults. As if I could care for a saint or a machine Of course he has faults—big ones. For one thing, I am quite convinced he has been—wild."

"'Wild,' my dear ? What *is* 'wild' ?"

"As if everybody didn't know ! Why, 'wild' is—wild."

"Well, it seems to me as if there is somebody, at any rate, who doesn't know. Do you mean that he drinks too much ?"

"Guy drink ! Why I would not look at him."

"Or gambles ?"

"He *hates* cards. And so do I.

"Or finds pleasure in sin and wickedness, without heeding what hearts he breaks or what lives he spoils ?"

"How can you say such horrible things ! You make me creep all over ! Surely—surely you don't *mean* anything, mamma ?"

"Only that you don't seem to know what *you* mean when you talk as if you were rather proud than not of your lover's having been 'wild.' I do happen to know what being wild means, and —— There, May, let us talk of pleasanter things. Breakfast, for instance, and then what we will do after. I suppose we two shall be all alone by ourselves to-day ?"

"Yes ; he will have his business to see to at Marchgrave. We are as free as air. We'll have all sorts of fun."

"Hypocrite ! Anyhow, we'll have breakfast at once. Then—why, then I know you'll be wanting to write just one long letter, whatever you may pretend. And meanwhile I'll go out for an hour by myself,

all alone. I must go to the bank, and there's no call for you to go too. It's no good your arguing the point; I'm going to have my way. Then I'll come back and find your letter finished, and we'll go out and spend as much of the money I bring back as we can get through in a day. In short, we'll go shopping all day long; and we'll go somewhere in the evening. We'll read all the papers at breakfast, and settle where. And then ——"

"Why, mamma, who's running 'wild' now?"

"Only me, May. Come—don't let's lose another hour of this delightful fog. How delicious it smells!"

That breakfast was a pleasant meal, and in the very midst of it came the post, with a letter directed to Miss Marion Furness, and marked 'Marchgrave.' That was an event—it was Marion's first love-letter, and it came with the greater zest inasmuch as it was the first time she had seen her lover's written hand. She was shy about opening it even before her mother, but the latter buried herself in the theatrical and musical advertisements, and contrived to make Marion feel herself for a few minutes better than alone. And the letter proved better even than Marion had expected—that of a man who feels to the core of his heart that he has won a prize and means to be worthy of it, altogether far too deeply to try to say half he feels in words. Of actual news there could be but little. He had arrived safe and sound in Marchgrave, had found nothing amiss, and had just paid a visit to his oldest and best friend, John Heron, with whom he was going to dine. The only slight jar in the letter belonged to the lines that sang with enthusiasm the praises of John Heron. They gave Marion almost a twinge of jealousy, though this paragon of paragons was but a man. "No—whatever mamma may say, I do *not* like perfection," murmured she.

Mrs. Furness went out, according to the plan of that day's campaign; and Marion, secure of no more than a single hour to herself, sat down without more delay than sufficed to read the letter ten times over, to write to Guy. But she was unpractised in such matters and found it hard. I know not how many false starts she made. Now, she felt her words too cold; now too stiff; now too gay; now too grave. Her heart never seemed to come into her pen; and she did not know that to be able to write what one feels simply means an incapacity for feeling below the surface of the skin. People who can do that must have ink instead of blood, and a glass bottle instead of a heart—and that is the whole secret, in spite of what people who trade in sentiment may pretend. However, Marion, without knowing it, was getting on very fairly well into the middle of her third page, when she was taken aback by the entrance of a waiter, with the startling announcement that a gentleman to see Mrs. Furness was on his way into the room.

It must be Guy himself—who else could it be? For they had not even another acquaintance in the whole United Kingdom. Her heart gave a great leap—and than sank again. It was not Guy.

Indeed, it was anything but Guy; and so confused was she by the intrusion upon her letter of an unexpected stranger that her keenly observant eyes forgot for once to do their duty. Indeed, it must be

owned that their faculty for close observation, as well as their varying lustre, was partly due to their being somewhat short-sighted—a frequent set off against special beauty in eyes—so that she could hardly adapt them consistently with courtesy, not to speak of shyness, to the observation of a stranger who was nearly as far from her as the door from the window. She had to be contented, or rather very much discontented, with a general impression of a middle-aged man, well wrapped up from the foggy weather, and that was about all. She felt that if she had been a young man—say Guy—she must at least have been wild enough to swear.

"My mother—Mrs. Furness—has gone out," said she stiffly, because shyly.

"Gone out," asked the visitor. "Well, I suppose she will soon be in? I'll wait. So you are *Miss* Furness. So *you* are Marion. And as like her—as like her—as a lily can be like a rose."

The speech was odd enough in itself, apart from his knowledge of her Christian name, and it was delivered brusquely, not to say rudely. That, however, might be merely manner—he might be shy too.

"Yes; I do know your mother," he went on after a moment's silence, as if he were answering the unspoken question in her mind. "That is to say, I did years ago. And she will remember me. But you don't—and little wonder, seeing I don't remember you—though I've not forgotten you, all the same. . . . I knew her before you knew her. She's well?"

An old friend of her mother's! Marion felt that it was she who had been rude. Yes; her mother had once had friends, she knew.

"Quite well. Please sit down and wait; she won't be long. I never thought we had any English friends! Of course, I'm glad to find myself so wrong. But how could anybody know we were here?"

"Ah! I happened to see the list of passengers on board the *Sumatra*. And the name of Furness isn't so common that—well, I wanted to see with my own eyes. And they told me at a glance whose daughter you must be. How strange—it's just as if your mother had grown a girl again; as if she'd taken the potion in the ballet, you know, where every drop takes a year off your age, and she'd taken twenty. You can't possibly remember your father. Does she—your mother—ever speak of him?"

The first roughness was passing out of his manner and his voice, and Marion was repenting.

"Sometimes—not very often," said she. "Did you know *him?*"

"He was my closest friend. . . . She speaks of him—kindly, I suppose?"

"Surely! Her dead husband—my dead father: how could she speak of him?"

"Ah! It must have sounded an odd question. I didn't mean to put it quite in that way. Indeed, I hardly know exactly what I did mean to say. . . . Only seeing you puts me in mind of so many old times and old things that you must forgive me if my

thoughts bolt a bit now and then. . . . And what have you been doing, you two, all this while?"

"My mother," said Marion, swallowing some feeling of shame that she felt to be unworthy, "has been acting, singing, and teaching, half over the world: and a hard life it has been—till now. She has *wanted* friends."

She could not refrain from this last bitter touch. It was rather late in the day for old friends to be finding her out, just when she had ceased to need them.

"Ah, poor lady. I understand. She always had every quality for the stage except one; and that happened to be just the most important of all. No—I don't mean want of voice, or want of cleverness, or anything of that sort. Never mind what I mean. It's a compliment—of a kind. Have *you* been doing anything in that way—singing, playing, acting?"

"No. I've longed to do something, if only to help her; and I sometimes think I really can sing, when I feel particularly vain. But she never would let me. Poor mamma! But I would have done something in spite of her ——"

"You've been having a bad time?"

"As to that—we have not been very often without bread; at least, I haven't; for I'm beginning to guess dreadful things about mamma. I was too young to guess it once; but I know now what it used to mean when she used to come home at night and tell me that she had dined, or supped, out of doors. It meant that she had had nothing to eat at all."

"Ah! That's bad. It's a great mistake, that. . . . I mean, you said something that made me think the bad times are over now?"

"Yes, thank God. Mamma had a brother, who wasn't on terms with her. I don't know why. We never expected a penny from him, and he died without a will. So ——"

"All he had comes to your mother, absolutely and without conditions. I see. It was old Skipjack—I beg your pardon; old John Raye, of Melbourne. Everybody had a nickname out there, in my—in those times. The old villain! Fancy *his* dying without a will! However, I've known queerer things happen even than that, and all's well that ends well. So old Skipj —— old John Raye died without a will."

A sudden consciousness came over Marion that she had become most uncharacteristically confidential with one who was, after all, an unknown stranger, even though he had been her father's and was still her mother's friend. She had drifted into confidences she knew not how; and yet, even now that she suddenly realized it, it still seemed natural. There are people in whom the shyest and most reticent people (perhaps these the most) instinctively confide at once, without any discoverable reason why. In the present case there was assuredly no self-evident reason why. He was still too far off for her to follow his face clearly; his questions had shown little tact or sympathy, and, like his manner, had not been without a touch of vulgarity. But there is no accounting for these things. For to talk of magnetic influence is simply to say, in

other words, that one doesn't know. However, if magnetism be the word for the thing, magnetism was there.

Well—her mother must soon be back; and meanwhile she could not have said anything that could do harm. The visitor, whoever he was, evidently knew, of his own knowledge, a good deal about them and their affairs, and was interested in them in a friendly if certainly rather inquisitive way. And, for that matter, there was no secret about the fact of her mother's having been an actress who had found it exceptionally difficult to get engagements and next to impossible to keep them, and had lived the shifty and semi-vagabond life of players who have not discovered the secret of how to succeed. There was no reason, Marion told herself, for being ashamed of their past life, for she knew her mother to be a lady through and through, and she took herself to task for the moment's suspicion that any sane mortal might think her otherwise.

Meanwhile her thoughts divided themselves into three—one full third was with her unfinished letter, another with her mother, for whose return it was anxiously listening, the remainder with her visitor, who, leaving personal matters, was not the less drawing her out by discoursing on her voyage and on her first impressions of London. And, indeed, in her present mood, it did not require any very large amount of skill or insight to read Marion Furness through and through. For all that it was so hard to tell the colour of her eyes, it was the simplest thing in the world to read that of her mind and soul, when once put off their guard. So he talked, and she answered and listened, until she caught the sound of a welcome rustle upon the stairs.

She just glanced at her letter with a little sigh. This stranger, or friend, or whatever he was, had wasted one precious hour. No doubt he would waste at least another, and half-a-day would be gone. Perhaps the whole day would be ruined, and all its pleasant plans spoiled. He must have seen the glance, or caught the sigh, for he smiled.

"Here I am at last, May!" said Mrs. Furness, placidly floating in. "And now for our fun ——"

All of a sudden she gave a little breathless cry, and stood just within the door, as if struck to stone.

The visitor opened his arms wide, as if for her to fall into them.

"Leah!" he exclaimed.

She did not move a step nearer to the extended arms. She made no step either way, and yet one felt that she recoiled.

"God in heaven!" she cried; "You have let him find me—after all these years—and now!"

Marion's brain began to reel. Never had she seen Madam Placid moved—no, not even when death had menaced them in the bush, from flood or fire, or when they had, in their wilder wanderings, been shipwrecked among savage tribes, or when they had been in greater peril among the real savages of the world—men who profess and call themselves Christians and yet hunger and thirst for gold. What was this mystery—who was this man? It is not for the fawn to protect the doe. But Marion, bewildered as she was, darted from her window between her mother and her mother's—friend.

Her eyes took a new light—they flamed.

"Who are you?" cried she.

He let his arms fall to his side.

"That's always the way with surprises," he said sadly, "they always fail. She'll come to herself in a minute. My dear—tell her—quietly—that your father has found her at last, after all these years."

As he spoke, Marion felt that her very lips turned pale.

No word would come. Her father! He of whom she had thought as of one dead—for what her mother had told to Guy Derwent had never been told to Marion. He of whom she had thought with a vague romance as of some departed hero—and this was he!

"Mamma—mother! Speak to me! Is it true?"

Leah Furness advanced, almost thrusting Marion aside. The do[e] took her rightful place in front of the fawn.

"Adam," she said, in a voice as clear as a bell, "I thought—I dreamed, that we had escaped you for ever, I and mine—I and my Lamb. How you have tracked us out, Heaven knows: but I, as well as Heaven, know why. Poor, I might have starved; rich, we are worth the finding. . . . But what is mine, and shall never be yours."

"You give your lost husband a strange welcome, Leah," said Adam Furness, more sadly than before. "But—you were always strange. As to any reason for my finding you whom I lost and have been seeking—I don't know what you mean. What reason can a husband have for seeking his wife but one? Come, Leah. Think of our girl, to whom I meant to give a pleasant surprise—as if, worse luck, planned pleasures didn't always turn sour. My dear, *you* will give your father a kiss? Tell her, you tell her, what I've been saying. She seems dazed."

"I am not dazed," said Leah, making a bar of her left arm between the man and the girl. "And I say to you in your own words—'What reason has a husband for seeking his wife but one?' And you know what that reason is as well as I. And what reason has a wife for hiding herself from her husband, and her child from its father—teaching her to think him dead? You know that too."

"No, I don't. But before you tell me, suppose Marion leaves us for five minutes alone?"

"It's too late for that now," said Leah Furness bitterly. "The mischief is done. She knows now that her father is one from whom her mother has been trying to hide. So she had best know why. No, Marion, don't go. I wish you to hear whatever this man may say."

"Then she *shall* hear it," said he. "Listen, Marion. I have been an unfortunate man. I have been so unfortunate as to have been convicted of a crime. And then, when I came back into the world, instead of finding my wife and my child waiting to receive me, they were lost and gone. Well, that might not have been their fault. I have been seeking them round the world: that has been the work of my whole life for eighteen long years. And now, when at last I have traced them, it is to find my own wife, who ought to believe in me

honour and my innocence against the whole world, turning from me as from the criminal that I have never been."

There was pathos in his voice and his bearing even more than in his words, dignified and simple as they were. They went straight to Marion's heart—she knew not what to believe. Her mother was her faith—and yet, if there was an unjustly wronged man in the world, this was surely he.

"But if I am to lose my wife," he said sadly but firmly, "I am not going to be robbed of my child. She is mine for two years more—not too much, I think, to make up for the loss of seventeen ——"

"I see," said Leah slowly, speaking clearly, and yet with the manner of one under the influence of a dream. "You—Heaven knows how—have discovered that it is worth your while to claim as your own a woman who is no longer poor. You forget only one little thing, Adam, that neither the woman—nor *her* child—is yours to claim."

"Not mine?"

"Not yours. I have said it. I am not your wife, Adam Furness. And now claim *my* child if you dare!"

The dream passed from her voice and her eyes. She looked him full in the face, and threw away her good name without the semblance of a pang.

"Are you out of your mind, woman?" he burst out. "Do you know what you are saying? Do you know that your own daughter, yours and mine, is hearing you—Heaven knows why—swearing away your name and her own?"

"I know everything," said she coldly. "It is hard on her to learn that she is no man's child—and from me. But it is true."

"It is a foul slander!" cried he. "A slander on yourself, Leah. No sane woman would say of herself what you are saying now. Not my wife? Why, you *know* that you are. You remember our wedding-day ——"

"Enough!" said she. "I deny that I was ever married—that I ever thought myself married! Prove it—if you can. . . . Come, Marion, the rest of this talk must be for you and me."

Without another glance towards him, she took her daughter's arm, and led her from the room.

"That's a bold lie!" he said. "Leah, of all women, to sell her good name for seventy thousand pounds a thousand times told!"

He rang the bell, ordered a glass of sherry, and lighted a cigar. While waiting for the wine, he caught sight of the two letters lying upon the table in the window, Guy's to Marion, and Marion's unfinished answer to Guy. He read them through; and then he read them through again.

CHAPTER III.

SEVENTY THOUSAND POUNDS.

MARION, though they had been hidden from her as much as a wandering life would allow, had not failed to see many of those shadier sides of life that act so differently upon different natures. But her original stock of faith in her fellow-creatures had suffered no diminution ; her illusions were no more capable of being blighted by a breath than if they had been so many diamonds. She had an inexhaustible supply of faiths of all sorts and kinds ; her faith in her mother being paramount over all. Even Guy himself would have to wait a while before in this respect he should find himself without a rival.

When, therefore, she heard that mother make so startling a confession, it was as if the world had suddenly started from its foundation. Alone with her, she could ask no questions ; nor, had she been able, did either her mother's silence encourage her, or her mother's first words that brought the silence to an end.

"You heard what I said, Marion?" asked Mrs. Furness. "Did you understand?"

"I heard something—I understood nothing," said Marion, with downcast eyes.

"You may fancy it was not for nothing that I made such a confession before you ! It *had* to be made. Yes—even if it makes you hate me or scorn me, it had to be made ! You understand—better anything than that you fall into that man's power."

"I hate you? I scorn you?" cried Marion, with all her heart in her voice ; "as if I did not know, as surely as I live, that whatever happened, *you* could never have been to blame. . . . But ——"

"You mean you would rather I had kept silence? Is that what your 'But' means?"

"I don't know what it means—what anything means ; except that you are mamma, my own mother, and that nothing—*Nothing* shall ever come between me and you. And so, why should He?"

"Because, if I had married him, he would have the right."

"To me?"

"To you and me."

"No. He might have a million rights ; but not the power. I know better than that he could have kept you with him against your will. I should like to see the man who could keep me against mine, married or no ! And what would it signify if I had to be called his daughter till I am two years older? What could he do?"

"What could he not do? But it is no good talking of what could or might have been. It is worth all the shame in the world to be free

—from him. I can't explain everything to you, Marion. Thank God there are many things in the world you don't understand; and pray God you never may."

"Mamma, I am writing to Guy. My letter has not yet gone."

"Ah—I remember. We were to have had a happy day. . . . . Well, send your letter as it is, and give him one. I will write to him, too. Of course he must know how everything stands —— "

"*Must* he know—everything?"

"Yes; he must indeed. And from me. I have already told him something; and he has a right to know all. Don't be afraid, May. *Your* lover is a gentleman; and gentlemen don't throw over girls whom they love, and who love them, and have done nothing wrong. He is not the hero of a novel, May."

Her mother had not called her "May" since her confession; Marion had not till now noticed the avoidance of the familar pet name. But it went to her heart, now that it had been spoken. At the same time, her mother's last words contained a bitterness that they were assuredly far from being intended to convey. Hero or no hero, gentleman or only man, Guy would have to learn a secret concerning her birth that would reflect upon her mother. Ought not her mother's good name to be at least as dear to her as her own happiness—ought she not to guard it with her life, if need be, as the most sacred trust in the world? How could she bear to let her mother be degraded in the eyes of her lover?

No—there are a few, a very few, impossible things in the world; and this was one of them. Rather than that he, of all men, should learn such a secret, she must deprive him of the right to learn it—and that in the only way.

She was as yet unconscious of the full extent of such a resolve; for she was still bewildered and dismayed. But that she must choose between her own happiness and her mother's good name was as clear as if burned into the air with letters of fire. There were other things, moreover. She had not known Guy long, or, at least, what most people would call long; but quite long enough to know that there was no chance of his being scared by a bend sinister. As her mother had said, it is only heroes and heroines of romance who regard the lack of a wedding-ring between parents as an insuperable bar to the marriage of the children, and hold that the world is religiously bound to punish one generation for the faults of another; as if there were not enough inherited punishment without the help of the world. That Guy held no such monstrous theories, and was capable of no such monstrous throwing of stones, she knew as well as she knew that she loved him. On the contary, he would open his arms to her all the more widely, and make his heart a larger refuge for her and hers. But, then, did it not make it all the more needful for her to blot herself out of his story, so that hers might be the self-sacrifice and not his—hers the suffering, and not his the shame?

Not that she was the girl to accept the surrender of her own happiness without a great deal of rebellion, whenever the time came for it.

The difficulties of martyrdom lie in its details; and these at present were all to come. The flame is always glorious till it begins to sting.

Suddenly it flashed into her mind that she had left Guy's letter and her own lying open on the table in the window of the sitting-room, to be read by any chance waiter or chambermaid, and being in an exceedingly human mood, the thought made her cheeks burn. Mrs. Furness had closed the talk, and was making memoranda with a pencil, so Marion ran downstairs to rescue the one letter that she would keep for ever as a relic, and the other that must never be posted. How could she send Guy more loving messages and half laughing chat that had become hypocrisies since she had made up her heart to love or laugh never again?

Had she only known, however, not even the letters would have tempted her down. For there, in the fog that had meanwhile gathered into a thick yellow foulness, sat the man in whom she was bound to recognize her father, whether she would or no. Until to-day, she had believed in him as a dead hero; and now he had come back from the grave in which she had believed him to lie, as if for the one purpose of breaking the hearts of the women he had left behind him, and of bringing them to shame.

She had never dreamed of his not having gone away. However it was too late for her to retreat now.

"I have been waiting for you," said he. "And if you had not come down again for hours, I would have waited till you came. I say, for *you*. . . . Is she often like this—like what she is to day?"

This terrible father certainly had some singularly tender and sympathetic tones in his voice; and they were apparent now.

"She is very unhappy," sighed Marion. "I don't know how to behave to you—you must forgive me that I don't know how. My mother has always been everything to me——"

"And she has been setting your heart against me?" he sighed back. "I see."

"Never. She has never spoken of you a single unkind word, until ——"

"To-day? Never mind about your own behaviour, Marion. How should either of us know how to behave one to another—a child who has no memory of her father, a father who has never set eyes on his child since she was in a nurse's arms? We shall have time to learn that--never fear. We've got to think of *her*, for now."

"Of her, indeed!"

"It's terrible—horrible. . . . . She has always spoken of me kindly, poor Leah: and she has no cause to speak else, God knows; and yet she has been wandering about to hide from me—me, who would have given, to find her, the world I've been chasing her round. Spoken of me kindly behind my back; and yet, when we meet, she charges me with monstrous crimes that she, of all women, knows I've never committed. . . . . And when I do find her at last, wanting nothing but to do right and justice to my wife and my child—she, a woman, Marion!—she denies her marriage: denies it before the face of her

husband, who knows the truth, and of her own girl, who honours her. I say it is horrible ——"

"My mother *is* your wife?" asked Marion faintly, her heart beating.

"Would I say it if she were not? Would she deny it, true or false, if—if she understood her own words? It is more than horrible, Marion. It can only mean one thing."

"What thing?" She could scarcely frame the dimmest guess; but her heart beat more keenly still.

"In certain states, Marion, people always turn love into hatred—they hate the worst those whom they love the best. Happily, she has not yet taken it into her head to hate *you*. But there is no knowing how soon she may—or rather, how soon she will. The husband hates the wife, the wife the husband, the parent the child, the child the parent—it is the rule. In that same state, people imagine themselves hunted and persecuted. If women, they will imagine themselves married to some man whom they never saw; or, like Leah, your poor mother ——"

"Good God! You mean she is ——" The poor girl could not speak the most terrible word that can be spoken outside of hell.

"You need not speak it," said he. "You know what she has said; and all the while we are surely husband and wife as a man and a woman can be made by church and law together: aye, and, once upon a time, by true love, too."

Marion's own brain was quivering. The thought was as new to her as it was terrible. But, with all her capacity for faith, she knew how to reason. And which was the more likely, after all—that a man should assert a false marriage to be true, or that a woman should assert a true marriage to be a false one? Surely the latter was impossible—unless the woman was what Marion dared not put into words.

If that was indeed so, what right had Marion to distrust the father who had, after the first instant, inspired her with no dislike, and had neither done nor said anything to make her doubt him? And, indeed, the idea of Madness threw a ghastly light upon a thousand things—things which had once seemed matters of course, but now seemed matters of course no longer. Other actresses had not lived her mother's wandering life, never keeping an engagement or remaining in any place for any appreciable time. Others had not changed their professional names constantly and capriciously. And so on, and so on, even without counting what Adam Furness had said about love changing into hate, the morbid fear of persecution, the charging innocent people with crime, and the crowning stroke of denying her own marriage and the right of her own child to its father's name.

Her eye fell upon her letter. She had already seen it written in the air that her engagement must be over for her mother's sake. She now saw it yet more plainly written that it must be blotted out for her lover's. If this new and horrible dread was anything even a little more than a dream, the daughter of Leah Furness was no fit wife for any man—a girl with madness in her blood for her dower. Well-nigh forgetting that she was not alone, she went to the window, tore her

letter to her lover into twenty scraps, and threw them into the fire.

Had she been less absorbed in her own exaltation, she would have seen that this new father of hers was capable of a smile. But he took no notice otherwise.

"And so," said he, continuing his own last words, when the last scrap had burned out into blackness, "we are in a terrible plight, you and I. There are no end of men—blackguards, no doubt, but then blackguards are plenty—who, finding their wife's state of mind, would just take her at her word, and be glad enough to find themselves free. But I couldn't do that if I would; and I wouldn't if I could. She's my wife before God and man; and it's not her fault she's got to hate me, poor lass; it puts it on me to love her and guard her all the more, till she comes round, as please heaven she will, all in good time. What are her plans?"

John Heron himself had not impressed the whole of his native city with a sense of his unlimited trustworthiness to a greater degree than Adam Furness was impressing his daughter. He had less convinced or persuaded than he had taken possession of her mind by force, and imposed his own views upon hers. . . . And, after all, better even madness than actual shame: better that her mother's brain than that her mother herself should have gone astray.

"We were planning to take some quiet place in the country," said she, "where mamma could rest ——"

"And that might still be the best thing. . . . But it wants thinking over; and it is I who must take things in hand, now. Besides, we must have the best advice, the very best, before anything is done. I won't see her again to-day. It would be bad for her—to think I should have to say that! But—let me see—this is Tuesday; I will call here again on Thursday, at the same time, and see *you*. No; that won't do, though. I must run no risk of seeing *her* again, till things mend." He sighed. "Do you think you could get out for five minutes—alone? I could wait for you at the corner of the street, not half a minute away."

"I can't promise that," said Marion.

"No; I suppose not. Well, then you must leave this also to me. God bless you, my dear; good-bye, once more, for a little while."

He touched her forehead with his lips, and was gone? but his influence remained. He might be a trifle rough and brusque; but roughness is the brand of sincerity—everybody knows that, and it must therefore be true.

Mrs. Furness looked inquiringly at Marion when the girl rejoined her, but asked no questions.

"May," said she, very quietly, and as if the last talk between them had not been broken, "one thing is certain—you and I must leave this place, and give no sign of where we are gone. I was mistaken when I thought we had found rest. We must wait another while. He had no legal claim upon us, it is true; but he is not a man who yields to legal rights if they stand in his way. There is only one thing to be

done—to fly. Here is a letter for Guy, telling him—what you know. See, please, that it goes, with your own. And—I am tired. For once, I have gone through to-day more than I can bear. . . . Well; we *will* rest in time. . . . And when that is posted, we will strike our tents once more."

"Mamma!" cried Marion—what had her father just been telling her? A knife went through her heart at each of her mother's quiet words. That eternal need of flying—that consuming dread of being pursued. However, one inn would be the same as another, now. She longed to say something—anything; but she could find nothing to say.

She took the letter, directed to "Guy Derwent, Esq., Marchgrave." What ought to be done with it? True, a letter is a letter, and a trust is a trust. But *this* letter, telling what her own heart as well as her father now told her to be false—that her mother was no wife; how could she, with her own hands, despatch to her lover this signed death-warrant of her mother's good name? If its confession were true, to send it would be impossible; being false, it became more impossible still. And if it were a diseased dream of her mother's brain, to send the letter would be more than a mere impossibility. It would be an infamy.

For the same reason, Guy had neither need nor right to another word. He must learn to forget her; she must teach him to forget that there was a Marion Furness in the world. Mad or not mad, her mother's daughter could be no wife for him. The letter must not go.

And then?

He would try to seek her, perhaps. Well, she must learn from her mother how women can escape from men who seek them against their wills. She could—to-morrow, perhaps—write him a line to break off the engagement and bid him good-bye. Women are privileged to be cruel without giving a reason, especially if the greater part of their cruelty has to be borne by themselves. It would only be, for him, a single wrench of pain. It could not, surely, break a strong man's heart to lose a girl on whom he had never set eyes until a very few weeks ago. He would be happy again, some day—at nineteen we know the world so wonderfully well, and can predict so exactly what those fabulous monsters, A Man and A Woman, will always do. We have to wait to learn that A Woman never happens to be This Woman, nor A Man to be That Man. . . . And then? For her mother, rest; for herself, whatever might choose to come. With seventy thousand pounds one can buy rest, and one can try to buy safety; and, perhaps, it is too much to expect to get more than such priceless gifts as these.

And so, though two letters had been written, the post carried none from the Clarence to Marhgrave that day. As for what she felt in giving up the man whom she loved with all her heart, her brain was on fire, and her heart was numbed. She had not time to feel.

But her father? Her very belief in her mother compelled her belief in him; for if he was not speaking truth, then her mother's incredible confession must be true. And in that case, was she not compelled by

circumstances to apparent treachery—was she not obliged, for her mother's sake, to defeat her mother's plans of escape, even while humouring them?

It was a terrible dilemma; and Marion had never had to rely upon herself and her own judgment since she had been born. If only Guy were there—if only she could look in his eyes, and say to him, You must give me up as a wife; but be to me, for this last time, a brother and a friend! That could not be. It did seem like betraying her mother to leave behind her a trace whereby she might be followed by the man she dreaded and abhorred. But, then, if her mother was Mad—and what else could she be?

However, the letter to Guy, unopened, was concealed in her bosom; the luggage was packed and in the hall; the bill was paid; the cab was at the door. And, since Marion knew not their next destination, there was no means of leaving a trail.

"The Great Western," said Mrs. Furness to the cabman, in a clear voice, so that she could be plainly heard by the hotel porter.

Marion's new thoughts and fears for her mother filled her with awe, and closed her lips. The horrible thought of Madness rose up between these hitherto closest and dearest of friends, like a dead wall between souls. Arrived at the station, Mrs. Furness had the luggage taken into the cloakroom, and went with Marion into the waiting-room, where she settled herself in a dark corner—it was now evening—and dozed, or seemed to doze, for the better part of an hour. It was all so strange—stranger and gloomier, it seemed, than their shipwreck on a desert. The poor girl was growing seriously alarmed.

At the end of an hour Mrs. Furness roused herself.

"Come, Marion," said she.

Engaging a porter, she had her luggage taken to another cab, and ordered herself to be driven to an address almost whispered into the cabman's ear. Off they drove again, through a fog now growing black with night, and between rows of flaring gas lamps which, to Marion's excited brain, appeared like a cordon of demon sentries stationed to keep fugitives in view.

"If he calls at the Clarence," said Mrs. Furness, at last breaking silence, "he will only learn that we have left London by the Great Western. If he inquires at the station, he will—if he learns anything—learn that two ladies might have arrived in a cab, or might have come from the country by train. If he finds *this* cab, he will learn that we have gone to—where we are going; and if he goes there, he will find us flown again, and past following. Yes—even if he strikes the beginning of the trail, we shall have had start enough to baffle bloodhounds. . . . Ah, here we are. I chanced to notice it on my way from Lombard Street to-day. We may have to rough it for a night; but we're no new hands at roughing it, you and I. . . . We shall be far away, when this time to-morrow comes."

The cab, after many twists and turns, had stopped in a dark, narrow alley, at a window whence a warm light glowed through the red curtains of a long, low casement with narrow panes. Once more the

cab was dismissed ; and Marion, now falling into a dream, followed her mother through the intervening fog, and across a yard of greasy pavement, into a close and dingy passage where a man in shirt-sleeves received the two ladies with a stare.

"No—nothing *can* be wrong!" exclaimed Guy aloud, when he leaped from his bed the next bright morning at Marchgrave ; "and, what's more, nothing shall—and nothing ever shall!"

This was Tuesday ; and on Saturday he proposed to run to town. It was a long time to wait—nearly four whole days. Happily for him, however, he was not an idle man, either by need or nature ; a whole pile of arrears waited for him at his office ; and then there was to be the delight of letter-writing—alas, that it should pall so sadly soon!—for which four whole days, though with seven posts in them, would be none too many.

It was a pity that John Heron's sudden absence had caused a day's delay in the invitation of Marion and her mother to Marchgrave ; but, after all, a day or two would not make much difference in such a life as his was going to be. His one regret was that this would be one whole day without Marion—his first real one since he had first seen her on board the *Sumatra*. For he had parted from her only on Sunday, and on Monday he had done little but talk of her to the Herons. To-day there could not be even a letter. Well, it would come to an end : so impatient are we for the sun to set even on our brightest days. And a letter, fragrant of Marion, would come with the new sun.

However, be he never so industrious, a man's ledgers and letter-book can never be quite the same comfort to him as they used to be before a new sort of air and light came between them and his eyes. At midday, an impulse that seemed uncontrollable inspired him to look in at the bank.

"I really ought to see if Heron has come back," said he, "especially after dining and spending a whole evening *tete-a-tete* with his wife—there's a bill for chaff due on both sides."

He forgot to add to himself that John Heron, having been made free of the subject of Marion, was, therefore, the best substitute for her own self that was at hand.

The banker, however, had not returned ; and Guy had not the face to invent an excuse for another call upon Mrs. Heron. She would too surely have seen through him ; and then business really did require attention. When it was over, he spent the evening in writing his second letter ; and then subsided into tobacco smoke and dreams.

Wednesday morning opened brightly above, but sourly below. There was no letter from Marion. And as the day opened, so it went on. There was none all day. Nor could he call at the bank, for a French ship had come in from a client at Havre, and plunged him in insurances and bills of lading up to the eyes. Which, under the circumstances, was just as well.

But when Thursday morning came letterless, he began to think of scarlet fever, small-pox, broken limbs—all sorts of anxieties, defined and undefined. Two women from the Antipodes ought never to have

been allowed to go to London alone. It would be his eternal crime if anything had happened. If he did not hear from Marion by the last post, he would throw the *Lucille* of Havre to the winds, take the night-mail, and be in London before another sunrise. As the time for the last post drew dear, his impatience drove him to the post-office itself, so that he might know that day's fate the moment the letters came in.

They arrived at last; and there, sure enough, was a letter for him with the London postmark, and addressed in a woman's hand, both delicate and firm—altogether worthy to be Marion's own. But no sooner had he opened it than his face changed, and he was at The Cedars as fast as the first fly-horse at hand could crawl. It was after banking hours, or he would have gone to Chapter Street; but, any way, John Heron would surely be at home again by now.

John Heron was at home, sitting with his wife over the study fire. If the banker's parlour was stiff, dingy, and choked with traditions and cobwebs, the home sanctum of the justice and the future member was a model of dignified comfort, wherein the master of the house was to be seen at his best, his innumerable public cares laid aside.

Both husband and wife welcomed him heartily, with outstretched hands.

"You *are* a good fellow, Derwent," said the banker. "And what's more, we've been taking the liberty to say so behind your back, Kate and I. Sit down, and light a cigar."

"I hope Everybody is quite well?" asked Mrs. Heron.

"I—I hope so," said Guy, in a way that changed the nature of that ever-ready sympathy which insured her a certain charm for young men with love-stories for the rest of her days, however many they might be. "I've come on business, Heron—banking business, though ——"

"Though it's the wrong time," sighed Mrs. Heron. "Oh, dear! I *did* think better of *you*, Mr. Derwent. Just two hours home again—and of course all Marchgrave tearing him to pieces before he has time to turn round. Of course, it's in the nature of the rest of them—but oh—You!"

"Never mind, Guy," said John Heron, with a laugh. "Kate grumbles; but she's proud of it, all the same. Never mind shop hours between you and me. I hope there's nothing wrong?"

"I hope not—I think not," said Guy. "But ——"

Mrs. Heron could take a hint before it was given.

"I shan't forgive you, all the same," said she, "if you are more than six minutes over the affairs of the sun, moon, stars—even of Marchgrave."

She left the room, and left a pleasant smile behind.

"Now then," said Heron. "Out with it: and—it *is* wrong.

"No—but very strange. . . . You remember what I told you on Monday about my future father-in-law?"

"Well?"

"Then read this letter. It is from Marion's mother. And tell me what to do."

The banker settled his *pince-nez*, unfolded the letter slowly, and read aloud.

"DEAR MR. DERWENT" (it ran),

"The letter you received yesterday from me will have told you what need I have to protect our Marion (I will say nothing of myself) from the man who calls himself my husband. We have left the Clarence, and are staying at a small inn, called the Green Cheese, in Blink Lane, in the City. To-morrow (Thursday), the day you get this, we shall go back to Southampton and put up at the hotel where we parted—I forget the name: if we have to leave for elsewhere before seeing you, I will let you know where we are gone. But it is not enough for us to remove ourselves. It is my fortune, or rather Marion's and yours, that he is hunting; and it must be in safer hands than ours, over which he will surely set up claims if he knows where it is to be found. I dare not leave it in any bank here. But he knows nothing of you; and you are a man of business whom I trust, and who will do your best for Marion's sake and mine—I will not insult you by adding for your own. I thereby enclose you a draft on Messrs. Drake, of Lombard Street, which I have procured this day, for the whole amount—£70,000, which they are prepared to meet, as I have arranged with them this morning. Marion knows nothing of this, I need not say.

"Affectionately yours,

"LEAH FURNESS."

"I suppose you will invest the money, so as to give us a moderate income. But that I leave to you. Oh, Guy—be good to my May! And you will—for I, even I, have not quite forgotten how to trust; and I trust *you*. And *you alone*."

"Well?" asked John Heron, refolding the letter, and letting his *pince-nez* fall.

"You know as much as I do," said Guy. "Evidently that scoundrel has turned up again—and evidently there is a letter, or, I expect, two letters together, that I have not received. Of course I am off to Southampton by the first train—but meanwhile ——"

John Heron considered.

"To be sure; by the next train," he echoed. "Wait a bit, though! I know a trick worth two of that. Telegraph. The post's a snail, and the express is a tortoise. There's nothing like wire. Wire them, 'Come to Marchgrave;' tell them to come here to me."

Guy Derwent was a Marchgrave man; and John Heron was John Heron, whose counsel was diamond, and whose word was law. And this was the best of all laws—the law of Chivalry. Why should not a banker be a knight-errant—a protector of damsels and a champion of dames? We are not told that Sir Gareth of Orkney was a financier, but he may have been. And in that case there is nothing to hinder a financier from being a Sir Gareth of Orkney. Bankers become knights;

and if their knighthood means nothing . . . then must John Heron of Marchgrave be held an exception to a rule.

Yes—such a wire as that would be drawn of gold indeed. Guy drew a breath of deep relief. He could not well have reminded his friend of his offer and promise; and his friend had remembered both of his own free accord.

"You *are* a brick, Heron!" said Guy, schoolboy-wise, his eyes kindling. "I'll telegraph this minute ——"

"What—and rob Kate and me of your company? No, no! Kate will never forgive you: and you've mortally offended her already, you know. You must make your peace. Here are forms; send one to Southampton and another to town, and I'll send a special messenger to the station. I always keep one on the premises these busy times."

"And the money?" asked Guy, having filled up the forms without the least respect to number of words. He would have preferred to be his own messenger; but he could not refuse to stay for what, after all, was nothing more than a whim. "Shall I bring the draft to the bank to-morrow, or will you take it now?"

"It doesn't matter. But perhaps you had better leave it with me; it's not business-like to carry such things about on one at midnight—and till midnight you're a strict prisoner. I'll put it in my private safe here. You see, I keep everything on the premises—fire and thief-proof safes, special messengers; and all—except Guy Derwent, so I must seize the chance of keeping him, too, while I can."

"Here is the draft, then. And it will have to be invested ——"

"Rather! Mrs.—what's her name?—Furness is a lucky woman, my lad. She'll have seventy thousand pounds' worth of original shares in the new docks. She'll help to make Marchgrave!"

CHAPTER IV.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

The far East of London is all very well in its way. Some travellers from the West—they are not quite so few now as they used to be—will even assure their friends, on their return, that Sahara is not in it with some of the waterside districts, regarded as a desert; or the North Pole for cold, hunger, and poverty. And that, for people who regard such things from an outside and artistic point of view, is all very well. But then they have never seen Piggot's Town.

Piggot's Town is not in the East. It has every motive for wishing it were. For indeed it has every reason for wishing itself anywhere rather than where a forgetful Providence permitted it to be placed by a forgotten Piggot. It is in the far North—that is to say, of London. The East has succeeded in striking attention; and it may be hoped

in a way of striking something less barren than attention. It has its picturesqueness of human life, and human nature, and human struggle —foul and horrible they may be, but they are not dead and dull. People starve; but they help one another. But the far North generally, and Piggot's Town in particular, has never yet struck anybody with so much as a sense of actual existence. The people do not actually starve, so there is no imperative call for anybody to trouble about them; and, in effect, nobody does trouble. There is nothing particularly foul or horrible about the quarter to create a national scandal. There is simply an air of feebleness, purposelessness, and universal blight beside which the grim struggles of life on the Lower Thames are stimulating—as being life, after all.

Nothing is remembered about Piggot; but it is written upon the face of the work that lives after him that he must have been three things at least: a Builder, a Bankrupt, and a Fool. No builder, without being a fool, would have started a mushroom settlement on the edge of an undrained marsh, where nobody would ever want to live for choice; and nobody but a bankrupt could have left so complete a blight behind.

Then there is such an air of pretentious gentility about its grime and squalor. Behind undulating flagstones with toe-traps and greasy hollows, diversified by mounds of dust and litter, runs a row of shops, half of them two-thirds built, and all of them empty—some with "To Let" chalked ominously on broken and tumbling shutters. Not one of them has ever been taken: not one ever will. Between this forlorn row and an exceptionally black railway siding is the public promenade and recreation ground; for, as the people have nothing ostensible to work at, they must play. And play they do, in a dismal way of their own, making incessant and mysterious use of bent buttons, lumps of gray chalk, potsherds, and oyster-shells. Trade is represented hereabouts by a public-house at one end of the shops, and by a shed close to the siding, devoted to knobs of coal, two or three faint-looking cabbages, and a bottle of pink and yellow sticky-looking balls.

The prospect is repulsive in its very monotony. There is nothing to catch the eye—not even a tall chimney. The visitor feels in his bones that were it not for the expanse of soot, and black dust, and premature decay, he would look over dismal and malarious marshes. Here and there he may catch sight of a stagnant-looking ditch, coiling about in the most incalculable way, and cropping up in all sorts of unexpected places. However, as it is not likely he will remain long to watch the nondescripts hanging about the door of the Royal Albert, or the barelegged girls playing hop-scotch, or the scrofulous youths trying to cheat one another with buttons and farthings, or the eternal string of trucks creeping through the railway bridge, or the solitary dock-leaf—the entire flora of Piggot's Town—on the edge of the sewer, he will no doubt fare further down a by-street labelled Belvedere Road.

Here, at the entrance, he gets a view of what were intended for the backyards of the shops, had anybody been induced to trust them with his capital—as things are, simply a chaotic *debris* of rotten palings,

broken chimney-pots, old boots, and more oyster-shells. Here, also, half the houses—all with one storey, one door flush with the street, three windows, and no basement, as if turned out of Piggot's only mould—were to let; but the rest partially revealed the secret of their being. Piggot had evidently not intended his Town for artisans; but mainly, one might guess, for the clerk who marries a greater fool than himself on twenty-five shillings a week, and, by the time he is fifty, struggles to make it thirty by trying to entice a lodger and a possible son-in-law combined, who may repeat the same round of imbecility, and increase the number of the most helpless and hopeless class in all the world.

On each side of Belvedere Road hung the inevitable slums—blight upon blight—where the ladies of Piggot's Town did their marketing; and such hands at a bargain were they that their purveyors carried on their business at a loss on the whole, and were swept away and renewed in a body with almost annual punctuality. What became of those who vanished nobody ever knew, any more than what becomes of the pins; the greater wonder is that anybody should follow them in their ruinous career. Piggot's Town could have supported with ease a dozen county court lawyers, if it could have afforded half a fee among them.

So who shall say that the East dares hold a candle to Piggot's Town? For there, at least, nobody has to keep up appearances; there, at least, pluck and muscle are of value; there a man can make a real fight before he falls. There is nothing even to fight in Piggot's Town; and anybody with an ounce of pluck in him would take the first train for Elsewhere.

The far end of Belvedere Road, opening upon a quagmire, was called Euphrosyne Terrace; and each of the very last two houses in Euphrosyne Terrace (the aristocratic quarter, distinguished from the rest of the road by a doorstep, an area, a knocker, and an extra storey) had a crimson lamp and a brass plate to scowl at one another across the way. So like they were, no mortal might one from the other know, except by the difference of name upon the brass. On the left was "Mr. E. Smith, Surgeon;" on the right, "Wyndham Snell, M.R.C.S., L.A.C., etc., etc., etc., Physician, Surgeon, and Accoucheur."

Mr. Wyndham Snell was a slim, youngish-looking man, with a pink complexion and fair hair—rather good-looking in a chinless, snub-faced sort of way. The four most observable points about him were a pair of singularly white and delicate hands, a more than needful display of dingy linen, flaxen hair brushed and plastered into a pyramid, and the sweetest of smiles. He was smiling now to himself as he stood drumming upon the parlour window, watching a maid-servant carrying out a big medicine-bottle from Smith's, over the way.

"That's Wigley's girl," murmured he. "Poor Smith! It's wonderful what an affinity there is between that plodding dolt and the patients that never pay. . . . I only wish there were one or two more that *did* pay ——"

His remarks were half to himself, half to a stiff, angular, sharp-featured and underfed-looking youngish woman, in rusty brown, engaged

in studying a heap of greasy scraps of paper at the round table, the top of which kept sinking down and starting up again with a creak of pain whenever she moved her elbows.

"And there's others than us wishing that, I'm afraid," said she, with a snapping sort of sigh. "I'm afryde" was what she really said; while there was no trace of the Cockney in her husband's gentle and flexible tones. "There's Chapman. And there's Giles."

"And who may Chapman be—and who may Giles?" asked he, drumming the market chorus from "Masaniello."

"Greens. And chops," said she. "And to think that just a few shillings on account would carry us on for ever so long more."

"Oh—shillings! That all, Julia? Why, I thought it was pounds. Oh, let 'em wait for shillings—Chapman and Giles. To think that a scientific man should be bothered about chops—and greens! If it was ortolans, now, or foie grass—but, Julia, you never had a soul."

"I know it," said she sadly, but with a queer sort of pride. "Soles are dear."

"I wasn't talking about fish, my dear," said Wyndham Snell. "But there, one can't make a silk purse out of a—never mind. You're a good girl, Julia, all the same. Now, if only greens and chops were patients ——"

"That Smith gets all the patients now. I've been watching 'em go in and out like flies."

"They don't pay. If a duchess was to be upset in Belvedere Road, and break her grace's leg, see who she'd come to—that's all."

"Yes, Wyndham. But if they don't py Smith, he don't py them; and whoever heard of a duchess drivin' daown Belvedere Road?"

"A countess, then. It's all the same. . . . By the way, *there's* a pretty girl going into Smith's! By Jove, I'd treat her for nothing, for the sake of her nose!"

"Wyndham! Just come and help me over this accaount. I think they've got the farthings wrong."

Mrs. Snell was not, and never had been, a pretty girl.

Wyndham Snell lingered a moment at the window, to give Smith's patient a chance of admiring his hair and his smile. But, as she took no notice, he shrugged his shoulders, and lounged to his wife's side.

"I can't help it," said he deprecatingly. "I'm the most domesticated creature going: and yet—though I'm not what you may call regularly handsome—I can't go to the window without—without - —"

"They myke it three farthings; I can only myke it one . . . Who was that girl?"

"Hanged if *I* know. If I was to know all the young persons that makes eyes at one —— Good Lord! I hope it's hysteria. I don't wish Smith ill, but I do hope it's hysteria, all the same."

"I do wish we knew what we could have for supper to-day."

"Dinner—dinner, Julia. Do learn to call things by their right names."

"Dinner's all right. There's the cold leg; and a pickled onion apiece. There's three still in the jar"

"Lunch—lunch, Julia. We dine at six ; we lunch at one."

"Well ; there's nothing for it at six but the cold knuckle ; and p'r'aps I might find one more gherkin, if looked very hard."

"Great heaven ! And thus science rewards her votaries in this nineteenth century of ours, that we brag and bluster over ! . . . . Well, never mind me, Julia. Didn't I tell you ? Only I've so much to think of and all . . . I thought I told you, though, I've a particular appointment, you know, with some *cong-frayrs*, in town. I shan't starve."

Mrs. Snell looked up sharply.

"*Cong-frayrs!* Is that French for a countess or for an opera dancer, Wyndham Snell ? Of course it's nothing to me ; only I should like to know."

Wyndham Snell bestowed upon her a smile that was positively Divine.

"Jealous, little woman, eh ? Well, well, it's not my fault. It's my misfortune, you know. *Cong-frayrs* means a fellow-practitioner—that's all. Jenner, you know, and all that lot. It's a little meeting at the Green Cheese—a medical meeting—and not a petticoat allowed. You won't sit up. I'll take the key. Bless your loving heart—as if your Wyndham ever looked at eyes that weren't yours !"

A cold smile stole over Julia's face ; but as soon as she became conscious of it she shut it up in a moment, and put it away with an indefinable snap, just as she seemed to do most things.

"It's a poor heart that never rejoices." murmured Wyndham Snell. "And when a man works as I do ——"

The appeal was irresistible. Satisfied that no petticoat was to sully the festivities of the Green Cheese, she clean forgot that, if never rejoicing constitutes poverty of heart, hers must be poor indeed ; or that when a woman works as she did, she also deserves an occasional holiday.

"And this one won't cost much," said he. "Its strictly professional. I've got to make a demonstration before those fellows—the tympanum, you know—the great guns are curious about it, and it may lead to heaven knows what. Indeed it must—it shall. You'll ride in your carriage yet, Julia—not in a common pillbox, but a Victoria and pair. . . . Yes, half-a-crown will do very well."

Julia emptied an ancient purse of a stock of threepennies and farthings.

"The byker *must* wyte then," she sighed. "One and elevenpence farthing. Can you myke that do !"

"Hardly. A physician can hardly meet the top sawyers of his profession with less than half-a-crown. It wouldn't look well. Do you mean to say that's all the money in the house, Julia ?"

"Why, you had over four sovereigns when you went out Tuesday afternoon !"

"My dear, I didn't ask what we have had, or what we shall have. The question is, what we have now. And they weren't four sovereigns —two of them were halves. Let us be accurate, my dear, whatever happens."

"Then you have nothing, Wyndham—nothing at all?"

"Nothing at all—thanks to this confounded social system of ours, where a dolt like Smith gets all the patients, and talent is left to starve on cold knuckle and pickled gherkin. And you have one shilling and elevenpence farthing—not a penny more?"

"Not a farthing more. And the rent's due to-morrow; and the water called the third time this morning; and the Royal Albert sent to say they can't send any more beer ——"

"*Et tu, Brute!*"

He spoke lightly, but for the first time his smile looked forced. There is always a point up to which ill fortune can be borne, be it the loss of one's ship with all one's fortune on board. But beyond that point, nothing—even if it be no more than the loss of a glass of beer. Men have been known, before now, to withstand ruin, pain, shame even, without flinching, and then to go suddenly mad because of some trifle—such as finding a fly in a teacup, or mislaying a piece of string. It is merely the doctrine of the last straw.

"Then—Julia—perhaps you will kindly suggest what the devil is to be done. I know women aren't much good at suggesting; but any port in a storm."

"I—I'm sure I don't know—if *you* don't," said she, with a curiously timid hesitation for one who looked so sharp and, in a general way, so capable of snapping. "But—it has struck me that we might set up where there isn't another doctor quite so near, and the pytients py, and the trydesmen ain't quite so poor, nor have to dun one quite so hard."

"Where's that, Julia? If you'll tell me, I'll go. Where *is* the place where patients pay and counter-skippers don't dun?"

"You might write another book, Wyndham. After such a success as your first ——"

"My first? Oh—ah—yes; of course. Snell, on the—on the—Pericardium. I *am* writing another book, Julia. Indeed, I may say it's half written, so far as being all in my head goes. But a book isn't written in a day—no, nor in a year—at least, when it's a book like mine. And then the jealousy of the profession! I believe it's half because of my book I'm kept down. It was beyond 'em. It had too many ideas. . . . Lord, to think I can't even make a clean bolt of it because I haven't enough for a railway fare."

"Or couldn't you go lecturing again? Something amusing, you know, with songs."

"I *could*, Julia. Though I say it myself, I could: and no man better. Find me a hall, where they'll let me stand up without money down; and a printer to trust me for a week; and there wouldn't be many in it with Wyndham Snell."

"Could *I* do anything, Wyndham? There's a terrible lot of washing wants doing in Piggot's Taown; and it doesn't get it, not even our own—the laundresses *are* so dear. I might do it cheaper—and then, after a bit, you might afford an 'all."

"Heaven alive, woman! No. The wife of a professional man

taking in washing! I, the husband of a washerwoman! What would the Smiths say? If it could be done under the rose, why then. . . . But things aren't done under the rose—in Piggot's Town."

She sighed again. Possibly she had dimly dreamed that her offer would have been resented on other grounds: that he might have asked her where she could find time for washing in addition to her other labours—fighting with the shopkeepers, cooking and contriving the meals, doing all the housework, making her own clothes, mending her husband's, pinching herself at every turn and planning how to pinch herself more, keeping and dispensing the drugs, and, in general, doing hourly battle with the wolf at the door. However, he was he; and, as he himself had said, silk purses require silk for their making.

And yet, if the truth could be known, this sharp and hard-visaged slave had a strange sort of satisfaction in their being deadly poor—the poorest people even in Piggot's Town. The world did not yet believe in Wyndham Snell. But she believed in him with all her heart and soul; and if her love was not demonstrative, it was because of awkwardness and awe combined.

These ungainly women have a hard time, not so much because they do not often get much love, as because nobody ever credits them with the power of loving—greater in them, perhaps, than in their luckier sisters, because there is self-love to interfere. They are thought cold because they do not know how to seem warm.

And if her Wyndham should ever become rich and great, she sometimes positively trembled to picture how other and lovelier women, real marchionesses among them, would be weaving spells for the unquestionably susceptible heart of that fascinating being. She knew herself to be plain; to have several more years as well as gray hairs than her husband; to be a dull companion; to be unrefined. She had a cloudy consciousness that her chief charm in his eyes had been a few hundred pounds that had vanished years ago. But she knew above all things that she loved him, and that a man who cannot lay his hand on more than one shilling and elevenpence farthing cannot manage to go very far astray. So long as he lived in Piggot's Town he would need a slave; that is to say, he would need her.

"I knew 'twas no good asking a woman for advice," said he. "You've only proposed a dozen things, one more absurd than the other. Look at me, Julia—a man of talent, if ever there was one; a man of exceptional skill in the noblest of professions; a man of varied accomplishments—though I don't take any credit for that, seeing how easy they came—and buried alive, hounded by duns, condemned to starve on pickled gherkins. I tell you, Julia, in spite of all your grumbling and complaining, that it is not my fault—it's the world's; and that something must and shall be done. I wish there was a revolution to-morrow; I'd be on the top of the barricades. I wish there was a devil; I'd sell him the best bargain he ever got in his life for five hundred pounds down. . . . Look, I say—and hanged if there isn't another fool carrying his carcase to Smith, and not to me."

"Not Wigley's girl again?" asked Mrs. Snell.

"I said a he, and a fool. I shall say a she and a fool, if you talk that way, Julia. It isn't my fault if Wigley's girl likes to look over her shoulder when the only gentleman in the parish chances to be in eye-reach. There he goes, the idiot. Incipient Cartaract, I guess. He's almost rubbing his nose on Smith's plate. Why doesn't he knock, the old noodle? But——— Hulloa! What's up? Hanged if he isn't coming to *me!*"

"A patient—to us? Oh, Wyndham! *Does* he look as if he'll py?"

Even Julia Snell felt a thrill of hope as she started from her seat and went to answer the bell. She knew that she would look to anybody like a respectable, elderly housemaid—she knew it only too well; for "anybody" would include Wyndham. So she prepared to play her part of servant; for no patient could be expected to pay a doctor whose wife answered the door. But the wintry sort of hope that had come into her plain face flickered out when she found herself face to face with a middle-aged man, who, though more than commonly well-wrapped up about the neck, jaws, and ears, had the air of being able to snap his fingers at the doctors, and who said, in a heavy voice:

"Good-day, Mrs. Snell. Is Wyndham at home? Ah!--I see you don't remember me."

He undid his wraps, as he spoke, before entering, and showed a face that, to judge from her look of dismay, Julia must be remembering only too well. Not that there was anything to object to, at first sight—a grave, strong, manly face, neatly shaven off all but a pair of the most respectable grizzled whiskers, and with keen, resolute eyes.

"I have not forgotten you, Mr. Furness!" said she. "So far from forgetting you—I would give a hundred paound, if I had it, sooner than ever set eyes on you agyne. You may syve yourself the trouble, sir. My husband, Dr. Snell, is a professional man; and we choose our own company—now."

"Oh—you think I'm come to bet or to beg, Mrs. Snell? Quite right of you to be particular. Young Windbag—I beg your pardon, Dr. Wyndham Snell--always did want a nursemaid. But never you fear, I'm come to do him a good turn; and you too. I know what you think of me; but my money, I suppose, is as good as any other man's—and a long sight better than none."

Rude as was the speech in manner, it was not unkindly in tone. There had been an ominous movement of Mrs. Snell's bony hand as if to slam the door in her visitor's face; but after a moment's silent duel of eyes, she yielded, with one of her frequent sighs.

He followed her into the parlour, taking note on his passage of many trivial but significant things—the absence of a doormat, the patches of green damp in the ceiling, the ragged holes in the thin floorcloth, all combined with a cleanliness which, however meritorious, cruelly emphasised symptoms of poverty that would pass unnoticed in a general muddle.

Wyndham Snell was seated at the round table before a big volume opened so as to cover the greasy bills. He rose politely; but suddenly his smile turned a little faint, and he recoiled.

"Adam Furness—by Jove!"

"Yes; here I am," said the other, still noting things with his eyes. "Everybody meets everybody, they say, once in seven years. How are you flourishing? Seems to me, from what I've seen of it, that this is a neighbourhood where a doctor ought to do well."

"Rather," said Wyndham Snell, throwing a warning look at his wife, who had reseated herself and taken up some sewing. "There isn't a better neighbourhood for practice than Piggott's Town. If it wasn't for a doctor or two, the people would die like flies. No wonder you're surprised to see *me* here, instead of Harley Street or Saville Row; but in our noble profession, Furness, we're bound to be in the forlorn hope of the battle. Poverty has a claim, sir, before which even dyspeptic duchesses, nay, royalty itself, must give way. This house is not a palace; but we must take things as we find them. There's hundreds of medical men—I don't blame them, mind—that will look after princes and peers; and that all the more obliges the chosen few of us to devote our talents to the poor."

"I see. Philanthropy. Not a bad game when its well played."

"It is hard, you must own, when you're telegraphed for to a consultation over a—never mind who, in Mayfair—to send back word that a greengrocer's tenth baby prevents your coming."

"I suppose so. Well—conscience does set hard tasks, no doubt; but then it gives high pay."

"Very true, Furness; most true. I'm afraid I can't offer you a glass of wine. I have to practice on temperance principles in a place like this; and I mustn't keep for myself what I mustn't prescribe. But of course you'll stop and dine?"

The table gave a tremendous creak; which told Adam Furness, as plainly as if it had spoken in words, that Wyndham's foot had come in expressive contact with Julia's.

"You forget, Wyndham," said she, with frigid docility. "You are engaged to dine in town."

"Oh, hang it—so I am. A medical thing, Furness, where I'm like Hamlet in the play—indispensable. I don't know what I should do without Julia. She's my social memory, you know. Well—another time."

The same cold smile came and vanished that had come and vanished before when he threw her a crumb of praise, and, for just a single moment, took ten years from her age.

"And—by the way—talking of that," said her husband, with a laugh, "do you happen to have any loose change? I hate changing notes before I'm obliged—on principle, you know—and it isn't worth while to carry a lot of gold up to town and back again. And, in a poor neighbourhood like this, it's downright funny the style a doctor's shillings and sixpenses run away. Could you spare me—h'm—half-a-crown?"

"No, Snell. I can't spare you half-a-crown. But I'll spare you five hundred pounds."

Mrs. Snell nearly let her sewing drop, she started so. Her husband threw himself back in his chair.

"Five hundred pounds!"

"Why the devil do you put on your windbag airs to me? Don't I know how you're off, and don't you know that I know? You're starving in this heaven-forsaken hole because it's the only place where you can squat for nothing; and because nobody knows you. You don't keep wine because there isn't a pothouse that will trust you. You're not engaged to dinner; you've got no bank notes; and you want half-a-crown for just the same reason that other men like you want half-crowns. You're an impostor, Snell; and I hate imposture. You've failed as an actor; you've failed as a finance agent; you're failing as a quack; and your confounded conceit would make you fail even as a suicide, if you tried. No offence, Mrs. Snell. *You* won't mind what I say. Well—I'm come to give an old friend another chance—and this time you can't fail."

Wyndham Snell shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, Julia won't mind. She has a fine sense of humour, has Julia; she can take a joke, and so can I. If there's anything we can do for you, Furness—without prejudice, you know—we'll do it with all the pleasure in life——"

"Never mind about the pleasure. To come straight to the point, there's a lady, in whom I'm interested, that wants a home, with medical attendance, and strict privacy."

"A lady?" asked Mrs. Snell, very sharply indeed.

"A lady. In short, my wife," said Adam.

"And you," said Mrs. Snell, while her husband silently contemplated his finger-nails; "you propose that your own wife, a lady, should lodge—*here?*"

"Sooner here than anywhere. Where is there to be found such privacy? Where such careful watching? Where such undivided medical attention?" There might be the dream of a sneer in his words; but certainly no more than a dream. "There's only one little thing I forgot to say. This lady, though as surely married to me as Mrs. Snell to you, is subject to one slight delusion, or rather two. She has taken a morbid hatred to myself; and she believes herself, poor thing, to be unmarried. It's strange; but ——"

"A case of monomania—and exceedingly interesting," said the doctor. "I see. I should like to undertake the case. I'm writing a book on obscure diseases of the brain. But it's a serious thing. I'm not sure, when I come to think of it, that five hundred pounds ——"

"Quite so. Five hundred pounds down, as a premium; that should enable you to put your house in order, and make a fair profit for a year; I can't be bothered with monthly bills and payments, and that sort of thing. I don't know myself where I may be. . . . Or, wait a bit. What do you say to this—add a thousand to the five hundred"—he glanced at Mrs. Snell as he spoke—"and cure her as quick as you can? Of course I mean money down."

The doctor and his wife exchanged looks.

Fifteen hundred pounds all at once—a leap from an abyss into the light of air.

"It's worth thinking of," said the former. "Of course, fifte
hundred's none too much—and there is nothing takes so long to cure
monomania —— "

"Well—take it or leave it," said Adam Furness. "I don't suppo
it will be hard to find a doctor who'll take in a woman with a weak li
for fifteen hundred, and run his chance whether he makes a profit o
of her or no. . . ."

Wyndham Snell's eyes roved instinctively to the brass plate acro
the way.

"Do you mean to propose that if this poor lady's cure took twen
years I should get no more ?"

"Just so. But then you'd get no less if she died to-morrow."

There was no special emphasis upon the words. But they we
spoken just slowly enough for each of them to tell. And, though th
were received in dead silence, he added not a single word more, till ea
had its full time for weighing and being weighed.

"If she died to-morrow," he repeated, in an absent way. . . .
"Mrs. Snell will kindly prepare a room; and meanwhile you'll ma
a run up to town and see my poor Leah. You'll have to judge of h
state of mind. You'll have to assure yourself of her state of mi
towards me; and to hear what she says about being married.
woman denying her own marriage—who ever heard of such a thing o
of Bedlam ? And I'm afraid she's got a weak heart, as well as a we
brain. However, all that's for you to judge, as her medical attend
—not for me."

"Is there—is there any chance of her refusing to come ?"

"Every chance—if she sees or hears of me. None, if you tell h
that you come on the part of one Guy Derwent, of Marchgrave. Yo
say that he has gone to Southampton, and sent you to town, so t
there might be no chance of missing her; and that you, being the
to find her, are to telegraph to him at Southampton, and to accomp
her to Marchgrave. But I'll give you your exact story, as we go."

"And when she finds herself here ?"

"When that happens—I leave things to you; and"—he bent
head politely—"to Mrs. Snell. Perhaps fifteen hundred was a t
mean. Say two thousand : fifteen hundred down this very aftern
and when I hear from you this day week, five hundred more. .
No; not another word. That's my very last, and —— "

"If we start at once, we shall catch the eleven-eighteen. Julia,
dear ——— "

Adam Furness left the parlour first; husband and wife followed

"And you said," she half whispered, "you'd sell yourself to
Nick—for five hundred pound."

"I didn't—so hold *your* jaw. But if I did—what then ?"

"You've done it for four times the money. That's all."

"I haven't. But if I had—the more fool he. . . Two thous
Julia ! When he might have had the couple of us for two half-cro
. . . Well, well. There's no pleasing a woman. When she's
she worries; and when she is rich she worries all the more."

. . . . . .

Here's the place," said Adam Furness, as the cab drew up at the d of the Green Cheese, Blink Lane. "You go up alone—first-floor t. I'll wait below."

I know the country," said Wyndham Snell. "She's not dangerous n?'

Not if she doesn't see me. If you've got your story pat, she'll be mb. By the way, if you find a girl with her, don't be surprised. It's only my daughter, Marion."

Will she know who I am, and what I'm come for?"

Of course. She'll go with her mother to your house; and I'll ollow alone by the same train, see her as soon as she arrives, and ain—I mean, bring her away. Keep up the fiction about March- e—that's all. The girl will understand."

am Furness lounged into the bar; Wyndham Snell threw a smeil a nod to the girl at the counter, and went up the narrow and ed staircase two steps at a time.

t's uncommonly queer I should have told Julia I was coming to Green Cheese this very day, and that here I am," thought he—as mere fact of his having told even a half truth by accident was a of miracle. "Ah! this will be the door."

tapped; but it seemed to fling itself open before him, as he found elf face to face with a girl with clasped hands and scared eyes.

You are the doctor?" she cried in a voice that sounded stifled. O—come here!"

S seized him by the hand, and led him to a horsehair sofa on which handsome woman with a calm white face, at which he needed not k twice to see what had befallen. Leah Furness had found the e longed for sooner than she had dreamed. She had escaped at o where neither hound nor hunter might pursue.

CHAPTER V.

FORTUNE ABROAD.

ADAM FURNESS stood beside the body of the woman, wife or no wife, om he had hounded to her death as surely as if he had succeeded nding her over alive to the interested mercies of Wyndham Snell. ver he had been to her for these nineteen years, he must have her once: for one could read at a glance, capacities for passion ace, and she, even as she lay here, pale and cold, was beautiful And Death knows how to bridge over broader gaps than nineteen

"A bad business—this," murmured the soft voice of the Doctor, ot a yard away.

The widower started—he must for the moment have been far
himself alone.

"Yes—it's that," he growled. "Poor Leah—poor girl!"

"I mean poor me," said Wyndham Snell, in the same monoto
before—a tone that nature or cultivation had taught to carry just
as the ear it was meant to reach, and no farther. "It's just my
and I'm—hanged if it's my fault this time."

"What the devil do you mean?" asked Adam Furness roughly
a sudden flash in his eye.

"Hush!" whispered the other, nodding slightly towards the
of the sofa, over which a hidden face was bowed. "I mean
I'm ruined by one minute and a quarter—that's all. On my
it's hard."

Adam Furness had already faced round upon him, and now sur
the man he had meant to make his tool with a long look of grave
Then his eyes followed the direction of the other's nod, and rest
an instant upon the hidden face and tumbled brown hair.

There should, by rights, be but little room for pity in the hea
one who had, in effect, been hiring an assassin. But no man can
hard of heart as not to feel some sort of awe when fate, or chan
whatever be the power in which he believes, has taken his crim
its own hands and saved him from the need of developing sinful th
into sinful deed. It tempts a man to believe in Providence itself
while gaining the reward of murder, his hands are left clean.

"Oh—you mean your fee," he said. "Come downstairs. We
talk before the child."

Ever since their flight from the Clarence, Marion had lived
dream. It is just in dreams that we hurry off by unknown w
escape from unknown hunters; that we find ourselves now in a s
railway-station, now crawling through a fog, and now in some da
dingy inn, our lives growing all the while more and more confuse
strange faces crowding out sense and memory. And could this b
than a dream—would she not wake up in a moment, and tou
mother's warm and living hand?

So surely thus it seemed that she endeavoured to wake. But
never entered her deepest and wildest of dreams that so dear
beautiful a mother should die. She was numbed in mind and i
as if in an actual nightmare, when one may live four whole
horror in a fraction of an hour. Had her mother spoken to h
dead lips, she would not have been amazed. She did not mov
she was left alone. Her whole body was heaving; but no
me.

Presently a hand was laid on her shoulder—heavily, but no
ly. She had not wondered that her father should be here.
wonderful in a dream.

Marion," said he. A first broken sob told him that she h
, with her ears. "Listen to me. . . . You *must* listen;
v it's hard. Can you—to a word? Very well. I am you

Marion. I must think for you ; and I have been thinking for the best, I trust and I believe. That gentleman who came with me is Dr. Snell ; I brought him to judge, as a physician, of your poor mother's state of mind. . . . Well. . . . and he finds her dead of her heart. . So he certifies. You will have to live somewhere, you know. I've arranged for you to stay, just for the present, with Dr. and Mrs. Snell."

She looked up—still with dry and burning eyes. She was terribly alone and forlorn—parted from her mother by death, from her lover by worse than death ; and all in three short days. What mattered it where she went, for a time, so long as it was far enough from Marchgrave, and beyond discovery by Guy ? She could write to him from anywhere ; and how her life must be filled, thought and time must show.

"And—mamma ?" said she.

The question must have bewildered him if he was speculating on any opposition to his plans.

"Everything will be seen to," said he. "You can do nothing more. This is no place for you. And . . . you will come now. Yes ; you may be by yourslf five minutes if you like. Only remember that the Doctor is waiting to take you home ; and that a physician's time must not be wasted by a girl. Never mind about your things ; the people here will see to them."

Five minutes, as it were, for a breathing space between two lives—a second as incalculable as that which lies before us when we die.

Left alone, Marion pressed her lips to her mother's forehead, covered the face, kneeled down beside the sofa, and tried to pray without words. More than the five minutes' grace had been given when she was summoned by a sharp tap on the door.

"Good-bye, mamma," she breathed hurridly, without another glance at the face ; and hurried away.

The journey, first by cab and then by rail, was performed in silence so far as she was concerned, while her father and the Doctor, of whose companionship she was only dimly conscious, conversed in too low a tone for her to catch more than an unconnected word or two here and there.

Once, before leaving the better streets, the cab stopped at a large stone building, and two or three times at shops, where the Doctor got out for a minute or two and returned with various parcels ! so that by the time they reached the station they were inconveniently loaded. Reaching the shed that did duty for a station at Piggot's Town, the luggage, great and small, was left on the platform ; and, while Wyndham Snell was astonishing a wooden-legged loafer with the sight of a whole half-crown, and giving directions about the things, Adam Furness spoke to Marion.

"The Snells," he said, "are people I can trust. The Doctor, being a genius and a philanthropist, is of course as poor as a rat ; and he has married a homely woman without an H to her skin—your learned men always do. But I've put it in their power to treat you well, and like a friend ; and I shall see you from time to time whenever I can. For the

first time, in a week from to-day ; and then we can talk further abo
your plans. For now—good-bye."

"Now, Miss Furness," said Wyndham Snell, hurrying up to he
"as they haven't sent the carriage, I dare say you won't mind walki
to Euphrosyne Terrace—it's not five minutes—and I hope, I do hop
we shall be able to make you feel at home. We're a bit in the roug
at present—our servants struck last Friday, so we haven't had time
get new ones ; but all that will be put right in no time. And, after a
one doesn't measure welcome by the yard."

To find an eminent physician living, without servants, in a ba
settlement was very much less strange to one with Marion's experienc
of distant travel than her new host supposed ; she had taken mu
greater incongruities as matters of course, and, had she been in a cri
cal humour, his excuses would have been to her far more curious th
the things excused. No common-place courtesies came to her lips
way of answer ; and they reached Euphrosyne Terrace without anoth
word.

"Ah, here we are, Julia," said he, as, having opened the door wi
his latch-key, he went first into the narrow passage. Mrs. Wyndh
Snell—Miss Furness ; our new guest, my dear."

"*Miss* Furness ?" exclaimed Mrs. Snell, surveying Marion fr
head to heel.

"Miss Furness, Juila. A sad circumstance has changed our pla
Would you mind stepping for a moment into the parlour, my d
young lady, while I explain ? Mrs. Wyndham Snell is naturally ta
a little by surprise. . . . There, Julia. So that's done. Two thous
in my pockets—all in bank notes and gold ! I think we'll asto
Smith now, eh ? Two thousand ! Ah—Skill's the horse to back
the two mile after all. 'Tisn't every physician that makes his
thousand a day—his seven hundred and thirty thousand a year !"

"You said *Miss* Furness," said she.

A woman whose notions of finance are bounded by the task of hav
to buy shillings-worths with sixpenses is not easily carried away
golden dreams. A visible five-pound note would have been far m
impressive to Mrs. Snell.

"Yes ; exit mother—enter daughter. And a live daughter like
for a dead mother—I call it a good exchange. Adam Furness i
such a bad lot, after all—I've known better men do shabbier thin
I have indeed."

"That girl is to live here—in this house—with you and me ?"

"In this house—with you and me."

"And for how long ? Is that arranged too ?"

"Julia, one would think your father was an acute angle and y
mother a quart of vinegar. Yes, it's all arranged. More than
minutes, and less than a hundred years."

"My father was a respectable coal merchant, and my mother
cousin to a dentist, as you very well know. *I* don't pretend to
star, and a cherubim, and a hangel—I do my duty in that stati
life ; and if everybody did the same, 'twould be a better world.

em that do their duties, they have their rights; and I'm not going have that—girl, in *this* haouse, no, not for a thaousand paound. nd so—there!"

"And quite right too. Nor would I, my dear. But it's for two ousand, you see."

"Nor for ten thaousand, then! So there!"

"Julia! You would turn away Fortune when she is knocking, sitively double-knocking, at the front door?"

"I'd ——"

He with all his coolness, she with all her stiffness, almost jumped. r even while he was speaking the double knock came.

When, however, Mrs. Snell recovered and opened, it was not to a y holding a pair of scales and with a bandage over her eyes. It ght, nevertheless, be Fortune, all the same; for the shapes in which comes are countless—sometimes, indeed, making people slam the r on her very nose, and without ever learning whom they have ned away. On the present occasion, if Dame Fortune it were, she e in the guise of a broad-faced man, with a sullen, dogged air, a ious odour, and black and broken nails.

At such a sight, it had been the habit of Wyndham Snell, for long t, to retire into invisible privacy, leaving Julia to deal with the my. On the present occasion he thrust himself chivalrously in t of the lady, and substituted for her sombre sharpness the gent· of smiles.

"And pray, my man," he asked, "who are you?"

"I'm no more a man than you be! So none of your soft sawder h me, Doctor Snell," exploded the representative of Fortune in a ow that must have been heard half down Belvedere Road. "I'm p, that's who I am."

"Crisp? Well, I'm glad to see you, Crisp, I'm sure, whoever you One of my patients? Let me see—anyhow, it isn't a case of k lungs."

"Patient, indeed! No, Doctor; it's Impatient, this go. Here's oldest boots, my missus was green enough to take in while I was —but they don't take in me. Not another patch on 'em till I see colour of my little account; and that's two pound twelve for over year. So here's the old things; I'm not going to find no more er for nothing, not I. So take 'em to them as will."

Something black flew over Wyndham Snell's head, and fell in the orm of what had once been boots at the foot of the stairs.

"And if you want to know what's to follow them boots, 'tis a summons," shouted Mr. Crisp, for all Piggot's Town to hear. "I reckon you've got sticks enough for two pound twelve—not that you've paid them, I'll be bound. But every man for himself; and a man that don't pay his bootmaker—that man ought to be flogged at the cart's tail!"

"And what of a man who doesn't pay his medical attendant—eh, Crisp?" asked Wyndham Snell cheerfully.

"pays mine—and he's Smith; and for why? Because he pays me."

"Ah—mutual accommodation, I suppose. He cures your body, a
you mend his—no; I won't waste a pun. If you had any sense
humour, Mr. Crisp, you would perceive the folly of asking a pro
sional gentleman for money in such an untradesmanlike way. I
going to give a rather extensive order for boots, and should of cou
have preferred to patronize a local tradesman; but you have compel
me to transfer my custom to the West End, and hang me if I'll ever
a good natured thing again. I've done with you, Mr. Crisp; and w
every tradesman in Piggot's Town."

"That's true enough, Doctor—seeing they've done with you."

"They'll have to be, my man. Pick up those boots, Julia. Tha
you, my dear. There, Mr. Crisp. One — two — three sovereig
You'll give me a receipt and the change. And there, Mr. Crisp—
make you a present of the boots; you may wear them yourself, if y
please. And now be off for an impudent blackguard; go to blazes, y
cobbling thief, and if they condescend to ask who kicked you th
with your own toe-leathers, say it was Doctor Wyndham Snell."

Mr. Crisp's eyes became saucers and his mouth a yawning abyss
amazement as he stared from Wyndham Snell to the sovereigns a
back again. No—they did not fly away. He scrawled a receipt w
a pencil-stump on the bill, and stood dangling the old boots, one
each hand, in a feeble sort of way.

"Sir," said he, in a hoarse whisper, "don't you going to no W
End! You'll get them new boots twice as bad and half as cheap
me—that's to say, half as good and twice as dear!"

He went off like a cobbler in a dream—a tradesman of Piggot's T
who had been paid his whole account, all at once, and witho
haggle, by a customer, and that customer Wyndham Snell. On
way to the Royal Albert, weighed down with a piece of local news
would come thundering upon his fellow-patrons of that establish
like an avalanche, he passed the milkman and then the grocer's yo
man each on his way to Euphrosyne Terrace, and each with a de
mined air. He guessed their errands; and, slapping the gold
silver in his pocket, quickened his step to the Royal Albert, tha
might be the very first with the golden news, and start a new sco
his own.

Wyndham Snell turned to Julia, as another quick rap—shar
single, this time—fell on the door. "That will be the candle
maker," said he. "I gave a porter half-a-crown at the station
it has brought the hawks down. And you'll turn away Miss Fur
Well, well. There's always a workhouse; and there's always a g

Mrs. Snell sighed—a long, deep sigh. But she went to the
and let the milkman in. If only Fortune had come to Euphr
Terrace in a little less fair a form!

Marchgrave was fairly roused from its torpor. It had Docks o
brain.

When John Heron dropped a spark, it never failed to burst in

He was not merely the man who dreams greatly; he made others dream greatly too. And not only so, but his great dreams turned out to be great facts, that bore the test of waking. But never had any of his plans been on so grand a scale as this, or borne such promise of being magnificently fulfilled. Even when ladies called upon one another in the afternoon, the talk, instead of beginning with what might pass for things in Marchgrave and presently plunging into persons, scarcely began with persons before rushing into things—the Docks, and nothing but the Docks, always and everywhere. In one way or another, everybody's fortune was to be made, either by having a finger in Dock pie from the beginning, or by sharing in the general wealth that would fall at large upon the town. There would be opposition, of course. Everybody knew that. But when had anything, in great things or small, successfully opposed John Heron, of the Cedars and Chapter Lane?

It was rather premature, of course, on the part of Alderman Sparrow to suggest, in strict confidence to everybody, the idea of celebrating the opening of the New Dock, when that came off, by unveiling a statue of John Heron, marble or bronze, at the meeting of the four ancient streets in his native town, where the City Cross had stood once upon a time, in addition to hanging him—that is to say—his picture in Shire Hall. However, when a place wakes up in the manner of Marchgrave, it is with a burst, like a sudden spring after a long winter, when the leaves promise blossoms and the blossoms fruit well-nigh before the snow has fairly melted out of mind. And artists in bronze and marble require time, as even Alderman Sparrow himself was dimly aware. It would hardly do to entrust such a work to the hands of Wilkins, in Florence Road, who called himself a "sculpture," and was great in monumental cherubim. The face of the banker was anything but cherubic; and then it was generally thought that the statue should be seated, for the sake of greater dignity. No doubt there was a certain amount of anticipatory gratitude in all these plans for John Heron's greater glory. But there was a great deal of honest public spirit, all the same, as is mostly the case in the hero-worship of a town that contains a real John Heron.

