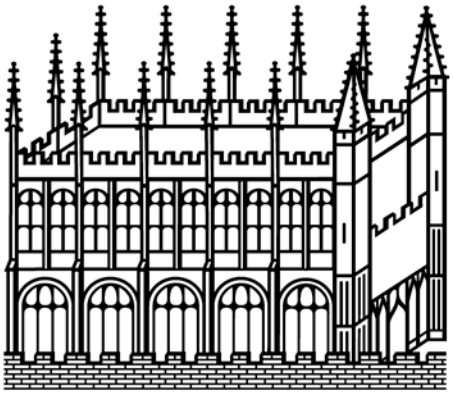


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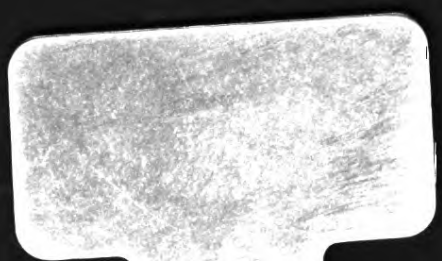


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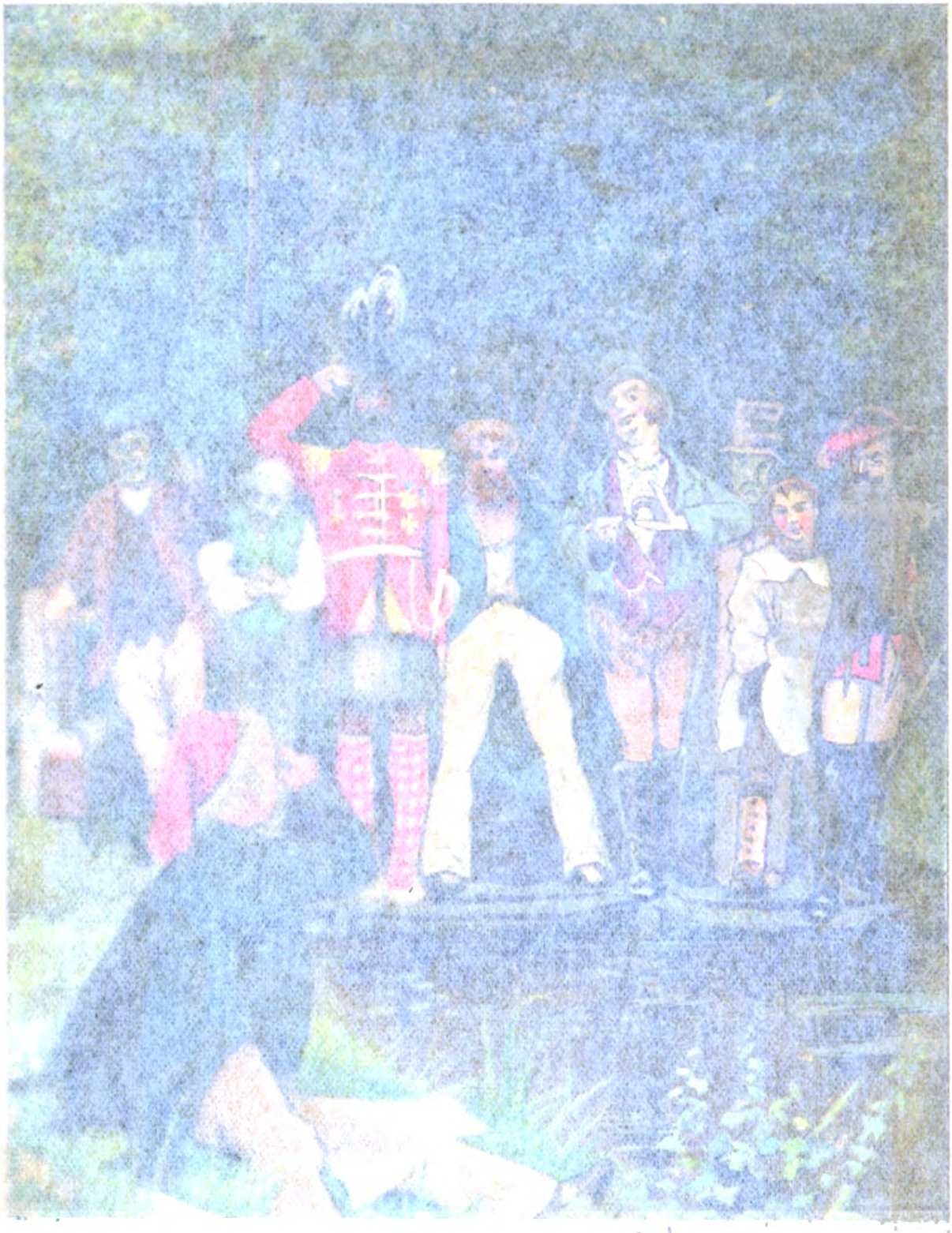
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PETER PARLEY'S ANNUAL

For 1882.





BEN, GEORGE, LITH.

PETER PARLEY'S ANNUAL

FOR 1882.

BEING

THE STRANGE STORIES OF

Tinker

Tailor Soldier

Sailor Rich Man

Poor Man Ploughboy

Thief



WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS AND COLOURED PLATES.

CASSELL, PETTER, GALPIN & CO.:

LONDON, PARIS & NEW YORK.

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PETER PARLEY'S ANNUAL.

HOW PETER PARLEY MET A PARTY OF PECULIAR PEOPLE.

"HI! PETER PARLEY, sir! Hi! hi! hi!"

I can assure you, young people, that I was quite startled. I, your old friend Peter Parley, of Nowhere Hall, Cheshire, was, I may say, exceedingly startled at this singularly unexpected salutation; for I had sauntered away to a little-known and sequestered spot, that I might be perfectly alone and undisturbed, having a great and important purpose in my mind, several new quills in my pocket, and a roll of ruled paper under my arm, on which ruled paper I intended to plan out your next Annual—that is this Annual, of course, *the* Annual of the year 1882.

As yet I had not the slightest idea, not the ghost of one, I may say, as to what it was to be about, for after planning Annuals regularly for forty, aye for forty-two years this very Christmas, first to be bought by your father's father, then by your own father, for son and daughter, nephew, niece, and cousin, you must allow it was not greatly to be wondered at that even I, old Peter Parley, felt at some loss for new and original ideas, and thought regretfully how much easier such a task was in those days when boys and girls had one specially handsome New Year's volume, where now they have ten, at the very least.

First, I had to consider whether it should contain one long story or several short ones: if several, how many, and of what kind, grave or gay in substance, odd or even in number. All these may seem very unimportant matters, but they had to be settled, and it was this fact that had brought me out this very morning, and these questions which puzzled me now.

I looked at the sky: there was not even a cloud, far less an answer there; I walked very slowly, and I walked very fast, with no better a result, until at last I discovered that I had, as it were by instinct, found my way to an old, disused, tumble-down rustic bridge, beyond which I knew was a pleasant bank all thickly carpeted with mosses, its base fringed with osiers, and washed by cool, shallow, rippling waters—altogether a very nook for solitary thought. I knew it well, however long it had been unvisited, for here as a schoolboy I had often come to con over my lessons or to indulge in some delightful romance of chivalry.

By dint of delicate striding, and some wetting of hose, I managed to get safely across the rotten old wood-work, and having found the exact spot I was in search of—it was all bathed in shadowy flecks and sunshine, and pinky white with thousands of daisies—I proceeded to instal myself there, with a pleasant feeling of being for once master of the position. Here, at least, I was perfectly safe from intrusion, and to realise this the better, I took off my hat and put on my considering cap—that is I carefully tied my red silk handkerchief over my head, which head I am sorry to say is getting exceedingly bald before its time — and, having chosen a comfortable seat, set to work; that is, I unrolled the paper, tried the pens, and unscrewed the ink-bottle. But I found

that with the best of intentions it was not easy to think of anything very serious in this quiet daisy-lined nook, where the soft puffs of wind came by laden with nature's thousand and one voices. Even the low splash of the clear, shallow wavelets would fall a-tune with the ceaseless chirrup of birds and the flutter of numberless flitting things; then, too, it being so clear and sunshiny, the air was full of gay, gauzy-winged flies, and busy buzzing creatures, leggy and inquiring, that *would* inspect my features and settle on my ears, or alight on the tip of my nose or on my fingers, ending their many investigations by flopping helplessly down in dizzy wonderment on the white paper, on which I had intended conjuring such interesting stories for your benefit. Then, too—to still further distract my attention, and turn it from a good purpose—came wandering hither an old speckled top-knot hen, preceded by an almost endless family of noisy gabbling bits of downy, yellow acrobats, evidently but lately arrived in a world of ponds and sunshine that interested them so much they could not make enough of it. Unluckily for me, they must needs choose this place in which to come and disport their young selves, boldly waddling almost to my very feet, and then plunging in, with foolish little "cheks" of delight, and shaking ridiculous little tips of fluffy tails, and doughy little legs and toes, instead of heads and wings above the water, they splashed and spirted in every direction—quite regardless of the warning shrieks and cries of their agonised parent running so distractedly up and down, her feathers all on end, and evidently in extreme doubt as to the sanity of her self-willed brood.

It certainly was a very curious, interesting, and comical sight; "but really, now about the Annual—you know." I

forced myself to withdraw my eyes from the ducklings, when lo, there rushed up a whole shoal of minnows, pouring from no one could have told where, right into a shallow clear as glass. What bright-coloured active creatures! how busy and intent they seemed, darting here and there, and turning tail like lightning, as though just remembering the door-key, or feeling a doubt lest the back nest might be on fire. I never see minnows but my fingers itch to inveigle them prisoners, with a bent pin and a willow rod.

It is no use denying it, boys; I really must confess that by this time I had entirely forgotten what object had brought me hither, and was sliding down close to the osiers, and bending them aside that I might the better watch the silvery water elves. Here was a whole party of shining stickle-backs — stickly-backed, indeed — of the three-spined sort, drifting together in a regular crowd, evidently intent upon performing a curious feat, nothing less than squeezing through a narrow crack or sluice, which they had discovered between two fallen stones; they had plenty of room to swim everywhere else, but no, they must needs press that way and no other, getting through anyhow, one or two at a time and then tumbling and bumping down a miniature torrent in the most awkward and uncomfortable fashion—yet still on they came, pushing and bumping one another, and snapping and snarling too in their way; for stickle-backs have any amount of spiteful spirits—to make up for their diminutive size, I suppose. How they shouldered each other as though their very lives depended upon getting through and seeing what was on the other side of that fissure! Though they had a whole world of easy, comfortable waters everywhere else, no other way satisfied them. "Really," I

thought, "these mites of sticklebacks must be as inquisitive and dissatisfied as a great many people I know;" and then I gathered a long twig of light osier, and bent its end into the clear water, and tried to bar some on their eager way. But the tiny fishes got into a great rage, and bumped, nose forward, against this new barrier, their coats growing quite green with ill-temper and indignation.

I know you will think, as I candidly admit, that it was scarcely worth while for such a personage as grave old Peter Parley to have roamed all this way on a hot summer's day merely to lie on the grass watching tittlebat life and manners; yet I did it, and for long enough, too, with a sort of lazy satisfaction, feeling all the time I ought to be doing something very different, yet without the strength of mind to exert myself enough to sit up and do it. I even fell to work idly counting the elfish things as they came tumbling through the hole, now one, now two at a time. I counted up to ninety-three; then, becoming somewhat confused, took to odd or even, odd or even, odd, even, middling; for sometimes one stuck half-way for a second; odd, even, middling. Why, that was exactly what had to be decided about the Christmas stories—oh, those stories—and here, thoroughly ashamed of myself, I decided to give just ten more minutes to the pool, and to make those passing flashes of life decide the question and end it for good and all.

Yes, that was it—capital. I drew out my big silver repeater, and determined that the order in which they stood, or rather swam, at the end of five minutes should settle the first doubt. "Odd, even, middling." I counted them breathlessly.

In the first five minutes seven and a half fish popped

through in quite an orderly procession. One question decided. "Odd, even," ha! three minnows made a simultaneous rush and put me one out of my reckoning, so I had to start again. "Odd, even, middling." Odd, even; five minutes and thirteen fish. There was a problem solved in the most simple way. Middling in length, odd in number. So it should be, and very good too. Nothing like letting chance determine some things; it is so comfortable and easy a way out of a difficulty. I lay back on the grass, and felt at last that I had accomplished a fine stroke of business.

Perhaps it was my sweet surroundings of white frilled daisies that presently set me wandering back to the pleasant old days when I had sat here with Polly—little Polly Parley, my sister; and then I remembered how she used to tell her fortune by picking out the daisy petals one by one, with almost the same words I had been using, "odd or even." And then, too, how often I had seen her with serious pursed up lips and with dimpled browny fingers working another kind of spell by counting out the small red beads in the many strands of her coral necklace. Girls all wore coral necklaces then. I wonder why we so rarely see such a thing nowadays. How carefully she parted each bead until the waxed thread showed quite plainly, as she slowly and seriously repeated the old childish incantation.

Let me see. Tailor, Tinker—no, no. Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor, Rich Man, Poor Man, Apothecary, Plough-boy, Thief—that was it; the very words that her soft, earnest voice would repeat over and over until it became a sort of buzz, bizz, buzz, of which I usually took as little notice as though it had been that of a bee, being myself generally busy enough in a book or some diversion of my own; yet I always



"Counting out the small red beads."—*Page* 14.

had to stop and to listen, or at any rate pretend to listen, when the spell ended, for she almost invariably exclaimed, looking on the necklace in unfeigned simple wonderment and some disgust, "However is it, Peter, I never do stop at the Gentleman, or even the Soldier bead. If I count fair its always Thief on this row, or Tinker on the other that's to marry me. Isn't it funny; because you know, Peter, I couldn't marry a naughty thief—'vief she pronounced it—and a tinker—a dirty black tinker. I shouldn't like to marry a tinker either; besides, Peter, dear, I couldn't ever marry anybody you didn't love too, and you wouldn't love a tinker; would you, now? not enough for me to marry, I mean." And she would shake her pretty little head until all her wavy hair glittered like golden floss in the sunshine — speaking so disconsolately that I would generally find time to look up for a moment and answer cheerily, though carelessly enough, I am afraid: "All right, Polly, try again; better luck next time, old lady." And then with a stifled sigh, and a little impatient movement, she would fall to counting again from the very beginning, never for one moment suspecting that the unchanged number of her many beads had anything to do with these unpleasant results that so troubled her.

Dear little Polly Parley! she never had to decide between either Tinker or Tailor. For long before her "fortune" began in earnest, she lay in quiet smiling rest beneath the pure dew-crowned daisies she had loved so well. And though I am old and grey now, I never see a girl-child gathering daisies, or repeating the old sing-song words, but my heart warms with the remembrance of that loving, golden-haired little sister of my shadowy long ago; and I kiss those other little ones, and love them too for her dear memory's sake.

And so I thought of her sweet young self now with a foolish, fond regretfulness, conjured up partly by the crowding white starry blossoms, and partly by the old words which my very boyish trick of settling a business matter by a chance "odd or even" had no doubt brought to my mind, and thinking of her, I idly plucked the daisy-petals, one by one, repeating dreamily and half unconsciously as I placed the flowers in a neat row:—"Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sail——"

Then it was that I was startled by that singular call—most singular, I may say, considering the time and place, and considering, I may also add, the person to whom it was addressed—"Hi! Peter!—Peter! Peter Parley, sir! Hi!" Yes, that was it; for although the cry had rather a far-off, muffled sound, the echoes took it up, and repeated—"Parley, sir! Hi! hi! hi!" as though it had been their business to aid in attracting my attention.

You may be sure that I did "Hi!" and quickly, too, on becoming thus made aware that I was no longer alone—at least, that is to say, I was still alone on my own particular ground; but yonder stood, what at first sight appeared to be a whole crowd of folks, who had silently invaded and taken up a position on the fragile tumble-down old bridge which, as I have mentioned, I crossed just now only with care and difficulty: a bridge placed there by Squire Ralph Parley, my maternal great-grandfather, who had a love for all kinds of rustic ornamentation, and this had never been much else. Now little remained of it, but one long, slight timber hand-rail, mossy and worm-eaten, and a few gaping, unhewn logs, which only accustomed feet cared to tread; and as but few feet came this way, few people knew, or cared, into what state of dilapidation the whole was passing.

Yet on this very unstable and unsafe platform now stood, or rather lolled, several most peculiar-looking persons, all apparently quite at their ease, and regardless of their so evident chance of a ducking. How these careless persons got there at all without my seeing them, or hearing the slightest sound of their approach is, I can assure you, one of those problems I have never been able to clearly understand or explain. But, being somehow there, how they managed not to slip their feet through the big cracks in the rotten, crazy woodwork, or fall bodily over its undefended side into the water—which for all it looked so clear was very deep just below there—remains another unexplained puzzle, which it requires a wiser head than mine to solve.

At any rate, there they were, and at their ease, carelessly supporting themselves against the long, straight hand-rail, that somehow vaguely reminded me—I'm sure I don't know why—of the long waxed thread in Polly's little red necklace. In some mysterious way this slim pole seemed to hold and connect the whole venturous party, although they were most evidently standing and moving quite independently of each other, and just now seemed equally interested and absorbed in one common intention and purpose, that of attracting my attention and notice, which having done in the very startling and obtrusive manner which I have described, they waved their hands, and nodded and stared, and bobbed and smiled, as though they had been familiar old friends or acquaintances that I must surely be pleased to see and delighted to welcome, when once I had realised the great fact of their presence in my neighbourhood.

My first impulse was to scramble on to my feet, and look all round and about me, to ascertain if this noisy greet-

ing might be intended for some other hitherto unnoticed person—for though the call had certainly sounded like one for Peter Parley, I certainly did not in the least recognise any one of the callers, and did not feel inclined to acknowledge or answer it. Yet, seeing no one else near me, and to make quite sure, I put my second pair of powerful spectacles over the first and looked and peered at these individuals again. No, they were all strangers, and exceedingly odd, ill-mannered strangers too, for they all stood still, nid-nodding at me like a row of those quaint Chinese mandarins in a tea dealer's shop, and with very much the same expression of countenance. It certainly was a most awkward and uncomfortable position to be in. Really I scarcely knew what to do; for being a well-known—I may say a respected inhabitant of the parish—I could not conscientiously return the frantically friendly nod of so many incomprehensibly peculiar persons—who, as it suddenly occurred to me, might have escaped from the lunatic asylum in the next town.

Impressed with this idea, and, as I say, not well knowing what was most advisable to do, I turned away my head with a slight shake, and an undeniable frown, tending to show that I ignored the whole party, and I even proceeded to collect the sheets of paper which had come untied and lay scattered loosely; but in my hurry I only sent them rolling farther away, and when I had gathered them together and sat down determined at any rate to make an endeavour to write, I found that in my confusion I had seated myself on the pens, and as you school-boys term it, had so squashed them that not one quill could be used unless re-nibbed—an operation at which I usually excelled, but which, agitated as I was, I did

not now attempt, feeling that I dare not trust my shaky fingers with a sharp penknife.

Dear me, now the pleasant scene had changed completely; what to me were my simple daisies, and innocent ducklings or sticklebacks? how could I collect myself enough to think of so important a subject as our Annual? much less to begin it, while all those staring eyes were still fixed upon my every movement; while all those mouths were grinning, and all those strange persons insisting, as it were, upon being friendly. I must leave this place, and then treat their impertinent advances with lofty contempt and indifference, going back to Nowhere Hall; and thus resolving I took off my silk handkerchief, and put on my hat, and fitted on my gloves; all this I did slowly, and I must admit nervously, for going was all very well, but how to get away without passing over that rickety bridge where they had taken their stand, and where to all appearances they meant to stay, though for how long, and with what intent, I had no means of ascertaining; it might be for the day, week, or month. Taking a step or two forward, I also took a sidelong glance at the enemy, for as such I had begun to consider them; there they stood in exactly the same positions, and all surveying me with the same sort of alert, watchful attention—pleased, yet attentive to my every movement—with which a fat well-fed household cat might survey a mouse she felt she could clutch at any moment. Surely they *must* have strayed from the asylum, and if so, what did this intense and unwelcome interest bode. Oh that I were safely past them, and on the opposite bank; but unluckily there was no royal road, my figure is by no means of the conformation suitable for running the

gauntlet, and swimming was also quite out of the question. Thinking the matter over I grew desperate, and growing desperate I grew brave, or, perhaps, I should call it cunning; for I remember hearing it said that apparent fearlessness imposes upon — well upon folks from an asylum. So summing up all the boldness I could assume, I faced the occupants of the bridge with a resolved air, tempered by a look of such placidity, and off-hand friendliness, as I could express without compromising myself entirely, and made as though I was coming their way, upon which they all seemed highly elated, and set up a sort of muffled, laughing cheer, which the busy echoes took up, and repeated for my benefit. Hip, hip—ha, ha, ha! then when I hesitated, a jovial voice shouted cheerily from somewhere about the centre of the group, "Thought you'd soon signal friendly, Capn' Parley; we're all piped up, you see, me and my queer messmates. Said you'd know our bunting and figure-heads anyhow; bless your old heart of oak, we're right down glad you signalled for us at last. Now three cheers for Capn' Parley; now all you land lubbers—hurrah! and three times three for 'the boys and girls,' Peter."

They all appeared to join in the hearty cheer very heartily, though their combined voices had that same far away, muffled sound, so bewildering, considering that the cheerers were really at a moderate distance, and the wind blowing straight in my direction. But everything as yet was strange and unaccountable, though on the whole encouraging, for plainly they all knew and appreciated me, and if I did not recognise them it was evidently not their fault, poor things. The king's fool did not know every one who knew him. So I began to look up and down

the row with a more assured feeling, and the loud pit-a-pat within me subsided somewhat.

"It's all right you see, we're all here," nodded one man, as my glance rested on his eager, wide open eyes:

"As right as tit tat toe,
The three jolly butcher boys all in a row,"

sang the next man, giving a sort of mysterious tap, first on his own chest, then upon his neighbours, who sulkily observed, "That's babyish; besides we ain't all right, one's a missing. *He's* a missing, one always is a missing, and a leaving the others wrong. I'm always a being left wrong, I am, and never being let miss. Nobody never counts me out, and nobody wants me in. But 'Pothecary isn't here."

"Cry about it, silly, do," the man to the left said, mockingly. "If he warn't called he needn't come; none of us need if we're left out, need we? and we're all left out some time or other. What's the odds, evens or middlings? *I* don't mind, not I, one rap, nor nobody else; what's the use of minding? it's all ups and downs, you know."

And here I could have declared that, had the thing been practicable—which it was not—to my inexpressible surprise, the speaker, giving no notice of his intention, suddenly performed a swift summersault, during which he rested with his rough head on the hand-rail, rapped his feet together, after the manner of castanets, and was again quite collectedly standing upon them, and staring at me, the whole performance—if performance it could be—not having occupied that short space of time known as a "twinkling."

Before I had got over the surprise and discomfiture

occasioned by this unnatural and neck-breaking evolution, of which none of his strange compeers took the slightest heed, the whining voice began again—

"It's all very well to say 'what's the odds.' Why, I'm the odds, and I don't like it. I'd like to be even for once; I'm tired of being the odds."

"What can it matter, so long as there's half-a-dozen respectable——"

"Half-a-dozen *what?*" sneered the other maliciously.

"I said respectable, a word you're not in the least likely to understand, but the rest of us do, and, being re—spectable, think it rather hard that we can never meet together but there must be one of your sort to wind up with; it leaves a wrong impression. I do wish—"

What he was wishing I never ascertained, for, as though suddenly propelled by some invisible hand, the speaker doubled quietly up—not like a man, but as a book or a telescope might have done—and vanished backwards, head first, between the handrail and the plank, making a great splash in the water, which I knew was at its deepest just there.

I sprang forward some steps, naturally expecting a general hubbub and attempt at rescue; but even while I was collecting breath to shout out directions, there was the fellow standing exactly in his old place, as unruffled and undisturbed as the rest of the party, not one of which had ever turned his head. Cool! I should think they were cool, far more so, in fact, than I was, for I found myself shouting excitedly as I half struggled out of my own coat-sleeves.

"Save him, gentlemen! save him! or he will most cer-

tainly be drowned." Yet all the while there was the very man, beaming and nid-nodding as though in acknowledgment of my interest in his welfare. When I could calm myself to listen, he was saying soothingly, as to a child—

"All right, Mr. Parley—all right; it's nothing, only a way we have. It don't hurt us. It's all right; only fun, sir, only fun."

It might be fun to them, but I did not approve of or understand such tricks at all. Indeed, so disturbed was I, that I still kept on exclaiming shrilly—"Gentlemen! gentlemen! I must protest. I do not——"

Here a low murmur ran almost all along the row, and one voice interrupted me in a tone of polite, yet grumbling, expostulation.

"Look here, Peter; please don't you keep on calling us that, because, you see, there's only one of the sort in the whole muster of us, as nobody knows better, if you'll only run through it."

Another voice took up the subject eagerly.

"No, there never was, nor there never is, nor there never will be more than one Gentleman in our party, and quite enough too. Some only call him Rich Man, but say 'Gentleman,' you'll allow, I suppose, that one gentleman can't make all the rest of us gentlemen, no more than one swallow can make one summer, before its time. Why, that's just the sort of way you'd put it down yourself, isn't it now, old P. P.," he cried triumphantly.

"Peter!"—"old P. P.," indeed! This was far too familiar to be borne with patience. What next? What—who was this extraordinary company? I must know, let what would happen; so I placed my glasses at their most imposing angle,

pulled my hat well forward, and demanded, in a determined tone—

"And pray who and what are you, my good fellows? You seem to know a great deal about me and my doings; but I as certainly know nothing of you. I repeat—who and what are you? and what business brought you here on my grounds?"

At this they all fell-to nudging one another, repeating, in tones of amused surprise and wonder—

"Who and what are we? Who and what are we? Calls for us himself, and then asks who and what are we."

"Yes, who and what are you? I am sure I never called or wanted you. How could I when you are complete strangers to me, at least as far as I know?

"For goodness' sake," I continued angrily, "don't sit there chuckling like Barbary apes; but some one of you tell me who you are. Will you speak out?"

Seeing, I suppose, that I was really very much in earnest, the top man—that is, the first to the left—answered in a tone of affected seriousness, while pointing comprehensively to the rest of the bobbing crew—

"We're them—them, you know, *them*."

"We're them—them," came in eager chorus from the rest.

"Them—them—what them? Who is to know what you mean by *them?* I know no thems, and do not want to know any; but what I *do* know is that I have no time to waste in nonsense, however much it may amuse you, and that I shall feel obliged if you will come off that bridge and allow me to make my way over it. It is private property, sirs."

This I said in a great huff; but as my words did not seem to have the slightest effect, and not one of my hearers budged

an inch, I presently lowered my tone, feeling, as the saying runs, that I was in the wrong boat or box; not but I should have preferred almost any boat or box to my present position and prospect. So there we stood staring at each other for full five minutes.

"Come, come," I pleaded, as calmly as I could, while pointing my cane at random at what chanced to be that first man's head, "be reasonable, my good fellow, and tell me what they call—well you for instance."

"Tinker," he answered, with great decision and readiness.

"But I meant your name; I inquired your name, my man, not your business."

"You didn't; you asked what they called me, and they call me 'Tinker.' Never had no name; none of us never had, nor never shall have. We should never answer to no names, should we mates?" to which they all answered with a ready "No," and looked and laughed and nudged as though the question were a ridiculous one, and I an amusingly ridiculous old gentleman for asking it.

The man who had last spoken now stooped, and caught up a battered, black-tinned pan I had not before observed, swinging it so recklessly that the sparks and thick streaming smoke set all the others coughing violently, singing out meantime, "Yes, I'm 'Tinker'; I always begin it, you know. Sir, it's 'Tinker.'"

His next neighbour, who appeared to be awkwardly warding the swinging, sooty can, with one of those oddly-formed irons, for some reason termed a goose, managed to choke out through the smother about him,

"I'm Tailor, the snip, your——" Here he was silenced by the third man—a tall, martial figure, who made one

stride forward and spoke one word, "Soldier!" then fell back into his place as though he had shot the word out of his gun, and had nothing more to do with what followed.

There was no particular need for this or the next announcement, for as he thus fell back into his place I got a full view of number four man; and then it was as though a veil fell from before my glasses, and I could not resist rubbing my eyes delightedly and calling out, "Sailor! Soldier! Sailor! *Of* course I see it all now. Why, Jack Tar, my fine fellow, allow me to shake hands with you;" and somehow I did it, and heartily too, for all he was in the middle of the rickety bridge and I ever so far off, with one foot among the minnows, and yet all the while rubbing my glasses most energetically that I might the better see the whole curious company, whom I now, as it were by magic, suddenly realised, and proceeded to count out one by one as Polly did her beads in this very place in the old, old days of youth.

"The Tinker, the Tailor, the Soldier, the Sailor, the Rich Man, the Poor Man, the Apoth—no, he was not there. Surely this is the Plough-boy—this must be the Plough-boy—and that—that"—here I hesitated somewhat, seeing which the last man quickly added, "Thief! Yes, sir, I'm Thief; it's only 'Pothecary that's a missing. He mostly is. Nobody seems to want him much neither; but I'm never left out, though I'm always last."

Yes, there they most unmistakably were, the whole company; for neither little Polly nor I ever had quite believed in that missing "'pothecary." I really felt so charmed that I could have embraced them all round as my boyhood's indulgent friends. Escaped lunatics? Why, I blushed to remember the suspicion, when I saw how exactly they resembled

the ideal personages that had often answered the thoughtless summons of so many young persons (myself among the rest); for have not all such young persons formed special ideals of such characters, gleaning them no one knows how?

The tinker, for instance, was he not a swarthy, cunning, dark-eyed, gipsy tramp, whose mate, if he had one, went her separate way through the woodlands and village dressed in the brightest of scarlet cloaks, with a large hood drawn over her face, and in one hand a pack of cards, while the other was outstretched for silver. And did not such people go about the country more intent upon snapping up any stray children they met with than in any honest mending of pots and pans? And did not the children thus carried away and for years kept hidden in secret huts and caverns, invariably turn out to be, not the children of the humble people who had lost them and gone seeking for them in every unlikely place, but the heirs of knights and squires who turned up at the right time to claim with delight the nut-brown youths and maidens?

That was the sort of muddled idea I had of "the tinker"—not for one moment confusing him with the matter-of-fact and rather sandy man that came to our own door, making one hole while he mended another, as my mother often declared. Oh, no; "Tinker" of boyish wonderworld was very different from that. I knew him well, and here he stood swarthy and grim as I could desire.

I should have felt more uncertainty in figuring "Tailor," though now I saw him I was pretty satisfied that he was all right, for he was a pale, wishy-washy, little old man, in an ill-fitting waistcoat and very loose shirt-sleeves. At first sight his features had no sort of expression, except, perhaps, a mild dread of Tinker's can, and a blinking anxiety concerning a

shabby pair of big carpet slippers which were for ever getting stepped out of, and having to be shuffled for from under the feet of his companions, who seemed to take a malicious pleasure in tormenting the meek, humble tailor by calling him "thread-paper," "snip" or "the ninth part of a man," and asking him the price of goose and cabbage—poor wit it would be considered now, I fancy, though I remember the time when I should have thought it clever: not that I should any more have dreamt of so addressing the rather pompous and stout gentleman in black, who measured us for our clothes at old Swishem's than I should have called the doctor "old Swishem" to his respected face. But then the true tailor of the rhyme—the tailor we lads built up for ourselves—was so very different from the real one that even now I found myself surveying him with a kind of contemptuous interest, and discovered that his pale face wore an exceedingly kind and benevolent expression (whoever heard of a wicked tailor, I wonder?), and that there was a twinkle in his mild eye which told of quiet enjoyable hours when many a busy thought came and went with the steady stitch, stitch, of the needle.

Soldier! ah that was a boy's, at least an old boy's idea of a soldier, if you like, a soldier to a tee—whatever a tee is—tall, strong, and straight, very big and fierce, with little seen of his hairy face but a pair of piercing, flashing eyes, and frown enough to scare and wither away any number of foes that his long, fierce, black moustachios had not already impelled to fall on their knees and implore for mercy. I, Peter Parley, could not inform you to what particular regiment this hero belonged—a soldier, being a soldier, never mind the rest. Apparently he had the pick of several uniforms, the groundwork of the whole being a Scotch

kilt, and a grenadier's scarlet coat. He had huge gold stars, spurs, epaulettes, a black cocked hat and feathers, a sword by his side so long and loose that it clanked with every step he took; at least, it would have clanked had he taken any steps, which he did not seem inclined to do, for he stood at attention and "eyes right" whenever any one looked his way. For the rest of the time, my impression is he was lolling carelessly, but I cannot say for certain.

If the Soldier was good, the Sailor was better still. Here indeed, was the very Jack-tar of tradition, the identical salt that Marryat pictured, and that Dibdin sang of to a tune that made us many sailors. Here he stood, the same that sweet little cherubs watched over so carefully, the very same by the peculiar hitch up of the loose white trousers; by the large straw hat, perched like a flat brass platter on the very back of his curly head; by the sparkle of his fun-filled eye; by the easy slip of the jaunty necktie; by the open fly-away jacket—eyes, necktie, and jacket all as blue as the best Prussian blue could represent them against a background of cobalt sky, waves and distant ship, all easily filled in with such a gallant figure in the foreground, though no picture could rival those lively imaginings depicted by means of Indian ink and gunpowder on the manly embrowned neck and wrists so liberally displayed—perfect scrap-books which we lads could have conned over for hours.

I must repeat—and I am not ashamed to own it, boys—my heart, old as it is, warmed at the sight of that honest fellow, and my eye moistened as it fell on those shadowy signs and tokens; for did they not carry me back to the days at Swishem's, to a silent corner in the sloping box-room, where I crouched for many a stolen half-hour over

the "Romance of the Waves," or "The Terror of the Sea," tattered and torn volumes of such thrilling interest that they won me many a caning for inattention to lessons; and we *did* get caning in those days—aye, and birchings to follow on very slight provocation—at least we thought so.

Well I remember how decidedly I made up my mind to be a port admiral, or at any rate a post captain or a midshipman, instead of a money-making merchant as my father wished. No, I would certainly go to sea; indeed, as I soon afterwards heard, every boy in that school had decided on the same profession. Even silly Simmons, or "simple Simon," as we dubbed him, because he always had his mouth so wide open, and could be made to believe anything—after hearing a great deal of talk upon the subject, and several extracts from "The Terror of the Waves," tied up a pair of compasses (to point the way I suppose) a few clothes, and some stale bread and butter in his best blue cotton handkerchief, and was detected marching off after school hours in the direction of Portsmouth, one hundred and seventy-two miles away. He never told his destination, but I knew, and it was owing to this knowledge, and the promise of my next six months' jam-pot, that Simmons allowed me to test the recipe for tattooing, which the "Terror" gave so clearly and effectively that I fell to practising it on every one who would. To this day Simmons, who became no sailor, but a well-known scientific man, whose learning is prodigious, goes about with his entire name—not "simple Simon" fortunately—but "Josephus F. Simmons" in Roman letters, printed clear on the back of his neck. So elated were we that I gave him my new knife, and might have practised on his face next. Simon—for jam, knives, and good-nature's sake—would have allowed any-

thing; but his parents made such a fuss when he went home that I narrowly escaped being expelled, was thrashed, and altogether came to such grief that Simon gave me back my knife as being undeserved, and promised me his next allowance of jam, which never came to hand.

Talking of Simmons, what splendid red pippins those were in Pott's orchard; but what a wall to climb. I and Simmons—but tut, tut, what nonsense am I recalling; of course all these things took place when I was a very little boy—a naughty little boy too; indeed, it stands to reason they never could have happened at all had there been a Peter Parley to advise and teach us better than to do such foolish tricks; besides, see the floggings and impositions we should have been spared. Of course, now I come to reflect, I see that it was my own experience of the need for such a mentor that made me myself grow up into a Peter Parley at your service.

It was the sudden pleasure and surprise of meeting with a real Jack, that not only led me back to those foolish days of my foolish youth, but led me to bestow more time and attention upon his appearance than could have been quite flattering or polite to such an important person as the Rich Man that came next.

"Rich Man!"—I involuntarily took off my hat and bowed low—"Sir." He took off his hat, bowed low to me, and said "Sir." Then we looked gravely at each other. I do not know what he thought; but, yes, he was the Rich Man—the rich man of my youthful fancy and my private stage.