Of course these ideas were studiously kept from the ears of its object, though Kate, his wife, could not help catching an occasional echo. Meanwhile they gave a personal zest to the main business of the Docks themselves; so that, in fine, there was but a single human being (not counting infants in arms) in all Marchgrave who, though a man of business, and entirely amenable to new and energetic ideas, failed to take a full and living interest in this great scheme. This was Guy Derwent, who had sent two telegrams and had received no reply. Not a word had he heard of what to him was worth more than a million new docks since that fragmentary letter from Mrs. Furness which had transferred Marion's whole fortune into his keeping. He wrote, of course; but in vain. And finally, business or no business, there was nothing for it but to set out either for London *via* Southampton, or for Southampton *via* London. What were a world of docks, if Marion was not there to see?

For a hundred reasons it was needful to see John Heron, if possibl before starting. The banker was to be the ladies' host; he was th confidant of their story; he was constituted their paymaster, advise and trustee. Moreover, a lover, if he be also a shipbroker, is not s entirely master of himself and his time, and his client's time, as thos delightful lovers of romance who never have any responsibilities excep to their sweethearts, and never anything at all to do, whether they b rich or poor. Guy was as anxious and as passionate as the idlest an least responsible of them all. But then he had the *Lucille* of Harve o his hands, not to speak of others; and a foreign captain is not lightl thrown overboard. Then, what with dock business, and what with th politics into which the popular candidate for Marchgrave had throw himself with his accustomed energy, he was always being called awa suddenly, and none, not even his wife at the Cedars or his princip cashier in Chapter Lane, could ever be sure when he would return.

At length, however, Guy contrived to manage matters so that, witho risking irreparable injury to his clients, he could give himself a Frida for travelling to one or both of his alternative destinations, a clea Saturday and Sunday for whatever might befall, and a Monday for h return to Marchgrave, bringing, as his inmost heart and hope cou not fail to trust, his love safely home. What could have gone wron except the post, after all? Had Marion been ill, he w assuredly ha heard. Had her father been proving troublesome, mother's lett had assured him he would have heard all the more. The anxieties th had been heavy upon him while he could go nowhere and do nothi lost half their weight so soon as he was able to go and to do. So things are utterly impossible because they are too unspeakably cru And that anything should be seriously wrong with Marion—that surely the most impossibly cruel of universal things. No: Marion a his love for her were far too sacred things to be made toys of by cha or doom.

He paid a last visit to the postoffice, and a twentieth to Chap Lane, on his way to the station. No letter—no John Heron. Sou ampton or London—which should it be?

It was almost a case for the only unbiassed and almost the only re sensible way of arriving at a decision on any practical question--He or Tails. That method gives an even chance of doing right; every ot gives at least ten chances to one of doing wrong. Had Guy Derw only taken from his purse the first coin that came to hand, spun i the ledge of the ticket office, said "Heads—London," and had For (as is her wont) favoured the boldness that trusts her all in all, history would here have come to an end. As things were, howe he trusted his judgment; took his ticket for Southampton; a Lost a Day.

It was therefore not on the Friday, but late on the Saturday, th reached the Green Cheese in Blink Lane. There had been some fantastic about the place to Marion, when seen through a veil o and flare. Guy, less fanciful, only saw a mean tavern, in a mean alley, distinguished only by an air of shabby antiquity from hun

more. It was evidently not a place where a chance customer would drop in for a glass of ale: far less a natural halting-place for a lady. So little, ndeed, was it the latter, that Guy passed the red-curtained window wice and three times before he could inquire at such a place without oo extravagant absurdity. And, moreover, when one has been a prey o anxiety for days, and at last the moment for ending suspense has rrived, so inconsistent are most of us that the more the heart is full f impatient eagerness, the more painfully it is sure to plead for just ne moment more.

At last he entered the close smelling passage, and then the bar, where blotched and pimply man in shirt sleeves, bald-headed and club-nosed, as serving a knot of seedy-looking customers at one end of the counter, d a red-haired girl was chatting with a smart and smiling gentleman cross the other. Except for these two it was a solemn though shabby thering; and yet Guy knew by instinct that he had come into queer mpany. And Marion—here!

"Are two ladies staying here?" he asked of the pimply man.

The latter turned upon him a long, slow gaze.

"No, mister. There's no ladies kept here."

An awkward sort of whispered chuckle seemed to come from the knot smokers, round. Guy's spirit turned at once both faint and angry, ough he scarce knew why.

"Have none been here within these seven days?" asked he. "This the Green Cheese, Blink Lane?"

"This is the shop, mister. No mistake there."

"And no ladies are here—have been here?"

The landlord of the Green Cheese shifted his gaze from Guy to the rt customer at the other end of the bar. Then:

"No, mister," said he, shaking his bald head "This is a respectable se—none of that cattle here."

omehow, Guy felt that the man was consciously lying. And yet should he lie? Unless—have we not all heard of such things?—ion and her mother had, in some fit of fright and folly, strayed into n of robbers and murderers and—Fancy shuddered at the picture laid her pencil down. Of course the thought was wild; but Guy a countryman after all, to whom legends of London were more fact fable, and were saturated with all manner of gloomy mysteries—s in innocent-looking floors, hidden cellars, and the unfathomable ts of the Thames.

"I shouldn't have thought your house was so large," he said, t you'd have forgotten what seems to be so unusual a thing. I en to know that two ladies have been here within the last seven ."

"You know a great deal, mister, about my house—a precious deal than me. Why should I deny it if 'twas true? 'Twould be t to me, so long as they drank square and paid their score—least- as somebody paid."

know this much," said Guy, speaking low and doing his best to cool, "that I have a letter from one of them in my pocket at this

moment, telling me that they were then at the Green Cheese in Blink Lane."

"Women are rum," said the landlord of the Green Cheese.

"Lost your sweetheart, sir?" asked one of the group, giving a genial wink to another, and a jocular nudge to a third. "That's bad—but never you mind; it's not half so bad to lose 'em as to find."

"Ah," said another, "but to lose two of 'em at once—no wonder the gentleman feels a bit put out, and so would you."

"Not a bit. I'm sure he's welcome to the lot of mine. P'r'aps if you'd show me that lady's letter, sir, I might advise, knowing the ropes of London better than a gentleman from the country could be looked for to do. It's a wicked place, is London. Eh, Jellitt, you bald-headed old sinner? None of your tricks on travellers. Give the gentleman his sweethearts back at once—do you hear?"

Temper must reach boiling point at last, and Guy's boiled over.

"Then, Mr. Jellett," said he, "if that's your name, since I can't make you remember, I must find somebody that can. I don't fancy this is a house where the police would find themselves welcome ——"

"Allow *me*, my dear sir, said the smart customer, leaving his chat with the barmaid, and advancing with a winning smile. "I think *I* can settle this little matter. Mr. Jellett is quite right to make no admissions. How can he tell what the motive of your inquiry may be? Jellett, though he mayn't look it, is just a lump of chivalry; and unless you can convince him of your good intentions, you may have him dragged to the gallows before he'll say yes when he thinks it his duty to say no. He's just the most honest, the most chivalrous, the most faithful, the most pig-headed publican in all London. There—don't blush, Jellitt; it's true. But a gentleman knows a gentleman when he sees one: and so *I* know *you*. There have been two ladies here. But they're gone. Our friend Jellitt's right there."

"Gone?" asked Guy, touched with a new distrust. "Have you any reason——"

"For knowing, or for interfering? I attended the elder for—a passing ailment, as a medical man. In that capacity you find me here now."

"And where are they gone?

"Well—I suppose it is no breach of professional confidence if I say abroad. Yes: they distinctly told me abroad."

It was a safe place to send them; but it tallied with the letter. And a sudden flight abroad tallied also with the same terror of her husband that had induced Mrs. Furness to rid herself, for surer and swifter escape, of the fortune now safe in John Heron's hands. Guy began to hope that he had found help at need. The drowning man does not require credentials from his straw.

"Did they tell you nothing more than that?" he asked. Now that the gentleman had come forward, the shabbier customers had fallen back and left the end of the counter clear for quiet speaking. "You will do them, and me, an infinite service if you will call to mind everything you can."

"Of course—of course. I'd tell you with pleasure anything I could remember—and more."

"Did they send no message to anybody before going away?"

"Let me see. . . . Oh, yes; they sent a telegram. I despatched it myself—of course, it's not exactly a professional duty: but—the good Samaritan—you understand."

"Ah—then you know the very message ——"

"Confound my—memory! That's what comes of tackling a big book on the top of an overgrown practice like mine. I remember—the telegram was one of my own, to fix for a consultation in the Isle of Man; it was a letter I posted for your ladies at the same time. Of course it was a letter ——"

"Addressed to ——"

"Ah, addressed to. Let me see. . . . I've such a slippery memory for names. It's cases I remember. One gets to be like that, in a practice like mine. Why, I couldn't tell you, off-hand, the name of the nobleman I've got to see in the Isle of Dogs, without looking in my notebook. . . . Addressed to—I have it. Guy Derwent, Esquire, Marchgrave."

"Thank you with all my heart!" said Guy, his heart relieved from a load.

Had he only waited a few more hours patiently at Marchgrave, he would have had that letter—perhaps even now he might have been looking into Marion's eyes; perhaps even bringing her home.

"Pray don't mention it," said his friend. "Anything I can do you're welcome, I'm sure. Perhaps I'm not wrong in thinking I have the pleasure of speaking to Mr. Derwent himself? Allow me to introduce myself—Dr. Wyndham Snell. You may have heard of my little work on Tuberculosis Mesenterica; but perhaps medical literature isn't in your line. It's an amusing—I mean an interesting little work, though, if you ever find yourself with an hour to spare. I wish I ever did; but—well, well. One mustn't complain. Take the word for it of a successful man, Mr. Derwent; there's only one way to succeed, and that's—to succeed. If you don't succeed, why you may remain unsuccessful all your days. That's always been my maxim from my cradle; and it's proved a sound one. What can I offer you? You mightn't think it from appearances, but Jellitt there keeps some uncommonly decent champagne. These sort of queer little old places, that anybody who didn't know the ins and outs of things would turn up his nose at, often do."

"Thank you again, Dr. Snell, and good-night—I'm more than glad to have met you," said Guy, too full of his own affair to notice any of his new acquaintance's little mannerisms. His one thought was to get back to Marchgrave by the quickest train, there to find the letter that was doubtless waiting him, and to hurry to wherever it would summon him—even so sacred a thing as business must go to the wall now and then.

He did not think it needful to throw Mr. Jellitt more than the slightest of nods as he turned from the counter towards the glazed

door, which opened as he came close to it for the entrance of a new-comer.

Guy started back as he came face to face with him.

"John Heron!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER VI.

VESUVIUS AT HOME.

MARION, not being deaf, was compelled, in spite of herself, to hear at least the louder portion of the argument between the physician and the cobbler, including the flight of boots from the street-door to the stairs. Nor, despite her being a stranger in the land, and used to rough ways, could she reconcile it with any available theory of the manners and customs of aristocratic England. However, this was a queer world—so much at least she had learned since she had left the Equator behind.

Meanwhile, she must wait in patience till she should see her father and learn to know him. Whatever first impulse had suggested, reason could find no cause for mistrusting him. He had unquestionably impressed her; and such an impression could readily pass for the natural recognition between kindred blood—which, they say, is thicker than water. Accepting the only too strong likelihood of her mother's madness, her father had done nothing, allowing for some natural ruggedness, that did not become a loving husband and a father anxious to prove himself tender. It was not his fault that his wife and child had been so hard to find. Nor his fault that his wife, when found, gave him a bitter welcome of fear and horror. Nor his fault that she had died, not in his arms, but in a chance tavern, whither she had crept for futile refuge. And anything rather than faults that he had followed a wife, whom he might fairly have taken at her word, in order to protect and care for her, and that he was now burdening himself with the care of a girl who was not the less a stranger to him because she chanced to be his child.

Well—who he was and what he was she must needs know very soon; and until then, and for the rest, it mattered little where she mourned. Perhaps, indeed, it is better, when a first great sorrow comes, that we should be forced at once from all familiar sights and sounds, be thrown straight among new faces, and be compelled to cut ourselves adrift, without a breathing space, from old things and old ways; and all this before the heart wakes fully to its loss and ceases to be numbed. Marion could not so keenly miss her mother's face and voice in Euphrosyne Terrace, Belvedere Road. Rather to meet with such a face and such a voice in such a place would be strange—like finding in a dust-heap an angel's wing-feather. It would be easier to think of her as in a better and a happier world than that which contains Piggot's Town.

After what seemed an interminable *levée* on the doorstep, her host came into the parlour flushed and triumphant, followed by her hostess, looking cold and grim.

"You'll excuse your being left alone so long, Miss Furness," said the Doctor; "but a professional man can't call himself his own master, you know—not for an hour. Patients never can be got to observe consulting hours; and they will persist in coming in crowds. And as for their manners—well, it isn't for society that one exchanges the enervating allurements of Mayfair for the Spartan regimen of an incompletely fashionable suburb. But the noblest of professions, Miss Furness, has its privileges as well as its responsibilities. I don't pretend not to appreciate ortolans eaten in ducal company; but then one doesn't see such a variety of practice, and my work on the Epidermis—as we call the outer skin—requires conditions for study under all sorts of unpleasant conditions which—well, ducal complexions are not sufficiently apt to afford—and so ——"

"Miss Furness would like to see her room," said Mrs. Snell, sharply and icily. "I've tidied up the second-floor back as best I can. And as you're going to that great dinner up in town, I've arranged to give Miss Furness her refection as soon as the things won't be in your way."

"What, Julia! do you suppose I don't know my manners better than that—to leave a lady guest to feed all alone with you the first day she comes? No; we'll all dine together; and, mind, I say *dine*. 'Refections' be—Hanged."

"Then I'm sure I don't know where to cut enough off that cold knuckle for the two of you," sighed Mrs. Snell. "It's true I might send out for chops again, now things have took another turn; only we can't get the firing in in time; and we must have a new gridiron. And I thought you was to meet the College and read a pyper ——'

"Why, where *are* your wits? Didn't I tell you I looked at my list, and found I'd made a mistake—that paper on Hypochondriasis is fixed for—well, not for to-day. Didn't I? Well, so it is, anyhow. One can't be expected to keep a million engagements in one's head, as if they were so many—so many—ideas. And if the whole College of Physicians was to go down on their bended knees to ask me to read them a hundred papers, *do* you think I'd throw over Miss Furness the first day she condescended to come?"

The Doctor's right hand made a wave towards his heart, as he bowed and beamed. Marion followed Mrs. Snell up to the narrow stairs, whose carpet grew more fragmentary until it disappeared, into a room with a crazy-looking bedstead in one corner, a rush-bottomed chair with a broken back, and an apology for a toilet-table in the window, furnished with a distorting mirror, a beerjug filled with water, half a cake of dry soap, and a cracked soup tureen. The window, without a blind, looked over a patch of marsh and a deserted brickfield to a black horizon of complicated railway lines.

"I hope you'll be able to make yourself comfortable," said Mrs. Snell. "But I'm afryde you won't," she added, in a tone that very distinctly implied, "And I decidedly don't mean that you shall."

"I'm sure it will do very nicely, indeed," said Marion, though rather blankly. "Please don't give yourself any trouble; I don't want to give any at all."

So humbly and so sadly the poor girl answered that Mrs. Snell, despite the prejudice against personal beauty, turned sharply round with a less stony look in her eyes.

"I'm told how you just lost your mamma, Miss Furness. Is is true?"

If the sour and down-trodden woman had only been a little less awkward she would have opened her arms and made a friend for ever. She might have felt that Marion was thirsting for a touch or a word of sympathy—of a woman's sympathy with a woman, which, if not always the best, is still the most needful. But that is as much as to say that she might have spread her wings and flown over the moon.

"Yes," said Marion—if she said any word at all.

"That's a pity. Though if it's true she had a bit of a bee, of course it's not so hard. And a precious big bee she must have had to marry Adam Furness—a regular humble-bee."

"He is my father," said Marion.

"No offence, I'm sure. Though I wouldn't be touchy about that, if he was mine. He was a coal merchant, and brought us up to be lydies—though I dursay you wouldn't think it, now. There. If you miss anything you've been accustomed to, take the hairbrush and hammer the floor; my room is just below."

Marion did miss a great many things; but she certainly had no notion of summoning back hostess whose whole bearing seemed deliberately repulsive. Nor had she been much more favourably impressed by the vaunted manners of her host, which seemed to her a trifle over-flowery. But then she had always been taught that genius is not to be judged by common standards; while it is notorious that the most brilliant men invariably go out of their way to marry the most inappropriate wives they can find. Well—it did not matter. Nothing mattered; nothing could ever matter again. So she sat down on the edge of the creaking bedstead, and cried with all her heart and eyes.

At last, what sounded like a clattering of a pair of tongs upon a teatray warned her that she must return to the parlour. She had more than half a mind to plead a headache, and go to bed; but her luggage had not yet arrived from the station, and she had many misgivings as to what Mrs. Snell's treatment of a headache might be. So she took the simpler alternative of going downstairs.

Mrs. Snell's threats of an insufficiency of cold mutton were unrealized to a startling degree. Only her husband's occasional stoppages for parcels at the London shops could account for a table spread with bewildering profusion. Either he or a wizard had covered the round table with all manner of cold things, displayed at a single view—pâté de foie gras, smoked goose's breast, salamé, oysters in their deep shells, Roquefort cheese, lobster, game pie, various cakes, and chaos knows what besides, with champagne to wash it down. The plates were cracked, the knives chipped, the forks and spoons of German silver, and there was nothing but a pewter pot, a cracked teacup, and a chimney-piece

ornament for the champagne. But one must have a mortal objection to nightmares to quarrel with the fare.

"And yet there's doctors, and big pots too," said Wyndham Snell, letting a cork fly, "who'll tell you that piecrust, and shellfish, and all those sort of things are unwholesome. That's all gammon, Miss Furness. I'm a specialist on hygiene; and 1 tell you that the more complex the creature the more complex and artificial ought to be its diet—and what creature is so complex as man, unless, indeed, it be woman? You see before you the Feast of True Reason; and I trust you may find it accompanied with some not inconsiderable amount of the Flow of Soul. I have a theory that man in his final development will wholly exist on pâté de foie gras. Have some now. This is the best sort—look at the truffles. Welcome to Euphrosyne Terrace, Miss Furness. Julia, give Miss Furness an oyster—she looks tired."

Marion had to make a pretence of eating, and of sipping from the teacup, the mantel-piece spilljar falling to Mrs. Snell. Fortunately her want of appetite passed unobserved by the Doctor, who, reducing his medical principles to practice, made an entire circle of the dishes, and then rebegan at the beginning.

"We'll have in a grand piano to-morrow," said he, lighting a cigar. "Mrs. Wyndham Snell is passionately fond of music. You sing, of course? I've observed that a beautiful voice always goes with eyes like yours. And so do I. We'll learn some duets together. I'm an operatic tenor—up to C sharp; I've taken the top E flat, real chest voice, before now. People usedn't to know the difference between me and Giuglini; and if you sing half as sweet as you speak, we'll make a pair."

"Wyndham," said Mrs. Snell, "people don't sing before their mothers are half cold in their graves."

"Don't they? Of course not, I mean. But it don't take long to get whole cold; and then they can—eh?"

Day by day, almost hour by hour, a transformation crept visibly over Euphrosyne Terrace, Piggot's Town. The house grew gradually furnished; Marion had no longer to sleep in a chamber that a maid-of-all-work would have scorned. A cook and a housemaid followed, to get on as best they might with Mrs. Snell. The meals became frequent, less chaotic, and less cold. The threatened grand piano appeared, and, by some magic, was squeezed through the front door.

And forthwith, strange to say, the patients who had hitherto patronized the simple doorplate of E. Smith, Surgeon, felt a magnetism that drew them to that of Wyndham Snell, M.R.C.S., L.A.C., Physician, Surgeon, and Accoucheur. In the mornings the latter had no longer to stand at his parlour window, smiling, envying, and trimming his nails. He found himself in such sudden request that, had his patients only been of the paying sort, he might have set up a carriage on the strength of his practice alone. As for Julia, she was reduced to wandering about the house, and to climbing and reclimbing the stairs for want of anything in the world to do, like some ghost of a housekeeper haunting the scene of her ancient reign, and finding the repose of the grave no comfort, but a weariness to brain and bones.

Marion wrote to Guy. And if her first letter had been hard to write, what had this to be? After all, it is one thing to sentence one's own heart to death—it another thing to deal the blow. But it had to be done.

"It must all be over. Do not ask me why. It is no fault of mine—none of yours. That is all I can tell you, now or ever. You must live as if there were no *me* in the world. That ought to be easy—for a man. It is only to look on a few weeks as if they had been a dream. Do not try to find me. You would only distress me beyond words; and so I shall take care never to be found. Only forget me—that is all."

To such, in effect, came her letter; for, though it was a long one, it told him nothing more. When it was written, she felt that she had been writing with frozen ink; but she could not bring herself to read it. For go it must; and if she read it, it would never go. So she signed the death-warrant, and sent it to be posted in London—that no postmark might tell tales—by Wyndham Snell. And, under the circumstances, she might as well have thrown it into the ditch where the dockleaf grew.

"For," he argued shrewdly, "there's just one certain way to make a man hunt out a girl like a bloodhound till he finds her, high or low—and that's to dare him. If that letter goes, then good-bye to Miss Marion."

She had better have thrown the letter into the ditch. The dockleaf could not read.

Perhaps it may be thought a little strange on the part of Dr. Snell that, having presumably been paid his fee in advance, he should be so anxious to retain a guest whose company must thenceforth be all loss and no gain. Perhaps he did not like to take unfair advantage of his position. Perhaps he, being by no means ungifted with fancy, saw in Marion a Mascotte—a bringer of good luck to every roof that shelters her. Perhaps he had more complicated views. But, however this might be, to Julia it was all as clear as day. Where is the woman who does not believe that she can read her husband through and through? And being right in her belief six times out of seven, what wonder if she sees nothing to baffle her the seventh time?

And certainly, if men are to be judged by acts, and acts by coloured spectacles, Julia, who had nothing left her to do but to watch and worry, found plenty of occupation in that way. So far as Marion knew, Dr. Snell might be a model of all the domestic virtues. But Julia could count on her fingers the number of occasions on which Wyndham had spent an evening at home during their residence in Piggot's Town—eight she made it, counting once when the line was blocked by a railway accident, and three times when he was out of sorts and wanted nursing—before Marion Furness came. Within the first nine days of her visit, however, he stayed at home no fewer than seven times. It was true he had a separate reason for every one of them. On Monday, for example, he had to read up a case of pericarditis that had come before him in the morning; on Tuesday he was tired with his growing

ractice, and needed to go to bed early ; on Wednesday it rained ; on Thursday he expected a summons from Mrs. Crisp ; and so on, and so n. No possible objection could ever be made to one of his reasons, aken alone. But there was the one fact for Julia—that girl.

He had not been able as yet to bring about the duet. But the grand iano had not been conjured into the house for nothing, and he was eally something of a musician, even though it was he himself who had aid so. He could sing light and easy songs in a pleasant voice and a leasant way, doing special justice to pathetic passages—indeed, he had uite a knack of touching those queer corners of the heart that are only o be stirred by certain scents and certain sounds, and then with a shy nd secret rapture that is harder to bear than pain. Marion was in he mood to be moved by slight things ; and Mrs. Snell, though im-ervious to music herself, could not fail to perceive how Marion listened hen Wyndham played. Though tactless herself, she could be jealously ware of the effect of the subtle flattery bestowed upon the vain heart man by silent attention ; and her spirit writhed. Never had Wynd-m stayed at home to play to her. It is true that there had not een till now any instrument to play on ; but that was a detail. The rinciple remained the same.

Then a brilliancy—to her mind, at least, a brilliancy—came into his ome talk that he had certainly never wasted upon his domestic hearth r many a long day. It is true that better circumstances may send a an's spirits up, just as a good meal decently served may keep a man home whom a diet of pickled gherkins quite naturally drives abroad. ltogether, a sensible woman might have found plenty of reasons for a dden change of habits without looking for them in another woman's es : and a yet more sensible woman would have invented even more asons than she found. And a consciously plain woman like Julia is und to be supremely sensible, or supremely a fool. The poor plain oman sat over her poor plain sewing in the evening (the one occupa-n she could retain in her own hands), and watched his brilliancy and r beauty till the needle seemed to mistake her flesh for the calico. t that for a moment she found any blame for Wyndham. What uld he, poor fellow, do, with his susceptibility and his own power to arm, when a pretty girl was making eyes at him, and looking melan-oly and demure, and humouring his musical hobby, and altogether having as only those quiet girls know how?

If only Marion had known through what sort of spectacles her hostess s watching her, she would indeed have stared.

However, she had other things to think of than what might be going in the grim abode of Mrs. Snell's brain—to say nothing of the Doc-'s ; and if only Mrs. Snell could have seen how little room the ctor occupied in the mind of his guest, it is she who would have red. Even as things were, she opened her eyes pretty widely when rion, after the usual late breakfast, asked Mrs. Snell for permission elp her in her sewing.

"I must do something," she pleaded ; "and I used to do all the ing, when ——"

She stopped short—the time had not yet come when she could speak of her mother to a woman who kept her at arms' length.

"Thank you, Miss Furness," said Mrs. Snell, snapping her scissors and her words at the same time; "but I've always done Dr. Snell's sewing myself; and it's too lyte to chynge—thanking you all the syme."

"Is there *nothing* I can do—till my father comes?"

"Till what, Miss Furness?"

"Till my father comes."

"Oh—you're going away, then?"

"I don't know," sighed Marion. "I don't know anything yet—I suppose I shall. . . . I only know one thing. I can't go on doing nothing all my days."

"It hasn't seemed to me like as if you'd found things so dull here, Miss Furness."

"Dull? Indeed, no! But if it had been—I'm sure you've both of you been very kind, and I'm sure I don't know why. Is it for my father's sake? Have you known him long?"

Some such question she had been burning to put ever since she began to realize that her father was long in coming—indeed, had she been less anxious she would have put it long ago, in spite of Mrs. Snell's repellent ways.

"Yes," said Mrs. Snell. "He won't have spoke much of us, though, I dursay—no more than of Bot'ny B'y."

Marion flushed crimson. This was not what she had meant to hear. Not that she suspected Mrs. Snell of finding any comfort in alluding to matters that are generally ignored among friends.

"I know—but—he was innocent," said she hotly, but yet somewhat feebly.

"Yes, Miss Furness. Of course. People that go to Bot'ny B'y always are. Anyhow they're no worse than them that don't go; it's all the syme," said Mrs. Snell bitingly, and making her calico scream. "But all the same, Miss Furness—and though you mayn't think it, I can't help speaking out my mind if I was to die for it—I'd sooner he'd styed there, and not come troubling respectable people over here."

Marion had never noticed anything in any woman so witchlike as Mrs. Snell's manner this morning. Hitherto she had seen in her hostess only an ungainly, self-effaced, silent person, capable of being shrewish now and then, hard and unattractive, but otherwise overshadowed by her husband's airy brilliancy. This morning, however, her grimness was positive and emphatic; there was an almost cruel glow in her naturally dull eyes, and she bit off the ends of her cotton as if she were snapping live flesh by deputy. And there is a way of sewing in which the operator ceases to be the diligent and homely housewife, and resembles nothing but a handmaid of Lachesis—a stitcher of shrouds.

It was as if she had suddenly caught a glimpse of some profound tragedy enacting itself in a back kitchen—a drama of passion

grotesquely emphasized by vulgarity. She seemed for a moment to see into a soul that she could not comprehend; and the baffling glimpse was not a pleasant one. Marion had no special gift of insight; but most of us can see by flashes now and then—and what she saw was that this ill-fashioned automaton was even as herself—a woman with a soul. It was like picking up what seemed like a dead stick, and suddenly feeling it twist and wriggle in one's hand.

Perhaps Mrs. Snell perceived some symptom of a start, or some shadow of a shudder, letting her know that she might enjoy five delightful minutes' vengeance on a girl whose eyes Wyneham, inspired by champagne, had only yesterday compared to stars in a haze. Stars in a haze, indeed—gas-lamps in a fog, more likely, Mrs Snell had thought with scorn.

"Of course, you're not answerable for your father," said she, "so don't take offence when there can't be blame. All I know is there's some innocent people better in jyle than some guilty ones out; and Adam Furness is one . . . of the innocent ones, of course; oh, of course, one of the innocent ones! As I said before, those sort always are."

"I wish, Mrs. Snell," said Marion, very quietly indeed, "you would tell me all you know of—of my father. It's always best to know the worst that can be said of anybody at once; and then, you see, there can never be anything worse left to hear. And—for that—for the very worst, I mean, I don't think I can do better than come to you."

She looked her hostess very steadily in the eyes as she spoke, and was met by a sharp, quick glance that seemed to say, "Oh, oh, my young lady! you've got a spice of spirit, have you, behind those lackadaisical ways? Then so much the worse for *you*."

"I'm sorry you've that opinion of me, Miss Furness," said she. "As if I was always on the look-out for evil—when I'm the last ever to do such a thing. Only I take people as I find 'em—that's all. When I see a young woman making a fool of a man—not that a man needs much making—I can't pretend I don't. And when I see an escaped convict coming back from the bushes to make mischief of all sorts in a happy English home, I can't undertake to approve."

"Well," said Marion, "I suppose my father will soon come; and then I shall soon go. Never mind telling me any more."

"There's no call to snap one so short up," said Mrs. Snell, who had no intention of losing such a chance of giving a few bad minutes to a girl with stars in a haze. "I'm sure I'll tell you everything, and welcome, seeing you want to know. Didn't your mamma ever tell you why Adam Furness was sent to Bot'ny B'y? No? 'Twas for forgery—which people used to be hanged for; and serve 'em right, say I. Because then, when they get free, they can't come mischief-making over them that may have their weak points, like the men, poor creatures, can't help having some, but would be right enough if they're only let alone. Perhaps, Miss Furness, you'll perceive why I've no love lost for Adam Furness when I tell you he's been our ruin—and

maybe he's being our ruin over again. That's why people ought to be hanged ; of course, meaning nobody in particular, Miss Furness, and nyming no nymes ; but scores of 'em, all the syme. I'll tell you the whole story of one of the sort, if you've never heard it, and haven't got anything to do."

"You must go on now," said Marion. "I have heard too much not to hear all."

"I don't know about 'must,' Miss Furness. But, to oblige you, I will. . . . Meaning nobody in particular, and nyming no nymes. . . . Dr. Snell, when first I knew him, was assisting a medical gentleman in a dispensary—wild he was, like a young man will be that's worth his salt, but as clever as he's high, and if they say there was any wickedness in him, then they lie. *You'll* understand, Miss Furness, that the girls used to be after him, poor fellow, in rocks and shoals. However, he married the only one of 'em all that never lifted a finger out of her way for him : which that one was me. . . . Of course, a man like him, with his talents and accomplishments, couldn't be expected to spend all his evenings at home, especially when the dispensary shut up because of an unfortunate accident without Wyndham being to blame, and when he took to lecturing on Poetry, and Noses, and those sort of things, and acting, when he wasn't kept out by jealousy. So one evening he brought home a friend—Mr. Adam I'll call him, not to be nyming nymes. Everybody's Adam, you know, in a kind of a way. I didn't take to Mr. Adam. And I didn't take to him any the more when it seems Dr. Snell had recognized him for a bachelor friend who'd been sent for forgery to Bot'ny B'y. I never did take to Dr. Snell's bachelor friends—they all seemed to have been in trouble of some sort, except the doctor and one that was killed on a railway before he had time. And what was more, Mr. Adam couldn't be fairly at large ; for it stands to reason that when a man used to be transported, he couldn't be back again in London in three years. So he had to be an escaped convict, which makes it all the worse : for that's the law. So you'd have thought Mr. Adam would have given Dr. Snell a pretty wide berth, but not he. Mr. Adam was just a devil—not a man. I didn't see things clear then, being only an innocent slip of a girl ——"

So Mrs. Snell had once been a girl ; and, as it is always the smallest trifles that catch the mind the most when the heart is the most absorbed in great ones, Marion caught herself vaguely speculating what kind of girl Mrs. Snell could ever have been, or how long it took and by what process, to develop any kind of girl into a Mrs. Snell.

"But I grew wiser, very soon. This was that devil's game—to mix my husband up with all his wickedness, so that he couldn't dare tell—'split' is the word they use. And Dr. Snell, being, with all his genius, just as innocent and unsuspecting as a baby, he fell into the trap, and in a couple of weeks he daren't call his soul his own."

"What trap?" asked Marion, gradually feeling her eyes giving way before Mrs. Snell's unwavering gaze.

"Ah ! indeed ! But that I've no call to say. It's enough, I should think, that poor Wyndham, instead of being President of the College

of Physicians, and me being Lady Snell, has had to grind and grovel away in Piggot's Town. But I did think we were rid of him—and now ——"

"And now, Mrs. Snell?"

"And now, as if he hadn't done enough, he's sent *you* here to steal away my own husband's fancy under my own very eyes!"

She could not have meant to bring her triumph to a more complete climax, but the thrust was irresistible, and passion had carried her away. An iceberg could not be expected to keep its head if it suddenly discovered itself to be a volcano—Etna would be outdone.

Marion's brain whirled and reeled as if Mrs. Snell had risen and dealt her a sudden blow with her open hand. What could it mean? That she had been listening to her father's story she had of course been perfectly aware; but this last monstrous charge had thrown discredit on every word. That she should have been sent into Piggot's Town to make love to Dr. Wyndham Snell—it would be ridiculous had she been in any other mood; there had been a time when she could have laughed it away with a word; as something too utterly absurd to cause even a moment's shame. Before she could recover her wits, Mrs. Snell amazed her still more by bursting into tears.

Nor did poor Mrs. Snell know in the least how to cry. She had no doubt had plenty of cause, but had hitherto had no leisure for learning the useful but dangerous accomplishment of graceful tears. Her eyes swelled and boiled over; her sharp nose reddened and swelled; and the tracks of the tears down her cheeks were too plainly to be seen. And then she did not let the rain come, as another woman would, but fought hard to swallow it down.

"It *is* hard," she said. "After working for him—and being true to him—all these years, 'n years, 'n years, and now just when we're better off, and patients coming at last—to have another woman come between—and you so pretty, and he *such* a Fool!"

Hideous and grotesque as was the sight, Marion could not help feeling overwhelmed with pity for the woman who had been nursing such a monstrous delusion.

She held out her hand.

"Indeed, Mrs. Snell," she said, "you are wrong as could be. As if I—as if anybody, would think anything of Dr. Snell, except that he has been very good-natured and kind to a very stupid and troublesome girl; and so have you."

But Mrs. Snell folded her arms. Poor Marion, meaning to appease her, had flown too far the other way.

"Not think anything of Dr. Snell, indeed? Why—why, let me tell you there isn't a woman in all London he mightn't have for the asking, and wouldn't jump down his throat if he opened his lips to speak to them! It's not his fault that so he's made. Grycious heaven—a girl not done growing not thinking anything of Dr. Snell! As if there wasn't duchesses that wouldn't be proud to clean his shoes! I suppose the grypes are sour. Not think anything of Dr. Snell! Whatever's the world coming to now?"

"You may as well shake hands," said Marion coldly. "Of course, I can't go away without saying good-bye. And of course I can't stay where—where ——"

"Where?" asked the doctor himself, with a pleasant smile. "And what, as well? What did I hear about good-bye?"

Had he not occupied the doorway, Marion would have left the room at once, leaving Mrs. Snell to explain, and have got her things ready for starting by the time that the explanation was over. As it was, however, she could only retreat to the new mirror over the fireplace, and turn her back upon any storm that was to come.

And it did come. She saw in the mirror the doctor's pleasant smile suddenly turn into a singularly ugly and unpleasant one.

"Julia," said he, "they don't build thick walls in Piggot's Town, and I heard every word. This young lady's father has placed her under my protection; and she sha'n't be insulted by you, if you were fifty wives. As if I—a gentleman, if ever there was one—would take advantage of a beautiful and charming girl; as if a young lady like Miss Marion—but what's the good of arguing with a born fool? No, Miss Furness—you shall not be driven away. This home is yours; and if you go, then—mark my words, Mrs. Wyndham Snell—I go too. There, Miss Furness, *you* can't say the age of chivalry is dead. I'm your friend; and—halloa!"

"Let me pass, if you please," said Marion, sweeping past him, neither he nor she knew how.

CHAPTER VII.

NUMBER SEVENTEEN.

"Well—and why not?" asked John Heron, in his hearty way.

Guy Derwent was so taken aback at seeing the Marchgrave banker in the tap-room of the Green Cheese, Blink Lane, that he failed to perceive how John Heron had seemed for a moment the more startled of the two; how he had, indeed, given a gasp for breath, and had glanced hurriedly and anxiously round the room before becoming himself again.

"I don't know why not—but all the same, you're the last man I dreamed of meeting here," said Guy.

"You're another, if it comes to that," said John Heron. "I should have thought there was nobody I was less likely to meet in a place like this than you."

"Don't you remember—this was the place where Mrs. ——"

"Ah—I remember now. Well?"

There was certainly something odd in John Heron's voice—something tight and constrained. Even Guy, preoccupied as he was, noticed it now. He would have suspected any other man of having

omething more than dined, and of keeping himself something more han sober by force of will.

"They *have* been here. . . ."

"Yes?"

"And have gone. But, by good luck, I met this gentleman, who ells me that a letter is waiting for me at ——"

"Home? Ah! Then of course you will fly on the wings of the vind. I've got a little account to settle here at the counter—I'll join ou outside in half a minute, if you can wait so long; and I'll walk or ab with you as far as our ways lie together."

Guy was not sorry to find himself again in such fresh air as Blink ane was able to afford. Bidding a cordial good-night to Dr. Snell, ho had returned to his flirtation, he reflected, in the doorway, on the yet unexplained oddness of such a meeting, and on the fertility of fe in coincidences ever since he had met with Marion—that most mar-ellous coincidence of all in a lover's eyes—until the banker rejoined im.

"Then all's well that ends well," said the latter. "Have a cigar. ou seem wool-gathering, Guy."

"Yes—all *must* be well now—or very soon."

"I'm going to lay you a wager, to bring you down from the clouds." here was no trace of embarrassment about John Heron any longer. I'm going to lay you ten to one that you're wondering how I came to at the Blue Stilton, or whatever it's called, and you're shy of seem-g to pry into the doings of an old friend. You ought to be ashamed yourself, Guy Derwent. Why, I'd ask you what you were up to if met you after midnight in my strong room.

"It did seem odd that both you and I should be at the least likely ce for either of us at the very same hour."

"Ah—when you're a dozen years older you'll find it an uncommonly tle world. I never wonder at coincidences. I only wonder when a gle day goes by without one, or two, or three. Perhaps there was mething a trifle odd about your being there. But my seeming entricity was the very simplest thing in the world. Ah, those docks hey'll have more to answer for than bringing a steady country banker o public-houses, and Pink Cheddars, and all sorts of wicked ways. e been interviewing a contractor—a man who once carried a hod, and w throws about millions. But his heart's a hodman's still; and tead of asking me to dine at the Reform, he, in the fulness of his pitality, thought he couldn't give me a greater treat than by taking to 'a snug little shop, sir, where they broil you the best steak this Temple Bar, and wash it down with the finest port wine that's wed.' And, on my word, he wasn't far wrong."

All the same," persisted Guy, "it *is* strange."

Of course it is. And so is everything. The only really strange gs are those that aren't strange at all. . . . So you're off home he next train?"

Of course I am."

And then?"

(5)

"Wherever Fate may call me."

"Meaning the fair Marion ?"

"They mean the same to me, Heron. . . . No; don't tell me that nothing is strange. It *is* strange that here, in England, with the postoffice and the telegraph at our service, and with all the will in the world to meet, two sane people should have been playing a maddening game of hide-and-seek for all this while. One would think the very devil was in it somewhere. And there's somebody else I want to find, as well as Marion."

"Her mother ? Well—when a man is hunting high and low for his mother-in-law I suppose one must own that there is something strange, after all, in the world."

"No—her father. The unspeakable scoundrel—to be hounding a poor lady about in this way. I'm looking forward to a solitary interview with Mr. Furness one of these fine days. Next to Marion and her mother, he is the creature I'm more anxious to meet than anybody else in the world."

"If you did meet him—what should you do ?"

Guy shrugged his shoulders. "I don't think there's much need to consider that," said he. "Anything that will give this poor lady peace, whatever it may be."

"Well. . . . A pleasant journey home. I wish I could travel down with you, instead of when the Docks will let me. I've got another appointment before turning in—so I must shake hands now. Here our ways divide."

"When shall you be back at Marchgrave ?"

"To-morrow, I hope. Good-night."

"Good-night, Heron."

John Heron, having shaken hands cordially with Guy, lighted a fresh cigar, and stepped out more briskly. The two had left the city behind them long ago, by way of Fleet Street and the Strand; and the banker now struck from Pall Mall to the north-west, always walking, until he reached Upper Vane Street, which as every Londoner knows, has joined Huntley and Eastward Squares ever since the days of Queen Anne. It was not an unlikely place for a contractor, or Parliamentary agent, or anybody in a great, solid, and respectable way of business, to be found in after office hours; for an aristocratic flavour still lingers about it, and it is still quite common to see a blazoned hatchment over the central drawing-room window, just as it is by the side of the front door to find an extinguisher like a Pierrot's cap—a relic of the days when link-men used to wait upon sedan chairs. It is not a very long street, but tolerably broad; and its tall brick houses, with generously wide entrances and double doors, sombrely absorb, instead of reflecting, the gaslight by night and the sunlight by day. It is not a lively street; but it has a quiet, comfortable, and even distinguished air, and the respectability of its address is undeniable—eminently suitable for people who, if not social roses themselves, are sufficiently well off to pay for the privilege of living well within the perfume of the roses. No brass plate, excep

ne, hardly larger than a visiting card, on the door of a fashionable hysician, marks the professional element that had no doubt crept in of te years; nobody as yet—ostensibly at least—conceals a contraband dger; and butlers and broughams are still as numerous as normal man nature, which really loves dulness in the depth of its heart, can sire. There is a legend that a lady from the opera, who used to sing Sundays with all her windows open, once sojourned in Upper Vane reet; but not for long. And there was yet a darker legend—but body was ever quite able to gather its nature, except that it concern- Number Seventeen.

Upper Vane Street runs north and south, Huntley Square being at north end; and at the back of the western side—there are special sons for special accuracy—runs Eastwood Mews, a cul-de-sac with an rance into Eastwood Square. Of this western side, with backyards d offices running to the mews, the central numbers are Sixteen, Seven- n and Eighteen.

Number Eighteen was in the occupation of two elderly maiden sisters, s Burdon and Miss Charlotte Burdon, who had a long lease of the use, and an ample income from the Funds—quiet ladies of ecclesias- l tastes and habits, aristocratic connections, and early hours.

Number Sixteen was in the occupation, still following the directory, Mr. Ward—a quiet bachelor, occupied in the City, with some one hose multifarious pursuits which, being 'in the City,' include alike lending of millions and the borrowing of half-crowns—in his case eminently respectable and profitable one, or he would not be in per Vane Street. He was also understood by the neighbouring lers and their subordinates to be of a scientific turn, for he had a n in the upper part of the back of the house fitted up as a labora- , of which he kept the key and did all the cleaning, like a prudent . The service of the two houses was rather lopsided, the Miss dons keeping the regulation butler, three maids, a coachman, and a in livery; Mr. Ward, only an elderly cook and a middle-aged semaid, whose places were nearly sinecures.

Number Seventeen was empty—a fact possibly due in some measure he legend that nobody rightly knew.

Few people are fully aware of the number of houses in London to h such dim legend clings. Some day, perhaps the heading Haunted Houses" will be made a regular feature in the Court Guide. then people will foolishly wonder that there are so many in a city h plumes itself, not without good cause, on being the most htened in the world. Foolishly, because the wonder should be he other way. How is it that, many as they would seem, they are y so few? The wonder is that every house built more than a gene- n ago does not swarm with ghosts. For what are ghosts but le memories? And how it is that anybody can fail to see the in- rable memories with which every London house must needs be ted, is past all understanding.

However that may be, Number Seventeen, Upper Vane Street, was y, and yet was not to let, so far as anybody could tell. How that

came to happen might well have been food for all manner of comment and gossip in many parts of the world; but Upper Vane Street—above stairs, at least—was not inquisitive, while below stairs there seemed nothing odd in the vacancy of a house where no servant would have lived for treble wages. The Miss Burdons had plenty of interests, domestic, ecclesiastical and social, without bothering themselves over strangers' house property—indeed, they rather preferred an empty kitchen next door, considering that gossip is too precious a thing to be let out of the drawing-room. And Mr. Ward, on the other side, had his chemicals; which is to say, that he had no turn for any gossip that did not concern some scandal or other about the conduct of Ethyl or Aniline—who are not young ladies, despite their names. And so up and down the street on both sides—for neighbours in Upper Vane Street were real Christian neighbours—they did as they would be done by, and avoided the faintest knowledge of one another, as all really good neighbours do.

However, there was, both by day and by night, something about Number Seventeen to catch the eye of any commonly observant stranger—such, for instance, as John Heron. Between its two next door neighbours it looked both deaf and blind. There was a gas lamp right in front, as if to draw particular attention to its peculiarities. And the rays fell upon blindless and curtainless windows, looking like black sockets without eyes, and yet staring. John Heron was certainly not a man sensitive to fanciful impressions. But any daring financier must have a good share of imagination somewhere about him, and he could not help a curious glance at Number Seventeen, before he knocked and rang at Number Sixteen—Mr. Ward's. Possibly, however, he was only thinking whether the purchase of a lease in so good a neighbourhood as Upper Vane Street might not be a good investment of spare funds. He had not become the great man he was without keeping his eyes open for chances, both great and small, here, there, and everywhere.

It is magnetism, however, of one sort or another, whatever we may call it, that rules the world—from the stars in their courses to the meeting between a mutton chop and a hungry man; from love and hate to a passing glance at one stone rather than another by the wayside. There was real, tangible reason why the glance of John Heron, or of any other passer-by, should seek for a moment to penetrate the blackness of those blank, staring eyes without balls. For there was life behind them, dead though they seemed.

Had any glance pierced far enough, it would have entered a large upper room at the back of the house, without any window, and ventilated, not lighted, from above, so that neither daylight could pass into it from without, and no lamplight out of it from within. There were two doors—once more to be precise, for cause—one opposite to where a back window should have been; the other apparently in the party wall on the south side. The floor was heavily carpeted with several thicknesses of drugget, and the same stuff was hung from the cornice

instead of paper, over the walls, so as to effectually imprison even more than ordinary sounds. The furniture was still more peculiar than the hangings. A stove was brought out into the room from the north wall, furnace fashion, supplied with large fixed bellows and a pipe for smoke, which, instead of passing through the roof, traversed the ceiling, and disappeared in the wall above the opposite door. There was a dull fire in the stove, and on a bench hard by was a row of cruicibles. On other benches ranged along the wall were singular little engines composed of screws and cylinders, with boxes of punches, drills, and other instruments not usual in any recognized trade. A large bare table, stained and burned, bearing a shaded lamp, occupied the middle. The general aspect of the room was confused; but a very cursory glance was enough to show anybody who knew anything about the conditions of work that the seeming confusion was systematic, and arose from having everything ready to hand.

Nevertheless, half smithy, half laboratory, as the room appeared, it was not Number Sixteen where Mr. Ward studied chemistry, but Number Seventeen, with which he had no more concern than the Miss Burdons on the other side.

There was plenty of space for the three occupants of the house which looked to passers-by so forlornly empty. Two of the three were men; the third was a girl, who sat on a low stool in front of the furnace, warming her toes and staring at the embers.

Of the two men, one was sitting, with dangling legs, on the centre-table—a short, thick-set figure with close-cropped hair and a dark red beard, covering jaws and throat, with moustache of the same colour, through which the mouth was scarcely to be seen. The hair bristled down in a peak over a low but broad forehead, well developed over the eyebrows; and under these, deeply set and singularly close together, were a pair of eyes as blue and as cold as steel. A thick, depressed nose, narrow at the bridge and broad at the nostrils, scarcely projected beyond the high cheek bones. His breadth of chest and shoulder, and his length of arm, promised unusual strength; while an almost savage gravity about the pale, pitted, bearded face, and the cold blue eyes, argued ill for him against whom that strength might be used.

The second, leaning over one of the long benches, and examining some small object held so closely to his face that he nearly swept it with his eyelashes, was the very opposite of the other, beyond that both were dressed in a sort of loose blouse, scorched and stained. He was probably somewhat the younger of the two; but the peculiarities of his face and figure made his age hard to tell. A large head, of which the forehead seemed to run up all the way to the crown, with cadaverous features and scanty, silken, colourless hair, hung forward as if too heavy for the slender neck that was prevented from balancing it properly by shoulders that came nearly up to the projecting ears, between which a narrow chest sank almost into a hollow channel, giving scarcely room for the lungs. Besides being thus deformed, the man was pitifully, though not repulsively ugly, with his long, weak nose, his chinlessness, his lantern cheeks, his sallow complexion and long thin lips,

of which the lower seemed to have insufficient muscular force to kee
it from falling. Nevertheless, there was a sort of refinement about th
face, though perhaps due only to physical feebleness, and there wa
something more than refinement about the soft, white hands, wit
supple joints, and long, tapering, pointed fingers, of which one of D
Snell's duchesses might be proud. And when the ill-made, twiste
sickly scarecrow laid down what he was examining, and turned toward
the lamp, then blazed out of that blurred and feeble face two grea
black burning eyes that seemed to have been made for an emperor.

"Cynthia," said he, in a voice harshly thin from weakness, "loo
at this. Will it do ?"

The girl seemed to prick her ears like a dreaming spaniel at th
sound of a whistle, tossed back her curls, and did not rise from he
stool—she sprang.

And if her fellow-tenants of Number Seventeen in Upper Va
Street, the demure and the conventional, were strange in their sever
ways, she was far more strange in hers. She gave one at once the i
pression of a fairy—small and slender, upright as a dart, and swift
lightning. Perhaps she was pretty ; but he would have been a stran
person who cared, or would have troubled himself to examine, point
point, a face which, had it been downright ugly, would still have h
its charm. Nobody could have told from memory, and scarcely ev
when in her presence, whether she was dark or fair, pink or pale. H
would only have noticed, and therefore only remembered, a small fa
sparkling all over with a hundred moods and humours at once—a fa
so speaking that one seemed to hear it rather than to see. The m
with the red beard, as he swung his legs and smoked a long pipe w
a painted china bowl, might have thought he saw a meeting betwe
life and death as the girl with the sunlight sparkling out of her turn
to the corpse-like creature with the blazing eyes.

"Will it do ? Won't it do ! Gloriously," she almost sang.

"You are quite sure ?"

"Why, Stephen, you know it will. What a fellow for doubting y
are ! Now, old Red Beard there never doubts anything or anybod
he couldn't, if he tried. Perhaps you'll doubt that next," said s
throwing herself up on tiptoe, dropping him a kiss between the ey
and then darting far enough back for his great purblind eyes to
nothing of her but her smile.

"And perhaps I do," said he, with the film of a sigh.

Cynthia—as he had called her—laughed.

"No, you don't," said she.

"Then I do. . . . Just that one thing. Cynthia, are you qu
quite sure that the die—*this* die—will do ?"

"Why this, more than any other, owl that you are ?"

"Because it's my last—there. And because I want my last piece
be a master-piece. That's why."

"Your *last*, Stephen ?"

"Yes. I've made up my mind ——"

"Indeed, you've done no such thing. *Your* mind, indeed ! Th

my business. You forget that when people's minds want making they've got to come to me."

"Let him speak," said Red Beard, in a slow, foreign drawl. "It is good, once upon a dime, to hear the tongue of a man."

"Meaning *I* talk too much," said Cynthia. "Of course I do. And if I had twenty tongues I'd talk twenty times more. If you don't like it, Stephen does; and if Stephen doesn't, I do. And if I don't ——"

"Hush," said the other. 'I *have* made up my mind, queer as that may seem. I only wish I'd made it up ever so long ago. I didn't rebel against social tyranny to become a slave. Now, look here, Cynthia, and look you too, Peter Petersen. What's the good of all this slaving out of one's brains to me and you?"

"I know," said Red Beard. "It means a great pig vortune—once upon a dime."

"Fudge!" cried Cynthia, with sparkling eyes. "It means—Fun! If I was asked what life I'd choose, I'd say the one I've got now. Just think, you dull, greedy Red Beard; and you, Stephen. Why, it's like living a play; not going home and taking off one's tights and spangles when the curtain comes down, and then waiting till to-morrow, but the real thing—real police, real villains, real secret passages, real money—ah, and real leading lady, and all. And if you'd only half an ounce more pluck, Stephen, there'd be a real hero as well. Yes—it is just fun to be making our own money instead of working and starving for it, like some of us used to do: and if we made less, its fun to be ghosts and live in a haunted house that gives everybody the creeps to pass by. Do you know, I dressed myself up in a sheet the other night, and stood at the drawing-room windows. I did indeed!"

"What?" cried Red Beard, with a sound as if a wolf were swearing deep down. "You are invernally mad—Gott in heaven, if you was seen!"

"Stupid! As if being seen wasn't half the fun; and half the safety, too. The next moonlight night we'll stand at the window all three; we shall make a lovely trio—me the ghost, you the ogre, and Stephen the vampire; and we'll grin. I wonder when there's the next full moon."

"Fortune—Fun!" said Stephen, flashing scorn. "Much of them come to me. It's always some day—some day—some day. And as for fun!" And indeed he looked like one who had never known any such thing, even in a dream. "There's my last die; and ——"

Cynthia drew herself up to her full height—not a fraction under five feet one—and regarded him gravely.

"Stephen," said she, "where are you going? What are you going to do?"

"Anywhere—anything."

"Ah, I understand. No—you cannot, you, a great, the very greatest artist, mean to desert your art. That is impossible. Nor can you, a great revolutionist, be going to be false to your cause—the Ann—what is it?—Nihilation of Law. I understand. You are a man; and you are going to desert me. . . . Very well, then. All right—good-bye."

"Don't be a born idiot, Cynthia! Of course you're coming, too."

"What—to anywhere? Not I. What does it matter to me? You'l be all right. I've no doubt there'll be scores of girls, ever so muc taller than me, who'll be only too happy to sew on your buttons an keep your pencils pointed and your burins and needles ground, an spot flaws in your work, and run your errands, and—and make al sorts of fools of themselves. I'm only of use to you here, where els you'd have nobody at all."

"Am I an artist, Cynthia? Yes or no?"

"You know you are. There. Good-bye."

"And yet you ask me to stay here—slaving for a convict, and——"

"'A convict, and——?' Go on, Stephen Ray," said Adam Fur ness, entering from the sidedoor and closing it behind him. "O second thoughts, though, *don't* go on. There's no call to play pot an kettle. It's always waste of time."

"I suffered for a Principle," said Stephen sullenly. "For th eternal right of every human being to equality of Fortune——"

"A Principle! So did I. Come, none of that cant. I'm an e forger, and you're an ex-thief; and I suppose our principle, deep down was pretty much the same. Ah—there you are, Cynthia: bright an bonny. Well, Petersen—how have things been going? Nothin wrong?"

"Nothing wrong, Adam Furness, but that this girl is a fool, to bran at ghosts; and that Stephen Ray, he talks of I know not what absur——"

"Absurd or not absurd," said Stephen Ray, "I've done my la stroke of work here."

"Indeed?" asked Adam Furness, lifting his brows. "Cynthia— what the devil does the fellow mean?"

"He says the place doesn't suit him," said she demurely, "and we've been saying good-bye."

"Well—it's a free country; and if you can't keep him, Cynthia, I' sure it's not for me to try. He won't peach, because he daren't," h said with an absent sigh. Well, Ray—if we must part we must; n doubt a fellow of your talents has only got to cant hard enough to fin somebody soft-headed enough to put faith in those fine white finger And now—don't stare—I'm going to retire from business, too."

"You, Adam Furness?" exclaimed Red Beard. "No. You do n such thing!"

"Yes. I; and you, Peter Petersen; and Father Isaacs; and th Count; and Jellitt; and the Knacher; and I'd have said Stephe Ray, if he hadn't taken French leave. And I'll tell you why. We' not done badly; but we're going to make so big a coup this time th if we don't retire on our winnings we shall be a pack of fools."

"I wait," said Red Beard, resuming his pipe, "to know the litt kame."

"It's told in a dozen words. And it means seventy thousa pounds."

"Seventy thousand pounds," said Red Beard. "That is a great Zum."

Cynthia had subsided back to her stool, and fell to grinding the point of an etching needle while she hummed a tune. Stephen Ray sat apart, making charcoal scrawls on the surface of one of the long benches and wiping them off again.

"Yes; it is a biggish sum. The Count has got the office that a million roubles in specie have got to be paid next New Year's Day—old style, of course, which gives us time to the good—to the Khan of Moulkhend, wherever that may be—somewhere in Tartary, I suppose. Of course it's secret service; or else there'd be nothing in my idea. Now, what is to prevent our receiving the million roubles, and paying the Khan of Moulkhend?"

Red Beard shook his head.

"Everything is to prevent," said he.

"It's risky—I know that. So risky that this *must* be the last time. Listen to my plan. All that has to be done is to contrive so that the Khan of Moulkhend's agent for receiving the Czar's little present shall be one of ourselves; or rather not one of ourselves, but somebody who will serve us innocently. Very well. I hear from the Count that the money is to be paid to Moshel Kraff, who keeps a bank at Oufa, on behalf of the Khan. Now, I know, of my own knowledge, that Moshel Oufa is under obligations to an English financier—never mind names—who has the strongest possible reasons for serving me. Wheels within wheels, you know: and I haven't laid my plan without putting a magnifying glass to every cog and every screw, like Cynthia there to the point of a needle. Very well. I go to my English friend—a most respectable man, by the way—and I say, 'Lend me a clerk to do me a little confidential business at——'"

"But will he—this vriend?"

"He will. And what's more, Moshel will be instructed to employ his particular clerk in this very affair. You may leave all that to me. And the clerk will carry out our specie, in sealed packets, for delivery to the Khan, and have clear instructions to bring us home what he receives from the Czar. We have only to make the best exchange we can of the good roubles into English gold—and there you are."

"Ah. It is a beaudiful idea. A beaudiful idea. All but when the Khan finds himself zold."

"Let him. A Tartar Khan isn't an expert; and ten to one our roubles will be scattered about all over Tartary before some Jew or other gets hold of a sample. But even if he does find out the trick, what then? Either he'll try to sell somebody else with them, or he'll complain to the Russian Government. The Russian Government won't care to make a fuss—they'll come down secretly on Moshel. Moshel will either pay up, with interest, or pass on inquiries to my English friend. My English friend will at once pass them on to the British Foreign Office. And then Russia will bow politely, and say, 'Never mind. All right. We made a little mistake, thank you—that's all.'"

"Ah! So! I gomprehend."

"And the difference between the cost of making our roubles and the value of the real ones, allowing for incidental expenses and probable

loss on exchange, will be, at the very least, seventy thousand sterli
Only we must get an extra good die. Let me see—we'll put on t
Knacker. I don't think he's ever yet tried his hand at a rouble ; b
he must make a trial piece or two. And we must look sharp—a milli
coins aren't to be turned out in a day."

Cynthia swung herself round, stool and all.

"Then that you shan't!" she cried. "The Knacker! Why h
not to be trusted with a teetotal medal. Stephen—don't sit the
messing the clean bench like a baby. You're the only man—man i
deed!—that can do it ; and do it you shall."

"No," said Adam Furness, sharply and shortly. "This isn't a ga
at play."

"Oh, I wish *I* were a man! Stephen—don't you hear? Th
think the Knacker a better artist than you."

"Than me?" cried Stephen, blazing around. "Give me y
sharpest pencil, Cynthia, and a scrap of tracing-paper. . . . The
Let the master of the Russian mint beat that for a rouble if he can."

Adam Furness took the delicately pencilled design, and handed it
Red Beard, who nodded silently.

"It's a pity—a great pity," said Adam. "I shall keep this,
course, though the Knacker won't like to work from another ma
design."

"Cynthia!" said Stephen feebly, almost with a moan.

"Well? What is it now?"

"I *must* do just this one die more."

Then it was Cynthia who almost sighed. She had conquered—bu
was the artist, not the man.

At last, after what seemed like a snail's crawl, the express reac
Marchgrave. Guy, late as it was, let himself into his office with
latchkey ; and there, sure enough, was a letter from London. It
in a strange hand—no doubt from Marion. He tore it open, his he
beating. And he read :

"Sir,

"If you want to see Miss M. F., come to Euphrosyne Terr
Belvedere Road, Piggot's Town, London, N. Dr. Wyndham Snell
the door.

"Your obedient servant,

"SOMEBODY YOU DON'T KNOW."

CHAPTER VIII.

CATCHING A TARTAR.

Marion had learned, all in a moment, what it means to be in a passion. She darted upstairs, threw herself into her own bedroom, locked the door behind her, and then paced up and down like an imprisoned storm.

Mrs. Snell's accusations had been less insulting than the Doctor's defence. The wife had the excuse of jealousy, which is as unanswerable as that of any less extreme form of madness. But there was something about Wyndham Snell's style of chivalry which showed that the jealousy was not entirely smoke without fire. She had never dreamed that there were such people in the world; she knew there were none on that other and rougher side whence she had come.

The idea of its entering any human brain to conceive so monstrous an imagination as that she, Marion Furness, could seem, even by accident, to flirt with Wyndham Snell! It was too outrageous for comedy—it made her cheeks burn and her ears tingle even now that she was alone. And for the Doctor himself to have heard the charge, and yet to have interfered in that odious way! What could her father have meant by bringing her and leaving her here? Her father! The burning and the tingling ceased, and left her cold.

Of the story of his crimes and his punishments, and of the evil influences he appeared to exhale, she could make nothing. But she could not avoid a full measure of fear. She had felt bound to be his champion in the presence of Mrs. Snell; but she had no right to suppose that the abominable woman had been lying. And what had become of him? Since the day of her mother's death he had never sent her so much as a message. Except that she knew him by sight, he was as much a stranger to her—indeed, more a stranger—than before the day of her mother's flight from him in terror. If she had not already sent that letter of dismissal to Guy, she could never have had the heart or the strength to send it now. Had she really, in her deepest heart, even when she forbade him to seek her out, meant that he should take her at her word? Well—he had done so; it was true that she was hidden away past finding out; but still she had a sort of instinct that a true knight and lover is not to be baffled as if he were a policeconstable. She would never marry him, of course—but if he had only found her out, despite all her precautions, and come to her against her will!

Surely there was no girl in the whole wide world so utterly defenceless and alone. Her mother dead; her lover bidden to forget her; her father a man to be feared, and as likely to be her foe as her friend;

no creature to speak to except a woman who had insulted her, and Dr. Snell. And what sort of thing was her life to be? There was bu one certainty about it—that it could not go on like this for another day How could she endure to sit again at the same table with her host an hostess, after the scene she had just left behind?

Agitated and bewildered as she was, she tried to think out some pla of action, so as to find some safe corner where she might sit dow awhile and decide whether and how she should enter the battle of lif alone, or whether she should throw herself on fate in sheer despair She sat on her bed, or walked up and down, thinking that she wa thinking, until the cracked teatray proclaimed that Dr. and Mrs. Sne were going to dine.

As she took no notice of the summons, it was repeated in the for of a tap at the door.

"If you please, miss," said the voice of the new housemaid, "th gong's gone, and master he says the soup's getting just like charit and would you please to come and sit down?"

All at once she was inspired with a plan.

"Tell them not to wait," she said, opening the door; "I am n coming to dinner to-day. And then get me a cab, if you please."

"A cab, miss?"

"Yes. I shan't be many minutes packing. I am going away."

"A cab, miss! Why, there isn't such a thing for miles."

"Well, you can find somebody who will take my things to the train

"You're going off by train, miss—without e'er a bit of food?"

"Yes—I must be off at once ——"

"I ask your pardon, miss. Am I to say anything to Dr. Snell?"

Marion had of course seen the girl constantly; but something in t manner of her question, half hesitating, half confidential, made h observe her for the first time. She was a young person, plain and co mon-looking enough to suit the most jealous mistress of the househ of the most volatile master, and something of a slattern, red-haired a freckled; but with the undefinable air that goes with a greater be in one's own good looks than is shared by the world. She had alm whispered her question in what seemed a most significant way.

"Of course," said Marion, a little haughtily.

"Thank you, miss. I only wanted to know."

Yes; that would certainly be the best thing she could do. Th was neither law nor duty to detain her with this odious couple; a instinct, the result of a hundred little things unnoticed at their tim but now brought into a focus, warned her that if Mrs. Snell wa woman to be detested, the Doctor was a man to be feared. And h they been her best and dearest friends, she could not have stayed to a mischief-maker and a cause of quarrel. All she had to do was to t herself off, and then send her new address, whatever it might be her father, to the care of Dr. Snell. It was the easiest thing in world.

And there was something attractively defiant about it too. Th was never a girl whom nature and habit combined had made so hu

r complete dependence upon another as Marion Furness. Which is e same thing as to say that she had to call upon her whole strength, its inmost marrow, when she found herself without even a straw to n on. People who are used to stand alone have no such need. They n do without calling on their reserve of strength—wherefore it often ppened that very little strength comes of its own accord. But rion had to discover and open up new springs of strength, and all gether—all that could come from fear, all that could come from pride, that could come from anger, from stubborness; even from despair. ver before had she known real fear, or real anger; and she was bewil-red by them into a renewal of the strength she thought she had spent ce for all when she had compelled herself to renounce her lover. e result might be mere recklessness—but then that also is a strong ng.

s for despair—it is not too strong a word for a girl of nineteen who cut herself adrift from her own sheet-anchor in a storm, and sees ore her nothing but a black sea fog into which she is being carried, hout chart or compass, or a hand to help her with helm or sails.

t last there was something to do. To crush her belongings into her es was an active relief for her, who had never touched a friendly d or heard a friendly voice since her mother died. That scrap of rgy, small as it was, kept her from brooding over the constant drag-weight at her heart, that she should know any such touch or voice er again—that she would have to drag through perhaps fifty years to e alone, and alone, and alone. . . This done, she dressed elf for out-of-doors in the black that she meant to wear for the rest er days, counted the small stock of money in her purse, and went ly downstairs. Perhaps by this time such substitute for a cab as ot's Town could afford would be at the door. When she reached passage she found Dr. Snell loitering up and down, in an old jacket slippers, with a cigar.

Fanny tells me you are running up to town, Miss Furness," said "If it is on any business, can I save you the trouble? I hope ."

I have sent for some one to take my things to the station," said on, as stiffly as she knew how.

"You are really going away?"

"I have no choice."

"Come, come—be reasonable, my dear young lady. Mrs. Wyndham did behave like a brute pig, I know. But you can't make a silk out of a sow's ear—I married beneath me, as no doubt you have covered with those bright eyes of yours—and you must make allow-e for jealousy that was exceedingly natural, I'm sure. You see we been such very particular friends, you and I."

"While I am waiting," said Marion, freezing, "I will wish Mrs. good-bye."

"Mrs. Wyndham Snell has retired to her room. A headache, *she* But I needn't tell another woman what a headache means. As s she's out of the sulks—for you'll be pleased to hear I've been

blowing her up sky high all through dinner—I'll see that she draws you up a written apology. You won't bear malice after that, I'm sure. Come—kiss and be friends : I mean, of course, when I say kiss, in a metaphysical way. Anyhow, there's my hand. Take off your bonnet in the parlour, and let me give you a glass of wine."

"I would rather wait here, while my things are brought down."

"Come, dear Miss Marion, I can quite understand you feel hurt—I'm a sensitive man myself, so I know. But malice and sulks will never do. They'd ruin the finest complexion that ever was made—even yours. Don't you give another thought to Mrs. Wyndham Snell. Who's that old woman, I should like to know, to come between kindred souls ? She won't do it again, after what I've been saying to her to-day. Come, my dear. As you like me, and I like you, Mrs. Wyndham Snell must learn to lump it—that's all. So you'll please to take off that bonnet again, and I'll open another Moët. I insist on it—as your medical man."

It was not the first time that Marion had suspected her host of opening a good many other bottles ; but he had never let them carry him so far as now. A horrible idea seized her that the conversation he had overheard between her and his wife had set fire to his vanity. She dared not make for the street door, because he stood full in the way ; and she dared not retreat to the stairs, for fear he should follow her.

"You are very strangely mistaken," she said icily, looking him straight in the eyes the while, with a faint and vague recollection of some mad-bull story.

"Mistaken, my dear ? Not a bit of it. There's one thing one can't be mistaken about—and that's sympathy. As if I didn't know ! "

"*I* was mistaken, then. I thought that any man—I won't say gentleman—would pay some little respect to any woman ; and a host to a guest ——"

"Gammon. Fancy Adam Furness being father to such a sly little bird ! 'Won't say gentleman,' indeed ! Say Wyndham—that'll sound just as well ; and I'll say Marion. So, Marion, my dear, put off your airs and graces : you've done enough for dignity and all that sort of thing ; and be your own sweet, lovely self again. Ah, you know well enough what havoc you've made of the heart of your own poor Wyndham. But he'll give you good for evil—never you fear. No woman ever yet repented that trusted to the honour of Wyndham Snell—his heart of gold—and every drachm, scruple, and grain of it, all for you ! "

She nerved herself for a sudden escape. "Honour ! " she could not help repeating with scorn, though it went against her will to waste a word. "Let me pass this moment ! " she exclaimed, moving forward, and without shifting her eyes from his face, as if all depended upon the steadfastness of her gaze.

But he was prepared for her tactics this time ; and only stretched out his arms with a singularly ugly smile.

"Ah ! As if I didn't know we were made for each other," he said, pitching his cigar behind him, "you and I ! and don't you know it too !"

No self-command could stand against such a tone and such a smile : nd Marion's, all untrained as it was, had been leaving her long ago.

"I despise you too much to hate you," she cried in a stifled voice at she did not know for her own. "Let me by."

Whether she pushed or struck his outstretched wrist in her attempt pass him, she did not know ; but there was no need of that for even s vanity to understand her words. Whatever had happened to his rist, hers was held tightly.

"You will *not* go," said he. "That felon, your father, trusted you me ; and here you stay till he comes : if that's never. Host and est, indeed? Patient and physician, you mean. Look here, young dy. You needn't wait for truck or boxes, because I've already dered them not to be sent for, or brought down. Go back to your n room ; put your head into cold water ; and stay there until you're a better humour. Either you make yourself pleasant to me, or I ake myself considerably unpleasant to you. Do you understand, w?"

She shook her bruised wrist free.

"Do you mean," she panted, "that I am to be kept here against my ll?"

"Unless you like to make it with your will."

"Why?"

"Never mind why. That's your father's affair, and mine. Go to ur room. Do you hear?"

"I will go to Mrs. Snell's ——"

"And tell her that *I* have been talking nonsense to *you?* Or should put it the other way round?"

"I shall leave this house. It is not a prison, and I am not a soner ——"

"You will not leave this house," said he, recovering his sweetest es. "And, so that you may put all nonsense out of your head, I tell you why. Are you aware why I was called in to attend Mrs. rness, your mother? It was because there was reason to fear ease of the brain. And a lady, be she mother or daughter, who is guest of a physician—well, neither servants nor neighbours will her to bring her visit to an end unless her friends remove her, or host announces her—cured. Do you understand now? Shall we duets together, like good friends? Or does your mental trouble uire sharper treatment—treatment that it would infinitely distress to use?"

"You are keeping me here as a mad-woman? Me?"

"H'm. Brain trouble is not necessarily transmitted ; but I can't et why I was called in—too late—to see your mother. And there o say the least, a curious similarity in her craze for running away her husband, and yours for escaping from your best friends. , we must hope for the best. And we must work for the best, —so perhaps you will oblige me by taking off that bonnet, *now.*"

er eyes might struggle ; but it was his that had to be obeyed.

. . . .

Guy Derwent, in his office at Marchgrave, read over and over again, by the light of a single candle, the mysterious communication that had reached him concerning Marion. Everything about it was strange. Dr. Snell--it was a Dr. Snell whom he had met at the Green Cheese. Why should he have concealed any knowledge of Marion? And why or how should anybody else have sent him news of her—who should know anything about him and her? And what need should there be for secrecy—for a letter without a name? Above all, how came it that there was mention of Miss Furness only, and of Mrs. Furness not a word? The handwriting was also a puzzle—evidently that of a woman unused to a pen.

Some secret mystery seemed to be folding itself round Marion. Otherwise it was impossible that so much time could have passed without a single word from her, or even about her, but for this scrawl, which provoked even more anxiety than would have come of dead silence, in its different way. Of course there was only one thing to be done—to act upon the message without delay. It might be a trap; it might be a false scent: but it was the only sign of a clue in what was becoming a bewildering and alarming maze.

So he spent the rest of the night in business correspondence, and in making the best arrangements he could for his affairs to do without his presence for another two days, breakfasted on coffee and a pipe; held counsel with his clerk; and was waiting for the next up-train, when he received in his own very office the honour of a visit from no less a personage than John Heron.

"You must think me the original bird that used to be everywhere at once," said the banker genially. "Good-night in London—good morning in Marchgrave. I got away sooner than I hoped for—left town by the half-past five a.m., had a good sleep in the train, and here I am on my way to breakfast and Kate at The Cedars. Any news? Which means, I hope, any good news?"

"None. And ——"

"Indeed? And you certainly don't look yourself, Guy. I am afraid you're worrying."

"No doubt about that, Heron."

There are impulses to reticence as well as to speech; and some most uncharacteristic impulse of that kind prevented Guy at once laying before his friend and counsellor that letter from "You Don't Know Who." No doubt there were plenty of good reasons for immediate reserve. Anxiety was beginning to burn itself into him too deeply to come readily to the surface; he was a little youthfully ashamed of doing nothing in Heron's eyes but chase about after a girl; and he was naturally reluctant to trouble further, about his own private affairs, a personage so overwhelmed in great public undertakings as the great man of Marchgrave. True, that great man was the essence of sympathy, good nature, and practical helpfulness; it was notorious that not only his money was at all men's services (that is common), but his time, which is uncommon, and his trouble, which is rare indeed. But the[...] this made it the more incumbent upon all real friends to show grat[...]

tude by sparing him any avoidable trouble or loss of time by every means in their power. Guy already felt himself too guilty in this respect to trouble him any more than he was obliged with love affairs. And, besides all these excellent reasons for reticence, there was one too subtle to be called a reason—some filmy phantom of feeling too vague even to be called impulse ; altogther unconscious, and incapable of being put into thoughts, much less into words ; the sort of sensation that now and then will suddenly strike the most open-hearted of children shy even in the middle of an exciting game. Some people call it a presentiment, when anything happens afterwards ; but, as mostly nothing happens, the world seems, for once in want of a word.

"Ah, you must learn not to worry, Guy. And don't say you can't help worrying—a man who works must have no more to do with worry than a soldier with fear, and it's an equal shame. Work and wait, and everything's sure to go right ; once worry, and everything from that moment goes wrong. I'm an anxious man by nature, but with all my irons I never worry about one of them. I don't dare. I haven't passed a sleepless night since I've been in Marchgrave. However, I didn't come to preach ; and I suppose you're wondering why I *am* come, before even going home. Poor Kate !—I really must manage to get a little more time for home. I might just as well be a country doctor, or a sailor, or a bagman. When *you*'re married, Guy, don't be a justice, don't stand for your native town, and don't get Docks on the brain. Stick to office and home. I mean it ; for there does come a day at last when a man gets tired ; and yet, if he's not kept himself his own master, he must all the same, tired or not, go on roll, roll, roll ; and, Guy, I'm getting to feel uncommonly like that man."

So unlike the most indefatigable, the most work-enjoying man in England was John Heron talking, and in so hitherto unheard a tone of self-pity, that for a moment Guy's own anxieties felt small and ashamed. After all, had Marchgrave been considerate to its willing servant—had it sufficiently remembered that the strongest and most unselfish of men is not a machine, that human nerves is not made of cast iron, and that even he who thinks the least of himself has his own human affections and his own need of repose for heart and brain ? In truth, John Heron was looking weary—more weary than was to be accounted for by his having just come off a journey that had started with the sun's. Could it be that John Heron was showing a sympton of breaking down ? The very idea of it was appalling to a Marchgrave man, who was besides the most grateful of all his friends.

"I wish to heaven there were any way I could help you !" said he.

"I know you do. . . . But come, my lad, you needn't look so scared. I'm game to roll as long as I hold together ; I want a sight of Kate and a pound or two of rump-steak ; nothing more. Only. . . Well, you can do me a bit of service, Guy, and that's why I'm come."

"Thank you, Heron. And I hope it's hard."

"I'm afraid it is—in a way. Could you spare the time to go to Russia, and, of course, back again ?"

Marion ! Guy hoped that his face did not fall.

"When?" asked he.

"Oh—say in about a fortnight; and you might be another fortnight or perhaps three weeks away. You needn't worry about your business; I'll see to that; and a journey for the bank in Chester Line will cover a multitude of sins."

"And what should I have to do?"

Guy felt ashamed of wishing that he had not been so reticent about that letter touching Marion; in which case, he knew, John Heron would be the last man in the world to trouble him about other thing that would carry him away. He felt it to be an unworthy wish, tha should make him unwilling to do what was in itself but a slight servic for the man to whom he owed his start in life and the friendly and generous countenance that had enabled him to think of Marion; and just, too, when that man seemed for the first time to be feeling th weight of his own labours. Love and Marion before all; and Honour and Gratitude were not among the smallest elements in a love worth of Her. And surely—surely she would be found before then, and th secret be cleared, before Love and Friendship could set up conflictin claims.

"I'll tell you in two minutes; and you'll see that I come to you no because there's any real difficulty about the thing, but because a ma is wanted in whose discretion and trustworthiness as absolute confiden can be placed as in my own. And it's not so easy—one man of bus ness needn't tell another—to put one's finger at a moment's notice, a man at once young and active enough for rough travelling, who c be trusted abroad with a big fortune in specie, and who can hold h tongue. There are plenty of active young fellows, of course; b trusting youth is always nervous work, and your ordinary acti traveller might turn out much too active: he might go to Russia Texas, and stay there. And there are plenty of men to be trusted w untold gold; but they're neither young nor active, and apt to come grief when they're taken out of their grooves."

Guy could not help feeling flattered. Approbation from John He of Marchgrave was praise indeed.

"The long and short of it is this," said John Heron. "A corresp dent of mine in town is agent for a loan to a Tartar Khan."

"What—are even Tartars coming into the money market, Heron

"So it seems. I suppose we shall have King Mumbo Jumbo ne or the Chief of the Cherokees. Ah! Progress and Civilization wonderful things; it's all good for business; and upon my soul rather deal with a decent Cannibal, who would give fair security, t with some Potentates I could name nearer home. And then this K isn't a common Khan. He's the Khan of Moulkhend."

"Moulkhend?"

"You never heard of the Khan of Moulkhend? Well—very li not. Central Asian politics aren't easy to follow without special at tion; and those coming men are too 'cute to draw general notic themselves—till they come. So this loan isn't to be talked of ou —you understand. It's to be paid in specie—pounds sterling.

will carry the money, packed and sealed, to a place called Oufa, near the Tartar frontier, in Orenburg. By the way, every sealed package will be marked 'A.' You will also, I understand, receive through a banker at the same place, to whom you will have an introduction, a large sum in Russian money, which you will pack and seal yourself, marking it with any other letter you please. That, I suppose, belongs to some other transaction, and that the notion is to kill two birds with one stone—to make a single journey do for two affairs. Only understand that you are to pay with the English money, marked 'A,' and to bring back the Russian money, marked say 'B'; to know nothing of the transaction, but only to act as a paying and receiving machine; and to be back as soon as you possibly can. You see, it's all very simple to a man who has quick feet, clean hands, and a silent tongue."

"It certainly does not seem hard," said Guy, who, had it not been for Marion, would have looked forward to a holiday, with a dash of adventure about it to give it piquancy. "I'm not likely to loiter, or chatter, or find myself in Texas. I suppose there'll have to be passports, and things?"

"Oh, they'll be all right: and so will introductions and instructions n detail. It's not my own affair, beyond obliging principals who have heir reasons for keeping in the background. Of course, that's nothing o me or you, so long as I know who they are. Your expenses will be did, of course; and you'll charge for your time—and, if you'll take a int, you'll charge high. And now that's settled, I'll give a whole half our to the inner man. And thank you. It's just one of those small hings that give one ten times more worry than big ones. I might have een weeks in those busy times looking for a man if it hadn't been for ou."

There was time to catch the up train; and the middle of the afternoon found Guy, no longer thinking of khans or cannibals, at the railay shed at Piggot's Town. He had never heard of that place, any ore than of Moulkhead, until yesterday; and when he did see it, he ought that it would benefit for a spell of Tartar rule. Central Asia uld not be so God-forsaken as Piggot's Town; and he could not help eculating on better uses of English gold than helping a Tartar chief play a part in the affairs of the world. And Marion and her other—what in the name of chaos could they be doing here? So far they were concerned, the atmosphere of Moulkhead would have been nitely less strange.

Having discovered Belvedere Road, he duly reached the brass plate which he had been directed, and knocked nervously and sharply.

"Can I see Dr. Snell?" he asked the girl who opened to him. I d not give my name.

He was duly conducted into the front parlour where the doctor saw patients and meditated over those great medical works that were to ke him famous in history to come. At the moment he was ostensibly king notes with a gold pencil-case from a large volume that might, anything appearing to the contrary, have been his own. He rose n his occupation with a slow, dignified, and sympathetic smile.

"What can I have the pleasure . . . Mr. Derwent!" he exclaimed under his breath, the smile fainting away.

"My name is Guy Derwent, and I have been directed to you for news of Miss Furness, who, you told me, has gone abroad."

"Gone abroad! Did I? Let me see. I suppose if I said so——"

"We are such strangers to one another, you and I," said Guy, with decision, "that we can't expect trust from one another because we happened to meet by chance for once in our lives. I don't expect you to trust me; and you can't expect me to trust you. I have had reason to believe that you did not think it right to tell me all you knew of Miss Furness. I dare say your reasons were perfectly right. I can quite understand there is some influence at work of which I know nothing, though I can guess its nature very well. And when I tell you that I am engaged to be married to the young lady, you will understand my right to ask you—is she Here?"

Dr. Snell threw a rapid glance round the room. Girls will sometimes leave a glove, or a handkerchief, lying about, which might serve for a trace. Fortunately for him, there was nothing of the kind.

"Here?" he asked in astonishment. "Bless my soul! no!"

But there was an infinitesimal hesitation before his answer that prevented it from carrying conviction.

"You will understand my position well enough," said Guy, "not to take offence at my ringing the bell and asking your maid the name of the lady who is staying here?"

He assumed more knowledge than he had; but he felt himself engaged in a fencing match, where it is supremely needful to know how to feign. Dr. Snell might fly into a rage, and refuse with indignation, in which case the fencing match would become an open duel and Guy would know how to press his attack home. Or he might——

What he did was the only thing Guy did not count upon.

"By all means. I quite understand, my dear sir," said he blandly. "If I were a lover after a young woman, I should do precisely the same. I will ring the bell . . . . Fanny," he said to the girl whom the bell summoned, "tell your mistress I want her in the consulting-room at once. Mrs. Snell will, I hope, be regarded as a competent witness," said he.

Now it so happened that Fanny had not to go far to find Mrs. Snell, who had learned from her husband the fact that the partition between the front and the back parlours was exceedingly and sometimes conveniently thin; and on hearing the message she conceived an almost dramatic situation, by which Marion should be delivered out of the custody of a too susceptible stranger, without the seeming accident being laid at her own doors. It would be easy enough, thought she, under the circumstances, to give her odious guest a hint that would send her into the parlour of her own accord; and as for Wyndham, he might wriggle out of the situation as he could. Till Marion was out of the way, she felt as if she hated him even more than her.

So, instead of immediately obeying her husband's summons, she went upstairs and tapped gently at Marion's door.

There was no answer.

"Miss Furness!" she whispered.

No answer again. That girl had kept her room obstinately since yesterday: perhaps she was ill. If she were only dead, thought jealous Julia, what a good job it would be! She tried the door. To her surprise, it was unlocked, and she peeped in, listening. Hearing nothing, she opened it a little farther still; then farther and farther.

At last she obtained a complete view of the room. And not only was every sign of Marion herself missing, but her trunks were packed, strapped, and locked, ready to be removed.

There was no doubt of it. That horrible girl had fled; and Wyndham would follow to join her by the next train. She saw the elopement unravel itself before her miserable eyes.

CHAPTER IX.

TWO IN THE MORNING.

Guy Derwent waited in silence while the Doctor, with an "Excuse me, my dear sir—a most difficult case, in high life," returned to his volume; at any rate to his reflections. Guy could not make things out at all. He was convinced that the Doctor was for some reason or other deceiving him; and yet how could he remain really deceived about so simple a fact as the presence, now or recently, in this house of a girl who must be known to neighbours as well as servants—a fact that he might learn by the simplest inquiries? Concealment seemed so utterly futile; and yet he could feel no doubt that Marion was being concealed. Angry impatience was rising up in him, even while aware that he was entering into an unknown country, where he must necessarily lose the track unless he practised patience and kept cool.

If only he could have seen what was passing in the mind of Wyndham himself! Versed as he was in the art of walking among eggs, the Doctor, while staring at his open volume, seemed to see the whole basketful [illegible] round him. For he had set down Marion in the books of [illegible] as a fountain of income for many years to come, and, on the strength of her, had dealt with his original retaining fee in ways that would have made his wife, had she known of them, fit for Bedlam. But with the influence that a man of his fascination would, as a matter of course, exert over any young woman, and when with his knowledge of her father's antecedents, he had seen his way to making an exceedingly fine season of golden sunshine, which promised to contain moments even more delightful than gold. For he was not so much a [illegible] as a needy man; a man indeed overflowing with all sorts of [illegible]ngers which mere gold could not appease. And now, just when he thought everybody was safe and certain, just when he had so triumph

phantly overwhelmed Marion with a sense of power that no woman on earth could continue to withstand, here came this Marplot to send his cards flying—Kings, Queens, Knaves, and all.

Luckily, he had not committed himself, or told an irrevocable lie; and he had gained some interval for thought by sending for Julia. And now—how would it do to stick to his old ground, and call his wife to witness that there was not, and never had been, any creature living in the house besides their two selves? No. There was the servants; and there was the Prince of Wales hard by. How would it answer to admit the presence of a guest, but in the character of a lunatic who could not be seen, and who neither in face, nor in age, nor height, nor in name, was Marion? That might do better, if he could manage to give his wife his cue. But no—it would be too delcate as well as too dangerous a game.

He would have to send Marion elsewhere for a while, and to provide himself with a mad woman answering to his discription in view of a second visit—and how was that to be done? And the lunacy laws, though convenient instruments, are apt to turn dangerously in the hands of those who try to play with them in an amateur way.

But—"I have it!" he exclaimed at last, seized with a real inspiration. "I've got it, by all that's Blue. . . . . I—I really beg your pardon, Mr. Derwent," he added hastily; for, like many another philosopher engaged on a proplem, he had forgotten for the moment that he was not alone. "I mean I've spotted her ladyship's symptoms, that have been puzzling the faculty for years. A little ebullition is excusable ———"

Suddenly the door was thrown open; and, standing within it, like a picture in its frame, Guy beheld a grim woman with ice in her bearing and thunder in her eyes.

"Dr. Snell!" she broke out, "what have you done with that girl?"

"Conf ——— Julia!" cried the Doctor, "what are you talkin[g] about?" Are you ———"

"Yes, Wyndham, I am! You've no call to remind me there's visi[tors]; I see that; and I see a great deal more. And I don't care wh[o] hears—no, neither who they are nor what they are; if they were th[e] queen. What have you done with that girl?"

Wyndham Snell tried the effect of that mighty frown on which h[e] plumed himself as being imperial in its power to silence and awe. Bu[t] though backed by a peculiar motion of the fist—a masonic sign we[ll] understood by certain initiated wives—it failed, and the Doctor was l[eft] looking like a baffled Jove.

"I ask you," said the lady, "what have you done with Miss Mari[on] Furness? and where's she gone? Ah—you may pretend to sta[re]. But well I know what's been going on under my very eyes—let my n[...] alone. As if I didn't see through that—that baggage, the very min[ute] she came! As if I was took in by tricks that wouldn't bamboozl[e a] byby! As if *I* didn't know what a girl's up to that does her hair l[ike] that, and what's up when a man that ought to be ashamed of hims[elf]

if she isn't, goes philandering up and down the stairs. Yes; *philandering*, Dr. Snell. . . . . But I'm not going to put up with such goings on any more. What would *you* say if *I* went off—with a Man?"

"Say? Why, I'd say Heaven help the poor fool!" said the Doctor, clutching at his vanishing wits in sheer despair. "Woman alive—will you come to just one of your seven senses, and say something that it doesn't want the Devil himself to understand?"

"I *will* say it, then. Miss Furness is gone; and I know why; and *you know where.*"

"Gone? I *will* know what you mean!"

"And so," said Guy, very quietly, "will I."

Verily the Fates were fighting against Wyndham Snell that day. He had just struck out the most magnificent of plans—an idea so completely splendid that he might have eaten all his cakes and kept them too—and in the very moment of inspiration it was paralysed by a spasm of idiotic jealousy; flattering, no doubt, but outrageously ill-timed. So completely paralysed was it that, could it ever again be available, he would be unable to recall it even to his own mind.

But not even his anger with his wife approached the bitterness of his rage against Marion. And that rage was less on account of her having brought him into this maze of trouble than on behalf of Vanity, which, in its tenderest place, had received a cruel blow. Never had it dawned upon him that he was not irresistible, even when she had repulsed his advances in a way that a much less really thick-skinned person would have been able to understand. He had regarded her behaviour of yesterday as but a trifling skirmish that gives zest to victory, and enables a woman to yield without forfeiting the formal honours of war. And—she had really gone: nay, had outwitted as well as repulsed him. Marion Furness had made Wyndham Snell feel like a fool—that is to say, she had done what his entire experience of himself, despite a life of unbroken failure, had hitherto failed to do. And what man ever forgave a woman who makes him feel like a fool?

He would sooner forgive his own wife after shaking her for his own fault, or a benefactor to whom he has been ungrateful. . . . And the worst of it was that he could not even pose as having really carried off and hidden away a young and pretty girl. There was no salve left for poor Vanity—none.

So, after a whole minute's dead silence, he suddenly turned to Guy with the calmest and easiest of smiles.

"I'm sorry," he said, "that a comparative stranger should have been present at this little domestic scene. But we scientific men—even Socrates had his Gray Mare: and if you were a married man you'd think nothing of it; you wouldn't indeed. Mrs. Wyndham Snell will be sorry for this—when we are alone," he added in a gentler voice still.

"I am waiting," said Guy.

"I am coming to that. Miss Furness *has* been my guest. She was placed under my care by her father—who afterwards sent for her, and whom she has now gone to join. If Mrs. Wyndham Snell, instead of

entering into competition with Mrs. Siddons, had asked me about Miss Furness quietly, you would have been spared what must have been, I fear, a somewhat painful scene."

Mrs. Snell threw back her head, and snapped her teeth together, with an audible click, but said not a word.

"Her father," exclaimed Guy, his heart sinking. "And—her mother? And you told me they were abroad."

"Her mother," said Dr. Snell, with his eyes upon his wife, "is no doubt exactly where every wife ought to be. . . . And when Mr. Furness sent for his daughter, it was to take her abroad—where, I have not the least doubt, they are now."

"'Abroad' means nothing. Where?"

"My dear sir, if a young lady's affianced husband doesn't know, how in the world should I? I beg you will not misunderstand my position, Mr. Derwent. I am simply a physician; and people to me are cases—nothing more. As a rule, I don't even remember their names. Mr. A., an old patient, requests me to receive as a tempory inmate Miss A., whose health he thinks requires attention, while he is away on business. I receive her; I study her; I find her sound from head to heel; her father comes back for her; I deliver her to her natural guardian; I give a receipt for my fee; and there's an end. What becomes of them afterwards—whether they are eaten by bears in Feejee or by cannibals in Mexico, I neither know nor care. . . . By the way, you come from a place called Marchgrave, don't you? Do you happen to know anything of a gentleman named Heron—John Heron?"

"The banker there? What of him?"

"Oh, nothing—thank you. Nothing to do with your young lady, if that's what you mean."

"That is everything that I mean," said Guy. "I've not come here to be played with, Dr. Snell. Perhaps when I tell you that I know more about him than you fancy I do—that he has been a convict, and is still a criminal ——"

"What! *You* know all about John Heron, of Marchgrave?" asked the doctor, staring hard.

"John Heron! What has he to do with it? I'm talking of Adam Furness. And you will be good enough to speak of Adam Furness too."

"Oh? . . . . Adam Furness. True. Julia, my dear—only think! Mr. Furness, my old patient, has been a convict! So seemingly respectable a man. Well, well! I'll never trust appearances again. Ah—this is a wicket world. Mr. Adam Furness a convict! By Jove, though, when one comes to think of it, that may account for his being in such a hurry to go abroad. Those convicts often are. Let me see—I fancy they mostly go to the United States, or Sweden, or Spain."

From desperation to righteous anger; from anger to frankness and confidence; from these to ingenious simplicity—such had been Dr. Snell's path to a mastery of the situation. He had trusted to Luck, and Luck had favoured him. Starting lamely and hopelessly, his sto

as it proceeded gathered force, coherence, and likelihood, till he left his unwelcome visitor without a word to say. If he could only venture one little step farther, and hint that Marion had been carried away because her physician had proved too perilously fascinating—but this, though the temptation was strong, he did not dare.

So there was nothing to be done; and Dr. Snell's story hung so well together that Guy Derwent's reason had to yield to it, though his instinct still rebelled. And so both mother and daughter had fallen, in some unimaginable way, into a mysterious scoundrel's power. He began to understand better now why Mrs. Furness had made him the secret trustee of her whole fortune, now happily safe in the hands of John Heron. And he began now to guess, only too well, how—with the lucky exception of that all-important remittance—every letter had miscarried. The man must be a very devil of force and fraud. No doubt he was keeping his own wife and his own child to ransom at the price of the fortune of which he had got wind; and Guy shuddered at the thought of Marion in that devil's hands. He naturally recoiled from applying to the police, and creating a scandal that would fall on the heads of the two women whom he was vowed, both by will and by duty, to defend at almost any cost from even a whisper of harm. But better open scandal, even for them, than the nameless perils that he feared.

And what would the police do? he had to ask himself as he wandered back, baffled and aimless, in the direction of the town. Unless the man could be charged with some definite crime, he might laugh at the law—the police could not deprive a husband of his wife and the father of his child.

"Julia!" said the Doctor, facing sharply round on *his* wife, as soon as they were alone.

She set her teeth hard; but the fingers were twitching nervously, and he could almost hear her bosom heave.

"I suppose this is your doing—eh? You, that, just because you came across a girl that you could never have held a candle to in your best days, must needs bully her out of the house, and bring a hornet's nest about your own husband's ears? Who's to pay the piper now, when our last hundred's gone? Who's to hold on for another month—and just when I was on a track that would have turned Adam Furness into a gold mine without a bottom! Who? Take that, you damned, infernal Hag, Viper, and—Fool!"

Down came his hand, swinging with all its force, upon her ear: and down she went with a scream.

Marion had gone upstairs and taken off her bonnet, as she had been bidden; and then, seated on her bed and regarding her trunks, her fellow-prisoners, tried to overcome her anger with herself for having let herself be conquered by a creature like Dr. Snell. And this was all the harder, inasmuch as, contemptible as the creature ought to be, he was not contemptible. With all his vile vulgarity, and his extravagant vanity, she was conscious of a detestable sort of power about him, painful as it might be to feel. It was plain that he had his own wife

under his thumb ; and she was certainly not the kind of person tha every man would have found easy to rule. Of what designs was sh the object? What would happen to her if she remained? Was sh really intended to pass for a mad doctor's patient—had she reall shown symptoms of having inherited the curse that had been laid upo her mother? It was a horrible idea ; and yet it might be true. Mad people don't perceive their own madness. She would, no doubt, seem to herself fairly sane, while obviously mad to her father and her physician. She tried to recall any strangeness of conduct on her part that might have made her suspect lunacy had she seen them in others. Failing to find these, perhaps she was the victim of delusions. Perhaps Mrs. Snell was really an angel of tact and charity. Perhaps the house in Euphrosyne Terrace was the model of a refined and well-conducted home. Perhaps Dr. Snell was a gentleman ; and perhaps what she had taken for an insult from a half-tipsy coward was really the exercise of a physician's moral authority over a patient whom weakness of intellec had led to rebel.

But—"No ; I am not mad yet!" she cried out in her heart; "though God knows how soon I may be if I stay here : withou mamma : without Guy. . . . What can my father know of me What right has he to send me to these horrible people, and leave m alone with them, after seeing me just twice, and no more? So m mother showed her madness by running away from her friends, to hid Then if I am mad, too, I will be mad in her way. Better be mad i her way than sane in theirs. Ah, we were happy enough, while w were free to be as mad as we pleased. . . . . If I am in my rig mind, my father will say I am right to leave such a place as this. If am mad—well, I must do as another mad woman used to do. Only- thank God I wrote that letter to Guy."

She sat there on her bed thinking, till she felt so utterly and hel lessly alone that she could bear it no longer ; till the only thing th seemed really mad would be to accept whatever might happen a remain sitting still. Unformed plans whirled about in her brain : on one thing she could grasp clearly—the need to escape at once fro unknown terrors, even though the world that lay before her was ev more unknown.

And because it was all so unknown, the fear that she might be f lowed, or be prevented from living any free life she might have t good fortune to find, never entered her mind. All her knowledge the world came from the wandering life on the other side of it th she had led with her mother ; and no doubt there were theatres a so forth on this side as well as on that, and crumbs enough for da needs to be picked up by anybody who knew a little how to play a sing, even although not quite right in the brain. Nor did she argu whit the worse than people regarded as sane who, with all their repu wits about them, nevertheless eagerly cut themselves adrift from th moorings, and think they have nothing to do but trust themselves some frail boat or other open sea of life in order to reach some bank that they mistake for a distant shore. If all the rocks, sho

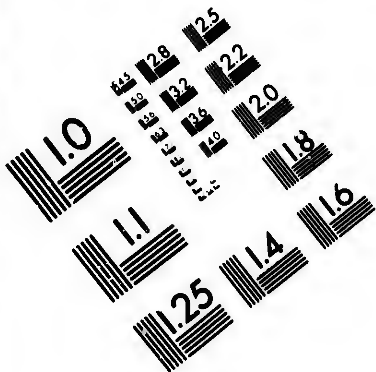
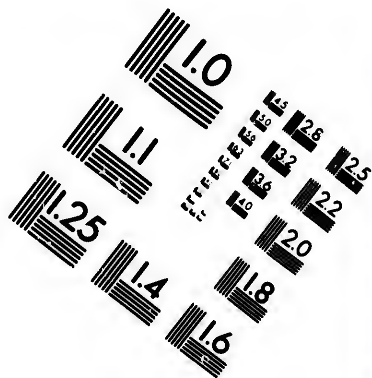
whirlpools, currents and haunts of pirates were mapped out for us beforehand, then. . . . Well, nothing. For nobody would ever start on any voyage at all; and nobody would ever be drowned.

Mrs. Snell used to go to bed early, and, before retiring attended to the safety of the house at all points with the exception of the street-door, which was under the sole guardianship of the Doctor. Marion heard the latter go out, and knew, from experience, that, with him, going out in the evening meant not returning till the morning. Then, punctually at ten o'clock, she heard the stairs creaking under the slow ascent of Mrs. Snell, and then the door of the bedroom just below her own open and close. Here was her opportunity for escape—the very opportunity for which, almost unconsciously, she had been planning and waiting. For she now knew that if she watched for a chance of carrying off her belongings with her, she would have to wait for long. Like a broken army with the enemy's dragoons in hot pursuit, her heavy baggage must go. The only real difficulty was so to time her flight as to run the least possible risk of disturbing Mrs. Snell, while allowing herself as much start as she could manage before the Doctor should return. So she spent the first part of the next hour in compelling the money in her purse to seem enough for present needs; the second, in robbing her trunks of as many small things as her pockets could carry; the last in counting the minutes till the hour she prescribed for herself had passed—dragging at the beginning and flying towards the close.

She opened her door timidly—everything was perfectly still. But how those wooden stairs, constructed by Piggot of unseasoned wood, creaked as she crept down them, one by one! As everybody knows, there is a tell-tale imp in every separate stair, which wakes up towards night, and screams when anybody carrying a secret treads upon its tail. But Mrs. Snell had slept soundly since Fortune came to Euphrosyne Terrace. She had nothing else to do except to wake early; and the two servants, Fanny and the cook, were stowed away somewhere under the kitchen stairs, with which Marion, fortunately for her flight, had no concern. At last, after making what seemed a hundred downward steps at least, she reached the entrance-hall, where a jet of gas burned so low as to be almost blue. She had nothing to do but open the street-door ——

"Fanny! Fanny, I say! Is that you? Boiling water—do you hear? And there's that confounded corkscrew gone off on its travels again."

The Doctor had come back, and was in the parlour, of which the door stood ajar. That he should have come back early—for him—on this one evening of all! Could he have suspected her, and was he playing turnkey? She could not face him again; but neither again could she turn heel—for the one she had too little courage, for the other too much shame. For a moment she turned cold; but before the Doctor's voice had died for a moment into a grumble, she had extinguished the blue flicker of the gas, and was holding herself so still in the darkness that she feared the Doctor would hear her beating heart.

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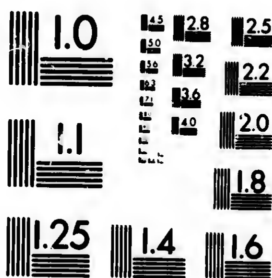
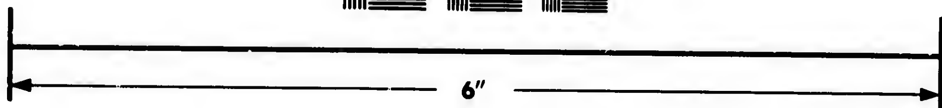

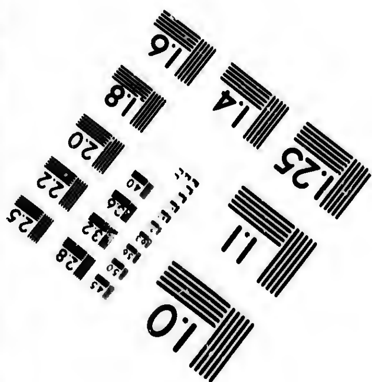
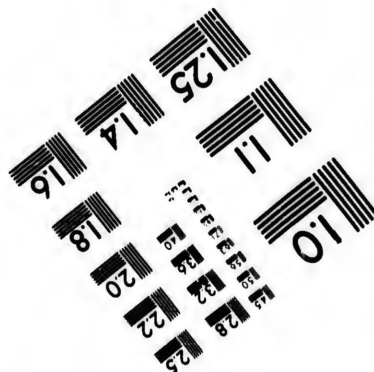

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And she feared that she must have betrayed herself still more when he, throwing a broad stream of light across the floor by opening the parlour-door, came out and looked round. He indeed almost touched her as he passed her where she crouched back into the darkest shadow on his way to the head of the kitchen-stairs, down which he disappeared stumbling, in search of materials for his vigil. That was her one irrevocable moment. She opened the street-door, closed it behind her without overmuch noise, and took to her heels.

At the farther end of Belvedere Road, all sound asleep, the lights of the railway line came into sight, crimson and green, and she heard the whistle of a passing or starting train. Her one definite idea was to make for London. The lights in front guided her through the darkness that partially veiled the deformity of Piggot's Town, past the skeleton houses, the ditch, and the cinder heaps, till she reached the station. Alas ! it was locked and dark ; and she read by the glimmer of a solitary outside lamp that she had heard, only five minutes ago, the whistle of the very last train.

Five minutes—at what now felt like the crisis of destiny ; and with everything round her so dismal, so unutterably hideous, and so lone, Marion was no heroine. She just sat down on the nearest cinder-heap and cried.

That is the worst of loneliness—being forced to pity one's self for want of having anybody else to pity. And the tears of self-pity become so horribly hard, and at last so cruel, in time. But this first outflow over herself did Marion good ; and, for that matter, she still had her dead mother and her lost lover in her heart ; for she would never see them again. And so—not being wholly for herself—the tears, thoug[h] springing from weakness, presently gave her courage to rise and to se[t] her face to the great far-away glow that shows by night like a pillar [o]f fire, where the road to London runs. She was now committed [to] flight, however floolishly ; and to London she must somehow fare.

So, till she might chance upon wheels to carry her, on she did fa[re] —again past the skeleton houses, full of black windows ; through [a] short passage of old turnpike way between ditches and twisted po[l]lards ; into a paved street between rows of mean shops, present[ly] diversified here and there by half-a-dozen brick houses with rail[ed] gardens ; then along a black and murderous canal, where a long bar[ge] or two lay sleeping ; and so on, till when, half ready to drop, t[he] vague blotch of undeveloped town began to take form, and signs [of] night life to appear. And then, already weary, she began to be real[ly] afraid. It was time to ask herself whither she was going, and [to] realize that the mere fact of having reached the fringe of Lond[on] meant nothing at all. She remembered the Clarence ; she might [go] there when she could find a cab to take her. But then that was wh[ere] Guy would surely have inquired for her—if he had inquired ; and [she] knew that it had a special connection with the neighbourhood [of] Marchgrave. Indeed, for aught she knew, he himself might actua[lly] be there.

If only she might act upon that as a hope instead of a fear ! [B]

she had not endured all this struggle against herself to give way now. Sooner could she go back to Piggot's Town than undo all her own work by risking a meeting with Guy. But somewhere she must go: and——

"Can you kindly tell me the nearest way to Blink Lane?"

She had reached a street of a better class, broad and as well lighted as gas allows; and she found herself making this timid inquiry of a belated person whom, after passing others without courage to address them, her instinct selected for her as a gentleman, and as likely to show courtesy. To her mortification he shrank a little when she accosted him, and quickened his steps without answering by look or word.

Could he also have mistaken her for a mad woman? It looked bitterly like it. And when presently she approached a policeman, who suddenly illumined her with a passing ray with his bull's-eye, it was she who recoiled. If she seemed so strange and so suspicious, he might think it his duty to take charge her altogether, and to inquire for her friends. Of course, she was behaving like a fool. But she was getting bewildered as well as frightened; and she was getting lost —in London, which means a thousand things.

Blink Lane had been her thought of a refuge because it had been her mother's—where her mother had died was her only shadow of a home. But she no longer dared ask her way, while those whom she might have asked were growing fewer and fewer. She had now passed a cab or two, and had tried to signal one by lifting up her hand; but she had failed. In short, what with unconscious hunger, very conscious fatigue, and the strangeness of it all, she had no more courage left than a child who has lost its way, and whose only instinct is to wander on and on. Perhaps by going on and on she might by chance reach Blink Lane; it must be somewhere, and even London must be exhaustible in time.

I am unable to trace her route through the greatest labyrinth in the world. One might as well try to trace that of a traveller led by Will-o'-the-Wisp through marsh and over moor. But it is certain that she had walked many miles, which seemed like many leagues, when she at once found herself at a corner which she recognised as surely that of Blink Lane. She even recognised the smell—or rather not that of Blink Lane itself, but of a bystreet that led thereto. So she entered it with renewed hope until it took a sharp turn to the right which she failed to remember. However, memory in such cases counts so little—till she followed the turn, she could not possibly tell whether she was right or wrong; nor indeed till she went a few steps farther, and a few steps farther still.

Alas! It was nothing any longer like Blink Lane. The next few steps brought her into an open square, with big houses and a railed garden in the middle, full of trees. She tried to read the name of the square at the corner; but, as I have said, her eyes—however starlike—were more than a trifle short-sighted, and the name was too high. Shy or not shy, she must trust to the honour or honesty of some cabman now; but none was to be seen or heard.

Boum—Boum—went the deep voice of a distant bell. And, as waiting for the signal, a whole chorus of voices began to sing in h ears; and down, down, she went, deeper and deeper, till she reach the very bottom of the sea.

"There! That's right," said a passing mermaid. "You're bett now."

"Am I?" asked Marion faintly.

She looked round and up, and shivered with the bitter cold of t waves. No—not the waves after all. She was in that horrible squa again; only lying down, with her head on the knees of a girl, seat on a doorstep, whose face bent over hers, and whose breath stirre her hair.

"Of course you are," said the girl. "What made you faint away Lucky I wasn't a bobby—you'd have been drunk and incapable befo you could come to again. Ah—and lucky it was Me, everyway. D you think you can sit on the step a bit? Lord, how cold you are Take my cloak. It's not very big, but it's nice and warm."

The girl was almost as young as Marion, very small and slight, n pretty, but with lively lips and bright eyes, and a voice that was pleasa though rather quick and shrill.

"I'm so sorry," sighed Marion, feeling the kindness and thinki no harm. "I never felt like that before. I won't be so silly agai but—can you tell me the way to Blink Lane?"

"Blink Lane?"

"Yes. That's where I want to go."

"Why, it's in the City—a good two miles. But—but—Blink Lan What the blazes do *you* want with Blink Lane?"

If the girl's way of speech was strong, her amaze was evident stronger. Still she had been kind; and Marion was not in a mood quarrel with kindness about a word.

"I want to get to an inn called the Green Cheese!"

"An inn! The Green Cheese!"

"Do you know it?"

"Oh no—not at all! But do *you?*"

"I have been there before ——"

"Why, how hot you are; you were just now like ice, and now yo like fire. . . . The Green Cheese—*you!* and I thought—Who's y friend?"

"Nobody. Unless it's you."

The girl looked her up and down, and through and through, ey eyes—and with such sharp ones that Marion seemed to feel a pain.

"There aren't many things I don't see through," said she; " this does beat me, if ever there was one. Who do you know a Green Cheese?"

"Nobody."

"And what are you going there for?"

"Because—because I don't know where else to go."

"Then, however you came to know of such a place, you *won't* go! So there! You've run away from home? But there—what's the good of asking questions when you're half-starved, and don't know what you're saying? A young lady fainting off in the streets at two in the morning, and going to the Green Cheese! And now you're all shivering again: just now you were like fire. Now look here. I know what running away is, and it's very good fun—for Me. But it don't agree with you: and I'm going to whistle for a cab, and see you home. Don't be afraid of the fare. I've got enough for that, and plenty more."

"No!" protested Marion, though she felt her brain swimming again; "I have no home ——"

"I should like to get at *him*, whoever he may be," said the girl sharply. "Then, whatever is to be done? Something, that's flat. Well—if you have been murdering somebody—and I hope it's Him—it's nothing to me. By Jingo, it would be rather fun; and—Gracious, it *would* be; heaps; and I will! There—come along."

Marion had not yet learned to fear her own sex, unless, indeed, it happened to take the shape of Mrs. Snell; but, indeed, afraid or not afraid, she was no longer in a state to resist any stranger who laid hands upon her in what seemed a generous way. And, for that matter, this particular specimen of young womanhood was obviously not one to be easily disobeyed. So she tried to rise, but only sank back again.

"Come—you can do better than that," said the girl. "And why—because you must, unless you want to be found there by a long sight worse hands than mine. I suppose you do feel weak; but you can lean on me. I'm little; but I'm awful strong. There'll be the deuce of a row; but who cares?"

"Where are we going to?" asked Marion.

"Never you mind. Not many steps away. Only to bed and supper. And you won't see a mortal soul but me—unless it's poor Stephen, and he don't count for anything: he's nothing but a Genius; not like a Him at all. There—that's better. Lean hard. And now you're all over it again! No—I'm hanged if I care!"

Marion felt rather than knew herself to be led out of the square through a dark passage strongly smelling of stables, and with only a single lamp to keep anybody from stumbling over a broken path of rough stones. It was sheer faintness, assuredly not courage, that kept her from being afraid. So feeble and so forlorn was she that she might have been led like a lamb into a den of wolves. The girl, however, chattered as if to cheer her in the most unwolf-like way till she reached a small door in a brick wall, which she opened with a key that must have been exquisitely oiled. The two were now in a small square yard, within high walls and paved with gravel, on the other side of which was one of a row of tall, blackened houses.

Into this the girl also led her, by means of another noiseless key. Opening the backdoor, she struck a match in the pitch darkness, and, by its spark, taking Marion by the hand, followed a close and gloomy little passage to the foot of some steep stairs.

"Mind how you come up those," she whispered. "They're all ful of ratholes—and, for Gracious' sake, make no noise. Isn't it gettin to be creepiful and fun?"

CHAPTER X.

ADAM FURNESS. COINER.

When Marion woke, the first and the last thing she could call t mind was the sensation of picking her way in the dark among a labyrinth of ratholes. Up to that point, everything was clear, between that point and the moment of her waking ran a blank wall. She remembered every detail of her flight from Piggot's Town, and of her forlor tramp to London; her collapse in the square; and her being carried into a strange house by a strange girl. But all this did not account fo the utter weakness in which she woke—a weakness not of fatigue, o even of exhaustion; but of a kind hitherto unknown. She had fel plenty of fatigue during her wandering girlhood; but a night's rest ha never failed to restore her elastic nerves and spirits to their prope spring. Now, however, she felt that she had no spring left in her. I was as different from her waking in the Clarence, after her happy voy age in the *Sumatra*, as could be. Then the return of thought had bee a new birth of joy; now the very simplest thought required an effo and implied a dread of succeeding. So she lay back on her pillow, an let her eyes wander, without any help from her brain.

She was in a small but clean and fairly comfortable bed in a larg bare room, uncarpeted, and with almost as few bedroom appliances her room in Euphrosyne Terrace before it had received its share drops from the golden shower. And, like that, this also had neith curtains nor blind to the window, which had apparently never be cleaned for many years. The furniture consisted mainly of boxes, op and shut, whole and broken, heaped or thrown about like the conten of a lumber-room, which they altogether resembled. Meanwhile t room itself had obviously been meant for better things than the rece tion of useless lumber, whether in the shape of broken boxes or hop less girls. No Piggot had been so generous of length, depth a breadth; had built walls so capable of shutting out the faintest sou from without; had framed a painted ceiling in an elaborately carv cornice; and had set up a mantel-piece of polished marble. Natural the ceiling drew her eyes to it more and more—a group of Cupids, rose and carnation, disporting themselves on a sky-blue ground, bound together with loose garlands of impossible flowers. The w had no doubt been considered fine in its way; but the effect was considerably injured by large patches where the blue had turned g or brown; one Cupid had lost a face, another a leg; most were crac and all were fly-blown.

It seemed odd, even to Marion, that she could be so much less occupied with herself than in speculating on what must have been the original attitude of the particular Cupid whose best leg had fallen a victim o gangrene. But the occupation was so much less unpleasant and entailed so much trouble; and, after all, the Cupid seemed ever so much more real than she. And there seemed something familiar about the creature, too. She had a dim impression of having watched it trying to dance whole hours together—sometimes by gray daylight, sometimes by a flicker of flame casting shadows that made it really seem to move. Of course its familiarity must be sheer fancy; but, then, so were any number of much less unlikely things.

At any rate, the Cupid was something to hold by, and to keep her wits from wandering altogether away. Then, weary of looking, her eyes travelled down a long waving strand of cobweb, thick and black with accumulations of dust, and connected with a whole labyrinth of strands and webs in every corner of the room. Futile attempts to gain clue to that vast and complex system of a Spyder-land where brooms were unknown occupied her between sudden sleepings and sudden wakings over and over again; and whenever she slept she dreamed she was awake; and whenever she woke, she fancied herself sleeping.

It was during one of the latter fancies that the thick thread waving loose from the Cupid's remaining knee guided her eyes to the girl who had been the chief among her last real memories. She gave no start; she felt no surprise. She only lay and gazed.

Yes—it was the same girl, little and quaint, dressed plainly in black, and engaged in sharpening some small instrument on a whetstone, on which she poured now and then a drop or two of liquid from a small phial. And as she sharpened she partly whistled, partly hummed, a low jumble of tunes. It was better than looking at the one-legged Cupid or the spider's cable. But at last the sharp eyes met hers.

"Why, you *are* awake!" said the girl, on her feet in a moment, without seeming to go through the process of rising. "Wait a minute, and you shall have some beeftea. How do you feel?"

"I don't know," said Marion, wondering what had become of her voice. "I don't think I feel anything at all."

"Ah! that sounds better. The nonsense you have talked, to be sure. But you mustn't bother to talk yet awhile. Go to sleep, there's a good girl. I'll send for the doctor as soon as he can be spared. I'm only the nurse, you know."

"Doctor? Nurse?—have I been ill? Is this a hospital? Or is ———"

A madhouse, she was going to add, but the word was too heavy for her tongue.

"Ill? Rather! Ill and a half, *I* should say. But never mind; you're going to be all right again now."

"How long have I been ill?"

"Just three weeks to-day."

"Three weeks! I've been three weeks—here?"

"Nowhere else, for sure. But don't fret about that. You migh have been four."

"And where ——"

"Are you?" asked the girl, who never seemed to require a questio to be put into words. "Oh, never mind about that. Everybody mus be somewhere, you know; and what's the odds where you are, so lon as you're there?"

"Is it a—madhouse?"

"Well—no," said the girl, looking at her extra sharply. "No—no a bit of it," she said decidedly. "So you needn't be a bit afraid. Oh we're awfully sane people here, especially Me. Stephen may be a bi cracked, now and then; but then he's a Genius, you know; so he' bound to be ——"

"A hospital?"

"Lord, no! Nor a palace, nor a workhouse, nor a church, nor theatre, nor a gaol. There—don't worry; you're going to have som beeftea."

"Have you a name?"

"Oh, never mind about names. Everybody must be somebody, yo know; and what's the odds what you're called, so long as ——"

"But it is great odds," said Marion gravely. "I want to know b what name to think of somebody who found a stranger fainting in th street, and has been nursing her for three weeks long."

"Come—stop that!" said the girl sharply. "I always know wha I'm about—catch Me! Of course you've been no end of trouble—you' right enough there—but it's not been bad fun, and—there. I'm mak ing a precious mess of it," she laughed. "And I'm Cynthia; it's funny sort of name; but I am."

"Cynthia. Perhaps—perhaps I shall be able to say what I think o you—if I ever get strong again. You couldn't tell how much mo grateful I should have been—if you had let me die."

"Ah—you *are* better! Nobody ever talks about wanting to die s long as there's a chance of being took at their word. Stephen's alwa wanting to die, too, but he never does it; and once, when there was off chance of his getting sudden death off a bullet, Lord, you'd ha split your sides to see him scuttle under the table! You see, he's o of them that's all Fire and Dew."

"Fire and Dew?" echoed Marion.

"Fire and Dew?" nodded Cynthia gravely. "I can't tell you wh it means, because I don't know, but so he says: and if he don't kn what he's made of, you can't expect me."

And with this, which might be simplicity or might be satire, without seeming to walk, run, or fly, she was out of the room ag leaving Marion ignorant of where she was, or with whom, or what been happening for three whole weeks to herself or to the world. seemed scarcely possible for any human being to be so completely off from all human life as to know nothing of herself but that was alive, and absolutely nothing more. Indeed, she thought, as

closed her eyes again, she had much better have died out and out, and have done with loneliness, once for all.

But by that time Cynthia was back with a large cup of strong broth, for which a certain voice within her began to clamour, and would not be denied. When, Cynthia holding the cup, she had swallowed a few spoonfuls slowly, she heard a tap at the door.

Cynthia produced her cloak suddenly from somewhere, and threw it over Marion.

"Come in!"

And, at the word, in came a deformed ghost rather than a man; or rather, a pair of big black eyes to which hung a shadowy outline of an owner, very badly drawn. The creature shambled half across the room, at down on one of the boxes with a weary sigh, and glared silently.

"That's your doctor," said Cynthia, throwing him a nod. "Not a eauty, is he? But then—ugliness, you see, is but skindeep; but enius—ah, that goes to the bone. You see she *is* alive, Stephen, for ll your croaking. What do you say now!"

The exceedingly queer doctor twisted his fingers nervously. Marion ondered if anybody had ever before breakfasted on broth in company ith a sprite and a gnome. . . . . And certainly there was an nazing amount of heat in the broth, both of pepper and of fire.

"Say?" exclaimed Stephen, so suddenly that it made him cough; why, that it's better luck than you deserve, Cynthia. Or worse ck—it always *is* worse, whatever happens. Nothing ever does go ht in this despicable bungle that idiots call a world. Life, indeed! if it were worth anybody's while, even a woman's, to come back to h a ghastly sell!"

"There—that means you're getting all right again as fast as blazes, l that he's glad of it," said Cynthia.

He did not seem very glad, thought Marion. However, there was comfort—he was exceedingly unlike Dr. Snell.

"You are the doctor?" asked she.

"An Artist," he answered grimly. "In other words, a Fool and a ve."

"Yes," whispered Cynthia. "He thinks you'll do—he always puts gs like that when he's particularly pleased. And he isn't a regular tor, you know: that would never have done! And a man who can , and etch, and everything, like Stephen does—why, he is bound now more than twenty doctors—and he does, too. Why, it stands eason a man that can make bodies better than life must know about them than them that can only cut bodies to bits and can't them together again. I've known scores of medicals—not common ors, but real students in the hospitals—and I wouldn't trust one hem to draw a child that you could tell from a mophead or a milk- -not that they weren't very good fun, in their own way. . . . , Stephen—what ought we to do now?"

"What, indeed! Cynthia, she and you between you have kept us three weeks after I put my foot down. It's a simple infamy that areer of an Artist should be at the mercy of chances and childish

whims. People who are well enough to eat are well enough to get up and go."

"Stephen! Why, she's hardly strong enough to lift her spoon!"

"That's not the question."

"But it's the answer."

"No."

"Yes, Stephen."

"I say—No. And it is No."

"And I say Yes, and so it ——"

"The woman's reason! Bah. The question isn't whether she can lift a spoon. The question is between my Art, and—your whim."

"Ah—I see! It is a wonderful thing, Stephen—how right you always are! Of course she must get up and go. And of course to get up and go she must get strong very soon. And of course to get strong she must lie very quiet and eat and drink all sorts of good things. . . . Isn't he clever?" she half whispered, glancing admirably at the peevish creature who sat on the box, brooding over his barren vanities, and caressing his delicate hands. "Now I should never have thought of all that in a year! Rest and good grub, and plenty of it—why, of course, there you are!"

"Is he your husband?" whispered Marion.

Cynthia laughed—for once a little awkwardly.

"Ah, I suppose you ask that because we snap at one another so. But it's only our fun. There, Stephen; now you've given your opinion you can go. Plenty to eat and drink, and nothing to do—I quite understand. . . . There," she said, as he rose mechanically, and slouched out suddenly. "Now you've seen a Genius. What clever notions he does have, to be sure—how he always does say just the right thing in the right way! . . . Ah, I see you think that's my fun. But it isn't: it's true. Only it wants somebody who knows him well to understand. It's Genius, you see. When other people would say 'Yes,' and smile, he always says 'No,' and scowls—but he means just the same. When you were so ill, he always used to say you'd die; so I always knew you'd get well; and you see how right he's been."

"I think it is you that has been the kindest, though," said Marion, holding out her hand and trying to smile through tears that came from weakness rather than from misery.

"Ah—that's because you don't understand. Nobody *can* understand Stephen but me. That's why he isn't at the top of the tree. But Lord, who'd be at the top that can 'bide at the bottom! All the fun of the fair is down below. You take my advice; there's no good to be got out of things but by flying in the face of them. I took to you the minute I'd heard you'd run away ——"

"And you don't even ask who I am."

"Gracious, no! I'm so afraid you've done nothing—nothing bad, I mean ——"

"Afraid?" asked Marion.

"Yes. You do look so horribly good; and I always did hate good people ever since I was born. Not that I've seen much of them;

then I don't want to. Let me see—I know you've got pluck somewhere, or you wouldn't have run away. You shall be something very nice indeed. A Murderess—that will do very well. You've murdered —let me see—you've murdered two judges and a dozen policemen, and all their wives. No—three judges and three dozen policemen, and the wives of course, all the same. You make them all in love with you—I mean all the men; and then you ask them to supper and put aquafortis in their wine, so that they die in agonies. You are a countess, of course—those sort of people always are. And then you make friends of all the wives, and put vermine powder in their tea. And then you ——"

But Marion heard no more of her chatter; she was really sleeping, which was perhaps the chatterer's aim. As soon as she was quietly off, Cynthia left the room, which she locked behind her—all the keys in that house turned with amazing smoothness and silence—and went upstairs into the workshop, where Peter Petersen with the red beard was toiling at a press, and Stephen Ray was picking up and examining the silver coins that fell from them one by one.

She entered singing: and, still singing, kneeled down and picked up the coins, handing them to Stephen so as to save him from stooping—an attention for which he thanked her with a growl and a scowl.

"Shall we get done in good time?" she asked, between two bars.

"Not if we so laze," said Peter, increasing his speed. "We shall not have done—no; not once upon a dime."

There was something about her that seemed to make the press itself work faster, and three coins to fall where only two fell before.

In short, Adam Furness, the Coiner, had obtained a greater acquisition to his establishment in Upper Vane Street than even in Stephen Ray. He would have found it difficult to procure a better artist; but impossible to catch half so good a she-help, seek high or seek low. There was not her equal in the art, far more difficult than the mere making of false coins, of getting rid of them when they were made; and then she threw herself into that part of the work, with its disguises, its risks, its tricks, and its triumphs, with the skill of a born actress and the zest of a child at play. Then she had such marvellously sharp eyes and ears —nothing escaped them; she was at once a sentinel against danger from without, and a spy against possible treachery from within, and she was loyal to the core. And then, moreover, she had the spirits of a lark at large, and kept up to the mark energies which, as being secret and criminal, were apt to flag and despond. For she revelled in secrets, and had absolutely no sense of crime—a reckless and defiant creature: a born rebel and outlaw, who takes to crime as a matter of course, just because lawlessness is more lively than law. And it may be that there are more such honest criminals then we wot of—sinners whom one would no more dream of morally judging than one would dream of letting go when they are caught, seeing that they are the most dangerous of all. Indeed, short of hanging them, there is nothing to be done with them —nothing in the world.

Such was Cynthia—if that was her real name, as was scarcely likely

—whom Adam Furness, in the course of his travels about London, ha
met at some more or less disreputable place of entertainment, and wit
whom he had at first been struck in a non-professional way. For th
Coiner kept queer company not only when at work, but when at play
One cannot very well contrive to lead a double life—that of a crimin
during office hours, and of a model citizen out of them. He made th
girl's acquaintance ; and, having been struck by her personal piquancy
was no less struck by her brains. But by her stupendous recklessnes
he was struck the most of all—there are men who prefer a woman i
proportion as she is unwomanly, and will do their best to make one so
But there was still a surprise for him in store. Rich as he was, at leas
in her eyes, he found her devoted to a creature who seemed born to b
scorned by women and pitied by men ; penniless, incapable, feeble
worse than ugly, selfish, vain, morose, peevish, and deformed. Fo
this poor wretch's sake she slaved joyfully as other women slave miser
ably ; and for his sake she reduced to simple chaos all the notions o
Adam Furness about women, who had hitherto, after the manner of hi
sex, flattered himself that he knew hers through and through. He ha
found a mere girl who, without either pride, or prudence, or discoverabl
conscience, was yet, even while poor, pretty, and thirsting for life an
all its pleasures, as unattainable as the topmost snows of a maide
mountain ; if such is still to be found in these days of adventurous dese
cration. However, he was not the man to take a rebuff of that sort t
heart : indeed, he had not the time. So, having seen his invincible rival
he pitied her poor taste, and, since he could not get one into his service
took the two.

And never had he repented from that hour. She was more than a
he had expected, barring her unnatural fidelity to her scarecrow ? an
Stephen—strange to say—was in all sober truth what she entitled him
a Genius as genuine as ever came into an unappreciative world. T
fellow had no more brains than a block ; he was half daft, half dullar
but his blazing eyes and his exquisitely fine fingers were inspired. Gi
him an idea, and he would stare at you like a sullen baboon ; give h
half an inch of chalk or charcoal, and it is you who would stare.

Of the gang who had taken secret possession of a whole house in
most respectable street in the "Court Guide," Adam Furness was
head, Cynthia the heart, Stephen Ray the hand. But there were ot
members besides.

Next to these in importance—if next to them—came Peter Peter
of the Red Beard, a foreigner from either Northern Russia or f
Sweden, or at any rate from somewhere thereabout. He had not
long taken service with the firm, coming with an introduction fro
highly valued correspondent abroad, but had speedily achieved
repute and confidence as a skilled workman, whose only distraction
his pipe, who could have set an example of honesty and sobriety t
man, and who knew how to hold his tongue. He was a sort of fore
of the works, and was consulted accordingly.

A fifth was that valued correspondent who had introduced
Petersen—a Pole, named Mirski, who called himself a Count, and

ave been a real one. He was seldom or never in London; but would be on Sunday in Paris, on Monday at Hamburg, on Tuesday at Vienna, on Wednesday at Monaco, on Thursday at Berlin, and so on; n short, on any day somewhere where money was flying, false or true. He it was who collected intelligence, which he telegraphed in cypher. Unlike Peter, he was a brilliant personage, with many friends in many quarters, high and low; a gambler, moreover, and a man of pleasure, but one who knew how to make his chances and his pleasures pay—an invaluable secret, known to few. A great many people who knew that charming Count Mirski would have been a good deal taken aback had they known the real whereabouts of his estates in Galicia and his gold ines in Temeswar. And it was he, of course, who had heard of the an to the Khan of Moulkhend.

The sixth was not otherwise known than as the Knacker—an engraver of more talent than honesty, who had done most of the artistic ork before the engagement of Stephen Ray. He was a rather humble ember of the concern, having been in his time, besides an artist, a lliard-marker, a writer of begging letters, and an inmate of various sual wards—once even a sham parson. But he had never been able get into real and serious trouble, for want of enterprise and brains. e was clever and competent, but was little trusted. For if want of briety is a fault in an honest workman, it is a fault in a dishonest e ten thousand times more.

The seventh was Mr. Jeliitt, landlord of the Green Cheese, Blink ne—a highly useful man in his way, by keeping a house where rious matters could be transacted without risking the secret of the tory at Number Seventeen. Moreover, his position as a publican abled him to perform multifarious necessary functions. He could ward messages; he could do errands, in person or by deputy; he ld set any advisable gossip going; he could do a hundred odd jobs which it was advisable that no more deeply implicated member of firm should appear. And not only could he do these things, but did them; and he also was a man who knew how to hold his gue, even when he was not quite so sober as the landlord of a nsed house ought invariably to be.

With these materials, it was obvious that the business conducted by m Furness enjoyed greater advantages, and was carried on under ter conditions, than is usual in the case of an ordinary criminal . As a rule, such undertakings fail because they are not conducted ound commercial principles. That could not possibly be said of company whose central office, chief workshop and principal warese was in Upper Vane Street. The head of the firm had taken care, it has already appeared from the list of shareholders, that one of his partners should be qualified to interfere with his eme direction or to set up a divided control; and he had always able to inspire them with a certainty that it was to their interest ccept his authority. John Heron himself had not more easily e himself undisputed King of Marchgrave than Adam Furness had e himself autocrat of this band of Knaves. Criminal as he was, he

could therefore be no common one. He had none of the ways of the class to which he belonged. He kept strict and methodical accounts, in carefully arranged books, both of money, time, and labour, which—except for the certainly important fact that they were in cypher—would have enabled him to pass an examination in bankruptcy with the very highest honours. He never allowed pleasure to send business to the wall. He never ran a needless risk—that form of rope with which most men pretty soon contrive to hang themselves. He was not a mere poacher on the field of the financial prerogative of the Queen. He was a financier, with the qualifications of a practical banker who has mastered his business; and he had taken to coining as the best means he knew of making a fortune with speed and certainty—a troublesome business, no doubt, and fertile in anxieties; but not, managed as he managed it, more so than that of any man who gives his mind honestly to his work, and much less so than legitimate speculative businesses often are.

His origin was unknown to his associates; so that, by his no doubt calculated reticence, he acquired such additional prestige as belongs to mystery. And it speaks volumes for the position he held among them that nobody thought of inquiring. Not that his reticence was entirely the result of calculation. For his past career was connected with two grand mistakes of which he was ashamed, as having lowered him in his own eyes.

He had started in life by committing a crime that had been discovered; and he had married a wife in whom he had only been able to inspire hatred and fear.

The crime had been a commonplace forgery; the marriage (which had befallen him the first) had been with a romantic and stiff-principled young woman, who had taken it into her head to idealize him, and then to make him answerable for having fallen short of her impossible ideal. That, at least, was his point of view—no doubt hers was a different one. However that might be, when he remedied his financial blunder in his own way by escaping from gaol, and, coming to his wife, unfolded to her future plans in which she might play an exceedingly useful share, she had repulsed him with terror. There are people who see in the fragments of broken idols, not mere lumps of common clay of which there is still a bust to be made, but the materials of a fiend still potent for future evil. Still, it could hardly be called madness that it should be the aim of a mother's life to shield her only girl from the knowledge of so much of such a father's name, and to preserve her from falling into the hands of one whom, after all, she had better means of knowing and judging than all the judges of both sides of the world. Such aims are apt to grow, and at last to possess the life, not when the nature is weak, but when it is strong. And she, knowing him, doubtless knew that when hate once grows out of love, it is certain to be returned; and that the hate of Adam Furness would not confine itself to thoughts and words. She had dreaded for her girl what he would call punishment, and she revenge.

He had certainly come to regard himself as an ill-used man. Wh

indeed does not, when he has to bear the natural consequences of what he would leave undone were he able to live his time over again ? In his case, and with his self-centred nature, that way of regarding himself was especially inevitable. His wife's attitude simply emphasized that of the whole world. He was not merely a convict—a strong man might live down that fact, if he really willed it, as he might a broken leg, or birth outside the social pale—but an escaped convict, a man for whom the law would never cease to watch more or less actively, and on whom it might at any moment lay its hand. After that interview with his wife, he was a man of great ideas and hungry energies without a career ; and one had to be made. And, once made, he found himself as much the slave of it as the man who raised the monster and had to do its bidding.

He had no confidant, and could have none ; that would have meant putting himself into another's power. And therefore no creature among his associates dreamed of the real and inspiring reason for the concoction of the great stroke of business now on hand. It was not for the sake of profit, though that was not despised. It was that he was longing, at a critical period of middle-age, to cut himself away from his monster, and to be no longer at war with the world. And to do this there was only one possible way. It was to implicate his accomplices in a plot of so daring a kind, and of such peculiar peril, that it would be incumbent upon everybody to withdraw upon sufficiently good profits, and to suspend operations which should never be resumed. He had been long watching for a chance, with the patience that is bound to find at last the chance it watches for. What was to happen afterwards was also arranged. But in this man there were secrets behind secrets ; and it was the arch-secret of his unfailing success that, having once fixed upon his end, he never allowed further consideration of it to divert the least fraction of his mind from the details of the immediate step that had at the actual moment to be climbed. The grand step at this actual moment was to wind up the firm. The step to do this was to involve it in a particular enterprise of a suicidal kind. To this, the present step was the substitution of a certain number of false for real coins. To this, the rapid production of the false coins. And to this Adam Furness was devoting himself, heart and soul, as if it were the only thing to be thought of, for its own sake, and without a view to any further end.

Not even Cynthia, with all her sharpness, had dreamed of guessing him to be other than he seemed—a Coiner, who plied his trade with a spirit and a success unprecedented in the craft's chronicles, and whom, therefore, it was pure delight for one of her humour to help and serve. It takes something longer than a needle to reach more than a strictly limited depth : something much more penetrating than a woman's wit to reach a real man's core. Cynthia believed that she knew Adam Furness as every woman thinks she knows every man—through and through ; and she did know him just as every woman does know every man—to the full depth of his skin.

The first step to freedom was now completed with the chink of the

last rouble: and all had been well made, thanks to the workmanlike qualities of Peter Petersen, the inspired fingers of Stephen Kay, and the microscopic eyes of Cynthia. Adam Furness had gone through the tale, and had given directions for packing. Then he reviewed his general scheme in his own mind, and could not discover a single flaw. The tale of the roubles itself was not more complete: and he had examined every point as jealously as he had counted every coin.

"Yes," he thought to himself, "I shall have conquered life in my own way, after all. There's more than mere luck in Leah's dying out of the way just then and just there; and there's no danger from a girl who knows nothing, and whom I've got under my hand. . . . I shall be as free to live a great life as if nothing had ever been—yes, Free!"

The day after the counting of the coins, Guy Derwent received a summons from John Heron.

CHAPTER XI.

THE OTHER CANDIDATE.

"Have you heard the news?" asked Alderman Sparrow, bustlin up in front of Guy at the corner of Chapter Lane.

"What news?"

"It's come!"

"What's come?"

"Dissolution. I've just seen the telegram. I always knew it woul It's quite phenomenal, the number of times I've been right about tho sort of things. Ah, politics are nothing but common sense, if y take 'em by the right end. Only most folk will take 'em by the wron and burn their fingers. So now for a long pull, and a strong pull, a a pull all together, as my old uncle used to say—what original thin he did use to say, to be sure! A pull all together—that's the way."

"I'm on my way to see Heron now."

"Ah—then I mustn't stop you. That man's time's gold. B what do you think I've heard? It makes one ashamed of one's o town. Fancy there being ungrateful fools enough in Marchgrave put up a man against Heron—John Heron! But it's true. A there's none of your common sense in politics. It wants an Arg to see through that milestone; wheels within wheels. It's the Doc Those Askness people—they're 'cute chaps, as the Yankees say, on word."

"Why—what can they do?" asked Guy impatiently, but still w anxious interest in his friend.

"I'll tell you; and mark my words—I can tell chalk from cheese, my poor uncle used to say. It's a put up job. They've nobbled h

he county members, and bought that mercenary rag, the *Watchman*, nd are working to make the Docks a party thing. They're bringing lawyer from London to fight John Heron in his own town."

"Do they take us for fools?"

"Looks a bit like it. But they'll give trouble, and they'll put us to xpense, and they'll stir up bad blood; and if anything was to happen o Heron—which God forbid—they'd be ready to fight a weaker man. h, I understand these things; and Askness is a regular nest of vipers. But we'll be a match for 'em; Honesty's the best Policy, as I've heard y poor uncle say many a time; and gad, sir, the old gentleman was ight; it's true. So 'Heron and Honesty,' say I. By the living eorge, sir, when I think of what that man has done for Marchgrave, ye, and will do, the very thought of a contest makes my blood boil. he Marchgrave man that didn't vote straight as a die for Heron ought be tarred and feathered, like they do in the States. I say, Englishen ought to fight fair—and if I don't find out some ugly story about hat precious carpet-bagger of theirs, my name ain't Sparrow. He's a wyer—so there's sure to be something against him; and if there n't, one can find something out, all the same. A lawyer! If he sn't done one thing, he's safe to have done another. He wouldn't t himself be made a cat of by the Askness monkeys if he wasn't more ave than fool. Good-day. I'm going to get the Mayor to call a eeting, to denounce this phenomenal, this discreditable, this un-Engh, this—this —— But Time's money, sir; and Time and Tide—my or uncle—a Nest of Vipers, sir! Good day!"

Guy, released from this enthusiast, who, after all, represented no ore then the general feeling of the town toward its King, found John eron engaged with his cashier, and thus had time to notice that his end was certainly beginning to look a little worried and pale. And wonder, considering all the work he had on hand—the leading bank the county, the new Docks scheme, the magisterial bench, the ive management of all the public charities and institutions in the n, a Parliamentary candidature, and the confidence of everybody o chose to give it to him as trustee, as almoner, or simply as adviser friend—not to speak of such private affairs as nobody can escape, for which everybody must somehow manage to find time.

"Thanks for coming over so promptly, Guy," said he. "I'd have e to you myself; but ——"

"Of course you couldn't. By the way, I've just heard you're to be osed. Is it true?"

"Quite true. A man named Morland—the inevitable barrister from don. Who ever failed to be opposed by a barrister from London, fless and young? I'm glad of it—I want a fight; a big victory do good to the cause; the Docks, the whole Docks, and nothing the Docks; that's the cry I'm going to win with; better than all Peace, Retrenchment, and Reform. Marchgrave first; England nd, and the rest of the world nowhere. However, politics will . Do you remember promising to make a little journey for me?"

"Of course I remember."

"Can you start—to-morrow ? It's short notice, no doubt ; but I'
answerable for your business, you know—you can dine with me an
Kate, and instruct me just as if I were your chief clerk instead of you
banker ——"

"To-morrow ! If it weren't for one piece of business, I'd start fo
the end of the world by the next train," said Guy.

"And that is —— ?"

"Marion."

"I see. . . . Yes ; that *is* awkard. You've still heard nothin
—nothing at all ?"

"If you had been in Marchgrave, and if I could have got at you,
should have asked your advice long ago."

"I must give up some of my irons. I'm ashamed of not having tim
for my friends. How do things stand ?"

"I had an anonymous letter, telling me that I should find her—
mention was made of her mother—at a certain house in London.
went there at once—only to learn that she, and no donbt her moth
too, were in that scoundrel's hands, and had been carried abroad. B
where ——"

"What house ?" asked the banker sharply.

"A Dr. Snell's—odly enough, the very man I came across at t
Green Cheese. He lied to me then ; and though he explained hims
plausibly enough, for aught I know he's lying now when he says
knows nothing of where they've gone."

"Dr.—*who ?*"

"Dr. Snell—a quack, if there ever was one, practising in a G
forsaken suburb called Piggot's Town."

"The Banker rose and paced slowly up and down the room.

"And the anonymous letter—can you guess from whom it came ?

"It is beyond guessing."

"I don't think your Doctor was lying, Guy," said the Banker
decision. "Unquestionably your sweetheart is with her father,
her mother too, abroad ; and unquestionably their address has not b
left behind. Have you been doing anything more ?"

"I have been to the police, of course. I was unwilling—but it
the only thing to be done."

"The police ! Well ?"

"They find there was an Adam Furness transported for forgery,
having escaped, now either dead or at large. They were intereste
hear of him ; he hadn't been heard of for near twenty years."

"Well ?"

"I could give no description ; and of course he would have cha
in all that time, even if there were anybody in the force who cha
to remember him. However they made inquiries as to whether a
with two ladies—whom I *could* describe—had left England ; and th
communicated with the police abroad."

"And they've heard ——"

"Nothing."

"And if you find this—man ?"

"Put all the pressure that can be put on an escaped felon. He nust leave the country at once, and return at his peril ——"

"I see. . . . Yes; of course that's what you'll do. Meanwhile, ou must first catch your hare."

"Exactly. And as the police are evidently a broken reed, I am oing to take it into my own hands. I will hunt down this scoundrel. it takes me all the rest of my days. And I shall succeed. Heron— he world does not hold the place where I shall not find Marion ——"

"Yes; the world is a very small place. And, as the song goes, Love ill find out the way. But your business, Guy?"

"Marion is my business, till she is found. And now for your counsel. f course I shan't stop the police from going to work their way. ut how shall I begin in mine?"

"Let me see. Yes—in such a case as this, the beginning's half the ttle; or rather the whole."

"Put yourself in my place, Heron. How should you begin? Sup- ose you had lost your Kate, as I have lost Marion ——"

"I'm afraid—I'm afraid, Guy, that even Kate would have to yield to e Docks, poor girl. . . . But in your place—I'll tell you exactly hat I'd do. I would do as you have done: set the police to work on urope, and the accessible parts of America. Then I should do the one ing the police can't—go straight to Galveston, in Texas, and from that a centre work round and round the far West: the refuge of runaways. ou mayn't find anything there, but you may; and if you don't, body else will. The police must work were they can; but you must ork where they can't. Come in."

It was Guy's clerk, from the office, with a telegram that had just rived. Guy took it anxiously and eagerly; those buff envelopes were ch more to him now than merely the masterpiece of the great orry-Fiend! He opened it.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "Read that, Heron."

The Banker slowly and deliberately mounted his glasses.

"'*Furness to Derwent, Marchgrave, England*"'—the message was in ench, but he translated it as he read on. "'*We are in Moscow. nnot write or say more. Come.*'" By George, Guy, here is another r of shoes! What shall you do now?"

"Heron, if I never believed in Providence in my life, I should !"

"Providence?"

"A coincidence—no: a plain guidance like this makes one afraid! cow—where I was to start at once for *you!* And now ——"

"It *is* queer! It hadn't struck me—to tell you the truth, I had for- en my own business in yours; indeed, I had made up my mind you were to be let off your bargain. But now, as you say—why ks to *my* business, as you call it (though it's really not mine), ll have your passports and papers and everything you'll want ready tarting by the next train, if you please. I can't answer for Provi- e; but it is uncommonly queer. . . . The Russian police does its work. Put it into their hands on your way to Oufa; and you'll

find it done on your way home—you'll return with joy, bringing your sweetheart with you."

It was altogether a natural thing to say—and yet it did not seem entirely natural as said by John Heron to Guy. There was something a little mechanical and even absent-minded about the Banker's manner, which could hardly have failed to strike a listener in less impatient mood.

"There's no time, anyhow, to talk about coincidences," said Guy. "You spoke of my being able to start by the next train, if I pleased. I do please. And don't let my business trouble you. My clerk will be able to put off all that will keep, and do what won't; and what he can't do and won't keep must go elsewhere. Where am I to get my papers and instructions? I'm ready now."

"I do like a dash of recklessness about a man! Some people say I like it a bit too much; but—well, a good journey to you! As to instructions, I have told you generally what to do. You'll receive a consignment of specie, Russian money, for you to pay to that Tartar fellow's agent at Oufa; and you'll receive from a Russian agent another lot of specie to bring home. You will be put, I believe, in communication with some local banker. But as to the details, of course I know nothing, except that, of course, a Russian loan to an Asiastic potentate is naturally a state secret. You will, therefore go to my correspondent's private address instead of his place in the City—Number Sixteen, Upper Vane Street—Mr. Ward. If you put on your visiting-card 'From J. H.' he'll understand. I've already written to tell him that for tact, discretion, despatch, integrity, and resourse there isn't your equal in the four quarters of the globe."

Praise from John Heron was worth living for. Guy's cheeks flushed and his heart beat proudly; if only Marion had been there to hear! And the best of it was that John Heron never misread character, and never flattered. This was more than praise: it was a patent of nobility such as the Kings of Business, who know their value, jealously weig[h] and very rarely bestow.

Whether deserved or not, however, John Heron had shown that he understood one of the principal arts of Kingcraft: that of grappling men to their souls by hooks of praise of the right sort and in the righ[t] season. Men never fail to believe in those who make them believe in themselves. It was with renewed confidence in the success of both hi[s] missions that, having told his clerk how sudden business of importance called him abroad, left such instructions as were possible, and referre[d] all matters of doubt during his absence to the bank in Chapter Lane he once more found himself on the line of railway on which he had o[f] late wasted such a large amount of time.

It is to be feared that his clerk, to whom so much principal's wor[k] had been left of late, was beginning to lose faith in his employer, an[d] to suspect that "important business," in town or abroad, was to b[e] interpreted according to its usual meaning when employed, witho[ut] further explanation, to clerks, masters, partners, parents, and wive[s]. However, the reference to Chapter Lane was equivalent in Marchgra[ve]

to a testimonial signed by the Bishop, and countersigned by the Dean.

Guy had plenty of food for reflection wherewith to occupy himself during the journey which had mostly seemed so wearifully long. Chance—coincidence—Providence; call it what you will, there was something prodigiously strange in the receipt of a summons from Marion to Moscow, of all places—the very city that was to be his first stage on a journey which had no reference to her. No doubt the more strange the coincidence, the more likely it is to happen in a life made up of them. But Guy was not yet old enough to have realized a fact that requires experience for its discovery.

Anyhow, if it were a mere coincidence, it was impossible to imagine that it had occurred only to be wasted. There would be the malignant mockery of some jesting fiend in the very idea. It rather seemed as if, by some complicated process of Destiny, Marion had been conveyed to Moscow as the one place in all the world where she could be rescued with the utmost certainty and speed. And it was in the most simple accordance with the eternal fitness of things that John Heron should have been the hand, even though the unwitting hand, that Providence had used. Was not his the hand through which all good things came?

What a Man he was, to be sure! No wonder that Guy, with his healthy instinct towards hero-worship, without which youth is not worth a pinch of salt to keep it from getting stale, regarded him as the highest type of the highest career that any other man could set before him to imitate and follow.

No doubt every British town has its great Citizen, either actual or historical, who has impressed his personality on his native or adopted place, and given it character; or, if there be a town that has never had a great Citizen, unlucky indeed is that town. But it had surely been reserved for Marchgrave to have a great Citizen like John Heron, in whom all the virtues, public and private, combined to set the man and his city on a high hill indeed. No wonder men were planning to give him a statue in his lifetime; no wonder Alderman Sparrow, on discovering that there was a leaven of ingratitude even in Marchgrave, had flown into a rage.

He had one companion in his compartment; a youngish fellow of about his own age or a little older, with clearly cut features that stood the trying ordeal of close shaving, and a pleasant look in an alert and self-conscious sort of way. What drew Guy's attention to him in the first instance was the number of newspapers with which he had provided himself, and which he ran through rapidly before he seemed to be even aware of Guy.

"Do you mind my smoking?" he asked, taking a "yes" for granted and opening a well-furnished cigar-case. "It isn't a smoking carriage, I know; and that's why I come here to smoke—I can't stand any tobacco but my own. Take one yourself—they ought to be good, and I think they are."

His voice, also, was not an unpleasant one, and somehow suggested practice in speaking: there was neither slurring nor langour, nor haste, but each word came out round and clear. He seemed altogether on

very good terms with himself, and therefore with the world, and with a very probable touch of impudence about him of a not unbecoming kind.

"Here's a light. You got in at Marchgrave? So did I. It was my first visit. It is a very interesting town—city, I should say. I do like those fossilized old places. Have you ever been in the States?"

"Never."

"Everybody ought to go to the States. I have; I was there four whole weeks, and have pretty well seen them all—enough for my purpose, which was to study their institutions with my own eyes."

"And what do you think of them?"

"Why, that they want a few Marchgraves. Unluckily, while that's essential, they can't get them."

"Perhaps when they're as old as we ——"

"Never. They'll never be as old as we, because they started older than we ever were, or ever shall be. They were never young—they were born senile. One must have a few places like Marchgrave to keep a country young; and if we ever improve them—we shall be considerably bigger fools than I hope we are."

"Isn't that a bit of paradox?" said Guy, smiling. "Any way, I hope you are wrong."

"No chance of that! I wish there were. But why?"

"Because Marchgrave will very soon be improved beyond knowing."

"Oh—you mean those blessed Docks. Absurd. The fable of the frog and the bull. Are you a Marchgrave man?"

"I am," said Guy, stiffening.

"And an elector, perhaps?"

"And an elector."

"And there are people in Marchgrave who really think they are going to blow themselves out into a Liverpool? I'll tell you what—I haven't been two days in Marchgrave without seeing how the wind blows. You Marchgrave people are all a long way too much under one man's thumb."

The stranger was unquestionably impudent—and not so pleasantly so as he had promised to be.

"If I differ from you," said Guy, "it is because I have known Marchgrave, not two days, but nearly thirty years."

"Exactly so. That is why you differ. The longer one lives in place the less one knows it—that stands to reason. Your vision becomes local. The place I know least of is London, because I'm Londoner. To whatever you said to me about London, I should bow. On the same grounds, I am the better qualified to judge Marchgrave."

"Do I understand you have come among us as a missionary?" asked Guy, provoked into being a little amused.

"As a missionary. Or rather as an Iconoclast—an idol breaker. That is my mission in life; and therefore I am a missionary. I am one of those rare creatures called enthusiasts, and I hate and abhor shams—Tory shams, Liberal shams, Radical shams, Church shams, Chapel shams, Atheist shams, shams of every sort and kind. A

between you and me, one of the biggest shams I've yet come across is John Heron of Marchgrave."

Guy pitched his half-smoked cigar out of the window.

"Then let me tell you that you are the biggest sham of all!" he said hotly. "As you like plain speaking to strangers, so do I. I know John Heron not only as everybody in Marchgrave knows him, but as his friend—and better and truer and wiser friend no human creature ever had in this world. I know him through and through. And what all Marchgrave says, I say too—there is not a finer or nobler or better man all round living than John Heron. . . . The notion of pretending to know a man like that after being in the same town with him two days!"

The other slightly nodded and smiled.

"Any way, *you're* no sham," said he. "By Jove! I hope I shall ever have a man stick up for me like you for Heron! I'd apologize for speaking, only that would be a sham; for I'm of the same opinion still; and, as you see, I don't go in for tact. That's the biggest thing out in shams. There are two ways of succeeding—making friends and making enemies. One's as good as the other, so long as you take the one that suits yourself, and do it thoroughly. The only thing is to find out which suits your own line, and then stick to it. Mine's the fighting line; its slower, but it's much surer. Heron's seems to be the other. I suppose he counts on every vote in Marchgrave?"

"No. It seems that Marchgrave has its quota of cowards and fools."

Alderman Sparrow himself could have said no more.

"Ah! Well. Perhaps independence may be cowardice; and it may be wisdom to be the victim of a craze. That's no new idea. However, after that—and because you're just the sort of enemy I like to make—I ought to give you my card, and thanks for a pleasant battle. If you ever feel inclined for another, come and see me in Pump Court, Temple. That's my name—Draycot Morland.'

"What! The stranger the Askness people have put up against John Heron?"

"The same; and who means fighting even if he can't win."

"Then, if you'll take my advice," said Guy, "you'll go back to Pump Court and stay there. If you talk to the other electors as you do to me ——"

"Ah—you mean dead cats, rotten eggs—all that sort of thing. Oh, I like that; really like—not merely don't care. I don't fight to win, you see. I fight like Don Quixote—just for truth's sake, and well—not to sham—for the fun of the thing. Of course you'll have all I say printed, and stuck up all over Marchgrave. Do. If one can't be popular, the next best thing is to be unpopular; and I tell you straight that I mean to be the best hated man in the town—city of yours—before I've done. Now, don't you think me the most crack-brained candidate that ever went to the poll? Honestly, mind; and no sham."

"Then, if it's any satisfaction to you, I do; and I think the Askness people more crack-brained still."

"My dear sir—I wish I could offer you my hand with any hope of

its being taken ! You're a man after my own heart ; there must be something good about John Heron, after all. We're terribly mixed cattle—we men."

"And you really mean to go to the poll?"

"Why, certainly. I've got nothing to lose. I come as a carpet-bagger. I mean to get into the House somehow ; and Marchgrave will do as a first try, to get up one's name. But don't think I don't care about your Docks, even though I never heard of them till a few days ago, and Marchgrave and Askness were no more to me than Patagonia and Kamschatka. I do. I can always care about anything ; and if I am beat, I dare say I shall have a brief against the Bill. So I'm all safe, you see," he said with a smile.

"I do see," said Guy, letting the talk freeze.

He was glad, on the whole, that he had seen with his own eyes th man whom the Askness people were setting up to be knocked down b John Heron. He had expected to meet a political adventurer of th usual pattern, who would have cringed before an elector, especiall before one opposed to him, and have tried, if he could not obtain su port, to disharm hostility. And he had come across a man who seeme laying himself out to be beaten, and displaying with the most unblus ing cynicism his reason why. And yet there was something winni about the frank, out-spoken, alert young fellow, too, with his obvio love of battle for battle's sake, and a disregard for other people's susce tibilities that was simply sublime.

Mr. Draycot Morland, having said his say, and apparently wi complete indifference as to which had the last word, handed Guy h a dozen newspapers, and returned to the others, marking paragrap in them here and there. Guy glanced through one or two, but fou nothing interesting enough to withdraw his attention for a mom from his own affairs. Arrived at their terminus, Mr. Morland b Guy a cheerful good-day, with a renewed hope to see him in Pu Court, and disappeared in the direction of an omnibus. Guy calle hansom, and set off at once for Upper Vane Street, Number Sixtee the house occupied by the City bachelor, Mr. Ward.

Marion, as the days went on, slept less and ate more. With medical help she got better ; and then came the crucial symptom convalescence. As her strength grew, her active thoughts retur and her troubles with them. And she could no longer satisfy he with the fancy that she was shut up in a chamber in Dreamland w sprite and a skeleton. The one-legged Cupid ceased to live, and cobwebs became simple cobwebs, and nothing more. She could even fall back upon madness to account for the unaccount Cynthia was a great deal too real.

The next stage of recovery was to take hold of the enigma b horns.

"Cynthia," said she abruptly, interrupting that young person i middle of a tune, while at her eternal work of polishing needl

am going to ask you questions ; and you are going to answer them. . . Where am I ?"

"Gracious ! Why, here, to be sure."

"You've been very good to me. . . . But just think what it is to me : not to know where I am, or what has become of my own self, or who you are. And I am well now—quite well : well enough to go ——"

"Home ?"

"Wherever I will," said Marion, without a sigh. Wherever I can."

Cynthia carefully wiped her needle, laid it down, and looked prodigiously grave.

"I see you're well enough to talk," said she. "And of course it isn't likely a young lady—for you're that, whatever else you are—would want to be shut up longer than she can help in a lumber-room. And, for that matter, Stephen comes in here much too often for a doctor, or to please me. It's natural enough : I'm glad to see a bit of human nature in him, and I'm not jealous—there's no fun in being jealous, but still—well, he *is* a sort of a man, though you mightn't think it only to look at him ; and if every man ate his proper food, why, the mokes would have to take to chops for want of thistles . . . nd as for looks, I know I ain't a patch on you. All the same, I've ked having you. Sick-nursing is real fun ! I've really enjoyed mylf for once—but, ah ! well : things will come to an end. Only, what er happens, I've not been keeping you out of your grave to let you op into worse ; and that's gaol. I don't ask questions, and I don't swer them. But if you're in trouble, you stay here as long as you e, so you don't make a fool of Stephen. That's all."

"In trouble ?"

"Why bless me, if I don't begin to think you're as innocent as a be !"

"You mean, if I'm afraid of the police ?"

"What else ? If it wasn't for them, who'd ever be afraid ?"

"Are *you?*"

"No, *I'm* not. They're much too stupid a lot for me. Why. . . . that's tales. You're not to ask where you are, nor who we are ; ause if you do, I shall tell you nothing but lies ; and I don't want ie—to you."

Then—how am I to go away ?"

There's only one way. Some night, when it's dark as pitch, you'll to let me make you blindfold. Then I shall have to lead you d about the streets till you're mazed ; and then see you driven to where, blindfolded all the while."

Cynthia—there *are* ways of living : for a girl that has been taught ay, or to sing ?"

Yes. Well—yes ; there are ways. . . . I've done it. . . . But re not for you. You're not me—and thank your stars !"

But they are for me. How do you begin ?"

I'll talk to you like a mother. The question isn't how you begin—ow you go on, and how you end. All you have to begin with is a

good name—I mean a good sounding name. That's why I'm Cynthia. And, of course, you wouldn't take your own ——"

"No. I am not Marion Furness any more," said Marion, without thinking.

"Marion—*What!*" cried Cynthia, starting from her chair.

CHAPTER XII.

CYNTHIA.

It will doubtless have been surmised that, despite all appearance the receipt of a telegram from Marion at Moscow, and Guy Derwent projected journey thither, was not quite so much a matter of chance or fate, or coincidence, as it might seem to an actor so completely i front of the scenes as Guy. Nevertheless, there are such combinatio of circumstances—which may just as well be called coincidences f want of a better name. And they have puzzled wiser heads th Cynthia's, and always will, until we find out how few all possible co binations of events really are, and how constantly they must f together : how extraordinary it is that what we so stupidly term ext ordinary coincidences are not even more common than they are. A it did take Cynthia somewhat aback, versed in adventures though s was, to find that the stranger whom she had taken in bore the sa surname as her captain ; while she knew enough to be aware that t surname, however spelled, was no common one. And then there the fact that this Marion Furness had been on her way to the Gr Cheese, which, if an isolated chance, would produce a threefold coi dence, such as the world has never yet seen.