What sort of a looking person should you have expected to see, for doubtless your ideas on the subject are very different to mine, which were formed so long ago, and upon such vague

originals, that I expect you will shake your head and laugh and say, "Mr. Parley, *that* a rich man; that a gentleman! —who ever heard such a thing?—why he looks like a—well—a—a nobody we know at any rate." But just ask your grandpapas if in their young days they never saw this kind of Rich Man, or Gentleman? It is not quite the same, you know, though I did not realise the difference between the two terms then as clearly as I did now that I saw the illustration of a really wealthy person standing gazing at me from the bridge. He was tall and quite imposing of stature, haughtily benevolent of face, with a great deal of fine white cambric frilling and pleating about the neck, and a great deal of embroidered claret velvet or satin waistcoat above the waist, across which jingled a great length of gold chain, thick enough and strong enough to secure the street door, pendant to which hung what might have been the seals of State, so large, and heavy, and solid were the chased tripods that held those heavy cornelians and purple amethysts, on which were engraved their wearer's crest, or motto, or device; all these fell clanking about the very visible outline of what might have been the good-sized half of an ordinary potato or small turnip, but which was in reality a watch, most likely of silver, which only came out of its resting-place after a struggle and a tussle, but once out as sturdily declined to be restored to that same resting-place; for a watch was a watch in those days—a fussy, pompous thing—by some still termed a "pocket clock," and to possess any sort of one stamped the wearer as a person of some means; the rich man therefore had an extra big watch, with so loud a tick that I thought I could hear it on my side of the river. As to his coat, it was of a light, bright blue, very short and tight about the waist, and adorned with any

number of small, flat, shining brass buttons. He wore buff-coloured, close, tight-fitting trousers, and smart, shining black boots, coming half-way up to the knees, then suddenly turning down, with little black silk tassels. Sometimes, I knew my Rich Man wore silk stockings and shoes and buckles, but to-day he had not favoured them, perhaps lest they should slip through the cracks. On his head—I ought to have begun instead of finishing with that, but you see I was confused—on his head, I say, our Rich Man wore a broad-brim drab beaver hat, as rough as a modern lady's muff. His hair was slightly dusted over with scented powder, and neatly twisted and tied in a pigtail behind. Then, to conclude, he had one much-beringed hand actively employed in jingling the gold coins which he carried loose in the depths of those capacious pockets; the other held a snuff-box of the size and capacity of a hollow muffin, which he was continually offering to his neighbours, or noisily regaling his own nose from. "*That* a rich gentleman! oh, Peter!" you exclaim again. Yes; I know; and I have no doubt that if your glasses should ever chance to meet the party, you will see its members looking very differently; we view things through our own particular glasses, and mine are better to look back, yours to look straight above and before you with; we would not see things quite in the same way if we changed, or perhaps be contented to do so.

Who was this shabby, yellow-faced—oh! dear me I forgot, the Poor Man, tidy, and neat, and well—too well—brushed and buttoned up to the very chin?—but oh! certainly, yes—the Poor Man. A very uninteresting person; I do not remember that I idealised him at all; I fancy I "skipped" him as often as possible, though of course in a politely blank manner. Yet, I knew him now I saw him; he had thin,

worn cheeks, and lack-lustre eyes and boots, and no wealth of white cambric, but an ugly old black silk stock with a worn metal buckle that held his neck so tightly it somehow reminded one of the grim clutch of poverty. I did not look long, for his entire expression and appearance was that of a person who was anxious to be passed over; it was evident that he could not help being there—it is "Rich Man, Poor Man," you see — and one must answer as well as another, or he certainly would prefer being out of the game altogether. Unlucky Poor Man! no one leaves him out, yet it is always a relief when his turn is over.

I allowed my eyes and thoughts to seek the next on the roll, who stood there grinning and feeling himself a far more satisfactory sight than his neighbour; for though in humble circumstances, he did not consider himself quite a "poor" Poor Man, nor was he. At any rate he was our Ploughboy—your Ploughboy and mine surely; a round, rosy, freckled face, with features small and nubbly, and scarce worthy mention, all, except the mouth, and that was a mouth that could have swallowed all the rest of the head, had such a feat been advisable—as it was, his mouth was for ever chewing something—a straw, or a clover-stem, or a bit of grass—but, best of all, it loved to absorb huge wedges of fat bacon, for which a thick hunch of bread, and a knife for which that originally used by Bluebeard must have been the pattern, were the only dinner arrangements required.

Around our real country bumpkin of a ploughman's neck was twisted some yards of a faded red comforter, which on holidays and Sundays he exchanged for a blue bird's-eye cotton handkerchief and a clean smock frock. He wore buttoned-up leather gaiters, yellow with clay, under which

showed peeps of grey knitted stockings, covering a pair of thin and somewhat bandy legs, for one never could picture a ploughboy with any but one peculiar ungraceful style or pattern of shanks, and big splay feet and hands to match—feet and hands over which he never had special control, and always shuffled uneasily, as though, like a lobster, he might be about to cast them. Just so our shamefaced Ploughboy did now, and words cannot paint the satisfaction his face and hands and feet expressed when my eyes passed on to the last man, the—well he had owned to it—Thief.

The most difficult and peculiar character of all to depict—the representative thief of who can decide how long ago—stood before me, so different, too, that it scarcely seemed fair to call him by the same title, or to confound him with the slouching, ragged, unwashed rogue who lurks about in noisome courts and alleys, or sneaks along our streets with such an impudent yet hangdog expression that folks button their coats and feel almost instinctively to see that their purses are still in their possession, shrinking from the miserable ne'er-do-well, whose greasy, shapeless, corduroy clothes tell of the professional thief; for when we called "Thief!" we meant thief—a fellow who will help himself to anything at any risk of prison to follow—just as when we said "Tailor" we meant the man who makes clothes and not the one who merely sells them; and when we said "Tinker" we meant the man who mends pots and kettles, not the one who sells tin wholesale.

I knew the moment my eye fell on him that "Thief," who faced me so complacently on the bridge, was one of the real right kind—I mean, of course, as being a thief worthy of the name. He was made up partly from the dashing Dick

Turpin type; then came Italian banditti in tall hats, feathers, and lace-up stockings, and a dash of Guy Faux, with a little black crape, and pistols; for in those days I drew no fancy lines between robbers of the road, bandits, and ordinary thieves, neither did any of our boys.

I looked upon "Thief," and in him I saw the "bold ruffian" of my young mind's eye. There was the broad-leaved, dark felt hat, with its crumpled plume flopping low over a most harsh and forbidding brow; there was the ample cloth cloak drawn about the crouching figure—for our villains had most peculiar strides, and figures that of themselves were calculated to attract the attention of the most sleepy "officer of the law." Their faces were all drawn on one model, just as I saw his now: gleaming eyes and noses that came down, and moustachios sharp and pointed and cruel that went up, and chins hidden in folds of the cloak, which covered a regular armoury of glittering knives, poniards, and pistols ready loaded and ready to go off pop on the slightest provocation; all these weapons stuck carelessly in a broad leather belt, the buckle of which was almost as large as the dark lantern hanging conveniently near it, for what was a thief without a dark lantern? This one must have known my thoughts, for as I slowly inspected him he as slowly held back his mantle, and there I saw it! Guy Faux—bah! even Diogenes' light-holder was nothing to it!

I could have lingered long over this strange assembly, each member of which seemed, in his own particular way, delighted and flattered with the interest the whole had so evidently aroused; yet soon I could but notice that their satisfaction was mixed with a repressed excitement, a sort of

fidgety eagerness, that set me wondering why and for what purpose they had come to this out-of-the-way place, in this out-of-the-way corner of the world. Could it be merely to see what *I*, Squire Peter Parley, was like? or, knowing that I was a lover of all uncommon and strange things, had they some errand or purpose? Surely, it would be as well to ascertain this point; and so reassured had I grown by now as to the harmlessness of the creatures, that, returning to the first man—that is, returning to him with my eyes, for I never moved otherwise—I asked, point-blank—

"Tell me, good Tinker, what brings you all here? What is your motive—what do you want?"

Tinker gave quite a little guilty start, for at that moment he was swinging his smoking can under the Tailor's nose, and answered hurriedly—

"Come—why did we come? Why, we came partly because you called us, sir; partly because—because—Here, Snip, why did we come?" and he nudged the Tailor out of one slipper, and then, when the Poor Man would have spoken, went on talking himself.

"Well, we came because we heard of you—among the young ones, you know. We have to listen to all they say, or we shouldn't be ready when they want us. Well, we've heard of you, I can't tell how long ago, and we've been waiting for you to call us—if you'd never done so of course we couldn't never have come—and we wanted to come very much, so directly you said 'Tinker, Tailor, Soldier' they jumped up, and all the others would come too, and here we are"—at which there was a cheer of the usual muffled kind.

"I am sure I am very delighted to make, or rather to re-make, their acquaintance, and yours also, being all so exactly what I could have expected; but"—for here they all took to nid-nodding again, as though they would never stop —"but, what I want to know is, what were you so very anxious to see me for, and what do you want now you do see me? and—excuse the question, but it is of importance—when are you going away, or rather, how long are you going to stay?" Then, afraid of losing their good will, I hastily added— "Not that it makes any difference to me, only that fragile bridge is not of the safest for heavy bodies—and I certainly should scarcely venture on it at present; I might upset you, or more likely still myself." At this such a laugh ran along the line that the little bridge shook again. I was a very amusing old gentleman to them, evidently.

Then the Tinker spoke out at last—"What have we come here for? Well, sir, as you don't seem to guess, we may as well out with it. Hey, Threadpaper, why don't you answer the gentleman? He's asking what we came here for?" and he gave Tailor a shove that shuffled him out of both slippers, and then he set his hot can down, as though by accident, on his toes, upon which Tailor answered me confusedly, as well he might—

"Yes, sir, that's what we want exactly—and it's very kind, very kind indeed, I'm sure, of you."

"But what is 'that?' I'm no more forward. What *do* you want?"

"We want putting down, all of us."

"He wants he, we want we—that is, everybody wants himself and everybody else put down—and that's what we've been a-waiting years for some one to do, and nobody never

did, nor never could do it as well as you. So here we've come to ask you, seeing you've given us a chance at last. Put us down, Mr. Parley—put us down; we'll never leave you till you put us down," said Tailor.

"Yes, do put us down—do, do, *do!*" rang in eager entreaty, while the echoes repeated gently, "Do, do, do-o-o-o!"

I looked and listened with fear and amaze. 'Never leave me! I—those—eight. I put them down—if down, where? I never put any one down in my life, except rude little boys—though a tipsy groom once put me down three times. But, dear me, was I expected to put all their extraordinary figures?—no, surely I must be dreaming"—and I tried to pinch myself awake—but the man was speaking again, and very earnestly.

"You see, sir, there's enough of us to do it, middling—you said middling before ever you called us, and you said odd—odd it is, and odder it will be when you've put us all down. You *will* put us down now, won't you, P. P.?"

"We'll never leave him till he's done it. I want to be put down, I do, just to see what it's like," said Soldier, boldly.

"They've been a-trying to put me down always—and never done it yet—and I don't believe he'll do it right, I don't, not I," muttered Thief.

"Just think," continued the first speaker, "just think how glad the boys and girls, who are for ever a-calling us to settle their tricks and fortunes, will be to see us put down before their very eyes."

"Boys and girls—why, what have they to do with this?"

I asked—pricking up my ears—attentively, for a light was dawning on my bewildered mind.

"Do!—why, everything. It's them we care about, not you grown-ups—it's them, pretty things, we want to know something about us and the likes of us—and nobody can do it better than you, sir; we want you to put us down in black and white, and then, as the old riddle goes, 'we shall be red;' d'ye see, sir, d'ye see?" And he laughed an expectant laugh, and they all laughed, and I laughed myself immoderately, for great was the relief I felt, I can assure you. "I see? why, of course I see," I exclaimed, with a gasp of relief and enlightenment. "When you ask me to put you down, you do not mean—no, no, of course, but that I should write your words down—tell about each of you in the 'Annual'—let you tell the stories. Hey, is that it? Why, my dear fellows, why did you not mention it at once, if that is really what you mean?"—and I rubbed my hands gleefully—for I knew by their joyous faces that was what they did mean—and it was what I was very glad to mean too.

"Ay, yes, sir, our individual stories told by our individual selves—that's it, that's what we've been after all along, that's what we said, put us down, P. P., put us down, middling and odd—Tinker and Tailor, and the rest—that's our notion. I began it. Tinker always begins everything, but I began that."

"And a very good notion too; I really wonder it never suggested itself to me; but the point now is, that boys and girls are very difficult to please—have you anything interesting enough to be worth communicating to my young people?" This was rather an unfortunate question, for there broke forth such a Babel of talk that I was well-nigh deaf-

ened, each one recounting his particular experiences, of which little could be distinctly heard, with the exception of that one important letter, "I," which, as in most conversations, seemed by far the loudest and most used of all its brothers in the alphabet. It was "*I* said, *I* went, *I* had," and for awhile I found that it was altogether impossible by any effort of mine to stem the current; so I deliberately set to work, making my preparations for writing, arranged the paper, mended the pens, replaced my silk considering-cap, ate a biscuit, and then having all ready, waited till there came a short and sudden lull—during which I coughed a loud "Ahem!"—and held up my forefinger in such an authoritative manner that they all stopped short in their talking as though by magic, each with wide open eyes and mouth staring at the said forefinger as though they expected a rap on the nose with it. Then I rose, and summed up the matter thus: "Now to business, to business, my friends; I call for silence and attention. Our business is the 'Annual,' and the 'Annual' is a most important business. If you really wish me to put you down, each and all (hear, hear!), if you really wish to tell our dear youngsters your tales, narratives, or stories, you must do it one at a time. I am as ready to write as you to dictate, but I have only one pair of ears and one pair of hands; so settle among yourselves which is to begin, and the others keep still, otherwise I decline the task."

"No need of that, master, Tinker always begins it." And having prepared his mind, by giving the Tailor such a nudge that both slippers vanished altogether, Tinker began:—

The Tinker's Story.

"My story, eh?" he said, giving his fire a swing to and fro to set it burning fiercely, the smoke and flame rushing out of the holes of the old saucepan in which it was made, "my story, eh?" and then scratched his head and pondered.

"Well, it's a rum un, it is indeed. It gets over me, sir, it do. Here have I been wanting for years to tell my story, red-hot, you know, and got it all ready, and now you're a-sitting there with your pens and ink and paper and your head tied up like, sir, to keep your brains from swelling too much, it all seems to have gone like, and I haven't a word to say.

"Pots *and* kittles to—— Oh, I beg pardon, sir. It comes nat'ral like to me to say that when I swing my fire, and it slipped out unawares, 'cause pots and kettles is my business.

"Well, now, it is strange. My story, eh? My story? Ah, yes, to be sure. Let me see, as the old woman said. My story——

"Pots *and* kit—— Dear, dear! there it is again. Here, I'd better put down my fire and think."

Tinker set down his smoking fire and looked up; then he looked down; then all around the landscape, rubbing one ear the while with his black horny hand; then coughing nervously, he began. "First thing I reck'lect, sir, was being very small, and making dabs with my little fist at a black bob. I was tied up tight in a big handkercher thing, and hung from some one's neck, and that big black bob used to come lower and lower till it tumbled all to pieces like, and did for me to

play with; and it used to make me sneeze because it tickled my nose, but I used to try and suck it and eat some, when it would make me cough and choke; and then somebody used to give me a bit of a shake, and wind all that loose black hair up and make it into a bob again, and I suppose that somebody was my mother.

"Next thing I seem to reck'lect is crawling about on some green grass where there was a beautiful high hedge with white flowers on it that smelt nice, and on the other side a white dusty road. Down under the hedge there was a ditch without any water in it, and out of the damp bottom the grass and weeds and flowers grew very thick. There were yellow flowers and blue flowers, and long pieces of grass; and it all looked very beautiful to me, and I used to try and crawl and pick them, and roll down on to my face in the bottom of that ditch, when he who had to take care of me jumped down on top of me and began to bark.

"Then a dark-faced woman used to come and snatch me out and shake me and put me down on the grass once more, and go away and sit down by a dark man and begin cutting wood, which the man fastened round with thin bits of tin, and stuck upon a piece of string.

"Then I can reck'lect crawling out on to the white chalky road and rolling in the dust, and hearing a noise of tramping feet and wheels gritting as they rolled over the stones. Then the dog used to bark again, and the woman would come and shake me as she snatched me up once more; and then I'd lie still on my back with the dog standing over me, pretending to bite my hands as I pulled his ears and tried to stick my fingers into his eyes.

"Of course I don't know anything about time, but I've

some idea that it was very cold, and that I would sit very close to a fire-kittle like this one; and I know that I used to burn myself again it, and get slapped for crying.

"Then somehow it got warm again, and I used to run about with Bob, for about this time I had got to use my legs. I'm sure of that, because I used to tumble down and cut my knees, and have sore places on them.

"I don't think I had enough to eat, but I used to have plenty to drink; for Bob and me used to drink out of the clean ditches, and the bits of streams by the side of the road, and Bob used to seem to be my brother, and I remember wondering why he had four legs and I'd only got two; and I used to think that was why he could run so much faster, and never tumbled down and cut his knees.

"Bob was set to mind me when I was only a baby, and he used to be my regular companion, did Bob. For we always had to sleep together, and very nice and warm he used to be to snuggle up to when he curled up close to my chest; that was when the wind used to blow cold through the canvas stretched over the bow sticks that made our tent.

"I never seemed to know much about father or mother, only that father used to mend pots and kittles same as I do, and mother used to make clothes-pegs and sell them, along with clothes-props, and we were always going on from place to place, picking up a few pence here and there.

"Sometimes there was plenty to eat, and sometimes there warn't any, but perhaps it was having plenty to drink made me grow fast, and nothing didn't seem to trouble me. I used to run along the lanes with Bob, looking for nuts and blackberries and scarlet hips; and sometimes Bob used to have an accident and kill a rabbit, and then he used to

bring it to me, and look up in my face as if he was saying, 'Please, I'm very sorry;' and then I used to carry it to father, who would take his pipe out of his mouth and shake his head. 'I say, youngun,' he used to say, 'you'll get into trouble about them rarebuds;' and then he used to throw the rabbit to mother, and she used to skin it and cook it for our dinner, Bob getting the head and bones.

"Fine games I used to have with Bob, racing along the lanes, and in and out of the fields. It did not seem to matter to us whether it rained or whether it was dry; we were always happy enough, and so long as I was not quite lost father and mother used not to care what I did, or where I went.

"First thing when I woke of a morning with the birds singing in the woods close by, there would be Bob sitting up and waiting for me; and as soon as I opened my eyes, he would give a short, sharp bark, that meant 'Come along!'

"I used to get up directly, and Bob would stand there wagging his tail.

"Perhaps you think he waited while I dressed; but not he: there was no waiting. My undressing in those days was lying down and shutting my eyes, and my dressing when I awoke was rubbing my eyes to get them well open again. That was all. So you see Bob did not have much waiting, for then we used to be off down some lane, or over some common—for father and mother always kept to the country—and if there was any water near we went straight to that, and paddled in it till we were tired. If there was no water we went and caught butterflies, or picked flowers, or looked for something to eat, and generally did not find it; and that

made me go back to the tent when it was a tent, to the van when it was a van.

"For sometimes it was one and sometimes it was the other. When it was a tent, father used to have a barrow with a wheel and stone, so as to grind knives and scissors as well as mend kittles and pots and things. When it was a van he used only to do mending, and help sell pegs and clothes-lines, and cut and sell props.

"All this time I was growing, I suppose, and getting bigger, and when I saw boys in the villages going to school I used to wonder what it was for, and why I didn't go to school; and when I asked father what they gave boys to eat at school, he laughed, and said birch-rod, and pieces of cane. So after that I used to think it was much better to lie on the grass at the side of the road, and watch father use his soldering-iron or grind a knife or pair of scissors, than to go to school.

"One day Bob said he should like a run in a big wood that lay off and away from the road: that is, he looked at me and blinked and barked in a way that I knew meant that he wanted to go to that wood; and as I wanted to go too, we started off, and a fine place it was.

"Just as we got in amongst the trees, you could hear the wood-pigeons calling 'Roo-coo-coo-coo! Coo-coo! Roo-coo-coo-coo! Coo-coo!' Then in the distance there was the cuckoo, and close by, though it was daytime, the nightingales singing as loud as could be, with a dozen of other birds, besides one that kept up a noise in the dark part of the wood just like father's wheel spinning round before he used to put the knife or scissors to the stone, and make the sparks fly like so many glow-worms by daylight.

"It all seemed so beautiful with the sun shining through the trees; and there were blackbirds' and thrushes' nests, and the blue-bells and little pinky-white flowers all over the ground, and thousands and thousands of primroses, some of which I meant to pick as I went back.

"I felt as if I was as happy as a king, and poor Bob must have been happier, for he leaped up at me and barked and rolled over amongst the flowers, and then ran here and there sniffing and snuffing amongst the bushes and dead leaves.

"I soon had a stick and joined Bob in hunting, for one time it would be a squirrel that would run to the nearest tree and scamper up, and then get out upon a branch and twitch and whisk his tail, and look down at us with his beady eyes, Bob barking angrily the while.

"Then he would sniff out a weasel or a stoat, and as they would be safe in some hole, we went on to where it was sunny and began to creep along, looking for adders and snakes.

"We killed six that day—two adders and four snakes; for Bob hated them, and he'd never rest till he had killed them.

"He knew the difference as well as could be, and if it was a snake, he'd dash at it and seize it by the neck, and shake it and kill it instantly; but if it was an adder, he'd keep on barking at it and teasing it, making it twine about and dart its head at him, always keeping out of its reach, till I killed it with a stick, when Bob used to jump for joy, and look up at me and bark as if he was telling me how pleased he was.

"I don't know how long we had been in that wood, for there was always something fresh to see or hear; but at last

we got to quite a glorious place, where it was all sandy slopes and places that you could slide and roll down; where the sides high above our heads were all full of little holes where the sand-martins built; and where all down below was prickly furze covered with yellow blossoms, and purple heath, and rabbits' holes.

"Bob dashed down to the first hole and smelt it.

"'Nobody at home,' he said, and he went to another and another; and then after pushing his head in ever so far he came out and began whining and scratching and tearing out the sand.

"I knew he meant that there was a rabbit in there, and, putting my hands on my knees, I stooped down and watched him as he worked away, till all at once I heard a loud *bang*, and Bob rolled back and over; but he got up again directly, yelping as loud as he could, and ran off along the way we had come.

"I started after him, and as I began to run I heard a man shouting to me to stop; but the more he shouted, the more I ran, and I could run fast, too, in those days. There was Bob on ahead, for I could hear him calling out, and that served as a guide for me, though sometimes I couldn't hear him, for the sound got quite faint; but it soon grew louder, and I followed on till I was so out of breath I could go no farther, and I had to stop running and walked.

"I was very much frightened still, and my heart kept thumping away hard as I wondered whether Bob was much hurt.

"Then I heard him whining again, and I caught up to him, not running, but crawling along very slowly; and when I called to him he stopped and looked up at me so pitifully that I went down on my knees.



"He only whined softly."—*Page* 49.

"'Why, Bob, what is it?' I says.

"He gave a long, low howl with his nose right up in the air, and then he crept up to me and tried to climb up like and put his head in his favourite place, which was inside my shirt, with his cold, wet nose under my arm.

"I don't think I had ever cried because I was miserable before that day. I'd cried and halloaed because I was cross sometimes, and they had let me cry till I got better; but I cried then because I felt so miserable, and didn't know what to do.

"For I was frightened—terribly frightened. When I took hold of Bob to hug him to me he was all wet, and when I looked at my hands I saw that it was blood.

"But I knew it was of no use to cry, and I spoke to Bob to come along to some water.

"'Let's go, Bob,' I said, 'and I'll wash it all off;' for I had a sort of idea that if I washed him with cold water it would stop the bleeding and cure him.

"But no: he wouldn't move. He only whined softly, and pushed his nose more into my breast; and so I knelt there, letting him be, poor fellow, till all at once he made a bit of a struggle, and pulled his nose out, looked up at me, howled very gently, and laid his head down again.

"I stroked his head, and patted him softly, for I thought he had gone to sleep, and so I stopped there for a good hour, till all at once I felt frightened again, and getting up I carried poor Bob home to the van, where father was soldering a pot, and mother was making a door-mat with some rope.

"'Hah, yes,' says father, as soon as he saw us; 'I thought he'd get into trouble about the rarebuds. Keeper

shot him then? Put him in the ditch, and cover him up with grass; we're going away from here to-morrow.'

"I did as he told me, and covered up poor old Bob, for he had been quite dead some time; and then I sat down on the edge of the ditch with a miserable feeling upon me that made me take no notice of anything; and I hardly ate anything for days and days, while we went on through the lanes and along the roads, our van being drawn now by a miserable old bony horse that used to go mostly on three legs, and graze beside the road when the van stopped outside a village.

"'We shall have to get that chap a dawg, or he'll mope hisself away,' I heard father say to mother one day; but it didn't do me any good, for I wanted back poor old Bob, and without him something seemed to have gone out of my life.

"I don't know how long it was after, but I'd been lying in the van for a long time, ill with some sort o' fever, and I couldn't sit up, when one day father come in and he says—

"'Here's a pup for you, mate'; and he threw a little fat puppy on to the bed.

"The sight of that little thing seemed to do me good directly, for I was never tired of seeing it try to walk, and keep rolling down, and I lay and played with its soft little ears, and it rolled about and played with me, and struggled up, and went to sleep close to me, and somehow from that hour I got to feel a bit stronger.

"I called him Bob of course. That seemed to me the proper name for a dog. And soon after father used to lift me out and set me down on the grass where the sun was shining, and I got stronger and better every day.

"So did Bob, till the days came when we used to race

and tear about together, for this Bob grew as fond of me as the first Bob had been.

"I'd had that dog about a year, when one day father said I was a big chap now, and must learn to work. So from that day I used to help make the door-mats, and learned to cut out pegs, and burned my fingers trying to handle the soldering-iron to melt the solder over the holes in a pot.

"How easy that does seem. All you've got to do is to have the iron hot, dust the iron with a bit of rosin, and then touch the solder, and it melts all over the hole directly. But you try it, and see if that solder don't run everywhere that you don't want it.

"I used to blister and burn my fingers and hands over and over whenever I tried, and father used to say I was as okkard as okkard, and that I'd never make a decent tinker as long as I lived.

"I suppose they were kind to me, but they were never kind as I've seen other people kind to boys and girls. I don't recollect my mother ever kissing or hugging me, and all my father used to do was to kick me out of his way, or throw a pot or kettle at me if he was cross. He didn't mean any harm, for it was his way; and they always gave me part of what there was to eat when there was anything, and that wasn't always.

"So I went on learning to be a tinker and getting no praise; but all the same Bob and I used to find time for a run, just the same as I did with the other Bob.

"I'd seen boys fishing in the rivers and ponds as we passed, so I tried too; and many's the fish I've caught early in the morning, and taken to the van for mother to fry for breakfast after I'd cleaned them. Then I'd learned how good

mushrooms were, and Bob had learned of himself like how to find them; and together we'd soon get a good cap-full. While at other times we'd pick sorts that you people would never think of eating, but we did, and enjoyed 'em too.

"Many a night have Bob and I gone hunting in the leafy copses and springs for hedgehogs, for Bob didn't mind a prick on the nose; and capital eating hedgehog is, if you wrap him up in clay and bake him in a wood fire, his bristles and skin coming off when you crack the clay.

"Rabbit wasn't scarce in those days, and we used often to pick up one, this Bob being if anything cleverer than the last Bob; and I never stirred a step without him at my heels.

"My first Bob got into trouble about a rabbit, and now it was my turn.

"Father wasn't well. He used to be always coughing, and he got to be thin and seldom spoke; and one day mother said to me—

"'Here, you go and get a rabbud to make your father some broth.'

"Bob didn't want any whistling to, for he seemed to know what was wanted; and instead of trotting at my heels, he went off in front, looking back sometimes to see if I was following; and if he didn't lead me right away into a sandy cutting, not such a one as that where the other Bob was shot, but a much bigger one, where they dig sand to take away, and there were rabbits' holes by the hundred, and I began to think that we should catch one before long.

"But somehow, though, we went to hole after hole without seeing or smelling a rabbit.

"'Go along, Bob,' I kept shouting; but though he

worked hard, and rammed his head into hole after hole once more, he never said there was a rabbit in either of them, and he came out and looked in my face, barking in an angry, disappointed sort of way.

"'Don't look like no rabbit, brother Bob,' I says; and he barked again and jumped up at me, and then we went on farther into the great wild place, for I found the soft sand so nice to walk upon with my bare feet. Every time I scooped some up by pushing one of my feet in and holding it up, all the soft dry sand went trickling through my toes like so much dry water, if you can make that out; and it felt so funny and ticklish that I kept on doing it, and chucked some over Bob.

"This made Bob forget the rabbits and begin to play with me, making dashes through the sand and pretending to worry my bare legs. Then he'd make bites at the sand, and cough and choke and growl.

"He seemed in a regular humour for a game, and so I forgot all about the rabbits, and began to throw sand at him, while he kept on making charges at me, barking as if he was in a rage.

"Then he'd run off and hide, and dash out at me from round corners and behind bushes, and after a bit of this I'd try to do the same. But, bless your 'art, I couldn't hide away from Bob; he smelt me out directly, and came leaping and barking at me.

"Next we had a regular tussle and a roll in the sand, and played at biting one another—for I was a reg'lar young savage, you know, and didn't know no better. I'd got a father and mother, but a dog had always been my mate, and seemed like my brother, so it wasn't surprising that I should do as I did.

"A chap gets tired of work soon enough, but he gets just as tired of play; and after a time Bob growled at me because I buried him in the soft white sand up to his nose, and said it was time to leave off larking; so I let him wriggle out, and he shook himself just as if he was trying to get rid of a lot of wet after a swim, and the sand flew out of his hairs just like water. So I shook it all out of my hair too, as Bob barked and gave a jump or two, just as he did when we went in the water for a swim.

"I thought I should like a swim then, to get rid of the sand that was tickling me; but there was no water near, and we started off again to have a look round.

"It was a place that took my fancy a good deal, and I had a look at the ruts where the cart-wheels had been over the sand where they dug it away, and then climbed up the face of it to where the sand-martins made their nests, and pushed my arm in right up to the elbow; but though I tried ever so many in the hard top sand, I couldn't reach a single nest.

"I found a blackbird's nest, though, in a stumpy thorn-bush half-way up the side of the great sand-pit, for I saw the blackbird fly away; but there was only one egg in it, and I didn't take that.

"Then I found a place where there was quite a hundred holes made by the sand-martins, and some of them were so big that I made sure that I should be able to get to the nests.

"What did I want one for? Oh, I don't know. Nothing —just for mischief like. So I began to climb up, Bob following a little way, and then slipping down again, and sitting himself upon the sand and barking.



IN SEARCH OF A NEST.

"It was a very bad place to get up, but that made me want to get up all the more. The sand was pretty hard, but it kept crumbling down under my feet; and once, when I was just half-way up, and reaching my hand to get hold of a bit of a bush, I made such a jump at it that the bush came out by the roots, and we rolled down together, pretty well enough sand coming down to bury me; and as I struggled out, Bob jumped about and laughed at me as he barked with delight: perhaps it wasn't quite laughing; but I'm sure he enjoyed the fun.

"But I wasn't going to be beat. I tried to use the soldering-iron in spite of getting burnt, and I kept on till I could do it pretty tidy; so it wasn't likely that I should give up because I didn't climb first time to a martin's nest.

"So I made a run and a rush, with Bob snapping at my heels, and got up a good way, and after a bit more climbing I was up amongst the nests, and I held on with one hand while I ran my other right in up to the shoulder.

"The martins flew about and squealed, and Bob kept on barking and growling, and tearing up the sand.

"But no—not a nest could I get; they were all too far in; and I kept on creeping along till I'd got over about the deepest part of the pit, where the sand was all in a long, soft slope, just as it had crumbled down.

"Here I found one hole that was so small that I could only just force my left hand in; but I held on tightly, and rammed it right in up to the shoulder, and then I could just touch the nest.

"I was so delighted that I forgot everything else, and I was just working my fingers about to try if I could feel eggs or young ones, when *whish*, my bare toes slipped off the bit

of a ledge where they rested, and I was hanging by that one arm.

"It frightened me just for a moment, but I knew it was all soft sand underneath, and that I couldn't hurt much if I fell; so I began to try and get a fresh place for my toes; but no matter how I tried, I couldn't get a hold anywhere, and my arm began to hurt.

"Then I tried to pull it out, but it wouldn't come, for the sand was all hard there like stone, and so wouldn't give way; and at last I got out my big knife, opened it with my teeth, and, reaching up as well as I could, I tried to cut the sand away; but it was of no good, I couldn't get a fair dig anyhow, and just as I was trying hardest the knife slipped out of my hand, and fell down into the sand, where Bob pounced upon it directly and carried it away.

"My arm began to hurt now horribly, and, setting my teeth, I gave myself a bit of a swing, got my feet against the sand, and gave such a push that my arm came out, leaving the ragged old sleeve of my jacket behind; and I fell backwards what seemed ever so far, and came down flop in the soft sand.

"Bob jumped upon me directly, barking fiercely, and I struggled up, rubbing and feeling myself, till, as I sat there, I found as I wasn't much hurt.

"'There ain't no bones broke, old man,' I said; and Bob said he was very glad, and if he was me he wouldn't climb up and stick his arm in a trap like that again.

"That's just what he seemed to say as he barked; and as there was no martins' nests to be got, we went on a little farther along the side of the great sand-cliff, peeping about, sometimes at the top, where the blackberry-branches hung

down like ropes and nets, or at the holly-trees holding on by their roots at the side, and looking as if a puff would blow them down; and then all at once we came upon a great hole in the sand, like as if a rabbit as big as a lion or a bear had made it his cave, and it looked so tempting that Bob ran in directly, and I walked after him.

"Yes, I walked in, for there was plenty of room at first; but when I'd gone in about twice as far as the length of our van—say as long as from our old mare's nose to the tail-board—I had to stoop, and after going as far again I had to crawl on my hands and knees, and all the time there was Bob on in front.

"It was a beautiful place, with soft sand at the sides and the bottom deep with it; and as I crept on, I kept thinking what a snug place it would be to have close to the van, so that I could make it my cave, and come and sleep in the soft, clean, warm sand every night.

"'What is it, Bob?' I shouted; but my voice sounded smothered like, and so did his barking as it came back to me from ever so far in.

"Then I crawled on, listening to the scuffling, rushing noise he made.

"'He's got a rabbit in there, I know,' I said to myself and as I felt sure he was after one, I began to think about what I should get for being so long, and I knew as well as could be that they'd throw things at me, and I shouldn't get any dinner.

"'I can't help it,' I says to myself; 'I have tried to get one sooner and it was no use. Never mind,' I says, 'they won't be very rusty if I take back a rabbit.'

"I'd crept in so far now that it was quite dark on before,

and I had to feel my way, and at last it got to be such a tight fit that I had to crawl, and I was just thinking that it felt like being deep down under the straw in a stack, when Bob came back, and touched me with his wet nose.

"'Where's the rabbit?' I says.

"He barked, as much as to say it had gone right into a hole where he was too big to follow.

"'You go and fetch it out, sir,' I says; and away he went in the dark, while I rested my chin on my hands, and began, as I lay there on my chest, to kick about with my feet, picking at the soft sand with my toes, and wondering what I should do if Bob came back without the rabbit.

"He didn't come, but I could hear him scuffling and working away; and, as I still kept on kicking my legs about, I thought I'd crawl after him, but I was getting so tired that I didn't care to stir, but lay quite still on the soft sand listening to Bob, till at last he came back whining and growling, and I knew there'd be no rabbit that day.

"'You're a pretty sort of a dog,' I grumbled, and he gave a low, sharp bark. 'What's the good of a dog like you, as can't catch a rabbit?' I says. 'Yah! get out!'

"Poor old Bob howled out quite loud, just as if I'd been thrashing him; and, feeling cross because I had got no rabbit to take back, and because I liked to bully him, I kept on calling him lazy and idle, and all the things father said to me because I was so stupid with the soldering-iron.

"'We shall both get kicked out when we go back, Bob,' I says at last, 'kicked out—kicked out—do you hear, old stupid?—kicked out. I never saw such a dog as you.'

"Bob gave another dismal howl here, and said in his way he was very sorry, but I kept on repeating "kicked out!"

"kicked out!" and I suppose I must have used my legs as I did my tongue, and kicked on till I loosened the sand, for all at once, just as I was speaking, there was a dull, soft noise just behind me, and I felt something seem to take tight hold of my feet and squeeze them.

"I gave such a shout, and made a bit of a scuffle forward, making sure that some great wild beast had come in after me, and was going to eat me up.

"But all was perfectly still, and then I knew what it was, and I began to laugh till I quite cried, to think I should be frightened at some of the sand I had kicked down laying hold of my legs.

"'Well, let's get out, Bob, old man,' I says; and I began to go backwards, scuffling along, with Bob snuffing and smelling about my face in a curious way, till I had got to where I was before, and there I could feel that the sand had come down from the roof, and there was ever so much lying there.

"Ever so much? The narrow passage I had come through was quite blocked up.

"'It don't matter,' I thought, 'I can soon shove it away;' and pushing against the bottom with my hands, I gave a good thrust with my feet, expecting them to go right through the heap, but to my surprise they only went in an inch or two, and the sand trickled over my heels.

"I gave another shove, and another, and another, working hard at it, till I got quite hot, but the sand didn't move; and now for the first time I began to be frightened, and to wish I hadn't come.

"It was pitch-dark, and I was wrong way on in a hole so small that I couldn't turn round; for I felt that if I could

have turned the other way on I have might have been able to scratch through like a rabbit, pushing the sand I tore out underneath me, and kicking it away with my feet.

"But of course, you know, I couldn't do anything, and as I lay there with the place seeming to get so hot, I couldn't bear it: I began to shout out 'Father!' and 'Mother!' till I was quite hoarse.

"As I shouted Bob began to growl; then he whined, and then he began to bark furiously; and, as he kept on barking, I had another try, but the more I tried the more I found it was of no use, and at last I gave up, feeling that I was regularly buried alive, and I began to cry and sob like a baby.

"It was Bob who roused me up, for after putting his cold nose against me three or four times, he barked fiercely for a bit, and then made a scuffle and a rush, and forced himself between my back and the roof, getting right by, and directly after he began growling and scuffling and tearing away at the sand, making it fly over my feet; and just as I thought that perhaps he would be able to make a way through, and pulled away my legs to give him more room, he seemed to get more distant and I could hardly hear him at all; then it was as if he was smothered, and no more sand came flying out, and last of all, everything seemed to be still, and I lay there and sobbed and cried the more, for I was very much frightened, more so than I had ever been in my life.

"It was very hot, and I felt too tired to move, and as if I should go to sleep. Then I began to wonder whether I should ever get out, and thought about how beautiful everything was outside where I could see and breathe easily. I seemed to see our old horse and the van, and the door-mats

hanging behind, and the clothes-pegs and lines; then I seemed to hear father's cough, and the whirring noise of his wheel before he put a knife or scissors up against the stone; and then for a bit all seemed quiet, and I think now I must have gone into a sort of faint through fright.

"Next thing I remember is being puzzled, and not able to make out where I was with the sand all about me; but I soon remembered, and came out all over wet with fear. But I was more plucky now, and after a few minutes I got my knife out of my pocket, for I had taken it from Bob after my fall, and began to think of how I should manage to turn round.

Last of all I thought that perhaps the hole got bigger further on, and I crawled along ever so far, till it was so small that I was quite stuck fast and had hard work to creep back again, pushing myself with my hands, and it took a very, very long time to get back to where I was before.

"It did me good though, for it made me so busy that I hadn't time to be frightened; and now I was back where it was just a little wider, for Bob had crept over me, I began to dig at the sand with my big knife, cutting it out from over my head and then throwing it before me; but I soon left off, for I found it begin to fall so fast, as I loosened it, that I should soon have been smothered.

"I had sense enough to think what was best, so I began now to dig down at the floor, and I scooped and scooped away, and flicked the sand on, till I began to get quite a hole, and if I could have kept the soft sand from running back I should soon have made a place big enough.

"I did it at last though, and screwing myself down I tried to turn, but I had not made the hole quite big enough, and

my head got stuck against the roof, and brought down more sand, frightening me so that I gave myself a wrench that made quite a crick in my neck.

"It set me free though, and the next minute I was lying there with my knees in the hole I had made, a heap of sand trickling down upon my back, but my face towards the way out, and so I lay and rested.

"A great deal of sand had come down from the roof, but I shuffled it off me, and it pretty well filled up the hole I had made; but that didn't matter, I thought, and after a bit I began to make a start to scratch back the sand, and kicked it behind me like a rabbit, making sure that before long I should come upon poor old Bob, and wondering whether I should be smothered just in the same way as he was.

"I don't know how long all this took, for I had got into a curious kind of sleepy state, and sometimes it felt as if it was all a dream, such as I had sometimes when I slept on my back, and Bob curled himself up on my chest; but all the time I was scratching and working away at the sand, drawing it under me and pushing it back, just like a rabbit or a rat would have done; but I seemed to get no farther, and when I backed out of the hole I had made to rest a bit and try to breathe, I found that the sand behind me blocked the way, and I could now only keep going on.

"When I began first I worked very hard and quick, drawing the sand under me, but after a time my hands and arms grew heavier and heavier still, and at last I only moved the sand just a little in a sleepy way, then more slowly still; and at last I lay there not able to breathe hardly at all, nor think at all, not even of Bob. I suppose I was in a sort of swoon in which I seemed to dream that I couldn't breathe,

and I suppose I couldn't; but all at once, as I lay quite still, I heard a scuffling rushing noise, and something ran over me; then the sand was being scratched just beyond my head, and thrown over me by something that kept on tearing away, and I knew it must be a rabbit, for it couldn't be Bob, because he would have growled and whined as he tore at the sand.

"But it all seemed sleepy and drowsy to me, and my breath came so short I could hardly fetch it, till all at once there was no more scratching, and I found I could breathe easier, but I was too weak to move.

"I didn't know then that a rabbit, perhaps the one that Bob had chased far up the hole, had found itself shut in from the fresh air, and scratched itself a way out, and so saved my life, for if it hadn't been for the fresh air coming I suppose I should have died.

"I seemed to go to sleep again just then, and lay till I heard the noise of scratching and barking close by, and I knew that it was Bob trying to get to me; and before long he was at my side licking my face; and when I roused up and spoke to him, he barked furiously, and scratched his way out once more.

"Then I heard men's voices, and then my father's voice wanting to know if I was there; and when I shouted back, I heard the sound of spades working, and at last I was dragged into the wider part of the hole, and about a dozen people who were there cried 'Hooray!'

"The first thing my father did was to ketch hold of me by the collar, and shake me till my head wobbled about. Then he gave me a clout and smacked it on one side, and then he gave it a clout on the other side and knocked it back again, because

he was so pleased to see me, I suppose. Anyhow, he seemed very glad to see me, and it was his way.

"He didn't say much to me, only drove me on first like a sheep, and told me not to come any of them games again.

"That night though, after I had lain down under the van and they thought I was asleep, I heard them talking to some one about it, and father says—

"'I couldn't make it out nohow. He'd been gone of a arrand, he had, for ever so long and hadn't come back, and I was putting a bottom—a noo one—in a beer warmer for the landlord at the "Chequers," over in the village, and not thinking much about him, when all at once the missus says to me, she says, "Where's that there boy?"

"'"Oh! I dunno," I says. "I daresay he's off a birds'-nesting;" when just then up comes his dawg, and begins going on in the most outrageous way. First he gets hold of my leg and pulls me; then he runs to the missus there and pulls her gownd, taking hold of it with his teeth, and tugging away; and she shrieks out as he was mad, and wanted me to kill him with the hammer, when he comes at me again, lays hold of my coat and pulls at it, and then leaves go, and runs a little away and barks, and then comes back again.

"'He did this over and over again, till I seemed to see as he wanted me to come with him, and I thought I'd try if that was it, and made a run for a little way, when off he went full trot, but kept stopping and looking back and barking.

"'"There's something wrong," I says to myself; and as that there dawg went on, I followed him right away through the woods, expecting to find that there boy lying under a tree somewheres with his legs broke through climbing after birds'-nests. But if that there dawg didn't take me right to

a great sand-pit, and rush into a big hole in the side, and run out again barking, and go in again tearing at the sand; and then I knew as that boy had gone creeping in there after rabbits, and the sand had tumbled down behind him.'

"'Well,' said the man talking to him, 'what did you do?'

"'What did I do? Why, went and got some people to come with spades, and we dug him out.'

"'Then he warn't killed?'

"'No,' said my father, 'not he; nothing wouldn't kill him. Good night; I'll call in as I come by.'

"Then I heard father go into the van, and Bob and I went to sleep; and I don't know whether he dreamed about being smothered in the sand, but I did, and kept starting awake; and I used to dream like that for quite a couple of years before it went off.

"I don't know how old I was about this time. P'r'aps I was fourteen, p'r'aps only twelve. I never knowed nothing about time or that sort of thing when I was very young; but I used to help father a good deal now. He'd call at houses, and see if there was a job; and if there was he'd bring it to me, and I'd do it. Sometimes it was grinding, sometimes reg'lar tinker's work with the fire and the soldering-iron; and I used to like swinging the iron pot round my head, to get it to blaze up well and heat the soldering-iron.

"I didn't know then how ill he was, but he must have been very bad, for one cold day in winter, when we were outside a big village, and the rain and snow and hail was all coming down together, mother calls to me out of the door of the van, and tells me to go and ask the doctor in the village to come and see father.

"I ran off fast enough, for her looks frightened me, and

I got thinking as I went how white father always looked now, and how he coughed; and I was wishing the warm weather would come again, when I saw the doctor's house with a brass plate on the door, just as a boy in the village had told me I should find it.

"He was a nice civil old gentleman, the doctor was, and he came back with me, asking me questions about what I did, and whether I'd been to school; and I told him all about how we lived, and that I'd never been to school in my life, but that father said I could solder a hole now better than he could, and nearly bottom a pot as well.

"'I can grind too, sir,' I says, 'and I'll grind your scissors or knives, or anything.'

"'So you shall, my lad,' he says; and he patted me on the shoulder, and went up into the van.

"He stopped there a long time, and I sat under a bit of shelter and talked to Bob till he came out, and then he walked straight up to me and seemed to be taking notice of Bob.

"'Would you like to sell that dog, my boy?' he said. 'I want a yard-dog.'

"'Sell Bob!' I says, fiercely; and seeing there was something wrong, Bob growled and showed his teeth.

"'Yes, my boy; I'll give you a sovereign for him.'

"'A sovereign!' I says, quite huffish-like. 'Why, I wouldn't take a hundred for him!' and if anybody had offered it to me then I wouldn't have took it.

"'You say you can work at your trade, my boy,' he said, kindly, 'and grind and mend?'

"'Oh, yes, sir,' I says. 'I can do all that; but I'm not going to sell Bob.'

"'No?' he said. 'Are you such friends then?'

"'Friends, sir?' I says; 'I should think we are—ain't we, Bob, old man?'

"Bob jumped up at me, and put his paws in my hand.

"'Quite right, my boy. I'm glad you love your friend,' he says in a quiet, serious way. 'I thought perhaps the money would be useful.'

"'Father always takes the money, sir,' I says.

"'And you can do the work then, my boy?' he said again, quietly.

"'Yes, sir,' I says, staring at him, for he spoke so strange.

"'Go on then, my boy, and work hard and help your poor mother, and God in His mercy help you in your task;' then he turned to go away, and I ran and took hold of his coat. 'Is—is father *werry* bad sir?' I says.

"'My poor lad,' he says softly, 'you have no father now.'

"It must have been for about three years after that that I went round with the van in winter and the tent in summer, just in the old fashion, only that I did all the calling at the houses now, as well as the working; but I took all the money to mother.

"She was werry fond of father, she was, though she never made much fuss over me, for I was always such an awkward, dirty, rough sort of a fellow, and she never seemed to care for anything after that Sunday when poor father was buried in the little green churchyard. We went about the country in all sorts of places, but she used to make me go round by that little village every year reg'lar like; and it was at that place that she turned ill, and the old doctor came and tried to make her better, but he couldn't do it.

"He told me afterwards, as I was sitting alone on the

steps of the van—well, not alone, because I'd got Bob with his head tucked in my lap, winking and blinking at the doctor as he spoke—he told me that it was the exposure to the weather that had killed them both; and he said that if I liked to leave off going about the country he'd try to get me something to do.

"I thanked him kindly, but I said no. I told him that I'd got to be so used to tinkering that I should never be able to do anything else, and I never have, and why should I? You must have tinkers, for it ain't likely that pots and kittles will leave off having holes in their bottoms, and if they did their handles would be sure to come off.

"No, you must have tinkers, and so I started in business for myself, with my dog Bob, as good a dog as ever lived, and I wish he was alive now, poor old boy, for when I lost him I lost my best friend.

"That's about all, sir, as far as I know, and I dessay you'll say it ain't much, but you see being only Tinker I speak and think as I find; and as for your young folks as read what I say, they'll know well enough that a black-looking fellow with a smoky pot full of coal and coke, though he travels about, never meets with lions and tigers and them outlandish beasts, like tinkers in foreign lands do. No, sir, a English tinker's only a tinker, and, as I said afore, pots and kittles will run or lose their handles——Beg pardon, sir, what say? If I've done, why don't I get out of the way? Cert'nly, sir, of course. Pots *and* kittles to——Now then, Snip, where are yer? It's your turn," he cried suddenly, in a hoarse voice, as he wiped his lips with the back of his hand, and gave the Tailor a nudge that almost knocked that mild man over.

The Tailor's Story.

"Yes, I know it is," replied the Tailor, whose blinking eyes were looking into space as though he saw something that nobody else could see. "I know it is; but the thing is, how to begin. The thing is, how to begin," he repeated, raising his low, weak voice a little, and looking appealingly at me.

"Fire away, there!" shouted the Soldier, giving a loud clanking kick on the other side. "Who do you think's going to halt here all day waiting for you? Spurs and howitzers! out with it; it can't be so much in a life like yours. Not a story an ell long, I take it, but a mere thread-paper. A poor whining, snivelling affair, I warrant. Only Tailor's story!"

"Yes, that's it," said Tailor, meekly, "but yet when I began life I wanted to be a Hero."

"Ha! ha! ha! ha!"

"Yes, Mr. Parley, gentlemen all, when I began life, my great wish was to be a Hero," repeated the Tailor, slowly. "I always thought I should like to be a coachman, and drive four blood horses rattling through the streets of a market town—dash with the harness all jingling and the wheels on fire, up to the chief inn, while the guard blew a tantivy on the horn—throw the reins to the ostler, swing myself off the box, kiss my hand to the landlady, and, with my hat on one side, and a flower in my button-hole, go into the best parlour to eat boiled beef and carrots and drink a tankard of old ale: all coachmen do that you know.

"Or else I thought I should like to be a waterman, with a gaily-painted trim-built wherry, dancing by the river-side as the tide flowed in, and with a blue coat and silver badge,

ready to row the city dames or the court ladies across, or to take officers and noblemen alongside big men-of-war, and to mount to the deck sometimes and be 'hail-fellow-well-met' with the sailors on board; or to ply at Richmond, and take out parties of pretty lasses to eat mutton pies, or maids of honour on Twickenham Ait; or to attend the boat races, with colours flying and ribbons on my hat, and there handle my oars with such skill and detexity as to be the envy and admiration of the University crews themselves. Or I have even thought of being head gamekeeper to a lord, and going out in a velvet coat, and with dogs'-head and pheasant buttons, and a gun with fine polished lock and barrel, and watching the woods and covers at night, when, if a poacher had shown himself——"

"Yah!" interrupted the Tinker, "you'd have been like a frightened rabbit before the fist of any fellow who had followed his proper calling and tried to snare a hare. Why, *what* if a poacher had shown himself?"

"When, if a poacher had shown himself," continued the Tailor, "I'd have told him to stand, and if he had tried to get away, I'd have let him; but if he had tried to attack me, I'd have fired both barrels in the air, put down my gun, closed with him, flung him a heavy back-fall, slipped a pair of handcuffs on to his wrists, and marched him before me to the squire or to gaol."

"Oh! you'd have let him go otherwise, would you, even if he'd taken the game?" said the Soldier. "Pretty fellow you must be."

"I would, if I hadn't seen the game on him; for I know what hungry men with hungry wives and bairns may be led to do, and I'd have made him promise to try and get work if

I helped him with a good word. For look you, my own sister's husband, as smart a fellow as ever stepped after a plough, and the best wrestler and football player in the village, was a poacher, after he'd been turned out of his cottage to let in a hanger-on of the steward. He went to the bad; but he was driven by poverty and a sickly wife, and hunger and bitterness in his heart, and he took a hare or a pheasant or a rabbit for the pot, and who's to wonder? He was shot—shot, I tell you, in Squire Straw's spinney; and his mother and his widow and his orphan child were left lonely, and his blood was spilt for the matter of a wild bird or a beast that nobody missed more than if a cat or a hawk had taken them.

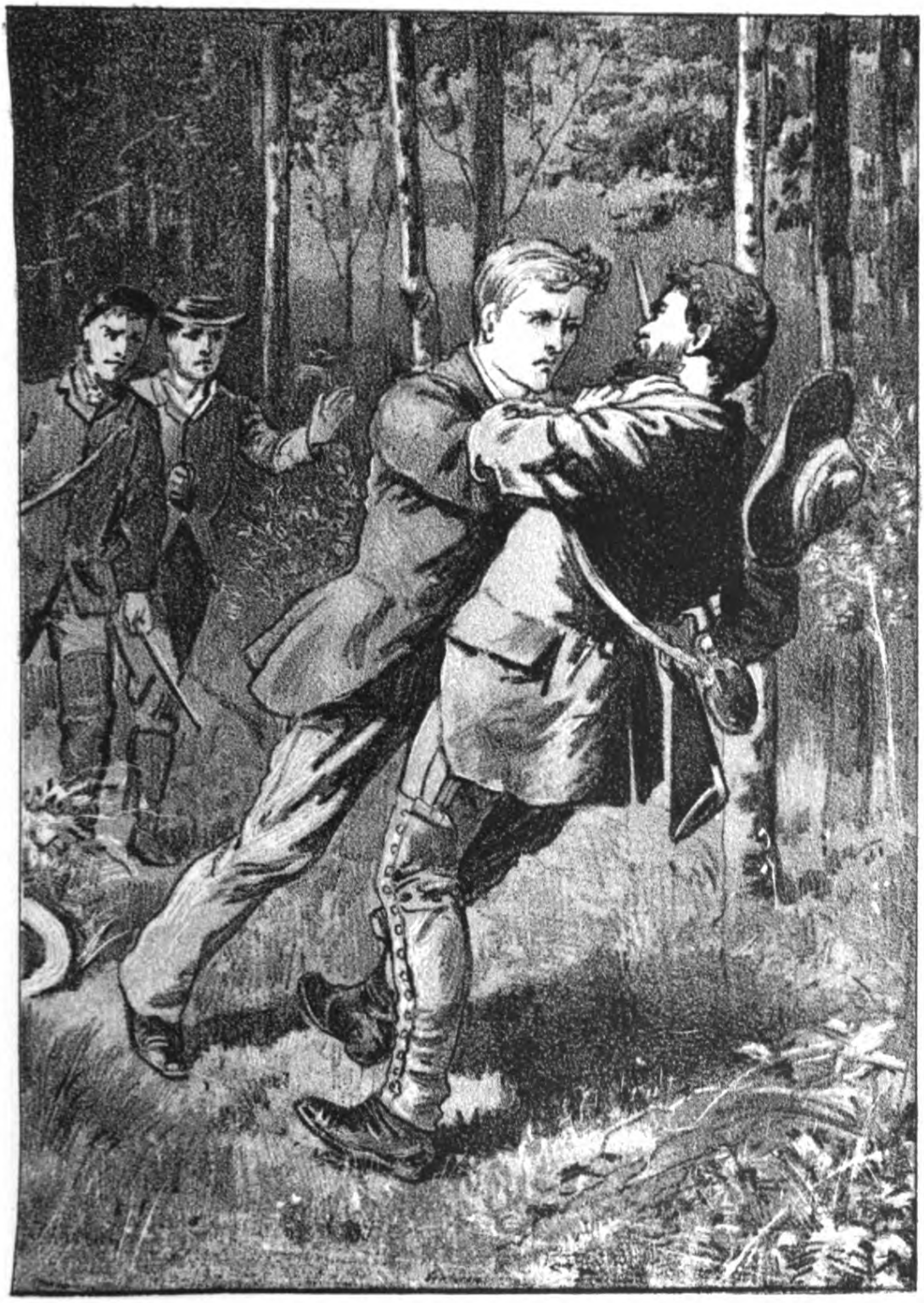
"I most should have liked to be a coachman, a waterman, or a huntsman, with a green coat, a curly horn, and a whip tucked in my belt, riding over hedge and ditch and stone wall in front of the field, and calling 'Yoicks, tally ho!' and pulling up in a moment, and off my horse at a bound to take the brush from the fox and present it to the foremost lady who was 'in at the death.' But all these fine wishes came to nothing. I was no hero—never have been—never shall be. I was apprenticed to the village tailor, who was the village sexton, and a famous man, mind you, for knowledge of herbs and roots to make ointments and washes and inward remedies—what people call an herb-doctor. He knew more than how to make a Sunday waistcoat with glass buttons, or to patch a pair of breeches, and part of what he knew he taught me. That's how it was that I used to roam about the fields and woods on spring mornings and autumn evenings, to get dandelion, colt's-foot, eyebright, borage, and ground ivy; and that was why I used to bend my back to work in the garden, or to look with my short sight to the growing of houseleek, wormwood, com-

frey, horehound, and a dozen such things, as we grew in a garden at the back of the shop, where I used mostly to sit on my board in the window stitching all day, and go about at early morning, when the dew was on the camomiles, or at night, when you can hear the mushrooms growing, and where the sheep-run crosses the common.

"This was how it was that I was out near the spinney that night, when I heard a shout, and the sound of men's voices, and the crackling of branches, followed by the clash of sticks and the barking of dogs, and then the crack of shots and the dull thud of a body falling on the ground, and then, as I crept through the undergrowth, came upon a number of excited men standing round one who had been dragged to an open space where the moon shone white through the trees. I was down upon my knees beside the dying man—I may say the dead man, for he never spoke again—and sprung to my feet again, and gave a great cry; and there stood the squire's keepers, with two men held fast, and the head-keeper looking on, sorry, I've no doubt, for what had been done. I could think of nothing but that the man who had been shot was Dick Standall, my sister's husband; and in another moment I had rushed upon the head-keeper, and, though he was a stronger man than I was, had borne him backward to the ground. We both fell together, and my hands were at his throat, for I was mad with horror and might have killed him, but the others flung themselves upon me and tore me away. The keeper got up panting.

"'Why, it's the tailor,' he said, and then his face changed; for he remembered how it came about.

"'I'm sorry for you; I'm sorry for you and for his wife,' he said; 'but who was to know? He'd got among a bad lot,



"In another moment I had rushed upon the head-keeper."—*Page* 72.

and we've been out every night on the watch for this gang, and the worst of 'em go scot-free while he—he lies there. Poor Dick! poor Dick!'

"The head-keeper bent his head down and covered his face with his hands. My sudden rush upon him had caused the other men to let go their prisoners, and we heard them breaking away through the hedge on the other side, and presently saw them flitting like shadows across the bit of rising land in the moonlight. One of the under-keepers raised his gun to fire, but the other held it down.

"'One's enough,' said he.

"'Maybe so,' said the first one, 'but one of them that's got away is Gipsy Jack, and who knows what mayn't come of it.'

"'They won't show themselves here again for one while,' said the head-keeper; 'but we must get this poor fellow away, and see if anything can be done for him. Bring him up to the hall.'

"They took off their coats and laid them on a field-gate that two of them took off its hinge-pins, and so made a kind of bier, on which they carried him up to the house; while I went away, sick at heart, to Molly's cottage, to try as best I could to break the news to her that she was a widow, and that her little girl was fatherless.

"Gipsy Jack and the others didn't appear again for one while, that was true enough; but the next week two ricks in the Squire's home-farm were ablaze, his pigs died in the sty, and when he was driving home from the town on market-day his best horse went lame.

"I never knew how I reached mother's cottage. I staggered on through what seemed to me like a red mist; but

when I got to the door, I could see nothing and heard nothing but my heart beating. She was stooping by the fire, where a handful of sticks was burning, and the light shining on my pale, clay-stained face, and my tumbled hair (for I had never stopped to pick up my hat), showed her that something was amiss.

"'Mother!' I said, 'you must come with me to Nancy's. Something very bad has happened.'

"'Is Dick in prison?' she cried, starting up. 'I thought it would come to this.'

"'Worse; he's been badly hurt.'

"'Where is he?'

"'Up at the hall. They've carried him there first.'

"'Won't you have some tea, Simon? You look like to faint. See, here's a mugful just made, and there's a bit of hot dough-cake.'

"I took the mug of tea and drank part of it, but I couldn't swallow the cake.

"'Simon, is Dick killed?'

"'I don't know; I fear so.'

"'Who did it?'

"'One of the keepers. Dick was with Gipsy Jack and others, and they showed fight and there was a shot; and when I got to the wood he was down.'

"We were out in the lane before I finished telling mother how Dick was shot, and that Gipsy Jack and the other had got away; but I said nothing about my tussle with the keeper. What was the use? Mother was crying, with the corner of her shawl at her eyes, as we hurried along; for Nancy's place was half-a-mile away, in a lonesome by-road beyond the village that was called Little End. We could

see there was a light in the window as we turned across the piece of waste towards the cottage, which was little better than a hut—just two rooms and a sort of shed, mostly built of clay and wattles. Mother was looking out towards the light as if she could see somebody inside.

"'How are we to break it to her, mother?' said I. "Better say Dick's had an accident, and then by degrees——'

"'There's no call to tell her much,' says mother. 'Look there; here's somebody coming this way.'

"I was so near-sighted that I could only see a shadow pass across the light, and seem to come towards us. A woman in a cloak was close to us, and said: ''Tis you, is it, Dame Eyelet, and Simon's told you of this sorry night's work; but there's them that mean mischief for it, I can tell you. Jack and Red Rob met me at the five-acre corner, where I was waiting for them, and I was soon up at the hall with my ears sharpened and a tread as light as a squirrel. The doctor was there to see Madam, and he was called down, but 'twas to a dead man that was past curing. You'd best see to *her*,' she added, pointing over her shoulder to Nancy's cottage. 'I left her with her little one in her arms; but she's sore at heart. Simon Eyelet, if ever you want a good turn, and Bess Lee can bring you help, I'll come through fire and water for what you did to-night; for Jack and Rob are away, instead of being in Bramleigh Gaol, and I'm away after them both. There'll be a bare place on the gorse-common to-night, for the tents are struck; and when the pig-headed Squire and his crew come to-morrow to rout us out, they'll find the ashes of our fires, and the ground scorched black where the pot was slung and the last goose was baked in its feathers in a clay jacket under the embers.'

"It seemed to make my blood run cold to hear the woman talk in this way, and I was glad when she lifted her hand as a sign of farewell and walked away, seeming to glide into the darkness and disappear.

"Nancy was rocking herself to and fro on a low chair, moaning, and holding her little daughter in her arms. She rocked quicker and moaned louder as she saw us go in; but it wasn't till we had made up a fire and taken the light from the window that we could rouse her to talk, and persuade her to go home to mother's cottage, to wait till the crowner's 'quest, that sat to consider the cause of her husband's death, was over, and his body was carried home before the funeral.

"The Squire and his lady were for making such amends as they could, and wanted Nancy to take money and to do some of the laundry-work for the hall; but the thought of it went against her, and I couldn't blame her for it. She said it was like being paid for her husband's murder. That was how she put it, and of course the Squire didn't like it, for it wasn't murder; but, for all that, I wouldn't persuade her to take either gifts or wages from them, and, in fact, I was considering whether it wouldn't be better to get out of the place and live somewhere else.

"Though I was no hero, and only a village tailor, I thought that I was loved by a girl, and a very pretty one—to me, at all events, she was beautiful; and I had been saving a little money against the time when we might be married. The thought would come into my head—how am I to find the money to go away, and to take mother and Nancy and the child, unless I break into my savings? and then, perhaps, there'll be an end to all my hopes.

"I hadn't long to wait, though. The next evening, when I went to see Kezia—her name was Kezia—her father, who kept the village shop, stood in the doorway.

"'I don't think if I was you I should try to bring disgrace on another family,' he says; 'and I shan't expect you to be coming here after what's happened.'

"'What's happened that is anything of my doing or my making?' I asked.

"'I don't say about that,' says he; 'but such things as being part of a family that's had such a thing in it as a poacher shot down, and his wife and brat left paupers, are apt to stick, and I don't choose that my girl shall have such said about her.'

"'My sister and her child are not paupers,' answered I; 'and as to things being said, I have heard stories of the village-shop being 'a leaving-shop' when your father had it, and poor people leaving their clothes and wedding-rings, and the silk kerchiefs from their necks in pledge for bread and bacon worth a tenth part the money, and never getting their poor bits of finery nor their Sunday-clothes back again, but keeping in debt for years, and having the prices of food raised for interest on the money. There are things as bad or even worse than poaching, Mr. Diggs.'

"'Then don't you repeat 'em,' cried Diggs, in a sulk, 'and if you won't believe me about Kezia, go and ask her yourself. Here, mother!' he called to Mrs. Diggs, who was in the back room, 'come here a minute, and let Simon go and speak to Kezia by herself.'

"The mother came out, and I thought she looked sorry for me. 'Tain't o' no use,' she said. 'Kezia says it must be broke off, and maybe she and father's right. She's more

uppish than I was, very likely,' and here I thought I saw her give a glance at Diggs; 'but whether or no, you'd better let her be, Simon; nothing but trouble could come of it, with a lass that looks down on her husband, even if she'd have you, which I doubt.'

"I went through the shop, and there was the girl I loved sitting sewing some gay ribbons on a hat.

"'Kezia,' I said, 'is this true what I hear?'

"'Is what true?' she said, looking up, frowning. 'I'll ask you not to be quite so free with my christened name. I'm not to be Kezia to everybody; and if you talk about what you hear, let me tell you that what *I've heard* must keep us apart. I don't choose to keep company with the brother-in-law of a thief, and to be mixed up with people that must go on the parish.'

"Could I believe my ears? Was this the girl that I'd been thinking and dreaming of for above two years, and had found courage to speak to six months before?

"'Is this your true meaning?' I said, leaning on the back of a chair, and looking at her closer.

"'Aye, to be sure it is,' she said, with a light laugh. 'I was silly ever to listen to you when I could talk to your betters, and you don't think I mean to be seen with you after what has happened.'

"'No. I suppose not,' I replied—for I seemed to be struck with something of truth in what she said—'I suppose not. Good-bye. You'll let me shake hands once more, and for the last time, Kezi—Miss Diggs?'

"'I don't know why I should,' she said, just touching my fingers; 'not but what I'm sorry for you—so sorry that if it wasn't for your relations, or if you'd give 'em

up and not see 'em or speak to 'em, we might meet again some day—as friends.'

"'Good-bye,' said I, turning to the door; 'no woman in the world would be worth such a price as for a man to give up his own flesh and blood, his mother and his sister, when they are brought low and haven't a friend to help them. Good-bye; and if we should meet again, don't fear that I shall by word or look remind you that you have been false, or that you speak falsely when you call Dick Standall a thief, or his widow a pauper. When the keeper who wants to be your sweetheart (for I had heard this, and had long meant to tell her of it)—when the keeper who wants to be your sweatheart brings your father a hare or a brace of birds, he's just as much of a thief as poor Dick was, for the Squire won't part with a feather of his game, not even to Miss Diggs, the village shopkeeper's daughter.'

"She gave a little scream, for I fancy she thought I was going to tell about her new lover, and so lose him his place.

"'Stop!' she cried; but I wouldn't stop, and as I went out I ran against the young fellow, who was just coming in.

"'What do you do here?' he said, with a scowl.

"'Nothing any more. Let me pass.'

"He held his arm up to bar my way. 'Let me hear what you have been saying first,' he muttered.

"'You are one of them that helped shoot Dick Standall for snaring a hare or two,' said I. 'Take care that nobody tells the Squire that they see the pied tail of a pheasant sticking out of your pocket when you come a-wooing.'

"He flushed, and his hand went down to his pocket. He thought I had seen what I only guessed at.

"'Ha! ha!' laughed I, bitterly, as I passed out. 'So the keeper has turned poacher too, and the respectable Mr. Diggs is the receiver of stolen goods, is he? Good night!'

"It was wrong of me, all this. I had no business to taunt or to accuse them; but my heart had turned within me, and I had made up my mind to leave the place. To desert my mother and my sister, and the little lass that was fatherless—poor Dick's child—was not to be thought of, and everybody would be ready to flout them here. It would need all the money I had saved to move away and take a bit of a cottage, and settle down again, after paying for Dick's funeral—for we didn't mean him to be buried by the parish if the jury brought in a verdict of died by accident. That *was* the verdict, for all that he had done against the law was to tresspass on the Squire's land, and nobody proved that he was there for the purpose of poaching.

"My old master, the sexton, was in the churchyard, and shook hands with my mother; and the vicar was kind to us, for after the funeral, while half the village was looking on, he took me into the vestry. There sat the Squire and his lady, and I should have gone out again, but the vicar had me by the arm.

"'I wanted to speak to you,' said the Squire, 'because the innocent need not suffer for this sad affair, and you have been in the village, man and boy, for a good many years, and have a character among us. What I propose is, to settle a little money on your sister or on her child, to send the child to school, and allow something for her living, till she is old enough to come up to the hall to be in the still-room as a maid or to help the housekeeper.'

"'Do you think that would be possible, sir,' said I, 'that

a girl could look forward to live as a servant, and to be dependent upon the people who, though it was not their fault, in a manner were the death of her own father?'

"'This is a world,' said the vicar, 'where we must bend to circumstances according to our station. It is painful, no doubt, to think of it in the way you put it, but you owe something to the Squire's kindness, and you should think well before you refuse—indeed, you have no right to refuse; it is the child's poor mother who is really concerned.'

"'And she would refuse it,' I replied. 'Poor people have two things that they can't part with: they can't get rid of their poverty, and they oughtn't to get rid of their respect for themselves. It is one thing, sir,' I said to the Squire, 'to be grateful for your generous offer, and another to accept it. Let us go; we shall trouble nobody, and few people will miss us. If we are pitied when we leave the village, it won't matter; but if we stay, pity will have a poor chance against all that would be said of a girl that was fed and clothed and taken into service by the hand that struck her father down. There's many a finger would point at her as she went to and fro, and point at us too. I mean no offence, Madam, but gentlefolks can't well understand these things. It don't so much matter what's said about them, when they're out of earshot, and in their great houses and with their own lands as far as they can see, and everybody with a bow and a curtsy as they come into church; but with them that live in a cottage with the door mostly open, so to speak, it's another story.'

"The Squire looked as though he was getting in a passion. 'This fellow's a preacher, surely,' he said, slapping his knee and turning red. 'He doesn't know his station, and wants

to set up superfine feelings for other people. Look you, Mr. tailor, if you don't interfere, I warrant the mother will be glad enough to see her girl well done by. Let her come up to the hall to-morrow, and don't interfere. I've no more to say. If you can't stay in the village, you had better go where they want such notions as yours. One would think that the man we had just buried was a martyr, and that I'd had a hand in his death. I tell you what, vicar, I'll have this independent gentleman out of the place, whether he likes it or not. A pretty thing that I'm to sit here to be taught my duty, and to find my lady's bounty thrown back in her face.'

"The lady placed her hand on his arm, and begged him to say no more.

"'Remember where you are, my dear,' she cried, 'and that within these walls there are neither rich nor poor; for here all are poor, and yet all may become rich.'

"'We are in the vestry, and not in the church, Madam,' said the Squire.

"The vicar shook his head. 'Madam is right,' he said; 'and though this young man ought to beg your pardon for his free speech, yet there is something in what he says. Where he got these notions and his speech from I can't tell, for there are no debating clubs or people's societies down here. He doesn't go to London, does he, Benjamin?' he asked my old master, the sexton, who had come in, thinking it was time the vicar wanted to be helped off with his surplice. 'What Simon, sir?—never to my knowledge; and there isn't a steadier worker or a quieter soul hereabout, nor one, except myself, with a better knowledge of the herbs of the field, and of his duty to his pastors and masters, as well

knowing that a still tongue shows a wise head, and so goes about silent-like, and reading, as one may say, in the book of nature.'

"'Why, here's another idiot!' says the Squire, jumping up. 'I tell you what, vicar, I shall leave you to settle this. You come up to the hall to dinner, and so save me from sacrilege; for if I stay here I shall be lectured for profanity in church or in the vestry, which you and my lady say is the same thing, though I shouldn't have thought it.'

"'Sir! Sir!' I cried out. 'Let me humbly ask your pardon if I have said anything amiss. I meant no offence, and I am grateful for all the good that you meant to me and mine; but pray consider of it, if you can remember all that we have gone through, and how it came about. Try, sir, to put yourself in my place, and think what you'd have said.'

"'What?' said the Squire, 'put myself in your place? Why, I might as well ask you to put *yourself* in *my* place. I daresay you'd be willing enough to do that in reality if you could.'

"'No, sir. I *would not, indeed,*' I said, looking him straight in the face; for I was almost in a passion, too, I can assure you. I, the village tailor, was almost in a passion with the Squire, for I felt that he looked upon me as little better than one of the hounds in his kennel. Oh! how I wished afterwards that I was a hero, and that I could have shown him I was one.

"That same night my old master came and sat with us. He gave me one of his best books—about herbs, and what diseases they were good for—and made me promise that, if we were in want of a little money, or were brought low, I

would send to him. He was to sell the few things that we meant to leave behind us, and let me have the price of them after the rent of Nancy's hut and my mother's cottage was paid. The next morning we were ready to start, and, poor as we were, I was able to take places in the coach that went to the railway station to catch the London train; for we were going right away to Essex, where some relations of my mother lived, not far from Epping Forest. We had scarcely finished our breakfast, and were waiting for a light cart that I'd hired to carry our luggage (for I took some books and my sleeve-boards and goose, and other things beside our clothes), when a groom came galloping up with a letter, which he put into my hand, and was off again before I could open it. It was addressed to me, and when I broke the seal, I read :—

"'From one who understands all that you meant in refusing the help that was offered you yesterday. Keep this, and use it for the child, or as you may need it.'

"The writing was fine and delicate, like a lady's, and a bank note for twenty pounds was folded in the letter. There was no time to think what to do, though I knew that it had come from the hall, and would fain have sent it back. The squire's lady meant it kindly, I knew, and I honoured her for it; but I felt as though the paper burnt my fingers as I put it into my wallet along with tape, and thread, and needles, and the other matters that I carried with me in a side pocket.

"There's no need to tell how we reached our journey's end, or how, after a time, I got a few customers, and being but a short journey from London, took work from a master, and so managed to keep a decent home for mother, and Nancy, and the little one. Nancy could help me, and the old lady was one of the best clear-starchers for miles, and could get up

fine laundry-work, such as laces and the like, and we had many a pleasant ramble in the forest on afternoons when we were slack of business; and I was a good deal sought after by some of our neighbours for my cough medicine, and my herb physic to cure rheumatics and to take down inflammations, especially as I never asked to be paid for anything. Even some of the farmers about would come to me sometimes and order a pair of breeches or a waistcoat for the sake of asking me about a mixture for whooping-cough, or the best cure for a sprain; and many a good piece of pork, or a bushel of potatoes, or other garden stuff, came home from the good dames who had tried the simple nostrums that I showed them how to make for themselves from the herbs that grew in their own gardens or in the hedge-rows. We were quiet folks, but not unhappy, and little Nancy grew a pretty fair-haired, rosy creature, and kept us alive, though I was mostly rather silent-like, and was naturally dreamy, and what people call absent-minded—as most tailors must be, I think, when they get meditating over their work, which leaves them plenty of opportunity to imagine all sorts of things, as they sit on their board cross-legged, stitch, stitch, stitching away, and only noting the time by growing hungry, or finding the sunlight slanting low as it falls through the window towards evening.