The girl was not given to thinking. She did not think—she flash and was thus saved from stupidity. But despite the sense of hon (as found among thieves) which forbade her to ask questions, she as curious as a magpie ; and, for once, the satisfaction of that ma passion rendered thinking an unavoidable necessity. No inward f could account for the secret flight of a young lady named Marion F ness from an unknown home to the Green Cheese, unless there some direct connection between her and Adam Furness himself— what could that be? She was not the man's mistress ; that coul sworn. A girl like Cynthia need give but one infallible glance to k anything about any other girl on that score. An honest elopeme honest at least on the girl's side, whatever it might be on the ma But then she would surely have made some effort to communicate an expecting lover all this while ; she would never have lain so staring at the ceiling in that passive way. A daughter flying fro father?—and Adam Furness might have a dozen daughters for Cynthia knew. No—in that case Mr. Jellitt's tavern was the

st place she would have been making for. Then there was her nxiety to earn her own living under another name. That, too, was consistent with the notion that she had any explicable object in making for a place where her name would be so exceedingly well known.

Here were things to get at the bottom of, with a vengeance. Cynthia lt the divine fire which is dignified with the title of philosophy when displays itself in the sons of Adam, and contemned as curiosity when moves in the daughters of Eve. Yet, magpie as she was, she was t all magpie. Only a prodigious capacity for helping the helpless uld have made her devote herself to such an ill-conditioned monstroy as Stephen Ray, who had as much right to expect a woman to care r him as a cinder has any natural hope of being taken from a dustap and worn on a white neck in a setting of gold. Some women are de that way, and these by no means always the best in other ways. ch do not crave to lean—they long to be leaned upon: they—ppily for some of us—prefer weak men to strong: they are born thers, and, like all real mothers, like to have the creatures they e for so made as to be incapable of escaping from under their wings. may be that Cynthia would have taken less keen delight in rebellion inst the forces of the world if she were less consumed with instinc- sympathy for the world's weak ones, from its geniuses to its broken s. The worst of her Genius was that he was never ill: Marion was first experience in the delight of having somebody as utterly endent upon her as a baby—of having to give up sleep, rest, com-, and all sorts of humdrum things. But one can't indulge in sure of that sort without getting to care for the patient when grown ; and though Marion, helpless with fever and fighting with death, been infinitely preferable, still there was comfort in finding her so htfully friendless, and apparently ignorant of the very alphabet of Cynthia took for the world—the battle of the wits of the weak nst the armed legions of the strong.

And to the bottom of this I'll get, if I die for it!" thought she. *at* girl to get her living with her throat or on her toes! She ln't: and if she could, she shan't: I'd as soon put her to my own —and she's as fit for that as I am to be a Quaker. It is queer how ent girls are made, to be sure. Why shouldn't I like to see her what I do every day for fun? . . . Stephen, you know every-. Tell me this minute what's the difference between Right and g."

he What?" asked Stephen, looking up from his copper-plate in orkroom, which the two now had to themselves. "I wish to ebub you women could be made to think of other people than own muddle-headed selves. You've made me spoil a plate with hattering. But much *you* care."

h, no—it isn't as bad as that; it isn't spoiled; you couldn't spoil if you tried. I *am* muddle-headed, and I *do* chatter! I won't gain—only I do so want to know."

ell? In for a penny, in for a pound. You're always wanting hing. What is it now?"

"What's the difference between Right and Wrong?"

"It's Right not to worry an Artist when he's at work; and when you do, it's Wrong. If it ever happens again, I'll—I'll hire a room, and lock myself in ——"

"And come out again in five minutes! I know. What is it—really, I mean?"

"It's Wrong to be found out; and it's Right not to be. Don't you know that?"

"Of course it's wrong to be found out; but I don't mean that this time."

"Well, then. Whatever isn't, is Right; and whatever is, is Wrong."

"No: nor that either. It isn't anything of that sort. Why wouldn't I have that girl in the back drawing-room know what we're up to—no, not for a thousand pounds?"

He laughed shrilly, until his usual fit of coughing stopped him.

"Ask a fool to tell you that! Because she's a woman, and a woman's got a tongue, and the nearest beak's got ears—long ones, maybe, but ——"

"You mean, because she'd split? Not she. For shame, Stephen! I think you've known one woman that can hold her tongue; and if there's one, there's two. Ask Adam Furness if he'd trust a secret to Peter himself sooner than he would to me."

"Adam Furness be—hanged! Right and Wrong, indeed! *That's* wrong: that a Man, like me, should be a slave to a—Tyrant, like him. If this hadn't been the last job, there'd have been splitting done ——"

"Stephen! What do you mean?"

"What I say. If this hadn't been blarneyed among you into doin[g] what no other living man could have done, the world would have see[n] an Artist's Revenge! Cynthia, I abhor that man. It is the curse o[f] a true Artist to have nerves: Genius is Suffering; and he makes m[e] feel as if I were a saw and he were a file."

"You don't mean *you* would have split, Stephen?" said the gi[rl,] turning pale.

"I do, though. And ——"

"Stephen! If you ever say another word like that, I'll never spea[k] to you again."

"Then I shan't get my plates spoiled."

"Nor your needles ground ——"

"Nor my nerves shattered and mangled every minute of the da[y.] Never speak to me, indeed! As if you were the only girl in the worl[d.] Why, there's another in this very house ——"

"I beg your pardon, Stephen. I didn't mean I'd never speak to y[ou] again. I meant something else—quite else. But never mind."

"What did you mean?"

"That—I would kill you!" She seemed to grow an inch taller [as] she spoke; and her voice came hot from her soul. "And that wo[uld] be no Fun at all," she said, becoming herself again, with a laugh an[d a] sigh. "Oh, Stephen! whether we're right or wrong, let's anyh[ow] stick by one another. Don't let's be mean. *She* wouldn't—that o[ther] girl."

"One would think you'd got that other girl on the brain," he sneered.

"Anyhow, I've got her on my hands. . . . But there. I didn't mean for us to quarrel. Only never let me hear you say again that—what you've been saying now. Say you didn't mean it—not a single word."

But the Cur, to whom Nature, in her craziest mood, had actually given the genius of which he bragged, and to whom Fate, in a crazier, had given a Woman to care for him, only threw off her touch, and scowled.

"Anyway, I'm not going to be bullied by a woman," he snarled.

It was certainly not for want of power that Cynthia let him have the last word. But she did let him have it; and, while he returned to his plate, sat a little apart, thinking, or, rather, indulging in such process as with her passed for thinking. She had begun to fancy there were things she did not understand; and in that case Stephen might be among them. That he could seriously be meditating treachery she did not believe; but she had believed it for a moment, and she could not forget how the belief had seemed like the sudden running of a knife into her. Such an idea of breach of faith had never before come home to her; and why should it have come home to her just now, in company with so many new and vague ideas?

So, in spite of everything, she could not but feel as if there were something wrong in the air. There was no fun in the prospect of losing her patient; none in finding that her key did not fit all the world's doors; none in feeling that something vague and hard had risen up between herself and Stephen. It was not anything that he had said—she was used to his humours and thought nothing of his words. Nor could any mind but hers have felt even the glimmer of a difference in things since Marion had begun to get well. But neither words nor acts were wanted to tell Cynthia that Stephen was growing dissatisfied, and for more secret reasons than had anything to do with Adam Furness. If she could only understand!

Yes; she felt she could kill him if he should turn traitor. But she could not honestly feel that his treachery would be the reason why.

And what if her passion of pitifulness for Marion lying helpless could turn towards another sort of passion towards Marion grown well, beautiful, and strong? Marion needing her would be a very different person from Marion needing her no more. She had never hitherto thought about her own looks; but now she began to be conscious, with a sort of pain, that Stephen was a genius and an artist, and that she was sallow, odd-looking, without a good feature in her face, and most contemptibly small; while Marion —— She wanted Stephen all to herself, and Marion all to herself; and she felt, with the dull foretaste of jealousy, that Marion was growing out of her reach, and Stephen beginning to turn restive in her hands—and secretly restive; which was the worst of all.

It had been growing dusk, and Cynthia, in her preoccupation, had failed to observe two things. One, that the light was failing in that

carefully darkened chamber; the other that, if Stephen was still absorbed on his plate, he must have developed cats' eyes. And she might have sat there, in unprecedented stillness for another whole minute equal to anybody else's whole hour—had not her marvellously sensitive nerves warned her, of themselves, that some change had taken place in the human atmosphere of the room. And presently she knew, as a cat knows, by nervous instinct, that the presence of Stephen Ray had been transformed into that of Peter Peterson.

Reaction was inevitable. Having gone through a whole course of mental tension, her next impulse was to play the ghost at the expense of Red Beard the Solemn. She wanted to laugh at something; and he was the only thing to hand. So she crept, if her swift and noiseless motion could be called creeping, behind the curtain that covered the door opposite the furnace, and waited for events to give her a cue. Peter was so solemn and so stolid that to startle him would be a triumph, and perhaps put her into good humour again with things at large—she flew to a joke as a man in like case would have gone to the nearest bottle.

The first thing Master Peter did was to open a close lantern, by the light of which she saw that Stephen had really left the room in the dark—for artistic meditation, no doubt, as the Sulks of Genius are called. Then he made a tour of inspection round the room, examining every object in it, and making frequent references to a notebook, in which—placing his lantern for the purpose on the bench or on the ground—he now and then made a mark or an entry. It was an eccentric proceeding altogether. Cynthia frowned to herself—she had not bargained to come across anything else, that same evening, of which she could not make head or tail.

And so for that reason, absorbed and therefore ripe for startling as he was, she waited a little—simple curiosity was resuming its normal reign over the magpie. Presently he took up the plate on which Stephen had been working, examined it with special care, and laid it down with a grunt which might mean a dozen opposite things. Then he set himself to another business—that of marking, with a knife, every one of the boxes in which the false roubles were ready packed for exportation. It was a detail of the scheme, no doubt; but it seemed singular, all the same. There could be no advantage, rather the reverse, in making the parcels more capable of being identified. She had thought she knew every trick and detail of the scheme so well as to be able to direct everything herself in case of need.

But if there was no apparent occasion for scoring the cases, there could only be mere caprice in similarly marking the press in various places, and scratching some of the tools. Some grown up children, she knew, have a passion for scribbling their initials on everything they see, from a broken tile to a marble statue; and this might be the pastime of the workman who appeared to have no other. But his next proceeding was inexplicable on any ground. He opened each of the cases in turn, took a single coin out of it, marked it, and returned it—all save on which, having also marked, he retained.

Evidently a careful process of identification—no doubt about that. But why? Cynthia had the whole plan by heart, step by step, including the layers of good coins placed above the false ones to satisfy Custom House inspection, and the method by which the cases were to be removed for shipment out of the house supposed to be empty without exciting neighbourly curiosity. Had it been anybody but Peter Petersen, she must have had her misgivings, without being able any the better to comprehend them. At last, all these things having been done, he gave another careful look round the room, closed his lantern again, and was gone without her having made an attempt to scare him.

Having waited awhile, she came out of her hiding-place, turned on the gas, and set herself to find out what Master Peter had been about in this mysterious way. And sure enough, she found that, wherever he had seemed to make a scratch or a score, was scored or scratched the same apparently meaningless figure composed of three straight lines of different lengths peculiarly arranged. What in the world could it mean? She might, it is true, have asked Peter himself; but it did not occur to her to regret having missed that way of putting her mind at ease.

She stamped sharply out of sheer indignation at this addition to her chronicle of mysteries. Then she also continued her tour of the room, till she, in her turn, came to the place where Stephen had been last occupied. There was the plate, it was true, that she had been accused of spoiling. But there also was, on a loose sheet of paper, a pencilled outline of a woman's face. Stephen was in the habit of sketching while he was talking. But he was not in the habit, at such times, of occupying himself with the features of actual women—and this was neither mermaid, angel, nor fiend. It was Marion Furness, line for line, and exquisitely drawn.

Poor Cynthia let it flutter back to its place as if it had burned her fingers. Had Stephen meant her to see it, out of defiance? Or had he left it there without heeding whether she might see it or no? Or had she come upon the revelation of a secret, such as seemed to be making the whole air heavy? She had never been taught that so long as a man calls himself an artist he is privileged to brood over whatever faces he pleases, and that what is called inconsistency in others is simply appreciation of the beautiful in him—that a woman has no more business to be jealous of another woman's portrait than she has of a sketch of a cauliflower.

She took just the woman's view—and happy and rare is the woman who has no knowledge of what that view would be. And who would care a straw for the woman who in such a case should be altogether else? Cynthia, from no better cause than the sketch of a face, felt that things were slipping away from her; that nobody wanted her; and that there might be such a thing in life as feeling alone. The old life was about to be broken, with all the perils and excitements that had made it so well worth living; and even the man whom she believed bound to her by his helplessness was—she could not bear to

think of it; she sat down among the lying coins, and felt that they were exceedingly like what is turned out from the mint of the world—fair-seeming silver, and not worth a straw unless one can pass them cleverly. What did Petersen's eccentricities signify, after all?

It may be remembered that Number Seventeen was not only next door to Mr. Ward, of Number Sixteen, but also on the other side, to Number Eighteen, occupied by two maiden ladies of high respectability and good connections of the name of Burdon. It happened, moreover, that a late sister of theirs had married a gentleman of the name of Morland; and that Mr. and Mrs. Morland had left an only son, christened Draycot, after an equally respectable and well-connected godfather. Now only sons, unless brought up with quite exceptional wisdom, are apt to develop that uncomfortable quality called Character; and Draycot Morland was no exception to the rule. Perhaps the world owes more of its originality—that is to say, of its food for humour—to only sons than to any other class of the community.

As an original, it would naturally be thought that Draycot Morland would be but little in favour with Aunt Grace and Aunt Charlotte. And—since what would naturally be thought is absolutely certain to be absolutely wrong—these two most conventional of elderly ladies petted their unconventional nephew a good deal beyond the measure of his heart's desire. A spice of wickedness, in somebody else, gives a zest to life at a certain age; Draycot was as salt to the old ladies' food—odious, perhaps, in itself, but certainly indispensable. And he was pepper, mustard, and vinegar besides. Not that he was really bad—he was a Radical, a Socialist, a Heretic, and everything that well-regulated minds cannot adide; a man who thought for himself, and made a point of flying in people's faces; an unaccountable being, who gave his aunts scope for wondering where he would go to when he died, and yet impelled them to make things pleasant for him, and for themselves, so long as he was alive.

And he, like everybody else, whatever they may say, liked now and then to go into the sober old-fashioned, monotonous respectability of Upper Vane Street for a change. And so little has this story of Marion Furness had hitherto to do with the merely respectable, that Draycot Morland's occasional liking for it sets up a temptation to escape for a while from worse company.

It was the Sunday following his expedition to Marchgrave that, having nothing better to do, and preferring the conversation of even his maiden aunts to no talk at all, he strolled to Upper Vane Street, arriving at Number Eighteen about the time when the Miss Burdons would have finished their nap after their early dinner. He found them, as he expected, in the drawing-room. Aunt Grace, the elder and the bolder, was turning over an illustrated paper; Aunt Charlotte was absorbed in a volume of sermons turned upside down. There could be no question about the warmth of his welcome, for Sunday afternoon in Upper Vane Street was anything but a lively time.

The illustrated paper was laid carefully in its proper place: Aunt

Charlotte stopped midway in a yawn, turned it into a gracious Sunday smile, and rang for tea.

"I declare," said young Morland, "that coming here, to see you, is like going back to Marchgrave—you two always make one forget that there are such things as worry and whirl. You almost inspire me to rehearse my first election speech upon you. No—you needn't be afraid. I mean to wake up Marchgrave: and I wouldn't make any change here for all the seats in the Commons. You would like my newly-discovered city. It's a place after your own hearts—all Dean and Dignity. I mean to astonish that Dean."

"For shame!" said Aunt Grace, with a severe voice but a kindly smile. "What an idea—and on a Sunday, too! Are they going to elect you?"

"And when?" asked Charlotte. "You don't remember your great-uncle William. He was in the House, you know."

"Well—I don't think they will. These aren't my great-uncle's days, when a man with brains could get into the House at one-and-twenty, and be a Cabinet Minister before getting into his dotage. The march of reform has changed all that. Brains are no good against the local great man."

"But you might get in," said Aunt Charlotte reflectively. "Your great-uncle did, and things run in the blood—gout, and baldness, and all sorts of things."

"Nonsense, Charlotte," said Aunt Grace. "Parliament's quite a different thing. It's true William Burdon had gout; but a more wonderful head of hair, for a man of sixty-five, I never saw—and not a tooth that wasn't sound."

"But it was turning gray," replied Aunt Charlotte. "Yes—I distinctly remember it was turning gray."

"Nobody can expect to have everything," said Aunt Grace cheerfully. "It's not so much getting into the House that signifies as what one does when one's there."

"True," said Draycot. "And the very best thing to be done is—nothing at all. I mean to go in for general obstruction. What the country wants is to have no more Acts of Parliament for the next thirty years—except one."

"Ah! to abolish all misery, I hope," said Aunt Charlotte, whose organ of benevolence was large; "and to oblige everybody to see the error of their ways. That's wanted, I'm sure."

"Nonsense, Charlotte," interposed her more practical sister, with decision. "That's impossible. But there is one Act sadly wanted; very badly indeed."

"Mine," said Draycot, "would be a very short Act in one clause—to repeal every other Act that has been passed since the Battle of Waterloo. That would send the shams flying, by Jove! But what's yours? I'll pledge myself to propose it, if it's half as good as mine. Aunt Charlotte's, I'm afraid, has the fault of being just a trifle large."

"There ought to be a law," said Aunt Grace impressively, "that

heavy carts oughtn't to be allowed in Upper Vane Street before people are called."

"Called?"

"Yes—in the morning. I'm sure the noise they made before seven yesterday morning was like an earthquake of Lisbon: enough to wake the dead, let alone a light sleeper like me."

"And that's not so light as me," said Aunt Charlotte—jealous, as what well-regulated mind is not?—of the reputation of the weasel. "It was Number Sixteen."

"The next house to your neighbour, the Ghost's?" asked Draycot, not very much impressed by the mere fact that somebody in Upper Vane Street had been moving heavy goods at an early hour.

"I'm sure I'm the last person to heed my neighbours," said Aunt Grace. "I don't know them so much as by sight, or by name. Indeed, there's nothing I so much despise. But servants are different: and when they insist on telling one things, one can't help hearing. And Wilkin says, being disturbed by the noise—and no wonder—he got up, and saw three men lifting heavy cases into carts with his own eyes."

"Heavy Cases? Lucky fellows!" sighed the briefless barrister. But his jest missed fire.

"It is Mr. Ward's," said Aunt Charlotte. "He is something in the City."

"That is no reason," objected Aunt Grace, "why he should bring his business here. There's a place for everything—at least, there used to be when I was a girl. But what with noblemen keeping shops, and shopkeepers being made noblemen, things are being turned upside down."

"But that isn't all," said Aunt Charlotte. "Wilkin says ——"

"Nonsense, Charlotte. Wilkin is an excellent butler: but he is credulous and imaginative to a degree."

"Still, Grace, you must own it's strange."

"No, Charlotte, I can't possibly do that. If there are no such things, there's nothing strange in those sort of people having fancies; if there are such things, we daren't call strange anything that Providence has thought fit to allow."

"What things?" asked Draycot.

"Wilkin, says," said Aunt Grace, "that he saw ——"

"With his own eyes," added Aunt Charlotte, "as plainly as I see you ——"

"A figure ——"

"All in white ——"

"Pass behind the window ——"

"The front drawing-room window ——"

"Of Number Seventeen ——"

"Next door!"

"What—the actual tenant of the haunted dwelling?" asked Draycot. "Lucky dog—that Wilkin. I'd give a good deal, if I had it, to see a ghost; or to think I'd seen one—it would be all the same."

"Draycot!" cried Aunt Grace, "what a horrible idea!"

"Do *you* believe in ghosts, aunt?'

"Goodness! No!"

"Then what can there be horrid in seeing an interesting freak of fancy?"

"I don't know. But it would be horrid, all the same. Just think how it would feel!"

"I have been thinking—often: and, as I can't think how it would feel, I want to know. So you actually live next door to a haunted house. Aunt Grace—such an opportunity ought not to be thrown away. To whom does the house belong? By Jove, now I come to think of it, there is something odd about letting a house stand empty—not letting it, I mean. I wonder what would happen if one were to ring the bell?"

"Oh, don't, Draycot! Don't do that, for the sake of goodness!"

"Why not?"

"Suppose anybody saw you—it would look so—so—dissipated ——"

Draycot Morland was not particularly, at any rate not exceptionally, dissipated; but he had many of the qualities that would not be held to fit him for any steady employment that called for the conventional virtues. And one of these was to be inspired with ideas that seemed to him the more humorous the less they were likely to seem so to other people. He saw develop before his mind's eye a whole comedy of the first order—how what he considered among the first items in his catalogue of shams, the ultra-respectability of Upper Vane Street, might be gloriously astonished; how Wilkin's commonplace legend of a white figure at a window might be vastly improved; and how—but there was no end to the vista of fancy. And, with him, impulse was deed—so long as it had not to be slept over.

Feeling in some danger of slumber if he stayed very much longer, he left without the sham of an excuse, as soon as he was inclined, and, while strolling with a cigar round the square, meditated on the means of entering an empty house without legal burglary. Having failed to solve the puzzle, he strolled back through Upper Vane Street for the sake of a cursory inspection of the premises, when, on the steps of Number Sixteen, he recognizee a figure he knew.

"Mr. Derwent?" he said, glad of an opportunity for giving the haunted house a longer gaze.

CHAPTER XIII.

"THERE GOES RICHARD PAXTER."

MARION also had a mystery to fathom—her own.

That she was some sort of prisoner was clear. But nothing squared with her notions of a madhouse: there was no doctor; there was no sort of routine. Nor, fever having cleared her brain, did she any longer—for the present—suspect herself of the curse her mother had bequeathed her. It might come in time—but she could not feel that it had come already. On the contrary, she had never felt so clear-headed as while in a situation that surely would have baffled the clearest brains. Still, there had been that long period of blank unconsciousness which she could not recall, even so much as one recalls a dream. How might she not have acted during that time? What might she not have seemed?

Clearly there was no use in trying to get anything out of Cynthia; and from finding an opportunity of questioning Stephen she recoiled. But how long was this to go on? If she were not in a madhouse, she was certainly being fitted for one. It did not seem to occur to her gaolers—unless indeed they forgot it on purpose—that she had nothing to do between waking and sleeping: not even anything to read. It had not mattered during her weakness, when even thought had been too heavy a labour; but two whole days, broken only by talks with her unfathomable nurse, out of which nothing had come, had set up rebellion in every nerve.

One thing, however, she might do, while waiting. She could make an exhaustive tour of her room.

When, however, it came to action, she felt how weak she still was: energy and hunger for simple liberty did not reach from her brain to her limbs. By the time she had inspected a few empty chests she felt unspeakably tired.

"Perhaps I am going to die after all," she thought, with an indifference that even to herself seemed strange. "Perhaps these people know it, and fancy it would hurt me to tell. No—I don't want to know where I am. I don't want to get out of this room. It's the whole world that's past understanding—and I want to fly out of the whole world—not to crawl out of a room. Mamma had the best of it; and she has the best of it still. I'm nothing to anybody—not even to myself. It's all a riddle together—life; and love; and all. Yes; I suppose Guy has forgotten me by now. He has taken our parting quietly and wisely—just as he ought to have done. . . . I'm glad he's so strong and so wise; I was afraid. . . . Perhaps I shall go to sleep to-night, and *not* wake to-morrow. Mamma will be glad to see me: as glad as I shall be to see her! And ——"

Hopelessness went all at once to the winds. While aimlessly exam

ning the chests that contained nothing, one of them had slipped, and revealed something that sent the blood sharply from her heart to her finger tips and back again.

For the emblem of imprisonment is also the emblem of deliverance. It was a key.

It was covered with rust, and buried in cobweb; but it was still a key. Of course it might prove useless; but still—somehow the very sight of it made Marion think of the open air and of freedom to breathe therein; and so long as one retains a thought of that, life, for mere life's sake, is worth living still.

She was still young; she still loved; she still believed in a heaven beyond the veil—and there was a key. She lifted it, wiped away the cobwebs, and, with a pair of scissors, scraped off as much of the rust as would come away at the first intention. She tried it on the door at which Cynthia and Stephen used to make their exit. But it would not even pass into the keyhole.

It must have been made to fit something; and that something must have been a door. Unfortunately, the room, large as it was, had but a single entrance; so that she might as well have discovered a magic wand without the spell whereby alone it could avail.

It was as if a prisoner on a desert island had found a gold mine.

Useless as her discovery was, however, it set her brooding over the possibilities of escape—if not from the house itself, yet from her labyrinth of uncertainties. And these sent her to sleep, and to those dreams which, whether out of mockery or kindness, are always bright and sweet in proportion as the waking life is dull and bitter. And she woke to the resolve not to let Cynthia leave her next time without making everything clear.

She generally woke to find Cynthia grinding needles by her bedside. This morning, however, she woke to solitude; and was not sorry. She rose and dressed, and, for the first time since her illness, made an inspection of her own belongings. The few pounds she had carried with her from Dr. Snell's still remained in her purse unbroken; and her trinkets had been laid out neatly together. These, with the clothes she wore, made up her all—not a very large outfit to face the world with, but capable of serving, with management, till she could earn something, as she, in her wisdom supposed. Her mother had never wanted for bread, so why should she?—remembering how many crumbs, out of all the bread baked in London, there must be to spare.

By the time she had lingered over these small affairs as long as she could, not fogetting to pocket the key, as a possible talisman, she began to miss Cynthia—and, to tell the truth, her breakfast also, for toast and tea had been as regular as Cynthia's humming. This break in the monotony of her convalescence was at first merely an uncomfortable and not an anxious one. But as the minutes dragged by, and became hours of unbroken neglect and solitude, mere discomfort became anxiety. It could hardly be that she was forgotten. Something must have happened to keep Cynthia away—something might have happened to Cynthia herself; who could tell?

When, however, after many hours of growing suspense, morning had turned into noon and noon into twilight, which the condition of the windows made earlier in that house than elsewhere, anxiety became alarm. Everybody knows what it is to wait and wonder for a familiar face or a familiar rustle, even when there is not enough love for serious fear, and no reason for any fear at all. But Marion had only herself to think of; and, next to that unapproachable misery, had the consciousness of being either a mouse caught in a trap or a bird forgotten in its cage. And, meanwhile, she had not even so much as a book, or a needle, or a pen, wherewith to pass the time.

Supposed something had happened to Cynthia—something to keep her away for days. Supposed she was lying injured in a hospital, for example; or had fallen into other kinds of trouble; for Marion had by this time come to suspect her good Samaritan of reasons for being so secret about herself and her a airs. Or a hundred things might have happened, beyond the vaguest guessing. What would happen, in that case, to a girl locked up in an unknown room in an unknown house, no human being knowing where she was, or missing her, or caring to find her? Somebody or other would no doubt come some day to open the room. But it might be a long time first; and by that time in what state would she be found?

Such fancies as these, if they could be called fancies, were not likely to allay themselves spontaneously in one who had passed the whole day in hunger, thirst, worry, and utter solitude. But when the darkness came on, they were scarcely to be borne. It was only nervous excitement that kept her from collapse; as things were, a touch of her old fever returned, to help her for a moment with its treacherous energy. Her ears were strung to catch the slightest sound—even Cynthia's well-nigh inaudible step; but there was not the slightest sound to be heard. They built a great deal better in Upper Vane Street a hundred and fifty years ago than in Euphrosyne Terrace yesterday. She struck one of the few matches fortunately left her, and lighted her candle—she had never been given more than one. But in that large, sombre, dust-clouded room, the flicker gave less light than shadow; and, if she shifted the candle ever so little, the shadows took a ghostly life, and moved, with changing depth and size.

They took all manner of forms, as the wick flared or flickered in a draught that came from heaven knows where in that hermetically-sealed room. Here was a giant shrank into a dwraf, and then expanded into an ogre. There a monstrous, shapeless thing with wings rose up from the floor and vanished among the dancing Cupids in the ceiling. The dark corners opened out into vast halls or endless corridors, down which processions of phantoms moved. And there was one huge shadow with a king's crown that did not change with the others, but was always ready to meet her eyes, whenever she turned them that way. Which being so, she seldom kept her eyes from it for long, but was impelled by inevitable and invincible fascination to return to it until its crowned head, its one eye, and its gaping jaws became too real and

familiar to belong to a mere ghost called up by a fantastic light in a weakened brain.

It was all as if real madness had leaped upon her at last, suddenly.

"They are nothing—nothing—nothing!" she repeated to herself aloud, as if she were using a charm. "They cannot hurt me; and if they could, they would not be allowed. I do know who I am: I do know what they are: I do know that God is everywhere. Nobody can be really mad who knows all those things. I wonder if mamma ever felt like this—I wonder what Guy would say? . . . But how shall I go through this night? I *can't* stay with those things for hours. If only a rat would make a noise!"

And all the while, though encircled by these dreadful phantoms, the more dreadful for their silence, she could not bring herself to put out the light which had summoned them. For all her assurance of their true nature, it seemed as if that same light protected her—she felt as if in the dark they would still remain around her, and become yet more terrible than ghosts unheard: that is to say, ghosts unseen. Draycot Morland, who imagined that he was eager to see a ghost, should have been in Marion's place now. Man though he was, he would have imagined any such eagerness no more.

So she crouched on the foot of her bed, without stirring a finger, till her eyes grew more and more fixed upon the king of the ghosts whose face would not change. And the lower her candle burned, the vaster and the more confused they all grew but he. And what would happen when her candle should give its last leap in its socket and leave her—alone? No: worse than alone, a thousand times.

Suddenly she heard a startled cry—either of a beast or of a man: either of rage or of pain.

She leaped to her feet, and stood with beating heart and ears strained. She had hungered for sound; but her hunger was gone at such an answer to her longing. She neither thought nor wondered—her brain seemed paralysed, even while her nerves quivered and ached with more than terror. The cry was not repeated. But heavy steps were hurrying to the door of her room.

Was she to welcome relief, or was she threatened with real danger—danger from living men? Was it for good or ill that she was behind a locked door? But before she could either cry out or hide, the door was locked no longer, and she was no longer alone.

"Cynthia!" cried a man's voice that seemed strangely familiar. "Quick—Petersen, damn him! has brought the police next door; they're on their way here. If the infernal Russian spy hadn't tried to take me himself instead of waiting for the constables, I should have the handcuffs on: I'm hurt by his knife as it is: but he's—done for. Quick—there's time to make for the back still: dead men can't bide; but there'll be none in a minute more, with my blood for a trail. . . . Use *your* wits, girl, for God's sake; mine are gone—unless you turn trator too."

Her father's voice! Had she gone mad indeed? For a moment she staggered back in helpless terror and hopeless amaze. And, as he

strode up to the light from among the shadows, she saw that it was her father; but pale, haggard, reeling as if fresh from a hard struggle, and stained with blood that was still dropping from his wrist and hand.

But when he reached the light, it was he who started and recoiled, as he dashed his unwounded hand across his eyes.

"Not—Cynthia! Marion!"

"What is happening?" she gasped, as well as her choking throat would allow.

"Are you *alive?*"

"I'm afraid—I am."

"Then"—he went back to the door and locked it; then, having plunged his wounded arm into the water-pitcher, he took his handkerchief and bound it roughly. "One must act first, and talk after. . . . Where is Cynthia? Do you know?"

"No——"

"Then"—he overthrew a pile of lumber against the side of the room opposite the window, and displayed the handle of the folding doors that divided the drawing-room in two—the back, where Marion had been lodged, from the front, whence, for obvious reasons, she had been debarred. He turned the handle and shook it. "Locked! and Cynthia has the key. Is *she* a traitor?" He threw himself against the door with all his force and weight; but it stood firm.

He turned and leaned against the stubborn door.

"I'm losing blood," he said, in a voice of such despair that it might have been Marion's. "I've no strength left. Marion—as you are Marion—I am flying for my life: and my one chance is gone. The one possible way out of this trap is locked and bared. And there are reasons why, if ever I am taken, it must never be alive. You know who I am? Adam Furness—remember that; a daughter will be a good witness as to the name her own father is to be buried by. For the rest, you need not tell anything more of me than you know; and, as my daughter, if you ask after my account at Barton's, in Lombard Street, you won't starve. And—hark! There they are——"

The key she had found on the floor! She darted to the folding door: it entered the lock: it moved.

He threw down the candle, caught her by the arm, and hurried her through. The dead man might want a witness: the man to whom life had, for one moment's chance, returned, wanted none: none, at least whom he could not trust to lie.

Hurriedly relocking the door behind him, he led her through the darkness; then down a broad oak staircase, lighted here and there by stray moonbeams; across a hall, and down to the basement from which Marion had entered the house with Cynthia, where the ratholes were. Not a sound told them that they were being pursued; nor did Adam Furness utter a word.

Then, at last—at last Marion felt the fresh air, cold with night upon her cheek; they were crossing the yard at the back, or rather creeping round it, in the shadow of the wall.

"Now for it?" said Adam Furness, under his breath, as th

reached the door into the mews. "No—the risk's too great. No doubt they've guarded every hole that a rat could creep out by. Listen, with all your ears. Do you hear the ghost of a sound outside? There's one good thing about a constable; wherever he is, his boots betray him. You listen. My ears buzz and sing."

Marion knelt down, and put her ear to the keyhole. She was realizing nothing; but strength seemed to have come to her from heaven knows where, now that she had any creature who was not herself to think for and act for. No; not only heaven, but everybody in his senses knows that from having this, and from having this alone, strength or courage can ever come.

She listened, while Adam Furness almost held his breath so that he might not confuse her ears.

For a full minute she heard nothing but the neigh of a horse in the nearest stable, and the crow of a bantam whose mission in life was to keep other bipeds from too continuous slumber.

"I hear no tramping," she whispered.

"We mustn't hurry, though. A policeman can keep quiet for more than a whole minute sometimes. I am going to give myself five."

Marion listened again. And presently she heard the faintest rustle—so faint as to be no stronger than the ripple of leaves in a June breeze. Then she caught the softest suggestion of a tune, hummed so low that it would not have broken a kitten's dream.

She started back and shrank into the shade of the wall, as the door opened, and Cynthia entered the yard.

But she did not start back so swiftly but that Cynthia saw her; nor yet did Cynthia perceive her so swiftly as Adam Furness came forward and seized the girl by both arms.

"If your hand's in this," he said below his breath, "and if I'm taken—by hell, I'll hang for *you!* Make a sound or a sign, and I'll shift my hands from your arms to your throat—I've not lost too much blood to throttle a girl."

"Adam!" she exclaimed.

"Hush! Do you mean me to be as good as my word?"

"Lord! Do you mean —— Ah, I see! No—I don't see; I can't see ——"

"But I do; and if I don't, I will."

"Ah—but I can! Only—*you* don't mean to tell *me* that—whoever it is—he's alive?"

"Alive? No."

"Who is it?"

"Peter Petersen."

"Oh—then I don't mind. I was afraid —— But oh, what a fool I've been!"

It seemed to Marion that they were talking in some strange sort of shorthand. And so, for that matter, they were; for no words written at length can give the way in which Cynthia, when not bewildered by uncongenial metaphysics, saw to the heart of things flash-wise.

"Nothing worse than a fool?" asked Adam sternly.

"What's worse than a fool? And me to let the red-whiskered wretch send me out on a fool's errand—I'm dead of shame to the end of my days. . . . So he thought he'd take you in the house; and then when I came back . . . But he *is* dead!"

"It had to be he or I—and here am I."

"I was afraid it might have been—but never mind now."

"And I—I was afraid ——"

"What?"

"That it might be *you*."

"I? *I?* Ah—then there *is* a bigger fool than Me, after all! I'd never forgive you—if I hadn't ought to be forgiven too . . . for thinking . . . but never mind. Are *they* there?"

"The police? I don't advise you to go and see . . . Are they there—outside?"

"I've seen none ——"

"Girl—I'm going to trust you as man never trusted woman before—at least, without repenting. I wouldn't; but that there's nothing else to be done. I'm badly hurt; and I must see a surgeon at any risk, short of being caught alive. The thing's smashed, but there are a good many pieces to be picked up, and we can't stop for that now. Meet me—let me see—on Wednesday at—I'll write where and when: you know where to look for letters, and you'll call every day; and you'll say nothing to Stephen Ray: after Petersen, I'll trust one more woman, and no man —— Ah!"

With a stifled exclamation, he threw himself back into the shadow. That peculiar tramp by which constables announce their approach was heard advancing from both directions at once along the mews towards the postern. Cynthia heard it too.

"Quick!" she exclaimed, in a sharp whisper. "You can reach the stable roof from the wall. It's the Miss Burdons'—they wont think of searching there for a good hour; and you needn't stay: there's a painter's ladder into the next yard, and all the walls are low all the way to the square, and no spikes anywhere. Come" she added, catching Marion by the hand, drawing her into the mews, locking the door quickly, and tossing the key over the wall.

Adam Furness paused. He was safe for at least another minute; and his trust in women was about to follow over the edge of the precipice his trust in man. Could it be that Cynthia had not been detaining him to give the constables time to arrive?—that her pretended ignorance had not been a lie?

He bound the saturated handkerchief more tightly about his wrist, and twisted a piece of whip-cord firmly round the arm above the wound, so as to cut off its connection with the heart as completely as possible. Then he measured the opposite wall and the stable roof with his eye: the climb could be made, no doubt; but then that roof might be made a second trap—it would be wiser to try the wall against which he was leaning, and follow the route Cynthia had given him by the law of contrary. But there was not a ghost of a foothold, and the coping was far too high for a spring; and to drop into Mr. Ward's back garden would mean to court capture.

With the constables at the back door, with the house in their possession, with an impassable wall behind him, with probable treachery in front of him, and with his own blood staining the gravel, he felt himself at bay. There were but two courses open : to wait till the door was burst open and to make a rush for it, or to let the constables find another corpse in addition to Peter Petersen's. It may seem strange ; but he had no thought of letting himself be taken alive—the alternative never entered his mind. Whatever his reasons, they were so much part of his nature that he had no occasion to muster them. They were part of the very breath he drew. He set his teeth, drew a revolver from his breast, and stood prepared to die rather than yield his secret—whatever it might be.

And it was the same world, the same little world, that contained Adam Furness and John Heron. While the banker was advancing to greatness by rapid strides—while his native city was at his feet, voting statues and talking of peerages for the man who was to make it a power in the empire ; while his were the hands, the head, and the heart that inspired new life into a whole town ; while he was trusted, loved, and honoured with a zeal that rivalled his own, Adam Furness was standing in a few square feet of London yard, betrayed by those he trusted, a hounded outlaw, and preparing to escape by self-murder the murderer's doom.

"There, but for God's grace, goes Richard Baxter," said that thoroughgoing Calvinist, on seeing a highwayman on the way to Tyburn.

And who shall say but that there might not have been standing John Heron, of Marchgrave—but for, say, a hundred things?

Assuredly, if Marchgrave, in some coporate vision, could have seen John Heron standing where Adam Furness stood now, it would have forwith voted a madhouse big enough to hold the whole town, and have unanimously committed itself thereto, man, woman, and child. And if John Heron could have shared such a nightmare—if he, who lived firstly for the public good, and secondly for honourable ambition, could have put himself in the place of the coiner on the eve of arrest, of an actual murderer, of a criminal who had failed—then John Heron, of Marchgrave, despite all his principles, would have preferred suicide to the hideous downfall of letting himself be identified with such a man, and have thanked heaven, even in his sleep, that dreams are but dreams.

But even dreams may be too wild for words. Good men do no Murder, even in a dream.

The tramp came to a sudden halt ; Cynthia, outside the door, laughed lightly, and hummed the fag-end of a lively tune.

"Halloa, young women," said a gruff voice, in a tone of authority ; "clear out of this—what are you doing here?"

"We're taking a stroll," Adam Furness heard Cynthia answer demurely ; "me and this young lady—my friend."

"Then you'll take your stroll elsewhere. . . . Wait a bit though. Has anything being going on here before we came?"

"Nothing in particular, Mr. Sergeant. But, gracious! is it a burglary?"

"Never you mind. That's our affair."

"Only think, Eliza!" said Cynthia, putting a cockney twang into her voice, and speaking with the most innocent air. "You remember seeing that man scrambling along the—— But there. It's none of our business. The sergeant says so. I think we'll go home."

"Stop a bit! What man? Where?"

"Blest if I didn't think 'twas a something. Didn't I say so, Eliza? There's something up, I says to Eliza, as sure as my name's Jane."

"How long ago? Which way?"

"Oh, p'r'aps a minute—p'r'aps less, or p'r'aps more. Lord, how he did scramble along to be sure! If he don't break his leg, I says to Eliza, says I——."

"Answer sharp! Which way?"

"Right along—— But, gracious? he'll never get there without a broken neck, or a limb. Oh!" she screamed—"look—if there he ain't right atop of the wall of Number Twelve! Oh!—*Don't* look, Eliza—he's gone!"

Adam Furness's heart gave a great throb. The girl was putting the constables on a false scent with airs of stupid innocence that would have taken in Fouché himself. She was true.

Returning his revolver, and regardless of his wound, he drew himself up the low wall that separated the back garden of Number Seventeen from the Miss Burdons'; thence up a slope in the brickwork to a higher level; thence to the stable-roof, where he could see from above without being seen from below. Yes—Cynthia had been true. The group of constables, some four or five, were following with their eyes the direction of one arm, which pointed the wrong way, while Marion clung to the other.

Stumbling round the roof, just within the low parapet, in search of the promised ladder, befriended by the false scent and the darkness, he was suddenly startled by a flash of light full in his eyes; and, recovering, perceived that there was one in the company below, a young man in plain clothes, who, armed with a lantern, was not looking in the direction of Cynthia's finger. Adam Furness felt that this man's eyes, not merely his lantern, had for a moment met his own. Instantly he threw himself down behind the parapet on his hands and knees, stifling a groan wrung from him by his wound. A shout of discovery rang in his ears as he found the head of the ladder—he knew himself to be in sight as he stepped upon the coping and swung himself to the topmost rung. The lower part of the ladder was boarded over; but this was to the help of speed, since it compelled him to slide the last twenty feet, though at the risk of a broken limb.

CHAPTER XIV.

STRICTLY ON BUSINESS.

THE Bell, at Marchgrave, is a large old inn, big enough for a town twice or thrice the size of that ancient city, occupying a considerable share of one side of the broadest part of Main Street, and backed by acres of stable-yard and garden. You enter, first under a swinging sign; then, under several joints of mutton, by a paved archway, whence two wide staircases, one on either side, run up into a maze of landing places and corridors. It had been a famous house generations ago—the scene of county balls, and assemblies, and all manner of adventures of the road. But of late it had settled down into a commercial house of the usual order, flavoured by such patronage as the county families had left them to give; busy on Thursdays, when the farmers came in, and waking up into bustle at election and assize times. It was also the seat of a Masonic lodge and a tradesmen's club; and was altogether one of the most respectable institutions in Marchgrave—as was indeed its business to be, with the cathedral close within one stone's throw and Chapter Lane within another.

An omnibus—in the words of the fly-blown card over the chimney-piece in the funereal coffee-room—met every train: and, it might have been added, usually came back empty. One evening, however, having made its preliminary tour of the town, it conveyed to the door of the Bell a well-dressed gentleman of between thirty and forty years old, with a new portmanteau and a pleasant smile. He asked if he could have a bed with an insinuating air that seemed to the rather elderly lady at the desk in the bar the height of fine manners, and obtained him a room scarcely warranted by his lack of luggage. And when he had asked the waiter in the coffee-room for all sorts of delicacies unheard of in Marchgrave even at corporation dinners, and had finally ordered a bottle of the most extravagant champagne with the best he could get, he was discussed in the parlour behind the bar very considerably to his advantage.

He had the coffee-room entirely to himself; and, as the room was vast and dimly lighted, and void of any entertainment beyond the portrait of a long-buried bishop, the County Directory, a Guide to the Cathedral, and a tariff of wines, it was natural that so genial-looking a gentleman should hunger for company after his bodily appetite had been appeased. The latter indeed had been excellent: tepid soup, watery fish, greasy cutlets, flinty tarts, and crumbly cheese had disappeared before him as if the Marchgrave cook had been a *cordon bleu.* He strolled into the passage; and, seeing several persons of his own

sex making themselves comfortable in the landlady's red-curtained parlour, made bold to join them, asking some ordinary question by way of formal apology.

Once there, he seemed to fall naturally into the place, lighted a cigar from his own case, asked for coffee and green chartreuse, and, since that was not to be got, contented himself with curaçoa. Nor did he turn up his naturally somewhat snub nose at either of them, as Mrs. Clapper, of the Bell, was half afraid so fine a gentleman might do. In the most affable way possible, he smacked his lips, and ordered a pint of port—which chanced to be really good, as having been the remains of the cellar of a late eminent canon of Marchgrave, who had obtained his stall when Port was Port and Greek was Greek ; perhaps because they hung together, instead of being divorced and parted—Greek to stage-struck schoolgirls, and Port to Bacchus knows where.

"Affable" was the exact word that came into the minds of Mrs. Clapper and her elderly niece in respect of their visitor. He was in every respect calculated to win the hearts (not very easily won) of their order, whether young or old. His clothes were obviously so fresh from the tailor's, and were worn with such an air, that one looked at the coat before the wearer; the more especially as he sported a sweet-smelling button-hole : a fashion that had not yet become vulgarized in Marchgrave. His hat was beautifully brushed; his light gloves, when casually drawn off, displayed several rings with flashing stones; his teeth were white and visible; his hair was elaborately arranged; his complexion exquisitely pink and clear. Whether these charms of person and manner, added to an evident indifference to the amount of his bill, had an equal effect upon the rest of the company, is much less certain. Mr. Wilks, the stationer ; Mr. Crabb, the saddler; Mr. Green, the auctioneer; Mr. Bruff, a reporter for the *Marchgrave Mercury;* Mr. Hemp, the vicar-choral; and Mr. Prendergast, the shipbroker's clerk, were one and all (so it singularly chanced) wifeless, though otherwise most respectable citizens; while Mrs. Clapper was the best-to-do widow in the place, and Miss Lamb was her niece and reputed heiress. Not one of them had a chance ; and each one of them knew it.

But they were nevertheless rivals of long standing; and, while accustomed to one another's rivalry, and being the better friends and neighbours for it, had a natural dislike towards interlopers of this particular brand. And the worst of it was, they could not help admiring, too—admiring even the airiness with which he lifted his wine in his jewelled fingers as if over the heads of their homely grogs and humble weeds.

But not for the British tradesman is the luxury of letting his antipathies be perceived—even a possible rival is a possible customer as well. And these were men of the pleasant, slow-lived, easy-going West, where people do not think of the buttering of parsnips before using fair words.

"A cool evening, sir," said Mr. Wilks, the stationer, "for the time of the year."

"But seasonable," said Mr. Green, the auctioneer, "most seasonable, I'm sure. Things are going ——"

"Going—going—gone!" interrupted the vicar-choral, who was a wag, and had contrived to bring in this particular joke every Friday night for the last seven years with never-failing applause.

"Oh, Mr. Hemp! How can you?" asked Miss Lamb. And Mr. Hemp felt that the visitor was out of it this time.

But the visitor balked him. "Capital," said he. "But then," he added, with a look round the room, with special comprehension of the ladies and the wine, "everything seems capital here. 'Seems, madam? Nay, it is'—the Bard of Avon, you know. This is my first visit, gentlemen, to your interesting town."

"Hoping, sir, it won't be your last, I'm sure," said Mrs. Clapper.

"Not if I know it," said he.

"Ah, Marchgrave's getting a lively place now," said Mr. Crabb. "Lord, sir, you won't know it for the same place in another year."

There are places where he would have been asked plump out—"Are you from London, on Dock business?" But it was not manners in Marchgrave to ask questions if you could get at what you wanted in a more leisurely way.

"Indeed? How's that?" asked he.

There was the opening aimed at. "Surely you've heard of the new Docks there's going to be," said Mr. Crabb. "I suppose there's lots of talk about 'em, now, up in town?"

"There's nothing else talked about," said the visitor gravely. "Nothing else, upon my word."

"Ah! And what do they say, now," asked Mr. Crabb, "in town?"

"What don't they say—that's the way to put it; what don't they say?"

"A bit frightened—eh?"

"Frightened isn't the word! Why, London will be nowhere—nowhere, in another year."

He had no more notion what he was talking about than the man in the moon; but he was evidently quick at catching cues.

"Talking of London," said Mr. Bruff, of the *Mercury*, "what's the latest about that smashing case? Anything new?"

"Ah—one has to come into the country for news!" said the visitor, who seemed to smell Mr. Bruff's calling—not that such skill, with a little practice, is hard to acquire. "Would you believe it?—I haven't heard a word of any smashing case till this moment, not a word."

"It *is* singular," said Mr. Bruff. "And yet it isn't, when you come to think of it. I represent a leading journal here; and though I say it perhaps that shouldn't, I constantly get news from London, startling news too, that never gets published there. It's all a matter of enterprise ——"

"Ah—you mean that empty house, Mr. Bruff!" said the widow. "I was reading all about it this very morning, in the paper. Law, it's to make one's hair stand up on end, when one remembers there might be empty houses anywhere ——"

"Not in Marchgrave, now the Docks are coming," interrupted the auctioneer. "There won't be houses enough for the city. Speaking as a house and estate agent, I can tell you, ma'am, that if I'd the blessing of a wife, she might look to ride in her own carriage in a couple of year. Why, Mrs. Clapper, I'm going ——"

"Going—Gone!" struck in Mr. Hemp, seizing the new chance wherewith Fortune had already favoured him. "*I'm* not—yet, though. I know where I'm well off—eh?"

"Some people never do go," grumbled Mr. Green. Once an evening was the rule for that joke: twice was a liberty. "Some people's like some things: try what one will, one can't get 'em off, nor knock 'em down."

"P'raps I *am* one of that sort," said Mr. Hemp complacently, who was five foot ten to the other's five foot four.

"Come, come," said Mrs. Clapper, who loved peace and scented war. "Mr. Green's meaning was strictly professional, I'm sure; and Mr. Hemp will have his joke; and I'm sure you're both of you as welcome to stay as long as you like as the flowers in May: and all gentlemen besides, that's good friends, like all here."

"Your sentiments do you honour, madam," said the visitor, who—without anybody knowing it—was the real cause of a certain tendency to discord in that comfortable air. "But about that smashing case ——?"

"Truth is stranger than fiction," said Mr. Bruff. "Fancy an empty house in a respectable street turning out to be a den of smashers—coiners, you know!"

"Ah," said the visitor, "I had a bad sovereign given me only the other day."

"Number Seventeen, Upper Vane Street. You know it, perhaps, sir? Perhaps you've seen the very house? Perhaps you could favour me with a little description of the outside?"

"Upper Vane Street, Eastwood Square—by Jove! Rather—I've passed through it hundreds of times. Not much to describe, though: a dead-alive place, where one would as soon think ——"

The very thing! Contrast is the soul of description! We must have a few words together, if you'll do me so proud. But—there you are. A house everybody believed to be empty: in Chancery, or something. And—a den of crime! Acting on information they received, the police made a raid on Number Sixteen, next door, occupied by a person of the name of Ward. At the top of the house was a room which Mr. Ward kept locked, on the pretext of its being a laboratory, and where the servants were not allowed to go—not even to clean. Out of that room, sir, a door had been made in the party wall of Number Seventeen: and there was a regular mint, fitted up with furnaces, forges, coining presses—everything on a regular scale. And it's said the business has been going on for years: coining half the bad money that's about everywhere."

"And they've caught the smashers?"

"Not one of 'em! It's the biggest bungle that ever was. Now it

Marchgrave we should have—but the London police are just duffers. There was only one man in the whole place : and he stabbed the informer and escaped over a back wall."

"They did muff it, by Jove. But he'll be taken, of course. Why, it's murder as well."

"Yes : I expect he'll be arrested," said Mr. Bruff. "He was desperately wounded in the struggle with the informer, for they've traced his blood ever so far ——"

"His *blood ?*" exclaimed the visitor, starting.

"His Blood !" answered Mr. Bruff impressively, as though the credit for the touch of melodrama were his own.

"Why, he must have bled like a pig, to have been traced really far."

"Indeed, sir ? Is that so ?"

"Rather ! By the way—I take a bit of an interest in such things—when was this : when did it occur ?"

"Monday night ——"

"By the living George ! . . . Well : everything must happen on a Monday that don't happen any other day . . . But this ain't nice talk for the ladies. I vote we make a change. I'm here on a bit of business. Does there chance to be a gentleman living here named Heron !"

Had he asked at Windsor if there happened to be an occasional resident there called the Queen, he would have been met with the same stares that met him now. As he felt those amazed looks bent upon him, he felt he had lost caste even in Miss Lamb's eyes.

"Perhaps, sir, said Mr. Prendergast, the shipbroker's clerk, "you might chance to hear of the gentleman if you were to inquire in Chapter Lane. It's just possible, you know."

The cutting satire broke the general frost of bewildered amaze.

"Well—after all, John Heron ain't the Dean an' Chap'r,' said the vicar-choral, asserting his superiority, while finding his whisky-and water beginning to tell a trifle upon his vocal chords.

"Gammon !" broke in Mr. Green, clutching at his first chance of revenge. "A fig for your Deans and Chapters. There's scores of them : but there's only one John Heron of Chapter Lane."

"True for you, Green !" came the chorus. "Here's long life to the Member for Marchgrave—and good luck to the Docks, and confound their enemies ; God save the Queen !"

"Well—I'm only a Londoner," said the visitor humbly. "I'll know better next time. John Heron, of Chapter Lane. Member for Marchgrave. Here's his good health : may he live long, and prosper. . . . By the way, it is a piano that I see before me ? Does nobody sing ? It would be a shame if such good company should part without a stave. 'I know a Bank' — Eh ? John Heron's, in Chapter Lane ?"

The visitor struck a chord that made the piano of Mrs. Clapper's early youth creak and jar as with pain. But he had tact enough to humour it : and presently the company were bending appealing looks upon Mr. Hemp, the vicar-choral, as if asking that musical authority

whether they ought to be pleased or not, and if so, how far, or how otherwise.

They were gratified to find that the cathedral chorister was nodding —say, time. "Going—Going—G-g-one!" he murmured, with a seraphic smile. Well—he was out of the way; and the mice might play as they pleased. It was past midnight when they parted, with much shaking of hands, and when Mrs. Clapper and Miss Lamb retired to their respective couches without a solitary yawn.

The first person in Marchgrave who had business at the Bank the next morning was Mr. Prendergast, the shipbroker's clerk—the shipbroker being Guy Derwent, whose affairs, during his absence abroad, the Banker had so kindly volunteered to superintend, much to the pride of Mr. Prendergast, who was an honest fellow, was shy of responsibility, and did not yield even to Alderman Sparrow in his admiration for John Heron.

For the first time since he had sown his modest crop of wild oats—now many years ago—Mr. Prendergast overslept himself, and woke with a headache that clamoured for soda-water.

"This will never do," thought he. "I'm hanged if I know what came over us all last night. That chap's a lively customer—a bit too lively I'm afraid. If the Dock business is going to keep him long, he must be looked after. Susan Clapper's but a woman: and it would never do if the old Bell was to get into wrong hands. If she don't know what's truly good for her, she'd better take Green or Bruff, or—no: not Hemp. He's too free with his chaff: and if he was master 'twouldn't be so easy to keep him down. I'll drop in on Green, and talk it over. Yes—if things are to go on as they are, and keep comfortable, something must be done. No—I wouldn't so much mind Green. Anybody can sit on Green."

It was the first forboding on the part of a soul in Marchgrave that the grand new life might mean the breaking-up of some comfortable old ways. Mr. Prendergast, however, was not a man to put two and two together, except in office matters, when he did it admirably; and on his way to the office, he occupied his aching head with planning how, even when Marchgrave became a greater Liverpool, with interesting strangers cropping up every hour, those snug evenings in the Bell parlour should remain disturbed. By the time he had got the office letters, he had almost made up his mind that it was a public duty to turn Susan Clapper into Susan Prendergast; and public spirit was now pervading the air. Well—he would have a good talk with Green and see. Having collected the letters, he carried them to the Bank and went straight into the parlour, where he was allotted a regular hour whenever the Banker was in town.

He was in town to-day.

"Bless my soul, sir," exclaimed Mr. Prendergast, on retiring, "what has happened to your arm?"

For John Heron's right arm was fixed on a splint in a sling.

"Oh—nothing, Prendergast," said John Heron. "Nothing at all. Only a sprain—the worst of it is that it's the right arm; if it was the left, it wouldn't matter a straw."

"Excuse me, sir, but a sprain's a very serious thing."

"To people with less willing right arms at their service, a very serious thing indeed," said John Heron, with a smile. "For me, it's half a holiday. Ah—your letters. I'll run through them now."

"Any news from Mr. Derwent, sir?"

"No. . . . Well, there doesn't seem anything of much importance to-day. You'll see for yourself what has to be done. I see there's a French ship to be cleared at Askness. I suppose you know all about it; and you'd better run down as soon as you can."

"I know, sir, the *Kater Freers*." Marchgrave spoke a good deal of French, in the way of business, with an accent of its own. "I suppose we may soon begin to look for Mr. Derwent to come home?"

"No doubt. . . . Well, Smith, what is it? I'm busy just now."

"A gentleman to see you, sir," said a clerk, who had come into the room. "He said it was on business, and you'd be sure to see him; but he wouldn't give any name."

"Well. Have him in," said John Heron, with a sigh. "Here are the letters, Prendergast. There's nothing in them you can't attend to without me. Good-day."

"Your governor don't seem himself this morning," said Mr. Prendergast to Mr. Smith as they left the parlour together. "And what *has* he done to his arm?"

"Getting out of a cab, up in town," said Smith, not forgetting to put in the note of condescension due to a clerk in a common office from a clerk in Chapter Lane.

"A serious thing—a very serious thing," said Mr. Prendergast; who had been impressed less by the sight of the sling than by a look of pallid weariness and an air of indifference to the details of business singularly uncharacteristic of John Heron. "A very—Holloa!"

It was odd—so Mr. Prendergast thought in his simplicity—that the man of whom his thoughts, in connection with Susan Clapper, were full, should almost run up against him in this very Bank on this very morning. The oddness of coincidences is hourly puzzling blockheads; and will continue to puzzle them so long as this world of theirs endures. And this coincidence was of a peculiarly irritating kind. While Mr. Prendergast's head was splitting, and his conscience accusing him after the manner of conscience before luncheon, Mrs. Clapper's guest looked just as spruce, and smiling, and pink as when he was sipping the port of the late canon; and his pleasant nod and "Good morning" were more irritating still.

When Mr. Prendergast left him, John Heron rose from his throne, went to the bureau of black oak, and filled himself a glass of that famous brown sherry wherewith he had welcomed Guy Derwent home from India. He was not himself—that was clear. But how could such a man as he be himself, with a useless right arm? He might make light of it—that was always his way; but even self-suppression tells, and increases pain. The heroes of Homer used to howl aloud when they were hurt, and lived to five-score—we think it bad form to howl, and

die, on an average, in less than half the time. To think that a John Heron should be at the mercy of a sprain! It seemed monstrous—over the whole Bank it cast a gloom which would presently extend over the whole town. For if one of John Heron's teeth had ached, every jaw in Marchgrave would have ached for sympathy. . . And he was the man whom a London lawyer dared oppose!

No doubt Mr. Prendergast was right: a sprain is a serious, a very serious thing.

He had emptied his glass, and locked the bureau, as quickly as his left-handedness would allow, when the anonymous gentleman, who had called on important business, entered the room.

John Heron had already seemed to Mr. Prendergast worn and pale. But, as he set eyes on his visitor, not one human being in Marchgrave would have recognised John Heron. The pallor became ghastliness—the weariness deepened into the gaze of a hunted quarry before it turns to bay. One could see the deadly sickening of the heart in the gray tinge that spread over the skin, and the film that suddenly deadened the eyes.

And yet the visitor was nothing, in himself, so terrible. He was as fresh and as smiling as when he had been throwing the apple of discord among the honest tradesmen who courted in company the landlady of the Bell. That John Heron should turn gray at the sight of a crowned king would have been held beyond belief in Marchgrave; that he should sink trembling into his seat before a smug and smirking Nobody —— Marchgrave would not have believed its eyes. Yet . . it was true.

And as the strong man quailed before the weak, the great man before the small, the lion before the fox, the latter assumed a more deferential demeanour and a more insinuating smile. "Mr. Heron?" asked he; "of course I haven't been an hour in this interesting old town without learning how valuable your time is—too many irons, I'm afraid, by far, speaking as a medical man. Ah, it's the curse of the age. However—I've only come to mention a little incident, of some consequence to a mutual friend; it won't take long. I'm a medical man, Mr. Heron—Dr. Snell, of London. Only the night before last, a gentleman, Furness by name, called me up to dress a wound in the arm: a very remarkable wound, accompanied by various lacerations and contusions. And—such things are not entirely unknown in my profession, especially when the patient is in a hurry—he omitted the slight formality of the honorarium; that is to say, the fee. I hope, Mr. Heron, I have not done wrong in just dropping in to inquire if Mr. Adam Furness is a responsible man?"

The Banker had not yet recovered himself; but he turned round slowly and faced Dr. Snell."

"How you discovered that it sometimes suits me," said he, "to masquerade under another name, I fail to perceive. And how you have found the impudence to come here, after taking money that you have not earned, I also fail to perceive. Am I the only public man who has taken another name for his private pleasures? Supposing I call myself Adam Furness, what then? Do you want blackmail? Keep what you

have not earned. I shall not give you a penny more." But though he spoke firmly, his unwounded hand was trembling.

"H'm. I believe there's an election pending in Marchgrave. As to the money —— If it wasn't earned ten times over, I'll swallow all my own pills. I'm not answerable, nor Mrs. Wyndham Snell, for the pranks of a crazy girl whom her own father wants to hide away. Blackmail! Well—hard words break no bones. I come simply on a matter of justice—justice, you must know, is my passion. I am interested in Miss Furness; she may have rights which require the interference of a disinterested friend. As a good citizen, it is my business to see that a British constituency is properly represented; and I have grave doubts whether a member of the British Legislature should be a man who plays Giovanni in London under a false name, and has a secret daughter whom he won't own—and maybe twenty more. And it is a duty to my honourable profession to insist upon a fee from all in a position to pay—it's only on that condition that I can help the poor. Blackmail, Mr. Fur—— Mr. Heron? No. But Duty—yes. I shall be sorry if it becomes that duty to ask for an interview with the election agent of Mr. Morland, who, I understand, is the other candidate for this enlightened—well, say, this not yet quite enlightened, town."

"You mean that you will sell a pack of scandal about me to ——"

"I beg your pardon ——"

"No, no. A spade's a spade. . . . Very well. Take it you thought it your 'duty' to warn me. . . . Take your wares to Marchgrave Market, and if you can get three half-pence for them, you're a lucky man. I'm going to forestall you."

He placed his finger on the bell.

"What are you going to do?" asked the Doctor, for a moment surprised.

"To call my chief cashier, and send for a worthy alderman of this city; to tell them before you the story you have told me; to give you the lie; and to show you the door. And if you get to the railway-station with a dry skin and a whole bone in it, you're a lucky man."

The momentary surprise changed to open admiration.

"By Jove! If that isn't cheek. . . . You'll say you're not Adam Furness?"

"I am not Adam Furness," said John Heron.

"That you never had a wife who died in a pothouse ——"

"Prove it, if you can."

"That you have no daughter, whom ——"

"Find her—produce her."

"That you were never in Botany Bay for forgery ——"

"No."

"That—that you never came to my surgery with a wounded arm on the night when a coiner murdered a man in Upper Vane Street, Eastwood Square? . . . Shall I ring that bell for you *now*, Mr. —— Heron?"

CHAPTER XV.

AN ADVENTURESS IN SPITE OF HERSELF.

LEFT once more to himself, the King in Marchgrave, the Knave in London, locked the door, and endeavoured to face steadily the depths of the precipice on the brink of which he found himself standing just when he had felt assured of having left behind him the region of crime and peril, and of having entered at last, unencumbered with a second self, the open plain through which life's highway runs. All had been so well contrived—all had so hideously failed.

There had been imminent peril, no doubt, when he first learned from Guy Derwent that the wife who knew him, and would recognise Adam Furness, the Forger, in John Heron, the Banker, was about to follow her daughter and her son-in-law to Marchgrave. But Providence had interfered to remove her out of his path without the helping hand that he had been prepared to lend to Providence if need had [illegible]n. There had been peril, again, in the marriage of Guy with the [illegible]hter who had learned to know him as Adam Furness in London, and would know him again when she came to her husband's home. But he and Providence between them had parted the lovers : that peril also had passed by. And even though the police were on the traces of Adam Furness, there was nothing to connect Adam Furness with John Heron ; the traitor who could have tracked him was no more, and he had escaped unseen. Despite the miscarriage of his last stroke of crime, he would still have baffled evil fortune, had it not been for Wyndham Snell ; for a mean and despicable fool, from whom he had never dreamed that the remotest peril could come.

When the fox is under the paws of the lion, he need not give up all hope—there is always the chance that the nobler beast, as fable regards him, will scorn to devour so mean a prey. But for the wounded lion at the mercy of the fox there is no chance—no mercy. He may as well make up his mind to be picked to the bone. There was one fox in the world who would make John Heron pay for keeping the secret of Adam Furness, forger, coiner, and murderer, to say nothing of his merely domestic crimes ; which meant that all he possessed on earth—wealth, hope, honour, and home—had become henceforth the property of Wyndham Snell.

Yet it was not of wealth, nor of honour, nor of home, nor even of liberty, nor of life itself, that he thought in the first place during that hour of what was almost despair.

He had once laughed at himself for having Marchgrave Docks on the brain. And that was only untrue because it was but half the truth. He had them not only on the brain, but in the heart and on the soul.

There are men who cannot entertain a project, or even an idea, be it love, or friendship, or invention, or philanthropy, or collecting cracked teacups, without its becoming a passion. John Heron was one of these men.

Everybody knows the story of the parish priest in France who was content to submit to a long life of scorn and hatred as "the Griper," because of his most unclerical miserliness and greed for sous. He starved; he hoarded stray pins and odds and ends of string; and yet not a farthing found its way to the poor. It was because—as people found out at last—he was amassing a fortune for the poor; a fortune that would do lasting good to generations, instead of being wasted and leaving no sign, like raindrops in an ocean, as daily alms would have been. What his parish was to "the Griper," such had Marchgrave become to John Heron.

After all, though he had a wife he had no child. Marion did not count—she was the daughter of Adam Furness the Coiner, whom John Heron the Banker hated with the hate that a man cannot feel except towards his own evil self—a hate surpassing the utmost hate he can feel for another as far as hell is deeper than the deepest depth of the sea. When Adam Furness escaped from Botany Bay, John Heron, after a season, returned to Marchgrave, where the bank was waiting for him for want of a will. It had been a marvellous stroke of luck that the bank, through lack of the commonest of precautions, had gone in its entirety to the black sheep of the house—to the forger who, happily for the Herons, had been convicted and sentenced under another name, so that his father and brother were able to keep the skeleton under lock and key. Or rather, it would have been an astonishing stroke, were it not that unbusinesslike habits are the chief characteristic of business men—at least in their own affairs. But when that stroke befell him, he was engaged in that colossal and labyrinthine career of crime, too labyrinthine for self-extrication; too colossal to overturn. There had been no help for it—though John Heron came to life again, Adam Furness could not die. He stood committed to the double life: not for pleasure, as with most men; not out of policy, as it has been with a few; not out of the passionate desire to revolt against all fixed habits and social laws, such as the best of us may feel at times, and to which some have desperately yielded now and then—but out of stern necessity, which compelled him to divide himself in two.

He could not extricate himself from the career of Adam Furness—if he paused or stumbled for a moment, the engine of his own creation would have rolled over him and crushed him altogether. Nay, he had to make John Heron of Marchgrave, serve Adam Furness, otherwise Ward, of Upper Vane Street; because the greater the capital the latter had at his command, the greater the safety he could secure. Adam Furness could not have bought the leases of two houses, and fitted them with the best and finest of machinery, without the aid of John Heron.

And for this John Heron had to pay double-wise. His respectability had to be without reproach; his position in men's minds more than merely beyond suspicion. He had to make himself a name that should

be synonymous with honesty and honour. For this he had laboured like Hercules; for this he had taken a wife; for this he had sought to make himself every man's trusted friend. But with prodigious success came honest zeal, the greater because not in its fulness could it be indulged. He hungered for a life of honour as for forbidden fruit; for free indulgence in honesty as having the added zest of unlawful pleasure. If only he could simply be what he seemed! For, as middle age came upon him, he also hungered for peace of mind. Then, moreover, it became needful that he should seem called upon to make long and frequent absences from home; and for this purpose the idea of the new Docks had come upon him, at first as a self-defensive inspiration. But the inspiration had become a real passion—he being he.

Thus the man, take him which way one will, was no mere criminal using respectability as a cloak to cover his crimes. He was a man with a great public passion for the greatness of his native town, for which he laboured greatly with his neck in a noose. And so, by degrees, even his crimes became entangled in the service of Marchgrave. If Chapter Lane had to feed Upper Vane Street, Upper Vane Street had in turn to feed Chapter Lane. Public spirit had to take the place of what, had he been master of his own life, might have been private ambition. He became as unscrupulous for Marchgrave as certain great statesmen have been for themselves. The frauds of Adam Furness became, as it were, consecrated by the purposes of John Heron. And at last the Docks had come into sight, and liberty besides, and the power henceforth to take his own life into his own hands. . . .

And all had been overthrown, in one miserable moment, by a Wyndham Snell!

As he sat alone in his locked parlour, he saw the great ends of his life vanishing from before his eyes like a dream. He saw himself condemned to a life of barren labour solely that he might enrich Wyndham Snell, who might, if blackmail ran short, send him back to the hulks or forward to the gallows. He was absolutely in the vermin's power. The bank itself had become virtually Wyndham Snell's. Unless he chose to pay whatever was demanded—for there could be no question of making terms—he would be worse than a mere felon: he would be degraded in the sight of Marchgrave. He could hear the talk and anticipate the ninety days' wonder; not Adam Furness, but John Heron the Forger, John Heron the Escaped Gaol-bird, John Heron the Coiner, John Heron the Murderer. It was hideous; horrible. Why, he dared not even face the thought of John Heron the Suicide. Anything would be better—even a thousand more crimes. Of what account was the life of a wretched piece of vermin, like Wyndham Snell, in comparison with Marchgrave's greatness and John Heron's good name?

It was plain enough for a child to read—henceforth Marchgrave's greatness could not grow save from the grave of Wyndham Snell.

Once fairly assured that Adam Furness had baffled pursuit, Cynthia took advantage of the confusion to slip away from the mews, leading

Marion after her. When once around the corner she quickened her steps, and, having made as many turnings as a hunted hare, finally came to a halt before a coffee-stall.

"The Fun's getting a bit lively, it seems to me," said she. "You ought to be peckish—if you're not, I am. Why—now I think of it, you can't have had a thing to eat all day. Here—eat this: eat everything. You must be starved. It's not my fault: it's that red-bearded villain, who sent me out on a false errand—I only hope Adam's knife didn't miss his heart—the spy! Oh, what a fool I have been! Here's some more coffee for you. The wretch—I wish he waren't dead, so that I might kill him my own way. It should be slow death: I'd—marry him!"

"And—your husband?" asked Marion. "Is he safe—or ——"

"Stephen?" asked Cynthia sharply. "What's that to me? Stephen's a fool. I don't know, and I don't care."

Marion was now long past being bewildered.

"I thought you did care—very much," said she; more for the sake of saying something than because she had a word to say.

"Then you thought like Cox's Pig," said Cynthia, more sharply still. "The men—they're all the same; if they have got red beards, they're spies; and if they haven't, they're fools. And better a knave than a fool. . . . No; 'tisn't your fault you've got a pretty face, and that men are—Men. I'm not jealous, so don't think it; I don't know what jealous means. Why, so little do I care, that if Stephen was to be hanged to-morrow, I wouldn't lift up a little finger to save him. Never mind men, and rubbish. Let's think of ourselves."

"Cynthia ——" said Marion timidly.

"Well?"

The girl still spoke as sharply as if, instead of Stephen's needles, she had spent the day in putting a point on her own tongue.

"I think you're right about—men; but ——"

"I know I am. I was never wrong but about two: and one's past counting, being dead; and the other's not worth counting, being a Genius—and a Fool."

"But—I mean—Cynthia: I am nothing to any human being except to one; of him I know nothing, but that you have saved him from I know not what peril; and heaven knows why or how we have been brought together—but you have saved my life—and his—and I—oh, what *can* I say, when I know nothing, nothing on earth, not even what is right or what is wrong?"

"Oh—then you've been bothered with that conundrum, too? Well—if Stephen, the idiot, can't tell me, 'tisn't likely I could tell you. But there's no fun in talking as if you were rambling in your sleep. We've got to be pals, I take it—you and me. You know what I've been to Stephen. What's Adam Furness to you!"

"My father."

"Oh!"

"And ——"

"So that's why you were looking for the Green Cheese?"

"No. It was because there my mother died. To-night is the third time I have seen my father, whom I thought dead till only a few weeks ago. Who is he? I must know—and I will."

"And it was by chance, then, you were taking the corner of Vane Street on your way to the Cheese? Let me get a good look at you, young lady. Yes; it's true. But it's almighty rum. . . . And you've got no mother; no brother; no sister; no young man?

"But for my father, and for you. . . . I am as alone as if God had forgotten me."

"Oh, everybody's got to be alone. And a good job, too. So am I. And so'll Stephen have to be now. There's nobody but myself would touch him with a pair of tongs. Don't you think he's the ugliest scarecrow that ever was made? . . . You do? Then you're wrong. Nobody can be really ugly with such eyes as those. Yes—fool as he is, his eyes *are* fine; and then—but I hate him all the same. No; I don't; I just despise him; and—but there. Look here, Miss Furness. We'll have heaps of time to make out how we came together; but we haven't heaps of time to make up our minds what we're going to do. We can talk free now, you and I—you with Adam Furness on your hands, and me with Stephen off mine. We're in the same boat. Can you row?"

"I can do nothing in the world."

"I don't know about that. I can't make head nor tail of you, Miss Furness. If I've been twice tricked by men—which maybe means oftener—I did think I knew Girls. I did think a Girl was a Creature that just muddled and maundered till she gave herself up to a bigger fool than herself, and was lucky if he was no worse than a fool. But you clean put me out. You're as green as a goose; and you don't seem to care for Fun. If I was to give you a new farthing, you'd just buy a farthing candle, instead of getting nineteen shillings eleven pence three farthings in change. But you're pretty—Stephen wouldn't have put you to paper else; and a pretty girl that isn't a goose can always marry a duke, and a pretty girl that *is* a goose can always make a living with her voice, if it's as hoarse as a crow's. Because our men chance to be in trouble is no reason why we should starve. That would be bad for us, and do no good to them. I'm going to play second fiddle to you—on the boards."

"Then—you think—I can?" asked Marion; for what else had her mother done?

"I never think. It's stupid. Men think; I *know*," said Cynthia.

"But how ——"

"How be hanged! Only you must get some sleep first. Nobody can sing, or play, or dance with red eyes."

"What has my father done?"

"Played for big stakes, had lots of fun, and killed a spy. Miss Furness—I might have been your stepmother; but I was ass enough to stick to a fool of a genius, instead of chucking him over for a real man. But—ah, well, there. That's the worst of a good time; it always comes to an end."

"And is he in real danger?"

"Pretty fair. But between Adam Furness and the police, I'll back Adam to win. Don't you worry about *him*—nor about any Him. They're all much of a muchness. I've done with—Him. . . . Have you got such a thing as a half-crown about you, Miss Furness? Not a flash one—I've got plenty of such—but a real? I know where to drive, if you can pay."

Marion had gathered at least enough from this strange day to learn, in her excitement of exhaustion, that her one link with her fellow-creatures was a criminal who had escaped, by the skin of his teeth and by the cunning of Cynthia, from being taken red-handed in rebellion against the law. And all the circumstances had enlisted her in his cause. She also, mistrusting her own sanity, had given up, as inscrutable, the question of the difference between right and wrong. All her principles were being overturned; and the all-sufficient reason was that she was—Alone. On a desert Island, what is Right—what is Wrong? It is for the desire of the solitary Crusoe to decide. He is his own sole law-giver. His own will becomes his only law. Why should she hold the principles of a girl with a mother to be all in all for the guidance of free women and free men? What, after all, is Law but the tyranny of the many over the few? Of relations between the State and the individual, whence private mints become an offence, she knew nothing; and would have comprehended nothing had they been competently explained. For the rest, she had learned that her father had taken vengeance on a traitor. And what else should he, could he, as a man, have done? The hunted man, the Ishmael, with his hand against every man and every man's hand against him, appealed irresistibly to her woman's soul. He was hunted—hounded. Where is the real woman for whom this would not be enough for sympathy, and more? Excited with physical exhaustion, with want of sleep and want of food, and she could only follow her instincts; and these were with the man who was fighting single-handed, as she understood, against a world in arms. She, hitherto alone, began to catch a feeling of pride in not being altogether as other girls. She had seen her father driven to bay, and yet, even in his extremity, more than a match for his foes. . . . She held out her hand.

"I am Marion Furness!" said she, with pride. "And you are his friend; and I am Marion, to you."

"And I am Cynthia—to *you*."

She had been Cynthia already to all who cared to give her a name. But that she meant to be Marion's Cynthia needed no pressure of the hand to aver.

"And now, what is to be done?"

"Find a bed, and get into it. If I'm not worn out, you are."

"Do you think he is safe?"

"Adam? Lord, yes. He's not of the sort that let themselves get taken. He had start enough; and start's everything. Didn't I do the servant-girl well? To do a duchess is easy; anybody can do a duchess, but it wants real cleverness to play a housemaid to a peeler. How much money have you?"

"Here's my purse ——"

"Four pounds, and silver; and all good ones. I should have ten; only it won't do to flash till this wind's blown over. Say five pound ten between the two. Rather a difference between that and a double share in seventy thousand; but—ah, well, there. If one always calls heads, one must expect a tail now and again. Let me see—where shall we put up till to-morrow? I'm afraid the Cheese won't be safe for some time, if it's ever safe again. I don't suppose Peter has been doing things by halves? It is a bit of a fix, for once in a way. Wanted, a safe place where two baggageless baggages can get a night's lodging and be asked no questions; not even when the papers are full of Upper Vane Street to-morrow morning, with a hundred pounds a head offered for the gang—Me and all."

"Are you in danger, too?"

"Rather! How it happens I'm not this minute in a cell beats me: and you, too. I can see why Peter wanted me out of the way; but if I'd been the police, no young woman should have been loafing about that backdoor without my knowing the reason why. . . . I have it! There's nothing for safety like flying high. You've seen me play Jane the housemaid; now you shall see the other thing—and it suits me better, between you and me. Five pound ten—that will do till we make some more. We've tramped enough now for to-night. We'll do the rest in style."

It seemed Marion's daily doom to be wax in the hands of a capricious destiny. But to-night a sort of recklessness had seized her, to which Cynthia's mere recklessness of nature was steady principle. She knew herself now to be the daughter of an outlaw, and to have no friends on earth save those who were his friends also. Why should she not accept what was so evidently her destiny? In what way else was she of any use in this bewildering world? And how was a girl with the blood of madness in her, as well as of crime—so she bitterly asked herself—to dare to decide, as Cynthia had put it, between Right and Wrong?

After all, one is not the child of an Adam Furness for nothing. It is not our mothers alone that have the making of us—and possibly things might not be so very much the better even if it were. Marion, brought all at once out of her passive solitude into the thick of a battle, had caught a spark of the fire. And if fortune had thrown her into the rebel's camp, where else should the natural woman's instinctive sympathy with the hunted side lead her—or, for that matter, the natural man's, until he is caught and tamed, and has something of his own to lose?

So she sat, in fevered, not exhausted silence, till the cab, that constant and essential element in every story of London, where the vulgar and the tragic jostle one another at every turn — stopped at the entrance of a palatial hotel, towering above them like an illuminated mountain against the black sky.

"Can I speak to the manager, if you please?" asked Cynthia, in a voice and with an air that Marion scarcely recognised for her companion's, so quiet were they and so suddenly refined. "We have had a terrible misfortune, my friend and I. We have just come from the

Continent by the express, and have somehow managed to leave all our luggage behind at Dover, unless it has gone astray. It passed the Custom House, I am sure. Can you receive us till it arrives ?"

The official, who had come forward to listen courteously, suddenly looked grave.

"I am very sorry. Have you not telegraphed ?" he asked.

"Of course, as soon as we arrived. We are passing through town on our way to Scotland. We would go on to-night ; but we can't leave without our luggage, and my friend is too tired to travel without a night's rest. We had a bad passage —— "

"I'm very sorry, indeed, ladies. But I'm afraid the house is full."

"Ah—I told you how it would be," said Cynthia, turning to Marion with a forlorn sigh. "Two women might as well leave their characters behind them in their boxes. I told you so. There's no help for it, then. Headache or no headache, on we must go."

Marion was listening with amazement to her friend's fertility in lies, told without a faultering of the eyes or hesitation for a single word.

"Of course you are right," continued Cynthia. "Business is business—I quite understand. We might be—anybody, so far as you can tell. When is the next train to Edinburgh ? I hope not too soon for a cup of tea ?"

"I am sorry, ladies—very sorry, indeed. The night mail is gone."

"Oh dear ! *Can* you tell us if there is any place in all London where to lose one's trunks—there are three and a portmanteau—is looked upon as a misfortune only, and not a crime ?"

There was pathos in her voice that would have melted a heart of stone. I know not how it would have fared with her had the official been of her own sex ; but few are the men who can associate duplicity with Cynthia's pleading tones or Marion's gray eyes. Nor were their clothes against them—both were dressed with ladylike quietude.

"Haven't you any wraps with you ?" asked he.

"We have nothing but what you see," said Cynthia. She gave no reason ; that would have been to admit that one was required. "If you could have taken us in, we should have had to borrow everything —even brushes and combs."

"Perhaps—a deposit ——"

Voice and eyes were beginning to tell.

"Surely ! What would be enough for a bedroom, a sitting-room, with a fire, and breakfast to-morrow ? Five pounds ? Ten ?

No ; they were not adventuresses after all. Young women so ready to cover a night's bill five times over would of course have lost their luggage ; and the more he saw and heard, the more certain of their transparent good faith their inquisitor became.

"Two pounds will be ample, ladies," said he, having done enough for dragon-hood. "I'll send the chambermaid at once if you will be kind enough to write your names here."

"Your purse, dear," said Cynthia. "I'd rather make it three sovereigns, if you please. We shall have to give some trouble, for want of our things. Our names ? With pleasure. I am glad to be at a house

so well guarded. Miss Adam, Miss Vane. I am Miss Adam—my cousin is Miss Vane."

"And your address, if you wouldn't mind?"

"What shall I put down, Marion?" asked she, suddenly remembering that in these horrible days an inquiry can be sent to the other end of the world and answered in a few minutes' time. "We haven't got one yet in Edinburgh," she explained to the manager; "and we have left our residence abroad—would that do?"

"Perfectly well."

"Then—Palazzo Sparafucile, Genoa. If you still suspect us, you can telegraph at once to the Rev. John Adam, care of Count Mirski, to whom the palazzo belongs. Shall I add the cost of the telegram to the three pounds?"

Truth and the gentlest approach beamed from her eyes. The official of the hotel looked downright ashamed of himself as, with an apology too profound for words, he resigned the ladies into the hands of a chambermaid. Led into a bedroom, Cynthia locked the door, threw herself on the bed, and laughed merrily.

"As if anybody who really loves action would go on the stage!" she said when her laugh was a little satisfied. "But how grave *you* look! Are you sorrowing after those three pounds? Are you afraid that man, whom we bewitched between us, *will* telegraph to Genoa? Well—if he does, there is a Palazzo and there is a Count Mirski, to whom I shall telegraph to open any message to our reverend relative, and how to reply. So I hope he will."

But Marion still looked grave. Into what labyrinth of welfare with the world of her dead mother, and the Guy Derwent, had she fallen—a labyrinth which centred round her father, and of which the clue was every moment baffling her more and more? And the worst of it was that she was so abjectly helpless—when she fled from Piggot's Town, she seemed to have left even her will behind her. If she was destined to the only life that seemed opening before her, in which her whole duty was to be owed to crime, at least she might have been allowed the privilege of entering upon it with open eyes, instead of drifting into it like a child. . . . Well, she had done one good thing in her life: she had saved Guy from a fatal marriage with an adventuress, the child of an outlaw, and the future companion of swindlers and thieves. If among them lay duty, so be it; she had no impersonal reverence for law. But at least he was free.

As the two girls came down stairs on their way to their sitting-room, they passed a young man who gave them a second look which every man is entitled to give any woman anywhere, if he has eyes at all. Unnoticed by them, however, he gave them a third, and then strolled to the open book in the hall where their names were inscribed. Being a young gentleman to whom inquiries were congenial and came easy, he was not long in identifying the ladies with Miss Adam and Miss Vane, or in hearing of the luggage lost on its way to Edinburgh from Genoa.

"One minute two maids in a mews," thought Draycot Morland, lighting a cigar, "the next two damsels errant from Italy. Queer!"

CHAPTER XVI.

AMATEURS.

Before breakfast next morning, Cynthia slipped out and sent a telegram abroad, by which the Post Office was not a whit the wiser: seeing that, seeming to mean one thing, it in reality meant entirely another. She also bought a morning paper, and studied it carefully.

"They haven't caught him!" said she to Marion, when she came back, triumphantly. "And what's more, they haven't even caught Stephen! Lord, what duffers they must be!"

"And now?"

"Let me have a good look at you, once more. . . . Yes; you are your father's daughter, after all: not all of you, but some. . . . You were asking, 'And now?' You must give me some tea to think on, for I'm hanged if I know. How good this grill is, to be sure. We must make the most of it; for at this minute I see no more chance of a dinner than of a supper. Of course it would be easy enough to get somebody else to stand them both; but there'd be no sort of Fun in that, and ——"

Cynthia no more knew why she stopped abruptly than why she deliberately rejected the obvious course that would naturally occur to a she-swindler who, to say the least of it, was not troubled with scruples. But Marion was evidently so innocent of her mere drift that, though not knowing why she stopped, it was with a queer sense of unfamiliar shame; and though she would have laughed at the idea of being any longer bound by a sense of honour to her eccentrically-chosen lover, yet so it was: for she was as true as steel.

"And—after all, it's Fun that's the only thing worth thinking about," said she, with a profoundly reflective air. "It's no good crying over spilt milk—it *was* good fun while it lasted; and now it's gone we mustn't funk, but just make the best of things as they are. . . . . There's just as much fun of the fair when one swings down as when one swings up again."

Marion, never having been at a fair, was not in a position to appreciate fully Cynthia's philosophy—a philosophy, by the way, which, in point of practical value, has never been bettered by the highest efforts of more self-conscious wisdom.

"So just put a brave face on it, and look things straight in the eyes. . . . I've got to reckon up where we are. We're as safe as the Mint; though dinner's doubtful. But Adam's not; and he may want help, any time. We must look out for him first, and then for ourselves."

"Do you know where he is, then?" asked Marion.

"No more than he knows where we are. So I must see at once if there's a message at our City office, by private code. It'll look odd if we both go out together, considering everything—so I must leave you in pawn while I'm gone. You won't be afraid? You've got nothing to do but to sit as quiet as a mouse till I come back; and whatever happens I can't be more than an hour. And then—we'll see. Keep up your spirits; and if anybody comes asking questions, tell them to wait for *Me*."

"I'm not afraid," sighed Marion. "I'm afraid of nothing more."

In truth, she was glad to be alone again, if only for an hour. She also, though in a different sense from Cynthia, needed to reckon her bearings, and to trace out, if she could, whither she had been drifting, and how far. Well—it was nothing that she was being passed off as a fictitious person under a false name, for no better reason, as far as she could see, than the mere pleasure of taking somebody in. Names were nothing, after all; and under a new one she was the less likely to be heard of by him whom she had resolved should never again hear her old name. Indeed, a part of her plan had been to be Marion Furness no more; and Marion Vane would do as well as anything else, were it not that it had been forced upon her, like all the rest, instead of being the result of her own free choice and will.

Passive as she was by nature, helpless as she seemed by circumstances, she was beginning to feel like a wild creature in a cage. Her knowledge of the nature of her father's life inspired her with no horror. It was fitting that a girl as much cut off from all good things—hope, love, and freedom of will—as if she were a leper, should have an outlaw for a father. But she was therefore all the more burning for the power to accept her place in life, not because she must, but because she chose. In short, the soul which she had thought to strangle when she wrote her letter of dismissal to Guy, and which had gone to sleep during bodily fever, was coming back again in power. And in what wise should it come to the child at once of Adam Furness and of John Heron?

In whichever guise, however, it had to be an active and a restless one, for good or ill.

"If I must be mad," she cried, though not in words, "it must be the madness that does something—not the madness that pines and starves! I wonder—I wonder if mamma ever felt like I do now? But no, never; *she* never felt alone; she lived her own life; and she had Me. She wasn't a slave to everything that came. Live some sort of life I must, and I will."

She was in the midst of this mood of fermenting rebellion, when she was startled by a tap on the door.

It has been said that no magpie was more full of curiosity than Cynthia. But while her curiosity was restrained by certain crude instincts of honour, such as may exist among thieves of all degrees, Draycot Morland's was absolutely unfettered. I do not mean to say that he would have listened at a door, or read a letter not intended for

his eyes—those, to a gentleman, are not matters forbidden by definite law any more than honour forbids him to walk a hundred miles with his feet in the air or squaring the circle. Honour does not concern itself with what is simply impossible. But he did regard, on principle, all scruples about indulging curiosity as so many hypocrisies and shams—and, it may be, he was not very far wrong. At any rate, the world's theory and the world's practice on this point are very far from being square. In the comprehensive interest he took in all the human nature that came in his way, he in no wise differed from some of the wisest men who ever lived, except that they have usually dignified their pursuit with the name of philosophy, while he degraded his philosophy by frankly admitting a much deeper interest in other people's affairs than in his own.

His ghost hunt had been a lamentable failure so far as regarded making any acquaintance with the other world. Nor in this—except in so far as he was baulked of an opportunity for muddling all the seven senses of Upper Vane Street—was he disappointed; for the belief in ghosts was as yet scarcely on the eve of its fashionable revival. But seeing that his meditations on the external arrangements of Number Seventeen had resulted in his being in at a police raid of the first class, any idlest tinge of disappointment had been amply made up for. He was rather disposed to shake hands with himself on a notable addition to his catalogue of adventures.

"It's very singular," he reflected, "how some people go round the world without anything ever happening to them, and others can't take an evening stroll without tumbling into a big thing. I wouldn't have lost the sight of that fellow scrambling over the walls and the roofs for twenty pounds—well, anyhow, not for nineteen. I wonder whether I'm really sorry he got off clear? No, of course I'm not. I wonder why the sympathies of the natural man, with the sham rubbed off him, should always be on the criminal side, so long as he's got nothing to lose. Confound the peelers, though, all the same. If I'd only managed to get into that house on my own hook, I should have had something to brag about for the rest of my days!"

But when, having returned to the hotel where he had an appointment with a lawyer from Askness, he met two young ladies on the stairs, he perceived that, if he had lost something to brag about for all his days, he had at any rate found something to think about for one of them. For he was observant by nature, and had cultivated his natural faculty, by practice, in the special direction of human faces. And he was as convinced as unlikelihood would allow him that he had barely two hours before seen two maidservants in Eastwood Mews as like these young ladies, clothes and all, as Dromio to Dromio. Had there been a single likeness, it would have counted little—everybody has a double who is always turning up at unexpected times and places. But a pair of doubles at once, and in company, is not in the nature of things.

"It *is* odd," he thought, as he woke the next morning, "how some people never come across an adventure, and others are always tumbling

over them if they only walk across the room. Well—if I let this one drop, I don't deserve ever to have another. So I won't let it drop. Why should I, after all? There's a chance of getting to the bottom of a big thing, without the police being in it, that's just one in ten thousand. To study the criminal classes in the way of being personally conducted by a police sergeant is the biggest sham going. But this looks like a backdoor. And, by Jove! what eyes the smaller girl had—they seemed to go through one like a gimlet. This must be seen to; that's clear."

Not being afflicted with shyness, or with the curious form of insanity that keeps some young barristers waiting in chambers for briefs which they know will never come, Morland, being one of the adventurous to whom adventures happen, set out on his further exploration of human nature; nor is there any need to assume that the eyes whose sharpness he still felt upon him had more to do with his proceeding than was inevitable. For there was nothing out of the way that had not its fascination for Draycot Morland, from a frantic paradox to an ascent in a balloon. He had indeed actually been above the clouds without any eyes to attract him; and he had followed up this experience by a descent in a diving bell. He had travelled with gypsies; he had conquered a maiden Alp; he had walked a hospital; and he had seen a man hanged. In short, he was interested in human nature, and curious about its nooks and corners, because he was himself so full of it. If the girls had been a couple of Calmucks, they would have had their attraction; and if eyes made magnetism a trifle more magnetic—well, that was human nature too.

There had been a time when a tap at the door would have made Marion start as if she were herself a criminal, and when such an incident in an hotel would have seemed as natural as it is certainly common. Now, however, it made her not only start, but tremble, at the idea of having to face even a waiter or a chambermaid without Cynthia's ready wit or pleasure in play-acting, though but to an unappreciative audience of one.

"Pardon me," said the young gentleman who entered, to her confusion. "It is an intrusion, of course; but have I the pleasure of speaking to Miss Adam, or to Miss Vane?"

He looked round as he spoke; these were not the eyes that had looked him through.

"Miss Adam is out," said Marion: that was less hard to say than "I am Miss Vane."

Could this perhaps, she thought confusedly, be one of her father's band? Or might he be, perhaps a foe? Meaning to be reticent, she was short and brusque; and the sudden flush of fear looked like that of anger at an intrusion.

But Draycot Morland was blessed with a skin of the most enviable thickness.

"Then you are Miss Vane?" asked he. "I hear you are in some trouble about some missing luggage; and I asked myself if you could by any fortunate chance be any relation of my friends, the Vanes of—

of—Marchgrave," he said, taking the first place that occurred to him as the imaginary residence of imaginary friends. He had not the faintest scruple on the score of white lies. For he held that they are only condemned in others by people who want to monopolise the advantages of them for themselves. In short, it will have been amply seen that he was a young gentleman whom principle rode with the snaffle only, and not the curb. "And if so, it is my business, and my pleasure, too, to be of any service to you I can. My name is Morland—Draycot Morland——"

"Marchgrave!" exclaimed Marion, taken by sudden surprise.

"I am right, then?" he asked, considerably surprised in his turn. Could his invention have possibly struck on the head a real nail? Could there be Vanes of Marchgrave? "That would be the devil of a mess," thought he.

"No," said Marion hurriedly. "We are from—abroad."

"And you've not heard yet of your luggage?"

"No."

"That's strange! Of course, it's safe to turn up; but it must be awkward for you and your friend, meanwhile. Luggage will go wrong sometimes, even on the best regulated lines. And—excuse me—I'm sorry I can't claim acquaintance even at second hand," he said with an exceedingly frank and honest smile; "but I'm not a conventional being, and it always has seemed to me that for a man to pass by women in want of help only because he and they aren't seventy years old and haven't been introduced, is the most ridiculous of all ridiculous shams. *Honi soit qui mal y pense*, you know. You won't think I've been trying to invent an acquaintance, I'm sure. . . . No; she won't *think* it," he added to himself—a miserable piece of casuistry enough; but then he was already beginning to doubt his own eyes.

He was beginning to suspect himself of having made a hideous blunder, and Miss Vane of being a lady after all. But then he recalled those other eyes of yesterday; as different in their look from these as—— Comparison failed him.

"I'm sure you meant nothing but what was kind," said Marion absently; for a temptation was gathering in her mind.

"It is you who are kind—to say that," said he, in a way that was just a shade less easy. "I may be any sort of a cad for aught you can tell; and——"

Marion's eyes met his with such unmistakable wonder in them that belief went up and suspicion went down. Not the cleverest adventuress on earth could look like that, however much she tried. Cynthia would have made a Prince mistake her for a Princess; but Marion could not have made herself mistaken for anything but a lady, even on the part of the most arrant sceptic who ever sneered at the notion that there is any difference worth regarding among the daughters of Eve.

"Where I come from," said she, gathering a little courage that always comes to a woman from the least token of confusion in a man, "people don't suspect those who offer to help them——"

"Then where you come from must be a precious long way from here.

But it is pleasant to be understood," he added, for once a little conscience stricken.

However, he was really speaking the honest truth now. His only suspicion now was that the girl before him was in want of help beyond the loss of luggage; and the knight errant who lay dormant under his oddities began to stir.

The temptation that had crept into Marion's mind was now tugging at her heart-strings.

"You mentioned a place called Marchgrave," said she. "I don't know it—but I have heard of it, and of people there. No—nobody named Vane. There is a banker there, isn't there, named Heron?"

That was not the name in her mind; but instinct, not wholly feminine, led her into a roundabout road. It behoved her to show no special interest in Guy Derwent, even though there was little risk to be feared from his learning from an acquaintance that he had been inquired about by an unknown Miss Vane. That would be no more than a passing puzzle; and then he had given her up without a fuss—thank heaven for that one thing.

"Heron? Rather! You do know something about Marchgrave, then, that's clear. By the way, have you any special interest in John Heron?"

"No. Only I have always heard a great deal of him in connection with Marchgrave."

Without knowing it, Marion was gradually becoming almost at her ease with this young man who was even still an utter stranger. And in proportion as her ease increased, his lessened. It was very far from Draycot Morland's mission to inspire trust in everybody, because, being aggressively eccentric, and given to shock people with outrageous opinions, he had been labelled "Danger." But he was none the less inspiring confidence in Marion. Perhaps that, however, was not to be set down altogether to any qualities of his own. It was the first time since her mother's death that she had exchanged a word of common kindliness with a living creature, save Cynthia; and Cynthia was still a mystery, belonging to an unknown world, on the threshold of which she stood and trembled. And as to his motive in visiting her, she simply took him at his word. For, traveller as she was, she had never been allowed to take for granted that a man could not be civil to a girl except for cause. Indeed, she had gathered plenty of colonial experience that pointed the other way.

"I'm glad you have no good personal interest in him," said Morland. "You see I'm bound to detest him for several weeks to come. If you're anything of a politician, Miss Vane, you'll understand me when I tell you that he and I are rival candidates for the honour of representing Marchgrave in the next Parliament. *Do* you take any interest in politics, Miss Vane?"

"I'm afraid ——"

"Ah—that means No. It's a pity, because 'afraid' ought to mean Yes—because it's the interest in politics, not the want of interest in them, that's the real misfortune. If only nobody would take an inte-

rest in politics, how well everybody would be governed—how deliciously everything would go on. I stand as a Radical, Miss Vane, because one must stand on something, and because Radicalism is the best practical creed for a man who hates that gigantic sham called Liberty. Liberty, indeed—as if it ever meant anything but the weakest going to the wall. And in order to abolish Liberty, I mean to go in for abolishing Law."

"Then *you* think Law is all wrong and evil?" asked Marion, with sudden interest—"that a man is in the right who puts himself outside it, and fights against it as hard as he can?"

"A philosopher in petticoats, after?" thought he, not remembering that when a real woman asks an abstract question some very personal application of it is safe to be no great distance away. "Of course," he answered. "Who goes home to the great public heart—which is as strong and as true a thing as the great public head is a weak one—Jack Ketch or Dick Turpin; the Sheriff of Nottingham or Little John?"

"Yes," replied Marion aloud, "that does seem true. . . . And —let me see; is there anybody else I've heard of at Marchgrave? Isn't there a Mr. Derwent—if that's the name?"

"Derwent? No, I don't think. . . . By Jove, though, I do! Of course—a young fellow with opinions as old as Methuselah about sticking up for his friends; as if all that hadn't become the very mouldiest of shams. I met him in the train, coming up from my first visit to my future constituency—or John Heron's. I took rather a liking to the young fellow. When I fell foul of John Heron, I thought he'd have knocked me down."

"Yes—that *would* be he!"

"I shall have to get him on my side; so if you have any influence with anybody in Marchgrave who can get at young Derwent, consider it bespoken. By the way, I came across him afterwards, and asked him to drop in at my chambers; which he promised to do and didn't ——"

"You met him in London?" asked Marion, whom Draycot Morland was by no means satisfying with his method of reporting. Why could he not feel, without too plainly seeing, what were the things she wanted to know?

"Yes; on the doorstep of a house in —— By Jove!"

Why, it had been on the doorstep of Number Sixteen, Upper Vane Street; and he had been asked after by the double of that girl in the mews! Suspicion went up again; belief went down. . . . While he fancied himself pumping the girl, could it be that she was pumping him! And yet. . . . with that voice, and with those eyes!"

The mystery of Eastwood Mews broke into new interest—the pieces of the puzzle began to group themselves. Number Sixteen was the house which had served for the cover and entrance of Number Seventeen. Mr. Guy Derwent, of Marchgrave, had been calling there—at the headquarters of a gang of coiners. And Mr. Guy Derwent, of Marchgrave, was now being inquired after, with signs of special interest, by a girl whose suspected connection with the failure of the police had been Draycot Morland's main reason, if not his only reason for his call.

"Of a house--you were saying—in —— ?" suggested Marion.

He paused, to give himself a moment for reflection on the course he should pursue. Clearly, if he let the matter stop here he would learn nothing more ; yet the slightest badly calculated word only put the girl on her guard. The detective fever was growing upon him, and with it some of that gambling spirit without which a detective is not worth his salt—so long as he knows how to correct the cards.

"In Upper Vane Street," said he playing a bold card.

"Vane Street ?" asked Marion, without intelligence ; for she did not know so much as the bare name of the street where she had been living all this while.

"Yes ; that was it. Upper Vane Street—where that raid on coiners happened, that you may have seen in the morning's paper —— "

Marion could neither help a start, nor the start from being seen. The street of the raid on coiners—and Guy Derwent there ! Her heart leaped and throbbed within her. Could it be, then, that he had not taken her at her word—that he had followed her so well as to have tracked her to where she had been not so much hidden as buried alive ? She could not tell, nor for that matter did she try to tell, whether what she felt was sudden joy, a flash of light through midnight blackness, or the completion of despair. She had bidden him forget her ; she had daily thanked God for his obedience—and yet not to have been forgotten after all ! It was as if a cup of water had been offered her in the midst of a raging thirst that she was forbidden to assuage—she must refuse the cup ; but who good it was that it had been proffered ; the proffer could not be thrust away.

And yet she, who was murdering her life for the sake of her lover, believed herself to be the sport of waves and currents when, by a single stroke, she could swim on shore. What wonder she had no will left for other things when it was all absorbed and centred in the irrevocable will to drown ?

She had learned enough ; she dare not angle for more.

But with her visitor, the appetite came in feeding. He saw the sudden start, and the sudden flush, and the sudden light that rose into the gray eyes and made them beautiful. The atmosphere of vulgarity inseparable from crime when it falls into the hands of the police was fading out of the mystery ; his imagination was beginning to take fire. What more could he ask ? And yet how could he leave so promising a problem unsolved—not for the sake of Law or Justice, but just for his own ? Why, never in all his life, sufficiently adventurous as it had been, had he come across so interesting a mystery as this Miss Vane, who, with eyes through which one seemed able to read her soul, must surely be the most consummate actress in the world. "It's well I'm no greenhorn," thought he—as if to doubt is not just as green a proceeding as to believe.

It was well for him that, balancing between the need of going and the desire of staying, Marion was for the moment too absorbed in herself to be aware of his company. "He does not forget me yet !" her heart kept singing so loudly as to deafen her ears. Morland, with

other eyes than a detective's, saw that she was excited with some emotion that looked strangely unlike alarm. It was as if the girl, hitherto merely pretty in a mild and melancholy way, had been all of a sudden struck into beauty by an enchanter's word—and that word his own, though beyond any guessing which word, or why, or how. And he had a real sense of beauty, apart from his taste for the added piquancy of mystery. That this was no common adventuress, no companion of ordinary criminals, he was already prepared to swear in the face of evidence clear enough to hang a murderer. And in that case, what extraordinary sort of adventuress could she be? Evidently, this was far too delicate a business for police hands, which had bungled it already, and would take into account none of the complexities of the border-land between such different things as legal guilt and moral sin. "One may be as innocent as a baby, though steeped in crime up to the —eyes," he thought, looking into hers; "another may be an arch-villain, though he never commits a single crime," he argued to himself in his paradoxical way. "This is a case that wants delicate and intelligent handling—very much so indeed," he mentally added, with a glance at a mirror which showed him back Draycot Morland as the sole owner of the tact and intelligence required.

But the mirror also showed him something very much less interesting —a waiter bringing in a letter, which he handed to Miss Vane.

Who on earth could be addressing her under her new name? What in the world could it mean? Yet there was the direction in the clearest of copper-plate, with "immediate" thrice emphasized in the upper corner.

"It's Awful!" it ran, without preliminary word. "I'm being *followed*. And just when I've had word from Adam that I *must* meet him, for instructions. And he's being followed too, and must be warned; and being followed myself, I daren't: it would be just trapping him. All I can do is to baffle the scent; but he *must* be met, and at once. You're not me; but there's nobody after you; and unless you want your father hanged, *you* must go. Burn this when you've learned the enclosed by heart; and when you see him, say, 'Bar Eighty-six': he'll understand. Never mind me. If you want money, pawn your rings; but *Go.*—C."

Marion's hand trembled as she crumpled up the note; but not with fear.

"Mr. Morland," she said, in a new voice, and with still new light in her eyes.

"Miss Vane?"

"I am going to ask you something very strange."

"Consider it answered—and if it is to do anything ——"

"It is to do something. . . . We are strangers—but ——"

"I hope not quite, Miss Vane."

"Can you—without one single question—take this ring ——"

She slipped a diamond hoop from her finger as she spoke, while, as well he might, he stared ——

"And let me have enough money to take me to the farthest place in

England—that will be safe. It is for life and death; and I have nowhere else to turn."

A look at her anxious face deprived him of surprise.

"Miss Vane," said he gravely, "you *have* asked me a strange thing. But it is not so strange as what I am going to do. I am going, with my eyes wide open, to lend you enough to carry you comfortably to John O'Groat's, which is the farthest point I know; and I am going to take the ring without looking at the stone."

"Thank you!" she said, in the most natural way in the world, without seeming to understand a word more than that her request had not been made in vain.

"That's either the coolest hand out, or the queerest!" thought he, as he looked out the money—he always kept it mixed and loose, so that the operation took some little time. "That's either the freshest and frankest thing out in confidence tricks, or else things are uncommonly the contrary of what they seem. . . . Well, perhaps they are. There's Derwent: he seemed a good fellow: and there's that prophet in his own country, John Heron. What a Sham it is, not to spell prophet with an F and an I!"

CHAPTER XVII.

SHADOWS OVER MARCHGRAVE.

To trace Rumour to its fountain was never set among the labours of Hercules. And for this good reason, that it was a million times more difficult than the whole of them added together and then multiplied by the number of the inhabitants of the world. How, therefore, the idea first crept into Marchgrave that Guy Derwent's absence was something more than business—that word of talismanic power—could explain, is not to be told. Such things generate themselves spontaneously in the air: unless the Bell may have a trifle to do with them.

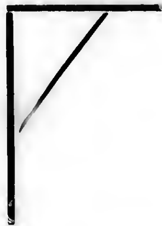
At any rate, Mr. Prendergast could not help wondering and being not a little hurt by the want of confidence displayed towards him. Not since his employer went off at scarcely an hour's notice had the clerk received a word addressed to himself personally. All instructions, where any were needful, came from the Bank; and the Bank, though always treating Mr. Prendergast with all possible deference and consideration, and relying in the most complimentary manner upon his independent judgment, never condescended to tell him where Mr. Derwent was or when he would be home.

Of course, the fact that the Bank was at the back of everything, and was advancing all money required for current needs, was enough, and more than enough, for both clerk and clients from a business point of view. It looked as if the shipbroker were to have the inestimable

advantage of the Bank's backing for good and all. And it might fairly be thought that men of business would concern themselves with nothing more. But Gossip plays so large a part in real business that it was bound to come in.

Guy stood alone in the world, and had no friend intimate enough to expect private letters, or else Rumour might have started earlier and grown faster. Thus far, therefore, John Heron had been able to provide his correspondents with an ideal messenger. But, as has been said, people were beginning to talk, especially now that election time was drawing near. A man's own self may never be missed; but his vote is of value.

Mr. Prendergast began at last to be rather ashamed of going to the Bell of a Friday night with no news to give of his employer. He was compelled for his own credit's sake to put on airs of knowingness, and to assume the manner of the custodian of a State secret. For, otherwise, the chaff would have been intolerable—it was bad enough as it was, and all before Mrs. Clapper and Miss Lamb. That impudent wag, the vicar-choral, had not scrupled to accuse Mr. Prendergast of having made away with his master for the sake of the till, and of having secreted him in the crypt of the cathedral. The joke took amazingly, couched as it was in the peculiarly British style of humour; and sly allusions to Jack Ketch, to altars and haltars, and so forth, with appeals to Mr. Prendergast on such subjects as black caps and knots for cravats, gave the auctioneer a welcome holiday from "going—going—gone." Indeed, these humours of the Bell filtered through the cathedral choir into the town, until one evening, to his natural indignation, Mr. Prendergast found, roughly chalked in white upon the office door, a geometrical figure of this form:—



with dependent therefrom a hieroglyphic suggestion of an obese human figure, and the inscription:—

"This is Old P."

Now although the sports of youth, especially when they take a literary and artistic form, enlist the sympathy of every healthy and well-regulated mind, the head of an elderly bachelor, without young artists of his own, is apt to lose tone and balance when it comes in collision with sportive infancy. *This* "Old" P. indeed! Why, he felt himself

growing younger and younger every day, and especially on Friday nights, when he was smiled upon by women and wine; and it was surely injury enough to be hanged, though even but in effigy, without being made so extravagantly fat and bald. Is a man really hanged without his wig? He did not know; but he felt that some sort of a line must be drawn somewhere.

He made no allowance for the exigencies of early art, which makes a man fat, not because he is really fat, but because a body is the more easily represented by a circle; and which makes him bald, irrespectively of fact, because it has not yet conquered the difficulties of the human hair. He made, indeed, no allowance at all—he fumed.

For a moment, indeed, he even thought of calling in the terrors of the law. Surely no libel can possibly be worse than the public suggestion, on one's own office door, that one has committed a murder and ought to be hanged. But a night's sleep, sound with the consciousness of innocence and of respectability, took the first edge off his wrath, and he concluded to appeal to a yet stronger power than that of the law.

"Mr. Heron," said he respectfully yet firmly, when he paid his customary morning visit to Chapter Lane for instructions, "I venture to submit that I ought to have some idea—say some dim and distant glimmer—of when Mr. Derwent may be expected home."

The Banker still wore his arm on a splint, and still looked pale and worn. But he had by no means broken down.

"Oh, that's impossible to give you," said he. "It's a long and difficult business—profitable, no doubt, in proportion. I don't know, myself, anything more."

"Yes, Mr. Heron. And, as I used to learn at the old Grammar School, what's sport to you, if you'll pardon me saying so, sir, is death to me."

The Banker glared at him sharply.

"Death?" asked he.

"In a purely metaphorical sense, sir. But it may be something more. A man may be roasted to death, Mr. Heron."

"He may—but what in the name of nonsense, my good fellow——"

"Roasted to death—by Chaff, Mr. Heron. They've got it into their heads that Mr. Derwent is—Murdered. There!"

"What? Confound this arm of mine. . . . There—it's better now; but every now and then it is just agony. Who says it? What do they mean?"

"I thought you'd be excited, sir! Yes; they've got it about, all over the town, that I'm a murderer, Mr. Heron."

"You? Oh!—Well; fools must be fools."

"Yes, sir; they must. But I'm not going to be caricatured on a gallows, and having the boys putting their tongues out and their knuckles into their collars when I go by; and they're an impudent lot down at the Basin, as everybody know. I don't mind it among friends, though before ladies a gentleman's feelings ought to be spared, seeing he can't retaliate—but when it comes to the boys!——"

"Well, well," said the Banker kindly, "we're public characters,

Prendergast; and we must take the consequences. It's election time already; and if young Morland's friends stop at putting me on a gallows, they'll be easily satisfied. Murderer, indeed—why, I look to be charged with all the crimes in the decalogue. You'll hear a very different character of me, my good friend, from what you've been used to, before we've done. Let them laugh that win."

"It would be great comfort to me though, if I hadn't got to more than half lie when I'm asked for news of Mr. Derwent ——"

"Why Pendergast, you couldn't tell half a lie, nor a quarter, if you tried. What do you say?"

"I am bound to say something at times. Maybe, sir, you don't know how bad it is to have to keep a secret when you haven't one. Something will ooze out. Because if you hold your tongue too hard, nobody'll believe you've got a secret at all."

"So you tell them ——"

"That's where it is, Mr. Heron. If I'd something consistent, I'd stick to it. But having nothing, I can't rightly know whether what I say to-day squares with what I said yesterday, or that with the day before. I'm dreadfully afraid I've sent him, all at once, to Denmark, Leghorn, and Buenos Ayres. We've correspondence with all those parts, and I have to say the first that comes into my head for want of another. And when there's talk of murder, it's bad to be in different stories—it is indeed."

"Never mind murder. That won't hurt—the only thing to care about when a man's abroad is whether his books are all right—and nobody will hint that, with you to keep them and me to keep credit alive. Let's see—if we must sacrifice to gossip, say—say—oh, it doesn't matter. Anything you please. Never mind the cackle of geese ——"

"But the caricatures? They're not cackle, Mr. Heron. As a magistrate, sir ——"

"No, no. As a friend, if you please. And as a friend I advise you to treat such things with the contempt they deserve. I've no doubt you're in the black books of those Askness thieves. But you trust *me*—we'll be a good deal more than even with them, long before they've done. By the way—of course you've got a share or two?"

"In the Docks, Mr. Heron?"

"What else?" In what else should a Marchgrave man have shares? I've had my eye on you, Mr. Prendergast, and you deserve to have something more than a little finger in the pie. I've got some of the new issue to place, and if you're not too proud to take a present from a friend ——"

"Oh, sir! It's more than I deserve, indeed ——"

"Not a bit. I only want everybody to have a personal interest in what's to be so great a thing for us all. . . . Well, between ourselves, I believe that Mr. Derwent is in Egypt, but of course that goes no further. It's really most important business; and the Docks—you understand."

Mr. Prendergast did not venture to own, even to himself, that he did not understand; although in truth he left Chapter Lane not a wit the wiser than he had come, and considerably more confused. He had a sort of sense that he had been promised a douceur, partly on account of personal merits too little recognized by his friends, but palpable to a really great man—partly as some compensation for a martydom that invested him with dignity now that it was ascribed to public grounds. And yet, for all that, it somehow oozed out before next morning that Guy Derwent was in Egypt on the great Dock business, and a facetious warehouseman invented a bran new joke in asking Mr. Prendergast whether he did not shiver in his shoes to learn that a commission was going out to drag the Suez Canal.

So the nine days' wonder caused among the great world of quidnuncs by the explosion of the great mint in Upper Vane Street had passed; and in the approach of political strife, with its public talk and its private ends, all lesser things were being swept out of the air. The police had failed to trace the criminal who had given them the slip so narrowly. The girl, if followed for a season on that or on some other score, had not fallen into their hands. Whatever any outsider, such as Draycot Morland, might have surmised remained in Guess-land. And a thousand other things of equal interest had also been rolled out of the road. Greater matters were to the front, and to greater matters therefore must we for their due season turn our hands.

By some unaccountable fortuity, the Askness candidate—it was in vain to deny it—was making way. It was unaccountable, because the popularity of the King of Marchgrave in no wise lessened, while the mere fact of opposition had the effect of concentrating his forces and bringing them shoulder to shoulder. Nor did anybody seriously doubt that he would emerge triumphantly from the poll. And, on the other side, the opposition candidate seemed bent upon not being taken seriously. He appeared to have entered upon his campaign rather in the spirit of a schoolboy than of a grown man engaged in a momentous struggle. But that was possibly the reason for the way he made, and for his justification of the choice of the Askness wire-pullers. His mission in Marchgrave was the denunciation of Shams—Civil, Ecclesiastical, Social; but especially in the form of the Promotion of Public Companies and of great Personalities. Who was John Heron? he asked: and the question, which had at first taken all Marchgrave aback with amusement, then with indignation, then with impatience, was at length, by dint of iteration, beginning to tell. Who is Draycot Morland? was asked contemptuously in return. But the retort failed, because he himself answered it with startling frankness. He proclaimed himself a briefless barrister, without money or prospects; an adventurer, who had no claim upon that or any other constituency, who cared nothing for parties or current questions, and was only bent—if anybody pleased to put it so—on advertising himself by exposing the quackeries of others. Nobody could throw a hard word at him

which he did not accept with the most good-humoured laugh in the world. In short the horse he rode was Impudence: and there is none that runs a losing race half so well.

In course of time, even the staunchest supporters of things that were began to find a kind of malicious excitement in hearing the municipal magnate so roundly abused. It was a new sensation to hear even the most ultra-heretic suggest a suspicion that John Heron of Chapter Lane was not the wisest, noblest, best, and greatest of mankind. That is the worst of being labelled perfection—everybody is so pleased to find a flaw in the gold. It is refreshing ordinary human nature does not care, in the long run, to find itself too completely outshone. It lent piquancy to the idea of the statue that was to be unveiled at the Market Cross, although it did not divert from that monument of gratitude a single penny. Thus a feeling of unconscious gratitude extended itself to Draycot Morland for providing the town with table talk, and for importing excitement into an election that would otherwise have been even unbecomingly tame. And all the while nobody could deny that the Radical candidate—for he had to accept some party name, even while openly ridiculing the necessity, in a purely local struggle—fought fair. He made his attack on the broadest lines. The absurdity of supposing that a centre of commerce and manufacture could be created as if by the wave of a wand; the degradation of falling prostrate at the golden feet of even a Banker; the folly of letting one man usurp the control of all their affairs and the management of all their funds. And he did all this in slashing style: the high spirits and impudence made him personally popular, and he made men laugh—at first at him, but then with him; while nobody ever laughed either at or with John Heron.

The great man took it all as a lion may the yelping of a cur. But if courtiers like Alderman Sparrow and others could have seen into the lion's heart they would have stood appalled. For the lion knew that every seeming random bolt drawn at him found some hole in his armour; and that when Draycot Morland urged the folly of trusting all things to one man, not half the truth of that folly was told—not a tithe of what his opponent might justly have proclaimed; not a hundredth of what would have to come out if any reiterated taunt should prompt a shadow of inquiry—even if Adam Furness were blotted from the record.

However, whatever happened, not a soul could say that the Banker left a single duty neglected, or was inaccessible to the humblest of his fellow-citizens (whether elector or not) who needed his aid. He had never realized how closely his native city had twined itself up with his heartstrings until now, when his work and the results of it appeared to be transforming themselves into a dream that was slipping away from between his fingers. Things could not go on like this for ever, with all his designs at the hungry mercies of Wyndham Snell. How was he to go on amassing money, and gathering into his own coffers all the resources of the city he had come to love with a passionate devotion, only to feed the maw of a slavedriver? A crash must come soon or late. Why not

soon? Why delay the inevitable for one useless hour, for the sake of prolonged misery and intensified despair?

To hope that Wyndham Snell might die—absurd? That sort of man never dies. The people who die are the men, the women, and the children we love; not the vermin we abhor. The blood-sucking leech is the true symbol of immortality. Besides, John Heron of Marchgrave was not the man to trust to chances. In his boldest schemes he had taken care to be master of his cards. . . . To-day, in especial, he felt as though something were about to happen; not for any reason, but because he was in that mood when things to come seemed to cast their longest shadows. There had been something ominous even about that visit from Mr. Prendergast. So people were beginning to talk already; and the fingers of gossip were groping unpleasantly near the end of the clue. There was no fear of its being found in that direction at present taken; but the slighest of accidents might shift that direction—accidents are always the things to be feared. It was the merest of accidents that had put him in Wyndham Snell's power. And then, when Mr. Prendergast had spoken of murder, could it have been for nothing on a day when omens appeared to be swarming in the air? Was Wyndham Snell's worthless life a card that must be left to chance, and not submitted to mastery?

His way home, after business hours, led him through the cathedral close. As he crossed it, the old gray tower was rosy with the after-glow of sunset; and, in all his visions of a great civic future, this rose-gray tower was still the changeless centre of all. To us, who know him, and may partly surmise all he had in his heart, it may seem strange that he passed under that tower, round which the rooks were cawing their way home, well nigh in the mood of a worshipper. But that tower belonged to the life of every creature that had been born in Marchgrave. It belonged to his best, his earliest, his longest memories; all the best part of his work and his life had been carried on under its shadow; it was the heart of the city, it was—What did it matter what it was? It was as good as mortgaged to Wyndham Snell.

Leaving the cathedral behind him, he passed the hospital, which he might almost claim to have founded, so poor a makeshaft was it when he first came back from foreign parts, so great an institution was it now. And it still depended largely upon the profits made in Chapter Lane. He had made its perpetual endowment an essential part of his will. Well—the poor of Marchgrave might whistle for their beds and their doctors now. What had been theirs was henceforth Wyndham Snell's.

Then he came to the old Docks, where the new docks were to be. More vividly than ever rose up before him the vision of his master-passion; the great swarming wharves, with goods, and passengers embarking and disembarking for and from all parts of the world: the warehouses overflowing with wealth; the bewildering grandeur of a great town. He knew the plans and estimates of engineers and contractors by heart; and he saw them all fulfilled. It was a fulfilment wherewith to float down to posterity, proudly indeed—not for the sake of one's own name, but for that of the work which had been done. He saw it

all open before him—the broad pools with their fleets; the crowded wharves; the towering palaces; the shower of gold and greatness, poured from an inexhaustible horn. In a moment the vision crumbled. It had been sold to Wyndham Snell.

And the people for whose sake the dream had been dreamed, whom he was deluding with false hopes to their ruin, and whose harvests, great and small, he had been gathering together to cast to the wind; the families who were risking their all because he whom they trusted so bade—these, too, were to be offered up a sacrifice to Wyndham Snell.

The man had his own ambition. But it was not mere Self that asked him once more: What is one vile life compared with all these things? Why, to realize one-half of them he would give his own as well as Wyndham Snell's.

And then, when the banks of the Aske—dreamless of its destiny, and only thinking of its daily tidal duties—brought The Cedars in sight, the smirking shadow of Wyndham Snell still met him, even at the gate of home. Nothing remained really his own—neither the present of honour nor the future of glory. If Wyndham Snell bade him sell The Cedars, sold it must be. And then there was the wife in there, waiting for him, for whom he entertained an affectionate friendship, such as he had intended to rest upon pleasantly and soberly so soon as the other life had been cut adrift for good and all. She, too, was a portion of his better life; and she, too was—none the less for not knowing—at the mercy of Wyndham Snell.

Of the death of the Russian police-agent by his hand he thought nothing. That had been the work of necessity and hot blood, and a piece of rough justice besides. It never troubled him for a moment; he had graver things to think of than the life or death of a spy. Why, then, should he scruple about the removal of a Wyndham Snell, seeing how clearly he had decided that Marchgrave demanded so slight a sacrifice as the life of so worthless a thing?

Yet he did scruple. And the reason was surely the strangest in the world.

It was Adam Furness who had stabbed Peter Petersen. But Wyndham Snell would have to be executed by John Heron.

And were they not the same? To those who might come to learn the secret, yes; but to the man himself, a thousand times no. It is not too much to say that John Heron held Adam Furness in unspeakable abhorrence; while, on the other hand, Adam, the reprobate and the outlaw, had a sort of rebellious feeling towards the impeccable John. And this would be bitterly hard to explain, were it not that so many thousands of us live that double life, though, it may be, only within ourselves, and though one of the two may live and die without having made a single visible sign. How many of us who lead the most godly, righteous, and sober lives have had some hateful self in chronic rebellion against the chains in which self-interest makes us heedful to hold him! How many who sit at home all their lives at writing desks or on office-stools are adventurers in spirit, for whom the world is too narrow, and the world's life too tame! How many, condemned to be such vagrant

adventurers in act, carry about a second self that would give up every pleasure of travel only to be allowed to sit still! And how many condemmed to crime are hungering for the decent virtue whereof those who enjoy it are weary in their secret souls!

For John Heron to be at the mercy of Adam Furness was horrible; but to feel himself impelled by that other self to deliberate Murder, though for the Public Good, was more hideous by far. He had meant to keep the two men apart; not to make them accomplices. And now ——

There was Kate, waiting for him in the drawing-room, just as usual, with her bright smile—just a little forced of late, for she could see better than others that there was trouble, and that this great, strong husband of hers was beginning to need rest, if he was not presently to break down. For little she guessed that there was no real question of breaking down with him—he did not dare.

And still less could she guess that it was actual pain to him to be in her company, where he ought to have found solace, if anywhere. Kate's very presence reminded him every moment too bitterly of things as they were with him; brought into full relief the contrast between these and what was to have been. Hitherto, his other self had never troubled him at home. John Heron had kept no secrets from his wife; and with those of Adam Furness she had no concern—she had never even heard his name. But now the Secret stood for ever between them—and she set down the gloom to election worry and a wounded arm. It was worse than want of sympathy. It was torture to him.

"There!" she said, rising to meet him. We're to have one quiet evening—aren't we? You've got no meeting to-night, I know; and—no; for once you're not going to jump up in the middle of the fish to catch a train."

"Well—not precisely in the middle of the fish, Kate. I have an appointment ——"

"Oh, dear!"

"But it will give us plenty of time to feed and have a chat besides."

"Well, then said the little woman, rising to the occasion and turning a sigh into a smile, "we must make the best of small mercies. You shall eat, and I'll talk; and we'll both get through as much as we can. But I *shall* be glad when that horrid Morland is beaten and the Docks are finished—yes; I shall indeed."

"Kate—I think you're the best girl in the world."

"Yes; I think I am. Indeed, I believe I've got only one fault; and that's pride. When you've done everything you're going to do, I shall be just eaten up with pride. . . How soon do you think it will be?"

"What will be?"

"Why, of course, the Election, and the Docks, and—your being able to rest at home for a day or two now and then?"

If she had known the truth, and had planned to sting him, she could not have stung him more. Why had she, on this day of all days, fallen upon this way of greeting him? Every word was a barb, tipped with poison.

"Oh—all in good time; hurry no man's cattle," said he. "It can't be long now before the—End."

"Then—Patience! But you do look tired, John; and you must put up with my being anxious sometimes. I wonder if anybody else ever worked like you."

"Oh, I'm all right. Never mind me."

"But I do mind you. What's the news? When are they going to throw that horrid Morland into the Aske? People like that really ought not to be allowed. I was calling at the Deanery this afternoon; and if you'd heard Mrs. Dean speak of you, you'd have been pleased. I was, I know."

"And what said her very reverence?"

"What didn't she say? She sung your praises all the time. I declare I began to feel quite jealous, John. And the new man at the Grammar School was calling there too; and he said that you ought to throw your ring into the sea. What did he mean?"

"He meant," said John Heron, "that I am like an ancient king named—I forget—who was so lucky that he got frightened, and so threw away a bit of his luck for fear the gods themselves should envy him, and ——"

She glanced at him in alarm, his voice had suddenly become so hard and cold.

"But that's all rubbish. . . . Let him tell that bosh to his boys. No; I've got no news; none."

"Have you heard yet from Guy? They were talking about him, too. Do you know that I have my suspicions, John? Oh dear—that poor arm! I'm afraid it hurts you terribly still."

"Yes, it still gives a passing twinge. . . . *Your* suspicions?" he asked, with sudden geniality. "And what may those be?"

But, all the same, she had made him, for one sudden instant, turn hot and cold. What an infliction the very best of wives may manage to be. . . . as Bluebeard was not the first to learn.

"You may call it Business; but it's Love, John—as sure as I'm alive."

"Oh—is that all?"

"All, indeed! As if— But mark my words; I always fancied from the beginning there was something curious about that engagement, and every day I think so all the more. He never told us exactly who she was, you see. And it is a curious thing, to say the least, that ever since his engagement he has been flying about, here, there, and everywhere——"

"Oh, business ——"

"As if a young man like that would have business like that; like you."

The talk was growing intolerable. Do what he would, it always came back into the one groove. It was with a sense of infinite relief that he bade his wife good-night, and set off on foot for the station, on the plea of needing exercise.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"A WOMAN, A SPANIEL, A WALNUT-TREE."

A CONSIDERABLE time had passed by now, since Mrs. Snell was left by her husband on the parlour floor; and nearly as much since, on coming to herself, she realized what had befallen her. The woman was as vulgar minded, and in many ways as stupid, as a woman can well be. But in no way had she displayed her stupidity more completely than in accepting her husband at even something more than his own valuation. That is a form of stupidity to which the wives of impostors are peculiarly prone—heaven knows why, seeing how many daily chances they must enjoy of being enlightened. So it had been, however; and so also may tragedy, like faith, lurk precisely in the places where it would the least be looked for.

For the vulgarest and stupidest of women is just as much a woman as if she were the most refined and the most brilliant of her sex; and, if there be any difference in the degree of her womanliness, the balance, in certain important ways, is apt to be in her favour. Tragedy had entered into the dull life of Mrs. Snell. No tragic poet would have chosen her for a heroine, with her grim features, her shrill voice, and her cockney twang; and that very fact made her tragedy all the more cruel to be borne. Do we, who are all, of course, potential if not actual heroes of romance, all beautiful, all brilliant, all fascinating—do we, in our superiority, ever pause to realize what tragedy may mean to the dull, the plain, and the absurd? When we suffer, we can console ourselves with the pride in our suffering; we can feel ourselves dignified by a struggle with destiny; we can at all events plume ourselves on the distinction of suffering as surely no mortal ever suffered before. We can claim sympathy, and can even sometimes get it; and if we can't get all we want, we can enjoy the superiority of being misunderstood by a cold and contemptible world. If we read, we can compare our lot with that of others; if we can fit a rhyme together, we are to be positively congratulated on an accident to a heart which is of no market value until it is properly broken. And, if the worst comes to the worst, we can draw from our cultivated stores of knowledge any quantity of self-pity. But poor Mrs. Snell had no such advantages. It had never occurred to her that an offended wife can set herself on a very becoming pedestal if she pleases; and, had she known it, she did not know how. Nor, had she known how, would any circle have found anything the least sympathetic in the sight of an ugly, elderly, unamiable, H-less woman of the decidedly lower middle-class—that least romantic of all classes—posing as Ariadne left forlorn. It is to be feared that even in Piggot's Town the attempt would have provoked

little but laughter. And, indeed, there was no circle in Piggot's Town before which to pose in any style.

And yet not Medea herself was more capable of jealousy, of humiliation, of a sense of wrong, and of a crush of illusions, than was Mrs. Wyndham Snell. She did not fly to her desk and let herself out in a sonnet that might bring her half-a-guinea's worth of consolation; she did not even sit down and say to herself, "Ah—this is just like Reginald and Muriel in the novel. All the men are alike; and it's just like A Man." These things she did not, for obvious reasons; but she did feel that she hated Marion Furness with a passion that could not have expressed itself in coherent thoughts—much less in words. No—though her ear was still stinging and her brain still aching with his blow, it was not Wyndham's fault after all. Had they not been happy enough, she adoring, he adored, until that girl came upon the scene? And had there been a moment of peace or content since that girl had come? Of course she knew that Wyndham, with all his cleverness, had never been exactly a good young man, or even a model husband in the strict sense of the term. Husbands whom their wives adore, seldom are. Nor had she always, in her inmost heart, taken entirely for granted those frequent scientific meetings that used to sit so late at the Green Cheese, and from which Wyndham used to come home so early in the morning. A man will be a man. She had been content to pinch and slave and starve, and had accustomed herself to passive neglect, so long as nothing was brought before her eyes—so long as she might believe that she believed. But when it came to bringing a strange young woman into the very house, to making love to her openly, and to knocking his wife down for interfering with such goings on—well, a woman will be a woman, then.

It was wonderful how clean she forgot all previous wrongs. With that blow of her husband's fist still upon her, he suddenly became the truest, the fondest, the most devoted of husbands that the world of matrimony had ever contained. He had knocked all his faults, all his peccadilloes even, out of himself with his own hand. With what arts must that pattern husband have been beguiled before he could raise his fist in anger against one who had never been worthy of him indeed, but whom he had always treated with only too generous kindness until now! What vile hussies are suffered to lie at large in the world, deluding honest men by their wiles, and wrecking happy homes! Of course Wyndham knew perfectly well where the baggage was gone. And, what was even more to the purpose, Wyndham's wife would know too. The man must be brought back to the senses of which witchcraft had deprived him, and for the girl, it was only a thousand pities that ducking-stools and cart's tails are no more.

So she watched; and, being a woman—there are more such than the fools who make proverbs wot of—who knew how to hold her tongue, she watched well. And having her heart in her work, tact came to her. When Wyndham came home in the small hours he found her, to all appearance, sleeping soundly; when he woke with a headache and a general impression that the world was engaged in a conspiracy to

spite him and keep him down, his grumblings were accepted with a meekness that would have made a less clever man shrewdly suspect some sort of a brew.

In a dim kind of way he had been meditating some sort of an apology, of course in a condescending way, for having knocked his wife down, though of course the chastisement had been no more than she deserved. But her conduct changed his mind.

"A woman, a spaniel, a walnut-tree," he muttered. "Yes, they *do* like it. every one of them. They like to feel a Master. Now, some men in my place, especially with the headache on, would go whining to Ju, and call themselves brutes, and be henpecked for the rest of their miserable lives. Hard to understand a woman? Not a bit of it. Whine to her, and she'll despise you and domineer; kick her, and she'll grovel; and the more she grovels, the more she'll love you—supposing one cared for the love of a dried-up old hag like Ju. Well—I don't want to quarrel; and there's no need, now I've brought her to her bearings for good and all."

And so it seemed, for never had he known her so sweet-tempered, so docile, so heedfully anticipative of all his possible wants in the way of home comforts, since their courting days, when she had those hundreds a year of her own. It did not go to his heart—for an obvious anatomical reason; but it agreeably flattered him, and made him feel forgiving.

"We are up a tree, though," he said, but rather in sorrow than in anger, by the time nursing and a judicious distribution of reviving drinks had done their work with some degree of efficacy. "I'm not going to scold; but you must see for yourself that you were an infernal fool."

"Yes, Wyndham," said Mrs. Snell humbly. "I'll never do it agyne."

"You won't have the chance. Such chances don't come twice to a man; and when the bills come in, much your never doing it again will get them paid."

"The Bills, Wyndham?"

"The Bills. I'd have thought you'd know that word by now."

"But all that money ——"

"All what money?"

"All the money you had from Adam Furness. Why, we can't have spent a quarter of it; no, nor half a one."

"Haven't we, though! Anyhow, it's gone."

"In the name of Grycious, where?"

"Ah! If you could answer the question where money goes, you'd be fit to puzzle Solomon. Where *does* money go? I wish somebody could tell me—that's all. And I'd be there."

It was not her cue to argue; and indeed she was the sort of woman who is far more impressed with the loss of a threepenny bit than with the unaccountable disappearance of millions. For, to her, threepenny pieces had been hard facts, at times desperately hard; while millions were but something in the money column of the *Times*. But still ——

"We have lost Two Thousand Pound, Wyndham!" she could not but exclaim.

"In speculation. It wasn't my fault, of course. But this is a world of rogues."

"In speculation?" she asked.

"Yes, in speculation," he answered sharply, suspecting a touch of the old Eve in her tone, and thinking it better to put down his foot at once to prevent a premature necessity for repeating the stronger discipline. "You wouldn't understand how, even if I was to explain."

Nor, indeed, would it have been easy to explain to Mrs. Snell the art and mystery of arranging one's betting-book in such wise that, on settling up, one is bound to double one's capital, except in the event of one impossible chance, which perverse Fate invariably brings to pass in the most miraculous way. Nor would it have been a whit more easy to explain to Wyndham Snell himself how it was that, throughout life, he had always arranged to win on whatever he was about, except in the sole case of some one impossible chance that inevitably befell.

So, for want of an explanation from her husband, Mrs. Snell had to find one for herself. People do not speculate away two thousand pounds in no time without any explanation at all. Practice had made her a good financier in a small way; and so, while her husband smoked and sipped a restorative of his own invention, she totted up their household expenses since the advent of Marion, and found that these, shamefully extravagant as they had been, had but nibbled at the sum paid for lodging, board, and medical care. And what speculation should be answerable for the bulk? Speculation, indeed! What was "speculation" but "Marion Furness" differently spelled?

When a man does make a fool of himself about a girl, Mrs. Snell knew perfectly well that there are no limits to his possible folly. He will even spend hard cash upon her—incredible as such weakness may seem. It is true that nobody, not even Wyndham when he was courting her, had ever spent money on Mrs. Snell; rather the other way. But she had read the papers, especially the parts concerning the relations of the sexes; and she knew something of the shady side of life in her own muddle-headed way. And, having set down Marion as being everything that was infamons and vile, the inevitable conclusion followed. Marion was getting through that two thousand pounds; and poor, befooled Wyndham knew where.

That nothing out of the common seemed to happen for some days puzzled her, until it struck her that something was happening very much out of the common indeed. Wyndham was becoming a stay-at-home. And then she felt double assurance that her belief in his infatuation was only too well founded. What should effect so striking a change but the need of blinding his wife's eyes? When a husband grows extra attentive—"Every wife knows what that means," thought poor Mrs. Snell in her jaundice "unless she's a greater fool than Me." And had he been less attentive than ever, then Mrs. Snell would have found equal food for jealousy in his diminished attention; and so it

would have been had his amount of attention neither grown nor slackened, but had remained precisely the same. As things were, however, "He used to keep at home when the Baggage was here, and he don't want me to see a difference," thought she, "now the Hussy's gone."

One evening, when he did go out, as of old, she followed him secretly; but she failed to track him beyond the door of the Green Cheese. The tavern struck her as an odd place for scientific meetings; but it could obviously have no connection with Marion. Not that her mind was in the least relieved—nor would anybody imagine it for a moment who has ever had even a bowing acquaintance with Jealousy.

He returned with the familiar signs of Science upon him. But he was more than usually morose. No doubt he was brooding on Marion. So little had she learned by watching that she watched more and more.

She waylaid the postman, and relieved him of the trouble of delivering his letters. She studied the agony column of the morning paper. She searched Wyndham's pockets diligently. She tried to decipher the marks on the pages of the blotting-book. She lay awake hours at night, on the chance of Wyndham talking in his dreams. It was all to no purpose. The postman never brought anything but matter for the waste-paper basket from dealers in wine or coals, or appeals from chapels in want of repair. Wyndham's pockets were as Dame Hubbard's cupboard; the agony column revealed little beyond craftily devised references to soaps and sauces; the vestiges of the blotting-book were, whenever legible, rows of figures following an L., an S., or a D., but never an M.; and Wyndham never, save once, said anything in his sleep, and that was:

"A thousand to one on Influenza for a place—Done.'

Evidently the plot against her peace was laid with diabolical skill.

But after these things had proceeded for a time, Wyndham—it was one morning after he had been called up at night to attend to an accident—said:

"Ju—I see daylight. And, Jupiter, it's time."

It was all he said before leaving home somewhat earlier than usual. But it became a remarkable speech in her memory when she woke the next morning and she failed to find him by her side; when breakfast-time passed and he did not appear; when it was not till nearly the next midnight that he returned, dressed in his best, and followed by the one-legged porter from the station with a valise. And he was looking positively radiant—ah, those Handsome Men! surely, felt Mrs. Snell, with despairing pride, they are not to be judged like others; their temptations are so strong. And yet she fancied that it would take but a trifle more to make her hate him. Why had he come back so radiant and so gay—why had he been away two whole days and a night in his best frockcoat, and a pair of trowsers that he had not put on twice before?

Answer: Marion.

She was far too wise, or thought herself so, to put questions that would only provoke lies. Wyndham volunteered no explanation of his absence—which was exactly as suspicious a proceeding as any other would have been. If his journey had been about money, he would

have told her, she was sure. Therefore it was not about money. Therefore it had been about the one other thing in the world, barring drink and tobacco, about which a man can be supposed to care. "Look for the woman," is supposed to have been said by a man. That is not true. It was said by a woman; and Mrs. Snell would have been that woman had she not been anticipated by a few thousand others.

No doubt he fancied he had sufficiently lulled her suspicions to sleep by having carefully avoided all mention of Marion—as if everybody did not know that out of the fulness of the heart the tongue is silent! and by keeping so much at home; so that he could now make an occasional trip on "business" without having to knock his wife down for objecting. In short, Wyndham was A Man; and what that means A Woman alone knows.

For what man knows anything about either sex? While what woman does not know all about both? And the stupider she is, the more she knows. It takes a terribly stupid man to think he understands one woman—a terribly clever woman to suspect that she does not thoroughly comprehend every man that ever was made.

So this poor stupid creature, thinking she knew all about even so much poorer a creature as Wyndham Snell, kept on watching for still fresh symptoms, and found them daily. Nor was her mind as yet distracted by any return of the financial crisis that had been threatened. On the contrary, Wyndham began to drop hints of a very golden time coming; and at last he spoke openly.

"There's nothing like speculation after all," he said one morning at breakfast-time. "The only thing is to stick to it and be bold. After all what's a trumpery two thousand? A sprat to catch a whale. What do you say to moving from Euphrosyne Terrace to Park Lane?"

"Where's that?" asked she.

"Why, among the duchesses, and that sort. I knew my ship would come home at last, and it's come. Of course I don't mean exactly Park Lane - one mightn't be able to get just the house one would like all in a minute—but say some good central neighbourhood like Upper Vane Street, or Eastwood Square, or some place of that kind. It's a capital quarter for a professional man with private means, who can afford to wait till he gets called in to the Queen. Ah, you may stare, old lady; but it was bound to come. A man of my mark and standing was bound to come to the front at last, in spite of the whole College. What do you say to being Lady Julia Snell, eh? No—you'd be Lady Snell: the other'd mean you were daughter of an earl—and you're not that, worse luck; I wish you were. Or say Lady Wyndham Snell. We could roll the two names into one, with a dash between them; that's often done often; and some day we might drop the Snell. It wouldn't do to get about that one had ever practised, though from purely philanthropic motives, in Piggot's Town. And one could easily tack on another name in front—Lionel's always a first-rate name: at once romantic, historical and royal: not too common and not too fine. Sir Lionel Wyndham, Baronet, F.R.C.P., Physician Extraordinary to Her Majesty the Queen: a good sort of brass-plate that, eh?"

She had been used to these bright visions: and she sighed.

"I wouldn't give three farthings to be a lady," she said. "But I'd give the teeth out of my head to be as—as happy as when we were poor."

It was the first time she had sailed so near the burden of her heart in words. But they passed him without leaving any apparent sting.

"Stuff; nobody could be happy without teeth," said he, showing his own amiably. "The short and the long of it is, I'm going to sell my practice in Piggot's Town; I dare say Smith over the way would give a five-pound note to be rid of me; and I'm going house-hunting—as soon as I've settled a trifle of business I've got on hand. Don't expect to see me to-morrow morning; but I'll be back the next without fail."

"Very well, Wyndham."

"And you needn't go chattering among the neighbours that we've become rich people. Indeed, I distinctly forbid your chattering at all."

"I won't say a word to a soul. Shall I pack your things?"

"You can put up the valise. But don't forget the pomatum, this time. Last time I had to buy some at—where I went to; and I've hardly got the smell out of my fingers to this day."

Mrs. Snell had not been very greatly impressed with the prospect of becoming the wife of a possible baronet and an actual man of fortune. Of course she had long been aware that the Doctor, with his talents, must come to the front at last? but the time had already arrived so often, that—in short, she made no account of it at all. But she had been very greatly impressed indeed with his obvious attempt to cover his second excursion from home and to throw it into the background. No doubt he imagined—she argued while putting up the Doctor's snow-white collars—that a golden fog would keep her eyes from fixing upon his journey; not that she put it to herself in that metaphorical manner, but in a way which, though more round-about, came to the same thing. Why should he have dwelt upon titles and grand houses, and then thrown his journey in as a sort of by the way, as if it were of no consequence at all? And the pomatum—why be so particular about the pomatum, unless for the sake of somebody whose eyes and nose he wished to please? That pomatum made her blood boil.

As soon as he had nodded her good-bye at the door, Mrs. Snell scrambled on the cloak and bonnet she had laid out to hand while packing the valise, and left word with the cook that she might be going to pass the night with some friends in town, and to be sure to bolt and chain the door. Wyndham always sauntered, and had to carry his valise; so that she, by hurrying, managed to get to the station before him by a slightly longer way across the building ground at the end of the terrace.

And now craft had to come to her aid. But there was no fear of that failing her—where is jealously there is craft, as surely as where is substance there is shadow. Come what might, she was not going to let another day pass without getting to the bottom of the tricks of that horrible girl.

From just within the door of the waiting-room, and with her veil down, she watched her husband saunter gracefully into the booking-office and take his ticket. Then—having taken the precaution to carry off the house-keeping money and her savings therefrom—she bought a third-class ticket for the London terminus, and contrived to get a corner seat without being seen. There was no fear of the Doctor's entering the same carriage, for he invariably travelled first, on principle. Arrived at the terminus, she followed him cautiously into the larger office, where seeing without being seen was proportionately easier than in the shed at home. Then, as before, she took another third-class ticket to the nearest station by the next train, which was to leave for the north-west in another half-hour.

From the booking-office she kept Wyndham in sight to the door of the refreshment room, where he staid some ten minutes; thence to the bookstall, where he supplied himself with newspapers enough, pink, yellow, and gray, to last through a longish journey; and so on, through the usual processes of time-killing, till the five minutes' bell rang, and she saw him establish himself, with much parade and ostentatious communications with guards and porters, in a first-class smoking carriage. She crept into a third-class compartment as before; and presently was travelling, she knew not whither, through unknown suburbs, between cuttings, and then past green fields. She had managed—fortune favouring—to get a corner seat on the platform side; and whenever the train stopped she leaned out and looked through her veil along the line of the train. It was not always an easy matter to make sure that any particular passenger did not get out; but her eyes were sharp, her senses were quickened, and the first-class passengers were fortunately few. And once, circumstances favouring, she ventured to leave the train at one of its halts and to hurry past the Doctor's carriage, to make sure that he was still there. There he was; and there he seemed likely to remain.

But at last, after how many hours Mrs. Snell, for want of a watch, was unable to gather, and while the porters were bawling a couple of vowals without a consonant to help them, the Doctor stepped out with his valise. It was a small country station, where few persons left the train or entered it. A few cottages were near; a pointed spire rose from a mass of foliage hard by; low, wooded hills made a kind of basin round; and, at the foot of a steep road leading up to the station rolled a broad river, brown and gray, with banks of silver mud, shadowed with thick leaves, and with large stretches of wet brown sand left here and there by the ebbing tide. A moist wind blew, salt and cold; and here and there a boat lay upon the mud or sand, waiting for the flow.

Mrs. Snell had arranged her plans for whatever might happen. She lingered till the Doctor had given up his ticket and was on his way down the road. Then, having during the journey thrown her third-class ticket out of the window, she professed to have lost a ticket all the way from London to Askholm, as the place proved to be. Ladies of her appearance are privileged to suffer such misfortunes without

comment or inquiry; and she was allowed to leave the station on the payment of her full fare.

And now came the most difficult portion of her undertaking. It is easy enough to do detective business in a crowded street, but far from easy on a country road. Fortunately for her, Wyndham was content to travel on his own feet; but then he might turn at any moment, or might even accost her to make some inquiry. All she could do was to hang behind as far as she could without losing sight of him, and to keep well within the shadow of the red cliff through which the road was cut on its way down to the shore.

It should have been a pleasant walk; nor did the Doctor appear to think it otherwise. He seemed to be even enjoying the fresh breeze and the view of the river, and would pause every now and then to rest his arm from the no great weight of his valise to watch a seagull or to revive the light of his cigar. And the woman who followed him would never have been suspected by a passer-by of being a creature in whom wasted love and maddening jealously had been creating a soul. There was tragedy at large upon that lonely road by the river as surely as in a drama of Kings and Queens.

At length the road, following the river generally, though not closely, made a sudden abrupt bend to the left, and again sloped downward till it skirted the very edge of the shore. And just opposite to the point where it almost touched the mud-bank at low tide and the water at high, stood a nondescript kind of cottage, such as might belong either to an exceptionally prosperous fisherman, or to an unusually small farmer—to somebody who was both, perhaps, as a boat with masts unshipped was anchored on the bank ready for launching. Or it might be a river-side alehouse or a ferry-house; or, indeed, a combination of all four. A rough patch of unfenced garden lay in front, and an orchard straggled behind.

Whatever it was, here the Doctor came to a halt; and Mrs. Snell knew, as by instinct, that here lay the mystery of this new life of his in which she had no share.

She kept close under a convenient projection in the cliff and looked to see what he was about to do. It was a singular spot whereto to have traced Dr. Snell. She had not expected to be carried beyond London; and she had travelled into another world. But its meaning grew plainer and plainer. Business and speculation indeed—as if a man would travel on business to a lonely cottage in a wild. But it was just the place a man might choose who had a love affair on hand that he was anxious to hide. There was concealment, distance, solitude. There was the zest of mystery. And, by no means least, there was the broad river whereby to escape in case of need for flight, and the boat ready wherewith to fly; a serviceable boat, fit even for the sea.

In short, it was a lover's paradise—or else an ideal place wherein to concoct, to conceal, and to escape from, a Crime.

CHAPTER XIX.

A BROKEN IDYLL.

Had Mrs. Snell's eyes been able to see through rough stone walls half as clearly as she saw through her husband's cunning, her convictions would have received confirmation indeed.

From Australia to the Clarence in London; from the Clarence to the Green Cheese; from the Green Cheese to Euphrosyne Terrace; from Euphrosyne Terrace to the haunted house in Upper Vane Street; from Upper Vane Street to the Great Railway Hotel—all these steps had Marion Furness made, almost as an elastic ball thrown upon the ground at random bounds aimlessly from spot to spot until it exhausts its power. And so it seemed to be the case with her, until a final bound had landed her here—an even unlikelier place than the least likely of all the others.

There was at least one good thing about the place, however—she had plenty of leisure to consider how she came there, and thus she had never had a chance of getting elsewhere. There was plenty to remember, though the journey thither had proved the swiftest and simplest thing in the world. Acting on Cynthia's directions, and without nearly exhausting her borrowed sovereigns, she had reached the station at Askholme; had met her father openly on the platform; had delivered her news; and had waited till Adam's brown study came to an end.

"You've got pluck; and you've got resource," said he, after a long pause, as they walked up and down. "I'm hanged if I don't think I'd sooner have you to hand than Cynthia after all. Someone I must have; and what Cynthia would have to act you'll do by nature; and—there are other things. But wait a bit. I shall have to trust you, and I'm not going to trust again without making sure. You know what I am?"

"You are escaping from danger," said Marion.

"Yes; from danger that I never meant you should dream of—much less share. I have killed a treacherous scoundrel who sought to do worse than kill me; and though I no more regret it than I should regret shooting a tiger or strangling a rattlesnake, it will be called Murder. Your mother hated me, remember. Are you going to be her daughter or mine?"

"I am always hers—for ever!" said Marion. "But she—I *am* yours, too."

"Marion, I believe if your mother were alive, and had the power, she would give me up to be hanged."

"Don't you think—don't you feel—that people get to understand one another when they become Souls?"

"I don't know. I never chanced to come across a soul. However, what do you think she'd understand?"

"That you are in trouble; and that it is my duty to help you for her sake—if I can. If she didn't understand you—with her brain—wouldn't she make up to you now?"

"You are strangely like what I once fancied she would be—when we were both young. I did love her, Marion. If she had let me, I could have loved her as no man ever loved woman. But you saw how, in her morbid state, she even denied that she was my wife—as if any woman in her senses would insist on her own shame, even if it were true . . . You are like what she would have been. Though you don't know me, you don't turn away from me just because I've nobody else to turn to ——"

"Nor have I anybody to turn to," she could not help sighing. "As we're both alone—what have I to do? If only I can do it, it shall be done."

"Anything—whatever it may be?"

"Whatever it may be."

"Even if it is called crime?"

"What does it matter to me," she asked, with gentle bitterness, "what things are called? I didn't come here to you without knowing what it did mean. I only want to be of some use—any use. I don't want to have to spend my life in dying."

Certainly something new had come to her—and yet, maybe, it was not new. She had the blood of Adam Furness in her veins. He turned upon her almost roughly.

"What makes *you* so reckless—you, a girl? And brought up by—Her?"

"I'm not reckless. I've made up my mind that I've got only one work given me; and if it's given me, it's right—and that I'll do."

"And that is ——"

"To do for you," she answered, with a hot flush, "whatever Mamma would have done, if only—and did not do."

"And I wish—but never mind now. You're sure you have no other tie—nothing to make you flinch or pause?"

"Not one."

"You care for no living soul?"

"There is no one ——"

"Not even a girl's fancy?"

"Father—do you want me to swear to you that there is no one between you and me; never will be, till I die? Do you want me to swear it? If you wish it—I will."

"I believe you. And I trust you; there is not; there never shall be. Now mind—I trusted once—and was betrayed. But I am trusting again. Do you know all that means—a man's trust for the last time?"

"I know."

"Then—remember. Nothing, for ever, to come between you and me; not a memory; not a dream. Marion, some people would think

me the very fool of fools. But rashness has always been my strength. I put myself into your hands."

"Tell me what to do."

"You must wait. I could have told Cynthia at once; but, as I have changed my agent, I must change my plans. For the moment, though, all you have to do is all that she could have done: to wait at a certain place in a certain way. I have taken a cottage near here where, for particular reasons, I am least likely to be looked for. Can you paint?"

"Is that necessary? I have sketched—a little ——"

"That will do. It is only needful to have a reason for a girl to live in an out-of-the-way cottage, and alone. An artist may do anything—even the yokels won't ask questions if you put up an easel and go about with a block and a pencil. You're an artist who wants to study the Aske—and no wonder. There's no river like it, to my mind, in the world. . . . You've fixed yourself there, just as many a young woman before you has fixed herself all alone in the middle of a moor. You'll have a girl from the village, and she won't be a dangerous critic, no matter how you daub. A painter, or paintress, is a privileged maniac all over the world. You can take any name you please. I'll send you all the things you'll want: and you won't be troubled with would-be friends, so long as you don't go to church, and all that sort of thing. So far, there's nothing hard. The great thing is that I should have a quiet place, just here, to receive my friends; a place to escape from at once by water, in case of need; and somebody whom I can get at any moment to do any sort of business I may require. There'll be plenty of that—soon."

"Your—friends?"

"Yes. You must wonder at nothing that happens; at nobody whom you see. You must never go more than a sketcher's distance from the door; and whenever you go out you must leave written word in some settled place where you are to be found. Whatever money you want, you will have. Only one thing more; but no—you are not Cynthia. I needn't warn *you* against being too clever. You won't be skirting precipices—for fun."

"And—this will help you?"

"Help me? This will save me—that's all!"

Marion Furness was not much of an artist. But she could do most things—a little; and, happily, she had enough skill with her pencil to open to her the most mind and soul-absorbing method of making the hours gallop that has ever yet been found. It seemed to her a matter of conscience that, having once devoted herself to a certain task, however uncomprehended and incomprehensible, she should obey it to the very letter. In her mood of self-renunciation, to whatever it might lead, she would have faithfully performed any bidding; the enthusiasm of the convert who for the first time feels the luxury of spiritual direction could not outdo the zeal of the girl who had devoted herself in precisely the same spirit to the furtherance of crime.

And, for the present, the sense of relief from daily doubts and hourly anxieties was so intensely precious that she became well-nigh

happy, and forgot that she was alone. It was real repose; not like the helpless convalescence of her prison-house under an irritatingly and wearisomely vivacious gaoler, but real rest, with only nature for her companion. And the repose was all the sweeter for her assurance that it was duty fulfilled—not understood, but still fulfilled. For the time she fancied it would be enough if thus, with a good conscience, she could go on drifting and dreaming to the end.

She rose early in the morning with the priceless pleasure of feeling that all the long hours of the new day were wholly her own, and yet not quite so much her own as to be unoccupied by congenial duty. She sketched because she had been bidden; and all day long, because the task became a pleasure—even a passion. Poor her work might be, from an artist's standpoint, but it made her love the broad river, gray at flood and brown at ebb, with its silver mud and sombre sands. If she could not paint, she could feel; and the part she was playing ceased to be a mere part. It approached a passion.

When it was wet she made wild efforts with unmastered materials and implements, upon the canvas on her easel—efforts that would have made a true artist, who knows the pathos of the struggle between desire and impotence, weep with sympathy, and the false artist sneer and stare. And at night, weary with effort, and sleepy with the sweet, salt air, she lay down and dreamed as little as might be.

What could it all mean? But, whatever it might mean, the days did not drag. They flew.

As her father had predicted, she was not worried by neighbours. Indeed, there were but few neighbours to worry her; and those of a non-worrying kind. Nor did she feel the slightest craving for companionship. That might come, she being human; but, meanwhile, having surrendered and cut herself off from the only companionship that had ever meant anything to her, solitude was welcome. If some fairy had risen out of the Aske and told her this was to go on for ever, she would have been content—at any rate, something more than resigned.

A good many days of this kind had flown or floated by, and her father had as yet made no sign, when, having performed the usual rite of pinning on a pre-arranged part of the wall a notification of where she was to be found out of doors if wanted, she betook herself to the point of the river whence she was just then engaged in making a study. It was a rather ambitious sketch—ambitious by reason of its very simplicity; a wide reach of the river at low tide, with varied effects of light and reflection, with a single broken boat to suggest desolation in the midst of calm, and with no life but a few gulls busy in fishing. She had forgotten herself in her work for perhaps a couple of hours, when she became conscious of the instinct that invariably warns sensitive people that they are not alone. Presently she heard a light and firm footstep, and then a young man carrying a fishing-rod and basket passed her on his way to the water, throwing her just a glance as he went by.

It was annoying, for her love of solitude had become perhaps a trifle

morbid from indulgence, and it so happened that she had never before sketched in company with anybody more formidable than a stray child from the scattered village or a troop of uncritical cows. She thought for a moment of rising, seeing that the young angler seemed to be settling himself within hailing distance; but she felt that the impulse was one of unreasonable cowardice, and therefore to be opposed. No doubt the angler would presently move on. Instead of that, however, he sat down, set his rod and line to look after themselves, lighted a cigar, and, in the most unsportsmanlike manner, began to read and to make notes with a pencil. She saw only his back; and he, consequently, saw nothing of her. No doubt he knew that a young lady was sketching hard by; but he took that after all not very extraordinary circumstance with the utmost ease.

Suddenly, however, he rolled round, so as to face her, resting on his elbows, and, just raising his straw hat, said:

"Excuse me—but I am still a stranger in these parts. Can you tell me if there is a ferry across the river, or if I can find a boat anywhere?"

She had to look up: and, to her dismay, found herself face to face with the self-same young man to whom she had pledged her ring.

At the same moment he sprang to his feet.

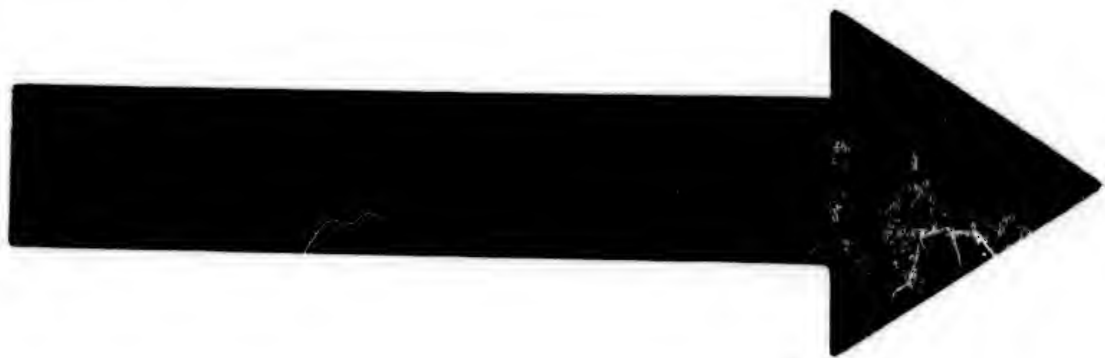
"In the name of all good fortune—Miss Vane! Ah, I always knew we should meet again somewhere and somehow—but fancy it's being here!"