"There wasn't much excitement in tailoring work, you see. There never is, unless you have to make a grand suit of livery or a new coat for a city beadle, or to cut out a new pattern to fit a cranky customer with a hump, or a high shoulder, or too much waist, and so set your wits to work. But there was a sort of change that I used to look forward to about twice a week, and that was coming home by the railway from London.

You see I hadn't been used to fast travelling, and for a long time it was a constant wonder to me to find myself flying along at such a rate with scarcely any motion except a gentle swaying that sent me into a sort of dream. Ah! how I wished I had been born a hero. I thought I could have given up being a coachman, or a waterman, or even a huntsman, to be an engine-driver, and have that great gliding, rushing, overpowering monster called a railway train under my control. I made friends with the guard of the train I usually travelled by, and the porters at the station knew me quite well, and we used to have a chat together now and then, and they'd laugh at my making so much of the trains and the engines—'as though they were alive, and like wild horses,' they said.

"I used at that time to get out at a station where there was a siding for luggage, and it used to please me to stand at the end of the platform and watch a train run in. To listen to the distant sound and rumble, and to feel the quiver of the air, and then to hear the gasp and snort of the monster as it came on and made the ground tremble, and to watch the two red eyes glow, and the flash and glare that grew as it came gliding through the dark, and seemed to swallow up what had just before been a great empty chasm, and suddenly to grow out of the night, bringing light and sound and speed out of black silence, and then to break through the station, and with a roar and a shriek dwindle in a few seconds to a vanishing speck that could not be seen to move, and was yet, as you knew, miles away before you lost it altogether.

"I had been five years up and down the line, twice a week, and the railway people were among my customers, so that I seemed somehow to be used to the station; and the signalman that was out beyond the platform once let me climb

the ladder to his box, and feel a train rush past. I was like a bird trembling on a twig, except that the bird's used to it, and I wasn't; but it was grand, even for a near sight like mine, to see over the country, right away to the low-lying marsh-land, and to the dark belt of forest, and then to be all of a tremble, and hear a whirr and a whizz, and along the shining metal road that curved and twisted into space, to see the lights come flashing below in answer to the light that swung up at the end of the signal-arm above.

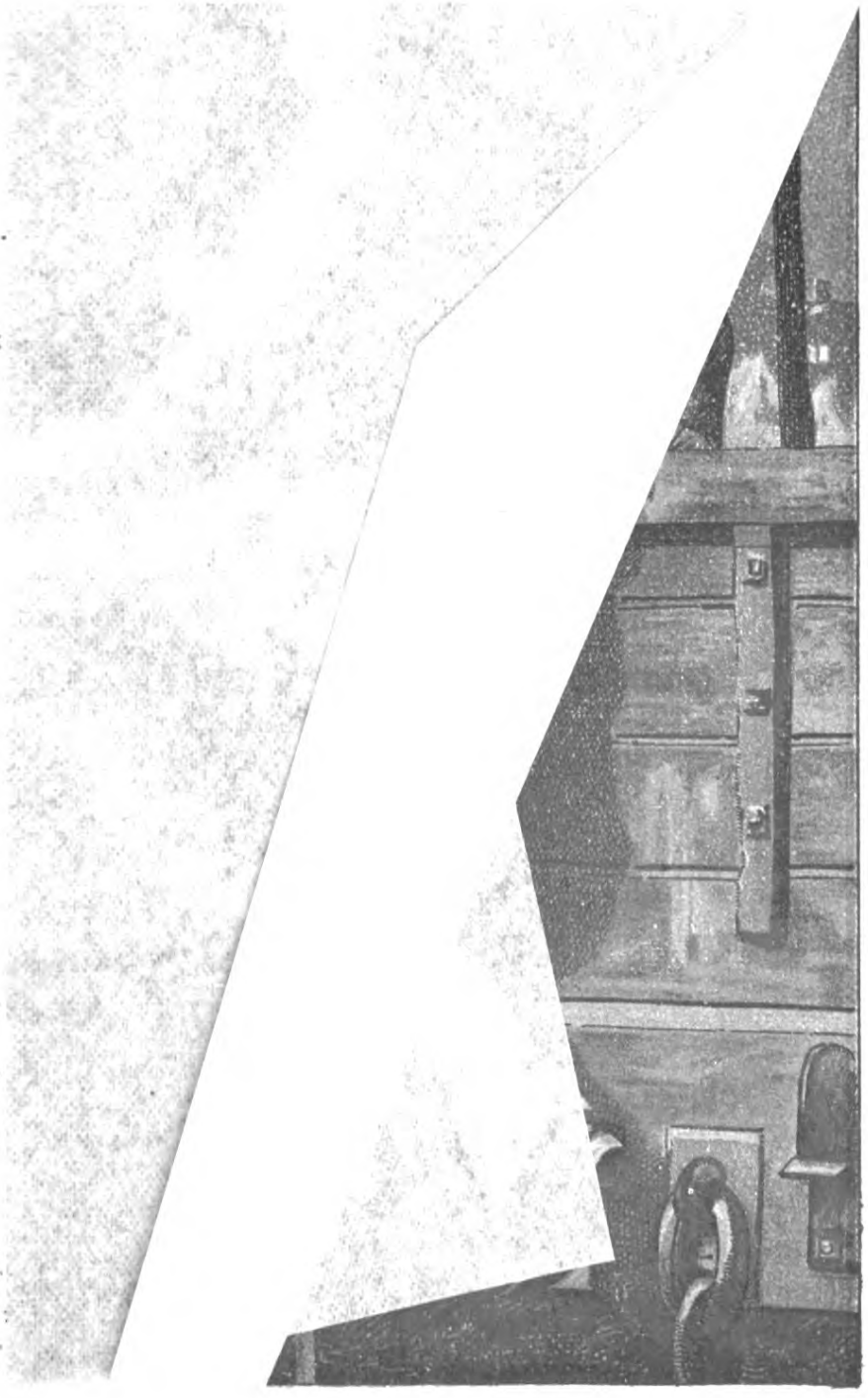
"But what I wanted to say was that I'd got quite used to the station, and would go down to the four wooden steps at the end to speak to the signalman or one of the porters when all was clear. I was going this way one warm night in August, when the harvest moon shone over the fields and the air was sultry and still. As I passed along by the siding, an empty luggage truck stood in the shadow straight before me, and without thinking much about why or wherefore, I put my hands upon it and gave a push as I jumped on to the end. Then two things happened that startled me. First, the truck ran on as if it was never going to stop, and then I was all of a sudden aware of somebody speaking. It was a woman's voice, and came from a corner of the van. There the speaker was huddled up on the floor and had a child beside her.

"'What are you doing, Simon Eyelet?' it said. 'I got in here, and rode all the way from London without a ticket, and now you must find me out, when I was only waiting for you to go. I should have called on you to-morrow with a rare message, and now—look!—look!'

"I seemed to know the voice. It came back to me all of a sudden that it was Bess Lee, the gipsy; but before I'd time to answer I was chill with horror. Still moving, moving,

and, as I thought, faster and faster, the truck ran on. It had turned off, too, and I somehow knew that we had got off the siding and on to the main line. An instant, and there was a quiver in the air, a low murmuring rattle afar, and there behind me was the gleam that would presently grow into a glare, as the engine of the night express came tearing through the station. We must be swept before it into a thousand fragments; and with a wild shriek I leaped down and tried to drag at the truck. But there was some one else there before me, and Bill, the signalman, had already got a purchase on it from the other side, shouting to me to go round and help him. He had seen the loose truck move, and had got down to stop it, but I had given it a shove that carried it clean past the box. It was too late to reverse his signal, and he had run down just as we got on to the main-line points, which had been left on by somebody when the trucks were shunted. All had happened in a few seconds, and now the thing was to get back again for twenty yards on to the siding. Bill was cool enough—he was a hero, you see, and not a tailor—and two porters came flying down in answer to his shout; and there was a scrape and a squeak, and we were all pushing, as the ground shook and the air seemed to be on fire, and the express came whirling through, so near the points we had just passed that I seemed to feel the scorch of the hot cinders in my hair. We all drew a long breath and looked at each other.

"'A pretty job of work you'd have made of it,' said Bill. 'Whatever did you go and play your larks with the truck like that for? Wonder you wasn't killed, as wouldn't have been half so much matter as wrecking the express, and most likely chucking it off the line. A nice thing that would have been,



F THE EXPRESS.

to have had nobody knows how many killed and wounded on your conscience, while you was a lying with your limbs off. I'm ashamed of a man like you doing such a thing; and, mind you, you don't come off the platform again. We don't want to be unfriendly towards you, but don't you do it, or else you'll be treated rough, and nobody 'll take your part.'

"'What Bill says is right,' said one of the porters. 'You ain't to be trusted to do it. But there's no malice, so let's get up to the station, where I've got some hot tea, and we'll all have a drop.'

"I peeped into the truck, but could see nothing of the woman or the child. 'They must have slipped out,' I thought, and so they had, but it was while we were talking, and now there they stood on the platform under the lamp. She in a gipsy cloak, and with the child crying in her arms.

"'Hallo! where do you come from?' says a porter. 'Why haven't you passed out? No more trains to-night, up or down.'

"'I've come from London, and can't find my ticket,' whined Bess Lee.

"One of the men turned his lantern on her, and looked rather suspicious.

"'I'll pay for the fare,' I said, 'if this woman has no ticket, and if she'll wait a minute till I go out.'

"'Well, it'll just serve you right to fine you that much for being such a stupid,' said Bill, with a gruffish sort of laugh. 'But we'll shake hands and make it up; though, mind you, no more coming on to the line without leave, or else you'll be treated rough.'

"We had a friendly mug of tea together; for, to tell the

real truth, I think that signalman was taken with my sister Nancy, who'd been a widow now these five years. And gipsy Bess whined for a drop of tea for the child, which she had, along with some bread and butter; and then I paid her fare to the porter and went out, as though I'd no more to do with her, but waited by the side of the road for her to come up with me.

"'What brings you to this part of the country?' said I; 'and what news is there of the old village? You've just come from there, I guess, or you'd have heard since I have.'

"'What brings me here in my native place, eh?' she answered, laughing till all her white teeth shone in the moonlight. 'Why the Lees live in Essex now. Don't you know that my old grandame Anne Lee is queen of the English Roms, and that there isn't one of the tribe that don't like Epping woods and Hainault hollows better than any place in England? And as to what's going at Bramleigh, Master Simon, for one thing I've struck the man that shot Dick Standall, struck him where he's got the last bit of feeling left. I told you it would be a bad night's work for some of 'em, and we've taken our time. The true Romany doesn't forget even in sleep. Do you know whose this "little squeaker" is?' She put down the child and pushed him towards me—a fine little fellow of about two and a half, with fair hair and a rosy face enough.

"'Not yours, then?'

"'Mine? What should put that in your head? Look again.'

"I stooped and looked into the child's face, and a sort of tremble came over me. There was something in the features so like those of another face that I had known, and had tried to forget.

"'Ha! ha!' laughed Bess Lee; 'we are even now. The man that shot Dick married that doll-faced minx at the shop, and we knew it. We have been here month in month out for these three years without your knowing of it, though I'd often a mind to stop and speak to you when you were out at Nasing or down on the Fairmead at Chingford, looking for your physic. So has Jack and Rob, but we let you bide till we had something to tell. Yes; she married the under-keeper, and this is their boy—the only one, and the only child the father cared for I fancy. He left off caring much for her above a year ago. I've been told he beats her, but that isn't true. He only bullies her. All his heart was in the child, and hers too, I fancy. It was he kept 'em together, and now they'll be puzzled to find him in the tents or among the tangles of the forest about Loughton or the Monk's Wood.'

"The little fellow began to cry, and I took him in my arms. 'Look here, Bessie Lee,' I said, 'you must let me have him.'

"'Ah! that's it, is it?' she said, clapping her hands. 'Well, I don't know but what it would be a fine bit of revenge, and I shouldn't object, for we've brats enough crawling about the camp as it is; but you must see Jack and Rob. And I say, Simon, just a word in your ear. Bess Lee is somebody down here in Essex, and her grandame's words law with the Roms.; so if the brat comes to you you'll know who did it, and we shall be quits. You'll have had your revenge, and none of us can turn round and swear against the other. You'll be late to-night, but we must settle this at once. Do you see two carters in smock-frocks and broad hats at the "Red Lion" yonder?'

"'I can see somebody.'

"'They're Jack and Rob, waiting for me.'

"There's no need to tell all the talk that I had with the gipsies over their bread-and-cheese and beer, nor how Bess Lee settled that I should take the boy 'for revenge;' and I hope it's not necessary for me to say that I had no such evil thoughts. I was thinking, in fact, of poor Kezia Diggs, the girl I had loved, and of her being left desolate; her child stolen away, and her husband with no kind word for her. I was thinking of it when I unlocked our cottage door and led the little fellow into the passage where a lamp was burning, and so into the kitchen, where supper was laid ready for me. You may fancy what a fuss there was when they saw the child; and I had much to do to persuade them whose it really was, and to convince them of my duty. I think what most reconciled 'em to it was, first, that the boy left off crying directly he saw little Nancy, and ran to her to put his arm round her neck; and, next, that little Nancy's mother had settled matters with Bill, the signalman, and that they were to be married in October, if I'd give my consent—as though anybody cared for my consent, though Nance was good enough to say that I was the only one in the world who should say whether she ought to marry again or not; for I'd been more than a mother to her, when all the world would have called me a fool for not giving her up. I had no objection, and Bill was a good fellow, and so that was settled; and it was settled, too, that we should take a bigger house by-and-by, and divide it, so that mother and I mightn't be left all alone. But the first thing to be done was to take the boy home to Bramleigh and restore him to his mother, and then I was to see the Squire. And I'll tell you why. Gipsy

Jack and Rob had said more over their ale than they meant to tell, or else they'd been so certain that I wanted to take Kezia's boy as a piece of revenge that they believed I should be glad to pay off old scores on other people too. Anyhow, they let slip that there was some scheme afoot for the Squire to go to a big horse-fair, and that they knew the day and hour, and that it was within a week that he would be up in London; and then there was muttering, and a look in their faces that I knew boded evil.

"I was away next morning by the mid-day train, and mother went with me, with cakes and sweets for the little one. When I got to Bramleigh, they both stopped at the station, and the first place I went to was to old Diggs' shop; for I had forgotten to ask where Kezia lived, and I didn't even know her married name. Old Diggs was behind the counter, but had grown deaf, and he didn't know me. He looked poorer, and his face was bloated, and there seemed to be very little in the shop. His wife came out of the back parlour and cried out, 'Why, it's Simon—Simon Eyelet'—and then the old man turned upon me, and said, 'What brings you here? We don't want any more trouble.'

"'Don't heed him,' whispered the old woman, 'he's nigh demented with the drink and his losses, and the way the trade's gone to the new society as the Squire's lady got down here for supplying folks for ready money, because it got about that the ruin of the people here was the tallyman and the leaving-shops; and then there's poor Kezia.'

"'It's of her I want to hear,' I said. 'Where does she live?'

"'In the rooms up above here, but she's not been that happy, Simon; and now their child's been stole away, and,

though it's hard to say it, such has been more a blessing than otherwise; for her husband's heart was softened like towards her, and they both grieved together till he seems a changed man, and in church last Sunday he promised that if they should have their little one found for 'em again he would live a better life, and be kind to the mother of his boy.'

"'Then,' said I, 'his vows may soon be kept, for I've got tidings, quite by accident, of the woman that stole the little lad away.'

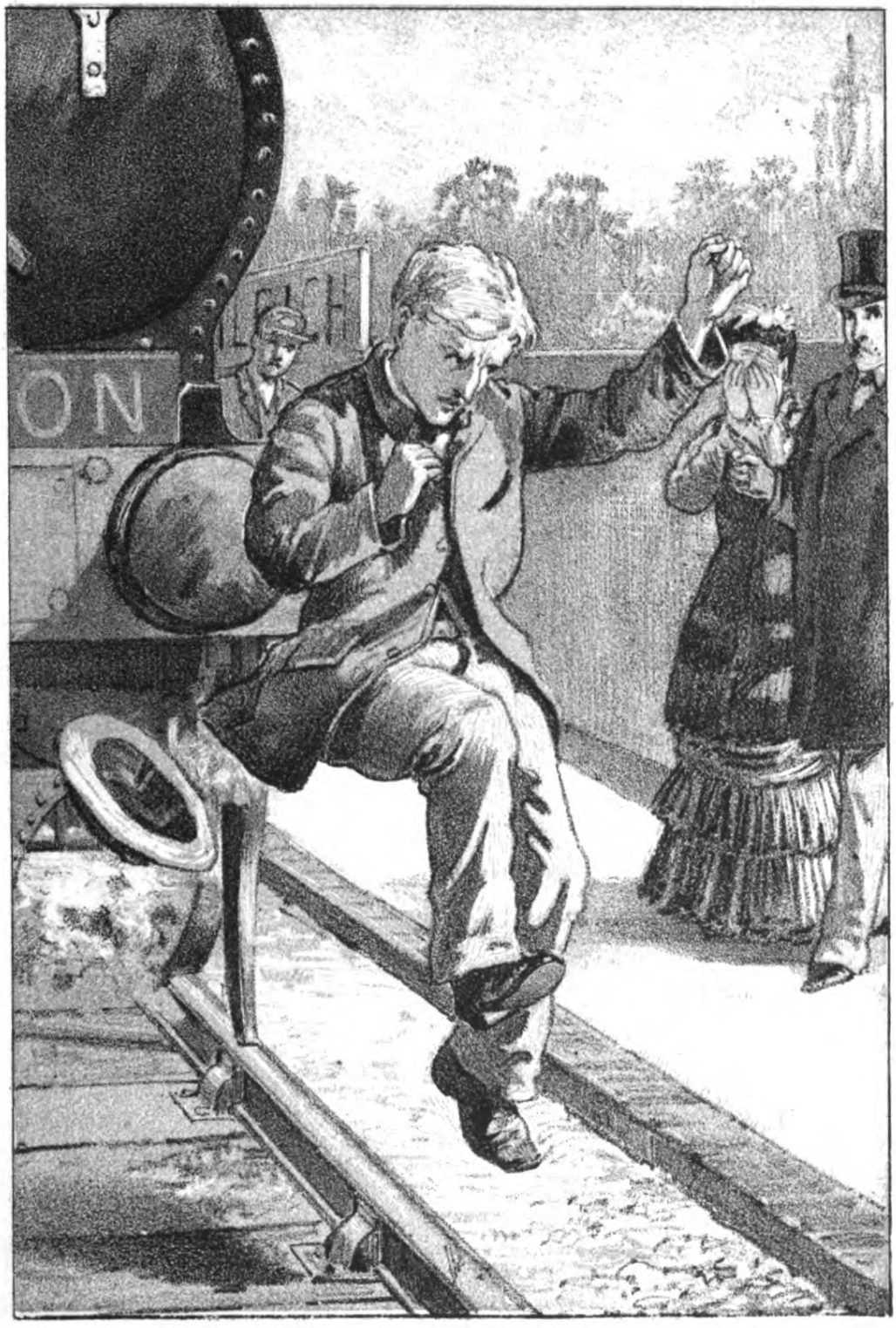
"'What are you talking about there?' growled old Diggs. 'That fellow, Simon, had better not stay here to make mischief, unless he's got money to spend.'

"'Don't tell him,' I said, speaking quick, 'and say nothing to anybody; but to-morrow, if you hear from the Squire, you and Kezia go over to the hall, and I think with the Squire's help the boy may be there.'

"I left her nodding and crying and clasping her hands, and went off to the hall at a pretty good pace. The outer gates leading to the drive were open, but I had come in by a short cut and not by the road, and the lodge-keeper stood and looked at me, as well he might, for I gasped out, 'The Squire—not gone to London—don't say it.'

"'The Squire and my lady have just gone in the carriage, and they'll catch the up-train to London after calling at the vicar's. You might get to the station before 'em perhaps—the new station, you know; just out of Bramleigh."

"I said something in reply, and was off as fast as I could run—and that's not saying much, for I'm no more of a hero at running than at anything else; where's there a tailor that's expected to have a strong pair of legs and a broad chest?—but I did run, and never stopped till I was up a long



"The buffer of the engine had caught my shoulder."—*Page* 95.

flight of steps and on the platform. I'd seen the Squire's empty carriage at the bottom, and as I passed, shouted to the coachman, 'Don't drive away yet; wait to see if Squire wants you.' And then I was on the long platform in a second—past the waiting-room, third-class, where I'd left mother and the boy, and right along to where I could see the tall strong figure of the Squire and his lady's handsome dress, as they walked up and down beyond the covered part, and near the embankment. The blood worked through my veins, for I heard the sound that I knew so well—the whirr and beating of the train coming in. There was but a minute to warn him of the danger that might meet him in London by the hands of Gipsy Jack and his mates; but in that minute I ran along the edge of the line, half on and half off the wooden flooring. They had gone down the steps, and stood in an open space from which passengers were allowed to cross the line; and I had to leap down as well as I was able. There was yet time, though the gleam of the engine seemed to be just behind me. The Squire looked up as they both stood back.

"'Don't go to London to-night, for your life,' I cried; and I had scarcely said so before I heard a scream, and felt myself lifted off the ground and flung on to the soft earth of the new embankment. I was shaken but not hurt, as I thought, and was up again in a moment. The buffer of the engine had caught my shoulder, and pitched me half-a-dozen yards away. The train had sped on at thirty-five miles an hour without stopping. This bewildered me for a minute; but I was on my feet before the Squire and his lady, the station-master, the porter, and mother with the little boy, came to see what terrible thing had happened. I was able to

go back to the platform; and there I told the Squire that he was threatened with some vague danger, and how I came to hear of it by finding Kezia Diggs' child.

"'But, my good fellow, who are you?' said he, 'I seem to know you.'

"I put my hand into my pocket, and drew out my wallet. I was just going to hand him a card, when my fingers lighted on something else: it was the envelope containing the twenty-pound note that had been sent to me so long ago, and never changed; but as I held it, and looked into the face of the lady who sent it, I felt my feet slide from under me, my head went round, and I lost what few senses I had. When I came to, I was in a great high bed-room, with a large window, where the late roses peeped in; and on my trying to speak, somebody came and gave me some cooling drink. It was the same lady; and presently the door creaked, and the Squire came in, and then the doctor. I remembered him very well; and I heard them talking and whispering. I'd had a fit, which lasted for many hours; but I was out of it again, and in a day or two should be able to be out and about. You see I'd mistaken the *down* for the *up train*, and forgot that the Squire would have to cross the line to take the train to London. You may guess how it all ended, and yet you can't exactly. Kezia's child went home again—the peace-maker between father and mother; my sister Nancy was married, and—well, I set up a handsome shop. 'Superfine clothing, at the shortest notice, to measure. Liveries. Gentlemen's own materials made up. Repairs neatly executed with punctuality and despatch.' I kept two assistants, and had all the Squire's custom, and was on the high road to a fortune—well, not exactly; I could have done these things, perhaps, but some

of the Squire's custom and a little private business were all I had the heart for. I never could take what was offered me; and, to tell the truth, what I had done wasn't for sale, and the Squire knew that now, as well as his lady. But I gave that twenty pounds to Kezia's boy, and—you mayn't believe it—but it came back again to me as a premium for him to be my apprentice when I opened business again at Bramleigh. The Squire called me his friend before all the farmers at the market dinner, where he asked me to eat and drink at his expense; and sometimes I used to dress myself properly, and go up to the hall to see how mother got on with her clear-starching, and then I was made to have cake and wine; and then it has been that I've most wished I was a hero. Not that I'm ashamed of being a tailor; far from it, quite the contrary; but now, begging pardon for taking so much time, I'll give way to our brave British soldier here, only remarking that if he, or you, Mr. Parley, or any of your readers wants a cure for hard or soft corns, or an asthmatical cough, or Saint Anthony's fire, or chilblains, or toothache, just mention it."

Tailor drew back, shuffling in his loose carpet slippers, and Soldier stood in full view of all the company.

The tall figure gave a salute, and, wasting no words, but speaking in a loud, clear tone—as though reciting an oft-told tale—began:—

The Soldier's Story.

"I am about to relate something that did not happen yesterday, but many a long year ago, when I was a smart young private in the second battalion of the 1st Royal Scots in the Deccan, where I had served during the whole of the Pindaree War, and smelt powder on the fields of Nagpore

and Maheidpore, and at the storming of Gawulghur and many other hill-forts.

"Upon the breaking up of the Grand Army, the united strength of which amounted to 110,000 men—perhaps the largest ever Britain put in the field—and which had crushed the Pindarees, one or two chiefs of renown who commanded particular *goles*, or bands, effected their escape, and retired to the almost impenetrable fastnesses which lie south of the Nerbudda river.

"Of these, two of the most desperate were Cheetoo and the Sheikh Abdullah, whose names will long be remembered in the annals and traditions of Central India, and where their war-cries of 'Hurri-bol!' and 'Sheikh Dullah to the Onslaught!' have still an echo.

"It was against the latter that a detachment of ours and of European Infantry, led by Captain Calderwood, accompanied by a squadron of Bengal Native Cavalry, under Major O'Dell, was detailed to act, and of that detachment I formed a humble unit.

"On a stormy night in May—the dry season in the Deccan—I found myself, with a Native Infantry man, posted as an advanced sentinel on the road—or path, rather—that led to a district north of the Tapti river, then and now an almost uninhabited desert, but in which Sheikh Abdullah, with some relics of the once vast Pindaree force, was lurking.

"Within musket-shot in our rear was concealed the outpicket to which we belonged, and the officers were in the house of a zemindar named Gopal Sing, close by it. Our sentinels were then posted in pairs, as single ones were frequently assassinated, and tigers and other wild animals abound in these jungles.

"My comrade on this occasion was one of the Company's European Infantry, of whom I had lately known a little, and little that I liked. He was a half-caste of Ghond blood, Peter Hossain by name, a suavely-mannered, slimy, and cunning copper-coloured fellow, in whose character were united many of the vices of the European with those of the Bengalee; and a 'bad lot' Peter proved in the end.

"We stood near each other, with our bayonets fixed and arms loaded. The united detachments were concealed in a wood, or tope of mangoes, and our orders were simply to keep a bright look-out, challenge all who approached us, and to be silent, as a plot was said to be on foot to surprise the post and seize our officers in the house of Gopal Sing; but our orders did not prevent us from conversing in a low tone, for our post was dreary enough, what with the howling of the wind through the trees, and of jackals in the jungle.

"'You have seen Cheetoo, I believe?' said I to Peter.

"'Yes; and the Sheikh Abdullah too.'

"'Where?'

"'In the house of the zemindar, Gopal Sing.'

"'What, in the house of him whom we have come to protect?'

"'Yes; I was his servant when the sheikh, who was scouring the country at the head of a few hundred horse in search of cattle and loot, hearing that Gopal had a fine mare of the *dukhanee* caste, which he coveted for her speed and beauty, demanded it as a free gift. The zemindar refused, so the sheikh vowed to be revenged; and one night in September last year he made directly for his house, whither he was guided by the sound of the *nagarrahs* (drums), which

were beaten when poojah was being offered up to the spirit of *Mahadeo*.

"'I am the Sheikh Abdullah,' said the Pindaree, when the zemindar came trembling before him. 'I have been compelled by you to come in person for your *dukhanee* mare; thus, I shall at the same time take every rupee you possess.'

"'The zemindar is a tall and handsome man; but he cowered and trembled before Cheetoo and the sheikh, who is a little man—dark, ugly, and horribly pitted with small-pox.'

"'You seem pretty intimate with the details of these rascals,' said I, by way of remark.

"Peter Hossain, who was chewing betel-nut like a native, remained silent a minute; and I thought I heard him chuckling in the dark. Then he continued—

"'On being ordered to "shell out" for a good round sum, he pleaded poverty; but the sheikh and Cheetoo, having no time to spare, ordered him at once to be stripped and bound. Then lighted *pulcetas* (slow-matches) were applied all over his body—a process by which he was literally fired from head to foot, and has thus been made a spotted man for life. Still he refused to part with his money; but when a leather gram bag, filled with green and red chillies, was tied tight over his head, the pungent and burning nature of them forcing streams of water from his eyes, maddening him with stinging pain and suffocation, made him beg for mercy, and show where his hoards were concealed. All that he had of value was then put on the back of the mare, with which the Pindarees departed, shouting with laughter at the state in which they had left the zemindar. The latter, reduced to poverty, curtailed his household; and I, from being a syce, became a soldier.'

"I may here mention that the Pindarees were not a distinct race, but men of many races and religions: all horsemen, associated together in arms under chiefs, for one common pursuit—outrage and robbery. Their costume was as varied as their equipment; in one thing only were they alike—wild and reckless ferocity. Dreadful were the sufferings to which they had subjected helpless villages, as they swept through the Deccan in their thousands, extorting treasure by torture, murdering the men, and carrying off women, cattle, and horses; yet they were cowards, who never fought when they could run away.

"'So you were a syce of the zemindar, Peter?'

"'Yes, and have cut many a swathe of sweet grass for that very mare which the sheikh rides now.'

"'I have heard that it was a syce who informed the sheikh where the mare was.'

"'Perhaps you heard it was I,' said Peter, with a grin, unwittingly letting a little light on his own rascality.

"'You must know this country well,' said I, presently.

"'Every foot of it.'

"'Hark! don't you hear something?' I exclaimed, as a sound reached my ears.

"'No,' replied Peter, drawing closer to me.

"'Horses in front, surely!' I cocked my musket, and cried, 'Who comes there?'

"No answer; but the sound instantly ceased, and I, thinking it as well to warn the picket which barred the way to the zemindar's house, which formed our head-quarters, tried to fire my musket, but cocked and snapped in vain. My flint—we used flints then—was gone!

"Just as it flashed upon my memory that I had given Peter

my musket to hold for a second, I received a dreadful blow from his clubbed butt, and it stretched me helpless and breathless on the grass as a whole troop of mounted Pindarees, with whom this rascal was in league, and to whom he meant to betray the post, swept over me.

"He did not use his bayonet, lest I might have uttered a cry, but took the most effectual way to silence me by a crushing blow on the head. In a few minutes, I staggered up, with rage and fear in my heart—rage at Hossain's treachery, and fear lest the picket should be cut to pieces and our whole post surprised in their bivouac; but a sudden fire of musketry flashing redly out in my rear announced that this was not the case. The officer of the picket had been parading his reliefs, when he heard the approach of Abdullah's Horse, and opening fire at once, repulsed them, and with more than one saddle empty the Pindarees careered past the spot where I was leaning helpless and confused against a tree; and with yells they vanished into the darkness of the night.

"With them went Peter Hossain, of whom we saw no more for a time, but who was known to have joined them.

"His treachery exasperated every man in our force, and on 3,000 rupees being offered for the capture of the sheikh or of Cheetoo, dead or alive, Major O'Dell offered 150 rupees for the capture of Peter Hossain; and in the hope of achieving this end himself, he resorted to a very singular ruse.

"Selecting the most powerful and resolute of his troopers, he dismounted them and disguised them as poverty-stricken Brinjarries or itinerant merchants, and placed in their charge a string of bullocks, on the backs of which were slung bags of sand to represent those of gram, which these useful traders convey for sale throughout the whole of Central India. In



BEN. GEORGE, LITH.

SOLDIERS IN DISGUISE.

the folds of his cummer-bund, or girdle, each mock trader had a brace of loaded pistols.

"After impressing upon the native troopers the necessity of being careful, secret, and to consider well the nature of the country and the villages through which they had to pass, the major disguised himself also as a Brinjarrie, blackened his face, assumed a turban, and set out with his men, who were in the highest spirits at the hope of the capture to be made, and with the adventurous nature of the ruse their officer had adopted.

"When they had travelled three or four days' journey from our camp, after passing through a very wild and jungly district, a cloud of dust and the flashing of spear-heads announced the approach of some horsemen, and a band of wild-looking Pindarees, mounted on Mahratta chargers, came swooping down with shouts to carry off the sacks and bullocks of the seeming Brinjarries.

"This was some miles from Hoshungabad, where the road passes between two masses of isolated granite. The largest mass on the right is called the Black Rock, and is a gloomy and dismal object to the eye; and underneath it are caverns, the lurking-places of the striped hyæna, the leopard, wolf, and jackal.

"'*Abdullah dop Ko jue!*' ('Long life to Abdullah!') was the cry of the wild horsemen, as they surrounded the Brinjarries; '*Alh'mdillah,* here is loot in plenty!'

"The Pindarees drew near the caravan of bullocks, but halted at a short distance, and two, who appeared by their superior dress and equipment to be leaders, called out to the supposed Brinjarries to stop.

"'What do your *guthiyas* (sacks) contain?' demanded one.

"'The finest of gram,' replied Major O'Dell; 'but we are only poor Brinjarries, and these bullocks bear our all!'

"This was greeted with a mocking laugh and great brandishing of pointed spears.

"'We shall take good care of your gram, fellow,' replied the Pindaree to O'Dell.

"Just then one of his troopers exclaimed—

"'Major Sahib, this is the Sheikh Abdullah!' The former, an impulsive Irishman, had detected in the fairer face of the other Pindaree Peter Hossain, at whom he instantly discharged one of the pistols concealed in his cummer-bund.

"This proved a dire mistake.

"The distance was too great for a pistol-shot to take effect —at least a pistol of those days—even when fired point-blank; and the echo of the report, reverberating again and again among the echoes of the adjacent rocks and caves, proved too much for the Pindarees, who at once wheeled their horses round and fled on the spur. 'Suspicion being the master spirit which works within a Pindaree brain,' as our officer used to say, 'coupled with the knowledge that Brinjarries *never* travel with fire-arms, indicated treachery, and counselled the freebooters' mind to instant flight.' The unfortunate troopers, disappointed in their hope, had to return to camp with their bags of sand—O'Dell angry with himself for his impetuosity; and ever after both Sheikh Abdullah and Cheetoo gave any Brinjarries they met a very wide berth.

"'Oh, Major Sahib! had we only had our horses instead of these bullocks!' was the exclamation of the troopers when the Pindarees fled.

"'True; but then you could not have acted as Brinjarries,' replied O'Dell.

"'What is done, is done. We may soon have another chance. *Tope Khaun* (thank God) for that!'

"When I heard that they had actually been face to face with the villain and deserter, with whose knock-down blow my unfortunate head yet ached, I regretted bitterly that I could not have been one of the major's party.

"A week after this I was sent from the camp where our tents were set up on a message from Captain Calderwood to the house of the zemindar, Gopal Sing, where Major O'Dell and his sowars had their quarters, about a mile distant. The heat, I remember, was intense. In those days kalkee uniforms and pith helmets were unknown. I had on a tight-fitting scarlet coatee, with large worsted wings, and my stiff shako, with its tuft and glazed top, through which the rain when it fell oozed by the cracks made by the heat of the sun. By a wayside well a man and a boy were drawing water with a rope and bucket. I begged a draught from them, which was accorded in a lotus-leaf, for the man would not defile the brass lotah, or drinking vessel, that hung at his girdle by allowing my lips to touch it.

"Just as I was in the act of thanking him, a horseman came galloping up. He rode a fine chesnut mare of the true *dukhanee* breed, and wore a scarlet turban, and a quilted cloak of yellow stuff; his lance was slung behind him, so was his handsome round shield, and he carried in his hand a formidable tulwar. I had only my side-arms—my bayonet—and felt rather uncomfortable, as he frowned at me, saying,

"'Tope-wallah (meaning 'fellow with the hat') what have you got about you?'

"By this I knew he was a Pindaree, and as any attempt to

escape him would be useless, I surrendered all I possessed—a rupee and two annas.

"'And you?' he exclaimed, turning to the man.

"'Alas! Sahib,' said the latter, folding his brown palms together, and salaaming very low, 'I am only a poor ryot of the Zemindar Gopal Sing.'

"'The curse of the Prophet lie on Gopal Sing!' exclaimed the horseman, furiously. 'Is this boy your son?'

"'Yes, Sahib,' replied the man, trembling violently.

"'Then if you do not yield up to me every anna you have about you, I will instantly transfix you both with my lance!'

"And unslinging it as he spoke (leaving the tulwar to dangle at his wrist), he placed the sharp steel point at the bare throat of the miserable ryot, who felt himself compelled to obey, and with trembling hands drew forth a few coins from a fold of his cummer-bund, and they were at once clutched by the Pindaree.

"The black gleaming eyes of the latter now detected silver bangles on the otherwise bare wrists of the boy. Stooping from his saddle, he dragged one off; the other he failed to obtain with the same ease, either because the metal was less flexible or the boy dared to struggle with him. He raised the tulwar, and dragging the boy's hand across his saddle bow, slashed it off, and secured the bangle.

"'There!' exclaimed the barbarian, as the boy fell, writhing and shrieking, on the ground, 'that will teach you to trifle with me. I am the Sheikh Abdullah!'

"And putting spurs to his mare—the beautiful mare of Gopal Sing—he laughed and galloped away; and this daring outrage he committed within musket-shot of our camp!

"Greater rewards were now offered for the capture of Sheikh Abdullah, but he lurked safely among the ferocious Ghonds, many of whose villages paid him tribute, that they might be left in peace; yet the Ghonds scorned to betray him for gold, and worshipped him in fear, as a kind of supernatural being.

"At this time, when parties of our troops were hunting him and Cheetoo from place to place, like the latter, he has been known to leave his own men at midnight, when they were fast asleep beside their picketted horses, without revealing his intentions, so uncertain and fickle was he in his movements and plans. He could assume every disguise, and was by turns a pedlar, a juggler, a brinjarrie or a faquir, and was often generous to a degree—with other people's gold.