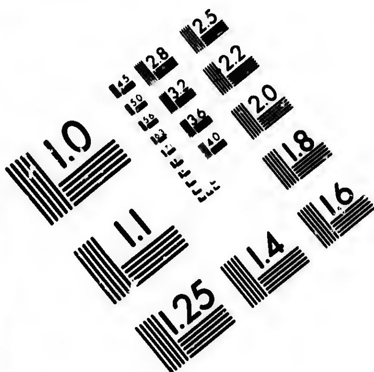
It did seem ominous, indeed, that she should have met this same stranger twice and at such different and such distant places within so short a while. Of course, as even the dullest, only the least bit more behind the scenes than she, has already perceived, nothing was more natural than that, on the banks of the Aske, one candidate for Marchgrave should meet the daughter of the other. Such a meeting was almost bound to happen in the ordinary course of things. But to her it was as if thunder were about to threaten through the air. There could be no purpose in what was so obviously a chance meeting; but there must be destiny; and upon her father's plans for living or for escaping, how would so unlooked-for an accident bear?

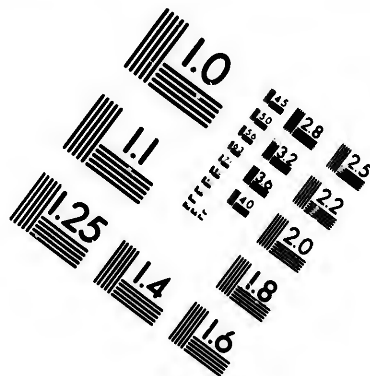
But her father's faith in her henceforth demanded invariable presence of mind; and it had been part of her promise never to feel surprised at anything that might happen or at anyone whom she might see. Everything might depend upon how she received this man; and she was henceforth an adventuress by fact and profession, instead of a sham one by way of temporary disguise. Had not the mantle of Cynthia fallen upon her—had not a hunted man said, "I put myself in your hands"?

So she looked up from her sketch to the full as composed as he—as different from the bewildered creature he had met in London as a tame fawn from a wild.

"Yes," she said, with a smile—nor could Cynthia herself have found a better among her professional properties—"it is a very, very narrow world. I am glad to be able to thank you for your kindness in London; and to be in your debt no more."







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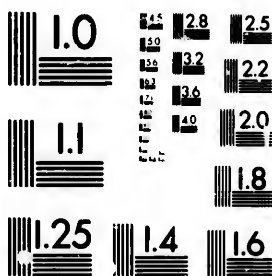

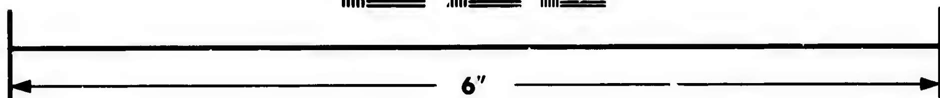

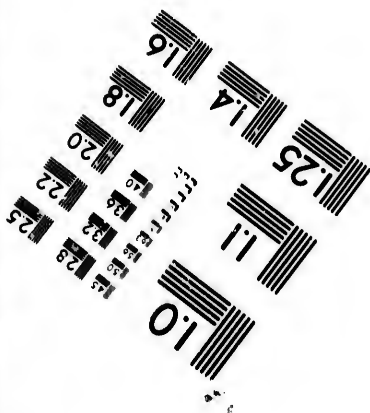

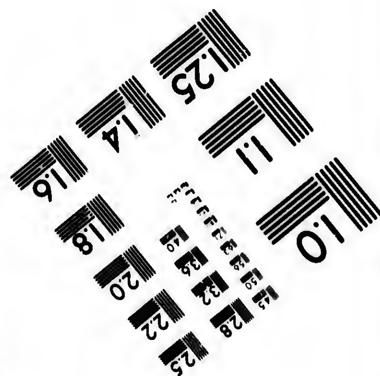

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"Oh, never mind that. Do you take me for a dun? I'm much more like to be a dunned. So you live—here? And your cousin—is she here, too? . . . I'm hanged," he thought, "if she isn't just a commonplace country parson's daughter after all."

"Oh, no. I'm only here for a time—making a few studies. It's a great thing to find new ground in these days. I suppose Askholm will be found out in time, like everywhere else; and then it will be spoiled. I'm doing what I can with it before it gets as vulgar and common as—as—Switzerland or Wales. Many people would call it ugly; but it has a great charm."

She was astonished at her own fluency—the more especially as her lips were trembling and her tongue stumbling all the while. Never in her life had she spoken so many words all at one time.

"Ah—you are a painter, then?" asked he, brightening to find that she was something more or less adventurous and unconventional after all. "I daub a little myself—enough to make me interested. May I see? By Jove!"

Before her first critic the conscious impostor flushed to the hair.

"You *are* a painter, Miss Vane! And, what's more, you're the only person I ever came across that understands what I'm always preaching—that there is nothing really beautiful but the ugly. The business of the painter isn't to copy what everybody can see is beautiful, because he can't. It's to see the beauty of ugliness, and make everybody else see it besides. And what I preach, you do. You would simply make your fortune as a portrait painter, Miss Vane. That is a splendid study. It is a poem. You make me see everything round us with new eyes.

His paradox was beyond her; but he seemed in earnest, and she could not help feeling pleased. One cannot love one's work without loving its praise. So she flushed still more, and the first impression of danger began to fade.

"But what an ass I am!" he exclaimed suddenly. "I forgot all this time that you had some connection with Marchgrave. Of course you'd be here."

"With Marchgrave?" she asked, beginning to flutter again.

"Ah—you don't remember what I told you of myself. But never mind. And I'm not going to remember politics either, for a good five minutes to come. Don't let me interfere with your work; I'll do the talking for two. And, talking of art, you can prove the beauty of ugliness; and I've been picking up an extraordinary fellow, with a real genius for demonstrating the ugliness of beauty. I've brought him down to Marchgrave for purposes of my own—everything's fair, you know, in love, war, and elections; and when you come to see your friends when the great fight comes off, I must exhibit my genius to you. I'm a collector of human oddities, you know—a connoisseur; and my last new specimen is just—Prime. He *is* a genius, Miss Vane; and guess where I picked him up; in the street, caricaturing a whole rank of cabmen, giving each of them three minutes. He's a caricature himself—as solemn as a ghoul. But I'm fighting a losing battle, you know,

and have got to hit hard ; and my ghoul is going to set Marchgrave by the ears in a way that—well, you'll see. I'm afraid my genius is rather a bad loc ; I shouldn't wonder if he's seen the inside of a good many gaols. And he's half an idiot besides—but that, as he's a genius, of course goes without saying—understand me ; I mean in a man. When a woman has genius it means she's a long way above the rest of her sex ; when a man, it means that he's a long way below."

The blunder and its instant correction by a paradox intended on the spur of the moment passed equally unobserved. He spoke as if they were in the neighbourhood of Marchgrave—a chance to more than trouble her.

"How far is Marchgrave ?" she asked suddenly.

"Why—don't you know ? Look up the river—no ; up, not down. Do you see a faint blur of smoke hanging round the ghost of a gray tower ! "

She put on her glasses and followed his finger with her eyes.

"I think I see it—yes ; I do see it. Well ?"

"That is Marchgrave."

Alas ! What could this mean ? Marchgrave, that was to have been her home ; Marchgrave, whence she had been striving to fly ; there it lay in sight, and thither destiny had been drawing her even by means of her flying. Could it be that, striving to put more than a whole world between them, only a few miles, over which the eye could travel, lay between her and Guy ?

And if it had been Guy instead of this stranger, who had come a-fishing by the Aske ?

The whole charm faded from the scene. He also might come this way without the help of accident ; or he might hear of her through Morland, and identify her. This at any rate must not be left to chance, whatever else might be.

"You once did me a great favour," said she. "Will you do me one more."

"Surely—and more."

"I am here to be alone with my work. I want no interruption—especially from my friends. May I trust you to keep my secret—not to mention me to anybody, especially in Marchgrave ?"

"I see. You are the one girl in ten thousand who really loves her art for itself, and not for the sake of having it seen that she loves it. By all the gods—ay, and the fishes I have not been catching—I have found *the* woman who is not a sham. I will respect your secret, Miss Vane, as I respect you ; I will be prouder of sharing it than of being member for Marchgrave ; nay, of being the beaten candidate, of which I shall be prouder still."

"And my debt ——"

"Will you pay it me in my own way ? Will you finish this sketch for me, and so wipe out the score with interest besides ? All right ; we shall meet again. I must be off ; I've got to give John Heron a public wigging to-night, and I must catch my train. I came here to get up

my speech; but I've done better, and shan't speak a penny the worse, I dare say. *Au revoir.*"

He was off before she could get in another word.

Dr. Snell, watched by his wife, tapped at the door of the cottage. She saw him enter. And must she stand watching, and watching, and doing nothing but watch a doorway till he emerged?

If she kept a veil well over her face, and gathered her cloak well about her, so as to alter her figure, she could, at any rate, come close to the house without fear of recognition through the window. She moved forward, in pursuance of an indefinite desire for more active vigilence, until she reached the door.

And must she stay here? What good, what discovery, what vengeance could come of her standing idle outside a door?

Ah, but a door has something more than an outside. What if she were to enter and surprise the guilty pair?

It was an inspiration, to such a point had she wrought up by her jealous rage. Her tongue would annihilate the wretch where she stood; and she would have her husband so completely thenceforth at her mercy that he would never stray again beyond the tether of her apron-string from that time for ever.

It was a bold, but congenial stroke: and her hand was on the door. She tried it before knocking, and it opened as readily as country doors will. She found herself in a narrow flagged passage, leading through into the orchard at the back, with a door on either side. She listened at both, but heard nothing. She opened one gently; and found herself, by stepping a little to the left as she entered, behind a high easel bearing a canvas so large as to conceal the upper part of her person from any occupants of the room, while a box seat with a small draped table covered her skirts and her toes from view. She instinctively took up this covert: for the instincts of the eavesdropper were strongly developed in Mrs. Snell, and the experience besides. Besides it would be so much more effective a stroke to observe first, and then at some critical moment, to start from behind the easel and appear.

There were two voices in the room. And the first was Wyndham Snell's.

"That's all very well. But don't you find the neighbours troublesome and inquisitive?" he asked; and the question made Mrs. Snell's blood boil. "Believe me, I know what these solitudes are; delightfully romantic, and all that, of course; but terribly dangerous; and the more dangerous the more lonely. Ah—for real solitude, in real, chemical combination with real safety, give me a big town—London for choice. You can see a single drop of water in a thimble, but not in the sea."

"Yes. That's just what all fools say."

Mrs. Snell started at the deep tones that were assuredly not Marion's. The voice was familiar enough—only too familiar; but she felt a strange sort of disappointment to find that her husband was in nothing worse

than the worst of masculine company. What should have rejoiced her, well nigh made her more angry still. It is disheartening for Juno to arm herself with all her terrors against some rival nymph or goddess, and to find that she has taken all her trouble in vain.

"Yes: it's what everybody says, fancying he's the first to say it; and what's the result? All your too clever-by-half people go crowding into London, so that the variest noodle of a detective has his hat over them. I grant you, a mere simpleton will go and hide himself in a desert. The thief-catchers know that much; and so they argue that what a simpleton does is exactly what a clever rogue will not do. The half-clever rogue of course plays into their hands. But the really clever rogue does just what the simpleton does just because the simpleton does it; and so baffles them all. Don't you see? They'll argue like this:—Adam Furness, not being a simpleton, is still in London or abroad. Therefore, the obvious course of Adam Furness is neither to stay in London nor to stay abroad, but just to act like a simpleton; that being the only thing nobody would expect him to do. I suppose even such a clever fellow as you can see now? And as to neighbours—so long as one fixes on a place where the parson's a bachelor without sisters, one may be what one likes and live as one pleases. A country parish is just like an omnibus. People stare at you like Gorgons when you first get in; but you soon get accepted as a regular part of the body corporate from the beginning, to be made common cause with against the next new-comer. When one gets over the first nine days people forget you haven't been among them nine years."

"That's not the common notion, though," said the Doctor.

"Of course it isn't. And that's why it's so true."

Adam Furness! Mrs. Snell began to see light; and therefore the more anxious to see more. Being, as has been said, accustomed to such manœuvres, she, without a single telltale rustle, contrived to peer hastily round the easel—and there, sure enough, were her own husband in company with Marion's father; the latter leaning against the mantel-piece; the former lounging in a wicker chair that creaked at every motion he made. Taking advantage of this defect, she kneeled down, so as to see whatever happened between the bottom of the canvas and the top of the boxstool.

"To come to business, then," said the Doctor. "I've got a capital notion. You must agree with me that I'm completely thrown away on a place like Piggot's Town. I'm thinking of buying a first-class practice in town. There's one going in Mayfair that would suit me down to the ground. But it naturally wants money; and then I must have a good house properly furnished, and start in good style."

"*You* in fashionable practice! Why, I wouldn't call you in to a cow."

"P'raps not; and if you did, I wouldn't come. But you were glad enough to call me in when—you hurt your hand and arm. Shall I look at it again?"

"Well; you want blackmail? How much, this time?"

"Blackmail! What do you take me for, Furness? I come to my banker for an advance—to buy a practice; a perfectly legitimate

object, offering the best possible security. Why, the Bank of England would jump at such a security as a practice like that—the last man was made a knight, and retired on twenty thousand a year. I don't like joking about business. Say—to begin with fifty thousand pounds. That won't break you, I suppose?"

"Oh. Fifty thousand pounds. Of course you mean including the ten thousand you had the other day."

"No. That went in—speculation. If things had gone as they ought, I wouldn't be troubling you now."

"And when this goes in—speculation?"

"It can't. Don't talk nonesense, Furness."

"If, then? But never mind answering. Look here, Mr. Snell. *I* am engaged in a speculation; not one like yours, but one certain to bring in ten times as much as I can now lay my hands on. If you are wise enough to wait, you may look, not for a poor fifty thousand down, which you'll throw away in a week, but to be a millionaire in a few years. But if you go on in this fashion, you'll ruin, not only me, but yourself too."

"A million—in a few years?"

"Yes. Every share I hold in the Marchgrave Dock Company I'll make over to you."

"Oh! You will?"

"I'm not going to waste breath in trying to explain what Marchgrave Docks mean to me. *You* wouldn't understand how anything can be to a man more than money. I'm not going to try to explain to a blind man what red means. But I tell you this—that rather than give up the work of my life, I'll go without personal profit from it, by so much as a penny——"

"Indeed? Excuse me, Furness; but if you can't make me see Red, you mustn't expect me to see green. . . . I don't believe in a future million that somebody is ready to give away in order to save a few thousands now. No; none of your dock shares. The next thing we should hear of would be a bear let loose in the market. Excuse me—me thinks I like not the security, as sings the Swan."

"I can't raise fifty thousand pounds."

"I'm afraid you'll have to, Furness. Please don't oblige me to put on the screw."

"I don't know. I shall have to face the screw some day. Why not now? And there'd be one comfort. You'd have got nothing. For your sake, don't ask too much, or——"

"Or you'll be- hanged!"

"Yes. But not for knifing Petersen, though."

"For what then?"

"For strangling—You."

"Nonsense. You've made one little mistake, though, Furness. As if I—I of all men—don't know what dross money is compared with a thousand things: science, for example. I'd sooner be What's-his-name than Rothschild. And so, for Science's sake, I'll be content—for the present—with fifty thousand down."

"Impossible. What with you, and the Docks, and a hundred things, the Bank wouldn't bear the strain. It would have to go—and you as well."

"It's no use, Furness. That money I must have. And—to tell you the truth—that practice I'm telling you about isn't exactly in Mayfair. That's only to throw dust in the eyes of the old woman at home. Between you and I, I can't stand Mrs. Wyndham Snell any more. She was always old enough and ugly enough; but she's been taking to be affectionate, and that's the straw that killed the camel. Ah, if I'd only known your Marion a few years ago. . . . Anyhow—say seventy thousand: and—I'll say good-bye to you for good and all. After all, there's nothing like the United States for a real field: and —— "

"You mean you would close the bargain and go?" asked Adam Furness in a voice that made the listener start perilously—so hoarse was it, and so full of hope that seemed like fear.

"For Seventy Thousand. Come—don't hang back: or I increase the dose—I mean the bidding."

"But what security —— "

"That I shan't come back? —— Good Lord! You ask that—and you have seen Mrs. Snell!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE MARCHGRAVE MYSTERY.

Words have yet to be invented for the suggestion of the effect upon Mrs. Snell of her husband's final words. Words belong to articulate natures; Mrs. Snell's newly-discovered soul was inarticulate—nay, dumb. She could neither think nor speak; she could only feel. And that was her tragedy.

Instinctively judging from some motion that the two men were about to part. she contrived—how she knew not—to slip from behind the easel and out of the room without being heard or seen; not that she much cared. And it was that very recklessness which no doubt enabled her to effect her escape imperceptibly. She had heard enough; there was no need for her to listen to another word. Marion, as she understood it, was at the bottom of it all. Her husband—the wretched imbecile—was using his power over Adam Furness to fly from his lawful wife with Marion. She comprehended none of the talk about docks, banks, and shares. Marion was the beginning; Marion the end. And, as if to goad her into sudden vengeance, while passing from the cottage, she caught sight of a graceful figure that she hated with the whole passion of her nature approaching from the river-side.

Many a woman will comprehend her first impulse—to attack her odiously triumphant rival with such words as she did know how to use. But some—it is to be hoped not so many—will appreciate with her

second : to speak no word at all. For in such a case speech is but punishment ; silence is revenge. And not even now was it on her husband that the vengeance must fall. Without victory vengeance would be vain.

With far other feelings Morland returned to the turmoil of Marchgrave from his meditations on Askholm. He had lost neither head nor heart in his mysterious acquaintance ; but he was interested; and in that condition of both with regard to her which made that catastrophe not wholly impossible. Beauty and mystery combined, with an impression that anybody who gave his heart and his hand to Miss Vane would have a glorious opportunity of shocking social prejudices and of dying in the face of the world, exercised their combined magnetism upon one who was in the chronically unsafe condition of confidently believing himself exempt from danger.

However, for the present, it was peril only, not catastrophe. Danger it certainly was, for he had not the faintest intention of letting the acquaintance fall. Nor had he any feeling that, if the girl had a secret, he was bound to respect it, so far as he himself was concerned. Why should he? She might be simply unfortunate, in which case she would need help ; and if she were something worse than merely unfortunate, she would need help all the more. The universal interest of the candidate for Marchgrave in all that concerned mankind could not possibly fail to extend itself to womankind, especially when womankind took a concrete form of beauty and mystery.

What mortal, though armed with the qualities of the Lion and the Fox combined, can boast that he has placed himself beyond the reach of discovery—that he has left no posturn open ; no loophole of his fortress without a guard?

Both Adam Furness and John Heron had thus boasted themselves ; and with every apparent cause. The last people on earth whom they would have dreamed of fearing would have been Draycot Morland and Mrs. Snell, as persons from whom even the most remotely possible peril could come. And these were no less ignorant of the true nature of the trail upon which they had fallen.

Alas! if one wishes for safety, one must throw force and craft equally to the winds. One must either procure a hundred eyes, a hundred hands, and a hundred brains ; or else—but no ; there is no other way. It is not true that murder will out ; but that does not render the luckiest of murderers any the more praiseworthy on the score of skill. The worst of such things is that, when one holds all four aces in one's own hand, the pack may prove to have a dozen more. And so it came to pass that Marion, is devoting herself to her father, was unwittingly drawing an unconscious chase his way.

Draycot Morland was in time, and only just in time, to be decently punctual at his meeting ; and then—such things have woman to put up with when brought into collision with almost any rival, from statesmanship even down to politics—that the candidate clean forgot all about Marion. He might have but few virtues, and would have told you

that he resembled his fellow-creatures in having none, except the honesty of not pretending to have any; but he had this virtue at least, that whatever he was doing for the moment he did with his whole heart and soul.

Well would it have been for John Heron had he on this particular occasion found room for a thought that might have distracted him from the task of attacking the demi-god whom the jealousy of Askness had engaged him to overthrow. He worried his opponent like a bulldog, only a great deal more unfairly. It was impossible to find really weak places in the respectability that enveloped John Heron, of Chapter Lane, like a panoply of proof; but he knew how to make respectability, especially of the moneyed sort, a text for a Philippic full of stinging humour. For the twentieth time he painted Marchgrave as kotowing at the clay feet of the brazen statue of Mammon, and altogether made an effect of which he felt not a little proud. It is true that not a single holder of dock shares was present in an audience consisting mainly of dock labourers, who were not even Marchgrave men; but then, for that very reason, the applause was all the more loud. And, after all, he only wanted to sow discord—not to win; and to make a noise, and therefore a name.

He was leaving the meeting arm-in-arm with a solicitor of no great repute, who had some spite against the banker, and had been so lost to every sense of local decency as to consent to act as principal election agent for the opposition. And no doubt the candidate found additional zest in his sensational campaign in having to work with an acknowledged rascal whose sharp practices afforded constantly fresh amusement and daily objects for phychological study. For Draycot Morland was a man who, had he been surprised in his bedroom at two in the morning by an armed burglar, would have astonished the intruder by asking him to supper, and have kept him talking till, having mastered all the mysteries of the craft, they parted the best of friends. Yes, the Miss Burdons were unquestionably right. Draycot did affect low company.

The two were passing the Bell—where, it need not be said, the opposition candidate was not staying—when a stout, middle-aged person, just entering beneath the suspended joints attracted the notice of the lawyer.

"Holloa! there goes old Murder," said he. "After the widow, I suppose."

"Old Murder?" asked Morland. "What an unlucky name."

"What! don't you know old Murder? Why, it's the joke of the town."

"Ah! I always thought Marchgrave must have some joke or other somewhere. No; I never heard of old Murder. I thought I had a monopoly of all the jokes in Marchgrave."

"It isn't a joke for the poor old boy; and that's just the fun. P'r'aps you might make a point of it in your next speech—a local allusion's never thrown away. That was old Prendergast—a red-hot Heronite. There isn't his like for innocence and respectability in all

the city. I do believe he'd give a hundred pounds any day of his own to save a puppy from having his ears pulled. And in some heaven-knows-how sort of a way the story's got about that he has cut his master's throat, and buried him in the coalhole."

"Well done, Marchgrave! I'll never suspect it of being wanting in a sense of humour again."

"It's not bad, is it, Mr. Morland?"

"Bad! Why, I can't find words that would do it justice, Mr. Giles."

"It *is* funny," said Mr. Giles. "And, if you knew old Prendergast, you'd think it funnier still. It just makes his life a misery to him. He's got to fancy that everybody believes it, and that sends him wild. I say—do you think that caricaturist of yours could make a sketch if I gave him the idea—old Murder, you know, sitting in a coalhole and picking his master's bones?"

"An exquisite design, Mr. Giles."

"Not bad, Mr. Morland, eh?"

"From a ghoulish point of view, admirable; but from a political one, I hardly see."

"Ah, you're not up to all our hopes yet. Old Murder has got to be a sort of toady and bottle-washer, you know, of Heron—every morning in Chapter Lane. Heron's backing up his—old Murder's—master, who's the most howling Heronite in the place—a good job he's away."

"Well, I don't see it myself, Mr. Giles; but you know best what will fetch your own fellow-citizens, I dare say. But who's old Murder's master? How can he be the most howling Heronite in the place if he's been sent, no doubt, to howl, elsewhere?"

"Capital, Mr. Morland. Ah, I thought you'd be able to touch it in somehow. 'A howling Heronite sent to howl in—Helsewhere.' Capital. If that don't fetch 'em, nothing will."

"I didn't know they were so fond of H's in Marchgrave. But you haven't explained the mystery."

"Well, old Murder's master's a shipbroker, who's away abroad, on Dock business, I believe: and doesn't seem in a hurry to come home. I suppose it's secret service; for even old Prendergast doesn't know where he is, and has to invent a dozen lies a day to make believe, for his own credit's sake, he knows. It *is* fun to ask old Prendergast where Mr. Derwent was when he last heard."

"Mr. Derwent, did you say?"

"That's the man. Mr. Guy Derwent—a young fellow that Heron took up and pushed for some reason or another—I suppose he found him useful. You were quite right in your rattling speech to-night, sir. This is a city of lickspittles. If John Heron told the Dean to lick his boots for a Dock share, down his very reverence would go."

"They seemed a good, honest, independent lot to-night, Mr. Giles."

"And not three votes among the lot of 'em. You speak like a regular Diogenes; no doubt about that; but our Askness friends 'll find it hard to bid above John Heron."

"Well, well. The non-voters of to-day are the voters of to-morrow. I go for the future, you know."

"And Heron for the present. He always did; and that's where he's got the pull. . . . There: that's where they're going to put up his statue; they're going to unveil it on the day the poll's declared."

Draycot Morland lifted his hat.

"*Ave Cæsar—moriturum te salutaums!*" said he.

"I beg your pardon?" said Mr. Giles.

"Oh, nothing. I only said, 'All right. Let the present have it's statues—it will want all it can get in time to come. The Future salutes the dying Present: and bids it good-bye.'"

"You said all that?"

"And more—all in five words. It's a pity we don't all talk Latin, Giles. We should save such a devil of a lot of time."

Mr. Giles shook his head.

"That would hardly suit us lawyers," said he.

"Oh, you could talk thieves' Latin. That's an expressive sort of a lingo, too."

"Capital! You must touch that in, as well. It's wonderful how any hit at us lawyers fetches the crowd."

"But wouldn't that be rather fouling one's own nest—or rather crying stinking fish? I'm a lawyer, too."

"Oh no. You're counsel, sir. But talking of statues, I've got a better notion for your artist fellow than poor old Prendergast. Why shouldn't he make a picture of a fancy statue to John Heron? Mammon, you know.'

"I'll see about it," said Morland, a little absently. "I'll wish you good-night now. Have I got to speak anywhere to-morrow?"

"Rather, Mr. Morland. Seven sharp at the Piebald Boar."

"All right. Then make everybody leave me sacredly alone till seven. I'm going to take a day. I want to meditate on—Mammon. A magnificent subject, Mr. Giles! Upon my soul, I believe that fine old Devil is the only creature alive that isn't a sham. I wonder which is really right—Heron or I? . . . No; don't be frightened, Mr. Giles. I shall get up to-morrow in a healthy state of cock-surety, you may be sure."

But of that he was by means really so sure. For he felt as if he were touching a mystery at more than one point; and his confidence in his detective powers and psychological insight was giving way. Guy Derwent was the citizen of Marchgrave, whose name had created so much interest in Miss Vane. Guy Derwent was the man with whom he had travelled from Marchgrave to London, and whom he had last seen on the steps of Number Sixteen, in the street which—by Jove? now that he came to think of it—bore Miss Vane's own name. And Number Sixteen was the entrance to Number Seventeen, the habitation of ghosts and coiners. And at the back of Number Seventeen he had met the two girls of whom one was, if not Miss Vane herself, Miss

Vane's double. And now, while Miss Vane herself was in something very like hiding near Marchgrave, Guy Derwent—last seen at the door of Seventeen, Upper Vane Street—had disappeared from his native town.

Round and round went this whirl, losing in curiosity and gaining in interest because of Marion, until Morland, curious by nature and interested by circumstances, felt that he had a very personal problem to solve. He could not bring himself to remain longer in a state of doubt—no longer possessing any piquancy—whether the girl was worthy of something more than his mere psychological interest or not. Had he been already in love, he would not even have asked the question; but, as he was one to whom love was thinking of coming, but to whom it had not yet come, the question and the answer were all-important things. To present a social nobody, a mere artist, to the Miss Burdons as their future niece, would be delightful; but a combination of circumstances seemed to point to a more serious kind of plunge. And he was the last man to make a plunge blindfold—unless it should ever come to pass that he found himself very much in love indeed. In that case, no doubt, the social philosopher would feel and act exceedingly like any other man.

Before he went to bed—not at his usual hour, because he had none—he tried to join the separate pieces of the puzzle together as well as the grievous gaps among them would allow.

As something of a lawyer—despite Mr. Giles—his first course was to arrange the pieces together in point of time.

On such a day, Guy Derwent, shipbroker, travelled from Marchgrove to London.

On the next, he was calling at Number Sixteen—practically identical with Number Seventeen—Upper Vane Street.

Immediately afterwards, the police had made a raid upon both houses, making, fortunately or unfortunately, no arrests, but amply demonstrating that the houses were a centre of an elaborate system of crime.

Guy Derwent—like everybody connected with that system—had disappeared.

During the visible escape of one of the criminals, a girl precisely resembling Miss Vane had been present—not impossibly aiding.

Miss Vane had herself admitted her acquaintance with Marchgrave in general, and with Guy Derwent in special.

These, divested of gossip and surmises, were all the facts, which served of themselves to connect Number Seventeen, Guy Derwent, and Miss Vane. They might point in a hundred directions; but inseparable they remained.

"And suppose they do—what then?" asked Morland, when he woke, not over early, the next morning. "I'm not a detective nor a thief-catcher. No doubt these people know their own affairs best; and why should I make their troubles harder? . . . But—no; that girl is pure and honest; that I'll swear. There are truths beyond the philosophy of a detective; and this is one. What right have I, or has

any man, to go on suspecting a girl of being the consort of thieves and murderers when a little energy could clear her; perhaps save her from becoming what she is not yet—thank Heaven? 'Mind your own business,' indeed—as if everybody's business isn't everybody else's; and as if any sort of business weren't the better for overhauling. No; the business *is* none of mine; and *therefore* I'm bound to see to it; and therefore I will."

And so Mr. Prendergast, sitting gloomingly in his office, was taken aback by the presentation by the office-boy of a card bearing the name of "Mr. Draycot Morland." Had the card been inscribed "Satan," he would not have been more appalled. London must not hope to comprehend what politics mean in Marchgrave until it learns how to love and how to hate—things for which we have altogether insufficient time.

"Mr. Prendergast?" asked Morland politely, hat in hand. "Mr. Prendergast may I ask you when you last heard from Mr. Derwent; and where is he now?"

Mr. Prendergast was a mild, a patent, and, of late, a long-suffering man. But to long-suffering, patience and mildness there must needs be limits. For weeks past he had been asked in the offices, in the streets, nay, in the sanctuary of the Bell, "Where is Mr. Derwent—Now?" And he knew, all the while, that the question was not asked out of kindly interest; he suspected that it was not asked even out of so pardonable a motive as that of getting a rise out of an inoffensive man. There was a cruelty about it, which he could not understand. It was bad enough, coming from the clerks of other shipbrokers and from his boon companions at the Bell, not to speak of the street boys. But when the Askness candidate, Draycot Morland, called upon him for the purpose of putting that eternal question, the cup ran over, and the worm turned.

"Sir," said he, sternly "I don't know!"

And, as if that fierce retort were not enough, he added:

"And—I don't care!"

Morland nodded approvingly. "Quite right, Mr. Prendergast," said he. "There's nothing like showing a bold, defiant front to the enemy. But you needn't be afraid that I'm come canvassing. I know Mr. Derwent's political opinions, and your own, much too well to dream of turning them—at present, of course, for I mean to do that one of these days. And I hope you don't think I've come to pry or spy."

"I don't know what you've come for, Mr. Morland. But I do know this, that you've put me an insulting, insolent question, for which—for which ——"

"Allow me to apologize. And I hope you'll allow me to do even more. Political opponents may be personal friends, I hope, without any sham; and I some weeks ago had the pleasure of a violent political quarrel with Mr. Derwent which left me with the friendliest impression of him. He was to have visited me in my chambers in London before he went away; and I quite looked forward to the satisfaction of finding

him among the adversaries here whom I mean to turn into friends. And I want to hear where he is, because—because I am anxious about him, from things I have heard. And—so are you."

Mr. Prendergast fidgetted and scratched his wig." "I can't answer any questions, Mr. Morland. These are business secrets which I'm bound not to disclose. For any information you may legitimately require, I must refer you to Mr. Heron, Chapter Lane."

"Mr. Heron is in communication with Mr. Derwent, then?"

"Of course. Unquestionably. Every day."

"Giles was right," thought Morland; "that fellow knows no more of his master's movements than I do. And what's more—he's anxious, though he won't even whisper to himself that he is so. We'll, if Heron knows where he is and all about him, of course it's all right, and things are a good deal simplified. But—it's a capital chance of meeting old Mammon face to face. I will."

But first he dropped in at his committee-room, and, by means of inquiries easily made without any appearance of special purpose, learned that Guy Derwent was a man of irreproachable character and reputation—a rising man, moreover, of equally excellent commercial and personal credit, backed by the Great Bank, and high in the favour and confidence of the King of Marchgrave. This was the jealous testimony of opponents given in the heat of party strife; to suspect such a man of complicity with a gang of London coiners was prodigiously absurd. In short, the problem had changed its conditions. Here was a man of high mark and character in his native town who, in the course of a journey abroad on business, had called at a den of thieves. "No; I'll not call in Chapter Lane," thought Morland, "after all. It's just those irreproachable provincials who daren't step an inch from the straight line in their own town that give a kick over the traces where they can. That can't be twisted into any business of mine."

But his heart could not help sinking a little as he felt that to put aside Guy Derwent in this way was also to think the worst of the girl he had seen at the backdoor; and that, despite of all evidence, he could not bring himself to do. So he changed his mind once more.

"There's no harm in asking old Mammon if everything is really all square and above-board," he urged at last. "Old Murder was really anxious—and—come; no Sham! So am I."

He was the last person to think of the gossip that would arise from the private and personal visit of one candidate to the other in a place like Marchgrave; and he was the first, if he had thought of it, to make a point of giving it a good start with plenty of food to feed on.

No doubt within half-a-minute of his arrival at the bank it was all over the town that Morland was closeted with Heron, with ten thousand reasons why. The banker was himself surprised; and looked so.

"I feel rather like a lamb in the lion's den," said the visitor, with a smile. "Ought we to shake hands? I've been doing so very much my best against you with my fists that I'm not sure whether ——"

"Yes; I've heard that you've been laying yourself out to hit hard,"

said John Heron. "I'm afraid I must own that I have not yet had the pleasure of reading your speeches myself; but I am told they are very good indeed. By all means let us shake hands. I am very glad to see you, I'm sure."

Now it is not agreeable to find that one's eloquence has been thrown away; that the one man has been overwhelming with scathing rhetoric for weeks together has not even troubled himself to know what we have said of him. Morland felt rather like a toy terrier who has been trying to worry a mastiff—that is to say, exceedingly small. However, the terrier does not suffer from loss of self-esteem for long; nor did he.

"I was referred by old—Mr. Prendergast to you, as able to give me the present address of Mr. Derwent, with whom I have some acquaintance, though of the slightest."

"Of Mr. Derwent? He is on business—abroad."

"So I am told. Can you tell me when he will return?"

"It is impossible to say."

"Of course you are in communication with him?"

"Certainly," said John Heron, after a pause too slight to be observed.

"And if I write to him to your care, it will be forwarded?"

"It will reach him in due time. But if it is on business, I am attending to his affairs ——"

"Oh no. It's purely personal. By the way, they seem to be talking a great deal of nonsense about Derwent in Marchgrave. However, as you know all about his movements ——"

"Yes, Mr. Morland. A great deal of nonsense *is* talked in Marchgrave, I am sorry to say. But I am glad to say it is not by Marchgrave men."

"Meaning Me?"

The banker shrugged his shoulders.

"However, so far as Mr. Derwent is concerned you may make yourself easy. You are aware that business is very often a delicate matter, and ——"

Morland felt himself bowed out; and he was conscious, besides, that he, with all the impudence and *sang-froid* on which he plumed himself, had no chance of coping with the heavier force of his opponent, who, without a single effort, seemed to bear him down. Then Guy Derwent was no criminal—no creature of mystery. He had not disappeared; he had simply been taking advantage of a flight through London to see life, as young men will. It was worse than a mystery; for everything seemed now to reflect upon Marion, and he hated that notion more and more.

Having nothing else for the moment to occupy him, he strolled to the lodging he had taken for the caricaturist whom he had picked up by way of a Bohemian whim; and, finding the fellow out, amused himself while waiting by lazily turning over a volume of sketches.

"By Jove! if he hasn't got Heron already," said he. "But this is a portrait—not a caricature. And—but what's this?" he almost exclaimed aloud, as he lifted up the carefully-pencilled outline of the face of a girl.

CHAPTER XXI.

"LEAVE ILL ALONE."

The portrait of a girl.

And why not in any artist's portfolio? In what portfolio is there no such thing?

But it must be either real or ideal. If it be a fancy portrait, the betting is a thousand to one against its being the picture of any actual girl; if real, then ten thousand to one. It was more like a million to one that Draycot Morland's caricaturist had not made this sketch without an intimate knowledge of the features of Miss Vane—nay more, without that greater knowledge which alone can enable the swiftest of artists to reproduce the expression of the soul.

That the fellow he had picked from the gutter had some sort of genius he knew. But genius was far from being enough to account for such a coincidence as this, even though without genius some knowledge, however intimate, must have failed. Though not yet in love, Draycot Morland was touched enough in fancy to be convinced that the world did not, and could not, contain two Miss Vanes. Of course that might be the worse for the world or the better—probably the better. And that only made it all the more likely that this mysterious young woman was unique; and that his artist's genius in this instance had come in at the eyes.

While he was examining the artist's work, the artist himself entered—a cadaverous, almost deformed, creature, shabby and morose—the last whom anybody less deliberately eccentric than Draycot Morland would dream of selecting as likely to excel in caricature. Rather would any ordinary critic have set him down as a seer of visions, and a dreamer of dreams wholly outside the world of politics, or even of much less savage and sordid things.

"Who's this, Ray?" asked Morland. "She's an uncommonly pretty girl."

"Oh, I never remember names. A face is a face ——"

"No, it isn't. It's nothing of the kind."

"A rose by any ——"

"No, it wouldn't. Call it a pigstye, and see if the notion of pigs don't somehow get into the nose. I'd give you five guineas for this if it had a name."

The artist made no answer. His thoughts seemed suddenly to go off after wool.

"What I like about you, Ray," said Morland, "is that you are such a jolly sort of fellow. Of course it was your genius that drew me first; but it doesn't follow that because one admires a man one's bound to

like him. The joviality does not lie on the surface, I own ; but that's because it's so deep down."

"You are right there," sighed the artist. "I'm not easy to understand."

"A man who could do this," said Morland, touching the sketch, "ought not to have had the streets for his studio. Come—don't fire up. I mean to be offensive, so as to get that part of the business over. I give you full leave to say that a fellow like me oughtn't to be raking gutter politics for garbage. All I want is to set up a system of mutual frankness, so that we may understand one another. You are a mystery ; and a mystery is to me like a red flag is to a bull. I am bound to go for it, whatever it may be."

Now, Draycot Morland no more believed in the mysteriousness of Stephen Ray than he did in that of any other helplessly clever man who is born to be drowned. But he did mean to fathom the mystery of Miss Vane ; and he had learned enough of human nature to know that the way to the heart of any mystery is to touch the spring labelled "Vanity."

"You are right there," the artist again sighed ; "a mystery I am."

"Then have a cigar. It's my opinion, Ray, that you are the victim of a conspiracy."

Stephen Ray's eyes suddenly turned upon Morland with a blaze of interest.

"How in the devil's own name did you find out that?" asked he.

"Then I am right ; and you are?"

"It is a comfort for once to meet with an appreciative mind. Understand me, Mr. Morland ; I refuse anything in the shape of patronage. I speak to you simply as man to man ——"

"Nay ; as one who has been touched by the divine spark may condescend to speak to common unillumined clay."

"Mr. Morland," said the genius, putting out his exquisite fingers, "if I were not an artist, I would be a critic like you."

Morland looked at the fingers—long, white, and taper—never before had he seen such, save once only, and that was in the case of a famous French pickpocket, at whose trial he had been present as a casual spectator in the course of one of his foreign tours. "Art is truly one!" thought he. But he said nothing more. The angler in the sea of vanity, if he be skilful, never wastes his bait. The fish that has once bitten, the more it is left alone, the more surely it will rise. And even as Morland looked for, so it proved.

"This is a good weed," coughed Stephen. "Almost as good as some I used to have myself in other times—not quite, but pretty near. That's the worst of Art ; it impoverishes the true artist while enriching the world. I might have been a rich man if I pleased. It's pleasant for once to talk to somebody who understands. I've been a victim of destiny, Mr. Morland, all my days."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. There are periods of history where I should have had a

great part to play. And therefore, by the law of circumstance, I am born into an age where I am bound to have none but that of martyr and slave."

"But isn't the part of martyr a big one—the biggest of all? I am a martyr, Mr. Ray. It's my profession; and, in my opinion, there's none better going. Only, of course, like any other, it wants industry and strict attention to business, and all that sort of thing. Now I doubt if you're altogether a business man?"

"So you think that, do you? Then I tell you this—it isn't that I'm not a man of business; it's that nobody else is, that I'm the only one—the only sane human being in a world of madmen and fools!"

"By Jove!"

"Understand me, Mr. Morland; I don't mean you. You have shown me that—that—if you can't produce, you can appreciate; and that's what I've never found before."

Morland felt that he was beginning to read the artist like a book. But he was still a long way off from reaching his aim—getting the victim of circumstance and of crazy self-conceit to throw light upon the story of the girl whom his pencil had reproduced so faithfully without putting him on his guard. For the more crazy one's witness, the more cautiously one has to move.

But there was no good in beating about the bush for ever.

"Now this young woman, for example," he said meditatively. "She must have been another fish out of her element in Upper Vane Street. To look at her, one would think her a princess; to look at you, one would take you for a—a ——. And yet both of you—well, it's a queer world."

He spoke very quietly, and as if nothing were more a matter of course than that any given people should be members of a coining firm. If his shot missed altogether, he would know how to recover himself by pleading jest or abstract hypothesis, or any of a hundred things that any moderately ingenious mind will at once perceive. But there was no need to revoke. Mr. Stephen Ray dropped his cigar, and forgot to pick it up again.

"Oh, I'm not prudish," said Morland, with a pleasant smile. "Bless you, I'd as soon be friends with a law-breaker as with a law-maker, any day—sooner, for there'd be no law-breakers if nobody made any laws. Don't you know that when I'm in the House I'm going in for the total abolition of all restraints on everything? There can't be criminals if there's no criminal laws. So now you know my principles."

"And honour them!" cried the artist, his eyes suddenly ablaze. "Mr. Morland—when you go forth into the streets I claim the right to plant the first red flag upon the first barricade!"

"Then—when I do you shall, Citizen Ray! Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality—eh? No more prisons; no more—no more—anything. Ray—you shall play Marat to my Robespierre. We'll contest our elections with the guillotine; and we'll strike off our adversaries' heads instead of polling our own. But we shall want a Madame Roland. No

woman – no revolution ; that's the universal rule. Let me see—she must be beautiful ; she must be young ; she must have a soul, and that soul must be in the cause. Let me see—would this do ; Miss—Miss—Vane ?" asked Morland, holding up the picture.

"Miss Furness ?" asked Ray nervously.

"No. . . . Yes. . . . No."

"Of course—Miss Furness," Morland corrected himself quietly. "I'm a regular fool about names. I was thinking of the street, you see. Miss Marion Furness. Now my opinion is she *would* do."

"You know *her* ?" asked Ray.

"Haven't you made out that I know pretty well most things ?" asked Morland.

"Isn't it my business," went on that imaginative and not wholly unscrupulous young man, partly in jest, partly pretending for a purpose, partly honestly and earnestly (for the moment) adopting in good faith the *rôle* of revolutionist ; he assumed, "isn't it my business to enrol for the good of the world at large all those great associations which bad laws compel to waste themselves upon law-made crime ? That was the idea of that great and good man, Robert Hood, of Huntingdon ; and by that idea alone social and political salvation comes to the world. Yes, my friend, philosophy has tried and failed. Christianity has tried and failed. Philanthropy has tried, and miserably, ignominiously failed. Science and education, of course, have failed. Law has worse than failed : it hasn't even tried. Therefore, it is time to call in, not the tyrants and oppressors and people who tell other people to be good in order that they themselves may have the monopoly of profitable evil—not those, but the victims and the martyrs, absurdly called criminals, who alone know what is wanted ; who alone have nothing to lose, and everything to gain. . . . By Jove !" he thought to himself, "if I havent got hold of the right end of the stick at last—upon my soul if I don't believe that it's a grand idea—of course if the world is down-side up, obviously the way to right it is to turn it upside down. And to think that it never occurred to any human being before. . . . Yes ; I do know her. I look for the realization of the future of humanity to us three—the woman who inspires ; the genius who is inspired ; the man who translates their inspiration into words and deeds—Marion Furness, Stephen Ray, and Draycot Morland. There's one other man still wanting, though. Your establishment in Vane Street, citizen, seems to have been the model of what a Secret Society should be. We must get at Mr. Ward."

"Damn him !" cried Stephen, whose brain, what with vane glory and fanaticism, was becoming on fire. "No !"

"But I say Yes !" said Morland, not dreaming of the twin devils he had been raising in the rudderless, ballastles, soul, whereon he thought himself so skilfully playing.

"No," repeated Stephen Ray. "I have not overthrown a tyrant to submit myself to him again—I have not turned like the worm on Adam Furness to crawl under his boot a second time."

It was as if from those slender, helpless-looking fingers that Draycot

Morland had received a blow to make Samson reel. It was true, then; than what he had dreaded, the dawning truth was worse by far. Marion Vane was named Marion Furness, and Adam Furness was the actual name of the mysterious financier, known to his neighbours in Upper Vane Street, and to the police, as Mr. Ward. Doubtless, it enhanced her interest from the student's point of view. But he had staked upon her virtue, and even upon her innocence, despite all appearance, his whole capacity for judging human nature; the whole of that, and perhaps something very different from judicial capacity, and a great deal more.

"I see; She is his wife," he said, in a voice from which all the life had gone.

"Who is whose wife?" asked Stephen Ray

"Marion Furness," gulped Morland, no longer lingering on the name.

"Adam's daughter? *Whose* wife?" cried Stephen, with a note of rage.

"His daughter?"

Well—that was better; it was almost a relief for a moment, to find that the girl who had advanced so far into his heart was the daughter of a man whom the law was seeking for a life of guilt, crowned with murder. But it was sorry comfort. The moment's relief left the greater blankness behind. It was all deplorably inconsistent, no doubt. He should have rejoiced that his demand for a criminal heroine had been so promptly answered. But—well, if all mankind had been created consistent, Draycot Morland would have been the exception to the rule. Yet it seemed so hidiously impossible that the girl from whom he had parted but yesterday on the banks of the Aske should have been more than the daughter, the associate and companion, of Adam Furness, the coiner and murderer. Had she been only the daughter, he would have been the last to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children, even to but one generation. But the abettor of Adam Furness—the friend of Stephen Ray, and of heaven who knew else—it was more than horrible. And the finger of love that had been laid upon him felt like a poisoned sting.

"You damned Adam Furness," he said dreamily. "Why? Was he not the chief of you all?"

"I damned him; and I do. He shall not have a little finger in the cause. He ——"

"What cause? Oh, I remember. *The* Cause. Well?"

"He found me—an artist, if there ever was one; he took advantage of my necessities, of my misfortunes; he made me do slave's work for slave's pay. When I protested, he put upon my spirit—an artist's spirit, Mr. Morland—an insult such as no man, no worm, of any spirit would bear. He ——"

"In short, you hate him?"

"I hate all tyrants, Mr. Morland. All."

"All right. . . . Then you must set to work against tyrant number one—to wit—John Heron. It's true he's only tyrant of March-

grave ; but one must begin somewhere. My agent suggests that you make a burlesque design for the statue they're putting up to him at the Cross ; You might see your way. Have you ever seen the man ? No ? Then I must put you in the way. By the way—what became of Guy Derwent ?"

"Guy Derwent ? I don't know the name. Who was he ?"

"Perhaps he had an *alias* too. A friend of Miss Furness—you'll see I know something when I tell you that he was at your place in Upper Vane Street just before the police came down."

Stephen Ray put his hand suddenly to his temples, as if to keep his wits from flying away.

"I hate all tyrants," he murmured—"all. No, I never heard the name. He wasn't one of the slaves. If he had been, I and Cynthia would have known. Not being one—if he put his foot into the place —one thing's certain : it would never have gone out again."

"Why—what the devil do you mean ?"

"I don't know what I mean ; but I ——" The bewildered look passed from his face. "Excuse me, sir," he said, almost humbly ; "I mean nothing—nothing at all. I'm of a highly artistic temperament, and I get excited about little things. You spoke of something you wanted of my pencil. Well—you've hired me. It's despicable ; but I suppose I was born to be a slave."

"Not to me."

Morland spoke merely for the sake of speaking, for he had by no means misunderstood the significance of the grim hint that had oozed out of Stephen Ray with regard to the fate of any intrusive or unauthorized visitor to Number Seventeen, or its neighbour next door. Into what labyrinth of murder had he strayed—after a girl ?

He shuddered and shrank back, as one who, opening an innocent-looking chest, finds it full to the brim of mouldering bones. He muttered to himself :

"Leave ill alone."

He satisfied his restlessness by taking his artist to his agent—that Mr. Smith whom Askness gold had rendered a traitor to Marchgrave. Mr. Smith was fertile in artistic suggestions, possible and impossible, but proved perfectly amenable to the proposition that it might be advisable for a caricaturist, before proceeding to business, to have a good look at the object to be caricatured ; and, by a stroke of good fortune, it so happened that it was one of the days for the city petty sessions, at which the most active of all the justices was certain to attend.

"And it's a busy day for Marchgrave altogether," said he—"market day, petty sessions, election of mayor. He'd better go to the Shire Hall ; I'll put Mr. Thingamy at the solicitor's table, where he'll be able to take off John Heron's phiz under his very nose."

So said, so done. Thanks to the good offices of Mr. Smith the cadaverous stranger, resembling nothing so much as a pair of eyes with a rude human sketch attached thereto, obtained a good place at

the table. But presently, as if the concentration of the eyes around him had the effect of heat upon vapour, he seemed to melt away, until his place became empty. Morland, sitting on the bench, rubbed his eyes, but the creature had certainly vanished, and that in a ghostly way; nor did it return—at any rate in visible form.

Meanwhile John Heron himself, after having shown Draycot Morland the door, had returned to the multifarious business that every day inevitably brought to Chapter Lane. This finished without more than ordinary interruption, he could give his whole mind for a few moments to his private, or rather much more private, affairs.

The man at whose mercy he was, and all the great purposes of his life, were bought off and banished for a poor seventy thousand pounds—if that could be! But he knew the Snell tribe too well. What would be seventy times seventy thousand pounds to a Wyndham Snell? They would be spent, or squandered, or gambled away before the purchaser of peace could realize his purchase for an hour. And then back would roll the rolling stone, barren of moss, and imperative for more. And yet, none the less, the sum demanded must be given even now, unless ——

Yes, the moment had come at last when he must choose between his whole life's work – the one great thing he lived for—and the life of—a man. No, of a Wyndham Snell.

How but in one way could he choose? What was one wretched life to Marchgrave's greatness and glory for ever? And Marion—honestly would he have purchased peace for himself by giving up the fight if it were not for the great work on which he had by now set every living atom of his soul. Even the thought of his child, any more than that of his wife, had no right to confuse so clear an alternative as that which lay plainly before him. One despicable life—why for one moment should he pause? He had not paused when Redbeard's throat had been in his left and his knife in his right hand. He had never felt a moment's remorse for that. Why should he pause before so much slighter a thing?

He could find no reason for a single instant's pause—unless it were for decision as to the surest means. Though deliberate murder had been rendered needful, it was essentially a case in which discovery would be infinitely worse than crime. Poison? He could invite the doctor to Askholm, or better still, to The Cedars, where nobody would dream of a more than formal inquest on any guest of John Heron, of Chapter Lane. A walk along the river by the cliff path, and a sudden fall? That, too, was worth consideration; for death might be insured by a strong grip before the push, and anybody might stumble over a broken cliff-side. Or a trip in a boat, with the bottom of the Aske for a haven. That, in many respects, might be the best of all, for the Aske mud was an accomplice that would never tell tales; and—the grim thought would come, as such things will come at the most incongruous times—the new docks would base themselves on the body of the doctor in a very literal way.

"No," thought he; "to doubt is mere cowardly folly. There is *no* reason why I should spare this man. And what is the use of reason if it gives way by an inch before some scruple of nerves? A queer thing conscience must be—to strain at removing an obstacle in the way of a great scheme. Why, there's no single life worth regarding—no, not my own, if it stood in the way. No; there's only one way to keep nerves in order. Crush them down." At any rate, he was in this much different from others—the temptation he fought against was, not to smite, but to spare.

With deliberate murder, therefore, in his heart, and his brains busy with the means, the magistrate proceeded from his bank to the Guildhall.

"Good-day, Mr. Mayor!" whispered Mr. Alderman Sparrow to his colleague. "You're unanimously elected, Heron. And of course *you'll* serve. I know I oughn't to let the cat out of the bag; but I thought it better you should be prepared."

John Heron nodded gravely.

"A warrant to back sir," said the clerk below him, handing up a document to the Mayor-elect of Marchgrave.

John Heron took it and read it slowly.

"I see" he said "I suppose it is all in form?"

With fingers that did not tremble, a warrant for the apprehension of one Adam Furness, charged with being at large before his sentence of transportation had expired, was signed and handed to a constable in waiting by John Heron.

At the same moment, the magistrate, glancing to the gallery, encountered the blazing eyes of Stephen Ray.

CHAPTER XXII.

IT COMES.

When Marion returned from her sketching, she saw nothing of the woman who, impelled by so tragically grotesque a demon, had pursued her to so unlikely a place as Askholm. Nay—despite the belief that all things about to happen to us project themselves, in the form of reflections, upon our souls, was she conscious of a single presentiment; of a single feeling that a new shadow had been cast across her pathway. She saw, it is true, a middle-aged woman in black irregularly hurrying along the roadway; but such a sight is not uncommon anywhere in the world, and she had no reason for connecting it with thoughts of Mrs. Snell—who, indeed, had well-nigh passed altogether out of her mind. If the figure looked in the least degree familiar, that was no doubt because it was common. But, in truth, she did not

give a second look, much less a real whole thought, to so insignificant a meeting.

And, indeed, had it been otherwise, any passing shadow of curiosity would have very soon indeed have passed away under another much more direct interruption to the monotony of her days.

She took off her hat and shawl, and stood, half idly, half critically, before the canvas on the big easel which had afforded Mrs. Snell so convenient a covert. But presently she began thinking. It was strange that she should have met Draycot Morland for a second time—exceedingly strange. But it was infinitely less strange than that the wind of destiny should have blown her, of all places in the whole wild world, straight to Marchgrave; almost the one spot where she would almost have given her right hand not to be. Within easy sight, within arm's length, so to speak, was the gray tower of which she had so often heard Guy Derwent speak on board the *Sumatra*, beneath whose shelter was to have been her home for the rest of her days. Guy Derwent himself was there, even now; and what was to prevent her meeting him by a no more out-of-the-way chance than she had met the other? True, she had besought Morland to keep her secret; and she had faith in him as a gentleman. But she had no means of measuring the degree of his intimacy of Guy; and who can compel secrets to keep themselves!

And—if by chance or design—he should discover her, which God forbid, what should she say, and what should she do? She had not surrendered one least atom of her will—of her resolve that, come what come might, she must be nothing more to him than a memory, nor he to her than a temptation of evil. More than ever was she now aware what manner of man was her father; more than ever was she bound, by outward oath and inward will, to do her dead mother's duty by him, which had now become her own. But she none the less, or rather all the more, felt in her heart that to will all these things to herself in solitude meant something very different indeed from what it would be if her lost lover were brought back to her, persuading her heart to rebellion against her new allegiance and loyalty. There was nothing she could say to him—nothing she could explain. She would have to resist in bitter silence—it might be that she would have to act towards one who was ranged on the side of law and oppression as if he were her father's foe, and therefore her own.

Then, even amid such reflections as these, she, standing before the work of her own hands, could not but be conscious of the praise, the first praise, she had received that morning. Self-consciousness had been touched in her in another way; and she thought, since she must forswear the full life of a woman, that she could be content to live among woods, hills and rivers with her pencil, and still find it far from empty. If art could never possess her, as it may possess a man, making love, and one's own heart, and the hearts of others of slight account thereby, still she felt she could find in it an asylum, wherein assurance of bread, with even some modicum of fame, were not to be despised. If one cannot be praised by one, the next best thing is to be praised by all. Morland had told her she was a painter—was in

truth what she was seeming to be for the sake of disguise. Was it true? And if true what meant this new caprice of destiny?

It would not have mattered what she was, once upon a time, when her hand lay in Guy's, with her heart in it and contented. But it mattered a great deal, now that her hand was no longer something to be caressed, but something to fight with—it might be, to prove both sword and shield.

Suddenly, in the midst of her double thoughts, she was aware of a shadow passing the window; and before she could glance round, a well-remembered footstep, slow and heavy, told her that He at last, her Father, had come.

He nodded to her gravely and somewhat absently as he entered the room.

"I was here about an hour or so ago," he said, looking hastily round the room, as men do who have acquired a habit of being on their guard against little things. "But you were out. How long have you been in?"

She remembered his orders that at nothing that might happen, at nobody that might come, was she to show the least sign of surprise. Not that discovery of the close neighbourhood of Marchgrave had left her much capacity for being taken by surprise—not to speak of other things. Did her father's coming mean Action? She had fancied herself to be hungry for action; and yet, now that its possible time had come, she was conscious of an inconsistent and disloyal pang. This season of solitude and rest had become sweeter than she knew; and it had not even yet had time to oppress and to pall.

"Not very long," said she.

"I meant to have seen you long ago; but something was always in the way. You have been really painting, I see. All the better; it makes things so much the simpler. . . . Your mother could paint, too; she did most things well, I think; all except one; and that, unluckily, was the most important of all. I'm hot, and tired, and worried altogether. Bring me something to drink—anything. Water will do."

"Are you safe—still?"

"Yes," said Adam shortly, and examining the canvas—clearly in no talking mood.

What Marion did was perhaps the last thing that would occur to anybody suddenly called upon to entertain an escaped convict who was at once forger, coiner, and murderer. She made tea.

And, somehow, she made it so quickly that, man and all athirst as he was, he had scarcely time to be impatient at the delay inseparable from tea-making. She set out the homeliest of cups on a white cloth and ministered to him silently.

Presently he looked round at greater leisure, and could not but be aware, after his battle with Dr. Snell, that peace and quiet had stretched their wings over him for a short but unspeakably refreshing spell. He had escaped from the close and oppressive dignity of his bank-parlour in Chapter Lane, and from the luxury of his home at

The Cedars. Rude and homely as was the cottnge he had taken for secret interviews and sudden emergencies, it held none of his troubles —now at least that Dr. Snell had left him for a while. No longer had he to play before the city to which he had given his brain and his soul the part of irreproachable magnate ; no longer had he, at home, to play a yet harder part before the woman who believed herself to be his lawful wife, and who loved him even better than Marchgrave honoured him. And, at the same time, no longer had he to play to himself the part that was hardest to play of all—that of audacious criminal, while all the while his real soul was, through and through, and with hungry passion, on the side of truth, the honour and the honesty on which he based what crime had made imposture. Here were no fellow-citizens to overwhelm him with deluded beliefs--no Kate to chatter loving questions that racked him to answer until a hundred times he had wished her well out of the world.

The sun was setting ; and the softened rays streamed pleasantly through the lattice on the snow-white cloth and humble crockery, catching also the sky on the canvas, and making it look like a window into wider world of peace beyond. Through the window, which he faced from his wicker chair, he could see the whole sweep of the broad and sluggish Aske, no longer broken by mud shoals and sandbanks, over which the tide had flowed, but bearing hear and there a white or red-brown sail. And, but for the slow and steady tick of the wooden clock in the corner, and the caw of homeward-bound rooks, sound there was none. There was deeper stillness even than the sleepiness of Marchgrave Close on a Sunday afternoon.

Could it be, he felt, sitting opposite to Marion, that he was a man hunted down by the law, his hand red with a fellow-creature's blood, bondslave of the vilest of jackals, baffled in every desire, and only desperately avoiding the hulks of the gallows by leading two hostile lives, of which each was a lie ?

It seemed impossible—unless for the hour, he was leading yet a third life still. It was like going to sleep, and better ; for he was not troubled with what he might say or do in a dream. For a long time—or it might have been a short one—he sat and mused.

"Marion," said he.

"I am here."

"I have something to say to you—something very important indeed."

She was all eager attention : Something was at last to come.

"When you marry," said Adam—it startled her, in spite of her warning. But he went on—"When you marry, remember that your husband will have two rights ; to be sacredly observed. One is—for you to remember, always, that every man has troubles and worries every day of his life, more and greater than any woman has to face in a year, and very few in a lifetime ; and always of a kind that his wife can never—never understand. The other right is—never to find a single worry waiting for him at home ; to feel that whatever be the weather outside, he is sure of warmth, sunshine, comfort and peace the moment

he enters his own door. . . . All misery in marriage, bar none, comes from women forgetting these two things."

There is certainly no reason why a criminal should not homilise on the art of domestic happiness over the teatable: few things are really incongruous, whatever they may seem. Nevertheless, such discourse as this Marion never dreamed of hearing when her father, after so long a silence, spoke her name.

She shook her head with a little resolute smile.

"I shall not need to remember," said she.

"Ah—you mean you'll never marry? Well—I hope you won't: though I dare say you will. And I'm inclined to think he'll be lucky that gets you. For here I sit, as full of trouble as any man on this devil's earth; and you haven't worried me with a single question, or a single grumble, ever since I've been in this room. You have made me feel as if—as if—things were as they might have been."

"And may they not be? Are you bound to stay in England? I'm an Australian girl, you know; and it seems to me that everywhere out of Australia everything is always wrong."

"And by—heaven, you're right there. Always, and everything! But it's no use talking that way; my work lies here; and I must grip it, and take my chance of dying before I've done."

"And I—where am I to do *my* share?"

"By—heaven again, Marion, if there were more women like you, there'd be fewer men like me. You don't ask what the work is; you only ask when you are to have your share. . . . I almost feel as if I could trust you: I mean through and through."

She felt herself turn pale with the dread of some new revelation. But it did not come. Presently he looked at his watch: and at the same moment she heard the distant boom of a bell striking the hour. She had heard it daily, when the air was still, or when the wind set from that quarter; but now she knew it to be from Marchgrave: and that Guy Derwent's ears must be hearing it too.

"I must be going now," said Adam; and he did not even say where. "Keep quiet, and go on with your painting. I don't know much about pictures, except what I've been told; but I've paid big prices for things that look to me a good deal worse; and it may come in useful one of these days. I've put some money for you on the chimney-shelf. Good-bye for now."

"You praised me for not asking questions," said she; "but ——"

He frowned a little.

"Yes. I did. And I hope you will earn my praise."

"I only want to know one thing. Am I being of use to you, or are you only keeping me here—because you think you are bound?"

"Oh—that's all. If you never ask worse than that, you'll do no harm. No; I'm not keeping you here because I'm bound. I'm keeping you here because I must have somebody here I can trust at a pinch, and ——"

"Cynthia?"

"What do you know of Cynthia? Oh, I remember. I think there

was something to make one forget things in that tea of yours. No. I don't want Cynthia. I don't want a single creature that knows me. I want somebody with whom one may start afresh, if need be. I don't want cleverness. I want—well, want somebody, anybody, who is *good*, and yet will stand by me—but I didn't come here to talk twaddle. Good-night."

He left her abruptly, and strode, in his heavy way, along the road. And not till he was gone did she recollect that she had forgotten to tell him of her interview with Draycot Morland—her confused reflections, her father's sudden arrival, and the effort she had to make in order to restrain, in his presence, her eager thirst for light, had put out of her head what she felt might be a more important incident than it seemed.

However, that could not be helped now; and, after all, the idea that any harm could come to anybody but herself from such a causal meeting was a matter of instinct rather than of reason. For the rest, that evening had given her thoughts ample food. This terrible and mysterious father of hers, Cain and Ishmael combined, had impressed her in a new way. It was the instinct which even blind and self-conceited reason can trust which told her that, apart from conscience, apart from remorse, apart from outlawry, he was a most unhappy man. Why had he preached to her about domestic troubles? Why had he seemed to snatch at a stray hour's silent peace as men clutch at happy moments that just touch the fingers without closing their wings? Was it grief for her dead mother, and a hopeless regret for what might have been? There had been pathos in every gesture, in every tone, none the less true because he had been ashamed of it, and because he had tried to crush it down. In short, Marion felt that he was wretchedly human; and her heart went out to him.

And, indeed, whither else in the whole wide world had her heart to go?

The next day nothing happened. Nothing indeed—for she did not even go out sketching, for fear (as she put it to herself) of again happening to meet Draycot Morland—who, being interpreted, signified Guy. She worked upon her indoor canvas, and with a quiet interest in her work which surprised herself—ignorant of the way in which over-strung nerves will imitate, at a certain degree of tension, the calm that inariably prognosticates storm. It seemed to her as if, whatever happened, she had to finish that picture; as if it were laid upon her that she could leave something in the world finished from her hands. It was an unconscious feeling only, without even a film of reason, or even of meaning; but it had to be obeyed.

And even likewise passed the next day, and the next. Nothing happened, save the gradual growth of the canvas into the broad Aske at low tide, with the gray sloping woods beyond. It was a sunlit scene; but there was something gloomily solemn even in the sunlight. Her own soul was finding its way into the scene. So absorbed did she become in that indoor work, that she lost the will, as well as the heart to go out of doors.

But she miscalculated sadly if she fancied that absorption in work, or any other sort of self-blinding process, would have any better effect than the well-known contrivance of the ostrich for hiding from the hunters. Mahomet came to the mountain—it was Draycot Morland himself who knocked on the knocker-less door.

"I forgot to ask your address," he said, rather abruptly—for him. "But I enquired after you in the village—and I have something to say to you ; something very serious indeed."

Now that, from a young man to a young woman should, by all the rules, mean only one thing. But she was living altogether outside rules ; and for her, at any rate, it could mean no more than to a nun.

Bearing in mind the one duty hitherto laid upon her, to show no sort of surprise, but regretting more than ever her forgetfulness to tell her father of this complication, immaterial though it seemed to be, she only looked her inquiry, and let him follow her indoors.

"I hardly know," he said, "how to begin. . . . But—hang it all, Miss Vane, I don't see why I shouldn't know. An accident, which most people, I suppose, would call a strange one, has . . . Well, has made me find out who you really are. Do you understand ?"

"No," she said ; but she could not quite keep back a quick gasp as she spoke ; for she was afraid—as a child in a dark passage may be, who hears a rustle in a corner.

"You needn't be afraid of me. I'm an eccentric sort of person, you know—it's my business to fly in the face of—things at large. Among my Marchgrave friends is a certain lawyer, who has associations with the police, and is a sort of a weasel by nature. And he tells me that there's a warrant out against one Adam Furness, for being unlawfully at large. He ought not to have told me, and of course I ought not to tell you. But I do."

"A warrant—for being at large ?" echoed Marion, visibly pale, and feeling that the circle was beginning to close.

"It seems some woman or other has been telling the police where he's to be found."

"*Here ?*"

Her head was beginning to reel, despite all commands.

"I think I would rather not know that. I suppose you're wondering what affair this is of mine—why I should bring warning. I'll tell you, to show you that you may trust me without fear. Miss Vane—I have not seen you often ; but often enough to know, as well as I know myself, that it is not your nature to be mixed up with crime. You are a mystery to me still ; but not more, I suppose, than everybody is a mystery to everybody, when all's said and done. . . . No man who knows the world need look at a woman twice to know whether she's all right or all wrong ; and—in a woman—there's nothing between. You are living in horrible peril—I can see that ; and I want to save you, if I can. No—not 'if' ; I *will*. You must tell Adam Furness what I have come here to tell you ; and if he is the man I think him, forewarned is forearmed. He is nothing to me ; but you are—

well, a very great deal. He must escape : and you---you must take your right place in life ; the place Heaven, or whatever you call it, made you for . . . Miss Furness, I've thought it all over, from top to bottom, and through and through. I don't care a single half-hang for that confoundedest of Shams, the World. . . I'm not going to make fine speeches ; that's all humbug and sham—but . . . Be my Wife. There !"

Not to be startled---whatever happened ; whoever came ? The command went to the winds.

If was a strange way of wooing—as strange, perhaps, as his method of electioneering. But there was not the less earnestness in his eyes and in his tone. For, in truth, if he had searched the world round for fifty years, never could he have found a better chance of flying in its face and letting his whole self go. He had thought it all out during the four miles of rail between Marchgrave and Askholm. The girl was interesting, mysteriously, fascinatingly interesting, from head to heel. She had beauty ; she had genius ; she had all the unmistakable impress of purity ; she was a varitable Una. But she was a Una in peril—body and soul ; Una still, but Una surrounded with an atmosphere of masculine crime that must needs end in feminine sin. It was she whom he had seen in Eastwood Mews. It was she whom he had found living on her wits (on no worse as yet) at the great hotel. It was she who was even now keeping house for the arch-criminal portrayed by Stephen Ray. She had to be saved. Where Una was, there must the Knight of the Red Cross also be. Did he love her? No. That was all gammon and sham. But—she had to be saved. And Draycot Morland's whole heart laughed at the thought of what Aunt Anne and Aunt Charlotte would say- if they knew.

But it is late in the day, and little to the purpose, to speculate on Whys and Wherefores in connection with Draycot Morland. He was He. And—to go to the bottom of things at once—I fear that an instinct to the effect that, of all women on earth, to marry Marion Furness was just about the maddest thing he could do, lay at the root of his impulse fully as much as chivalry—though that also was there.

So—"Be my wife !" said he.

Marion wandered to the open window for air. She could not doubt the zeal of his wooing, strange as it seemed. Nay—under the influence carried by all earnestness, she felt something of what mingled in his bidding ; of the pity, the chivalry that was ashamed of itself, the generously overmastering desire to save.

So, breathing deeply, she turned and held out her hand.

"No," said she humbly. "No ; though—though I almost think I understand ! Have I—has *he*—found one good friend ? Oh, Mr. Morland—don't you spoil your goodness ! Don't, ask me what I can't give ; and never can. . . . You are right ; I *am* Marion Furness ; and my father's life is mine. . . . Oh, what *can* I say ?"

"Say, 'Yes,'" he said, taking the hand she gave him. "Never mind love, and all that rot. You need me—and I want you."

She thought of that twilight scene on board the *Sumatra*, and sighed

—she almost smiled, as she drew her hand away. It did not, after all, seem a case in which a "No" was a cruel thing.

"I don't want---so much as that, to make me trust you," said she. "I am never going to be anybody's wife; and if I were—how could I think of such nonsence---of such things, I mean, when. . . . Don't *you* understand? You say you know who my father is. His life is mine."

If he had not seen that she was as far above his offer as the sun is above the moon, he must have been blind. Of course he, being a man, should have entreated with the servility which is in truth a command. Nor was Draycot Morland one to be content, in a common way, with a woman's "No." But he was not without sensitiveness; and the manner of Marion's "No" gave him a chill. Perhaps the fuel, blazing hot as it was, had not been really much more than straw.

"But that is just it—just what I mean," he argued. "His life must not be yours. He has no right to take your life and make it—God knows what it must be made. You *must* be guarded. Don't you see what this warrant means? Only a return to his sentence—that is the form. But you and I know that things won't stop there. You know, and I, that the arrest of Adam Furness the convict will soon prove to be the arrest of the coiner of Upper Vane Street; of the—slayer—of Peter Petersen ——"

"The more he has offended," said Marion, with a proud curl of the lip not far removed from scorn, "the more his life is mine. You have warned him—it is good of you. But don't let it be for my sake! Help me—to save him!"

She clasped her hands as she spoke, and looked up in his face with intense appeal. A certain unwonted sense of humiliation made him waver. Why should he transfer his aid from the girl whom he would save from Adam Furness to Adam Furness himself, to save a murderer from the arm of the law? But the hesitation was not for long, before the clasped hands and pleading eyes.

"There is not much I can do," he said, "except the only thing you have refused. I could save you from him—but how a criminal from the law? And yet I will—if I can. Yes; I will, Miss Vane,—Miss Furness; I will not behave like a lover; that is to say, like a selfish humbug; I will behave—unlike one. Only we must look things in the face, and see them as they are. It is true that your father is ——"

"An escaped convict?" said Marion proudly. "It is true."

"And the head of a gang of coiners?"

"So I am told."

"And has ——"

"Put to death a traitor, and a spy."

"The law will not call it so. But—it will be best, for you, to think of it as you will. . . . One thing more. What has Heron's friend, Guy Derwent, to do with your father's affairs?"

"Guy?" cried Marion. "Mr. Derwent? Nothing—nothing in the world!"

"It's do use my going to work in the dark: though of course I can't ask you to tell me more than you will—*I* am not here as a spy. Guy

Derwent is said to be abroad. I told you that I had seen him, and where: at that house in Vane Street. And, since that moment he has never been seen again: not even his own clerk has heard of him: nobody has heard of him but John Heron; and he will say nothing. I confess myself in a fog. You say that, though you know Guy Derwent, he had nothing to do with your affairs. And I believe you—I need not say. But—in addition to his being a convict at large, a coiner, and a —all the rest, has he anything to fear in connection with this mysterious disappearance of which all Marchgrave is full? . . . I must help you: I will; but, in the dark, what can I do?

It was not for a full moment that Marion realized his meaning. But even before she realized it, and while he spoke, a mist, worse than mere darkness, fell over her eyes. She held out her hands as if clutching after a hold to keep herself from falling. Morland stepped quickly towards her with a look of alarm: alarm so intense as to forget to become renewed suspicion of a darker kind. She knew, and she alone —what else could she think possible?—the only reason that should bring Guy Derwent to Upper Vane Street. He must, in some wise, have traced her from the Clarence to the Green Cheese, from the Green Cheese to Euphrosyne Terrace, from Euphrosyne Terrice to Number Seventeen. And, in the course of such a sleuth-hound-like labour, he must needs have run Adam Furness to earth as well—Adam Furness, who, for reasons no longer beyond discovering, good as well as evil, had been keeping his daughter hidden, and the secrets of Number Seventeen hidden more deeply still.

What had Cynthia said—about what would befall one who, being neither ghost nor accomplice, should find his way within those doors? The words had burned themselves into her brain. Her father's hand was, she knew, red with the blood of one intruder. And how many more?

She recovered herself with an effort: but not one she could hide.

"But—his friend—John Heron," she began.

"Says he is abroad. But it's my opinion John Heron knows no more about it than I. My belief is he thinks Guy Derwent has made a bolt, and doesn't want to make a scandal among the Heronites just at election-time. I, I—I'm afraid you knew Derwent well?"

"Yes—no ——— But ask me nothing more. There is nobody can help us: and you least of all. Don't think I'm ungrateful," she said with a miserable smile. "But there is only one thing you can ever do for me—for us. Go: and forget there are such people in the world. . . . Go at once, for God's sake!" she cried: for her strained nerves felt, rather than heard, the approach of a slow and heavy tread along the road.

He lingered; wavered; wondered if he should go or stay. But in her voice and gesture there was what had to be obeyed. And he had asked her to marry him. He felt as if he had been trying to court a Pythoness; and for all his chivalry, and all his impudence, he shrank appalled.

For she saw that she had given her life to a father who had slain her lover: and that she herself was the cause

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT BAY.

When Morland left her, Marion crouched into a corner of the room, and buried her face in her hands—too forlorn to moan. There are horrors that bring their own proofs; and this was one. She thought she knew her father: she knew that she knew her lover—the stubborn violence of Adam; the chivalrous courage of Guy. He had sought her in the robbers' den, and had met with the fate prepared for all honest men who crossed its threshold. It was no mere ghastly suspicion. Longing to disbelieve, she was overwhelmed with certainty that every least remembrance rendered more certain still.

And this is the life to which she had vowed herself without reserve; this was the grand revolt against tyranny and law. It came home to her as a poisoned dagger to the heart. And she was the cause! If it had not been for her miserable self, Guy Derwent would even now be alive and happy; her father would have been spared a crowning—nay, an unnatural crime—for what is more against nature, in the sight of woman, than blood between one she loves and one to whom she has sworn duty? Such a crime as that rends her in twain.

But what place have thoughts in an air that blinds the whole brain with a black and crimson glare? For herself, Marion could only impotently wonder why she had ever been born to be a mere blind, hepless bond-slave of destiny, and to spread a curse around her wherever she might go. Not once since she had stepped from the deck of the *Sumatra* had one single thing happened to her of her own doing or of her own will—not even her flight from the Snells; for there was nothing else that any girl could have done. Even her vow, she now desperately saw, had been ferced from her; and how could it be kept—for it needed both will and heart to keep it: and the heart had been struct dead and the will had never been alive.

I have said that she hurried Morland out of the cottage because she heard her father's footsteps upon the road. How that could be, I know not, nor can pretend to know, seeing that many miserable minutes passed before her fore-hearing proved true. There was more than time enough for Morland to pass out without the meeting; there was eternity enough for her to realise the whole horror that had befallen. But no doubt there are times when the whole being is strained to its uttermost, when the eye, the ear, and every organ of sense shares in the strain, and normal limits disappear.

In such a state, however, the imagination reaches the extremity of tension too. As he entered, somewhat slowly and wearily, her eyes, by a sort of fascination, sought his right hand, as if expecting to see it stained with crimson. If he had been less self-absorbed, he must have

been struck by her icy paleness and her hopeless eyes, as, after glancing at his hand, she shrank away.

"Something has happened, at last," said he, sinking wearily into a chair. "And it means—I give in."

Even his voice sounded changed—either actually, or only to her own ears.

Fortunately he did notice her silence.

"There's a warrant out against me, which I've traced to the Snells. What they mean by it, I can't conceive—with everything to lose by my capture, and nothing conceivable to gain. I had thought of ridding the world of the rascal; but it's too late now. It isn't worth wasting powder on such trumpery as revenge. And so—you don't know how hard it is, Marion—I give in."

She heard, though scarcely listening; but still she said no word. She was more than ever conscious of his power; but it had become the power of turning her to stone.

"So there goes the work of a life," said he. "There's one creature nobody can fight against—and that's a Cur. . . . They've got the net fairly round me now, and there's no mouse to gnaw the ropes; not even you—good girl as you are. They've left me only three things; to fight on, and be beat; to give in without fighting; and—well, to make the best of things—to save the pieces," he said, almost savagely, and yet with a shadowy suggestion of a smile. "The pieces of a life; of a wreck; such as they are."

Marion was still silent.

"You once asked me why I did not leave the country," said he. "I could not tell you then; and there is no reason for my telling you why I could not now. For that is what I mean to do. There will be commotion enough—but what will that matter, after all? I've never worked for fame; and if the work has to fail, fame and name and all may go. What they may say of John—of Adam Furness, won't matter to some other man under some other name. . . . I can carry enough away with me out of the hands of the Snells to live on, in the way I mean to live, beyond the sea. I want rest; I want safety; They're the only things left me to get; and wanting anything but what one can get 's fool's play. Marion, if I know anything of you—and something I've got to know, I hope and believe—you won't be sorry to know that you've saved me from the fourth thing left me: to blow out my brains. I've planned it all. We will carry this cottage—the only place where I've found a minute's peace for twenty years—to some country where nobody will know anything of me but that I'm a dull and highly respectable elderly widower, with respectable means, and a daughter that sticks to him like a burr. You shall paint; and I will—sleep myself out, and, when I happen to be awake, look on. That's the whole programme; and if some wise young man, who goes to church, and is a pattern of all the virtues, without being too much of a prig and too unbearable a bore--no; I mean if he's both—wants you, and gets you to want him, I'll give up even you if he undertakes never to live half-a-mile away."

The petrification proceeded ; the statue was becoming not silent merely, but dumb

"But the first thing is—to get there, wherever it may be. I have my methods of getting behind the police : behind the detectives goes without saying—Detective's another way of spelling Idiot, all over the world. I've given orders myself—I mean orders have been given—to watch every train that passes Marchgrave, and every ship that sails from Askness ; damn the place !—or from there. Well—it's not my fault that Marchgrave tonnage will stand where it is ——"

Was Marion dreaming, or was he wondering, that she was listening to a discourse on tonnage? The doubt made her listen ; it must have been her wits that had been wandering in a dream.

"But that's nothing more to you and me. . . . But they're not up to the loophole, Marion. They don't know any address ; and a single loophole is as good as a barn door. . . . I want a night to settle my affairs ; and then you must leave that big canvas of yours ; there's the boat that I bought with the cottage, and I'm sailor enough to cross the Aske—for the last time—take the train at Oldport (the warrant hasn't been backed there) for Milford ; and then—a new life in a new world. It's as simple as—as—blowing out one's brains.

He also relapsed into silence, regarding, not her, but a visionary and of rest and peace, beyond the wooded hills. Was it John Heron surrendering wealth, honour, good name, life's purpose—or was it Adam Furness longing for the peace which John Heron had never been able to win? Men of double lives may be able to surmise. But it needs the most passionate of enthusiasts to even dimly conceive what it meant to the man to resign what he had lived for through twenty years—not his own glory, but the splendour of his native town.

I pretend not to imagine—this is a chronicle ; not a dream. But it may be there are some few who will be able to imagine and to realize for themselves, and to others the skilfullest pen could give but scanty aid. He, at any rate, could picture to himself the frenzy that would fall on Marchgrave when it learned that John Heron had vanished, and that the great Dock scheme had been a fraud. Actually picture it indeed, in all its details, he did not dare : for the criminal who prized the respect of his fellow-townsmen more than life had not the courage, or rather the strength, to set it before him in full. Even the consternation of Alderman Sparrow, and the gossip of the Bell parlour, loomed as terrible things to one who had no very special scruples against murder. There is no human courage without its limits ; and there was only one way left to spare himself the sight of his own ruin—to fly ; to treat it henceforth as if it did not exist, and if possible, to think of it no more. John Heron had signed the warrant for the apprehension of Adam Furness ; and now Adam Furness must proceed to annihilate John Heron.

And so complete must be the annihilation that even John Heron's wife (in name and belief) must be left to take her chance in the universal

catastrophe. She had not married Adam Furness, even so much as in name; and even if the need of late of acting an impossible stage part before her had not been compelling him to detest the very thought of her, he had heart and mercy enough left in him to spare her the discovery that instead of being merely the wife of a fraudulent banker she was actually the mistress of a man whose real calling was crime. . . . She had her settlement, and would not starve.

So complete must be the separation of these two men that the annihilation of the Banker must amount less to his fraudulent flight than to his murder, for the sake of plunder, at the hands of the Criminal. So the matter took shape in Adam's mind. The public-spirited philanthropist, the great and wise citizen who only breathed for the welfare of his fellows, was already virtually slain—so his brain, reversing the normal process, felt; while his heart argued: why should an Adam Furness strain at such a gnat as robbing the slain man? His one self had issued the warrant to apprehend his second; it only remained for his second to rob his first; a bewildering but inevitable charade.

And then, with this last crime, and this last flight, all would be over —the burden of the double life; the strife between two irreconcilable enemies imprisoned together in a single body: the dread by night and the haunting terror by day. Marchgrave must no longer hope to rise, on the ruins of Askness, into rivalry with Liverpool. But he who dreamed that great dream, and laboured for it, and sinned for it would not be without such comfort as some hermit may have found in the desert when driven from a throne. And he would be even better off than the hermit, inasmuch as he would not be alone. Marion had devoted herself to him, while knowing the worst of him: it was she who had put it into his heart to pine for the peace that was now all Fate had left him; and ——

"*She* shall never repent it!" he swore.

The girl who thought herself the mere helpless waif of a miserable destiny, with neither control over her own life nor influence, save as an unwilling curse, over others, had not done anything very appreciable as yet in the case of Adam. But an effect, heaven knows, need not be appreciable to be great and real; or there would not have been many changes in the world for the last six thousand years. The man was repenting of nothing but failure, and was still plotting ruin. But, none the less, the Adam Furness who was Marion's father was not the Adam whom her mother had feared and flown. True, she had done nothing—beyond letting him know that there was a world of which he might, at few and far off moments, have dimly dreamed, but had never seen.

Meanwhile, Marion felt his presence with growing horror; for every word he had spoken strengthened her certainty. A sort of fascination impelled her to put the question gnawing at her heart to some test; but she could think of none short of putting it in so many words. And if she did that, it was not likely that a man like him would not know how to answer a girl; while any attempt to put it indirectly was

a thought scarcely to be borne. It is not all in a moment that unaccustomed fingers can nerve themselves to open what they feel to be one of the portholes of hell.

So she remained silent. But he did not observe her silence; indeed, that was perhaps her crowning merit, that he could think at ease in her company, and be alone without feeling alone.

"I came to warn you," he said presently; "not to stay—and to rest a minute in the only spot I have ever found to rest in. Well—that will be over soon. Has anything happened since I have been here last time?"

It was as much as she could do to bring herself to speak; but she had to answer.

"Yes," she said. "I knew you were to be arrested before you came."

"You knew? The police can't have been here—already? No!"

"It was not the police. It was a Mr. Morland, who is one of the candidates for Marchgrave."

She spoke as if she was repeating a lesson. But such an announcement, so coldly made, was more than enough to make him deaf to a girl's tones, even had that sort of observation been the least in his line.

"Morland! What—*He* has been here? Tell me instantly—there mayn't be a moment to lose! Let me see how quickly you can tell me everything ——"

"He helped me when I was alone in London. I had known nothing of him before; I hardly know how he came to help me; but it somehow came out that we both knew ——"

Her throat suddenly closed.

"Quick!" cried Adam fiercely. "You both knew ——"

"Guy Derwent!" she said, with a clearness that amazed her—her eyes at first not daring to seek his, for fear of seeing a murderer's conscience revealed in them; but the next moment trying to pierce him through.

"Then," cried Adam, "he lied? He no more knew—him, than—But go on. Well?"

"Afterwards, I met him by chance here, while I was sketching. We talked about pictures, and ——"

"And ——"

"Nothing more. I don't know why I didn't tell you: but ——"

"Never mind 'but' now. Go on."

"And to-day he found me out to tell me of this warrant, so that you might escape while there is time."

"Did he tell you why he, or any respectable man, should busy himself to help a criminal to escape the law?"

"That was what he told me," said Marion; who could not have brought herself to say another word beyond what was still the duty to which she had made herself a slave.

A look came into Adam's face that might have told her much had she ever seen some strong beast at bay.

"I see. The Snells have carried their wares to Askness; ay, and

Askness knows they would be dirt cheap at seven times seventy thousand pounds! And so this is how Morland means to win! By God, he has done it well! Marion—whatever people may say of me, I'm the only man on this infernal earth who isn't at once a coward and a —— But it's no good talking. . . . It's not your fault, Marion. I should be sorry if you had been a match for a—Draycot Morland. Only, there's not a minute to loose. I must be grateful, I suppose, for being allowed to escape; unless it's a trap. I suppose the business would look a bit ugly for the Snells and the Morlands and the Askness shippers when it leaked out, if they had me hanged. You'll have something to do now. I'll be here in the morning somewhere about daybreak. Be ready for starting. I'll look over the boat before I leave now. Don't take more things than you can carry; we'll get everything you want elsewhere. I'll see to it that they don't strike to-night, even if Mr. Draycot Morland's warning was a blind."

He turned to go; but, when he reached the door, turned back again.

"Only one thing more. . . . Things may go wrong, even now. It may be a trap; and knowing what they know, they may close in on me before morning. I must risk that; but one must be prepared. If I'm not here—let me see—by nine o'clock, something will have gone wrong. In that case go to the station, take a ticket for Marchgrave—there's a train at 9.40. When you're there, drive to the bank in Chapter Lane, and ask to see Mr. Heron. And wherever you are told he is, there go."

Heron! How well she knew the name; how often, even during their brief voyage together, had Guy spoken that name as that of the greatest and best of men. And now it was a further link between Adam Furness and Guy. But what could she do! It was becoming the ghastilest of nightmares, with no sign of waking. If she could only save her father from his fate by dying, she could have done it with ease and peace; but to help him by living had become past bearing. Did he mean her to live with him and comfort him with her lover's death on his soul? He must be a fiend. And yet she must do his bidding—she could see, though she could see nothing else, that her father was trusting her with his life, and that she was all he had to trust to.

As for him, he had not the least intention of letting her into the secret of his double life unless under invincible necessity. But it was clear enough to his mind, as it would have been to anybody unaware of such remote forces as Mrs. Snell's jealousy and Draycot Morland's eccentricity, that, unable to defeat the King of Marchgrave by open fighting, the threatened interests of Askness had conspired to effect a sensational collapse on the eve of battle. He could see it all as clearly as if the plot had been his own. The Askness wire-pullers had been beating about for flaws in the record of their apparently unassailable enemy—the great respectability sham, he called to mind, had been the theme, of all Morland's electioneering speeches, of which the purpose had now become plain. By some infernal hook or crook, they had got hold of Wyndham Snell, or rather Wyndham Snell of them; and he,

finding that the Banker's resources were more limited than he thought, and that he could make better terms with the other side, had acted in accordance with his character—so misunderstood may be even the most virtuous and honourable of professional men. It was bitterly unjust to Wyndham Snell, no doubt because he had done nothing of the kind, but it was the Doctor's doom to suffer unjustly—why, he never could understand. Wyndham Snell knew where he was to be found: Morland, with a singular propensity for doing his own dirty work, or perhaps because that work was too delicate as well as too dirty to be trusted to jackals, had gone about to investigate that the Doctor was not being paid for nothing. "Yes," thought the unhappy enthusiast; "to defeat Me and the Docks would be worth a fee that only Liverpool, and Glasgow, and Askness all combined could afford to pay." So the King of Marchgrave was to be thrust from his throne, not to descend from it, after all.

He set his teeth as he asked himself, on his way homeward, whether, since that was to be the case, whether it was not worth a battle—even still? It was one thing to yield out of the new hunger for rest and peace; it was quite another to give way to a pack of curs. All the force of his nature revolted at the idea. Though he did not yet see his way before him, unless he could invite all his enemies to a feast of poison, impossible in these English and degenerate days, it was this instinct of battle which had inspired him to leave alternative instructions with Marion. If, as his whole nature demanded, he elected to stay and fight, he must have some one at his side he could trust: and there was none but she. And—for such gamblers' notions will come into the wisest brains at such desperate hours—it might mean good luck to have on his side the only pure eyes and stainless fingers he knew. He would cut off his right hand sooner than trust her with full knowledge of his whole life: but his own Self told the other, he must have to do even that sooner than let his enemies triumph over him without a bite or a blow.

The new Mayor of Marchgrave returned to the town late in the evening—too late, perhaps, to perceive that a certain shadowy person of whom he had been dimly conscious of passing on his way from the cottage to the station had ridden in the same train, and took the same route from Marchgrave Station to Chapter Lane.

He did not go home to the Cedars. Kate would have been more maddening than ever with her affectionate questioning: and, besides, he was about to do her a necessary, but not the less infamous, wrong. He needed solitude for his plans, and for something else besides; so he let himself into his bank with his private key. There was nothing very out of the way in that, at any hour of the night: a man with so many irons had to do, as a matter of course, hundreds of unseasonable things. Indeed, he occasionally slept there if he had heavy work and had to catch an early train.

Then, having lifted his lamp, his Worship the Mayor sat down to work out his plans.

How much was known to his enemies? The warrant, the first he

had signed since his election to the civic chair, was merely for being at large during his sentence for forgery. Had Wyndham Snell sold his suspicions as well as his knowledge? Probably not: because the crime set out in the warrant would be enough for every political purpose, and the Doctor was not the man to sell more than he was paid for.

Only, if he were arrested on that charge, the rest was sure to follow. Only was it so sure? Suppose he simply denied his identity with Adam Furness, the forger, and brazoned things out. How could that identity be proved? His wife was dead; and which would be credited—his repute, or the oath of Dr. Snell? Only then, if the doctor were cornered, he would bring out his identifitation of the forger and the mayor with the suspected coiner; and though his oath might be of small account, not even the detectives could fail to be set upon the traces; and there was the notorious evidence of the wounded arm; and, above all things, there was Draycot Morland, who, not being a detective, was to be really feared.

It was a complicated matter, and he, whose brain was so proverbially clear in the affairs of others, became confused when anxiously applied to his own.

So he allowed his mind a certain time wherein to clear itself and strip for combat; and applied himself to the easier labour of examining, by means of his private books, how much capital he could contrive to carry with him abroad. This led to the opening of certain safes, and the inspection and collection of sundry bank notes and negotiable securities which, in the aggregate, allowing a margin for what would be useless plunder, made a more than respectable sum, including the gold kept to meet ordinary demands. For a banker to rob himself—that is to say, his customers—is not an easy matter, if done in a direct and unfinancial way; but John Heron—or rather Adam Furness, who was robbing John Heron—had the advantage of concentrating the bank in his own person, so that the work was somewhat less difficult than it might in the majority of cases have been. And, thus far, the work was one of calculation only—a mere stocktaking. Actual conveyance was yet to come.

A great deal could be done—enough, at any rate, for peace and comfort beyond the seas. The philanthropist felt no compunction at the idea of plundering his fellow-townsmen, though he would willingly have gone to the stake for their profit and glory in his own way; and in great things, not in small. Indeed, so completely had the man become two, that Adam Furness could feel no possible scruple over plundering the customers of John Heron. No, if that separation of persons, actual though it was, seemed too violent for belief on the part of those whose lives are, happily, one—then be it that if the Docks were gone, all was gone; it mattered nothing to the Fanatic what became of Marchgrave, or its people, or all else in the world.

Then, once more, he returned, his brain strengthened by Arithmetic, to the crucial question—fight or fly.

"Adam Furness!" came a consumptive sigh through the dim lamplight from a corner of the room.

The Banker hastily closed the ledger before him, and started from his chair. Had he been trapped at last? But in the name of every terrible wonder, how?

"You are a tyrant and a traitor?" cried the voice, coming nearer. "But your time has come! I am Stephen Ray—and it is *my* hour!"

Snell—Morland—Ray! For a moment the coolest brain in Europe turned hot and reeled. But it was for a moment alone. Had the moment for biting come? Then so be it—Adam Furness was John Heron.

"Who are you? How did you come in? What are you doing here?" asked the mayor—sharply and sternly, and not as one afraid.

"Who am I? Stephen Ray. How did I come in? I shouldn't have thought Adam Furness would have needed to ask how one enters a door when the owner pockets a key; and anybody else has fingers—like these. Feel in your pocket; and if you miss a key—look in mine, if the things you call fingers can find their way. What am I doing here? What are *you?*"

"You mean you have picked my pocket. I see. Well—the next time you try to rob a bank, make sure that the banker's away." He threw open the window. "There—I've left you a way out. Now, my poor fellow, will you take it, or will you tell me all about yourself? I've often wanted to interview a London burglar—you're from London, of course? I'm interested, as a magistrate, in—Crime; and I don't want to call the police, unless I'm obliged."

He felt his heart beating hard; but his voice was firm as a rock, and clear as a bell.

For a moment Stephen Ray almost cringed—such was his captain's power. But he had not come to cringe.

"You *are* Adam Furness. And only yesterday I saw you sitting on the bench—you—I understand now; thief-taker; informer; traitor; spy!"

"I don't understand," said John Heron, with sarcastic politeness, even while the sweat rolled from his brow. "Adam Furness? I never heard the name. And if I were Adam Furness—I wonder if Adam Furness, whoever he is, would keep his hand from your throat. I wonder—if I were to send you through that window, whether it wouldn't be a shorter way than calling a constable. As I don't want to be troubled, you may go."

The artist looked round him—somewhat feebly. But, sudden as a cat, he made a spring.

"As you to Petersen, so I to you—*sic semper tyrannis!*" * he cried, while a sudden knife gleamed in his hand.

"Bah! Idiot!" cried John Heron, grasping both the intruder's wrists as in a vice of steel. "I know what I have to do with now—so

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* "Thus ever to tyrants!" So said Wilkes Booth when he assassinated Mr. Lincoln. Wilkes must (and it is likely enough) have been acquainted with Mr. Ray.

they can't beat me without killing! Then I know where I am. Be off with you; your masters wouldn't hire knives if they knew a better way. So—there!"

The fall of Stephen Ray on the rough pebbles outside was the one thing needed to steady and bring to its bearings the brain of John Heron. They had reached, then, the root of the matter, or they would not have hired the knife of Stephen Ray. And so—war!

Of course the man might have been a midnight robber, who saw a miraculous chance for plundering one who dared not resist plunder; he might have been simply crazy with self-conceit and a greivance against the universe which, concentrated on a single object, called for blood rather then plunder, or, at any rate, for a combination of the two. But the prompt action of the Banker was inspired by what filled his own mind.

He closed the window—he had no fear of that creature at any rate, dead or alive. If dead, all the better; if alive it was not worth while to turn aside from the onset of the hounds in order to trample out a worm. Cooled and steadied by action, he turned to his letters. All were on ordinary business except one——

And thus, engaged in calculating the robbery of his own bank, and having by violence renewed his strength for a last desperate struggle against the law of the land, the convict by status, the coiner by calling, who had fitted himself to pass from the hulks to the gallows, received a gracious intimation that a baronetcy was not considered more than was due to the philanthropic services of the new Mayor of Marchgrave, who had set an illustrious example to every citizen of every town of the realm.

He could not help a grim smile; he of all men to be entitled to display the Bloody Hand! But there was no need of the badge of Ulster; Stephen Ray's knife had already reddened once more the hand that had scarce recovered from that of Peter Petersen. If John Heron had earned the badge of Baronet, Adam Furness had won it too. Their partnership would not dissolve.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A NEW SORT OF FUN.

There was sensation the next day in Marchgrave.

When Mr. Prendergast, now grown thoroughly anxious about his missing master, went down to the office, he had occasion to pass the Guildhall, round which a little crowd, early though it was, had gathered—an excited crowd.

"Shame!" cried one.

"The cowardly blackguards!"

"Three cheers for Heron: Hip—hip—hip——"

"Three groans for——"

Then in the midst of a chaos of cheers and groans, Mr. Prendergast thrust his way in, put on his spectacles, and saw a large sheet nailed over the hall door. It bore a masterly portrait of John Heron himself, done in coloured crayons; and underneath was written, in huge capitals, increasing in size as they decended:

Electors of Marchgrave! Vote for this
MAGISTRATE;
TYRANT;
TRAITOR;
INFORMER;
THIEF;
BIGAMIST;
CONVICT;
COINER;
SWINDLER;
FORGER;
MURDERER,
MAYOR!

"Great heaven! It's sacrilege!" exclaimed Alderman Sparrow, recognising Mr. Prendergast in the growing crowd, which by this time consisted of all sorts and conditions of men.

"It's worse than that—its Actionable!" said an articled clerk standing by.

"Morland never had this done—that I'll swear," said somebody, whose hat was promptly smashed over his eyes, while three more groans for Morland went up as from one man.

"It *is* bad to call a man a murderer," said Mr. Prendergast. "A man who calls another a murderer ought to be hung."

"This is a case for strong measures," said the alderman; "for measures very prompt and very strong indeed. In fact, we must have no half measures. We must have this sacrilegious—this ——"

"Actionable," prompted the articled clerk.

"This sacrilegious *and* actionable insult to a great and good man—Taken Down!"

The alderman spoke with stern determination. And forthwith, by a law of nature that has hitherto baffled investigation, but never fails to provide a crowd with whatever it wants, from dead dogs and rotton eggs upwards or downwards, a ladder sprang into existence, and a man upon the ladder. An angry cheer rent the air. And it would have gone wrong with that work of art had not a big voice called out:

"Stop there—hold!"

Every creature in Marchgrave knew the voice of John Heron.

"What is all this about?" asked he.

Fifty forefingers pointed the answer: a hundred eyes were upon the man who knew that every word below the portrait was True

He read it without a change of countenance, every word. He saw himself at last, and for the first time, advertised to his fellow-citizens in his true colours; but he also saw another stroke on the part of the enemy, and all the battle in him turned his nerves to steel. And he also knew that there was only one hand in England capable of that masterly outline—that of the worm who had turned against him in the person of Stephen Ray.

"Leave it alone," said he.

"My dear Heron!" protested the alderman. "What—leave that infamous libel—alone!"

"What else?" asked Heron aloud, so that everybody could hear. "We've never yet taken notice of anything our opponents do; and we won't begin now. If a man wants to make you angry, disappoint him. I wish this thing to remain, for all the world to see to what shifts our opponents are driven. If they had a chance of winning, they wouldn't throw away that chance by libels and lies. I don't think anybody who looks at that picture on his way to the poll will waver as to whom he'll vote for. Besides, it would be a thousand pities to hurt so admirable a portrait. When the election's over I'll have it framed and hang it up in The Cedars—and if I can find the artist ——"

"Pitch him into the new Docks, John!" cried a voice of the crowd.

John smiled grimly.

"No. He's a Genius. He shall paint the portrait of Mr. Draycot Morland after the poll."

"Ay, John! With black for the eyes and blood for the nose—and not a rag on his dirty carcase;" and there went up the ugliest sound on earth—the laugh of a crowd that means mischief. John Heron had not said a word to excite it; and yet it had come. He had acquired a strange power.

"So," he said, "let it be."

So for all that day all Marchgrave saw the crimes of Adam Furness ascribed to John Heron. The man himself was fascinated by the sight; and he even went out of his way to pass and repass the placard some twenty times. He had no more thought of flying: he felt an assuranc that his enemies were delivering themselves into his hands. How he could battle through he could not foresee; but it seemed to him that all the gods were marvellously on his side.

But dire was the confusion when the gentleman with the smashed hat carried, out of vengeance, his report to Morland's committee-room. Things were getting terribly close and sharp; for the day after to-mormor was fixed for the poll, and, though it was an understood thing and a conclusion foregone that Morland was to be beaten, it was all the more needful that he should be beaten with honour.

"This is your doing, Mr. Morland," said Mr. Sharpe sharply.

"*My* fault? What the devil do you mean?"

"Why, bringing down that artist fellow. I don't pretend to know much about art, but I know a lunatic; and that's your what's-his-name—Ray."

The champion of Askness was growing troubled, and strange suspicions were making way into his mind. Of course this was Stephen Ray's doing—but what had made him write "Coiner" under the portrait of John Heron? All the other ill-names, from "Magistrate" to "Mayor," belonged to the ordinary vocabulary of abuse; but nobody calls a man "Coiner" without cause.

"I'll see the scamp," said he. "No—I'll go first and have a look at his work—if his it be."

You won't, then, Mr. Morland," said Mr. Sharpe. "You'll do no such thing. I'm answerable for you—leastways for my clients at Askness; and I tell you that your life ain't worth twopence if you go near the Guildhall this day."

"My life's my own, I believe," said Morland coldly. "And really I don't much care what becomes of it. It don't seem to me that it's much worth living after all."

And he sighed. No doubt it is a stroke of luck to be rejected by a convict's daughter; but it takes as long a time to find the luck out as if she had been the heiress of the most virtuous of earls.

"It isn't though," said Mr. Sharpe. "Your life's Askness's till after the poll. You may hang yourself then, as much as you please."

"True," said Morland. "I'm not often wrong; but I am there. What ought we to do?"

"Wait till after dark, and pull the—confounded—thing down. Only, up or down, this means a big row on polling day. Well—there's lambs in Askness as well as in Marchgrave; and—well, it's not for *me* to tell *you*—only we must hold our own. That's my affair."

"Oh, hang your shams. You mean you're going to hire a mob to break heads and smash windows. All right—so long as you leave the cathedral alone. That isn't a sham. Why shouldn't *you* tell *me*? If I had my way, every election should be fought, not vote to vote, but hand to hand. That's the ultimate logic of democracy; and a heavy hand's better any day than a heavy brain. . . . But you're right about the genius. He must make no mischief and play no more pranks. I'll give him a bit of my mind."

"You'll find he wants a bit of somebody's, sir," said a grocer who had in early life been fined for playing tricks with weights and scales, and had therefore put himself on Morland's committee. "He's in hospital; tumbled down in putting up that bill about the mayor, no doubt, and picked up with a broken back in Chapter Lane."

'The deuce!" exclaimed Morland, wishing that even there had been Stephen Ray before he had ever been brought down to Marchgrave. "Well—they'll hardly kill one in the hospital so long as one isn't a patient with a disease that them hungry for a post mortem. I can go there."

"So long," said Mr. Sharpe, "as you don't go past the Guildhall."

For almost the first time in his life, Draycot Morland felt small. He could see for himself that the placard would tell bitterly against him, and that it was his own fault for bringing down a Genius to take part in practical affairs. But why "Coiner?" He had traced the connec-

tion between Marion and Adam Furness; between Adam Furness and Stephen Ray. But what had all this to do with John Heron?

He did not go past the Guildhall. And if it had not been for the influence of John Heron's contempt, he would have received something more than a groan. The groan he did receive: and it did not displease him—at least not altogether, being in a combative humour, so he dropped the eyeglass out of his eyes, and bowed. In passing, he indulged his curiosity with a single glance at the portrait. He was a better art critic than Mr. Prendergast or than Alderman Sparrow; and there was no question of its excellence. It was not a caricature; and yet it wore an expression that could not possibly have been familiar to Marchgrave. Every feature was exact, to an extent that was barely credible, even in the case of Genius, without long and careful study.—But there was a suggestion of what no mortal had ever identified with John Heron—hypocrisy and fear. Every artist, of course, knows the trick of making any face express anything he pleases. But not every artist knows how to do this without at least a touch of caricature.

"It looks like a sanctified devil!" thought Morland. "It's what I felt about Heron from the beginning—only this fellow has put into lines what I could never have put into words."

Arrived at the hospital of which John Heron was the second founder and principal supporter, he was told that what he had heard was perfectly accurate—a patient, precisely answering to the description of Stephen Ray, had been brought in by two constables in the early morning, and was lying seriously injured in one of the wards. At least not so very seriously, but still badly, and with much more fever about him than his injuries could account for. There was no objection to Morland's seeing him—quite the contrary; but the visitor, while treated politely, was conscious all the while that he was being received by the surgeon in charge of the house with anything but open arms.

"It's a mysterious sort of business," said the surgeon in charge.

"Why?" asked Morland, as he was being conducted to the ward.

"He was found lying as if he had fallen from a height; and just outside Mr. Heron's bank. He was perfectly sober. I expect it's just a chance that he tumbled off the bank coping instead of ——"

"Where?" asked Morland.

"Well—say the Guildhall."

Naturally the surgeon was a strong Heronite, and had heard the news of the day. When they entered the ward, an assistant and a nurse were by the patient's bedside.

"Well?" asked the surgeon, taking the assistant asid .

It was plain to see that Stephen Ray was in a high stage of fever. Morland had been a great frequenter of hospitals, and had for some time studied medicine and surgery with what he called seriousness, as a necessary department of human nature. Fever was tangible in the harsh skin—visible in the glowing eyes, that glared at him without recognition as he bent over him.

"What do you think of him?" asked Morland gravely.

"I'll tell you exactly what I think of your—friend," said the surgeon

pointedly. "To begin with, his constitution was never worth a year's purchase; and I doubt if he's got more than half a lung. If he hadn't been so light a weight he'd have broken his neck; as it is, he has had a violent shock to the system which —— Has he any relations, your friend? If so, they ought to be sent for."

"Tyrant—Traitor—Thief?" coughed and spluttered the patient. "So there you sit in your scarlet gown, do you? And leave those who have made you rich to be hanged!"

"H'm!" grunted the surgeon. "Not much doubt, I think, who did that little bit of electioneering at the Guildhall."

"Yes—Adam Furness, the Coiner! There he stands—seize him, before more murder's done!"

He sank back as he screamed out with such strength as he had left; but his eyes and his finger were pointedly fixed at one who then just entered,

"Seize him— Adam Furness, the Coiner?" he cried again.

"Poor fellow!" said John Heron, nodding to the doctors, and bowing to Morland slightly and coldly. "Ah—I thought no sane human creature could have posted that placard. Poor fellow—I see. Do you think you'll pull him through, Williams? What name was he saying—Adam Furness? Perhaps you will ask Mr. Morland if *he* knows the name?"

Nothing could have been kinder than the banker's bearing—nothing more dignified. Morland himself felt shamed out of his vague suspicions. Suddenly Stephen Ray broke out again:

"You were to be Robespierre—I Danton!" cried the sickly creature whom the Giant of the Terror could have crushed between his finger and thumb. "Sic semper tyrannis! Now, Citizen Morland, rouse the people! I denounce Adam Furness the Coiner; Adam Furness the Tyrant; Adam Furness the Traitor; Adam Furness—and there he stands?"

"Mr. Morland," said John Heron, "it is my duty to tell you of an impression in the city that you were yourself the instigator of that placard on the Guildhall. I never believed it myself, I need not tell you. Gentlemen do not fight in that way. It will give me pleasure—as your opponent—to testify to the condition of this poor fellow here, and to acquit you of all complicity in an act of simple lunacy, and nothing more."

He spoke without flinching, looking Morland straight in the eyes. Yet it was a moment of agonised suspense—it was a test whether his identity had been discovered by his enemies. If it had been, now it was Morland's moment to say, "He is *not* mad; and you *are* the man."

"But —— I thank you Mr. Mayor," said Morland. "I will ask you to do me so much justice with the electors—and in my future speeches ——"

"Oh, speech is free. Say what you like—I never read a word of it," said John Heron, who had to say something to account for a smile of triumph that he was unable to restrain.

After all, the idea of letting the ravings of a crazy vagabond reflect for a moment upon the Mayor of Marchgrave, whose statue was waiting to be unveiled, and of whom it had got about that the new member was henceforth "Sir" John Heron.

Sir John lost nothing by his kindly visit to the stranger, whom everybody now knew to be the author of that monstrous libel; nor, somehow, though he was good as his word in expressing his belief in the good faith of Draycot Morland, did the unpopular candidate gain much from this more than generous advocacy. As Mr. Alderman Sparrow pointedly put it: "Sane men don't hire lunatics to do their dirty work without uncommon good reason why."

In the course of the next afternoon another visitor arrived at the hospital for Stephen Ray.

This was a pretty little woman, dressed in black, with big eyes, and quick but not altogether unladylike ways.

"I read in the country news of a London paper," she explained to the surgeon in charge, of an accident at Marchgrave; and, as the description answered to a missing friend—relative—of mine, I took the next train, and hurried down. . . . Is he—very, very ill?"

The young lady, or young "person"—the doctor was unable to decide which—noticed enough anxiety in the question to make him more reticent about the patient's state than he had been before strangers.

"He is a good deal shaken in mind and body," he said. "But I am glad somebody is here to claim him. Of course you know his name!"

"What does he call himself?"

"Stephen Ray."

"Ah—that is he! Let me see him at once ——"

"Certainly. You say he is a relation of yours?"

"Yes. . . . He *will* get well."

"We have done what we could. But—as you are not his wife—it is an anxious case. By the way, has he ever, to your knowledge of him, been strange at all in his ways?"

"Of course he has—he is a Genius!" said she.

The fever had certainly lessened—indeed it always left him somewhat prostrate in the afternoon. The young woman went straight to the bed, and laid her hand on his brow.

"Stephen, don't you know *Me?*"

He turned feebly on his pillow and glared.

"Don't I, though!" said he.

"And what do you mean," she said sharply, taking somewhat ungenerous advantage of the superiority of a healthy young woman over a helpless man. "What the deuce—I mean what the something mild and proper—do you mean by going rambling about and getting into mischief all alone?"

"Freedom—Liberty!" he moaned.

"Oh! Freedom to make a fool of yourself—Liberty to tumble off ladders!" said she. "Oh, Stephen—are you very, very ill?"

"Hush! No! I was: but they've got to think so, still."

"Why—if you're not very ill, I'll give you a bit of my mind. But why have they got to think so? What's your game? Oh, dear, that's slang!"

"And what of that?"

"Why, that I've found out at last what's right and what's wrong. And slang's wrong. Not so wrong as swearing; but infernally improper, all the same."

"Hanged if you haven't been lagged, Cynthia, and been nobbled by the Devil-dodger!" said the Genius.

"Lagged—I! As if the Bob—police-constable were born that would ever lag Me! The idea! And as for Devil-dodger, I don't know what you mean."

"The gaol parson," he sneered.

"Stephen," said Cynthia severely. "There's no sort of Fun in talking that way—no Fun at all."

"Fun!"

"Yes, Stephen, Fun. We're going to be good, Stephen. And that's the biggest Lark in the world."

"Rot. You asked me my game just now. What's yours?"

"Stephen," said Cynthia, with a grave smile, as she stroked back his hair, "you know how bothered I was about things! You remember Marion!"

"What of her?"

"You made me just mad with jealousy. Yes; that's a rum thing for a woman to own up to; but you did, and it's true. I just *hated* that girl. Why did you like her? For you did like her; and don't tell me you didn't, because I know. No—you needn't answer. I know why. She was good; and 'twas she that made me think about right and wrong. Well, I *was* bothered. She hadn't half my wits; and I don't believe she can see clear a yard before her nose. I don't believe she knew a good sovereign from a Hanover token. But then she wouldn't have given the token for a sovereign; she'd have took it; and that made me so that I didn't know which was my head and which were my heels."

"Didn't you?"

"No. Then I thought to myself, what Fun it would be to get hold of a few young girls, and bring them up to be like Marion, and not like me!"

She might have had tact enough to see that she was worrying him, as he lay there at her mercy; but she showed none.

"It seems to me, before one teaches, one's got to learn," he said, with another sneer.

"Oh—and wait to begin till I'm Eighty-five! A lot of Fun that would be!"

"Well?"

"Well, I got myself up like a Quaker, and made a call on those two old maids at Number Eighteen. I told them I wanted to start a house where a few poor friendless girls could find a home. I didn't know

where else to go to, you see. I came over them—trust me! By—no, not 'by'; I mean I could have passed a whole mint of sham shillings on them before I'd done. Yes, Stephen, I do beat that Marion of yours in one thing; no, in two—Tongue and Brains. They're going to help, and to send the hat round besides. And where do you think we're going to set up our School?"

"How should *I* know?"

"*Number Seventeen!*"

"What!"

"Number Seventeen. It's to let dirt cheap from the ground landlord; we can have it for as long a term as we please. Just think, what Fun it *will* be, *Me*—for I'm to be manageress, of course—teaching a lot of poor young girls to be just as unlike myself as I can make them. Oh, I can do it—no mistake there! You see, I know the bad side of things, and that gives me a long pull over them that know none but the good side. And now for the biggest Fun of all!"

"Well?"

"*You* shall teach the girls to—draw!"

The girl spoke with the utmost gravity. And, after all, I do not know that there was anything more absurd in her notion than in seventy-nine philanthropic schemes out of every eighty-two; it is best to be strictly statistical about such things.

"What's really the matter with you, Cynthia?" asked Stephen.

"Oh—I've been thinking; and I've got to think that to be thrown into a music-hall ballet, and then to get her living as a smasher's decoy, alone among a lot of gaol-birds, with a murder thrown in now and then for a change, isn't quite the best sort of life for a girl in a general way."

"Indeed. It seemed to suit *you*."

"No it didn't. I used to think so—and so did Cox's pig. That was one of the things that made me hate that Marion of yours till I wanted to strangle her. I'm going to make a regular breed of Marions—girls that don't know wrong from right—not like me, because they've never tried what's right; but like her, because they'll never have tried the wrong."

"You've turned saint, then?"

"I'm going to make other girls so—if I can. And of course I can. Adam Furness used to say I could always do anything I pleased. And that's the fun of it—a young woman like me that knows all the ropes going in for *this* work How those old maids at Number Eighteen would stare if they knew!"

"Cynthia! what's your screw?"

"My ——"

"What do you get by it?"

"Nothing."

"How are you to live, then?"

"Oh, we shall work; we shall make things, and sell them. And then there'll be voluntary contributions—there's always voluntary contributions—and private theatricals and bazaars."

"Voluntary contributions, eh? You'd better have an interview with a great philanthropist that hangs out in this very town, running over with money and charity. As you're come down to the begging lay, you'd better go and see Mr. John Heron."

"I will. It's a big work, this is going to be; and we must get what we can. But oh, Stephen, I do so wish I could get you to understand! When you went off by yourself, I was that mad, I swore (I hadn't given up swearing then) that I'd never see you nor speak to you again. But when I started this plan, it made me feel like bringing you up properly too, and making you comfortable, so that you could be the great man you ought to be and *can* be; and when I read of your accident—well, here I am. You can't do without Me, after all! No, Stephen, you can't; so it's no use for you to try. . . . Just think how splendid it will be! I'll nurse you well in no time; and the very minute you're strong enough I'll take you back to town."

"All right," said he wearily. "What name are you going by now?"

"Mrs. Stephen, Matron of the Institution for the Transformation of Weeds into Flowers."

"Ex-lady Superintendent of the Institution for the Transformation of Real Pewter into Sham Gold. Well —— it's a queer world; and when I've settled a certain score with it, the sooner I'm out of it ——"

"No. You're going to be Good. And —— But what score?"

"Never you mind. I'm going to sleep; your chatter has made my brain burn like ——"

"Hush!" said she laying her hand on his brow.

The arrival of Cynthia certainly seemed to have marvellously calmed him, and it was noticed that he never again repeated the craze of confounding the Mayor with some unknown or imaginary enemy. Indeed, since yesterday morning the name of Adam Furness never again passed his lips. Yet there was something unsatisfactory about his calmness; it had made an uncomfortable impression on the mind of the house-surgeon, who fancied he could detect symptoms of the madman's cunning in his sudden reticence and apathy. But then the patient had already proved himself quite mad enough for everything he did or did not do to serve for confirmation.

Cynthia had a long talk with the doctor on the case, in the course of which she interested him warmly in her project for the conversion of human weeds into flowers. She was not in the least like the conventional lady philanthropist; she was at once business-like and enthusiastic, and with a peculiar piquancy about her perhaps better calculated to charm a man than attract a woman. If he had any suspicion that she might once have been something of a weed herself, she had been an unquestionably pretty one—say the sort of weed called wild flower. In fine, so interested was he that he promised to speak to his friend Sir John about it, who, though he devoted his philanthropic energies to his native city, might, under such special circumstances, give a helping hand.

"I must run back to town for to-night and to-morrow morning," said she, "if I can. I have to go over the house we have taken for

our work; an interesting house," she said, with impudent demureness, "as having been the scene of a great crime. It is said to be ghost-ridden, too; so we get it very cheaply—indeed, almost for nothing."

"I hope your girls won't be scared off by the ghosts, Mrs. Stephen."

"The first thing I am going to teach them," said she, "is to be brave. Nobody can be good for anything who isn't brave. . . . Can I safely leave him, do you think, for four-and-twenty hours?"

"Certainly. There is no danger of that kind. Of course he was already receiving every attention; and after what you have been telling me, the attention will not be lessened, you may be sure. May I offer you a guinea towards the expenses of your work? I wish I could afford more."

"And I wish you could, too," said Cynthia, thanking him with a bright smile, "for I am very, very greedy for my weeds that are to be. And when I come back, I may see your friend—I forget his name."

"Sir John Heron. We are all proud of Sir John Heron. He is our Mayor: he has just been made a Baronet: he will be our Member he is creating the new Docks; he is a very great and very good man."

"Then," said Cynthia, "he is the very man for me."

There could be no question of the sincerity of this strange young woman. Thorough in all things, her conversion—if such it can be called—was as violent as it was sudden. She was as earnest and as singlehearted in her new passion for keeping other girls out of her own mischiefs as she had been in passing bad money; and I doubt if anything beyond high spirits, a craving for constant excitement, and a hunger for enjoying life to the utmost, was really at the bottom of her own transformation. Unless, indeed, there was Marion—the girl who believed herself to be without influence upon a human life; not even upon her own.

She was proud of having gained that guinea—her first honest one. "I believe poor Stephen got into Burglary at Marchgrave just that I might get to know this wonderful Mayor. It is wonderful how one thing leads to another, to be sure. Oh, what can I do to keep *him* out of mischief! He is a trouble—more trouble than a hundred girls, poor dear things, will ever be. I have it! He must be the head of another institution for boys; he could look after the boys, and I could look after him, and see that the boys didn't lead their teacher astray. But that's nonsense, I suppose. . . . Oh dear! I don't believe that I'm really fond of him, any more. I suppose I must give him teaching work; and sit in the room all the time. But he'll have to understand that the first time he gets into trouble, out he goes. Oh, dear me! Geniuses are provoking things."

She did not know Marchgrave; and was therefore less struck with the appearance of those usually deepy streets, as she passed through them on her way to the station, than she would otherwise have been. Unmistakable roughs were about—not of the heavy Marchgrave pattern, nor sailors from the docks, but men looking like navvies out of work, whose boots were plastered with the mud of the river on which Askness lay. They were peaceable enough, loafing about in knots,

and staring at the passers-by. But they had evidently no business in the place; and their presence had a threatening look in sight of orderly citizens like Mr. Prendergast and Alderman Sparrow—a result that Mr. Sharpe quite possibly had in his mind, when bethinking himself that, thanks to Stephen Ray, the unpopular candidate might require a bodyguard.

Cynthia's train was just starting for town when, giving a last glance out of the window, she started at the figure of a girl passing quickly along the platform. She leaned out, and looked eagerly; but at that moment the whistle sounded, and both train and girl were off and gone.

CHAPTER XXV.

CYNTHIA AT HOME.

It seemed to Cynthia as if she had caught a vision of Marion Furness before the train whirled away—of the very girl of whom she had been thinking ever since they had parted in London. Nor was Cynthia one to suspect herself of optical illusions. With her, seeing was believing.

And being, as I have said before, just twice as curious as a magpie, seeing with her did not mean merely believing, but also wondering How and Why. Circumstance had made her a thief; but Nature a detective. How had Marion Furness come to Marchgrave Station? Why had she come there? What was she doing? And, be it remembered, Marion was the most interesting creature to Cynthia in the world.

"Change for Askness and Askholm!" cried the porter at the first junction, where a solitary passenger entered her hitherto empty carriage.

Cynthia never forgot anything. She would notice a speck of iron-mould on a white dress, and remember its exact shape and position for years. Askholm: that was the name of the station where she had been summoned to meet Adam Furness, and whither she had sent Marion as her deputy. And Stephen Ray was in trouble at Marchgrave—hard by!

"He's not left the country, then. He's taken to burglary; and he's got hold of Stephen. And he's got hold of Marion, too. She'll come to ruin among them as sure as she's alive. And Stephen—oh, the Fool!"

She gave a mental stamp; and possibly a more actual one. For temper was still one of her weaknesses; and conversion, however complete, is not incompatible with the old leaven of jealousy. And at the same time it came upon her as a sort of shock that the girl towards whom she felt with mingled jealousy, hatred, and almost possionate worship, was becoming what Cynthia herself had been.

"And she won't like me, either. She hasn't got her wits always bristling like me. She's so innocent that over she'll go—clean. She won't do what's wrong for fun. She'll do it because—because—she's She," thought Cynthia, stumbling about in a psychological quagmire. "I know that sort of girl. When they go, they *do* go, and no mistake! It's time I turned up to keep a few dozen of them safe from the men, and the women that's worse than all the men together. I must get hold of Marion. She shan't have anything to do with Adam, who'd make a devil out of a grasshopper; and she shan't have anything to do with Stephen, that inf——— Oh, hang and confound it all—I mean that very silly man. She must be a Weed!"

"A fine morning, miss," said her fellow-passenger.

Of course, even while absorbed in her own thoughts, she had observed every hair in his carefully-arranged whiskers, and even the W.S., M.D., in spotless white letters on his brand-new valise. She could have told to a penny what he had given for his hat, and could even have made a very fair guess at the name of his bootmaker.

"Very, sir," said she in her demure style.

W.S., M.D., plumed himself after the manner of some men and all cock birds in the presence of a fairly presentable hen.

"Going all the way to town?"

Of course a lady would have snubbed him, for there was impertinence in his manner, if not in his words. But Cynthia would not have even called herself one.

"All the way," said she. I see you got in at the station for Askholm. I believe it's very pretty about there?"

"Not so pretty as about here," said he, with a smirk and a bow.

"Nor, I expect, so cool," said Cynthia, more demurely still.

"Cool? Oh—I see! Capital! Meaning me? Oh, I can be warm enough, when I please."

"Most people can," she said, icily. "When they please, Doctor—Smith, I think, of Askholm?"

She knew the meaning of M.D., and that W.S. is at least as likely to stand for William Smith as for any other name. What she wanted was to put herself *en rapport* with Askholm; and to make a mistake was as good as any other way.

"By Jove! It's odd you should spot my profession, though. But I'm not Smith—not even Smith, of Piggot's Town. But—by Jove! Aren't you Mademoiselle Cynthia, of the Pelican? Here's luck, by Jove!"

"I beg your pardon, sir. I am Mrs. Stephen, Lady Superintendent of the Home for the Cultivation of Weeds."

"Of the—what?"

"Of the Home for the Cultivation of Weeds—into Flowers. Voluntary contributions thankfully received. Perhaps, as an M.D., you are acquainted with Dr. Williams, of Marchgrave? Or with Sir John Heron?"

"*Sir* John Heron? Rather! . . . But I owe you a thousand apologies, madam, for mistaking you for a young person who, between you and

I, is—well, say no better than she should be. We doctors are brought into unavoidable and involuntary relation with all sorts of people, don't you know, high and low. One day a marchioness; another, a creature at a music hall . . . Your admirable institution is provided, no doubt, with a medical man? No? Well, there's no harm in giving my name and address, my dear madam. My card—Wyndham Snell, M.D., M.R.C.S.—never mind the address. That's purely temporary. I'm just moving into Upper Vane Street; or else Park Lane. But, if any emergency in your noble institution *should* arise, a telegram to Euphrosyne Terrace, Belvedere Road, Piggot's Town, would bring me, I am sure, on the wings of the wind. The Countess of—H'm—the Marchioness of—Hah!—mine's a lady's practice; and though I say it that shouldn't, I may say, between our two selves, that I'm waiting daily to attend the very Highest, or next to it, in the Land."

Wyndham Snell!

The very man, the very place, whence Marion had been escaping when she fainted away in Eastwood Square. And he coming from the very place where she was now! Curiosity, and something else, rose to boiling.

"Persons in my position," she said, with as much dignity as she could contrive, "come across all sorts of out-of-the-way people. You got in from Askholm. Do you happen to know anything of a young l[illegible] whose acquaintance I made under rather curious circumstances, a[illegible] whom I am deeply interested—Miss Marion Furness? She is staying there, I believe."

"You know Marion Furness?" he exclaimed. "Well—the world is small."

"And what is she doing at Askholm?"

"Doing? Oh, she's painting—making pictures, you know. She's a clever girl; and a pretty one, too."

"Stephen!" thought Cynthia, when she heard of pictures. "And her good father? Is he there too?"

"You know him?"

"Oh, yes."

"And did I understand you to say that you are acquainted with John Heron?"

"*Sir* John Heron," said Cynthia, a little anticipating her promised introduction. Her work demanded every advantage she could give it; and as she could not as yet venture to boast, like her companion, of marchionesses, a prospective acquaintance with a baronet was not to be despised.

"You know Adam Furness *and* Sir John Heron?" asked he.

"Why not?" asked Cynthia, suspecting that she had somehow been putting her foot into it, but unable to see how.

"Because, then," said he, looking at her hard, "there's nobody knows both of them but you—and me."

A dreadful pang shot through the doctor's heart. Could anybody else have discovered the secret identity and be trading on it? He made

his last remark to see how it was taken. If she did know the secret, it was incredible that she should have played with it before a stanger—unless, indeed, she were playing some very deep game indeed. And he was the more puzzled because, almost for the first time in her life, Cynthia was playing no particular game at all, but was groping about in the dark no less than he.

"But you—and me," he repeated significantly.

If she really knew of the Identity of John Heron and Adam Furness she would understand.

"How curious !" said Cynthia.

"It is curious ; but so it is. . . . How much does he subscribe to your noble institution, if I may inquire ?"

"Sir John ? I don't know yet. Ah—you are a medical man ; perhaps you have been going begging for something, like me. What do think he'll stand—give, I mean ?"

"Stand !" thought the Doctor ; "that isn't a Lady Superintendent's word ; and if a Lady Superintendent had used it she wouldn't have changed it for another. Lord ! if this business gets wind, the golden goose is killed—that's all, he reflected, his forehead turning damp and cold. "And I'm hanged if she doesn't know I'm in the swim, too. . . . I wouldn't advise you to put the figure too high," said he.

"What would you call high ? Of course, I want to get what I can for my Weeds."

"Of course. Naturally. Well, you'll be lucky if you get—say five hundred. To my knowledge, the Bank's shaky ; and ——"

"Five hundred !" exclaimed Cynthia, who had been thinking of five.

"It isn't much, of course ; but—look here, we mustn't have the goose killed. Of course, neither of us is likely to split ; it wouldn't pay. But look here ; I'll make it a whole thousand, on my honour as a medical gentleman, if you'll undertake not to worry Adam—Sir John. That's handsome, I'm sure."

Cynthia began to doubt her own wits ; but she began, in some sort, to see through her companion, and that he meant to keep what he called the golden goose in his own hands. So she said at a venture :

"All right—if you'll make it two thousand, money down."

"Impossible, my dear—young lady. One thousand was halves, on my honour as a ——"

"Two thousand—or I split," said the Lady Superintendent, though what she had to split she had not the remotest idea.

The Doctor considered. Well, that would leave him sixty-eight thousand pounds ; and he was never mean to a pretty woman.

"Done, then," said he, with a sigh. "Two thousand. I'll give it you in notes as soon as we get to town. But mind this, young lady—if you ever ask our mutual for a penny (and I'll know it), I'll let every one of your lady patronesses know that you're as like Mademoiselle Cynthia, of the Pelican, that Sir Adam Furness, the Forger, used to be sweet on, as two peas."

"Yes ?" asked Cynthia sweetly. "I have heard people say that she is a very charming girl. I wonder if she would do for a Weed."

The talk languished after that. The Doctor had intended a flirtation, and had ended as the blackmailer blackmailed. Cynthia was distracted between ravening curiosity and speculation as to what wonders she could do for her sex with two thousand pounds. She never doubted for a moment she would get it ; for it was clear Dr. Snell, whoever and whatever he was, was buying her silence about her knowledge of Adam Furness, and she wished she had asked three thousand instead of two. It was real fun to think of making an obvious rascal pay to save girls from other rascals ; and she had not ceased to be Cynthia by the mere fact of her unscrupulous fraudlency having been transformed into no less unscrupulous philanthropy. Her notions of right and wrong were considerably mixed still.

"And that donation ?" she whispered when the carriage, which they no longer had to themselves reached the terminus. "I have *your* address, you know," she said, showing him a corner of his own card.

"Oh, don't come there !" he said hastily, thinking of Mrs. Snell, who had not been of late so manageable as of old. "What's yours ?"

"Number Seventeen Upper Vane Street. At least ——"

"*What?*"

"Yes ; I've got it cheap because of its bad name. But I shan't be there till three days from now ; and I don't want to wait for the money so long. Leave it for me, in good notes, at the Miss Burdons', Number Eighteen. If you bring it to-morrow, all right ; if not—I'll split as sure as ——"

"As sure as you're like Cynthia of the Pelican as two peas !"

"As sure as if you don't bring two thousand—in notes—I'll make it three !"

"What a goose of a girl !" thought Wyndham Snell, as he drove in a hansom to Euphrosyne Terrace. "Lord !" if I hadn't been as sharp as a lancet she might have asked, not for two thousand, but for five-and-thirty thousand—and had it, too. Well, I've done *her*," he said, as, with a sigh of relief, he wiped his brow.

"What a fool of a man !" meditated Cynthia, as she travelled in an omnibus to the nearest point to Upper Vane Street. "Buying something or other I hadn't got to sell ? If I hadn't been as sharp as one of Stephen's needles I might have lost a thousand pounds. Well, I've done *him !*"

Arrived in Upper Vane Street, she knocked at Number Eighteen, and was received by the Miss Burdons with open arms. Not only was she a jewel of a girl, so zealous for others, so self-devoted, but she was about to exorcise Number Seventeen next door, and to purge the street of its scandal. A Home for Weeds was not the neighbourhood they would have selected for choice ; but it was preferable to a den of thieves, at which everybody pointed as he or she passed by. And then Cynthia had managed to infect those most conventional and most respectful of spinsters with some of her own enthusiasm—heaven knows how, unless it was that her own earnestness equalled her want of scruple ; which, after all, is no uncommon thing. He is not much of a missionary who dares not lie, or even steal, for his cause ; or, if not He, then, anyhow,

read She. Cynthia, in her new-born zeal, would have sold her soul, if by so doing she could have saved a single Weed.

"Only think?" said she; "I have got two voluntary contributions—one's a guinea; the other—guess what it can be?"

"Five?" suggested Aunt Charlotte.

"Three? Ten?" suggested Aunt Grace.

"Ten, indeed!" said Cynthia with scorn.

"Twelve, then?"

"No—Two Thousand! The Home is made!"

"Why—who in the world?" cried Aunt Grace.

"Ah, who! Did you ever hear of Sir John Heron, who lives at a place called Marchgrave?"

The two ladies looked at one another.

"Oh, dear!" said Aunt Charlotte. "The wretch that's candidate against Draycot—oh, dear!"

"It's Bribery and Corruption!" protested Aunt Grace. "Dear Mrs. Stephen—we don't know what to say!"

"You think," said Cynthia, "that ——"

"We know it," said Miss Grace, with decision. "We don't pretend to know politics; but when a candidate pays away two thousand pounds at election time—well, the other must do the same."

"Grace!" exclaimed Miss Charlotte.

"Yes," said Grace. "We haven't given *our* donation yet. Draycot must get into the House; it will be the making of him. Getting into the House cost our uncle, Charlotte's and mine, twenty thousand pounds. Mrs. Stephen, if Mr. Heron gives your home two thousand pounds, my nephew Draycot shall give two thousand guineas. Yes, Charlotte, the Family requires it; and it won't mean to us more than sixty pounds a year. Get me the cheque-book, Charlotte. . . . There, Mrs. Stephen! If Mr. Heron brags that he has given the home two thousand pounds, you will say that Draycot Morland has given a hundred pounds more."

"Why, this is better than coining!" faltered Cynthia, taken aback by this shower of gold. "I—don't know what to say!"

"There's nothing to be said," answered Miss Grace. "This is a thing that's got to be done."

They talked for a good hour over their tea, of the transformation of Weeds. And as it is a subject that demands a thousand Cynthias, and four thousand time four thousand guineas, I would that what they said were sensible enough to be worth reporting. Then said Mrs. Stephen:

"Good-night, dear ladies! I must have a look at Number Seventeen before its bedtime—I have the key."

"What—you are going into *that* house—all alone?"

"Why, I've been there a hundred—there already. *I* don't mind ghosts—not I."

"Of course not," said Aunt Grace. "But still so late ——"

"All this—this money makes me want to see it with new eyes. So, if you hear of a ghost at the window, it's only me. And to-morrow, I may have to be away for days."

"Four thousand, one hundred and one pounds one!" hummned Cynthia as she let herself into Number Seventeen—"all in one day! Why me and six Weeds can live on that without earning a penny or touching capital. Those old ladies are bricks, and M. D. stands for Muddle-headed Donkey. Afraid of Ghosts—I!" said the Ghost herself, as she entered the dilapidated hall.

Not since the police had made their raid, and subsequent search, had anybody made entrance into Number Seventeen. For want of a claimant, and by unquestionable forfeiture, it had fallen back to the ground landlord—a peer of the realm who was a schoolboy, whose affairs was in the hands of the trustees, who left everything to a country solicitor, who acted through his London agents, who employed a surveyor to manage the estate, who deputed Upper Vane Street to a clerk, who, like a prudent man, took the first offer that was made for a ghost-ridden den of thieves, whatever it might be. At any rate, philanthropy was better than a brass plate; and it was everything to get the windows cleaned. And, for references, Cynthia had got hold of the Miss Burdons, than whom nobody more respectable existed.

Entering the hall, she struck a light, and set herself to the consideration of how the home could be best arranged, and how far she could reasonably come down upon the landlord to repair the mischief she had taken so much part in making. She needed nobody to show her the way about—indeed she was the only person alive who knew every one of its corners. Into every room, as she came to it, she carried her candle, feeling it odd that she might do so without concealment, and that even if a constable, attracted by a lighted window, knocked at the door, she might boldly open to him, and declare herself to be in an Englishwoman's castle and the Queen herself a trespasser.

Having explored the ground-floor, and having made a tour of the basement, she went into the upper regions, which, it will be remembered, communicated with the mythical Mr. Ward's next door. Of course the police had carried off all the machinery of the workshop, which was now simply a large, bare room, with nothing left in it but a few benches and forms. A trifle of furnishing, thought Cynthia, and a great deal of light, will make this the very thing for the girls. But, even by her dim candle light, she saw everything; and presently her eye fell upon a large brown stain upon the floor, which she did not remember, even though the stain, from its position, could never have been covered. Nor was it any stain from acid, which she would have recognised perfectly well.

Examining it more carefully—for she never passed a straw without seeing through it from end to end—she saw that the main blotch broke off into smaller splashes, all running in the same direction, namely, to the unused door at the head of the back stairs.

"I must have a carpet here," she determined, after a momentary shudder. "The girls won't like to have blood always before their eyes. I suppose this is where Adam killed Redbeard. Oh, dear—I almost wish things had gone the other way. I wonder whether there's much of this sort of thing. Blood's worse than aquafortis for never coming

out, they say. Well, one can get a good deal of drugget for four thousand pounds. I wonder if I can trust that Doctor. Of course I can't, though. He's a knave if ever there was one. But I fancy I can do a long sight better than trust him. He's buying me off something; and when I know what that something is, I shall be as sure of him as of my old maids—what fun they are, to be sure. Halloa! the rats seem to have been finding their way upstairs. Well, we'll soon get rid of them. I'll get a terrier. It'll be fun for the girls, and make it cheerful for them at home."

Meanwhile she had followed those ugly spots till she reached the door that enabled one to reach her own old quarters—the back drawing-room. Somewhat to her surprise, it was locked; but then she remembered that Adam would be certain to lock it when escaping, and that the police would not require it to reach the drawing-room in the usual way. However, a pupil of Adam Furness was not to be much put out for want of a key. Indeed, locks had always been a favourite study of hers, as is so often the case with curious and ingenious minds, especially when they have no scruples about combining practice with theory. In short, Cynthia was never without a whole apparatus of keys.

The lock turned easily enough; but the door stuck a little—Cynthia did not care to speculate on the nature of the cement—and so, bursting open rather suddenly, it blew out her candle. And, at the same time, she seemed to hear a hollow cry—or rather moan.

If anybody was free from ghostly terrors, it was Cynthia. She had much too often been a ghost herself to shudder at any seemingly unaccountable sight; and I am sure she would never have allowed a disembodied spirit to leave her without the knowledge of the stuff of which its clothes were made, and what it had paid for them. But seeing is one thing; hearing another. It wants something more than any ordinary lack of imagination to stand upon a stain of murder in the dark in a haunted house, and to hear a moan, and not discover that one has nerves.

Her first instinct was to close the door again quickly, so as to place that at any rate between herself and whatever there might be beyond.

The room was now absolutely without any light whatever, not even so much as might find its way from the lights of London in a room at midnight; for the boards that blocked out the windows had not been removed. All was as pitch black as a dark cell in a gaol. However, she was more likely to be without even keys than without matches, and she had luckily kept tight hold of her candle.

The crackle of the match was some comfort; and, having recovered her light, feeble as it was, Curiosity got the better of Nerves; and never was the might of ruling passion so strongly displayed as by her opening the door yet again.

She strained her eyes into the darkness of the stairs, but, not being entirely a cat, she could see nothing. She strained her ears; and again she heard that hollow cry.

"Who's there?" she answered, though rather under her breath;

and her own voice sounded to herself as ghostly as the moan, if moan it were.

"No; there can't be anybody," she argued. 'I *must* go and see. If it's nothing, I can't stand shivering here like a fool. If it's something—here goes!"

"So, shading her wick with her hand, to prevent another mishap, she threw up her head, and, looking neither to right nor left, went down the creaking stairs to the back drawing-room—whistling. For once, however, her whistle was lamentably out of tune and time.

And suddenly she heard a faint but unmistakably human cry.

Dr. Snell, never being in any particular hurry to see Julia, did not return home immediately. He did not even look in at the Green Cheese; which indeed had just passed into other hands. However, wherever he went, he got home at last; and, for a wonder, found his wife waiting up for him.

"I hope you have had a pleasant journey," said she, with a grimness that tried to sound amiable, but which had a note of triumph in it for observant ears.

"Pretty well, thank you," said the Doctor, with a stare. "Business is never exactly pleasure, you know; but it's a good thing in its way."

"There's some that manage to combine 'em," said Mrs. Snell."

"I don't know what you mean, and you don't know yourself. Now look here, old lady. I don't know what's come over you of late, and what's more, I don't care to know. Perhaps you'll leave me to manage my own affairs my own way *now*," said he, in not altogether sober triumph, and unrolling befor her astonished eyes a pile of thin paper that gave forth a delightful crackle.

"Smell that!" said he, putting it to her nose. "Now you know the smell of Seventy Thousand Pounds! Ah—I knew I should get appreciation at last—that my Time would Come!"

"Wyndham! Is all that yours? How much has Adam Furness got then?" she asked, suddenly terrified off her guard.

"Adam Furness, woman? What the devil do you mean?"

She saw something ominous about his fist.

"Only—only—you had a lot of money from him before—and ——"

"Well?"

"If Adam Furness is ever took—mind *I* don't say as he will be—will all that money still be yours?"

"What do you mean by saying you don't say he will be!"

"Nothing, Wyndham," said the Informeress, seized in her dull mind with a shapeless doubt whether she had not been betraying a gold mine instead of a girl. "Nothing—nothing at all. Only such a lot of money! *Is* it all safe? Are you?

"Have you been drinking, Julia? Bank of England notes not safe? Why everything's safe. The only doubt in my mind is whether I'll stay at home and be physician in ordinary to the Queen, or whether I'll go to New York and make a million. To be a baronet wouldn't be bad;

but there'd be nobody like the Yankees for swallowing Snell's Cerebro-dyspeptic Pills. I just invented them in the train from—town."

"And you've heard nothing about Adam Furness? Nor that girl?"

"Adam Furness be hanged, and his girl with him. Don't you ask questions, Julia. A man may be master in his own house when he's making at the rate of seventy thousand a day. . . . Confound it! There's the night bell."

"And with all that money in the house! It might be burglars!" said Mrs. Snell.

"Might be another young Cobbler. Go and open, Julia. I'll stow the money away."

"Hadn't you best go yourself, Wyndham, and leave the money with me?"

"No, I hadn't. Look sharp—don't you hear?"

The bell clattered angrily.

"No," Wyndham Snell heard his wife sharply answering a voice at the door. "No, young woman; the Doctor can't go out to night, not if it was for the Queen. There's Mr. Smith over the way; not much of a doctor, but I dare say he'll do."

"But he won't do, indeed!" pleaded a voice that made the Doctor start as he stowed away the notes in his table drawer. "There's nobody will do but Dr. Snell. Tell him it's Mrs. Stephen, from the Home."

Wyndham Snell hurried into the passage.

"What's all this?" asked he. "What — Mrs. Stephen!" he exclaimed.

Mrs. Stephen looked significantly at Mrs. Snell.

"All right—you want to see me alone? Leave us, my deur. This lady wants to speak to me. . . . Well?"

"Doctor," said Cynthia hurridly, and in a such a way as to baffle the the most skillful of eavesdroppers, "You know the man we were talking of?—you don't want to get him into trouble, for your own sake—and there's a case wants a doctor that'll give no end of trouble if it falls into strange hands. I've been driving here like mad, and kept the hansom at the door ready for you to jump in. It's somebody at Number Seventeen!"

"Not—Adam?"

"No, indeed?" But don't stay talking. The man may die. Bring instruments—everything."

"You want me to come to Upper Vane Street?" asked the Doctor, turning a little faint and cold. "No, Mrs. Stephen—I'm sorry—but ——" It flashed into his mind what a thing it would be for Adam Furness to get him out of the way: and what if this girl had been sent to travel to town with him, in order to decoy him to a den of murder?"

"And I'm sorry, too," said Cynthia. "For I shall have to go to the first doctor I can find, and he'll have in the police, and—you best know whether you're friend enough of our friend to have your friendship known."

"Very good," said the Doctor, still nervous, but feeling that, if this were really no trap, the secrets of the Furness family had better remain in his own hands. "But on one condition. Mark me—I don't bring as much as a sovereign with me; I carry a loaded revolver; and I leave a written message with Mrs. Snell to say where I'm gone."

"Anything you like," said Cynthia, a little scornfully, "I have plenty of money for fees and cab fares; you may take a dozen revolvers, and leave a hundred messages. Only come. . . . Don't your dare to come to a dying man."

"In one moment."

He was not very brave, but he had supreme faith in his cleverness; and midnight murder was not the chief of the risks among which he had to choose.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"NO MORE HAVE I."

Marion, in obedience to orders, waited till the day and hour when she was to expect him whom she dared not call, even in her outermost thoughts, by the name of father. Every circumstance, every word he had spoken, combined with her unconscious reading of his character and with every likelihood in the matter, accused the slayer of Peter Petersen as being the murderer of Guy Derwent, who had been last seen at the threshold of the house whence no intruder, so Cynthia had boasted, had ever again emerged.

She could not call her own father to account for his crime. She had thrown in her lot with him, knowing what he was—one whose hand was against every man, and against whom was every man's hand. Her plight was as helpless as it was horrible. Even had he not been her own father, to whom she owed the help and love her mother had failed to pay, whatever she could do would be out of vengeance; and vengeance was in vain. Nothing could bring Guy Derwent back from the grave; nothing could whiten the hand that sent him there. And to think that if she had never been born, if she had never loved him better than her own happiness, Guy would even now be living in peace and honour and usefulness among his friends, with his young life still before him—was it not time that her mother's curse should fall upon her, and that she go mad forthwith, with so much ampler cause?

No—not yet. She must hold her brain together for a little while still. . . . She could no longer think; but one thing she knew, that she had vowed her whole help to the man who had given both brain and heart this worse than deadly blow, and that he trusted her, and her alone. Marion was as an Arab, into whose tent has come the slayer of his kind-

red, and with whom he has shared salt unawares. Her trust was still upon her. But afterwards—was he not to fly the country: was she not to share his flight: was she not to make him a refuge and a home? Yes; she had heard all that; and to make up to the outlaw, so far as a daughter may, for a loveless and desperate life which had left him without any friend or hope but her.

That could not be; even though she would have, at last, to set her broken will against destiny. Her last remaining hope she could find for herself, was sacrifice; but surely even sacrifice must have its bounds. And if she was to go mad, like her mother, what could madden her so swiftly and so utterly as living, year after year (and years are endless at her age) with a man who knew not of her knowledge that he was more than a murderer! No; she could make no home for any man, husband or father: and least of all for him. The only homes for her to think of were for herself, and unshared—first the madhouse: then the grave.

But, meanwhile, it was not for her to betray trust; and the more inasmuch as she knew wherein—save in obedience—the trust placed upon her lay. As he did not come, the only thing for her was to obey orders: to take the next train to Marchgrave, and to inquire for John Heron.

Marchgrave, and John Heron! If this were not an arch-stroke of fate, it was a dream. Marchgrave was a living picture, and John Heron its most familiar figure in it, ever since she had crossed the Equator. And how—but how differently from what was to have been! She was to see both it and him. And what should Guy's Murderer have to do with Guy's Friend? What meant it?—what was to come of it? But, whatever it meant, or was to happen, she must go.

The little railway station, usually so quiet, was so crowded with rough passengers that she had some difficulty in finding a place in the already crowded train; nor, had her mind been less occupied, would she have been over pleased with her company. For classes seemed to have got mixed; so that she found herself the only woman in a compartment full of navvies or quarrymen—at least to her inexperienced eyes—and impregnated with a flavour of pipes and ale that reminded her of the entrance of the Green Cheese.

But beyond the habits of smokers who have never studied the elegance of their art, she had no reason to complain. She got a few stares, it is true; but they were ox-like and inoffensive, and in no wise resembling the highly cultivated glances of Doctor Snell.

"Going to see the fun, Jim?" asked one of a new comer, who hurried in and squeezed himself between two of his mates—luckily not on Marion's side.

"Morland for ever!" bellowed Jim.

"Who's he?"

"Blessed if I know. Morland for ever! Ain't that the name?"

"That's right enough, Jim," said another. "Blest if I don't wish 'twas election time once a week ——"

"Stow your blest gab, mates," growled a man in the corner.

"We're quiet chaps, we are, out on a spree to see a bit o' fun. We don't meddle with nobody if nobody don't meddle with we."

"Not with old John's windows?" winked one.

"No; nor with the lampposts; nor with the new statty; nor with nothing; nor with old John. If anybody wants to duck him in his own Docks ——"

"Ay, Chicken—what then?"

"Why—let 'un alone," Chicken growled.

"Which 'un? Old John, or him as wants to duck old John?"

"Why, the ducks, to be sure."

They were a good-humoured lot, laughing at obscure jokes, and breaking now and then into horseplay, taking no more apparent heed of Marion than if she had been as far away as her thoughts were. That the election was in progress, she gathered from the name of Morland; and presently she noticed that one or two of the men wore scraps of red ribbon—doubtless that candidate's colours. What made her notice such a trifle was that one of her companions, nudging his next neighbour, said in a hoarse something, intended for an inaudible whisper:

"You've got no colour, Skeweye. Ask the young woman for a bit out of her hat."

"Ask her yourself," said Skeweye gruffly. "She'll be one of Lawyer Sharpe's—she'll be."

That was the only notice she received; and, as it was not meant to be noticed, it was no harm. At the station, they tumbled out one after another, and, joining their fellows from other carriages, were received by a young gentleman on the platform, and then broke up and loafed off in knots of threes and fours.

Marion waited till the station was fairly clear, and then asked her way of the ticket-collector to Chapter Lane. She felt wofully lost; she wondered how it was that she was less impressed than she was by the fact that she was in Marchgrave than by her imagination beforehand. Everything looked so different, although in fancy she had a hundred times travelled every step of the way. For one thing, the streets were by no means so quiet as she had always heard. Indeed, at some points they were actually thronged; and there was unmistakable, though suppressed, excitement in the air—the most contagious sort of all.

But the prevailing colours were not those of the train from Askholm. That might be seen here and there, in rosettes and upon posters—mostly defaced and torn; but blue and white was the colour of Marchgrave. Ladies wore all the blue they could: even the darkest complexioned managed to bring in a point of it somewhere. Men paraded it in the buttonhole; flymen on their whips; even dogs round their necks, and walls and houses everywhere. Once, on her way, Marion caught sight of the masts rising out of the docks; and every one of them carried Blue Peter topmast high. Which, besides combining blue with white, might be a graceful way of signifying that the shipping of Marchgrave was on the eve of departure from the old Docks to the new.

She caught this glimpse from the corner of Chapter Lane. Arrived at the Bank, she would not let herself hesitate, but entered, and asked the first clerk she came to at the counter for Mr. Heron—an elderly personage, as all the clerks in Heron's Bank were, even when they were young.

"Mr. Heron is not at the Bank at present —— But, ah! you are the young lady who was expected to call. I think this is for you?"

He handed her an envelope without an address. There was nothing out of the way in the transaction: all sorts and conditions of men and women were always calling to see Mr. Heron, on all sorts of philanthropic business wherein the left hand was not to learn the doings of the right hand through the use of names. For ought the clerk could tell, the young lady might be the daughter of some poor curate who was to be delicately and anonymously aided by the contents of the letter in her hand. If John Heron let his light shine before men, his generosities were much too numerous for him to find the time to publish them all—especially, it might be, at election-time.

It was no doubt for her. She opened it—it was unquestionably for her.

"Is it all right?" asked the clerk, adding, with paternal jocularity, such as the staidest of men on the eve of polling day may irreproachably indulge:

"I'm sorry to see your colour; isn't it rather rash of you to wear it in Chapter Lane? We've some desperate characters here, I assure you: eh, Mr. Prendergast?" he added, as that victim of calumny passed the desk on his daily call, wearing a noble rosette of white and blue.

"I *shall* get desperate at last," said Mr. Prendergast. "But anything's possible after that affair at the Guildhall—except that Heron shouldn't get in. There'll be near three thousand majority—less or more."

"That'll be a great business on Thursday, when the statue's unveiled. Mr. Prendergast—it will be an era in the history of this city. It's a thousand pities young Mr. Derwent won't be there—such a friend to Sir John as he'd always been."

"Yes," said Mr. Prendergast, with a sigh.

Marion had taken her unaddressed letter a little way aside. "I have been led," he wrote, "to put off, or possibly to change, my plans. *I shall have much to say to you* when I know what they are. Go home now. Call here again at the same time to-morrow, and ask if there is any message for you.—A. F."

Disappointed by this never-ceasing darkness that eternally ended in nothing, Marion had just run through this new order when she caught the mention of Guy Derwent's name. It was true, then, that he had vanished; and that men sighed when they spoke of him as gone, as true as that his slayer was leaving messages for her at the house of his friend.

It was all getting past bearing. If there were only anybody in the world whom she might consult—if there were only Cynthia, even.

But she also had vanished, in company with the rest of the procession of shadows who formed, for her, the inhabitants of this side of the world. Well—she could not return to Askholm immediately: there could be no reason why she should go back for hours. It was enough if she obeyed orders to the letter: her father was not the man to leave anything needful unbidden. It was not likely she would learn anything; but she could not bring herself all at once to leave the town, where, if anywhere, everything was to be learned. Of course she could not breathe the thunderous air of the streets; but there was the quiet cathedral close, and the great nave itself, where she could remain all day long if she pleased, and try once more to bring her wandering mind together. She might, before she left Marchgrave for another day, set eyes at least on John Heron—Guy's friend. Why should she not take counsel with that best and grandest of men to whom, as Guy had often told her, not even the humblest stranger who had the remotest connection with Marchgrave had ever come for counsel in vain?

Alas! how could she tell anything without telling all? Ask counsel from Guy's friend! It would be delivering up her father to his doom.

Entering the close was like passing into another world: out of the Marchgrave she could not recognize into the Marchgrave of which her heart had dreamed. She passed for greater quiet and solitude through the south porch into the nave, changing the elms for arches and columns, and seated herself in the shadow. It was her first visit to a church since she had left Australia: her first to a church like this in all her days. And in its coolness and vastness it did seem to her for the moment that all things without the porch, and all things within herself, might come to feel immeasurably small. It was no more than a passing relief, no doubt; but her whole overstrung self demanded it, and, from some source or another, it came.

But when the organ opened, the space of rest was over. It should not have been so: she should have been able to loose herself in the solemn music still more. But instead of peace it was pain—it spoke too deeply of what had been, of what should have been, and of what could never be. The Indian may find it easy to resign himself into the hands of a God who condemns him to drift through existence blindly; but Marion, for all her slavery to circumstances, had still in her the rebellious and masterful blood of her father, which, as forbidding resignation, forbade prayer. She could see no justice; and she was not old enough to conjecture that there may be such a thing as justice unseen.

Why had Guy been cut off from a bright and useful life that might have become a great one only because he had met a girl on a chance voyage? Why had she drawn him to his death by loving him so much that she could even surrender him? Why was a man like her father, born to rule, driven to waste a commanding will upon violent crime, and an active brain, upon escape from himself and all mankind? Why was the whole world made up of madness and crime.

Yet one humble being seemed to stand out like a strong rock in the midst of chaos—John Heron, of Marchgrave. She knew all about him

from Guy—he at least, showed that at least one man in the world was what her father might have been—honoured, although true and stainless; the master of his life. and not its slave; one on whom all men leaned because they knew him strong enough to help them. Could it have been that even her father was leaning upon him even now?—was the friend of all the friendless about to aid him in the new life he had been planning? had John Heron perhaps even inspired the plan? thought she; herself its true inspiration. A longing filled her to seek out this one strong and helpful mortal—Guy's friend and hero, who alone of all men seemed to know how life could be met and conquered—to throw herself at the feet of the only being in earth or heaven who represented the victory of justice and kindness over violence and fraud, in the hope that he might hold out even to her a helping hand, or speak to her a helpful word.

And so the music that filled the nave, and should have filled her heart also, was thrown away. She left the church with even less comfort than she had entered it, and betook herself stationwards—or at least she thought so.

For though the plan of Marchgrave is simple enough to anybody who knows it, being cruciform, its very simplicity of plan is a stumbling-block to strangers, since an alley apparently leading to one limb of the cross is pretty sure to take some unaccountable twist into another. So it happened that the nearer sight of masts, and the sharp smell of shipping, warned Marion that she could not be near the station, where she remembered nothing of the kind.

And presently she emerged from the seeming labyrinth upon a narrow quay, from which tall brick warehouses, of many storeys, towered over the few masts that told how far Askness was ahead of Marchgrave. There was no signs of bustle, and few of business, for it was getting late, and, for quietness, she might as welll have remained under the shadow of the cathedral tower. Here and there she saw a grimy sailor lazily engaged on a grimy deck, and across the black water twinkled the lights of a public-house whence a chorus came, mellowed.

In certain moods, a trifle will make all the difference between simple hopelessness and absolute despair. It is not much to loose one's way in a small town, in which one can never be very far from anywhere; but to Marion it seemed as if this loss represented her entire life—she could not find the way to anywhere in great things or small. As she looked down into the black water—was it madness upon her at last that brought on her a temptation from which she recoiled in terror? Or was it only the natural feeling of one who had lost her way, not only in Marchgrave, but in life, and whose mere existence was worthless, now that her heart had been slain? A drop into the black water, a moment's struggle, and she would no longer be the daughter of Adam Furness? no longer hunted and haunted, no longer in this cruel and incomprehensible world, whence her mother, finding no rest in it, had flown. They had left it—her mother and Guy: why should she remain?

Suddenly there burst upon her ears, no longer mellowed by passage

across the water, but hoarse and near, a chorus in which women screamed and men roared :

"Rule Britannia! Britannia rule the waves!
Britons never, *never*, NEVER, will be slaves!"

"Halloa!" cried one of the advancing Britons. "Here's a Red 'un! Make her join in. "Hurrah for the bonnets of blue!"

"Yah! you Askness—Girl!" cried a Boadicea of the band of Heronites—only she did not exactly say "girl"—making a clutch at Marion's hat.

There is nothing so calculated to inspire courage into the heart of the average Free Briton, of whatever sex or age, as a perfectly helpless creature, be it cat, pigeon, genius, idiot, savage, seagull, man who is down—and therefore kickable—timid boy, or unprotected girl. With all our splendid qualities, we are bullies from our cradles upwards; the freeborn Briton enjoys nothing so much as a good wory—when he can do so without risk to his own precious skin. It is we, and we alone, who jump upon the wives who are fools enough to let us; who make one another's earlier schooldays into anticipations of hell; who, for the sake of what we call sport, kill or torture every weak creature we can find; and who, for what we Pharisees call civilisation's sake, use the very Bible as a means of bullying those who cannot understand a word of it into buying our trash—unless they are wise enough to show a bold front and then we cringe. . . .

But what has all this to do with Marion Furness? Nothing; except that she was one, while the Free Britons were nine or ten; and that, had they been one fewer, they might have let Marion's hat alone.

It was one thing to be tempted by the calmness of the black water—quite another to be set upon by a crew of Caractacus and Boadicea. From the water she recoiled; from the Free Britons she ran.

A shout rang out after her, and some seemed to follow. But, when she reached the first dark entry, she was alone, and

"NEVER will be slaves."

was howling farther and fainter away.

Her place of refuge turned out to be the entrance of an unpretending office, at the side of which was painted in black letters on a white ground, "G. Derwent, Shipbroker."