"By the middle of October five different strong detachments of horse and foot scoured all the plains below the fortress of Aseerghur. Thus the movements of the freebooting sheikh, of Cheetoo, and of Peter Hossain (whom we had yet failed to capture) were well watched.

"The sheikh was likewise securely environed in his fastnesses; but still, the wild nature of the country and the favourable disposition of many of the people towards him gave him great odds in his favour, while the whole range of Kalee-bheet Mountains, whereon he had many lurking places, extending all the way from the beautiful fort of Mukrai (then the abode of a Ghond prince) to within a short distance of Booranpore, one of the noblest cities in the Deccan, was open to himself and his Pindarees; and the villagers of the plains that are bordered by these hills, in antagonism to the Europeans, furnished him with supplies and information of our movements, enabling him and his companions to baffle all pursuit.

"Young though I was, and hardy too, I must confess to being very weary of the desultory work in which we were engaged without honour or profit, and often with loss of life and limb. At last there came a day which I never forgot.

"Towards the end of October, Captain Calderwood's detachment had come rather unexpectedly upon Sheikh Abdullah's band, when the latter had halted, bivouacked, and were in the act of cooking some food. We could barely open fire upon them, so quick were their movements when alarmed. They were all in their saddles, lance in hand, and off like a flash of lightning!

"In their haste they left all their fires lighted, their cooking pots and half-cooked food, a welcome find to Calderwood's hungry and toil-worn Royal Scots, who were too fatigued to continue the pursuit; thus once again did Sheikh Abdullah escape us. He had quitted the vicinity of Puplewdah, and from the reports of spies was believed to be, together with Cheetoo and Hossain, with his friends the Ghonds at a mountain village called Baseegurh, six miles north-east of the Prince of Mukrai's fort.

"And now came the evening which I was fated long to remember.

"It was a glorious one in October; our detachment had pitched their tents in a beautiful spot in sight of the magnificent range of hills among which the Pindaree chief was supposed to be lurking. The country around our camp was one expanse of luxuriant cultivation, chiefly sugar-cane, wheat, and grain.

"'The shadows of the mountains were falling eastward; all nature seemed to be at rest. The advanced sentinels were carefully posted; we had no fear of a surprise, and our men

were smoking, singing, lounging in their shirt-sleeves on the grass, and many of them pipe-claying their cross-belts for the morrow's march. No sound came from a distance, save perhaps the tinkling of a bell attached to the neck of the leader of a herd grazing free on jungle-lands, or the voice of some rarely-plumaged bird from a shady tope or grove of trees.

"I was on duty as orderly near the captain's tent, when two natives approached, each attired as a *mewah-furosh*, or itinerant dealer in fruit. Each carried before him a slung basket, filled with the dainties of his avocation, and coming up to me with low salaams, one asked if the "Captain Sahib" would buy of them, as if so, they would give me some of their sweets for myself. One seemed to be a mute, as he only made signs, and pointed from the good things in his basket to his lips.

"Nothing loth, I took their message into the tent of Captain Calderwood, who, with three other officers of ours, was resting before assembling in the mess-tent for dinner.

"He purchased a few rupees' worth, and while doing so, asked the mewah-furosh who could speak whence he came.

"'From the neighbourhood of Mukrai, Sahib.'

"'Oho! Any word of Sheikh Abdullah thereabout?' asked Captain Calderwood.

"'No, Captain Sahib—not now.'

"'Why not now? Where has the rascal gone?'

"'A rascal indeed, Sahib!' replied the other, his eyes and teeth glittering. "But he has left the hills."

"'Will you swear that he is not there *now?*'

"'Yes.'

"'You are a Brahmin, I think?'

"'Salaam, Captain—I am.'

"'Then swear by what you hold most holy.'

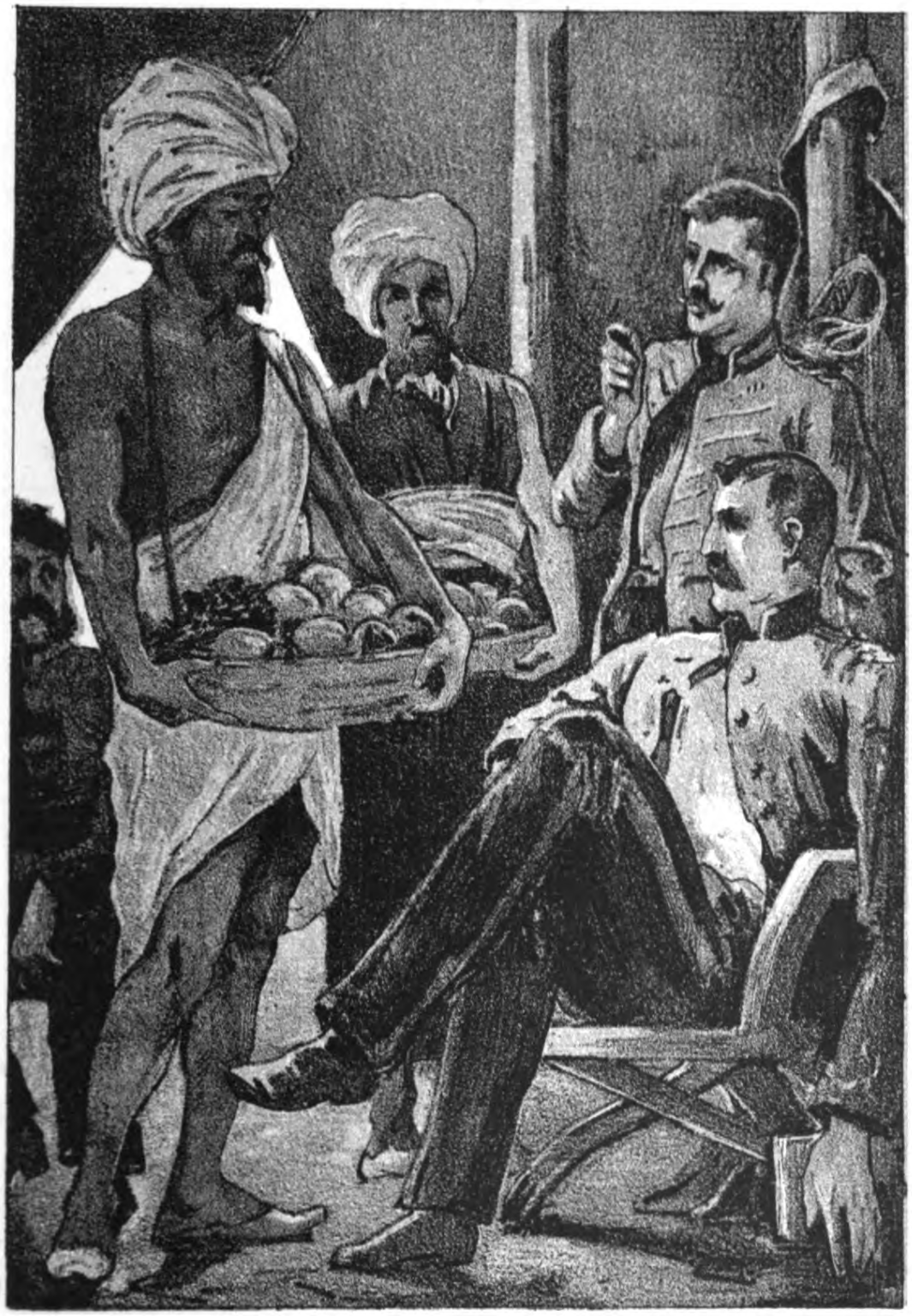
"'By the Ganges water—by Ganga the blessed, he is not there now!'

"The captain believed him, he spoke so earnestly, and then salaamed himself out of the tent. He gave me some luscious fruit, as he promised. Then they strolled all about the camp, till their baskets were emptied; sunset was at hand, and they could remain no longer.

"The elder merchant begged me to guide them out of our lines; and aware that the captain was now at mess, and would not be likely to require me, I was rash enough to proceed with them a hundred yards or so beyond our advanced sentries, little thinking who they were or what was before me.

"When about to turn near a wayside shrine, over which some baubool-trees shed their golden bells, with the rapidity and skill of a couple of Thugs (which perhaps they had been), the pretended fruit-sellers threw round my neck a silk scarf, the ends of which they drew with such force as to half strangle me on the spot and preclude any attempt to cry out. Choked and half insensible, I sank heavily on my knees; a thousand lights seemed to be dancing before my eyes, and all power of resistance left me.

"When I did partially recover, it was only to find that a gag had been placed in my mouth; my hands had been bound behind me. I was roughly dragged up, menaced with my own bayonet at my throat; and just as darkness fell on hill and plain with its usual tropical rapidity, I was conveyed helplessly away by this treacherous pair, who proved to be no other than the Sheikh Abdullah and Peter Hossain, who had skilfully disguised himself, and had now found a tongue with which to mock, revile, and exult over me. The sheikh said



"The captain believed him, he spoke so earnestly."—*Page* 110.

little, but it was maddening to be thus at the mercy of a half-caste like Hossain—a creature who had all the vices of a slave, timorous, false, cruel, and revengeful, though without even a sense of having been wronged.

"All night I was compelled to accompany them; and if I attempted to loiter or affect weariness, the cold muzzle of a pistol was applied, as a pressing argument, to my head. Yet it was a source of surprise to me that they did not shoot me on the spot, and save themselves all further trouble, as I was only a poor private soldier, whom, save my comrades, no one might be disposed to ransom; but I knew not till we arrived at a Ghond village for what I was reserved, and when I came to that knowledge, deep and profound was the horror that fell upon me.

"Sheikh Abdullah owed a great debt of gratitude to the Ghonds, who had always succoured, aided, and protected him. These barbarians offer up human sacrifices. A victim was wanted by the Killadar of Aseerghur, who was a Ghond, and for this fate I was reserved.

"On our arrival at the village, about sunrise, I was warmly welcomed by a crowd of Ghonds, whose dress consisted only of a cloth tied round the loins, from whence it hung like a short skirt.

"They gave me to drink of their favourite spirit, which is made of the maw-flower; and as my appearance was the cause of general rejoicing, they all drank freely, till many of them became intoxicated, and they danced, whooped, and brandished their bows, slings, and battle-axes—weapons which they use to this day—in a way that I thought very menacing; but, as yet, I was safe and sacred, being reserved as an offering to their goddess Duarni! But perhaps, Mr.

Parley, you may not know that such things go on in India, and that it was not until 1836 that the British authorities first became aware that these odious Ghonds were in the habit of kidnapping strangers, children in the plains, or buying victims from their neighbours for human sacrifices to their monster goddess; and, though vigorous attempts were made to suppress a practice so atrocious, they have always been addicted to it in secret; and quite lately an instance has been recorded in which the chief of the Ghonds at Patna offered up the life of a wandering minstrel at the Dussera festival to the goddess Duarni, for which he was hanged by the Commissioner of the Chattisghur division.

"My blood curdled when I learned the fate for which I was reserved. I only knew I was to die when the day of the festival came, but knew not the mode in which I should perish; nor could I have the least conception of it.

"I remained a week in the Ghond village, fettered and closely watched. Kept as I was for a sacred purpose, I was not unkindly used, and I was well supplied with food. But it was in vain that I besought Sheikh Abdullah to get me released. He had given his word to the Ghonds; and on alarm of the village being surrounded by our troops, he, with Cheetoo and Peter Hossain, took their departure quickly, and I was left to my fate.

"My heart beat wildly with hope on hearing that the village now surrounded by our detachments was to be closely searched—not for me, as nothing was known about me, and I was supposed to have deserted or been murdered, but for the sheikh and Cheetoo, of whose whereabouts Captain Calderwood had heard.

"The troops were drawing close on every side; I could see

their skirmishers feeling the way as they approached the village, supposing it might be defended. I thought of feigning sleep till they came quite close; for we think and, if wise, act rapidly in moments of great peril, and I thought if I remained quiet the Ghonds might take to flight and leave me unmolested, if I made no alarm; but they did neither.

"I was tied hand and foot, gagged again, and placed in a species of *tykuna*, or underground place, where I lay with anguish in my soul, helpless, and hearing the voices of our men, and even that of Captain Calderwood as he questioned the Ghond chief of the village, who swore solemnly by the goddess Duarni that he had never seen or sheltered the object of his search, the Sheikh Abdullah.

"I heard Calderwood threaten to destroy the village, which was only a mean collection of huts, formed of stakes cut from an adjacent forest, with wicker-work walls of wattle and dab; and had he done it, I might have been discovered, if not ordained to perish of hunger; but he retired without doing it. The troops marched back to their cantonments, and I was left to my fate.

"'I am, I know, a favourite soldier of Captain Calderwood's,' said I to the Ghond chief; 'and if he knew that I was a prisoner in your hands, he and the other officers of my corps would pay a handsome sum as the value of my life."

"'How much?'

"'A thousand rupees, perhaps.'

"The eyes of the Ghond sparkled for a moment or two with avaricious hope.

"'Send a messenger to him,' I said.

"'If I did so,' he replied, 'the Captain Sahib would be

more likely to come here with an armed party, and demand my head.'

"I thought this very probable, as Calderwood was, I know, a resolute and high-handed fellow.

"'Moreover,' added the Ghond, after a pause, 'you are consecrated to Duarni, and all the wealth of the Deccan could not purchase you. Your fate is irrevocably fixed!'

"'In what manner am I to die?' I asked. 'By torture?'

"'No.'

"'How then?'

"'We have one general mode of putting to death the human victims at her shrine. You will be brought before her statue at Aseerghur, and laid there on the steps. Your throat will be slowly severed by a sacred axe, while a lota is held to catch the blood as it flows; and when you are dead, the chief Ghond, at the tenth hour of the morning, will wake up the *pujali*, saying, 'I have brought you an offering of liquor for the goddess—pour it over her image;' and this will be done amid solemn prayer."

"Soldier, what horrors you are relating! Surely this is an invention," interrupted a voice. It was that of the Tailor, looking very disgusted and surprised.

"No invention at all, Snip," answered Soldier, sharply, "for this was precisely the mode in which the minstrel, or itinerant story-teller, perished at Patna in the March of this year, save that the Ghond chief whom the Queen's Commissioner hanged endeavoured to impose upon the pujali, or priest of the temple, by passing off the blood of his victim as that of a buffalo-bull.

"I must admit, though, that my heart seemed to die

within me as I listened to this too probable fate. To undergo the contingencies of war, wounds, or to fall in battle, as Lochiel says, with 'my back to the field and my feet to the foe,' was a probability to expect; but to perish thus secretly, slowly, by a horrible and anticipated death that would never be avenged, and never known by my loving parents in their humble Scottish home, where the hills of Dunblane look down on the wooded dell through which the Allan flows, or to my comrades of the grand old Royal Scots—the oldest and most famous regiment in the world—was awful and maddening to contemplate.

"I could but hope that tidings of a European being a prisoner in the hands of this Ghond chief might, by some good chance, reach our people; but in carrying me to Aseerghur, his followers took the precaution to blacken my face, change my costume, and to travel by night only, lurking during the day in their sacred groves; and on the last day of February I found myself within the walls of that fortress, which stands in a wild tract of country, so infested by man-eating tigers as to be all but inaccessible. It is still named 'the Gibraltar of the East,' and belonged to Scindiah. It is situated on a detached hill, which no other height commands, and consists of an upper and lower fort, irregular in form, measuring eleven hundred yards from east to west, by six hundred from south to north, and crowns a slope of seven hundred and fifty feet high.

"On being brough tbefore the killadar, or governor—Jeswunt Rao Lar by name—I besought his mercy, and spoke of ransom or bribe, as I had done to the chief of the village, but, like him, he quietly and steadily declined to entertain the idea, and indeed derided it, adding calmly—

"'You may deem yourself only too happy to be reserved for such a sacred fate.'

"He was a Ghond by race and religion, born and bred in Ghondwana, and in the preceding year, having undertaken to procure a victim for the Dussera festival, and failing in doing so, he offered up his own daughter; so, what hope of escape had I?

"I was brought into Aseerghur, as I have said, on the last day of February; in the first days of April the Dussera festival would be held, so I could reckon those I had to live, and felt like a helpless creature under sentence of death, and enduring the agony of that as the hours flew quickly past.

"Meanwhile, unknown to me, the whole of the hill-forts in Candeish had been reduced by our troops, and, amid terrible privations, they passed through the province of Berar, and in the first days of March the Hyderabad division began its route to besiege Aseerghur.

"Jeswunt, the killadar, was aware that the British general possessed the order of Scindiah for the surrender of the fortress; but he had Scindiah's secret order to defend it to the last, and, as he believed himself to be shot-proof, in consequence of an amulet he wore, he was quite prepared to do so.

"Somewhere near Ellichpoor, that precious rascal, Peter Hossain, fell into the hands of our troops, and was hanged by sentence of a drum-head court martial; while, driven from village to village, and from one hill-fort to another, the Sheikh Abdullah and Cheetoo at last sought refuge with their friend, the Killadar of Aseerghur, but for some reason which I cannot explain Cheetoo was refused admittance into the fortress, which the killadar was preparing to defend with vigour.

"Most miserable was the fate of Cheetoo, the once formidable chief of the Pindarees, who had not now one spot in all British India that they could term a home.

"On finding the gates of Aseerghur closed against him, Cheetoo took shelter in an adjacent jungle, alone, with no companion but the *dukhanee* mare of Gopal Sing, which had been bestowed upon him by the sheikh; but for many days no one knew what had become of the once terrible Pindaree.

"His mare was at last discovered by the killadar grazing on the edge of the jungle, saddled and bridled, exactly as when Cheetoo had last been seen upon it. A search was made; a bag of rupees was found attached to the saddle, together with some letters written by the sheikh to Cheetoo, which fixed the identity of the animal's late rider.

"These circumstances, together with a knowledge that the jungle was the resort of the most dreadful man-eaters, caused a search to be made for the body, and at no great distance some gnawed fragments of bone, some clothing clotted with blood, and at last the head of Cheetoo, untouched and entire, were discovered in succession.

"Surviving the terrible association to which he belonged, and feeling certain that he had nearly escaped the fate of Cheetoo, the Sheikh Abdullah, now literally the last of the Pindarees, remained shut up in the fortress of Asserghur, for the siege of which the British brought forward such an accumulation of ordnance as had not, it is said, been seen in the wars of India since the siege of Hattrass.

"How many men the killadar had under his orders I never knew, secluded as I was near the little temple of Duarni, in a solitary tower at an angle of the hill-fortress, but it seemed to be crowded with Scindiah's people.

"Never shall I forget how wildly my heart beat with hope when, in the first week of March, the deep hoarse boom of cannon shook the walls of Aseerghur, and announced that our troops were before it, and that the attack and defence had begun.

"If the former proved rapid and successful, thus anticipating the festival of Duarni, I might be rescued; if the latter was protracted, my fate was sealed; and, indeed, I was informed that if the garrison was compelled to capitulate, the killadar would slay me, at all events: a victim devoted to his atrocious goddess.

"All round Aseerghur, with the exception of one place, which is strongly protected by walls and cannon—the precipice is sheer, and varies from eighty to a hundred and twenty feet in height—runs a lofty wall, closely loopholed for musketry, and lower down are two supplementary lines of works, with the *pettah*, the entrance to which is protected by great gates with flanking bastions.

"The killadar had left nothing undone to render Aseerghur—naturally a post of vast strength—impregnable; and when I thought of all that, and reckoned the days I had to live, I could only pray, but had no hope.

"The investing force consisted of 20,000 men, with 101 guns. On the walls the killadar had 119, some of which were of enormous calibre, one being no less than a 384-pounder!

"At midnight on the 17th of March, five companies of the 1st Royal Scots (including Calderwood's), with the flankers of the 30th, 67th, and Madras European Regiments, and five companies of Native Infantry, with some sappers and miners—the whole led, sword in hand, by Colonel Fraser, of the

Royal Scots—got under arms to assail the *pettah* of Asseer; and at two in the morning this column began its march.

"When the din of the assault reached me in my prison-tower, I knew not that the hearty British cheers I heard came from the throats of my comrades, the old Royal Scots. The stormers arrived unseen in the dark, till they were within five hundred yards of the *pettah*, which in Hindostani means a little town adjoining a fort. The gates of it, strong as they were, our soldiers carried with a wild rush, being burst open by the Royal Scots. The first man through the gap was Captain Calderwood, who pushed up the main street, driving before him an advanced picket of the enemy, which fell back into the lower fort, firing briskly with their matchlocks into the head of the column while giving way.

"Dawn came on; and all that day, till night fell, the troops maintained themselves in the *pettah*, under the command of Colonel Fraser, firing on the walls of the lower fort, against which he opened a heavy gun battery on the morning of the 19th.

"The killadar, as night fell, made preparations for a sortie, led by Sheikh Abdullah; and as all his garrison seemed to have their hands full, I began to have hope of achieving an escape to our lines, or of concealing myself somewhere till the place was—as I knew it would be—carried by storm.

"Led by the sheikh, a party of the garrison, who were all ferocious Arabs, stole down a rocky ravine into the main street of the pettah, where they were attacked and repulsed by the Royal Scots under Colonel Fraser, who was then killed by a matchlock-ball. The cheers of the British, the yells of the Arabs, the roar of the musketry as it flashed out redly, made up a horrible medley in the dark.

"Secured in a vaulted chamber, high up in the tower, and closed in by a grated door of iron, through which my keepers could see me from time to time, all hope of escape by that way was vain; but I had recently discovered that around the narrow opening which passed for a window and admitted light and air there grew from the base of the wall a strong and tough tendril, somewhat of the nature of a vine.

"Amid the darkness on the night of the sortie I crept out, and, clutching the creeper, while the hair of my head seemed to bristle up with fear lest I should fall or the plant give way, I began my descent, very carefully, for now at length there came hope with the prospect of life and liberty. While the horrible hubbub I have described was in progress, I swung myself downward, holding on by each hand in succession, till I reached the ground some forty feet below, but unhappily within the circle of the outer fort. Yet I still hoped to baffle the cruel spite of the Sheikh Abdullah and the barbarous designs of the inhuman Ghond.

"A man wounded in the sortie lay by the foot of the wall dying, and to possess myself of his matchlock and ammunition were the work and thought of a moment. I twisted his turban round my head and face; the Ghonds had already dressed me like a native. Thus my disguise was complete; and at the risk of being shot by some of our own men, I passed through the fugitives of the repulsed sortie, and ere they closed the gate, got into the main street of the pettah, and took shelter in a deserted house.

"There I remained hidden till day broke, when I found that the edifice had another occupant—one of the sortie—who had failed to regain the gate in time, and who turned out to be no other than the Sheikh Abdullah!



"I began my descent."—*Page* 120.

"Great was his astonishment to see *me* there, and stern was the joy I felt at seeing him! At last he was within my grasp—the author of all my misery and anticipations of death!

"Not a word did we exchange—we simply glared at each other, with teeth clenched and eyes flashing. He was rushing on me, with his sharp tulwar uplifted to cut me down, when the ball of the matchlock I so fortunately had whistled through his brain, and he fell dead at my feet—the last of the Pindarees!

"The sound of the explosion brought a number of my comrades rushing into the house with their bayonets fixed, and I narrowly escaped being pinned to the wall before I was recognised and brought before Captain Calderwood, who heard my story with commiseration and surprise.

"'You have not escaped an hour too soon,' said he, as he took my hand. 'This is the day of the great Ghond festival —the Feast of Duarni!'

"It was indeed so. I was safe among my comrades at last; but my face was so overgrown with hair, so wan and worn with all I had undergone, and the daily contemplation of a terrible and helpless death, that I could scarcely recognise it in the glass, and it was some little time before even my oldest friends in camp knew me. But I soon recovered, and was present when our guns eventually knocked Aseerghur to pieces; on the 17th of April the killadar surrendered, and "the Mahratta rag," as Sir John Malcolm called it, gave place to the Union Jack.

"That's my story—one of them only—for, of course, a soldier's life is so full of adventures that I could go on for long enough; but you said one story each, and discipline is

discipline, so, if you have put me down, Sailor Jack's the next man on the roll call." Soldier fell back with a salute.

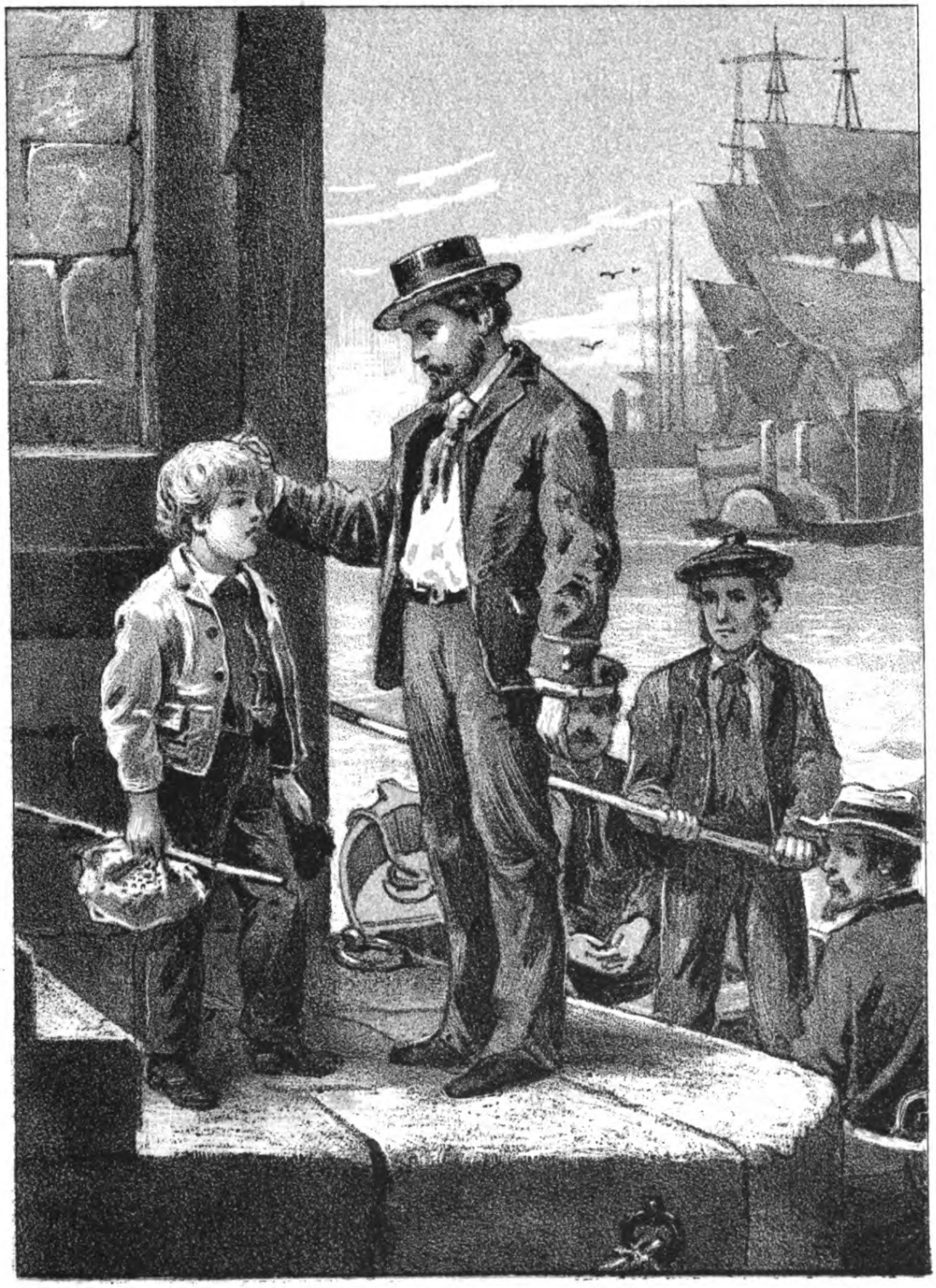
"Well," said the Sailor, hitching up his waistband, and giving a kind of shy beseeching look round to his companions, which said plainly enough, "I wish it hadn't been my turn quite yet, but if I do come to a hitch, you'll help me over it, won't you?" "Well," said he, "if so be it *has* come to my turn to speak a piece, of course I comes forward like a man; for dooty is dooty, and, as Soldier says, 'discipline is discipline,' by land or sea, all the world over. Isn't it, Tinker?"

But Tinker turned away his head without speaking, for people in the body of the hall don't like to be appealed to by the man on the platform. It was then, I think, that the Sailor felt the complete isolation of his position, but, to the honour of the British tar it must be said that he rose to the occasion. He cleared his throat, and began at once.

The Sailor's Story.

"Jim Jackson, gentlemen, is my name, England is my nation. And you can see I'm a sailor from the cut of my foresail, my battered bowsprit, and my build all over. Leastways, I hopes you can. Oh, I knows that my name sounds a bit pecooliar, and I freely confess that Jack Jimson would have been more natural and nautical, but that is no fault of mine, nor anybody else's for the matter o' that. Is it Cap'n?

"Howsomesoever, it seems I was destined for the sea, although my father was an honest farmer, and had never seen a bigger sheet of water in his life than his own mill-dam. But my mother had travelled a bit; her brother, too, was skipper of a Greenlandman, and she used to croon sea-songs



"The steward himself put his hand kindly on my little white head."
—*Page* 123.

to me, gentle and quiet-like, as she bent over my cradle, and rocked me to sleep. If I had taken after the old man, and stayed at home to plough the fields, instead of going to plough the sea, I would—well, I doubt if I'd be better off than I am now. But stay at home I couldn't, or wouldn't. Sailor must have been sown in me somehow. It must have been in the blood. Why, when I was a mere mite of a boy I owned more ships on my old dad's mill-dam than there is in all the Russian fleet; and when I stretched out another foot or two, I goes straight to the old man, and boldly axes his consent to go to sea.

"'Oh, the sea,' says he, 'is that your idea? Well, I'll sea ye.' And he gave me a thrashing that kept me quiet for a month.

"Well, he scotched the snake, but he didn't kill him, for after this I tries the mum, and you may easily guess what her answer was. So one night I makes up my mind all of a sudden like, and then I makes up a little bundle, and steals a stick of my father's, and after creeping into their little state-room, and kissing the old couple as gently as I could, not to wake them, I lifted the latch, and crept out and away. There was a curious lump in my throat that I couldn't swallow, and I think my jacket-sleeve was wet, but on I trudged for all that, and morning saw me standing at the pier-head of a sea-port town.

"The steward's beef boat was just shoving off to a great ship that lay at anchor in the sound, and the steward himself put his hand kindly on my little white head, and says he, 'Well, my wee man,' he says, 'how is it you are up so early?'

"Why, I thought he must be the captain himself, he was

dressed so neatly in his blue jacket and gilded buttons, and shiny hat. But I answered, determinedly—

"'I want to go to sea and be a sailor.'

"'John,' says he, looking down into the boat, 'can we do anything with him?'

"'Bring the little chap along, anyhow,' says the cook.

"You see they weren't so particular in them days about indentures and such. So I was taken on board, and all my life a'most I've been a sailor, ay, and what's left of me is a sailor still. But I didn't like it at first, though. I reckon nobody does. I was turned over to the cook to begin with. This knocked a deal of the romance out of me, I assure you. One can't imagine himself a hero when he's got to pare the potatoes, and empty slush and such overboard to the sharks and the gulls. I don't say, mind you, that the cook wasn't kind to me, though he kicked me a lot; but, as I might say, kicking was my lot, and I got so used to it at last, that if any day passed without my being kicked it seemed quite like a Sunday. I tumbled about a deal, too, and people were always tumbling over me, so mine was a rolling life rather. And cook, he taught me things in a queer way, but a 'ffectual enough one for all that. There is two ways o' doin' most things, a right and a wrong. When I asked him which was the right way, cook always looked serious, and told me the wrong; then, when I came to grief through it, he laffed at me. About the first day I went on dooty, after having my spell at sea-sickness, cook says to me, earnest-like—

"'Now, mind what I tells ye, Jim, always empty everything to leeward except the ash-bucket, empty that to windward.'

"I determined to remember. So, on the very next day,

up I goes with the ash-pail. There was a group o' men looking over the weather bow, and I empties the bucket just abaft o' them. I've been in sand storms since then in the desert, but I never see'd such a storm as that. In course the men were about half smothered, and so was I, for the matter o' that. But didn't they tan my rigging for me! You see, the cook's method o' teachin' was 'ffectual enough.

"Now the first time ever I went on shore in a furrin land was the turnin'-point in my history. Our ship was bound for Melbourne, and as soon's we had arrived at the Cape, we put in there to take in more coals. I'd never seen such grand hills before, nor such wild flowers anywhere, and when I asks the steward to let me go on shore with him in the beef boat, 'Surely,' he says, 'surely, Jim, and mebbe we'll make ye useful, too.'

"The glare of the sunlight alone, and the dazzlin' colours all about me as soon as I put my foot on shore, was quite enough to intoxicate a kid like me. I never felt so happy before in my life, and was pretty much astonished that the sailor as had me in tow, like, wasn't as delighted as me. I'll give him the slip, anyhow, I thinks. And so I did, and away I cruises on my own hook, enjoying myself as a boy would, but I missed my feet at last, and tumbles down a whole fleet of steps, and the next thing I remembers is waking up in bed, with a bandage round my head, and a mustard poultice all along my chest. The poultice was only for punishment, like, but never mind, punishment or not punishment, the man who placed it there was the best friend that e'er Jim Jackson had in his little life. My sea-dad I always called him; and one day, long years after I'd grown up to be a man and an A. B., I called him so to his

face, and told him before a lot o' hands that I respected him as such.

"'Indeed then, Jim,' says he, 'I'm not ashamed to own you as a sea-son.'

"'No,' says I; 'and for that matter you needn't, Doctor, for sure enough you had the seasoning of me yourself.'

"I didn't mean it as a pun, gentlemen; and I didn't see it till the Doctor laughed. But it was the truth, for as soon as my head had got better after tumbling down the fleet o' steps, the Doctor took me for his servant—half-cabin, half-loblolly boy—and mebbe I don't remember the thrashings he used to give me, whenever I managed to break a bottle or two, singe a poultice, or put salt in it. Howsomever, the Doctor made a man of me at last. Well, I fancy I wasn't cut out for a loblolly boy; physic didn't seem to suit me; leastways, the Doctor appeared to think so, for one day he ordered me aft to his cabin. In course, I thought it was to give me a peppering, as usual; but no, not this time, for he talked to me quite serious-like, and says he:—

"'Jim,' he says, 'when you fractured my phials, cracked my crystal measures, mauled the bottom out of my best mortar, mis-labelled my bottles, drank my syrup, and blamed the motion of the ship for it all, I freely forgave you after a just and proper beating; but when I find you taking to doctoring the men on your own irresponsible hook; when I find you about to administer an ounce of oxalic acid to one poor fellow instead of Epsom salts, and about to give a wine-glassful of solution of arsenic to another, in lieu of tonic bitters, then, Jim, I think the matter begins to soar beyond the regions of jocularity'—them's his very words, gentlemen—'and assume a somewhat serious aspect. Mind, Jim, I

don't say that the arsenic wouldn't have cured the man even more effectually than the tonic bitters. I'm casting no slur on your professional ability, Jim; I've no ill-feeling in the matter, nor am I jealous, Jim; but as too many cooks spoil the broth, it only remains with me to—as gently as possible —kick you on deck.'

"And on deck I was kicked accordingly.

"But the Doctor didn't give me up for all that. Not he; and mind you he was every bit as good a sailor as any captain ever I sailed with; and he taught me to splice, and to steer, to box the compass, and sail a ship.

"Well, the time flew on. We made many a voyage together, the Doctor and I; and somehow or other I never felt perfectly at home on the sea unless we were shipmates. When he was on board I was happy, when he wasn't the voyage always felt irksome; and I was never sorry when we were in dock again, and it was all over. Not that I seed very much of my sea-dad, you know; that is, leastways, not to speak to; for days, ay, and weeks too, would sometimes slip away without his taking a single bit o' notice of me, unless it might be just a simple 'Well, Jim, old man' as he passed, while I was a-takin' my trick at the wheel. But I saw him all the same, and every day, too, on the quarter-deck, and it was as good as an extra tot o' rum to me to observe how much he was respected by all hands, from the captain downwards. Even when I didn't see him I heard him. You'd have to be a goodly ways down to leeward not to hear that voice o' his, whether it were laughing he was or only talking."

Here the sailor paused for just a moment or two, to fidget it a bit as it were. There seemed to be a knot of some kind

or other to get over, and he had to give a lurch to leeward, and a roll to windward, and a bit of a hitch to his waistband.

"I aint," he continued at last, "no kind o' a skollard, and I'm not much of a fellow to spin a yarn; but what I does tell you I'd like to do so plainly and distinctly. I want to give you a clear impression—ahem! them's the words of my sea-dad, the Doctor, so don't you heave ahead with the idea that his laugh were a loud, a harsh, or a horse laugh. No, it were the pleasantest moosic you could listen to. It did you good to hear him laugh; it went thrilling through you straight away to *your* heart just as it came from *his*, and made you happier as if by magic. It did you good to see him laugh; good to see the laugh beginning to form around the lips, then going rippling all over his face, dimpling his cheeks, and shedding sunshine round his eyes, before it broke out into anything you could hear. You'd be bound to laugh too with him, I can tell you; and I don't care how much in the blues you might be, you'd feel better after you'd been five minutes in that Doctor's company.

"'Ah, well,' you'd say to yourself, 'it isn't such a very gloomy world after all.'

"Yes, gentlemen, there must have been magic in my sea-dad's smile, 'cause a plainer face you never saw in your life, not to call it ugly. No, you couldn't call it that. His nose, if it were anything at all, was a bit of a snub, and his face all over was just the colour of a well-baked flower-pot. His eyes were as blue as—well, I won't go far to liken them—you see that forget-me-not yonder, just as blue as that, only a trifle more bleached-looking.