And scarcely had she realised whither she had wandered and where she had found refuge when the inner door opened, and a respectable elderly gentleman issued, well wrapped up in a great coat and comforter, and drawing on his gloves carefully. Mr. Prendergast of course—he also had belonged to the story of the *Sumatra*. How strange everything seemed! The real Marchgrave was the phantom of the Marchgrave she had known but had never seen.

He looked at her suspiciously.

"Are you on business?" he asked. "It's after office hours. . . . I beg your pardon. Didn't I see you at the Bank this morning? Are you from Sir John's?"

"No," said Marion. "I was frightened by some people—you can hear them now—and I ran in here. I was going to the station —— I lost my way ——"

"H'm! that's an awkward thing to lose about the Docks to-night, young lady; a very awkward thing indeed. There's mischief brewing, as sure as I stand here."

"Where is the station? Is it far?

"Too far for you to walk there by yourself, you'll have to go through some bad places, where anything might happen to-night, from what I see. I don't like the look of things at all. I'd offer to see you through, but ——"

Prudence before chivalry. It was bad enough to be chaffed for murder; but the Bell parlour would be no place for Mr. Prendergast after he had been seen walking with a strange young woman after nightfall; and he would unquestionably be seen. He would simply be roasted to death; and, then, what would Mrs. Clapper say?

"But ——"

It was not very light in the passage; but Mr. Prendergast always bought the very best of glasses, and something about this stray young person puzzled him. There seemed something about her not unfamiliar to him. It was not merely that he had seen her at the Bank that morning; that had nothing to do with it. It was that certain tones of her voice put him in mind of somebody else; and not only tones of voice, but, the more he came to think of it, her features also. And, absurdly enough, these intangible associations were unaccountably connected with Sir John Heron—and yet not entirely with Sir John Heron.

"What train are you going by?" he asked, as slowly as he could—which was very slowly indeed—for the sake of another minute's study.

"The next for—that stops at the junction," said Marion, feeling helpless again.

"That'll be at 8.20; not much time to lose. . . . By Jingo!" he exclaimed, if one can exclaim without words. "It is—and yet it can't be; why she's as like that photograph Mr. Derwent once left on my desk as if they were twins. And calling in Chapter Lane! There's more here, as they say, than meets the eye."

It seemed to be more than met even the best spectacles, with any reasonable hope of seeing through. Was she employed in these mysterious transactions which not Mr. Derwent's own confidential clerk was allowed to share? It was election time; could she by any chance be the Man, or rather the Woman, in the Moon!

Now Mr. Prendergast, it need not, I trust, be said, was as honest as the day, and no more capable of a breach of confidence than, despite gossip, of murdering his master and hiding him among the coals. But he was in an exceedingly painful position. He was really getting anxious about his employer. He was becoming daily more embittered and humiliated by the inventions he had to make in order to hide his ignorance of Mr. Derwent's very whereabouts; and he felt positive that his inventions were all made in vain. He seriously believed that

he was labouring under some suspicious foul play. In short, he was a victim at once of a sense of injustice, of wounded pride, of confidence insultingly withheld, and of unselfish anxiety. If he only knew what the secret was, he could conspire to keep it, he was sure, as well as any man. But how could he help to keep a secret he was not allowed to share ?

Under such circumstances, curiosity, and the awakening of the detective spirit at the touch of opportunity were, I cannot help thinking, for once somewhat more than pardonable. If we don't want our servants to pry, we must reasonably trust them ; and these are not days in which the detective spirit need have the faintest fear of being too much despised. Being a shy bachelor, he had not the least notion of how he was going to set about the process of pumping. But that he should succeed, he did not for a moment doubt ; for, being a simple-minded man, he had the profoundest faith in his own cunning.

If Prudence before Chivalry, Curiosity before Prudence.

"There," he said recklessly, "I will."

"Will ——"

"See you to the station," said he. "At least, show you the way. These are dangerous times, Miss ——. I didn't quite catch the name ?"

"You are very kind, Mr. Prendergast, said Marion absently.

"Now—How should *she* know *my* name ?" asked he. "I'm right ; there *is* something more than meets the eye," he thought, as, still pulling on his gloves, they left the doorway. "When did you see Mr. Derwent last—if I may enquire ? And hope he is well ?"

Marion had been warned by her father to show no surprise, whatever she might see—whatever she might hear. But she started now, even so that Mr. Prendergast could see. What could he know of her ?

"What !—— Why do you think I know Mr. Derwent ?" she asked —weakly, it must be owned.

"And what makes you think my name's Prendergast, eh ?" thought he, but did not say so. "You see, Miss—Miss—as Mr. Derwent's clerk, his confidential clerk, you understand, I know all about Mr. Derwent's affairs ; there are naturally no secrets from Me."

"Then you know where he is now ?" she asked, a wild hope rising within her.

"Why, of course I do."

"Oh—— Where ?" cried Marion, forgetting everything but one.

"That is to say, of course not exactly at this minute—let me see, where would he be now ? I've a shocking bad head for names."

"Mr. Prendergast," said Marion, hesitating no more, seeing how much hung upon what answer she might receive, "tell me truly, for God's sake, when you last heard from him—Mr. Derwent—and from where."

"Why—what does this mean ?" asked Mr. Prendergast, catching something of her excitement.

"It means—it means that I have a right to know."

"Bless my soul ! And don't you know ?" he asked, his own hope fading as hers struggled to rise.

"I know *nothing*. Do you?"

"And what is your right to know, if I may make so bold?"

"We were great friends. I was to have been his wife," said she.

He could not see her face, but he heard something like a sob, that was suppressed instantly. Now many a man would have thought it queer, to say the least of it, that a young woman should have been prowling about the office under such singular circumstances as attached to the Marchgrave mystery. But to Mr. Prendergast, being a tender-hearted person, with a head that he believed to be as hard as the heart that he had took to be harder than the nether millstone, her situation became at once as clear as day.

"I see! I see! You've not heard from Mr. Guy, and you've come to hear of him. No wonder—no wonder! You've not heard of him, then?"

"No ——"

"No more have I."

Out went her last hope before it was lighted. How could she have been so foolish as to let the ghost of hope enter into a life like hers—the ghost, where the substance had never been?

"And nobody has heard? Has nobody tried to find ——"

"There's only one in the world knows—Sir John Heron. Well, if people don't write to their sweethearts, I suppose their clerks mustn't complain."

Sir John Heron—always Sir John Heron!

"And what does *he* say?" asked Marion, in a tone so cold that Mr. Prendergast fancied he had heard a heart breaking.

"He says—Patience. My dear young lady—for that you are, or you'd never have been the intended of a gentleman from his hat to his boots like Mr. Guy. My dear young lady—I'm beginning to think all sorts of things. What Sir John does must be right, because he's Sir John; and he was my poor principal's great friend. And 'tis my belief that Sir John don't know what's come of him no more than you and me; but that he's searching high and low for him, and keeping it dark for fear of scandal and the business going to the dogs before he turns up again. That would be just like Sir John—always generous, and considerate, and wise. But—this way to the station ——"

"I am not going to the station," said Marion.

"Where then?"

"To The Cedars. Which is the way?"

"The Cedars!"

"Yes; to Sir John Heron's. Whatever happens—I *must* know whatever anybody knows. You are Guy's—his friend; but you can't know, nobody can know, what this means to me. It isn't only that I've lost him; it means—but what am I saying? . . . Whatever comes of it, I must see Sir John Heron. . . . There, it is striking eight; I cannot catch my train. Yes; I was meant to stay here."

"Heavens!" thought Mr Prendergast, "this will never do. I can't let her go to The Cedars—I'm afraid I've gone and put my foot in it

after all. . . . No, my dear young lady; you can't go all the way there—no. And you wouldn't find Sir John, if you did, I happen to know; and—Patience —— "

"Patience!"

Just then they reached the flaring High Street, where a dense crowd blocked the entire space between the Guildhall and the Bell somebody seemed to be haranguing somewhere, in a voice frantically shrill, and was answered with all sorts of clamours—laughter, groans, hoots, and roars.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Prendergast of a constable.

"I don't know what it is, sir, but it don't look well for to-morrow. The town is getting just mad against Morland."

"And what are you police going to do?"

"His worship has given strict orders to let everything alone ——"

"Quite right—quite right; nothing like oil on the waters—plenty of oil."

"And, begging your pardon, sir, to advise all ladies and gentlemen to go home."

"I want to see Sir John Heron," said Marion.

"Then, miss, you'll have to go to his committee-room; and that's no easy matter just now."

"It's impossible," said Mr. Prendergast. "You can see him to-morrow—at the Bank, you know, or the Guildhall. You ——"

At that moment the crowd swayed backward, and pushed all three—Marion, Mr. Prendergrast, and the constable—into the archway of the Bell.

"Ah!" panted Mr. Prendergast, "*that's* settled. You'll have to stay here to-night —— Mrs. Clapper's a friend of mine, and I'll step in. . . . I don't know what to think. . . . But if you'll come in here for the night —— To-morrow ——"

Just then up went a great roar, as the orator gave out the word "Murder" in a highpitched scream, answered by a great clattering in the inn, and a rush of boots and ostler to close the big doors.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LAMBS AT PLAY.

Less, it may be, out of either chivalry or dective spirit, than out of care for his own reputation, of which he was so laudably careful, Mr. Prendergast had impressed Mrs. Clapper with a sense of the importance of the guest thus thrown upon her hands. The shifts to which he had been put for so long to hide his ignorance of his employer's movements were rapidly qualifying him for a full-blown Jesuit of fiction—that is to say, a man who is always lying, but never succeeds in taking

anybody in. On the present occasion, however, there had fortunately been no need of direct lies. At that time of excitement, an excitement for which there seemed to be no sufficient cause, mysterious and important whisper, as of a state secret, about some ineffable business with Sir John Heron was quite sufficient to awe the landlady of the Bell, where Sir John's very name was, in oracular significance, equivalent to the bishop's and more than equivalent to the dean's. It was with a feeling that she herself had been honoured with some high and mighty political confidence that she in person lighted Marion to her room and made herself generally motherly. So much did Mr. Prendergast make of it, bringing in Sir John at every word, that Mrs. Clapper, who was a reader of romance of the mysterious and sensational order, began almost to suspect that she might be entertaining a peeress unawares. True, she had no luggage, and had not spoken of any. But then —— Sir John !

And, so, when Mr. Prendergast impressively added, "And so, my dear lady—a nod's as good a wink, you know—If I was you I wouldn't say much about this—H'm !—to any of those gossiping fools in your parlour," she not only threw her head up with an "As if ! What do you take me for ?" but disproved the notion that a woman is not to be trusted with a secret for evermore. It is true the secret, had the tumult in the street and anxiety for her front windows given her time and leisure to examine it, did not provide her with much to tell ; that the habitues and other occupants of her parlour had other things to think of and talk about in the extraordinary state of the town ; and that she did what little she could to let people know she had a secret which, if she revealed it, would entirely change the aspect of affairs. Still, the great fact remained that the secret was not betrayed.

Nevertheless, though Mr. Prendergast had done so well for himself, both in saving himself from immediate annoyance and in making himself of real importance in the eyes of the widow, thus making a stride beyond his rivals behind their backs, he was very, very uneasy. He took his tumbler among his fellows, waiting till the streets were quiet enough for respectable folks to see one another home ; but he took it silently and unsociably. So not even the young person to whom Guy Derwent had engaged himself knew anything of her lover ; while the truth of her tale was manifest from her anxiety to see Sir John. Yes ; what he had already suspected must be true—there was a mystery ; Heaven grant there might not be foul play besides. It was clear he had really disappeared. It was clear also that Sir John Heron was covering the fact of his friend's disappearance. And why ? There could be only one reason : that which had at once occurred to him. The sudden disappearance of a young man of business would mean scandal and ruin. Everybody would set it down to the flight of a fraudulent bankrupt, as the most charitable and the only business-like way of regarding such things. But then it is not every young man in trouble who is blessed with a friend and banker like John Heron, of Marchgrave ! With all that noble generosity of which surely he alone was capable, he had come forward with his own cash and his own

credit to keep the business going, and had accounted, on his own unquestionable authority, for the absence of his friend, as if it were a temporary mission of importance to the city. So when Guy Derwent returned there would be a profit instead of ruin, and increased respect instead of scandal; for ho would question the position of one who was backed by the whole credit of Chapter Lane?

But if he never returned? If all this generous protection was being thrown away?

Could it be that Guy Derwent had really got into trouble—perhaps been writing the name of his friend and benefactor instead of his own? Such things have been done, and mostly by the least likely hands. And to cover a friend's fall, though to his own loss, and to help him to rise again, would be just John Heron. But no. Mr. Prendergast's heart was more loyal than his head, and sent his suspicions flying.

"I'd sooner suspect myself of such a thing than Mr. Guy!" thought he. "I know what that poor girl thinks—that he's had foul play. I never did hold with those trips to London—a wick d place, full of ravening wolves. It's no fit place for a young man without somebody of experience in wickedness to guide him. There's the music-halls; and the billiard-rooms; and the turf; and the gaming-tables where you lose a five-pound note in a single night; and the clubs; and the pa k; and the places where they delude you into, and sew you up in a sack, and drop you off London Bridge; and the barbers that cut your throat and make you into pies. . . . I wonder if Her n's put on a detective. Wonderful fellows some of them are to be sure. And—by Jingo! He has, though!" he exclaimed aloud, as his eye fell upon the piano and recalled to his mind that accomplished gentleman London, who had asked so many questions, and had been closeted at the Bank with John Heron the next morning for a good hour. "That'll be the very man!"

He st tled the room, and sent all eyes to the door.

"Bless us alive! I thought you'd seen a ghost, Mr. Prendergast!" said Mrs. Clapper, with a little scream.

"Ah," said the vicar-choral, shaking his head, "remorse is an awful thing."

By this time the streets had become fairly quiet; though, after the outer peace of Askholm it seemed to Marion that there was turmoil all night through, both within and without the Bell. The rattle and seemingly eternal chatter of the bar parlour, continually enlivened by new voices just when it seemed dying, mingled with the hoarse shouting and laughter of a slowly dispersing crowd; then followed the shooting of bolts and the slamming of doors; and, when this was over, all the clocks of all the churches seemed seized with an epidemic of striking and chiming in all manner of keys.

Then even before it was light began a sound of hammering; and then a bustle in the stable-yards. It was a long night, and Marion had slept but little, and only to start out of painfully and vivid dreams. Neither dreams nor vigils, however, had changed her determination to see John Heron, but had strengthened it rather. What harm could

come of it? She need tell him nothing but that she was interested in the fate of Guy Derwent, and wished to know all he could tell her. She might even avoid showing interest, and merely make ordinary inquiries, as anybody might concerning an acquaintance when one happens to be in his native town. As to the rest, she felt inspired at last to use all her wits; it was more than life and death to her to know at whose hands he had died. And surely John Heron was not the man to leave a friend to disappear and die unsought for and unavenged.

Mrs. Clapper brought her breakfast in person. It was a grave condescension; but then the crisis was grave; and the guest was less unlikely to be confidential with the landlady than with one of the maids.

"Ah, these are terrible times," said she. "What with these Morlandites and such—wicked Atheists *I* call them—one don't know the very town where I was born. I'm sure one never used to hear of Morlandites when I was a girl; and though one used to have fun at elections and assizes, and such like, it was all good temper, and good for business as well. No; this isn't good for business at all, unless it's for the public-houses, which if I was the magistrates they should all be shut up, every one. Then everybody would have to be respectable, like they ought to be; and so I was saying only the other day to the Very Reverend the Dean. Yes; we're all very proud of Sir John, and so we've a right to be; and he knows best, and I'd be the last to say he wasn't, for one. Only there was never all this fuss before the Docks was started; and—but there, I suppose we must move with the times. Shall you be in town when the statue's opened, or whatever they call it, to-morrow? It'll be a grand sight—the Bishop's going to be there, and the Recorder, and the Bishop's lady; p'raps you know them? And his lordship the lord-lieutenant, and her ladyship, and all the country people, I may say. It'll be quite a ceremony. That was a strange thing happened, wasn't it, at the hospital?"

"Where do you think I shall find Sir John Heron?" asked Marion; "at the Bank, or The Cedars?"

"Ah—there's no knowing on polling-day. Of course you know Mrs. Heron—I beg pardon, Lady Heron she'll be now. She was a Marchgrave young lady; never did her poor father think he might have lived to see Miss Catharine a baronet's ladyship; it's just like a novel. But there—the world's just full of strange things nowadays. And the idea of a patient escaped out of the hospital and running alive about the streets; it's enough to make one's blood run cold. He was the man, I hear, that put up that wicked bill; and a man that would do that would do anything. But of course, you couldn't expect a Morlandite to keep quiet in his bed, no, not if his very neck was broke, as every man Jack of 'em ought to be. . . ."

"She's a wonderful sensible young lady," said Mrs. Clapper to her niece on returning to her own quarters. "I never heard anybody talk more sensible, not even Mr. Prendergast; and to hear her let out against the Morlandites, it was fine! Ah, and she told me something too—don't you let it out, but she *is* going to see Sir John."

. . . .

But greater things were in progress now than the anxieties of a clerk or the heartbreak of a girl. Worries and heartbreaks are everyday things; but it is not every day that a David, such as Draycot Morland, dares to battle such a veritable Goliath as Sir John Heron. I quote from a caricature of the hour, in which Morland and Heron were depicted in those identical characters, the giant striding across an unfinished dock, with money-bags sunk into the mud at the bottom, while a stone had struck him squarely in the centre of the forehead. But nobody took the artist for a prophet— had the Heronites condescended to fight with lead pencils, they would have retorted by making Samson trample on a wriggling worm, or crushing between his finger and thumb a buzzing fly, while legs, like those of the Rhodian Colossus, bestrode the merchant navies of the world.

In that case, surely the election of the popular candidate should have proceeded with befitting dignity. But strange rumours had got abroad. It was not only that a strange fanatic, armed with the power of frenzy, had been going about haranguing half-amused audiences to the effect that John Heron had been guilty of about a dozen felonies, but that—no doubt Mr. Sharpe best knew how—an article had appeared in a special edition of the *Askness Advertiser* calling upon Sir John Heron, Baronet, of Marchgrave, to deny publicly that he had ever gone by another name. Great is the power of print; and even those who set down the orator as a lunatic suffering from an acute paroxysm of election fever, felt uncomfortable doubts as to the possibility of so much smoke without at least a modicum of fire. Of course, anybody in the world might now and then find it convenient to take an alias—almost anybody, that is to say; for the mere suggestion of such convenience in the case of one so immaculate as Sir John Heron, was almost equivalent to breathing on a merchant's solvency or a woman's good name.

"Really I think you *had* better take them at their word!" urged Alderman Sparrow. "Go out on the Bell Balcony, and tell the scoundrels they lie."

"Argue with a madman?" answered Sir John, smiling grimly; "no."

"Treat him as such, then," said the alderman. "He's inciting to a breach of the peace."

"On their heads be it," said Sir John. "If he provokes my good friends too far—well, I should be sorry to see dragoons in Marchgrave; but a troop marched yesterday from Redchester to Askness Junction, and can be here in twenty minutes, if need be."

"What a man you are, Sir John! You think of everything—everything in the world."

"What the devil's the meaning of *this*, Sharpe?" asked Draycot Morland, pointing to the article in the *Advertiser*. "And what the devil again do you mean by putting me at the head of an army of wolves? How much do you pay your special madman a day?"

"Wolves? **Pray, Mr. Morland, call the People by their right name.** Those whom you call so opprobriously"—"hopperobusly" was his exact word—"are honest working men; who, hating shams, but not being voters, have to do the best they can. Heron shan't win without a fight of some sort; and if we can only get him to read the Riot Act, and call out the military, he'll have the devil to pay. He won't be the better for riding into the House on the back of a dragoon. . . . And as for the article, Mr. Morland—throw mud; some'll stick somehow. . . . And what do I pay our madman? What do you pay your genius, Mr. Morland—eh?"

"What *is* your game?"

"A shindy! My—our game is to get Heron to ride in on the backs of the dragoons. He's sent for them, as I happen to know. He'd have a majority without 'em. But if we make him send for 'em—why, we can always say that without 'em he wouldn't have got in. And then ——"

"Then?"

"Why, there you are."

"Where?"

"Why, there! We can petition. We can set the whole Radical press howling. We can mix it all up with our opposition to the Marchgrave Docks Bill. My dear sir—if there's one thing that the British public can't swallow—and there isn't much it can't—it's dragoons. *They* aren't a sham, you see."

"Sharpe—I'm beginning to doubt if realities are so much better than shams, after all. I'm quite sure one can't touch genius without being defiled. He *is* a genius—that madman—but ——"

"As a lawyer, I don't admit his lunacy. He goes about the town proclaiming his worship the mayor a felon. Now suppose it was true?"

"The idea?" Since his interview with Heron in the hospital, he also had been impressed with the impossibility of connecting any idea of baseness with the King of Marchgrave. "I'm not going to have anything of this sort of thing, Sharpe. I came to fight hard—to fight anyhow, if you please. But there are bounds to anyhow. And I'm not going to allow a madman ——"

"I don't admit ——"

"I say a madman, to go about slandering my opponent in this outrageous way—especially after what passed between Heron and myself the other day. I tell you, that man is a gentleman, in spite of all I've said of him ——"

"I thought you didn't believe in gentlemen, Mr. Morland," sneered Mr. Sharpe.

"Any way, I believe in blackguards; and if we don't stop this ruffianly way of going to work, I shall be one of them. Sharpe—I don't want to ask indiscreet questions, so I won't ask what's the hire of a lunitic for polling day—but ——"

"Not a penny, Mr. Morland, on my honour. It's all pure zeal."

"Pure zeal? Then we'll have a little corrupt apathy, for a change.

Send somebody to tell him he's wanted immediately, at my committee-room ——"

Mr. Sharpe left, smiling. Things were going well. If only this heaven-sent lunatic could provoke the loyal citizens of Marchgrave into breaking heads, the contingent from Askness would not submit patiently to have their heads broken, and the amount of political capital to be coined out of riot was beyond calculation. Why the election might be made void: and if not, the arch-enemy of Askness would suffer an infinite loss of prestige if he had to wade, as it were, through slaughter to the head of the poll. Having brought his lambs to Marchgrave, the difficulty was what to do with them. Surely the gods were fighting for Askness, to have sent this madman to scatter whirlwind.

And, in truth, it was a whirlwind that was being sown: Mr. Sharpe might find as many difficulties in the way of obeying this candidate's orders as he pleased. It was just as possible as he liked—if not a trifle more than he liked—to penetrate into the crowd, dense, though not large, that had taken to follow about the frenzied demagogue who devoted himself to the denunciation of John Heron. Nor was it on this occasion a wholly unsympathetic crowd. The Askness lambs had begun to understand the reason of their preference in Marchgrave, and they gave the orator cheer after cheer as he shrieked out his catalogue of crimes like a prophet in a rage, and, shaking his fist towards Chapter Lane, asked how anyone who called themselves men could let a monster like that wallow in his ill-gotten millions while honest Englishmen, like those before him, were doomed to grinding toil.

"If you've not got votes," said he, "you've got better. I never heard that William Tell had a vote; but he made his country free. He wouldn't bow to a hat: but you—you cringe down to a monster's old boots, and lick them; perhaps you think you can lick them clean of blood, and mud, and slime. But you can't: you only make them filthier still. I tell you, fellow citizens, what William Tell, what Caractacus, what Washington, would have done. Would they have licked the boots of tyrants and traitors? No. They would have said—There is the traitor, the tyrant, wallowing in *your* gold. Britons—*take* your Own: and all else you can!"

"Morland for ever!" roared the lambs.

But at the word the flock, more loud than numerous, was suddenly increased by a rush like a flood tide through a rocky channel, that sent it reeling. Not even Marchgrave could keep its temper for ever when John Heron was being called all the names in the Newgate Calendar. Whence the rush came, or how its blue-ribboned atoms combined in one, nobody could ever tell—such things are beyond telling. Mr. Sharpe might account for his lambs from Askness, and how much secret-service money they cost his clients; but this was an honest rush, as if an electric current had darted through the City, and inspired it with gratitude and loyalty.

John Heron's heart, heavy with secret anxiety though it was, might well swell high with pride as, coming out upon the balcony of an upper

room in the Guildhall where he was then engaged in municipal business, he saw how impossible it was from holding back his fellow-citizens from resenting an insult to his name. This was better than the honour that was to be done him to-morrow by bishops and peers. That would be but the outward recognition of what he was and what he had done for his city, and therefore for his country. But this was heart-burst. Probably there was not a creature in that crowd who did not own him a grateful debt for personal and private aid, and was struggling to pay it with what Stephen Ray had called better things than votes—to wit, blows, and hard ones. Member—mayor—baronet: a peerage in due time: what were all these things together compared with one of these honest blows dealt for plain John Heron, of Chapter Lane!

And he had thought of giving up the battle: of exiling himself, and burying his very name out of sight with nobody but a timid girl to make a world for him out of a hermitage. Even in the midst of the pride with which he gazed down upon the tumult, he was ashamed of having been so weak, even for an hour. That he, John Heron, of Marchgrave, should even for a moment have let himself feel the bond-slave of a Wyndham Snell—have trembled before a Draycot Morland—have condescended to violence upon Stephen Ray! Looking down upon the friendly mob, and standing in a little knot of staunch friends, who half loved, half feared, and all honoured him, his spirit rose: his heart beat joyfully: he felt himself a king indeed—a King of Men. . . . And even at this moment, when he at last felt his full strength, he saw the masts of the world towering out from the Docks of the future—even now, he realized himself for the sake of his great aim, wherein self was as nothing.

He felt impregnable: that the Docks were being dug out of a rock: and that the rock was He.

"Good God!" exclaimed Alderman Sparrow, as the rush surged past. "Look at that, Heron—there'll be mischief done."

"I see," said John Heron—not seeing for a moment through a mist that blinded him, and allowed him to see naught but great things far away. But he suddenly turned round with a smile of grim triumph. "No need, I think, gentlemen, to give our friend there the lie now!"

If Stephen were to sink bodily in that raging and shouting tide! If only Wyndham Snell were in it also—what a heaven life would become! If only those hundreds of loyal feet could trample into the mud the whole of his Other Life as readily as all those hands clenched themselves and struck out for the man they thought they knew! It would be the changing of life into heaven indeed: it would be like the casting off of the mortal body with all its pains, and burdens, and sins, and leaving the soul clean and free.

But the lambs, though formidably and increasingly outnumbered, were not so easily swept off their feet by the pack of watchdogs. They had been brought to fight—possibly chosen for each man's fighting power, and their duty lay in the form of Heads, plain before them. Moreover, three out of four had a bludgeon, which gives odds against fist any day. And then they were friends, or at least workmates--

mostly navvies from the docks at Askness, or quarrymen from Axholm, with a regular bruiser or two from Mr. Sharpe knows where. The Heronite rush, on the other hand, was an extempore army, with no recognized leader. So the charge, after making the lambs break and give for a moment like the British square before the onset of the Arabs, recovered and showed a front as gallant as if one man there knew what he was being gallant for. And then the blows began in good earnest—smashed faces and cracked crowns.

The orator took no part in the affray. Orators seldom do. But, as he could not get out of it, he gave no occasion to doubt his courage, although his deformed shoulders and delicate hands would not have made the want of it the unpardonable sin that a constitutional dislike to giving and taking hard knocks is supposed to be. He was hemmed in by the lambs, whose trumpeter he had become ; and, from the midst of these big and burly fellows, with muscles like their own crowbars, the consumptive skeleton with flowing hair waved its arms, and coughed and screamed. If he was not mad before he was mad now : the demon of battle had possessed him : he thought himself inspiring a revolution that was to spread over the land—while John Heron saw a vision of peace, wealth and welfare, he saw chaos : where John Heron saw the masts of merchantmen, he saw the poles of the guillotine. It was a great battle for a country town.

Without a plan of Marchgrave, it is easy to perceive that the balcony on which Sir John stood was on one side of the High Street ; that Morland's committee room was on the other ; and that the narrow turning into Chapter Lane (nearly opposite the archway leading to the close) was between the two, on the same side as the Guildhall—all these being on the same side of the market cross. Thus Morland had almost, though not quite, as good a view of the struggle as his opponent ; and the sight put him in a rage. He was leaning as far as he could stretch out of the window—he had looked round for Mr. Sharpe, but Mr. Sharpe had not yet returned, and this enraged him still more.

"I'm hanged if the town isn't being given over to sack and pillage!" he exclaimed, all his coolness gone. "It's infamous—and there's no place one can get at to speak to them. I must do something, though. Here, one of you fellows, give me my hat—I'm sorry it's a new one, but it must take its chance ——"

"You'd better not go out, Mr. Morland," said his friend the grocer. "The Heronites 'll tear you limb from limb."

"Well, so long as they'll leave enough of me to get to the Mayor, here goes. Why, this is a riot, Mr. Sims ; and there's the Mayor in full sight, and not even trying to say a word ——"

But before he had fairly withdrawn his head, crash went a pane of glass just over his ear, and a round paving-stone smashed an inkstand under Mr. Sim's nose. At the same moment, the lambs were pushed back by sheer weight and number, so that presently Morland's committee-room itself, with its flaunting scarlet posters, would be at the mercy of the mob of Blues, which had already thrown its first stone.

Morland might as well have thrown himself into Niagara. All he could do was to prepare himself for a harangue as soon as the enemy was under his windows, when he shuddered with dismay.

"Good God, if there isn't *She!*" he exclaimed, pointing to the corner of Chapter Lane, round which the centre of the tumult seethed and surged.

But nobody heard him. Mr. Sims was off, searching for a backdoor.

There was no time for mutual surprise (were either any longer capable of it), much less for mutual explanation, when Marion and Cynthia met one another at the corner of Chapter Lane. Not that, under the circumstances, there was any occasion for surprise.

Strange to say, however, it was Marion who was at least outwardly calm, though miserably pale , it was the Lady Superintendent who was wringing her hands.

"And I hurried back from town," she began volubly," "thinking to find him so quiet and converted—and it was all low cunning ; the Horrible Wretch has escaped out of the very hospital—look at him ! Oh, my dear, never have anything to do with a Genius if there wasn't another man in the world ; they're all alike—all ! and after all I've been to that—Thing ! Do you know what he's doing, Marion Furness ? Do you hear ?

"It is Stephen Ray ! "

"Why, where are your eyes ? But, I forget—you wear glasses. Don't put them on ; don't look at the vile wretch : I wish *I* was blind ; and deaf too. . . . A fine plot I've found ! "

There were no sheltering shops in Chapter Lane between the corner and the Bank where Marion had once more failed to find John Heron. They could only shrink back from the riot till it might pass by, and enable them to escape from the streets altogether, while Cynthia's tongue never paused.

"You know best what your father's up to here, Marion. From what I make out, he's up to robbing a Bank belonging to Sir John Heron ——"

"What ?" exclaimed Marion, aghast—"where these bidden visits, then, of hers to Chapter Lane some undeciphering wheels in a plan ?"

"Don't be fraid. Sir John's a friend of mine—or going to be ; and I'm reformed and converted ; but by —— No ; not by anything, but reformed or not, if I split on old pals, may I be—never mind what may I be. Stephen's in with the gang, that's clear ; and—and—but of course *you* know, being one of the gang yourself —— Take a hint ; that's all. . . . Marion Furness ; tell Adam at once to make himself scarce ; *its all blown!*"

"Cynthia, for once in my life let me know what Something means !"

"Ah ! Come further back ; we shall get hurt if we stay here —— !"

"No. Not a step till I understand."

"I—I've gone through things to spoil all my pluck ; though I always knew you had most pluck, if I had most brains. . . . I can't get at Stephen—wouldn't I, that's all !"

"Do you mean," asked Marion, as quietly as if the battle were far away, "that my father—that Adam Furness is being pursued for some new crime?"

"For all of them, Marion; don't ask me how I know it —— There's no time to lose, and I mustn't mix in such things now, being a Lady Matron; but Sir John Heron has signed a warrant against Adam Furness, and he's been traced to Askholm—you know a Doctor Snell. That man has split, as sure as I'm a living woman. How can Adam have been fool enough to put faith in such a man? I've done him out of some of his blood-money, though—that's one comfort. He knows Adam; he knows Heron. Who could have put Heron up to the warrant, but he? Do *you* trust Snell?"

"Trust *Him?*"

"Ah! I thought I was right, Marion! —— There are plain-clothes men from Scotland Yard in the town this very minute. I know them; there isn't a detective in the country I'm not up to, whatever his rig may be. And one of 'em got out at Askholm Junction and the others came on. . . . Oh, Marion—Run!"

A more furious charge swept past the corner, and made the girls cower still further back, clinging together. But run they could not, for Cynthia was apprently losing her limbs as well as her head, and Marion felt herself turning to stone.

Crash! It was a shower of paving-stones against Morland's windows: the worse aimed demolishing those of the neighbouring houses, without distinction of colour. The Blue blood was up, and bent on pelting the Champion of Popular Rights from John Heron's City in a hail-storm of fury.

The Lambs had given way at last, and were in full flight. Crash! went another storm of stones. Morland had come to the window, waived his arms, and tried to speak; but his reception obliged him to remove paving-stones for evermore from the diminishing catalogue of shams.

"Yah! Chuck him over the bridge!" was the shout now. It was Lawyer Sharpe, trying to regain the committee-room, hatless, with one trouser torn off his bleeding leg, and his coat in ribbons. Never again would he play with fire!

And Stephen Ray? If a remnant of him was left to bury, he was a luckier man than he had ever been before.

Cynthia fairly clung to Marion.

"Oh, what *shall* we do! Let's hide. . . . Where is Adam?"

"You say—the constables with a warrant are here—in the town?"

"Yes. Is he at Askholm?"

"I think not ——"

"Here, then?"

"I don't know."

"You can't warn him? Oh, Marion! He may be taken in a minute—he may be taken now! And we may be killed!"

"Yes," said Marion, dreamily. "I know nothing; I can do nothing. Killed! So much the better for us all."

"Oh—Look, Marion! Look—there!"

Marion, by force of habit, raised the glasses which, doubtless, deprived her of any claim to the rank of heroine, and, looking, naturally saw first the most striking object—and it was a striking one, indeed, if only for the sake of colour. Far up the street, beyond the Guildhall, was a blaze of scarlet and steel, advancing slowly, with a faint clash and the sharp clink of flint against iron.

"Halt!" she heard above the uproar.

But—"Not there," cried Cynthia in a whisper; "there!"

Marion turned to where Cynthia pointed —— There stood Adam Furness on the balcony of the Guildhall; with constables below, and dragoons hard by.

Was it too late Or could he still be warned of danger?

The body of the crowd having passed by to wreck Morland's head-quarters, she darted out—to save her lover's murderer, but to be true to her trust and to keep her vow. As father she no longer thought of him: but she did not think, she ran.

Cynthia clutched at her; but she pulled herself free, and made for the projecting porch of the Guildhall. But the rearmost of the crowd had become aware of the dragoons; struggling lambs were sustaining single combats; and Marion's red ribbon gave an aim to armed creatures maddened and drunken with rage and victory.

In that state, frenzied and threatened, the stragglers of a mob know neither courage, nor reason, or shame.

"She's going for the soldiers!" That was Courage.

"She's going to shoot John!" That was Reason.

"Yah! Stone the Morlandite devil!" That was Shame.

The stones fell like hail. Marion ran like a deer. Which would do their work first? Would she reach that corner of safety —— Would she reach it in time; could she reach it alive?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

OUT OF THE WORLD AND BACK.

It was strange, but Marion, as she ran with all the speed she could towards the Guildhall through that storm of stones, felt no bodily fear. The only terror she felt was lest she should be too late to warn him who was showing himself so openly, that he was in imminent danger. Even thoughts could form themselves in her mind—by broken flashes, it is true, but more like actual thoughts than when she had, in solitude, set herself deliberately to find a clue to her life's maze.

But it was no mere flash—it was a steady, hard burden that Cynthia had given her to carry through the fusilade. The murderer of her lover

was now plotting the plunder, the ruin. for aught she could tell, of her dead lover's best and dearest friend. She had to save her father not merely from arrest, but from crime—or if she could not save him, at least enable him to save himself, if it were not too late; if everything were not always too late in the whole world. But, too late or not, there was a strange sort of triumph bearing her along, that carried her above the sense of danger and that deadened blows. It was the triumph that at last she was doing something of herself and knowing what she was doing, even though that something should be, like all else, in vain. There was the delight of struggling energy at last set free in daring actual peril—the same instinct that has sent many a man into battle, not because he loves fighting, but because an open fight has become a need of his whole being. Marion was blind and deaf to the crowd; she ran, but solely for haste; she never moved her head to avoid a stone. Not for a moment did she feel that she her mother's daughter, the timidest and daintiest of girls, only too sensitive to touch a shadow, was being hunted through the streets as if she had been a wounded cur. She was treading on air, far above all such things.

Suddenly, though she never ceased to be aware of the tall figure on the Guildhall balcony, all else became a dream, and the shouting around her became as the roar of a distant sea. Her feet no longer felt the ground—whether she was running or truly flying, she no longer knew. She felt herself grasped around the waist; and struggling to free herself, felt that her strength was gone. For one wild instant she fancied herself in the arms of Guy; and she named his name. And then she knew no more.

And she had indeed passed through the Valley of the Shadow. It must be so; for she woke in that other world where, she had been taught, we meet those who have passed through the valley before us to part from them never again.

Certainly it did not look very much like a chamber beyond the stars, unless rooms also have their apotheoses, and very ordinary rooms sometimes. But then it is true that a great many very ordinary people may find their way beyond the stars—at least, it is to be hoped so or else the population will be but small. When the pain of dying out of one world, and the greater agony of been born into another, was past, the region where she found herself was singularly like what on earth is called a watchmaker's—possibly her soul had strayed, being a stranger to the country, into the paradise of watches and clocks that have at least tried to do their duty; fit companions, no doubt, thought Marion, with a faint smile, for human souls that, in no less ignorance than sightless and will-less machines, have tried to do theirs, and failed.

But it was certainly somewhere in that other world. She looked round for her mother; but no doubt she would come presently to welcome her daughter home. But, meanwhile there, of course, was Guy—to give her welcome the first of all. She was glad that he was the first on whom she opened her eyes. Neither blood nor madness could part them now, these three. She held out her hand with a brighter smile, as the tears came into her eyes.

"I am glad!" said she, as if it were all the most natural of meetings in any world.

"Marion!"

Yes—it was the voice; but the tone was no calm, starry welcome. It was wild at once with earthly joy, with passion, with anger, with bewilderment—with a thousand things. He took her hand, and pressed it almost fiercely to his lips, which burned like fire, while she gazed into his eyes without even so much as simple wonder; like a child waking from a dream.

"What a way to find you—what a place—what a time!"

"Yes; it was Guy—but how changed! How he must have been waiting and hungering for her till she came—had she done right, after all, in loving him so much as to be blind to the greatness for his love of her? He looked as if he had been starving in slow fever instead of dying by violence, he looked so pale and worn; and his eyes seemed to gaze through her's into some haunting vision far away. Suddenly she started, with a little cry. A stream of blood was trickling from his hair.

Could it be that the Murdered carry their wounds with them to cry for Vengeance even above the silent music of the stars?

No—that could never be!

"Guy!" she cried, "I am not dead! It is you!"

Then, as her senses returned, the world of earth also surged back, and filled her ears. Oh, if her fancy had only been real—if she had truly changed the desert of life for a happy dream without an end! The waking of the body from its swoon had not been so full of agony as that of the mind from its dream.

She could be nothing to him, she knew—no meeting, however sudden, could change the past, or her reason for her will. But even in this, her will, that they should never again meet on earth, had been, like all her other resolves, in vain. But they had met—and how should lovers meet after such a parting? How but in one way?

And, oh the relief, when she knew herself, without remembering that it must be for the last time, to be clasped in his living arms and to be feeling his living kisses on her face; to know that whatever curse still rose between them, it was not the curse of Cain; it was not her father's hand. That was almost joy enough; that would make surrender seem almost like a thankoffering. . . . For this moment, at least, they were alone; knowing nothing of what each had suffered or how they had come together; hearing nothing but an unheeded echo of the human storm without; heeding nothing but that they were there. . . .

"But questions had at last to come.

"You have been in Moscow?" asked Guy.

"In Moscow? No! Not out of England. . . . Is that where you have been—seeking me? Is that where you've been lost all this while? . . . But you are hurt——"

"Oh, that's nothing—— The cowards! They meant it for you. Well—I was in time, thank God, to give at least one of them a little

of what he deserved. But Marion—my darling, what in the name of madness brought you among that pack of wolves?"

"I must think. . . ."

"I can think of nothing but that you are unhurt—alive! That I have found you—that I shall never lose you again."

"Guy ——"

"I know. I know in whose hands you have been, though nothing more. But whoever he is, it is nothing to me; You are You. Is your mother here?"

"Guy! You remember our last good-bye? You said good-bye to *her* for ever —— She is dead, Guy."

"Good God! . . . And you have been with him, your father, alone? You are with him still? Darling, how shall we ever tell one another what has happened—how shall we ever begin?"

"You have been seeking me—in spite of my letter ——"

"Your letter? You never sent me a word. Since your mother wrote me from the Clarence, I never heard of you again until. . . . Seeking for you! I have done nothing but seek for you. What else should I have done? Why do you say in spite of your letter? Nothing would have forbidden me to seek you till I had found you, or died seeking ——"

"Guy, will you swear to me something—on your honour—on your word?"

"Anything—except to lose you again."

"Do nothing to harm my father! Help him—he is in terrible danger. I know what you think of him—what my dear mother thought of him—but ——"

For a moment Guy looked hard and stern: changed indeed.

"But you have asked me to—help him. That is enough for me."

"Perhaps—it is the only, the last thing I shall ever ask you, Guy! He is here, in Marchgrave; and it is known that he is here——"

"Yes," said Guy a little gloomily. "He *is* here, and it *is* known. But what has he been to you? Your father! It was about him I have your mother's last words to me. I believe he hounded her to her death: he has used his infernal power over you for the sake of a fortune which your mother saved from his clutches at the cost of her honour; he is no more to you than he is to me—even less, to you. Let him trouble you and the world no more."

"Oh, Guy? Your word!"

"I know more of Adam Furness—more than you know: more than your mother knew. She was right, Marion. That he has imposed on your innocence and your trustfulness, I can well believe. If you had ever known him as a father, if he had any right even to your pity, it would be another thing. I would try to save him ——"

"Ah! But he has—he has a right to all my pity Guy! He is a most unhappy man; and I—I have done him cruel wrong; and he has no friend, no help, but me."

"Marion ——"

"Your word! Oh Guy! don't be cruel to me now! As you know

he is in danger, go to him—warn him—from me. I was hurrying to him when—oh! don't let me have gone through all—all that—in vain!"

Holding his hand, she for the first time realized what it had been to face that raging mob—that storm of stone.

"But Guy, if you cannot help him, I will face it all again—weak as I am. If he is lost for want of a word of mine, I shall go mad—before my time! . . . Oh, do one more thing, for my sake —— Hark!"

The outer roar which had fallen into a partial lull, rose up again with tenfold rage.

She clung to his hand.

"No," she cried, "you cannot go! I *am* mad to send you. . . . *He* did *not* kill! . . . Oh, why can I think of nothing but what is wicked, and do nothing but what fails?"

"Where is he, Marion?" asked Guy.

She led him to the window. At that moment the uproar ceased, as bareheaded, and with an officer in uniform at his side, the Mayor of Marchgrave, hitherto an inactive spectator of the disorder which was in truth his own glory and a lesson to rebels, raised his right arm, and spoke to the people in a slow, strong voice that all could hear.

"Fellow-citizens," said he, "I understand your anger at the infamous attempt that has been made to interfere with your free election of your own member—an attempt to violate the rights of the people by preventing a free poll. Do not damage your legitimate victory, gained at the polling booths, by violence towards the vanquished. I hold in my hand a paper—here it is—which shows that you have already gained a great constitutional victory. The returning-officer will in due time announce to you by how much more than two thousand majority Draycot Morland will be sent back to London. Do not give me the shame and sorrow of reading the Riot Act to my own friends. I am proud of your anger: of your peaceful triumph I shall be a hundred times more proud. Give three big cheers for Marchgrave, and go home."

Then went up a mighty cheer.

"That is he!" cried Marion.

"Adam Furness ——— Where?" asked Guy.

"He—who is speaking to the people ———"

"God in Heaven! That is John Heron!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

TWO AND TWO MAKE FOUR.

"SPLENDIDLY done!" exclaimed Alderman Sparrow. "You have saved the town!"

"It was as well to read Askness a bit of lesson," said John Heron, leaving the balcony. "Of course I shall make good all damage—if I were not member for Marchgrave, I'd be a Glazier . . . This dear old city! Of course you'll dine with me, Captain Lawson! I don't think you'll be wanted now."

"I only wish Sir John," said the officer, "that our swords were as sharp and as strong as your words. Instead of horses, we ought to be mounted on mayors—ha! ha! ha!"

"*Cedant arma togæ: concedat laurea linguæ,*" said the recorder—adding for the benefit of an unlearned audience, "To Gown let Arms—to Tongue let Laurel yield."

"And you'll dine with me also, Mr. Recorder, and you too, Sparrow? Of course you'll have to put up with potluck ——"

"Potluck at The Cedars is uncommon good luck indeed," said the alderman. Ah! this is a grand day! But to-morrow'll be grander—eh?—when the statue's unveiled. . . . But, bless my soul, I forgot: 'twas to come as a surprise."

"Oh, I can always be as deaf as I like," said John Heron genially. "Hark! What's that noise?"

And he must have been deaf indeed, if he did not hear a great groan for Morland, and a greater cheer for Heron.

"A gentleman, your worship, Sir John, to see you on business," mysteriously whispered the usher of the Guildhall.

"Always something? Who is it, Dixon?"

"Well, sir —— Your Worship —— He was very particular not to name no names. But between you and I, your Worship ——

"Well?"

"It's—naming no names, your Worship—Mr. Guy Derwent, from foreign parts: so I took the liberty of showing him into your Worship's Worshipful private room."

"Yes, I'll come. . . . . Excuse me, gentlemen, for a few minutes. . . ."

In the moment of his triumph, a film seem to pass over his eyes and his brain. Guy Derwent, whom he had supposed engaged on a wild-goose chase beginning at Moscow and ending in the mines of Siberia—the friend whom he thought he had for ever removed from his way! Yet, after all, why should he fear? He went slowly to his private room, so as to think the whole situation out, inch by inch. One of

two things must have happened. Either Guy Derwent had succeeded in disposing of the false roubles to the Tartar Khan—in which case there was nothing to fear; or Guy had been detected and escaped—in which case he must contrive to disclaim all responsibility for the transaction. It was awkward; but it was impossible to decide upon any course until he saw how the land lay. If only the confounded young fellow had not turned up again on this day of all days! But then that is always so. People invariably turn up on the wrong day—if they turn up at all.

"Guy!" he exclaimed, holding out both hands, "where in the world have you been? Why have you never written—never telegraphed even? Have you negotiated the Tartar loan? Have you found your sweetheart? Have you —— But where—when—how—why Any-how, welcome home! And, of all days, welcome home to-day!"

He held out both his hands.

But Guy, instead of touching them, kept his hands by his side, and his eyes upon the floor.

"Marion Furness," said he, "bids me warn—her father—that ——"

He raised his eyes, and he saw before him, in the place of the strong man, apparently overflowing with welcome and triumph, the meanest and vulgarest of all sight in the world—a detected impostor.

But could he have seen below that miserable surface, he would have seen something so infinitely pitiable that the vulgarity and the meanness would have been lost in the tragedy. He would have seen the passionate labour of a life shattered in the very moment of victorious pride. His hands were still outstretched, but not, as they seemed, imploring—they were grasping after a Royal dream that was vanishing away.

What mercy could he hope for from Guy Derwent—from him, of all men? Surely none. He remembered—not that there was a grain of need to remember—how Guy had returned home from India, full of love, hope, courage, and, above all, of devoted trust in his friend and hero; how he had trusted to that friend all he loved, and all the inmost secrets of his heart; and how that friend was all the while not only a foe, but a treacherous foe, only bent upon trapping him to his destruction.

"Do you hear?" asked Guy, in a voice of ice. "I bring you a warning. The police are searching for Adam Furness, both here and at Askholm. I suppose you do not wish to be arrested here—on Sir John Heron's warrant—in Marchgrave Guildhall."

The coldness of his words seemed to break a spell.

"I have nothing to say," said John Heron, letting his arms fall feebly, and in a hoarse and hollow voice that not even Guy could recognise. "I am not going to defend myself. . . . I had to choose between *you* and Marchgrave. . . . And if you and I were together where I could kill you—yes, even you, so as to keep my secret safe, I should have to choose Marchgrave still. . . . What are you going to do?"

"Nothing to help your poor wife's persecutor—her murderer for

aught I know; nothing to help the robber of your own child—a man who would make his own daughter an accomplice in his crimes; nothing, even, to help one who, without a scruple, without remorse, has used a friend, who worshipped him, as a cat's-paw to his own wrong; nothing to help one of whom I know, and believe all that I know of you. What pity, even, can I have for you, who have left me no more faith or trust in mortal man?"

"None. . . . Then why ——"

"Do I warn you? Because Marion—it is her warning, not mine."

"Did *she* betray me?" asked John Heron eagerly.

"Is the daughter of Judas bound to be a traitor too? No! She risked her life to warn you, under your very eyes. . . ."

"Thank God for that! . . . A man who prides himself on his play likes to know how he loses. You say you have brought the police upon me. No; you could not have even seen her, till ——"

"No; it is not my doing that the police have traced Adam Furness to Askholm—to Marchgrave. It is your own. . . . Yes; you have the right to know how. When you, to prevent your daughter's coming to Marchgrave, and recognising her mother's enemy in John Heron, hid me from her, and her from me, and sent me abroad, as I see now, to find the end of my journey in the Siberian mines ——"

"Derwent—I swear to you ——"

"You gave yourself the chance of it, anyhow. When you did all this, you did not reckon on my falling into another of your traps, or on my coming out alive to tell the tale. Oh, I followed every letter of my instructions. I was received at Mr. Ward's by a foreigner in a red beard—no doubt you know the man ——"

"Ay—and he knows me! I see; he kept you till the police came——"

"At any rate he kept me—to arrange for the delivery of the bullion, or for some such reason—any how I was taken into an upper room ——"

"The damned villain!" cried John Heron; "I do see—he meant to bring us all under his hand together ——"

"And I should have thought it strange but for one still stranger thing—a picture of Marion. Heaven knows how, but the strangeness of the place, my loss of her, the impression I had of her father, all assured me that she had been there—might be there, even then. I was alone. Suddenly I heard the noise of a confused struggle; two men rushed past me in the half light—one, he with the red beard, fell. What became of the other I don't know; I received a blow as I passed, that blinded and maddened me. I followed, reeling down some dark stairs. I heard Marion's voice, as surely as I had seen her picture. . . . When all was over, I was a prisoner ——"

"Of the police?"

"No—alone; in a room that was locked and barricaded; in pitch darkness; sprained, lamed, wounded; understanding nothing of what had happened; trapped, for aught I knew, to be murdered; not knowing even the day or the hour ——"

"Good God—Guy! . . . You are alive?"

"Yes; and sane. . . . Miracles still seem to happen now and then. I found candlelight; I found food—not much, but enough to keep a fever going. Men don't easily starve, I've heard, in fever. How long I lay in that dungeon I know not to this hour; how I lay there, I shall never know. All that while I never heard a voice or a footfall, unless of rats; and I was far too weak to break a door. . . . But no more of that. I was found at last ——"

"By whom?"

"A man and a woman—a Mrs. Stephen and Doctor Snell. . . . You know *him*."

"Snell? . . . Then—Guy; five minutes ago I was going to startle Marchgrave," he said, with a strange smile, "by going into the next room and blowing out my brains—as I can't very well blow out yours. But I've got somebody to live for still; and that is Wyndham Snell. And, by God, I will! . . . Where's Marion?"

"She is safe—now."

"Derwent—I know how I look in your eyes; but not worse than Adam Furness has always looked in John Heron's. And if you knew what it means to give up what I am giving up this day, I should say this—think what you will of me, but, for Marchgrave's sake, forget that there has ever been an Adam Furness—imagine him dead and buried. And so he is; for if that last trick had been won, I should have buried him with my own hands. Why should Marchgrave lose its future because —— But I won't trouble you to say 'No,' as I suppose you would, not having dreamed my dream. There's—Snell. Who knows that Adam Furness is John Heron, besides Marion, and you, and—Snell?"

"Not a soul!"

"Then I know what to do—yes, even now. I must save my skin for the sake of—Snell. . . . Where's Marion?"

Of course, the Doctor was as innocent of treachery as a newborn child; but it was his invariable destiny to be treated unjustly. It is a terrible misfortune for an honest man to look like a knave. For his part, Adam Furness looked so little like a knave that even now Guy Derwent himself was beginning to feel a touch of the old mastery return. Who can shatter an idol without a pang?

"I have said she is safe," said he, the more coldly and sternly for having let himself be moved.

"Oh, you needn't be afraid! She is a good girl. I only wish I had known her sooner. You may hear every word I want to say to her, if you please. I suppose I have a right to say good-bye as well as you?"

"I?"

"Well, I don't suppose you want to marry a coiner's daughter—*my* daughter, I should think, least of all," he said, with an air of bitter scorn.

"Nothing, and least of all her father, can come between me and Marion Heron."

"I remember—you always knew she was a convict's daughter.

Derwent—I wish to God you had never stood in the way of Marchgrave! Well, I promise you one thing—neither you nor Marion shall ever hear of me again. Nobody shall ever hear of me but—Snell. Is that bribe enough to get you and—Marion—to go with me as far as Askholm?"

"Askholm? The police ——"

"Just so. I keep a boat there, at a private place, ready for an emergency. You see, I put myself in your hands. If I come across the constables, of course Snell will be there to point me out as Adam Furness; and if they're London men I shall want you to identify me as John Heron. One must chance something; but there's not much chance in Snell's persuading the biggest detective idiot that John Heron's Adam Furness against your word and mine. For the rest, I know what to do. I only want an hour."

"But—your wife?"

"Oh, she has her settlement. . . . and nobody need know she isn't my wife, poor girl, any more than that Marion is my daughter. You won't punish her, I suppose, as you don't mean to punish me—except with coals of fire. Come. . . . Wait a moment. . . . There, I'm ready now."

It was no detected criminal, and worse than criminal, who re-entered the room whence he had addressed his people like a king. Guy, now feeling the reaction of weakness, marvelled to see once more the John Heron of old—calm, masterful, a little bluff, wholly genial, and at ease.

"I've brought you a surprise," said he. "Here's our friend Derwent back from—which is it, Guy? Greenland's icy mountains or India's coral strand? Poor Prendergast won't have to stand a trial, after all. But I've bad news, too. I must put off our potluck! No—there's nothing the matter; but I shan't be able even to return thanks after the poll. I've got to catch the very next up train. It's a national crisis just now, you know, and 'Kismet,' as the Turks say. . . . Sparrow, you'll say a word for me to the electors? And don't spare Draycot Morland ——"

Derwent's return fell as flat as ditch water.

"But you'll be back to-morrow?" asked the alderman. "Of course you don't know anything about it, but ——"

"Oh, course—of course! There are plenty of trains. . . . Good-bye; a thousand thanks to you all. Come, Derwent, we haven't a minute to lose."

"A National Crisis!" said the alderman, swelling importantly.

"Sir John sent for to town!" said another.

"Ah—Two and Two make Four!"

"And gentlemen," concluded the alderman from the balcony of the Guildhall, "not only have we licked all Askness into a cocked hat with a glorious majority, but we have also broken them like a butterfly. As a man of Peace, Retrenchment, and Reform, I don't approve of riotous proceedings, nor does my worshipful and honourable friend, Sir John

Heron, Baronet, M.P. But if it is ever justifiable to knock a fellow-creature on the head, it is when he applies unparliamentary and un-English language to my worshipful and right honourable friend. I believe I may say that I am justified in conjecturing that they'll never do it again. And now I'll tell you a secret. This is a national crisis; and Sir John Heron has been wired to town. I don't say he's been offered a place in the Cabinet. I don't prematurely disclose the whispers of little birds. I don't blab, which is a very improper and un-English and not at all a nice sort of thing. But I do say this, that if John Heron isn't in the Cabinet it'll be the worse for the crisis, and that that little whisper that that little bird whispered is not that That that that little bird does whisper, in point of fact, as it were. And so, gentlemen, though I haven't the eloquence and all that of my right honourable friend, having my heart, so to speak, in my mouth, I do call upon you to put your hearts into your mouths too, and give as many cheers as you've breath for for the very best individual alive; our benefactor, our chief magistrate, our Parliamentary representative—in point of fact, our fellow-townsman; viz., John Heron."

Meanwhile, Cynthia was seeking high and low for Stephen Ray.

CHAPTER XXX.

"IF THEY HAD KNOWN."

If only the people of Marchgrave could have had a full view of the carriage which made a triumphantly slow progress from the Guildhall to the railway station, they would have seen not three occupants, but four.

There was Sir John Heron, whom they were cheering; there was Guy Derwent, returned from his mission; there was a lady whom Mrs. Clapper, peering cautiously from behind the Bell curtains was proud to recognize her guest of last night, and who would doubtless find her in conversation for many a Friday evening. But there was also a fourth in this good company, seen and yet unseen; one who would have provoked, had he been recognised, another fusillade—in short, Adam Furness ——

But I am wrong. John Heron and Adam Furness were two no more. It was John Heron, the King of Marchgrave; for whom those cheers would have been converted into stones had his subjects known. He, as he bowed to the crowd with grave dignity, felt the thought bitterly—as bitterly as a man who is existing in a frozen dream.

They thought they were giving a triumph to a hero; he felt himself but the hero of some procession to Tyburn in the old times.

And then—how would it all have been had the life of Adam Furness been but a nightmare, and if he were in truth but John Heron, and

John Heron alone! What an hour of true and honest triumph would this have been, with his best and most loyal of friends face to face with him, and the daughter whom he had known and found too late beside him, with his hand in hers! The bitterest of all his thoughts was the vision of what might have been; more bitter even than having to own himself beaten; than having to leave the city for which he had lived, to see its towers and its faces no more—than this knowledge that to-morrow would rise upon his ruin and shame.

Suddenly the carriage was brought to a stand, with a jerk.

Marion turned pale—Guy felt as if his own conscience had startled him. Had the detectives from London met and recognised their prey? He dared not glance at Heron's face--it was as if the guilt, and the start of guilty terror, were his own. The old mastery of the greater and stronger nature was asserting itself still.

The horses' reins were grasped and held. . . . But presently the carriage moved on, swaying almost like a ship at sea, drawn no longer by horses, but by a hundred men, while a cheer went up greater than before. From the windows of the narrowing street it began to rain flowers, while the towers of Marchgrave broke into a clash of bells.

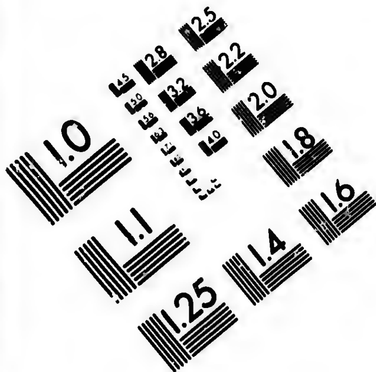
If they had only known!

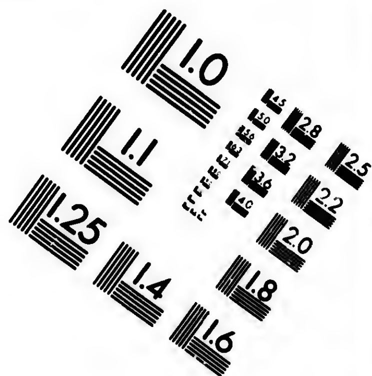
Arrived at the station, John Heron stood up in the carriage, and tried to speak. But the need to keep down one great sob chocked his voice, and he could only hold out his hands to the people for whom he would have died, yet whom he had spent his life in robbing and betraying. His obvious emotion touched all hearts beyond the power of the most eloquent words. The hearts of King and People beat in unison for the last time. And so—good-bye.

The three fellow-travellers passed out of Marchgrave in silence. What was there to say? Only Marion was conscious of a strange joy. It was not that the barrier had been removed between her and Guy; that still remained. He had in truth been nearer to her dead than living. But though living meant a renewal of the pain of parting, the river of blood between them run no longer. She could devote herself to her father now, without love indeed, but as to the work that had been given to her, without horror; without having to bear the remorse of another's crime.

They reached the junction just before twilight, and in a few minutes more were at the lonely station that served the scattered parish of Askholm. Then John Heron at last broke silence, as they slowly followed the road by the river side. The turmoil of Marchgrave streets seemed in that placid silence to have fallen back years.

"Derwent," said he, "I'll tell you my whole plan. I laid it when I foresaw that something--of this sort—might happen; and before I thought I could fight it through; and through I would have fought it if--But, all that's over. I've not brought you here to see me kill myself. I've got one or two things still on hand before bedtime. I have a boat waiting near here—Marion knows where—by which I shall cross to the other side. Nobody will guess that; so the search will be broken at Askholm. Once across, I can take the first train to Milford,





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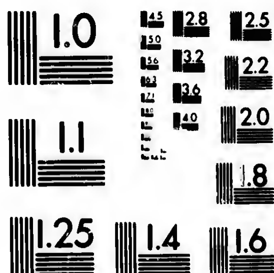

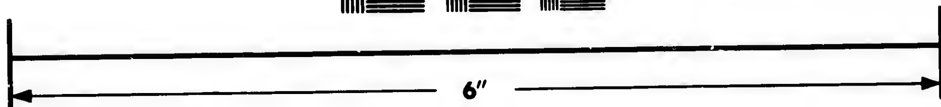

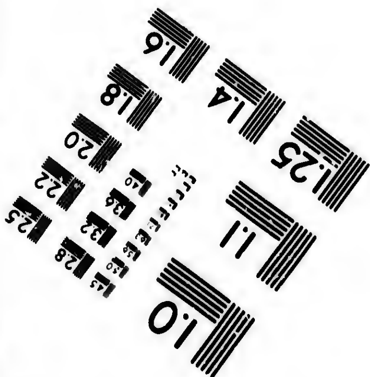

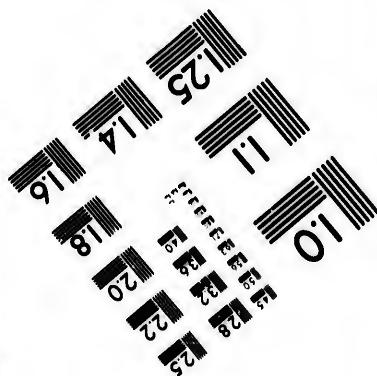

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buy what I want, and take a passage in the first vessel bound for a port from which there's no extradition . . . and now . . . ."

He walked on in silence for a minute or two, as if putting some difficult thought into the fewest and plainest words.

"And now," he continued, as if his sentence had been unbroken, "I will say all that remains. I'm not going to whine, or talk sentiment; so don't be afraid. If not to-morrow, yet in some three days at most, it must come out that John Heron has made a bolt of it; and then will come out the reason why. They'll look into my affairs, of course. Well—luckily for everybody, I've been obliged to leave everything in fair order; customers will be paid when all's realised full eighteen shillings in the pound—I've reckoned it to a penny. And Kate has her settlement. She needn't know she isn't my wife; you won't want to put forward yours as my daughter. I'm sorry you won't give up Marion—for she's all that's left me; but—well, I'm not going to whine ——— All the better for her. . . . Don't be afraid I shall ever trouble *you* again. You can think of me as dead; and, by God, you won't be very far wrong. . . . But, Derwent, the Docks! To think that Marchgrave must be ruined by—Snell! Every fraction of *that* money's gone; for I worked alone, and alone I would have won. Not for old friendship's sake, not for Marion's sake, but for Marchgrave's sake, as a Marchgrave man, fight like a lion for the Docks; take up the scheme where I've left; be to the old city all I meant to have been; all I would have been. You've got stuff and pluck in you; and you have no other self to baffle you. . . . Don't let Askness crow!"

Enthusiasm rang in his voice, that he was anything but John Heron of Marchgrave it was hard to believe. With the broad river before him which he had meant to convert into a great highway for the world's wealth to crowd into Marchgrave, he resembled, not a hunted criminal, but a monarch bequeathing his ambition for his country with his crown.

Guy knew not what to say. Having lost his faith in man, he had lost his faith in man's dreams.

"And you *will* make the fight," said Heron. "Don't let it be lost because of me! If I could know that you would put your hand to that work, and your back and your heart into it; if my ruin could help the battle—I would go almost gladly; yes, though I have to go alone."

"No," said Marion, quietly, with downcast eyes. "Not alone."

"Marion!" cried Guy, aghast; for of that he had never dreamed.

John Heron turned round with slow wonder. He could scarce believe his ears.

"Yes, Guy—yes, father," said Marion, in a clear voice that scarcely trembled; "I know all that I mean: I mean all that I say. Guy—were all things different, I could still be nothing to you—but your sister and your friend. And were there not that which *is* between us—how could I leave my father *now?*"

The boat was in sight.

"Marion!" cried Guy again, unable to move. "This is horrible!

Who on earth needs you more than I?" I will never lose you. You, whom your dead mother gave to me and trusted to me—what man, what power on earth can take away? What horrible influence can be between you and me?"

Had he been able, he would have seen in her eyes that her pain was even greater than his own.

"Guy," she said, holding out her hand, "don't kill me—don't think I'm cold; don't think I don't understand. But when I gave you up—before—I meant it: for good and all. It *must* be. As if I had not thought it over and over, night and day! I must *never* marry; you, least of all, because—because—I love you. But if I might—Oh, Guy, don't look at me like that, don't speak to me; you only make hard what must be—I know what my father has lost now! He does need me—think how much; you have your life still, your work, your youth, your pride; but he ——!"

"Marion," broke in Heron, in a slow, deep voice. "You, of your free will, choose to give up all the good things of a woman's life, all, to follow into exile a convict—an outlaw, of whom no human creature will ever speak but with hatred and shame? Have you counted the cost? have you thought of the man who loves you well enough to marry even the child of John Heron? do you know what you are doing? do you mean what you say?"

"Do you need me?"

"God knows how much! Ah, if I had known you before!"

"Then I have counted; I have thought; I do know; I do mean. I will come."

Heron turned to Guy with a sad, strange smile—a look of triumphant tenderness, such as no man had seen on that face before.

"There!" he said; "I have something left me, after all!"

Guy stood in dumb despair. Could he only have imagined that she cared for him? And yet that was impossible to doubt, when he recalled looks, tones, a thousand indefinable things that had passed between them one memorable night at sea—still such a little while ago, though it seemed so long! Where there is little love one may doubt; but when there is great and true love, never—one may question whether a shadow be a substance, but never whether a substance be its shadow. And in the face of a surrender like this, what could he say? He knew not all that bound her to take herself out of his life. But he could see that she had devoted herself to her father with a full fixed resolve; and that she would hold to this he felt and knew as surely as that it came from no want of love for her lover.

Yet without a struggle he could not let her go; and that triumph in John Heron's smile was hard to bear.

"Marion," he said, in a low voice, while Heron strode slowly forward, "I cannot let you go. *His* all? No; you are *mine*. I will say nothing against him; I feel that he is being punished enough: but, Marion—what duty can you owe to him, of whom you never heard till a few short weeks ago—what or who on earth can come between you and me—what duty can there be in sacrificing your life to blight mine?"

He spoke passionately ; but he knew himself fighting a lost battle against the air.

"Dear," said Marion, "I cannot tell you all ; for if I did it would change neither you nor me. . . . I have hungering to do not what I must, but what I will ; the time is come for that, and I *will*— hard as it is—for *me*. Dear Guy—think how much I feel I ought to do when it means giving up you. . . . I know it is cruel—just when we have met again ; but it is not my fault that we have met ; I had given you up long and long ago. It was for your sake then ; but it is now for every sake and—Guy ; don't break my heart when I am doing what is so cruel—so hard. Oh—don't you know me ?" Can't you understand ?"

"You *can* do this ——"

"No, dear. I cannot. . . . But I *will*. Won't you give me your hand ?"

He turned aside with a groan—sick and blind. He did not see the hand she held out to him—he could not lift his own. He was only conscious of the pale face and quiet voice that told how Marion had at last found her Will—of these things, and of a horrible future that stretched out before him black and barren : of a yet more hideous future for her who was to share the life of John Heron.

Thus they stood in silence, making this miserable good-bye, when Guy was suddenly startled by a grating noise, as of a boat being thrust off, and by the splash of an oar.

"Good-bye !" called the deep voice of John Heron. "I go—alone !"

It was a brave thing : the bravest thing he had ever done : nay, a braver thing than the best man in a million could do. He needed Marion : his whole soul knew how much he needed her. Guy's love might be the greater, but not Guy's need. He had given up Marchgrave against his will—with a will that beat down every longing, he gave up what had become to him a thousandfold more dear : gave it up just when it was gained.

"Alone !" Whatever, he was, this, at least was the word of a hero. And well for him that so it was. For before Guy could recover from his start and clear his eyes, before Marion could turn, a strange, wild figure seemed to rise out of the earth, dashed through the mud and shallow water, and scrambled into the boat at the back of the exile, whose eyes were fixed upon the shore. There was a wild shriek of triumph—the flash of a blade, the heavy thud of a body hurled with the marvellous strength of mania among the river reeds.

Guy started forward to cover Marion from the sight. It was too late for more—the boat that was to have carried John Heron into a lonely exile, may be of yet more desperate crime, was carrying Stephen Ray heaven knows where.

CHAPTER XXXI.

IRONY IN BRONZE.

Never shone the sun more brightly on Marchgrave than on the morrow of the morrow of the poll, when the statue of Sir John Heron was to be unveiled.

Peace and order reigned once more in the ancient city, looking its best and gayest, and its proudest as well. Not a rag of red was to be seen anywhere, except perhaps in the gutter—all was heavenly blue, both above and below. In a fabulously short time every approach to the Market-Cross was turned into an avenue of bannered arches, every house front burst into life and colour, like the hedges on the first sunny May morning, and the old basin was a blaze of bunting. The church bells had been ringing in discordant chorus for hours : and all the world was abroad. Every workshop was closed, every school had a whole holiday, and foreign captains, in a hurry for a clearance, had to put up with their own swearing, until they also caught the contagion of gala.

There was no prouder woman in England than Kate Heron—her pardon : Lady Heron—that day.

"And now," she thought, with a sigh in the midst of her pride, "perhaps we shall be a little nearer ; perhaps now he will be able to be a little more at home."

As if Parliament meant home—as if there could be any rest till the new Docks were made. . But Ignorance is Bliss—sometimes.

Draycot Morland, not liking the sensation of a cur attached to a tin kettle, had made one point of not leaving Marchgrave on the declaration of the poll, and another point of going out into the streets at as early an hour as a late breakfast allowed. He felt not an atom of soreness about his defeat—he had fought to be beaten, and circumstances had convinced him that it was he, and not his opponent, who had turned out to be the Sham.

"Hanged if I don't make a speech at the ceremony, pitching hot and strong into myself," he thought. "It'll be a novelty, and good fun. To abuse one's own self, as if one were Two! It'll give the Philistines and Pharisees a new idea. Oh, how we should all pitch into ourselves if we only could realise that every man is two men—if he isn't three, or four, or nine hundred and ninety-nine! One self abusing the other—when I'm in the House (not for Marchgrave) I'll bring in a bill for recognising Universal Duality : sending one of everybody into the House of Lords, and the other to the Treadmill. That's the only way of getting justice done. 'Done'—rather a double-faced word. . . . Good-morning, Mr. Prendergast. A great day for Marchgrave—eh? Where's your Draycot Morland now?"

"I don't know, sir, I'm sure," said Mr. Prendergast, rubbing his hands. "A great day? Why, sir, it's a glorious day. Our Mr. Derwent's come home!"

If Lady Heron was the proudest woman, Mr. Prendergast was the happpiest man.

The only note of anxiety in the place was struck upon the mind of Alderman Sparrow: for the hour of the ceremony was approaching, and there was only one more train by which Sir John could possibly arrive. Nor had there been a telegram. But, as time proceeded, anxiety became mitigated until balm suggested itself in Gilead even if Sir John should not come to enjoy his own triumph. The Alderman's success of yesterday as an orator encouraged him to think that a modest absence on national and imperial affairs on the part of Sir John might look graceful, especially if compensated by a flight of apologetic eloquence on the part of Alderman Sparrow. So he went about in a brown study, planning an impromptu.

And now the hour had come—though not the man.

The statue, under its canvas veil, stood like a daylight ghost where the Market-Cross had been. On an extemporised platform were the Marquis of Herchester (Lord-Lieutenant of the county) and the Marchioness, the Bishop of Marchgrave and Mrs. Stole, the Dean, the Canon in Residence, the Recorder and Aldermen and Aldermen's wives, the County Court Judge, various county magnates and County Members, the Clerk of the Peace, the beneficed clergy of the city, the foreign consuls, Lady Heron, and sundry flys in amber, including Draycot Morland, who turned, by a bow, a not ill-natured hoot into a good-humored cheer. What with uniforms, silk hoods, scarlet gowns, and, above all, the ladies in their bravest, the banners, the arches, and the golden light of a blue sky, the scene was gorgeous in colour as even honour to John Heron could demand. In the front rank round the covered statue, kept in place by the high sheriff's javelin-men in antique livery, were the bedesmen and bedeswomen of the almshouses restored and refounded by John Heron; the children of the schools established and managed by John Heron; the staff of the hospital built and supported by John Heron, and the cathedral choir, marshalled to sing to the praise and glory of John Heron. Round these stood the crowd, and beyond the crowd came the open windows filled with feathers and flowers.

It was unfortunate that the last possible train came in without bringing the hero of the day, and the Volunteers sent to the railway-station as a guard of honour had to march back again, substituting some other tune for that march from "Judas Maccabæus" which their trumpeters and drummers had been rehearsing so diligently. However, as everybody agreed, on consideration, there could be no real cause for anxiety. A man must sacrifice even the enjoyment of his own praises at a national crisis; and then—was it not after all in the very height of fine taste and Royal modesty for John Heron to conceal himself till the honour had been done? Was not that just like John Heron?

At any rate, though with some slight change of programme, the ceremony had to proceed. And perhaps it was just as well for a modest man

to have stayed away. For the speeches were many; and each outbid each in his praise. The Marquis held him up as a shining example of an Englishman, who had learned, in helping to rule and benefit his native town, how to help in the good government of an empire—he was ever so little condescending, perhaps, but, then he spoke for the County.

The Bishop, a real orator, eulogised John Heron as a pillar both of Church and State; a philanthropist not only generous, but wise; no slavish flatterer of the crowd, but a master and judge among the people—truly a Prince of Israel.

The Recorder spoke of him as a magistrate.

The —— But there is no need to reproduce in small what may be found set out in all the local papers of the hour. Applause was chronic; but it reached a climax when the vice-chairman of the Chamber of Commerce drew a brilliant picture of what Marchgrave was to be in time to come—when John Heron's new Docks would make all those present citizens of one of the greatest and wealthiest cities in the world, and fellow-citizens of one of the world's greatest men. "A statue to John Heron should have Two Faces; one for the past and one for the future," said he.

At last, amid a flourish of trumpets and a firing of bells, a cord was drawn, the coverings fell, and the statue of John Heron became henceforth the centre of his native town.

Where he was to whom all this worship was being paid belongs not to this story. But even while the trumpets brayed and the bells fired, the corpse of a police-hunted convict was lying in a fisherman's cottage, watched only by the daughter whom he had never known till of late, and by the friend he had betrayed.

That statue was all that remained of Adam Furness; that corpse, all that was left of John Heron.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"My Dear Guy,

"In my last letter, in which I put Marion's fortune into your hands, I was obliged to write hurriedly, and to leave much untold. I now write to tell you *all*, in case anything should happen to me.

"As you know, my husband had discovered me; and, be assured, will not rest until he has deprived my girl of every penny. I know what you will say—'Marion's fortune is nothing to me.' But to me it is a great deal. Her father shall not injure her while her mother stands tamely by. You understand that though I call the seventy thousand pounds Marion's, it is a legacy left to me, and I, having no settlement, it is legally my husband's—and that he will stand upon his legal rights, to the letter, you may be sure. But what is law in this

case anything but justice. That fortune was left to me—to me and my child ; not to a convict—a—but I need not go on. I have therefore determined on a step which I think right, though it may seem a strange if not mad one. I have defied my husband to prove that I am his wife.

"To Marion's husband, and for Marion's sake, I confess, as if I were in the confessional, and as if it were a crime, the secret that I am the wife of Adam Furness. But that is a secret for *you alone.* I tell it to you for two reasons. Firstly, because it is due to you to know that Marion was not born in dishonour, and need not blush for her mother. Secondly, because, under changed circumstances, it may become important some day that the truth should be known in Marion's or her children's interest, while I might then be out of the world.

"Keep, then, this full admission, and the 'marriage lines' accompanying them, not to use (Adam Furness living—nor then without imperative and practical cause most unlikely to arise) but to keep, as I know you *will* keep, any confidence of mine. Meanwhile I shall, against him and against all the world, maintain myself to be *no* wife ; and as the marriage was candestine against the wishes of my friends, and in a remote Australian station, it will be hard for him to prove, especially without advertising himself as a convict and otherwise in his true colours.

"I am now about to escape from Adam Furness once more, leaving no trace for him to follow. Not only do I dread him for myself, but I dread still more the influence he may obtain over Marion. He has no scruples, and his will is of iron. I sometimes think he might have been great, had he pleased.

"You will hear from me in a few days. God bless you, my dear Guy ; and that you and our Marion may be happy all your lives, prays with her whole heart your loving mother—in her maiden name—

"LEAH FIELD."

Such was the letter addressed to Guy Derwent, now a voice from the grave, which, still unopened, Marion had dropped in her flight from the chamber which became her lover's prison, for him to find there and read. And when she read it also—the Curse between them was removed. Leah Furness had not been mad in trampling on her own good name ; only a woman driven to bay by a man.

And so it came to pass that at last that Marion and Guy. . . .

But this story has been misread indeed if it has been taken for theirs. It is no more theirs than it is the story of how Dr. Wyndham Snell turned his seventy thousand pounds—Marion's fortune—into something nearer a quarter of a million by his invention of Snell's Neurocephalopanaceatic Pills, so that his wife became a carriage lydy after all ; or of how Mrs. Prendergast disposed of the Bell to less able hands, and enabled her second husband to retire into dignified leisure, wherein the Vicar Choral's undiminished wit has become a pleasure and not a pain, and the still extant sobriquet of "Old Murder" has lost its sting. Nor even of how Mrs. Stephen, Cynthia no more, energetically blundered

into success with her Weeds, in whom the Miss Burdons grew to take the zealous, but not always helpful interest of wealthy maiden ladies with nothing to do. For that story would lead to a delicate surmise.

Draycot Morland presently took to visiting his aunts a great deal; and he was just the man to fly in the face of the world—just for Fun's sake and scorn of Shams. She had been a bad lot in her time, no doubt; but then—nobody knew.

No; it has been the story of none of these things—but of things that never were; of Docks that were never built, and in all likelihood never will be; for Glasgow and Liverpool still hold up their heads, and Askness flourishes, and Marchgrave has turned itself round to sleep once more—and is none the worse off for that, maybe. But there still stands, in the place of the Market Cross, the memorial of a great tragedy. It is still remembered how Sir John Heron was assassinated by a political fanatic who forthwith vanished and was never heard of again. For none ever, in all Marchgrave, save his unknown daughter and her husband, knew that the city had erected a public statue to a convicted forger, a coiner, a swindler, a bigamist, a murderer, for whom the law was hunting even when, to the sound of trumpet and bells, his glory was unveiled to the sun. His wife, who was no wife, mourns him with pride; and the glory of Marchgrave was buried in the grave of a scoundrel without remorse or scruple, yet with none but noble aims, and with his first self-conquest for his last deed.

Was he Knave, or King? Let him answer who can.

THE END.