"'A rough old sea-dog of a doctor,' you'll say. Mebbe,

gentlemen, mebbe, but rough and right, else every one wouldn't have liked him.

"'Oh, isn't he nice!' This is a remark I was quite used to hearing from the lady passengers; and 'Extraordinary well-read man,' this from the gentlemen. I can't say what the children thought of him; but I know the babies would start off crowing whenever they saw him, and it was nothing to see the Doctor dancing all round the decks with a little boy or girl on his shoulder, and three or four more chasing them. But then the fun he made with them wasn't forced fun, it was natural, and everybody felt that when he was having a game of romps with a toddling youngster, he was for the time being just as much a child as it was.

"I suppose if I were to say my sea-dad studied the ladies you would believe me. But I won't say anything o' the sort. Bless you, he didn't need to study them, he'd studied them long ere I knew him—studied them, and knew them thoroughly. He was most impartial, though, in his attentions. He wouldn't linger a minute longer by the lounge-chair of a young lady, simply 'cause she could prattle pretty, or had a lovely face or hair that caught the sunbeams. Sometimes I thought it was quite the reverse. You know, gentlemen, that at sea beauty is just as much worshipped as it is on shore. The stern sex crowd round a pretty girl; they talk their best, and look their best, and, I may say, strut their best before her; and a plain quiet bit of a lass the men are only just decently civil to. But if my sea-dad saw any girl o' this sort bein' kind o' neglected, he just seemed to single her out for his special attentions. He would look after her at dinner, mebbe get her to sit beside him, and give her his arm on deck; walk her about, and keep her laughing, till

she'd come at last to think there was no life in the world like a life on the ocean wave. I've seen ladies, though, and pretty ones too, that would like to make a slave of my sea-dad; that would have liked to have had him always dangling around them. These sort of girls could do with a deal of attention when the Doctor was the donor; and sometimes I used to think that if he'd said 'there now,' as he would to a child, and given 'em a bit of a kiss, there wouldn't have been much offence.

"That's the kind o' man my sea-dad was. I'm a sort o' particular in describin' him, as the story hinges on him so to speak. And if ever you happens to be goin' out to Australia or America, or ——, or ——"

"Botany Bay," suggested Thief.

"Well, or Botany Bay either," said the sailor; "and you meets him, then make much of him—there be few like he.

"Now, I'll tell you how it was that I lost sight of him for three whole years, and where he hove in sight again. You see, we'd taken out the *Anemone* with passengers and a mixed cargo to Sydney, and we were to take back a cargo as far as the Cape, then if anything turned up there we were to take it, if not, come straight to England. Something did turn up at the Cape—they wanted to send troops to the West Indies, and they wanted a ship to send them in; and so the *Anemone* was chartered, did the voyage like a good 'un, and landed the soldiers, and filled up with sugar, and prepared to return to Old England. Well, just as the blue peter was hoisted, the Doctor he comes off in a bum-boat, with an old yellow woman a-rowing of him. You see he wasn't proud, not he.



THE DOCTOR COMING ABOARD.

"'Hang alongside a bit, Sally,' he says to the old girl; 'it is probable I'll come back with you.'

"'Ah, Goodness bless ye for good then, my lammie,' says the old lady. 'I'll wait, for true.'

"So away goes the Doctor up to the Captain straight. He was standin' by the binnacle smoking.

"'Right glad to see ye, Doctor,' says the Captain; 'we're off to-morrow.'

"'Well,' says the Doctor, 'you don't want *me* for the rest of the voyage; I'm going to take French leave, and stop here.'

"'What!' cried the Captain, in some astonishment. You're surely not going to run away and leave us.'

"'Troth, and I am then,' says the Doctor.

"'But what shall we do for want of a surgeon?'

"The Doctor laughed.

"'Why, man alive,' he says, 'you've nothing on board but sugar and molasses. Sugar doesn't want a surgeon, no more does molasses.'

"Then the Doctor looked serious all at once, and says he—

"'I'm going to stop,' says he; 'it's just like this: cholera has broken out among the blacks down the country, those Spanish doctors have all run away, like the cowards they are, and the poor creatures are dying by hundreds. I've gone to the governor, and volunteered my humble services; they've been gladly accepted, and, with God's kind help, I'll do my level best to stay the plague.'

"'Then, good-bye,' says the Captain, shakin' hands with my sea-dad; 'and may Providence protect you, boy.'

"I noticed there was moisture in the Captain's eyes as he spoke; but then the smoke might have got in them.

"'Good-bye, Jim,' cried the Doctor, waving his hand to me.

"So the Doctor got over the side into the crackly bit of a bum-boat, and I saw no more of him for three years, as I told you. The Doctor himself never told me how he had got on down the country among the blacks; but I heard it all afterwards.

"Have ever you been in a plague-stricken city, gentlemen?—then pray Providence you ne'er may be. But I have; and I ain't likely to forget it either. It was out in Malta; It was in sixty something—I forgets now—when the cholera broke out. No, not that 'xackly, 'cause it had broken out afore I got there; and I was popped into quarantine soon's ever I landed. They didn't keep me long; what was the good o' lockin' the stable when the steed were stolen; but bein' in quarantine is worse than bein' in prison, or, as I might say, it's just the same with this difference, a man in prison—not as I've ever been that man, mind you—gets everything clean and nice, and there's nothing to pay; but in quarantine you gets everything bad and dirty, and they charges you two prices for it, so it's all in favour o' gaol. Well, please don't begin to fidget and cough, gentlemen. I'm not going to favour you with an account of Malta under a cloud: it would take a cleverer man than poor Jim Jackson to tell ye how this city, that was once so gay, was now deserted; that your footsteps rang in the empty streets as you walked, just as though it were midnight, that every shop was shut, that every blind was drawn, that I walked for half a mile without meeting a soul, save two women—they were hurrying along with shawls drawn round their faces and over their mouths, as if to filter the death from the air they breathed; that there wasn't a sound to be heard in the stricken town, save now and then a bell, or the

solemn notes of the funeral march as the soldiers buried their dead; that people dropped down even coming over the threshold of the house of God; that the very dogs who snuffed around ran on a little ways, staggered, fell, and died.

"I had business to do, and I wasn't going to shirk it; I wouldn't even take an extra glass o' grog, as some advised, 'cause it would smell like Dutch courage, yet I wondered if my time would come. I was wondering like this to myself as I was a-passing down the street one day, when all at once like, I felt myself turning queer. My head swam, and down I'd have dropped, as sure as the clock, had not a couple of men, who were just coming round a corner, caught a-hold of me: Maltese men, I afterwards learned, and hospital attendants too.

"'Drink, drink!' they said to me. 'Drink quick, plenty mooch quick.'

"I drank something, and next thing I remember is awaking in hospital. Oh, the fearful, fearful night I passed, principally on the floor, rolling and groaning! I had kind attention, though, and in the morning was in bed, warm, but unable to lift a little finger. But one thing I remember: the nurses coming on tiptoe, and peeping fearfully into the ward, *to look at my corpse.*

"It is for the Doctor's sake, gentlemen, I'm telling you this. I want you to know him as he was, a brave, good man. I want to show you, if the plain language o' truth can show you, that a man must have a lot o' pluck to brave death as my sea-dad did. They will tell you in the island to this day—white men'll tell you, and black men, with snow-white hair will tell you—how bravely and well the Doctor fought the cholera day and night, night and day, for months; how

he organised a troop of nurses, and how, by his help, the plague was stayed, and the white population saved; and how at last he himself fell ill at the end of it all, and how with that strong constitution of his he battled with death for days and days, and was triumphant in the end. And they'd tell you, too, how that but for old Sally, he would indeed have died. This poor creature, when she heard of his illness, forsook her bum-boat, forsook her family, and went, as she said she would, 'Down to de coontry to nurse her lammie, and be a mudder to him!'

"It was funny that I should have been thinking about my sea-dad on the very morning I met him, looking as hale and hearty as ever; looking as if he'd been on shore all the time, living on oysters and bottled stout, instead o' sailin' the seas and takin' pot-luck, as sailors have to do.

"Well, I tell ye the truth, gentlemen, that at the very moment I was turning the corner into the street down which the doctor was careering along with all sail set, so to speak, and humming a tune to himself as he was wont to, I, Jim Jackson, was fairly on my beam ends, with precious little chance o' righting again.

"At the moment I met the Doctor my hands were deep in a pair of empty pockets, my chin was on my breast, and my head ached like billy-O!

"'Llo!' I cries, running stem on to him.

"'Hullo!' says he. 'Why, Jim Jackson?'

"'What, Doctor!' cries I, 'my old sea-dad!'

"'Ah! Jim, my boy,' he says, so hearty like, 'tip us your flipper. Down on your luck, are ye?'

"'I'm a kind o' takin' aback at present,' says I, drawing my sleeve across the bridge of my nose.

"He'd never let a go of my hand, and he justs lugs me along like, talking away all the time.

"A Seidy boy eatin' a bit o' sugar-cane has always seemed to me the beau idea' of contentment and bliss. Had you seen my face ten minutes after I met the Doctor, and then had a look at the Seidy boy a-eatin' of his sugar-cane, you'd have said at once that the happiness was all on my side o' the dish, and that the savage wasn't a circumstance to Jim.

"Headache went all away at once, like, with joy at meetin' my old sea-dad, and then I listened to his long, long yarn, and then I told him mine, and then he luffs up sharp, and 'Jim,' says he, 'do ye want a ship?'

"I pulled my pockets out, and held them so.

"'That'll do, Jim,' he says, laughing, 'you convey your sentiments most expressively.'

"'On conditions, of course,' says I, 'that you're going in her too.'

"'To be sure I am, Jim,' says he.

"'Well, now,' says I, 'you can tell us all about the craft, and where she is bound, and this, that, and t'other, for I declare to you, Doctor, I long to get hold of a rope again.'

"'That I can,' says my sea-dad, 'and it won't take me long either. I don't know anything about her sea-going qualities, 'cause she's a new one, but she looks a clipper. About 2,000 tons, or thereabouts, sail or steam, belongs to McKnot and Co., of Glasgow, well timbered, well rigged, and well found. Haven't seen the crew. She sails in two weeks. Passengers and cargo to touch at the Cape and the Comoro islands, then right away for Bombay.'

"'Well,' says I, 'I'm in luck's way for once, and I wouldn't change places with the king.'

"After this, it was all business with me. The doctor himself took me to the agents—it were Southampton we were in—and at his recommendation I was engaged at once. I hardly think I would have been on my own, for I wasn't much to look at just then. But I got my advance, and, next day, had you met me on the same street, you would have said it was quite another Jim Jackson you were looking at, so smart was my rig, ay, and for the matter o' that, so tight and so trim was the man that wore it. I felt bigger and prouder than I had done for many a day.

"I was on board the *Highland Queen* a whole week before the blue peter was hoisted, for there was a deal o' cargo to be got in, and it was 'hoist away' and 'lower away' all day and all night too; but we were all ready to receive the passengers when they did arrive all of a bunch, as they always do. The heavy baggage was struck down to the hold the day before, and the passengers stowed as soon as they came off—that is, they got the number of their cabins from the purser, and set out on a kind of wild-goose chase to hunt for them. We got up steam at last, and up the anchor too, and before sunset it was precious little of England was in sight from the quarter-deck, only just a long white line a-top of the blue of the sea, and next morning there was nothing but horizon all around us.

"I saw more of the passengers and mixed more with them on this voyage than I had ever done on any other. 'Cause why, they were a hand short in the saloon, and too well manned on deck, and bein' a smartish chap, that a short blue jacket with brass buttons would suit all to pieces, I was offered

a berth as steward, and had one side of a table and three or four cabins told off for me to attend upon. And the change, too, was a very agreeable one, not as I minded doin' duty in any weather on deck; still, it is a kind o' nice to turn into your hammock with no fear o' bein' turned out again to reef topsails, just as you're going comfortably off to sleep.

"For days and weeks we could hardly have told without lookin' overboard that we weren't in harbour, so steady was the good ship, and so gentle the motion. Fiddles on the tables were never needed, and the swing-tables overhead, with their coloured glasses, were pretty as ornaments, that was all. We crossed the Bay of Biscay, that the ladies dreaded to look at, as steadily as if we'd been in a mill-pond.

"Our captain was an old man of sixty odd, with snow-white eyebrows, beard, and hair, but with a hale red face of his own, and a pleasant word and smile for all.

"'Three years ago,' I heard him tell a passenger one day, 'I retired from the service, and determined to settle down for life. I took a farm, too, and went in for sheep and cattle in fine style; but six months of this kind of thing was more than enough for me. I took another ship, and I hope to die at sea.'

"Mebbe the life and soul of the saloon was poor Mr. Bryant and his lovely young wife. I dunno, gentlemen, as I can describe him to you, for, as to appearance, there wasn't anything very taking about him. He was good-looking enough, but thoroughly Irish all over; rather below the middle height, and speaking with a brogue that made everything he said ring with a kind of silveryness that it isn't in me to imitate.

"Nobody in the saloon told better stories than Mr. Bryant. He was first at all kinds of fun on deck. Not that the fun

was very furious, but it was the zest with which he entered into everything that made him such a favourite. It seemed to me like, that, ruined man though he was, he was just brimful of happiness and jollity himself, and was fond of scattering a little of it around him wheresomever he went or wheresomever he was. And that's the sort of people you always want to have in a passenger ship, a few of them, I mean, just to give a kind of seasoning to the others.

"'Och!' he cried, one beautiful moonlight night, after we'd been about two weeks out, and the passengers were gathered in groups on the quarter-deck. 'Och! ladies and gintlemen, we're too quiet entirely. Let us get up a concert, and, talking of concerts, Freddie, my dear'—Freddie was his son—'run down for your father's concertina. Now, gintlemen, I feel sure that every one of you is willing to conthribute his mite to the amusement of the company, and sure it's meself will begin.'

"And begin he did, with 'There's a bhog in ould Oirland, where Pat first drew his breath.'

"Now Mr. Bryant wasn't much of a singer, nor much of a player, but he went at it so willingly that his example was catching. In two minutes everybody was trying to remember what song they'd sing when their turn came, and the evening passed so merrily away that they were all astonished when four bells struck.

"Mr. Bryant's two 'younkers,' as he called them, were Matty and Fred, six and seven years of age—Matty, charming, sweet, and sunny-haired; Freddie, modest and fair, with sweet blue eyes that grew larger whenever you spoke to him, and seemed to wonder at all he saw. Mrs. Bryant herself, gentlemen, looked but a child, and a sweet child too, with

her delicate features, her fair face, and her little shell ears.

"Sailor-men, Mister Parley, are seldom romantic in their ways o' looking at things; they haven't much of what my sea-dad used to call the 'fire of genus;' they'd mostly tell ye they hadn't time for any such nonsense as poetry and such. Oh, Jack likes a song as well as anybody in the world, but he prefers to have it made for him, and he isn't ill to please either, just anything with a little bit of go in it and a roaring chorus. It is all very well for your long-shore chaps to imagine that yonder middy in the maintop is gazing over the blue sea, and dreaming of home. He is gazing over the blue sea as much as you like, but he is wondering if there will be enough plum pudding on Sunday to go twice round. Howsomedever, a-leaning over the bow of the *Highland Queen*, and gazing landwards as we steamed up the salt-water lake called Simon's Bay, I really couldn't help wishing I was a poet for once in a way, or an artist, at least, if it were only just to sketch a little bit of that bold mountain shore, the blue of the sea, the greens and browns and the purple and crimson of the hills, the white town nestling beneath the rocks, and the golden sands beyond; everything near us standing out bold and clear, everything at a distance a kind o' losin' itself in a purple haze. There isn't such another panorama in all the wide world, and I didn't wonder at the passengers not saying much about it; they liked to look at it—drink it all in, as it were, in silence.

"But as the anchor is let go, and the monster chains pop rattling out with a sound that shakes the ship as if she were a wenerable old clothes basket, poesy—that's the word—poesy and romance were all forgotten, and grumbling and growling were the order of the day. It would be two hours at least

before they got on shore. Oh bother those boatmen; bother pratique, and a clean bill of health; and bother those idiots with bills of warning about poisonous toad-fish—who wanted to eat toad-fish? bother everything and everybody; and so on *ad liberty*, as my sea-dad used to say.

"When the *Highland Queen* sailed away again from the Cape, with her head nor'ard and east, there was first a silence, and then a kind of a gloom settled down on the ship. You see there were so many empty places now; the purser that day told fewer funny stories; the captain was less amiable to the two or three ladies left; sunny-haired Matty looked sad, and Freddie's blue eyes were bigger and rounder than ever. My sea-dad the Doctor had 'bent his foul-weather gear,' as he called it—he had donned a heavy pilot jacket. I wasn't surprised after this to know the glass was going tumbling down, and to hear the boatswain's pipe every minute on deck. The breeze had died away entirely, and sails were being clued, there was no knowing where the wind would come from, but with a quick falling glass come it would, and mebbe with a vengeance too.

"I could tell that our luck had turned.

"Coming events, they say, cast their shadows before. The shadow had come, or it came that night, and it never, never left us to the end. I have a queer memory, gentlemen, it has always served me well, and if I'd time I could describe to you, as far as words could do it, the terrible storm that burst upon us that night, so that you might almost imagine yourself on board the *Highland Queen*, standing on her wet and slippery decks, clinging to her wet and slippery cordage, and ducking under her weather bulwarks as the white seas flashed over her; the thunder drowning the roar of the storm through

the rigging, the lightning playing and quivering close over us every moment and revealing everything; men's pale faces, masts and shrouds. When it ceased for a second or two, our eyes seemed at first filled with boiling blood, then all was blindness, all was blackness.

"Ours was a good ship, or she ne'er would have stood that storm; she'd have foundered and gone down like an old tea-kettle, for it raged for days. The bits of canvas we put up to steady her went off next moment, as our steward expressed it, 'just like a dozen of soda-water;' our bulwarks were sadly splintered, green seas swept most of our boats away, ay, and swept the decks, and demolished the deck cabins, and drowned more than one of our poor men. For three weeks after the weather was simply this: gale after gale of wind, with dirty weather between. We got a kind o' used to it at last. We lived below, almost in the dark, a kind of water-rat's life; and were glad to eat what we could get and when we could get it.

"The weather did moderate at last though, but we had been blown a long way out of our course and reckoning, and it would be some time before we could make up our leeway. What made matters worse was that we were short of coals; when we left the Cape we'd barely enough to take us as far as Johanna in the Comoro Islands. Here we were to leave a new Consul, and we'd get some coals from the Government stores there. It was just like swapping the Consul for coals; and no bad exchange either.

"A clear sky and a calm sea at last, just enough wind to fill the sails, and it was fair too; so the few cabin passengers we had came on deck again; the carpenters set to work, making good repairs, and everything seemed to be going on jolly once more.

Even the Doctor laid aside his foul-weather gear, and appeared at breakfast in white and blue, looking all over as fresh as apple blossom. Now, few on board took so much notice of the Doctor as I did; that was only natural, you'll allow. I could read his face just as easily as I could the barometer, and I couldn't help seeing that there was a kind of absent-mindedness about him that day when he came down below. He didn't sit down on his usual seat, but right away over at the other end of the saloon, and he beckoned me towards him.

"'Jim,' he said, with a smile that didn't curl up round his eyes as usual, 'Jim, we've been shipmates together for a good many years, off and on, haven't we?'

"'Look here, sea-dad,' I said—and I took the liberty of seating myself, that I might look more straight and earnest-like into his eyes—'look here, sir, there is no need for a preface. We are in danger of some kind, whatever it is, and you want to rely on me for something. I can see it all in your face. Tell me, sir, bid me, order me, Jim Jackson's your servant—slave, if you like—and he'll do any mortal thing for you that you tell him, as long as he has life in his body.'

"'God bless you, Jim, I do rely on you, and the danger is this: that long, low, black raking craft that we sighted after breakfast is ——'

"'A pirate,' I said, interrupting him.

"'Yes, Jim, or I'm mistaken. The captain thinks so too. She shows no bunting, she does whatever we do, in fact she is following us. We have been trying to edge away from her, but she keeps steadily on after us. The captain and mate both agree with me.'

"'We are a steamer, sir,' I began.

"'Ah, Jim! yes; and we burned our last coals last night. And she is a steamer, too; your pirates of the nineteenth century, Jim, may be few, but they are terrible compared to what they were of old. They don't fight in sailing-tubs now-a-days, nor use the weapons of a former age. I tell you, Jim, that if that craft can board us, it will be all up with every one of us. There may be no cutting of throats in cold blood, no walking the plank, or any such stagey style of going to work. They'll rob us as soon as we surrender; they'll take everything worth taking out of us, then they'll stand off and sink us with their guns. That is the modern style of pirate warfare. They don't want our lives, they don't care for murder, it is our goods they want; but they'll sink us for their own safety's sake. And, oh, Jim! my heart bleeds to think of sweet young Mrs. Bryant and those darling children!'

"I tell ye, gentlemen, it made my heart bleed too, for, barring the Doctor and myself, the Bryant family were just then the only people in the saloon; poor Mrs. Bryant was quietly sewing, but casting many a fond-like look at her husband. He had the girl on one knee, and the boy on the other, and was yarning to them, and telling them stories so ridiculous, though interesting, that the young wife was fain, every now and then, to lay down her work and laugh as cheerily as the children themselves.

"I never thought of my own danger, nor, I'm sure, did the Doctor of his, but a chill seemed to steal all round my heart, and almost take my reason away.

"'What can we do? What can I do?'

"*Hursh—rsh—rsh—rsh.* 'Twas a shot flying past the open ports on the weather side.

"'They're at it!' cried the Doctor, jumping quickly up. 'We are going to fight at the last, Jim,' he continued, hastily; 'but first we're going to try to run away. They're getting up steam now; they're putting hams on the fire, and breaking up the bulk-heads for the wood. Your place will be by me at the last.'

"He squeezed my hand, and ran off to talk to the frightened wife and children of Bryant. What he said to them I never knew, but presently he led them past me, and out forward to the ladies' cabin; and, oh! so white and fearful they looked.

"The preparations for the fight, if fight there was to be, were simple and efficient like. The magazine was got up, and all the rifles on board, and all the pistols, axes, knives, and boarding-pikes. In addition to this, there were the two signal guns—they looked to me as though they'd been captured from the Scots at the battle o' Pinkie, and hadn't been fired since.

"We had got out o' the reach o' the pirates' guns as soon as we got up steam. Sails didn't help us much, if any, so they were got in, and away we went, increasing our distance from the foe every bell; it was quite evident we had the pull on her as far as speed went, and if we could only crack on till nightfall we might slip away in the dark, for we were well up in the tropics, and the night's just about as dark as the inside of a coal-tank when the lid 's on. I didn't see very much o' the Doctor; but I saw him *often* enough, sometimes popping down forward, and sometimes aft, and I knew it was comforting the women-folks he was, and the poor children. The day wore on. A Yankee passenger was spending it in his own way, at least in a way he seemed to like—he was grinding cutlasses, and

oiling the locks o' rifles. It struck me he rather gloried in the prospect of a fight. There was the noise of hammers and saws at work all day; it was actually gutting the ship they were, to find wood to keep the fires alight and the steam well up.

"Dinner-time came at last.

"'Showing him a clean pair of heels, aint we, Captain?' said the Doctor, rubbing his hands, and laughing as he entered the saloon.

"The Captain laughed too; but I could see there was precious little laughing at the hearts of either.

"I never saw a dinner pass off so dull like.

"After it were over Mr. Bryant took his little anxious wife on deck. The pirate was miles and miles astern. Half an hour afterwards the great red sun sank in a blood-red sea, and a leaden hue stole over all the face of the water.

"'Thank God!' said the Doctor, piously.

"Poor Mrs. Bryant fell into her husband's arms, and sobbed like a child.

"The danger seemed over when darkness fell. Seemed to me the pirate would be sure to give up the chase. Had there been wind now, the right thing to have done would have been to douse all the lights, bank the fires, set sail, and alter our course. There wasn't, though, and there was where our ill-luck lay. I turned in about ten, after just one turn on deck, and a look astern, where, far away in the blackness, I could see a queer uncertain light, that I knew only too well was the glimmer from the pirate's funnel. I didn't mean to sleep, but tryin' to keep awake soon sent me off.

"Sailors, gentlemen, are queer men, they'll sleep through a thunder-storm, or with guns roaring on the deck above, if

they've gone to sleep expecting either o' these things to happen. I went to sleep with the rattle of the revolving screw under my ear. A silence more awful than death itself awoke me. All was quiet, save the roar of the idle steam.

"We had broken down!

"Two bells in the morning watch rang out sharp and clear. Two bells, ay, and day would soon be breaking, and then——

"In the short twilight that preceded the sunrise we were all on deck, peering anxiously across the leaden-grey sea. Yes, yonder she was; yonder was our fate, coming steadily, steadily on to us, while we, as some poet or other says, gentlemen, lay—

'As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.'

"I reckon," said the Ploughboy, "that were right fine, matie."

The Sailor only just looked at him, he seemed neither to see nor hear, and appeared speaking more to himself than to the company.

"On came that pirate ship, on she came and up, hand over hand, but no soul could we see on board save the fiend at the wheel; *he* was armed, his rifle was slung over his black, naked chest, a cutlass hung by his side, and a knife was in his teeth. We knew what this meant—it meant that as soon as their vessel grazed the side of ours it would be all hands to board, they would pour all their fury on our decks. She wasn't two hundred yards from us now.

"But we weren't going to let her have all her own way; if she even ran into us and sunk us it would be much the same, for we felt we were doomed; it wasn't fighting for our lives

we'd soon be, no, only sellin' them as dear as could be, so down went that man at the wheel. Another took his place, and down went he. Then the pirate stopped ship, and we could see them hastily throwing up a barricade in front of the binnacle. This was done under as rapid a fire from the *Highland Queen* as we knew how to give them. Even the old Pinkie guns were brought to bear upon them.

"But in spite of us the barricade was built, and then once more the pirate began to advance towards us.

"'Stand by, men, to repel boarders!' cried the captain.

"We gave one wild British cheer, then every man Jack of us flew to axe, and pike, and sword. It couldn't have been five minutes ere her sides were rasping against ours, but it seemed to me an hour, and a long, long hour too. I looked along our line, we lay under the bulwarks, and could see the anxious wild-cat glances on every countenance—they looked like tigers about to spring.

"'She 's alongside, up men, up!' And up they sprang. And none too soon. It seemed a troop of fiends we had to repel. Black, every man of them, with wild red eyes, heads kerchief-bound, stripped to the waist, and shining with cocoa-nut oil. For a few minutes fortune seemed to favour us—twice, thrice, we beat them back, but soon they swarmed. There must have been one hundred pirate warriors. And now they carry us, and the fight is raging on deck, round the capstan, and round the masts; in the scuppers men are rolling together in a death tussle, even up on top of the hatches men are locked together struggling like wild beasts. Oh! it is a fearful sight, and the shouts and the groans, the wild oaths and the curses, I think I hear them now. It is but little of any battle that a man can see; but that

little lasts in his memory for a lifetime. One glance aft shows me this. It shows me the Doctor and Captain fighting as surely men ne'er fought before. They are dealing death, it seems, at every blow. But now the Doctor is pulled down from behind, and a giant form stands over him, and dashes upwards the cutlass that is aimed at his neck.

"'Hold!' he cries, 'Hold!' in a voice that rings out loud and clear, and is heard high over the din of the battle. He waves his sword as he speaks, and as if it were a spell he had uttered, there is silence fore and aft, broken only by the heartrending moans of the wounded and dying.

"The Doctor and the pirate captain stand face to face, and I creep up towards them feeling as in a dream.

"'Master!' cries the pirate.

"'Lamberto Matteeas!' the Doctor says, in sad, slow tones, 'you here! You here engaged in such dreadful work! Speak! explain!'

"'That is easy,' said the terrible black, but bold as he was he almost quailed before the Doctor's calm, stern eye. 'In Jamaica you white men bad use the black. Black must live, they rise up and kill the white, then the white take revenge and shoot us and hang us, they spare neither women nor old men. The place is not fit to live in, and I leave it in this ship."

"'Which you stole?'

"'Which I took,' said the fellow.

"'And you have turned pirate. Your hands are red even now with innocent blood. Oh, Lamberto Matteeas!'

"There was no answer.

"'Lamberto,' continued my sea-dad, 'you know what I did for you and yours.'



A LULL IN THE STRIFE.

"'Good master, yes,' said the pirate.

"'I need not recount all I did for you in cholera times, when every white man had turned his back on you and your people. Lamberto, you know you owe me more than life.'

"'And now you'd have me spare yours?' said Lamberto.

"'I'd have you spare me and mine; I'd have you take yourself back to your ship, call off your crew, and leave us to reach a port in peace, if indeed we ever can.'

"The pirate leant for a moment on his sword as if thinking. Then—

"'Will you swear that when you report yourself in a British port you will not mention names? that you will not say the captain of the pirate is Lamberto Matteeas, the once notorious chief of the insurgents of Baronto bush?'

"'Lamberto, I swear.'

"You've seen, gentlemen, the gradual clearin' away o' a summer thunderstorm, the black clouds rolling away to leeward, leaving nothing behind them but peace and sunshine. A peace like this settled down on our ship a'most as soon as the pirate called off his men, and retreated to his own ship. The decks were cleared of all signs o' the recent 'ffray, the poor fellows who had lost their lives were buried quiet and respectable-like the same night, and the wounded were placed in the sick-bay.

"The Doctor was somewhat late o' comin' in to dinner; but, when he did come, he was just the same old pleasant-smilin', rough-and-right sea dog of a doctor I'd always known.

"'Heigho!' he said, 'so that little scrimmage is over.'

"'And thanks to you,' said the grey-haired Captain, rising to shake hands with him.

"Of course Mr. Bryant must do the same, ay, and Mrs. Bryant; and there were tears in her blue eyes as she did so that I well knew the meaning of.

"Sunny-haired Matty, and Freddie with the wondering eyes, must needs put up their faces for a kiss, and Freddie said in a whisper—loud enough though for everybody to hear—'Doctor, papa says you're a brick!'

"I needn't tell you how pleased I was to see my sea-dad made a hero of.

"When speakin' about the pirate that evening, the Doctor said—

"'Ah! well, you do find such things occasionally.'

"'Such as what, Doctor?' inquired the Captain.

"'Grateful patients,' says the Doctor, with a smile.

"'That Lamberto Matteeas,' continues my sea-dad, 'though a black man, was a promising young planter in the West Indies at the time I lived in the bush. His was a bad case of cholera. I never saw a worse. He said he'd never forget me, and you see he didn't.'

"A bit o' wind was all we wanted now, and it came that night too; and in three days more we were anchored inside the reef off Johanna. We stopped there for more'n a week, coalin', makin' good our damages, and recruitin' our health; for a wilder, a more bootiful and bracin'—as the Doctor called it—island there doesn't exist, leastways Jim Jackson never saw it yet. The Doctor had been here before, and could show the Bryants all about. I met the five one evening as I was comin' down through the lovers' lane as leads from the Consul's house to the sea-beach; my sea-dad was chasin' big bright butterflies wi' Matty and Fred, and the Bryants were linkin' along and lookin' on. I'm much mistaken if they

weren't both a-thinkin' how kind Providence had been to us all.

"Three weeks arter that we landed at the Apollo Bundah, in Bombay. And there ends Jim Jackson's yarn, Mr. Parley, sir, and he makes his bow, and hopes the youngsters will like it."

The Sailor had scarcely let the last words of his narrative fall from his lips, when the Rich Man stepped a little forward from the line of his companions, and gracefully flourishing his silken handkerchief, related his story in slow pompous accents, very different to those in which the other personages had spoken.

The Rich Man's Story.

"The curious order in which we are ranged—most inexplicable and unbecoming, I may say in passing—has deprived you until now, Mr. Peter, from hearing a history which, were it weighed on its own merits, ought to have taken precedence of all the others. You wonder, no doubt, and with good reason, to find me, a man of weight"—here he laid one hand on his embroidered waistcoat, letting his jewelled fingers play carelessly with the huge golden links of his watch-chain, while he bowed low, as if to say, "You, I know, understand me, Mr. Parley"—"in such a—ahem—distinguished company. This ancient fraternity had the friendliness"—something that the Rich Man said in an undertone escaped my ear, but it struck me as sounding very like "Save me from my friends"—"and good-will towards me to propose me as one of their number. The advantages described to me were a powerful inducement, for at that time I was thinking that I required a wife, having come into possession of a handsome fortune,

which I found gave my friends and tradespeople and household so much concern on my behalf that they were trying their utmost, and with tolerable success, sir, to relieve me of such a burden. Now, as I could not agree with them on this point, and found it necessary to chastise, and snub, and hoodwink these very busy and interested individuals, I came to the conclusion, sir, that a lady who could do all this for me, and leave me in ease and comfort, would be a highly valuable acquisition, but on looking round me I saw nothing likely to suit my requirements.

"While I was walking in my meadows one day I was accosted by a shabby, but no doubt most excellent personage, whose name is, as we know, 'Tinker.' He informed me that he belonged to a society very much patronised by ladies and youthful maidens of every rank and degree; that its members, limited to a select few, had, so to speak, the pick of the civilised world in the matter of taking a wife, for they were in constant request. There was one vacancy, and already two candidates had applied for it, one a man of undeniable birth and breeding, described simply as Gentleman, which you will readily admit was very incomplete; for, as all the world knows, he may have been as rich as Crœsus or as poor as a church mouse, and pray what good is a gentleman without any means? The other candidate was a person called an Apothecary—very good in his way, but one of those fellows who make a great show, keep a carriage and horses, but have to work day and night to pay for them. Well, Mr. Parley, these two were already put up for the vacant place; and I, agreeing with Tinker that Rich Man ought to be better than either, consented to include my name. But, you will hardly credit it, my right to undisturbed possession is constantly disputed, and

many of the youthful maidens give an unblushing preference to the 'Gentleman,' who, mark you, Mr. Parley, is most likely as poor as a church mouse, or the ''Pothecary,' who works like a slave and hasn't a penny put by. Such, sir, is the taste of the soft sex, and by your leave, Mr. Parley, very soft they are. But you will no doubt wonder why, after such gross indignity, I did not retire altogether. That is just what I would desire, but I find that I am already wedged in between Mr. Sailor and Poor Man in such a manner that I cannot do so. I am stuck fast here, though I am not brought forward more than a third as many times as either the Tinker, the Tailor, or even the Thief. You, Mr. Parley, I rejoice to think, had the good taste to mention my name, and I am delighted to make your acquaintance, for I have said over and over again, 'Now, if a man of letters, a real story-teller, would only summon us, we could tell him our history and have it spread as far as our names are known. I wished to have my unfair and undignified position clearly explained, for I feel assured that it only requires this to establish me as a general favourite, and oust the Poor Man and the miserable Apothecary from the competition. You will remark, Mr. Parley, that they all of them claim the idea of getting our stories put in a book, but I can tell you that it was really mine. When you have done it, sir, I rest convinced that there will be no more leaving out of your humble servant, the Rich Man."

He added these words in a lowered voice, straining his neck forward as if to impress on me that they were in confidence. "And I suppose," thought I, anxious as I always am to find an excuse for anybody if there is one to be found, "that it is quite natural for such a splendid creature to be a little ashamed of being seen in such company."

"You must know, sir," he continued, still in the same confidential tone, and almost as if he had read my very thoughts, "it is the easiest thing in the world for us all to appear at the same time, side by side, as you now behold us. Such a learned gentleman as you will doubtless be aware that the words of the charm must be repeated over and over again until the last petal of the flower or bead in the necklace be attained; and whichever of us is mentioned last, alone has the right to come forward and peep at the damsel who thus summons us. If the charm falls upon the same one of us three times following, the damsel's fate is sealed. Should she please our fancy, we can claim her at any future time, no matter how distant; and when the time comes, she must consent. If we do not altogether approve of her, we turn her over to another of our species, of whom, Mr. Parley, there are plenty waiting for the introductions we are able to give them. The damsel is none the wiser, and as a rule accepts her fate pleasantly and gracefully. She will remember how it always used to come Sailor or Soldier, as the case may be, and little dream that the *real* sailor or soldier has turned her over to one of his messmates. This you will see, Mr. Parley, is the only way of managing such a piece of business; for you will be ready to admit that we could not marry all the damsels that fall to our share. This explanation, my dear Peter, is in confidence, and only to make you clearly understand all about us; it is not intended for the Annual."

But Mr. Rich Man should not have told me if he wanted it kept secret. It is written now, and I feel inclined to let it remain. The damsels Mr. Rich Man speaks of so freely are dear to old Peter Parley's heart; for hasn't he watched them, and thought of them, and written for them, as well as for

their brothers, these ever so many years? and why should they go on saying over the flower-charm in ignorance when their old friend can tell them all about it? No, Mr. Rich Man, your words are written down, and must abide; they cannot now be effaced.

"You must know, sir," the Rich Man went on, in his most grand manner, "I was not always as you see me now. I was once a poor lad with a widowed mother, gaining a knowledge of reading and writing, and such simple matters, at an important school in the great town known by the name of London—you may perhaps have heard something of the place—where the boys wear a blue frock and yellow stockings, and go bareheaded in the open air."

"Yes, yes, sir, I know it well—the Bluecoat School," I cried impatiently, thinking that our friend was needlessly explicit.

"Such, was, I believe, the nick-name given to it; anyway, through that noble foundation, on to which I was elected by some kind friends, I owe my education, which included, among other gentlemanly acquirements, a perfect knowledge of the dignified use of the fist.

"'Jamie,' my mother said one day to me when I was home in the holidays, 'I often wonder what will come to you when you've done your school-learning.'

"'Why, mother,' I replied gaily, 'don't you fear but what I'll make myself famous some way or another, even if I have to kill as many giants as Jack, or gain as many battles as our great Nelson.'

"But my mother only shook her head sorrowfully, and said, 'Now if your uncle would only provide for you;' at which I burst out laughing, for my uncle was the poorest,

meanest, shabbiest old fellow I had ever seen, unless it was a beggar or pauper.

"But my mother still shook her head and said, 'If only you could get your uncle to take a fancy to you; but you always behave so rudely to him, Jamie.' And then she added hastily, as if she were afraid she had said too much, 'Age is honourable, Jamie lad, and the young should bear with its follies and oddities. You really ought to go and see your old uncle sometimes, and amuse him, poor fellow.'

"'I declare I won't go within a mile of him,' I cried, crossly—for this sounded to me like preaching, and that was what I always hated—'a cross-grained, miserable, worrying old soul.'

"'Ah, that's the way with the young,' my mother cried, beginning to wipe her eyes; 'they despise the aged unless there's anything to be got out of them.'

"'Precious little chance of that with Uncle Sam,' I rejoined, contemptuously.

"'Yes, of course,' my mother replied, 'but that's no reason why you should neglect him.'

"Well, to please my mother, who was very good to me, I thought when I had got over my bit of temper I would go and see the old fellow.

"I found him sitting in a musty old arm-chair, hanging over a miserable bit of fire, before which he was rubbing together a pair of bony, wrinkled old hands. 'Eh, lad, and what have you come for?' he croaked out in his shrill old voice, eyeing me suspiciously, and not asking me to sit down or anything.

"'I've come for a jolly good tea, sir,' I cried, determined to make myself welcome, even if he didn't.

"'Eh, what?' he said, bending down his deaf old ear, and fidgeting in his chair, 'brought me some jolly good tea, my dear. It's very kind of your mother; such an expensive thing! Dear me, what a treat it'll be, this bitter weather!'

"'I didn't say I'd brought it, I said I'd come for it,' I cried, raising my voice.

"The old fellow peered into my face for a moment; then with a cunning expression he exclaimed gleefully, 'I don't sell it, my dear. Mary must have forgotten. It's fourteen year since I did a stroke of business. You've come to the wrong shop, my boy.'

"'I've come to have a jolly good tea with you, sir,' I bawled out, putting my mouth close to his ear.

"The old fellow jumped out of his chair. 'I'm not as deaf as a stone,' he cried, in his quavering old voice. 'And you want some tea, do you? Why, I don't drink it myself, only once in a way when I'm right-down bad. It's very costly. Your mother ruins you and herself too. If I'd been so careless I shouldn't have a bite or a sup to put in my mouth now.'

"'Ain't you going to give me anything to eat and drink?' I bawled, impatiently.

"'Dear, dear! what a boy you are, thinking of nothing but eating and drinking!' the old man mumbled, sinking down again in his chair, and bumping feebly on the floor with his heavy walking-stick.

"'Bring the lad something to eat and drink,' he said to an old woman, nearly as lean and miserable-looking as himself, who appeared in answer to his summons; and the old creature presently brought a tray containing some odd bits of bread and a scrap of butter, a little drop of milk in a tiny

jug, and a great jug of water, the only thing of which there was plenty. I was pretty hungry with my walk in the keen air, so I took up a thick crust, and belabouring it with all the butter there was, began to eat. The old man looked on anxiously. 'That's all the butter I've got,' he muttered presently.

"'Never mind,' I cried, 'when that's gone I can't have any more. I'll take it at one go.'

"'Mary's getting very extravagant,' the old man said, piteously.

"'Why, what's butter?' I cried, contemptuously. 'You should see me at the jam.'

"'I'd rather not,' the old man cried, uneasily, 'but there's no jam here. I couldn't afford it. Where does your mother get all her money from?'

"'Jam's nothing,' I shouted, maliciously. 'Mother gets the fruit out of the garden.'

"'She ought to sell it,' he said, earnestly. 'She's very extravagant. Martha and I never taste jam.'

"'Poor old things,' I thought to myself, drinking the jug of milk at a draught, 'it's bad to be so poor.' But I didn't believe but what they might have had a bit of jam, and a cup of tea too, if Uncle Sam had chosen.

"'How are you getting on with your schooling?' he asked presently, crooning forward, and talking as if I were as deaf as himself.

"'All right,' I cried as loud as I could. 'I'm doing bills of parcels, as long as my arm, sir. Ain't they jolly hard, that's all!'

"'Bills, are they? Who pays the bills?' the old man asked.

"'Why, the people who have the things, I s'pose,' I replied, cheekily.

"'What rich folks they must be!' mumbled the old man, clasping both his bony hands on the head of his stick, and wagging his head over it. 'And extravagant folks too—bills as long as your arm—shillings, pence, pounds—four figures in the pounds column—do you get to four figures in the pounds, Jamie?'

"'Four? Why, I get to eight, and ten too, sometimes,' I cried, raising my voice pretty loud.

"'Men too? I should ha' thought it had been women-folks' bills,' he mumbled in the aggravating way deaf people will when they hear wrong.

"'I didn't say men, I said *ten*,' I shouted at the top of my voice.

"'You needn't scream, I ain't deaf,' he exclaimed, irritably. 'You young folks talk with your mouth full of plums. Don't speak so thick;' and then he fell to muttering over and over again, shaking his old head as if he had the palsy, 'and extravagant folks too, and extravagant folks too.'

"'Bother the old fellow!' I muttered, crossly, thinking what a lively entertainment this was after a four-mile walk.

"The old man turned round sharply and shook his lean old fist at me. 'You'll be old some day, and young folks 'll bother you, and perhaps you'll be poor, and forsaken and miserable.'

"'Well now, you old ogre,' I thought to myself—I took care not to say it—'who'd have thought of your hearing that? and as for your being forsaken and miserable, it's your own fault, you miser-able old man, for you're not so poor as you

make out, I feel sure. I shouldn't be surprised if you had a pound, or perhaps two, in your purse at this very moment. I won't come all this way to see you again. Catch me.' Just at this moment Martha came in to fetch her tray, and as the door stood open I suddenly caught sight of a glimpse of fair curls.

"It was gone again in a moment, vanished into the darkness of the gloomy, unlit passage.

"'Martha,' I asked of the old woman, 'who's that out there?'

"'H'sh!' the old woman exclaimed quickly, 'it's wee Nelly a-waitin' for the crusties.'

"'What! my crusts?' I asked in surprise and disdain. 'Surely she wouldn't eat those stale bits!'

"'H'sh!' the old woman said again. I got up, strolled round the room, peering with apparent curiosity at the musty old prints on the walls, when suddenly I somehow found myself by the door, and disappeared through it.

"Wee Nellie's curls betrayed her. They were as bright as gold, and could be seen even in the dark passage. I followed her and Martha into the kitchen, as dreary and dark nearly as the parlour, with its dull miserable fire and one dip candle.

"The child took the crusts and began to eat eagerly, and Martha, who seemed very nervous and fidgety, came suddenly close up to me, and whispered nervously in my ear, 'You won't betray me, Master Jamie? It's little enough she takes to keep her, poor mite, and she's neither kith nor kin left but me. I couldn't let her go to the poor-house. It's hard enough to find food to keep her poor little body and soul together, for the master's as near as can be, but it's better

than charity; but he wouldn't let me have her if he knew. Promise you won't tell, Jamie dear.'

"'Me tell?' I said, in a low tone, for fear the old fellow should hear anything. 'I ain't a sneak, Martha;' and I stood looking with all my eyes at Nelly's golden curls and great blue eyes. Presently she came up to me, and putting her little hand in mine said, 'Won't you tell me a story?'

"I sat down on the kitchen fender, to be as near the fire as possible, and Nelly came and sat beside me, and then I began to tell her a wonderful story which I invented as I went along. She clapped her hands and laughed at the funny parts, and looked up at me with her great eyes full of wonder at the thrilling ones, and when I had done she put her arms round my neck and kissed me, and said I was a good boy to tell her such a nice, beautiful story.

"'Nelly,' I cried, thinking of those stale crusts, 'do you like jam, and cakes, and goodies?'

"How her eyes sparkled to be sure! but Martha cried, 'It's cruel to tantalise her, poor child; that's worse than eating the best of her supper.'

"'Was that her supper?' I cried, thinking with remorse of the butter and the draught of milk I had clean swept away—things worth nothing to me, but everything to poor Nelly.

"'Yes, it was,' Martha said, rather spitefully, 'she's had nothing but dry crusts to-night.'

"'I didn't know, Nelly,' I cried humbly, not caring a fig for Martha, if only *she* would not believe me greedy. 'If I had known I wouldn't have touched them, though I was dying of hunger.'

"'You couldn't do that,' she said, laughing softly; 'I am always hungry, but I don't die of it.'

"'Oh, Nelly,' I cried, almost beside myself, 'only wait till to-morrow, and I'll bring you such a cake!'

"'Will you,' she exclaimed, gleefully; 'don't forget, Jamie, there's a good boy. I shall dream of it. Now pray don't forget.'

"'Poor child!' I heard Martha say under her breath; and I, boy though I was, was so upset at the thought of poor Nelly living this wretched life of hunger, and cold, and misery, that if I had stayed any longer I should have been soft enough to cry, I do believe.

"So I went to bid the old man good night, but found him nodding over the scrap of fire; so I let myself out, and sped away home, haunted by the thought of Nelly and her dry crusts.

"The next day I got my mother to make me a fine cake, and, with that and a pot of jam, I was off to Uncle Sam's house as fast as my legs would carry me.

"And, Mr. Parley, you ought to have seen Nelly's eyes when she spied me with the great cake under my arm. They grew as round as saucers, and her poor little pinched face had such a hungry, starved look it was quite pitiful to see. I remember now how eagerly I cut the cake, and watched her eat. It gave me more pleasure than anything I could have eaten myself; and when she put her arms round my neck, and said I was a good, dear Jamie, I was almost ready to cry with delight, and so was Martha, I could see.

"As long as the holidays lasted I went over every day to carry Nelly something nice, and when the last day came we were as miserable as could be. Nelly clung to me and sobbed, and said I mustn't go away. I was half mad with anger to think of her starving there all the time I was at school, and



"She put her arms round my neck."—*Page* 162.

yet I dared not tell any one of her existence in the old house. I could only promise that as soon as the holidays came again I would not lose a moment in running over, and that as soon as I was a man and rich I would marry her and give her plenty of everything. That comforted her a little, and she said a great many times, 'You won't forget, will you, Jamie dear?' And so I bade her good-bye."

"And haven't you married her yet?" I could not help asking, with some sternness.

"Well, you see, Mr. Parley," the Rich Man began; but before he had got any further he suddenly disappeared right through the chinks of the bridge.

This was most exasperating, and I sat tapping my pencil impatiently on my paper, wondering what was the meaning of such cool treatment. After about a quarter of an hour's delay, the Rich Man reappeared again, looking very flustered and out of breath.

"It was Nelly herself," he exclaimed to me. "I knew her again, though it is so many years since we met; and she's grown a beautiful woman too. She was saying the daisy-charm, and it came to *me*."

The Rich Man looked quite pleased and elated with his small adventure; but presently the bright smile died out of his face, and there again was the comely, pompous, Rich Man of my acquaintance.

"Every time I had any holidays," he went on, "I was most assiduous in my visits to my old uncle, though, to tell the truth, I didn't see him one time in twenty. It was Nelly and Martha I spent my time with, and what a bright, bonny little girl she grew, to be sure! We used to sit on the ricketty old fender and talk of what we would do when I

was a rich man and Nelly was my little wife; and Nelly would always put her arms round my neck and say, 'You won't forget, Jamie dear, will you?' as children do, while I made rash promises as a boy will.

"My mother wept with joy at seeing me so good and attentive to old Uncle Sam, and she confided to me one day, what I had guessed all along, that he was a mean, niggardly old soul, and must have several hundred pounds stowed away somewhere. 'Who knows but what he may leave it to you when he dies, if you are kind and considerate, and he takes a fancy to you; for besides you he has neither kith nor kin?' she would often say.

"I only wished he would spend a little of his hoardings on poor Nelly, instead of saving them for me or any one else. I had perfect faith in my own luck, and never doubted that I should get on somehow when I was a man. I had no desire in those days for Uncle Sam's money.

"When the summer holidays came, little Nelly used to run out at the back of the house to look for me; and when she saw me coming, we would turn off into the fields together and feast off the good things I had brought; for Nelly was growing thoughtful, and would not touch anything unless I shared it. Sometimes she would pluck daisies, and I used to tell her to try her luck; but she would look up wonderingly in my face and say, 'What's the good, Jamie, because I'm going to marry you?' I often tried to persuade her, just for fun, but she never would.

"Nelly began to grow quite a big girl, and I was getting a strapping lad. Uncle Sam was deafer and meaner and more infirm than ever. He could not look after the candle-ends and the bits of butter and scraps of bread now; but he

guarded his money so carefully that Martha and Nelly got very little. However, Nelly was old enough by this time to make shirts and knit socks and stockings for the neighbours, and so she was a little less starved. She would have gone away into service, only she thought I shouldn't like it, for she never doubted she was going to marry me.

"In those long summer days I brought books, and taught her to read and spell and cipher. She was a bright, clever little thing, and got on capitally.

"Well, one day, while we were sitting in the field, Martha came running towards us with clasped hands and scared face.

"'Oh, Jamie! dear lad, do come to the poor old soul. He's going as fast as he can!'

"'Whatever do you mean, Martha?' I cried, not relishing the interruption.

"'Your poor uncle, he's struck for death,' she cried wildly. 'Do come to him, he's carrying on dreadful.'

"I followed Martha reluctantly. Such a sight was not what I cared to see, but it seemed a duty to help poor frightened Martha in her uncomfortable task. Nelly came, too, holding my hand; and when we parted at the door, she lingered sadly, declaring that she wished she might come with us and help us instead of having to watch alone.

"The old man was quietly dozing when I went into his room, but presently he roused and began clutching at the bed-clothes, rapidly muttering some incoherent words all the while. His eyes grew bright and restless, and suddenly perceiving me standing there, he caught hold of my arm with his long, bony fingers.

"His lips moved fast, but it was impossible to hear what

he was saying. I put my ear down close to his mouth, and once or twice caught the indistinct sound of my own name, but that was all. So it was something that concerned me. But it was as vain to listen for any coherent words as to expect the waves to tell you their secrets. Each moment the old man's voice grew more and more indistinct.

"Martha was standing on the other side of the bed, but though she was so used to his muttering she could not make out what he said either.

"He lay perfectly still for a short time; then suddenly he opened his eyes, raised himself a little from his pillow, and said quite distinctly, so that Martha and I heard it plainly, '*Fifty thousand pounds*—tin box—Jamie;' then his poor old head fell back on to the pillow, and his eyes closed for ever.

"To say I was shocked is no description of my feelings. I was but a great overgrown lad of sixteen, who never troubled my head with such an awful and unpleasant matter as death; and to see the old man I had laughed at, and cheeked, and despised, and been so angry with, lying there mute before me, his poor pinched face looking full of some solemn, inexpressible secret, filled me with awe and self-reproach. I had wild visions floating through my stunned brain of how I might have been good, and tried and cheered up his lonely old days—I, his only kith and kin—but that all such opportunity was lost for ever.

"'Go and tell poor little Nelly,' Martha said softly, laying her hand on my arm with gentle force, and leading me towards the door.

"I had forgotten everything, even Nelly, in the first bewilderment; but now I remembered that she was waiting there alone all this time.

"I crept out of the room along the narrow, shabby passage into the kitchen, but no Nelly was there. In a field at the back of the house I found her sewing away at her shirts.

"She jumped up and came running towards me.

"'Oh, Jamie! what is the matter?' she cried, catching hold of my hand, and looking anxiously into my scared face.

"'He's dead, Nelly,' I gasped, unable to say any more.

"'Dead!' she echoed in bewilderment; then she said softly and meditatively, 'poor old man!'

"We sat down on the gnarled root of a tree, and Nelly's clever fingers flew over her work. Neither of us spoke, but every now and then I could feel that her eyes were fixed furtively on my face. A confused tumultuous sense of confusion and terror and pity held my mind chained for the time, and I suppose Nelly saw something of that in my looks, for after a long age of silence she laid her work down on her lap, and laying her hand on my arm, said very gently, 'What are you thinking of, Jamie?'

"As she spoke to me it suddenly flashed into my mind that this matter was more, far more to her than to me. She was destitute and homeless now. What was she to do?

"So it was with no untruthfulness that after a short pause I replied, 'I was thinking of you, Nelly.'

"'Ah!' she said, thoughtfully, as if the idea had just dawned upon her, 'Aunt Matty and I will have to go, I suppose, and we must find a home somewhere. Aunt Matty is getting old and tired, too. I think it will be hard for her.'

"'And hard for you, too, Nelly,' I cried, impatiently. 'I fancy you work a great deal too much now.'

"'What should I have done without Aunt Martha?' she

said reproachfully, 'I cannot do too much for her in return for her goodness to me.'

"'This is drudgery,' I cried, impatiently tossing the work off her lap. 'It is a shame that you should be starved and hungry, or else have to work like a slave.' It fretted me so that I should be obliged to see all this, and not be able to do anything. I was in the frame of mind when I wanted a magic ring to turn her into a princess, surrounded by ease and wealth.

"'Never mind, Jamie,' she said, consolingly. 'Don't you know you are to be a rich man some day?'

"'But I have not begun to be rich yet,' I exclaimed, irritably, 'and what are you to do till then, Nelly?'

"'God will take care of Aunt Martha and me till you are,' she replied, with all the simple unreasoning faith of a child."

Here the Rich Man made a long pause, took a loud and long pinch of snuff, and flourished his gorgeous silk handkerchief very much in the neighbourhood of his eyes. I waited eagerly for him to proceed, for I was deeply interested in his story. He himself seemed quite to have dropped the important pompous style in which he commenced it, and to have gone back in mind to the boyish days he was telling me of.

"Sir," I said, with a polite bow, "your story entertains me very greatly. I quite love Nelly already, and the only thing that puzzles me is how it came about that you did not marry her, for it is evident that you became rich."

"Don't be impatient, Mr. Parley, you will hear it all in time. Poor little Nelly! I have often thought about her since. Well, of course, we were children then, and I did not think anything about the difference in our position; but let me go on in proper order."

"Certainly, that is just what I desire," I replied, and the Rich Man continued—

"While I was fretting and fuming about Nelly, my dazed brain began gradually to grow clearer, and I suddenly remembered what the shock I had received had driven out of my mind.

"'Fifty thousand pounds!' I cried wildly, jumping up in my excitement. 'Fifty thousand pounds, Nelly. What do you think of that?'

"She looked at me curiously. I caught hold of her and danced her round, and ran about like one out of his senses.

"'I only mean fifty thousand pounds,' I cried again.

"Then she put her little hands into mine, and said, with a pale face and tears in her eyes, 'Let me take you home to your mother, Jamie.'

"My mother—I had forgotten all about her, and she was lying at home weak and ill. She must be told, and Nelly did well to remind me of my duty.

"'Yes,' I replied, 'I must go to her, but think of the fifty thousand pounds in the tin box. I am coming to look for it, directly. I suppose Martha is to be trusted, isn't she, Nelly, especially as it is for you too?'

"But silly little Nelly only began to cry and to hold my hands very fast, drawing me along out of the field as quickly as she could, quite heedless of the shirt lying on the ground.

"'Is this the way, Jamie?' she asked, nervously, when we came to the streets.

"'But why are you coming, Nelly?' I asked, in surprise. 'You will have all the walk back again alone.'

"'Never mind, Jamie,' she replied, decidedly. 'It won't hurt me. Come along, dear, do.'

"For I had stood still in bewildered surprise at this new phase in Nelly's character. She had a will, then, of her own, and a pretty strong one, and it was very evident that the little puss meant to use it over me. Of course, I resisted. No lad of sixteen likes to be ruled by a bit of a girl, even if she has golden curls and great blue eyes, and is very fond of you, and you of her.

"But she seemed very much in earnest, and I humoured her, though it did seem to me a little ridiculous that we should walk through the village streets hand in hand. But she seemed troubled when I offered to draw mine away, so I humoured her in this too.

"At last we got close to my home. 'Now, Nelly,' I said, 'you must turn back. I shall come as soon as ever I can to look for Uncle Sam's fifty thousand pounds.'

"'Where's your mother, Jamie?' she asked, obstinately. 'I must speak to her.'

"'Nonsense,' I cried, hastily, more than half inclined to lose patience. 'She does not know of your existence, and what good could it do to let it all out now?'

"'I must see her,' she said, firmly, and bounded away from my side into the house, calling out, 'Mrs. Mackay! Mrs. Mackay!'

"Guided by my mother's voice, she found her way into her room. When I entered, sulky and vexed at her unaccountable behaviour, I found her talking rapidly and earnestly to my mother.

"She stopped at once when I entered, and coming to me, she led me by the hand to my mother's couch, brought a chair for me, and said, 'I have told her about the poor old man.' Then she slipped quietly away, and was gone.

"I suppose I looked sheepish enough, for my mother regarded me curiously, and asked, 'Who is that?'

"'It is only Nelly,' I replied; 'old Martha's niece.'

"'She seems to know you well,' my mother said. 'She called you Jamie. It is not the way Martha's niece should have spoken.'

"Silly little Nelly! How she had marred and ruined everything!

"'I have seen her often,' I answered, still sulkily. My mother looked at me hard, and then said, 'Now tell me your news.'

"I told her all about the old man's death—so sudden and unexpected.

"'Why did you not fetch me?' she asked; and I told her the truth when I said it never entered my head; all was so sudden.

"When I came to the fifty thousand pounds she started up quickly.

"'Fifty thousand pounds, did you say?' she cried. 'Oh, my boy, I never dreamt it would be five hundred. And Martha heard it too? Why, you ought never to have left the place.'

"'She is to be trusted,' I replied, confidently.

"But my mother seemed dreadfully agitated, and cried excitedly, 'The little minx! I see it all now, Jamie. They'll get that money as sure as I'm your mother.'

"I laughed incredulously.

"'Why, Nelly won't eat a bit of my cake unless I have half, and do you suppose she'd rob me. And then, to set my mother's mind at rest, I gave her some idea of my affection for Nelly, the hardship she had endured, and the promises I had made her.

"'Worse and worse,' she cried, beating her hands together against her breast; 'but the promises are nothing, of course; you are only children, though she is far beyond you in cunning, my poor boy. Do you know what she told me?'

"'About Uncle Sam?' I asked.

"'No; about you,' my mother replied, eagerly. 'She said the shock had driven you out of your mind. Oh, the wicked, deep creature! Who could think you were out of your mind? It's a vile story. We must go and take possession at once, Jamie. By to-morrow those two wicked things will have spread it over the place that you are mad.'

"Who, indeed, could think such a thing? I was as calm and rational in my manner as a boy of sixteen is likely to be; and I knew very well that I had neither felt nor displayed any symptoms of insanity. What could Nelly have meant? Could it be, as my mother said, a plot to rob me of the money? The thought staggered me. I would not believe it of Nelly. Yet I felt I should like to be sure that the money was safe. It would make me a rich man, and I could not touch upon the thought of losing it. It must and should be for me. My mother was right. At any rate, it was wiser not to give any one a chance of meddling with it.

"My mother rose from her couch, and made a few hasty preparations while I went in search of a vehicle. When I returned, I found her all ready, waiting for me, with a strength and courage which the strange circumstances alone could have given her.

"In a short time we reached Uncle Sam's house. Nelly came to let us in, and turned quite pale and trembling when she saw us. This struck me as strange. It was not, after

all, such an unusual thing that I should come back again so quickly under such circumstances. I did not say anything to her, for, somehow, she seemed to me almost a different being from the Nelly of yesterday, or else my eyes were being opened to see her differently. I don't think even her hair looked as golden, or her eyes as blue, as I had been in the habit of thinking them.

"Still I felt a little hot and uncomfortable at the way my mother spoke to her once or twice, giving her to understand pretty plainly that she was not to come near us unless she were summoned. I could not help remembering the long years of hunger, and want, and loneliness, the poor child had spent, and that I had always promised her should end when I grew rich. Yet, why should she have told my mother that I was out of my mind, unless, as my mother said, she had some deep-laid plan in her head?"

"Well, I think it was enough to make her believe such a thing, for you to go dancing her round, and screaming out 'Fifty thousand pounds!' in that uncanny sort of way, when she never knew but what the old man was miserably poor," cried Poor Man, angrily. "That vile money began to work its evil charm even before you got it, that's easy to see."

The Rich Man smiled provokingly.

"That's your way of thinking," he replied, and then continued: "Up to the day of the funeral no sign of the tin box could be discovered, though we searched in every reasonable place; but we could not, of course, make any great commotion till that was all over.

"My mother and I took possession of the house, never leaving it from the time we first entered, so if anybody had touched it they must have been pretty quick about it.

"Nelly and I used to meet sometimes on the stairs; but I avoided her as much as possible, for it was so strange that the money should not be found, and I did not know what to think. She glanced at me in a strange, wild way, as if she were half frightened of me; and I thought once or twice she looked as if she had been crying a good deal. Perhaps she was sorry, or perhaps she was afraid of something being found out. It was a dreadful shock to me to think she could act as she had. Fancy her telling my mother I was mad!

"Once, I remember, she caught hold of my arm and asked me if I would not come into the kitchen and tell her a story like I used; and when I pulled myself away she cried like a poor, pettish child. I began to wonder whether *she* was not a little mad herself.

"Well, my mother managed everything. She got rid of Martha and Nelly as soon as possible after the old man was buried, for she declared that she did not trust either of them. What became of them I hardly know. Most likely Nelly worked at her knitting and sewing and made money; but it came to my ears long years afterwards that Martha died in the poor-house, and I suppose Nelly must have been very poor herself, or she would not have let her old aunt go there, though there is no telling what she might have done after that money business, which seemed to alter her so; for she really was a dear little thing before that time.

"After they had gone we began our search in earnest. Every piece of furniture was ransacked, every corner and cupboard of the old place turned out, but to no purpose. We tapped the walls and the floors to find some sign of a hollow place or loose board, ripped open cushions, pillows, beds, and mattresses, without finding anything. Think what awful tantalisation it

was to know that such a prize was within reach and yet not be able to discover it.

"My mother thought of nothing else but the money, and would not let me forget it, however much I might have been inclined, and more than once she threw out dark hints about Martha and her niece.

"'You will be a rich man, Jamie, when we find it,' she would say, over and over again, dwelling on the thought with evident delight. 'Fifty thousand pounds! You must marry a great lady and live like a prince.'

"All that sounded very nice, but I must confess that I often wished Nelly had not behaved so strangely, and that we were a little boy and girl sitting on the kitchen fender together again.

"I don't know how long we continued this search. It was weary work. Every morning we rose with renewed hope, and every night we went to bed worn out and wretched, with disappointment and longing. Months and months passed, and my mother grew visibly aged and worn with her ungrateful task. She, who used to reprove me for speaking unkindly of the old man, said worse things of him now than I had ever done, and I must confess that I, too, began to hate him for the way he had tantalised me with his miserly hoardings. Over and over again I wished that I had never known of the existence of the money and was enjoying myself among other youths of my age; but fifty thousand pounds was fifty thousand pounds, and try as I would I could not bring myself to settling down quietly to hard work and poverty when I knew that such a prize was lying quietly hidden away, only waiting for me, the rightful owner, to unearth it.

"But in the meantime we were compelled to live almost as meanly as the old man had done. We were afraid to let any stranger enter the house, so that we were obliged to do everything for ourselves, even scrubbing and washing and cooking. My mother, who had long been ailing, was often unable to see to these matters, so that I, who had been waited upon all my boyish days, was compelled to do this horrible work—I, the owner of fifty thousand pounds.

"My mother crept about the old house, still hopeful of finding it, even when she was scarcely able to remain upon her feet. It was wonderful that she kept up as long and as well as she did, for she had been almost an invalid at the time of the old man's death. But after awhile the unnatural strength that had sustained her began rapidly to give way, and at last she could not rise from her bed. It was pitiful to see her disappointment, and vain efforts to rise from her couch, even when it was quite impossible. The time came when she could no longer hide from herself that she was dying. 'Never rest till you find your money,' she said to me, eagerly, as she lay there fretting over her inability to help me. 'It's my firm belief that that girl knows all about it.'

"But one morning when I brought her the food I had prepared as well as I knew how, she said quite fiercely, 'I wish, Jamie, that Uncle Sam had sent his money to the bottom of the sea before he had worried us with it. All the money the world contains couldn't buy me ease of mind. I've led you astray, Jamie. Forget the money, and set to work to earn an honourable living as soon as I am gone.'

"That night she died, and I was left alone. Several wretched days, full of indescribable loneliness and terror,

dragged by, and then I set to work again. It was all very well for my mother, old and ill and dying, to tell me to forget it. She did not forget it herself while she was strong enough to care for it, and I was young and hearty. Do you suppose anybody could forget fifty thousand pounds? I could no more give up the thought of having it than I could think of living without food. I seemed to hunger and thirst for it. My very eyes ached for the sight of the yellow gold stowed away in that tin box, for I had spent my last farthing and did not know where to turn for more. At last in desperation I determined to have the old house pulled down; but I could not do it by myself, and I had no money to pay workmen. It was a wretched, dilapidated old place, but beautifully surrounded by lovely meadows. I found that the village builder was quite willing to pull it down and build some better houses on the ground without charging me anything, and indeed he even agreed to give me a small sum of money in addition. I thought he was very generous, and had no idea how much profit he gained by the transaction.

"You may be sure I took every opportunity of watching for any sign of the tin box. Not a chimney was unbricked but I was there to see it. From the time the men came in the morning until the time they left at night my eyes were upon them, and when they were gone I went over the ruins with the utmost care.

"I had taken a cheap, miserable lodging in the nearest house, a little sort of farm-place. When it grew dark I returned to my room and ate my scanty supper alone.

"Well, one night, while I was thus engaged, a tap sounded at my door, and my landlady came and placed a small parcel in my hand. It was square and sharp at the

corners, and, for a moment, a wild vision of my uncle's tin box flashed through my mind; but this parcel was of only ordinary weight, so that it could not, at any rate, contain money.

"I undid the papers in which it was wrapped, and there came to light an old, mildewed, and discoloured box. In a moment I saw it all—some one had found the box, and robbed me of the money.

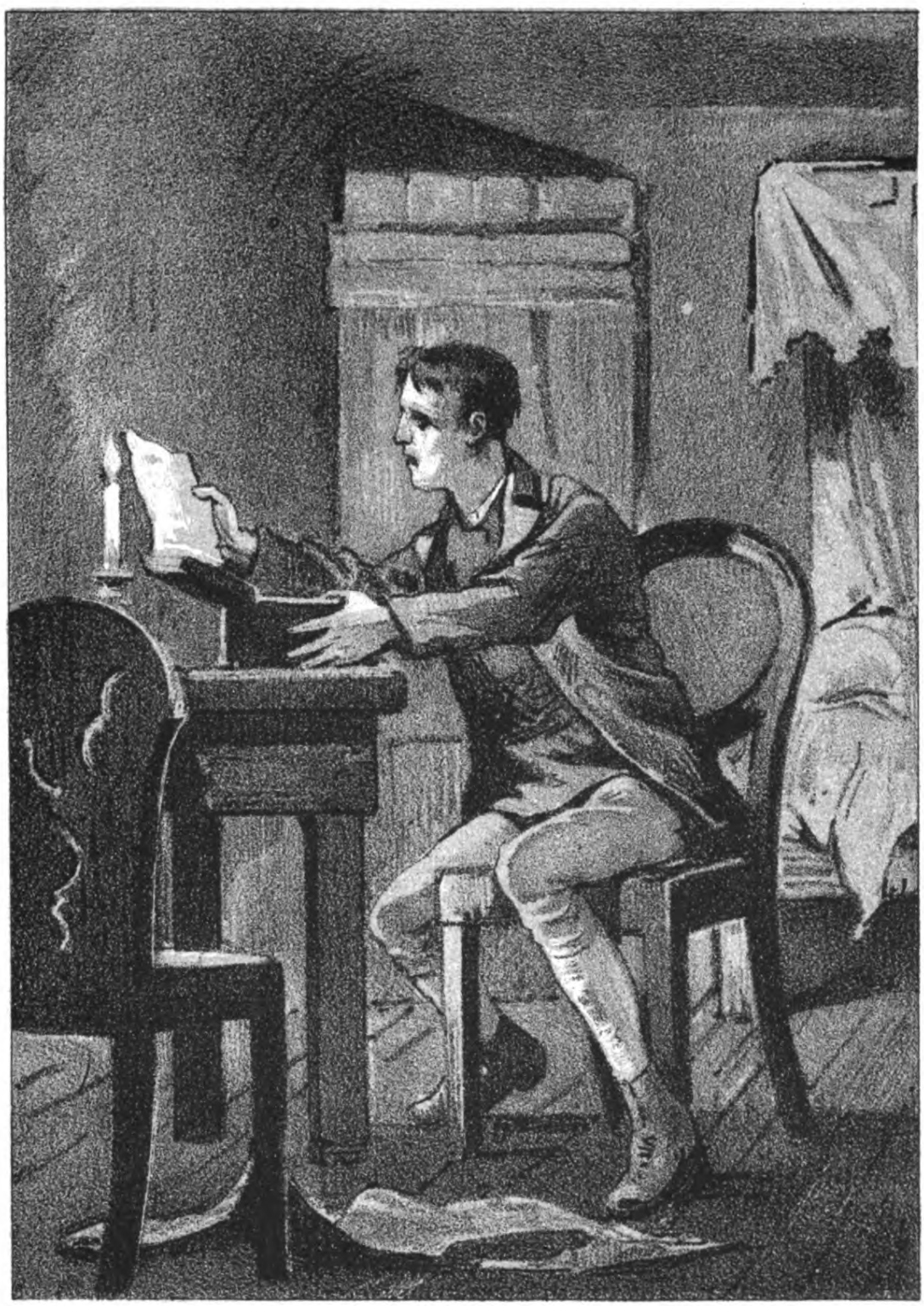
"I don't know what happened to me when I made this discovery; I have an idea that I sat there gazing at it in a half-unconscious way, and that after a long time I found myself clasping it with both hands, and that my forehead was wet with a horrible, cold moisture. Gradually, I suppose, I recovered my full senses, for I began fumbling with the lock, which I could not open.

"Uncle Sam's keys were in my possession, my mother having warned me always to guard them carefully. I went and fetched them, and began trying each one to see whether any might unlock the box. At last one slipped in. With a tremendous effort, for the lock was old and rusty, the key turned, and I lifted the lid. The box was filled as close as could be with paper.

"I took out a sheet, and holding it to the candle, looked to see what was on it. My heart stopped beating; I could scarcely believe my eyes. It was a hundred-pound note.

"Yes; and the box was full of them. Eagerly I turned them out, and with trembling fingers counted them. There were five hundred; I had no need of a pencil and paper to find out that that was fifty thousand pounds, and that I was a rich man at last.

"I can tell you I had little sleep that night. It was not



"I could scarcely believe my eyes. It was a hundred-pound note."
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so much the possession of the money, which soon began to seem the most natural thing in the world, but the puzzle as to where it could have come from. There was but one solution of the mystery. Martha and Nelly, haunted by remorse, must have given it up.

"The next morning I inquired carelessly of my landlady who had brought the parcel.

"'Quite a young girl,' she replied; 'a delicate, tender-looking young thing, with golden hair, and very blue eyes.'

"So there, Mr. Parley, you see was the proof that my surmise was correct. Who could have believed it of that gentle, innocent-looking creature, who used to put her arms round my neck, and say so plaintively, 'You won't forget, Jamie, will you?'

"I was still only seventeen; but my trouble and suspense had taught me to be careful. I determined to hide the box until I was twenty-one, and go on just as I was, not letting any one suppose that I was anything else but a poor lad.

"So I locked up the money, and put it into the bottom of my clothes-chest, keeping that fast locked as well. No one, for a moment, suspected what the chest contained; and for the next three years I lived on in the little farm-house, working hard to support myself, yet never touching one of the notes.

"As soon as my twenty-first birthday was turned, I went to the village lawyer in the nearest town, who I believed to be a really trustworthy man. I told him my story, and showed him the box, taking good care, however, not to let it go out of my own hands.

"'You say Martha, the servant, heard the old man's

words as well as you,' he remarked. 'Where is she? We must have her as a witness.'

"That I could not tell him; but he made inquiries, and then it was I heard that she had died a month or two before in the poor-house.

"It was quite easy to prove my right to the money, for I was the only surviving relative of the old man. Mr. Holdfast, the lawyer, conducted the whole business for me, and I have no doubt paid himself pretty liberally. For awhile I lived very frugally, in order to make up again the sum that had been expended on lawyer's fees; but even that was wealth and luxury after the life I had led."

I—Peter—was just about to ask the Rich Man a question, when, with a polite bow, and "I beg you will excuse me, sir, I am called," he disappeared from off the bridge.

The Ploughboy thrust forward his great round face, with the broadest of broad grins upon it, but I waved him back impatiently, for I could not help wondering whether it was Nelly who had summoned the Rich Man again. For my own part, I was not going to believe that Nelly did take that money; for even after the Rich Man's account of her, which was certain to be prejudiced, I could not help feeling the deepest interest in her and believe her to be good and true.

I waited so long that I began to think I must give it up as a bad job, when suddenly looking up, there, behold, was the Rich Man, making me one of his profound, old-world bows.

"Was it?" I asked, excitedly; "I pray you will forgive my curiosity; but was it Nelly?"

"It was," the Rich Man replied, as flushed and excited as myself. "That is the second time running the charm has fallen upon me. After talking so much about her, and re-

calling those past days, I was filled with a very natural longing to see her and speak to her again, so I went strolling along the meadow where she was seated, and accosted her.

"She did not know me at all, but we got into conversation, and I asked her where the charm had stopped. She told me at 'Rich Man,' and I asked her who the 'Rich Man' was; but she looked sad and said it was only an idle joke, and that she liked to say the flower-charm, because it reminded her of her childhood, and of some one she had been very fond of, who used to ask her to say it. And what else do you think she told me, Mr. Parley? She told me that the 'some one' was a rich man now, and she had made him rich, for she had found an old tin box in the field where they used to wander, lodged in the hollow trunk of a tree, against which they used to sit, and that directly she saw it she knew it was intended for him and she had taken it to him. And she told me, moreover, that she had always thought he was out of his mind till that day, and then she knew that she had been mistaken."

"There, Mr. Rich Man," I cried, triumphantly; "now what do you think of all your vile suspicions? Don't you wonder what that poor child suffered before she let her old aunt go to the union? and aren't you ashamed of yourself for breaking all the promises you made her before that wretched money turned you into an avaricious, hard-hearted man of the world?"

I really couldn't help it, for I felt so angry; and I know very well that rich men seldom get the truth told them about themselves. He, to my surprise, took it very well, and when he spoke to me he said quite humbly—

"I believe I have behaved wickedly to Nelly, but all the time it was the worst trouble of my life to think she was

wicked. I have spent my money carefully, Mr. Parley, and always given large sums in charity; but I promise you now that if Nelly summons me three times following, all my money shall belong to her, who found it for me."

"She has summoned you twice following," I cried, with great delight, "and I do hope, Mr. Rich Man, that the third time is not far distant."

He made me a low bow, and stepped back among his companions, but from the bridge I distinctly caught the words, "I have not forgotten, Nelly, I have not forgotten."

The Poor Man's Story.

"Poor Man next;" and as I remembered how often his kind was "skipped," I felt all the more determined that this man at least should have a fair hearing for once. Of course a large proportion of this strange company represented poor men; but they were "poor men" with work and purpose in life, which this "Poor Man" did not appear to specially have, so shabby, uninterested, and listless did he stand, looking, in his well-brushed, well-worn garments, more like a second-hand gentleman than anything else. He had a half-humble, half-defiant manner too, quite different to the general smiling, don't-care-a-bitishness of the rest, who, by their looks, pined no more for his company than he did for theirs. When he stepped forward in answer to my call, he bowed rather loftily, and said in a low, impressive tone:

"I suppose, Mr. Parley, that though I am with this mixed party, you will understand I am not of them; indeed, if I had my rights, I should certainly not figure as 'Poor Man,' I can assure you—that is, if I could only find a clue,

being quite fitted to stand in the place of 'Gentleman;' however, it is as 'Poor Man' I must speak, premising that I have no set tale to tell. Aristocratic friends I have not at present, and common working persons I abhor as much as I do menial drudgery; perhaps, were it otherwise, it would be better as far as my outward appearance goes; and so for the present look on me as 'Poor Man,' desirous that it should be plainly understood that he in no way resembles such of these bystanders who might claim the name.

"I have been recalling two or three scenes from my boyhood, for I will not sadden your readers' young hearts by a recital of the troubles of my later life, which troubles took their rise from the fact of my not having been more openly introduced into society by my parents;" and here his light blue eye brightened for an instant as it met mine. "Let me inquire of you, as a gentleman of the world, Mr. Parley, have you at any time heard of persons—persons of position, I mean, of course—losing in some mysterious manner a very young member of their family? No, never? Dear me, that's what every one says; and yet I have gone on asking the question of all strangers, for one never knows when, where, or how a clue may be met with; and a clue is all I want, that is, a right one, for patience knows in how many false ones I have been entangled. I may well say entangled, since it is through following out clues that I am 'Poor Man' to this day." He paused, and sighed dejectedly, then, with a forced cheerfulness, began his narrative.

"In scene the first I made my appearance—'growed,' like Topsy, only how different!—and in a ramshackle basketful of dry hay and cold leaves, which was discovered on the kerb of Miss Georgina Ballisy's back-door early on a Christmas

morning, when old Norah, the Irish charwoman, arrived to give extra help. It seems that the first impression in the kitchen was that this basket contained some seasonable present in the form of ham, sucking-pig, or turkey; for, as cook Rachel observed, sulky at the snow brought in with it, 'they as didn't want always got lots, and they as deserved had to pine and do without.' But she stopped short aghast, when old Norah, having scraped off the white covering and untied sundry knots, tumbled off the lid, and pulled out the hay, discovered no comfortable farmhouse token, but me—just tiny me—too chilled and miserably blue to scream or even whimper, as, under any other condition, a baby must have done being rolled about, bumped and dumped every way, under an idea that it was something good to eat, and intended as a surprise for the mistress of the house. A surprise certainly—a very unexpected, objectionable gift to be picked up at an old lady's door, and one which caused such a loud chatter and stir that she soon came to ask if the huge yule-log left smouldering last night had done any damage.

'"My dear, I saw you tumbled, hay and all, on to the dresser, and the women staring as if you had been something uncanny that they dared not touch; dear me, it seems but the other day,' Miss Georgy always concluded with, when, years after, she repeated the oft-told tale—a tale ever fresh and exciting, and the least details of which had a charm to both of us. Blue Beard and all the giants were as nothing to it as far as I was concerned, and I felt very pitifully for that little baby rolled in the torn pink shawl. To think that it was *I*, and *I* was *it*, and we both were one—how wonderful! how difficult to realise!

"'And what did you say, Miss Georgy?' I would ask, as

though I had never heard what she had said fifty times before.

"'Say? I'm sure I don't know what I said. I know I felt all in a sort of frightened flutter, and Rachel and Norah and I looked at each other, in the dim morning light, quite white with wondering; and there we might have stood, if the poor little creature had not opened a pair of pretty blue eyes (at this I would blink most consciously), 'and staring all round, suddenly held out its poor mottled-red arms to us, and cried a little weak cry for help and comfort. At any rate, that roused Rachel enough to get it milk, and warm it and nurse it in her big lap, while I ran to fetch wraps and some long-preserved baby-clothes of my uncle Jacob's, who died at sea. The next idea was propounded by Tobias, the big odd man I then kept, who, on hearing the state of things, came hurrying from his cottage, while I was trying to choke down some breakfast, to know if he had not better step over for Timms, the constable, to come and take that "fondling" away at once; it would only be a hindrance and worry, so long as them women had to nurse it on a Christmas Day, and they with the dinner to cook, and their heads full of babies.'

"'A constable, and have me taken away! What had I done, and where would he have taken me for doing it, please?' I remember asking one Christmas Day, when I was about nine years old, and beginning to understand things.

"'Done?—done nothing but come uncalled into a strange kitchen and into the way of these people, who would have been glad to get you safely out of it, lest they might have any extra trouble. As to Tobias, he would have carried you off and handed you in at the workhouse-door with just about the same satisfaction with which he sometimes handed in a

basket of second-best vegetables. And yet Tobias is a kind father to his own, and would have given his head for any of my family; but the "House" for which he paid rates was for stray children, so that settled it in the worthy man's mind.

"'What did you say when he asked that?' I repeated, not understanding or appreciating Tobias, or his motives.

"'I told him, I would think it over, and so I did thought and thought, and the answer come plainly enough; Tobias might not have understood it, but I did. You see, my dear, it was a very important decision for a lonely woman like me to make, and I was a little nervous about what people would say; but I asked for guidance, and it came, first in my own heart, which said "be merciful to this friendless thing;" it came in the text, which chanced to be, "I was a stranger, and ye took me in;" followed by no word of turning out again, nothing of chattering, evil tongues—only "ye took me in." It came in the clang of the distant bells, telling of joy in earth and heaven, because eighteen hundred years ago a little humble baby lay in a manger at Bethlehem—a little child who lived to teach charity, and that even a cup of water given to such little ones for His sake would be hallowed and glorified. I could but hear and think of all this as I walked over the hills on that Christmas morning; and—and that is how it happened that you are here, child; for when I came in, I went downstairs and took you straightway from Irish Norah's arms, and shook my head reprovingly at Tobias, standing quite ready and eager to dispose of you as a difficulty—a weed in my life's garden—which he would be glad to aid me in removing and flinging out of sight.'

"'And then, Miss Georgy?'

"'Why then, you curious boy, you know I brought you

up-stairs, and rocked you to the voices of the carol singers outside, who were chanting that old carol I am so fond of—the one I taught you, Monty; how

"All the angels in heaven shall sing,
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day;
And all the souls on earth shall sing
On Christmas Day in the morning."

"'But now let us say "Our Father" together—not your father or my father, Monty, but "*Our* Father"—then good night, and never mind the rest. It is in His hands.'

"Strange, how well I remember that particular night, and how she laid her light thin hand in a sort of tender benediction on my head, a benediction of which I am afraid I was even then growing unworthy—for I also remember how tearfully and pityingly I lay and thought of that baby, myself, that no one knew, that no one wanted; but I do not fancy I in the least realised Miss Georgy's unselfish beautiful compassion, ready to receive and act upon an answer so many would have shrunk from accepting.

"After this confession—for I am bound to relate things as they are, or rather as they were—I need not add this Miss Georgy was one of the best of women, simply pious, and earnestly endeavouring to do the duty before her, full of charity for all mankind. But yet she was somewhat high-flown, and with a great deal of family pride that made her shyly keep aloof of folks with whom she could not sympathise, yet whose feelings she was afraid of hurting. Living thus much to herself, she had read a great deal, devouring all new books, such as were to be had in her day. She played love songs of a plaintive sort, on an antiquated spinet, had a wonderful memory, and could recite any number of pathetic

old-world ballads, and quaint extracts from thrilling ghost stories, and scenes from plays of the tragic or tender order, that often brought us both to tears or high heroics.

"Miss Georgy, I learned to know, had lived a most quiet and uneventful life until I was thrust bodily into it, in a green hamper, on Christmas morning, causing a total revolution in all her habits and customs. At first, no doubt, I was a great anxiety and trouble, and even as time went on she was long afraid to allow herself to feel too much interest in me, lest I should be claimed and carried off, for she always had a lurking idea that there was some other reason for my presence than the mere chance disposal of my very small person at her door. But by-and-by this fear wore off; she grew very fond of me, finding a perfect pleasure and delight in making me a peg on which to hang all sorts of wild romantic fancies, treating me as an equal, and making me her constant companion, to the surprise and dissatisfaction of the old servants, but more to that of the village folk, who could not understand or tolerate my position in the household, do or say as she would. I was Miss Georgy's 'poor boy,' nothing more, and I could not very well be less in their eyes, for they never forgot or forgave my coming unannounced to Finton. The few youngsters of a better class sneered at, and repulsed me in insulting ways; so provoking were they that they brought about violent encounters between my fists and their heads—encounters that made me get looked upon as a quarrelsome and aggressive nobody it was everybody's business to suppress, though I had only tried to be admitted peacefully into respectable society. Even the poorest and roughest set in the place looked down upon me with contempt, threw mud or ever-ready pebbles at my garments, seemingly looking upon my neat

blue jacket and pleated white collar as an insult to their order, or rather disorder—to which they took it for granted I belonged, and should instantly return if they had their will.

"But untidy and common humanity never had any attraction for me even in those days, any more than now. I had very high 'upstart' notions, cook Rachel sneeringly said. I avoided the servants as proudly as I was avoided by the boys, so that I was driven for amusement and company to busy, precise Miss Georgy's room; and very well I liked it. I learned to read almost solely out of her novels, letters, and magazines. Some day I was to go to school, but for the present I waded at will through volumes accumulated through long generations of Ballisy's, and having in time skimmed most of them, my fancy, naturally enough, always turned to those whose plots and intricacies were in any way connected with lost children and mysterious outcasts, and as I was constantly pursuing that subject it is really wonderful what a common one I found it. In every other book almost, there was an unexpected personage of the greatest importance turning up when least expected, to claim some youth hitherto by all considered a humble nobody. So often did I read of this as a fact, and so often was it told, sung, or recited by Miss Georgy, that I grew sure she, too, had a deep-seated, though unconscious conviction upon the subject, and would be surprised at nothing. Thus I reported all I read and heard on this special subject with great gusto—for she took as much pleasure in listening as I did in telling; and we jumbled up all about pretty Perdita, and Lord Montague's heir—after whom I had indeed been called Montague—and collected traditions and anecdotes all pointing one moral to willing eyes and ears, and which affected me so much that

about this time I took to patronising everybody—the servants about the house especially—to an extent that would very soon have been put a stop to by notices and expostulations to their mistress, had it not happened that suddenly her health failed her, and as she grew more delicate, a distant relation, Thirza Ann Loyd, came to manage things. Once she was established in the house, things were not so easy I found. Thirza Ann did not like me, or want me, and as to patronising *her*, that was altogether impossible. 'Young Master Monty? rubbish!' I was 'poor boy' most decidedly, and ridiculously 'poor boy,' upon whom it was not at all necessary to smile, and whom it was very necessary to get rid of. So I soon found myself being edged out of Miss Georgy's presence at every opportunity, and constantly snubbed and laughed at. It was as bad now in-doors as out, and though I raged, all I could do was to lament my own condition, and read and re-read the many passages applicable to my story. Thirza Ann taxed me with being idle and sulky, and a sneaking dependant on her aunt. I answered her from my supposed height, at which she only jeered, as did the servants. Of course, if I could have appealed to Miss Georgy it would have been better, but I dared not do that, with Thirza's mocking eyes upon me.

"So the long winter passed most uncomfortably. Poor Miss Georgy, almost stiff with rheumatism, seldom came down till late, and when I saw her I guessed Thirza had told her strange tales, which made her cross and distant; and then I, too, was distant, which made her angry, and Thirza Ann glad. The old pleasant hours of spinet and rhyme had passed into a time of ailment and matter-of-fact, out of which I was glad to creep as much as possible, retreating to the companionship of my books and fancies; and a curious double

life I led, imagining myself the victim of strange plots and hard circumstances, which might at any moment be reversed. For the more I turned the matter over, the more I was convinced, and the higher I soared in the realms of fancy. I do not think I should at any time have been at all surprised if a gilded carriage, drawn by many white horses, had come thundering through the village to stop at Miss Georgy's; that a lady and gentleman might step out hand-in-hand to claim me as their lost son, and bear me away rejoicing—a foolish enough fancy, I see you think; but I was young, unadvised, and very credulous, besides I wasted but little thought on the why of my being left cold and miserable on that Christmas, thirteen years ago, to be taken in or tumbled out, as might happen. Some family feud, no doubt; books said great families always had family feuds, and books should be right, surely. Miss Georgy believed in books. In any family feud, 'the infant heir,'—that sounded well—might have been—nay, was, the very party to be carried off, far, far away. I certainly had not been inquired after by any great family yet; besides, there were none for miles from Finton, so that showed; besides, in such cases, it was only by confession of the wrong-doers that the wrong came out, or when the child grew up and did wonderfully brave deeds, and I had not had time for that yet, but I would some time.

"I was in this state, when one day as I wandered by the river, kicking my heels, and hating Thirza for telling me I might be filling my mind with spelling instead of trashy notions, I noticed a young man—tall, and with close-cut hair—a complete stranger, at a time when strangers were as scarce as parrots or railways in our part; we had no railways then—like many other things, they had not reached Finton yet.

We two surveyed each other with interest—he looking at me, so much better dressed than the village boys, I staring admiringly at his white hands and big shining rings; then we somehow got into talk about fishing, horses, and dogs; then about London—for he told me he came straight from London town—and presently, that he was the bailiff of Lord St. Giles, a great nobleman, and had come to see about the fishing, only he didn't want it known yet; and then he sat down, and brought some bread and cheese out of his pocket, and offered me a cake, and talked so kindly about all sorts of wonders he had seen, and the king and the queen, and a live dwarf, and a cock-fight, and all sorts of people he knew; and when I talked he listened, quite interested, and let me know that he thought me very sharp, and good-looking too. It was nice to be chatting like that, for the gentleman seemed in no hurry; no more was I, and it was almost dark before he said 'Good evening, young sir,' quite polite like, as if he thought me a gentleman, and lifted his hat. Ha! what would Thirza and the boys have said then, I wondered?

"If I had seen Miss Georgy I should have told her about my delightful London acquaintance, and all he said, and all I said; for as yet I had always told her everything. As it was, she had just gone up, and there was no confiding in Thirza, cross as two sticks, because I had forgotten to come in to tea. So I went up to bed and thought it all over and over, and wished and longed that I had screwed up courage to ask him if, among the grand people he seemed to know, he had ever heard of any losing a little baby boy, found afterwards without any clothes, only wrapped in a pink shawl and a basket. 'Dear! how stupid to miss such a chance.' All night long I tossed and rolled, repeating this regretfully.

"But the next day the chance turned up again, wandering in the same lonely place, and then so full was I of my object that I at once went up to him and put my question, at which he seemed very surprised, and asked what I meant and why I asked him. Then bit by bit I told him the whole story—all I knew, all I had heard, and all I had imagined about myself, and what Miss Georgy had imagined for me.

"He listened to every word, asked all sorts of things about our house, Miss Georgy, and the what, where, and how of anything I had not made plain. Then, to my unbounded surprise, he suddenly whistled loud, jumped up from the tree-stump, and slapped me excitedly on the shoulders—so excitedly that I almost tumbled into the river at our feet, and then stood staring up at him; for I certainly did not expect so immediate a response, prepared as I was for anything.

"'Why, of course; how strange! I didn't mean to let it out just yet, but Lord St. Giles—St. James of St. Giles, you know (much I knew)—has offered a reward of a thousand'—I felt myself turn white, as his keen eye searched mine—'a clear thousand pounds for just such a son he lost eleven years——'

"'But I'm—I'm over thirteen, sir,' I stammered.

"'Aye! that's what I meant—about twelve his lordship said, when he asked me to come here and see if there was news of such a boy.'

"My heart beat thick and fast. 'Lord St. Giles—young Lord St. Giles, of St. James—what would Miss Georgy?—what would Thirza?—what would everybody say?—a lord after all, a live lord.' I quite reeled as I rose, eager to run and tell the glorious news; but my friend held me with a firm hand, laughing a little.

"'No, no! Don't be in such a hurry; sit down. Of course you may be and you mayn't be the right party. I can't go a-taking your own word for it like that, young sir.'

"I sat down and stared at him in sudden fear and dismay. 'Was he going to leave me unowned after all?'

"'But ask Miss Georgy, and—and Rachel and Norah; they'll know. They can tell you I was found here. Old Norah found me in a basket on that very Christmas. Oh! do —do ask them; and I've got a pink square shawl—and look, a mark, a queer mark, just as lost children always have. See!' and I pushed up my jacket-sleeve and displayed the queer brown moles at my elbow.

"'Ah! yes, exacterly,' he said, peering at them closely, and then bringing out a paper and peering into that. 'Just so; I see three bulls'-eyes. That's the St. Giles' own special trade mark—family sign—that's right enough.'

"'Then it *is* all right. I am the real young lord,' I cried; joyful recollections of Lord Montague's son recovered among the sweeps rising before me.

"'Stop a bit! stop a bit! It's a matter of a thousand pounds in clear notes paid down to me. So don't be in such a hurry. You say this old Miss's ill. Can she come out and talk to me about it?'

"'Why, no. How can she when I tell you she's ill? but there's only Thirza and Mary in the house now. Won't you come and see her? I'm sure she'll see you when she knows. Oh! do come,' I implored, almost in tears.

"But he shook his head decidedly in the negative.

"'I won't come, if she knows I'm a-coming. The lady's evidence wouldn't be no good, if the thing's all talked over before. No, I'll get back and see what Lord St. Giles says

about it; but there, don't look so bad, you shan't wait long. I don't mind telling you one thing, my lad,' he whispered, after looking mysteriously round. 'Lord St. James St. Giles—I mean t'other—isn't in London just now; he's shooting private in a place I know of, and if you'll promise to hold your young tongue to everybody till I give you leave, I might—well, I might—I can't say I could, but I might——'

"'Might what?' I asked, husky with excitement.

"'I might persuade him to come over here himself. Perhaps he will; perhaps he won't. Any way it's only if you'll promise faithful not to say a word to any one. If you do, it's good-bye to my thousand pounds and your chance. If he found out any one knew of his coming here he wouldn't come at all; and if he did, he'd shoot you and me too—which being a lord of the king's court, who'd ever stop him?'

"Aye, Mr. Parley, you may smile; but how was I, a simple, ignorant, country goose of a boy, to doubt or disbelieve a fine London gentleman—in those days, too, when it was generally understood that His Majesty never went abroad without his big crown on, and that gold ball thing in his hand. A nobleman, to my mind, might have unlimited power, as of course he had unlimited wealth. At any rate I promised all and everything. My head was in such a whirl that I could hardly listen to my new ally. Lord St. Giles! fancy that; young Lord St. Giles! I could hardly resist shouting it out to the crows till his lordship's bailiff got rather cross, and made me listen to his plans, threatening to leave me if I did not, which threat soon made me all ears. I think I should have had a fit had he gone from me then.'

"His idea was, if possible, to prevail upon his lordship to come and see me, my moles, and my shawl, privately first;

then, if satisfied with me, my moles, and my shawl, to visit kind Miss Georgy, and talk matters over with her. 'I have no doubt but that when he looks at them three bull's-eye marks, he'll up and own you all of a heap like,' said my friend; 'but if not, don't you make a fuss about it, or try to persuade him. If his lordship says "No, you're not the young chap," it's not any use saying you are, horses wouldn't change him, and you'll never be St. Giles or St. James either. I'll say all I can first you may be sure, if it's only for my thousand down, any way; keep a still tongue and a sharp look-out, and leave the gardener's ladder put ready, and the window open, in case he may take a fancy and come to-morrow night. His mind is that took up with this he'll never rest; and I tell you what, it will be a fine day for this old Miss of yours if he does own you, my boy—for he's got oceans of money, of course, being a lord—and he'll be sure to take her to London and show her all the sights, and the Lord Mayor, his brother; and take you both to court too, I shouldn't wonder, 'cause you'll be a young Earl;' he called it 'Hurl,' but that was only his fine city way of talking.

"I went home restless, fidgety, and uneasy; so terrified and fearful lest I should talk and tell, that Miss Georgy, from her sofa, noticed my flushed cheeks and wild eyes, and taking it into her head that I was feverish, spoke to me so kindly that I burst out into a violent sobbing fit, seeing which she gave me some very bitter physic, had a mustard poultice put on my neck, and sent me to bed early, where I tossed and tossed, struggling with my secret as though it had been a living thing, and only able to keep it at all by thinking of everybody's surprise, and how I would annihilate the village folks—the spiteful women and their

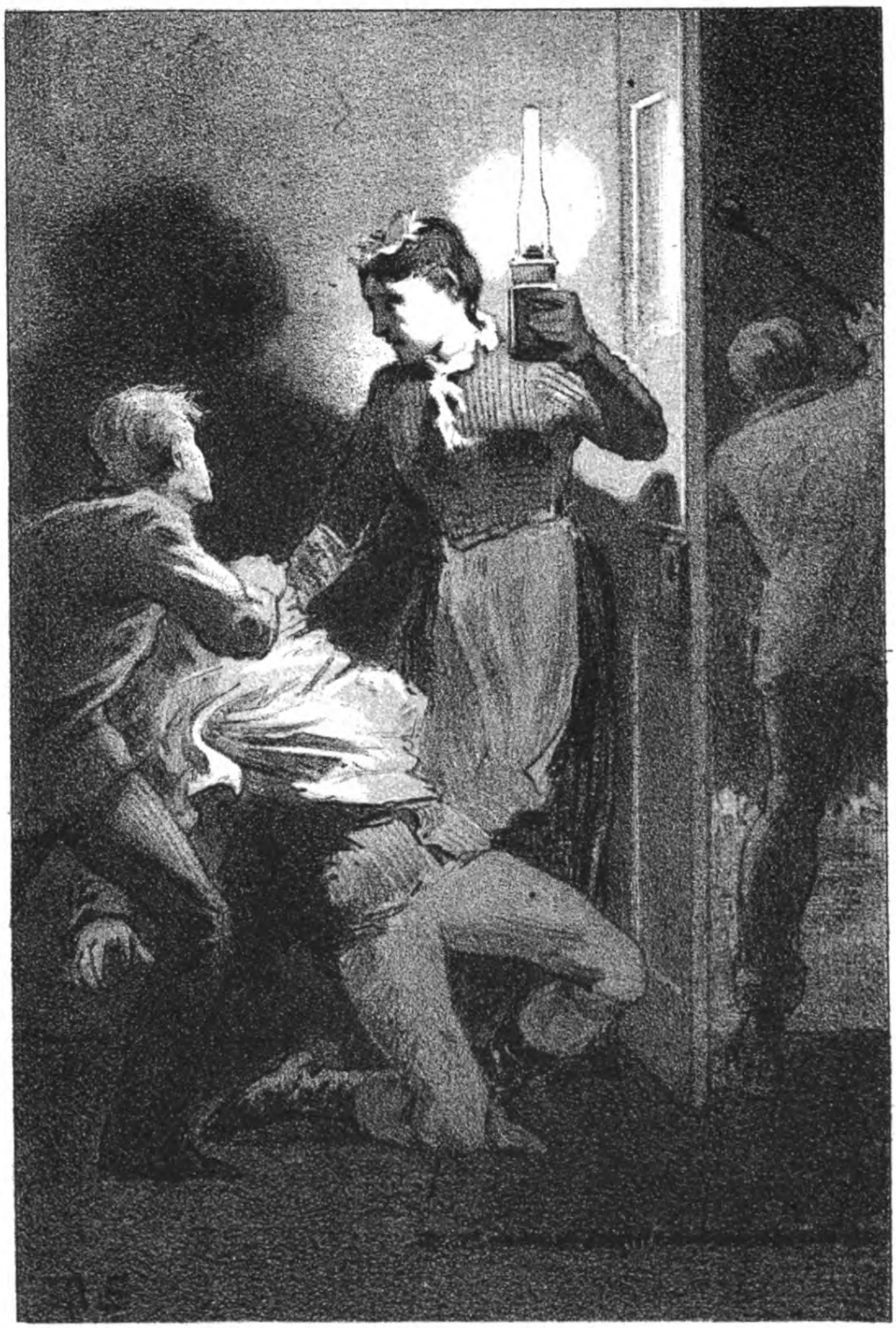
impudent youngsters—by pointing the finger of scorn at them as I drove through the village in triumph, with my noble father in a red coat, covered with orders, and myself—well, I did not quite know how to paint a young 'Hurl's' attire, but just so. The women-folk wanted to persuade me to keep in bed next day, and I had to master my excited feelings and seem calm, that I could go in and out as usual; twenty times I went staring about for some sign of the bailiff, but no sign came; and twenty times I made sure that the ladder was conveniently placed; it seemed as if evening shades would never come on, or Miss Georgy go up-stairs, for after twilight she seldom was seen by me. I was rather taken aback, however, when, as soon as she was well off, Thirza Ann coolly observed 'that she hoped I would take myself out of her parlour, for the fact was young Sam Higs was coming in for an hour or two, and it wasn't likely he'd want me, I was of course too high company for a miller,' she sneered; 'and Sam was quick with his fists; I could stay if I liked of course, or I could tell Miss Georgina if I liked.' I sailed indignantly off to my room very much put out, and I may say nearly wild, that that big, hulking cousin of Thirza Ann's, who always grinned so rudely at me, must needs come paying his visit to-night of all nights. However, one comfort was, that the parlour, as it was called, was in front of the house, and there was no telling when any one was in it at night, so Lord St. George, no, Giles, wouldn't be hindered by that, and once he had seen my marks, and heard my tale, and looked at the old shawl, I felt sure that he would, he must, be convinced; and then Sam and Thirza, and all the rest, would not matter one bit.

"I waited and waited till it began to get late, feeling

very lonely, for I had shut the doors below carefully, that no sound should be heard, not only Sam, but Sam's big brother being in the parlour, though no one would have fancied there was any one, they speaking low, because Miss Georgy, it was known, did not approve of either, being very common folk, and what I had once heard her term privately, 'simple clods.' I did not know if this was because of the quantity of that sort of thing they stamped about with them, but I liked the term 'clod;' it showed how low they were, and what knobby sticks they carried.

"I sat waiting and watching restlessly until the moon streamed full in upon me, and the peaceful stars shone down; but they brought no peace to me, for my heart went pit-a-pat at the slightest noise or rustle. I dreaded, and hoped, and feared, acting over and over the scene to come, when it seemed my whole future was at stake. I never dreaded anything but 'My Lord's' incredulity, I folded and unfolded the old pink shawl, grown so precious, and peered up my sleeves at the 'bulls'-eyes' as though they might vanish, and then, in the middle of it all I leant back, and without warning fell asleep, as fast asleep as a worn-out lad could be, and knew no more—luckily for me I knew no more for a long time, and shouldn't have known if there had been an earthquake.

"When at last I awoke, chilled by the night air streaming in, my neck was so stiff and I so heavy with sleep that it was some minutes before I remembered at all why I was sitting there, or whom I expected. Then I became dimly aware of three tall figures, and blundered on to my feet, stretching out my eager hands to meet those of—'the clod,' who, with his brother Ben, had been examining the window,



"His head and arms were completely enveloped in a large, heavy table-cover."—*Page* 199.

and discussing in low voices concerning the ladder beneath, and something exciting that had happened. They made out, to my disgust and dismay, a most astonishing story—one which I would not, could not believe, till I was led down and shown the living proofs of its truth. You, no doubt, will not be so incredulous.

"It appeared that the bailiff had kept his appointment, and come first, perhaps to announce that his noble lordship preferred coming in by the door, which, as he guessed, was very slightly fastened, the security of years having made Finton folks careless. Thinking it not worth while disturbing me, he had passed through my room and down the broad wooden stairs, which, as he did not know, had a most decided creak, which was heard by some of Thirza's surprised friends cosily enjoying their stolen visit. At first the trio had visions of Miss Georgy detecting them; but the step was too heavy, and the plan so unlike that lady's open dealing, that Sam took heart of grace and quietly peeped through the keyhole. There was a hasty whispered consultation, the result of which was that as the bailiff stooped to draw back the one rusty bolt, a door opened noiselessly behind him, and in an instant his head and arms were completely enveloped in a large heavy table-cover, which Thirza Ann and Ben flung over, and rolled and twisted with all the vigour of desperation, dragging their prisoner backwards into the parlour, and triumphantly holding him quietly pinned, while Sam welcomed the unsuspecting visitor with just two flourishes of his knobby stick in a way that made that noble personage take a sudden seat on that very kerb where I had been found, not much more helpless, and there surrender without one word of objection; the double capture being effected so suddenly

and quietly, that poor invalid Miss Georgy slept peacefully till morning, quite unconscious until after her usual cup of tea that two regular rogues and villains were safely locked up in the outhouse till further orders. I tried to keep back my share of the affair, but of course it had to come out, and oh, how ashamed I felt when I had to tell the whole story bit by bit in court! How everybody laughed out loud when I told how the bailey had said I was quite sharp and handsome enough for a 'Hurl,' and to be related to Lord St. Giles of St. James; but I didn't laugh, nor more did Miss Georgy, when the judge in the big wig said it was a providential escape, and that we might all be thankful that we need fear these visitors no more; though he advised me not to go telling my history, and confiding or making friends with passing strangers who ministered to my vanity and conceit, but to trust to the benevolent lady who had already done so much for me. 'Let the dead past alone, my young friend,' he concluded, kindly, as I drooped my humbled and confused head and wept loud and bitterly over my broken hopes, 'the present is yours, use it well, and try to fashion the future bravely for yourself; as, from what I can see, I should say that it is far better being, at the worst, what you seem so strongly to resent—this generous, kind, Miss Ballisy's "poor boy"—than the doubtful "Hurl" of St. Giles, even with fine brown bulls'-eyes to prove your identity. Learn to make your own nobility, my lad, and worthy people will soon learn to forget the rest, and the more ready to own you if you are to be owned, which I doubt if you would find desirable.'

"That, sir, is the end of my first experience," said Poor Man. "It did not have effect for long; for the older I grew the more I detested the drudgery of slow, steady study, the more

anxious and disturbed my mind grew. I felt, I knew, I was somebody; but who and what, that was, and is, the question, and alas! must still remain the question until I find a clue. But there, I will pass on to another odd adventure, which to some extent sprang from this first one.

"As you may suppose, I did not have an easy life of it after the trial; whenever I went out I was worried, the boys shouted after 'his lordship,' and strutted and crowed, while rude girls sneered when I passed. Queerly enough, Thirza Ann became quite kind now, and through her sensible advice Miss Georgy sent me right away to a good school near a town, trusting, I suppose, that I should forget myself and my unfortunate story in the bustle of this new kind of life.

"We parted with tears and good advice, for now I began to realise how much I owed the one friend I had in the world. I promised to study hard, and as she termed it 'make a clever man of myself;' certainly I had good abilities in those days, but my head was soon much more filled with hopes of finding out the 'proud illustrious kindred,' which I still persuaded myself were to be discovered in the great world opening before me. What if I had been deceived 'once,' surely there were not many St.— but no, no! the very name made me hot and sick with shame and disappointment. I tried to forget it at Shuffleton.

"It was a capital commercial school, and had I known myself to have been anything but 'poor boy,' I should have got on well enough, for as I said I had the power to learn, had I also the good sense and determination to do so, and forget a great deal of trash picked up in too much easy leisure time, and through the mistaken fond indulgence of a dear old-fashioned maiden lady, who knew no better than to share with me what had been so pleasant to herself.

"She was proud, but with a pride that somehow made her humble-hearted. It agreed with her, and made her gentle and considerate to the poorest; but it disagreed with me, the difference being that in those days I was exceedingly vain,—the old story, 'one person's food, another's poison.' Of course it is easy enough for me to understand and tell the truth about what happened so long ago, and besides, I am not vain and overbearing now, not in the least, as I leave you all to judge.

"I can hardly tell how great the change was at first. I had never been used to the society and ways of boys—such boys as these especially; noisy, clever, rollicking, frolicking, outspoken lads, ready for anything, and very often in scrapes, they were inclined to be friendly at first, but they then took to making fun of me, and what they called my 'finikin' ways; and certainly, when I found they were mostly me as tradesmen's or farmers' sons, who did not in the least understand my ideas or indulge in the sort of literature I liked, and were by no means particular about their nails, neckties, or buttons, I certainly did feel inclined to look down on them from the height of my past training, and my prospective greatness, for the more I studied and considered the difference between us, the more positive I felt of my own inborn superiority.

"One boy, however, was the grandson of Sir Francis Wittier, the member. He was very sharp, and often hailed as 'Wit Wittier;' he and I got on better than the rest. You see, being a 'Sir's' relative I naturally took care to be civil to him, for all he did not take much pride in the fact; indeed, I only found it out by accident—fancy that!

"I do not believe any boy there ever troubled about who or what my belongings were. I was just 'Monty Finton' to them, and 'the poor boy' altogether ignored, for thoughtful

kind-hearted Miss Georgy had taken care that no whisper should follow me, knowing as she did what a sore subject this was. You may be sure I kept my story to myself by this time, and that anything uncommon might the less be guessed at, I talked and behaved grand, like people in books, and kept aloof of the boys whose vulgar nicknames told whose sons they were—'baker' Carr and 'draper' Smith—keeping more with those whose fathers did not deal in ordinary commodities. At first I snubbed 'tea shop' Gerrard, till I found out the 'Sir's' grandson was a chum of his, and so, indeed, were most of the best boys, just because he had a concertina and a little printing press, and above all because he could write real verses, sometimes funny and sometimes sad; hooking rhymes together by the dozen about holidays and birthdays. He used to swap these for anything—jam-tarts, pennies, cakes, or cricket-balls, with the boys who used to send them to mothers and sisters, or cousins, and get fine tips in return. Valentine's day was a regular feast time, because valentines were not easy to be bought in those times, and fetched a good return in the school market. That all happened long ago; but I thought of the 'tea-shop Gerrard' one day lately, when looking through a volume at an old book-stall, I came across a 'Good Deed Treasury,' and the very first thing it opened at was some verses of his about young Hield, Harold Hield. I called them 'bosh' at the time the thing happened that made little Harold so fussed up, but when I read it and thought how Ensign Hield had got killed out in India, defending his flag like a young tiger, it was said, I did not call it 'bosh,' but learnt it in sundry peeps at the book-stall, and could tell it you now word for word, I really believe."

"Do so, Poor Man, pray," said Tailor, bobbing forward.

"I am sure they—Mr. Parley's young people—would like——"

"Thank you, sir, I'll take my own time, and finish my own story. If I am 'Poor Man' I suppose I can do as I like;" and he drew back his arm as though Tailor had offended his dignity.

"Oh, certainly, certainly! I only thought, and I apologise; I'm sure I never ——'

"Of course, I understand, sir,' he answered, resuming presently in his aggrieved way.

"I did not make much progress at school, I'll own to it. The fact is, my mind was not in my lessons. It was all very well for the Smiths and the Browns junior, who must cram, or catch it from the Smiths and the Browns senior, but I—I—it was different. Miss Georgy? Oh, I didn't fear her displeasure. She had no real right to scold me; besides, I knew she had neither will nor strength to interfere. Foolish boy that I own I was, I missed getting on at school, just as somehow I have missed getting on all my life. The fact is, I have always been expecting luck—fortune, chance—call it what you will, to save me trouble—and it really has not done much for me, as you can tell from the fact of my answering the call, 'Poor Man,' though, after all, something may happen. Who knows but a clue—— Yet, to return to my school days.

"Because I did not care to work up, the masters did not quite approve of me. I knew that, and was vexed, trying to think it unfair. I knew, too, that I was no favourite with the boys; but that did not affect me much, for after all, by dint of talking of fashion and of grand folks—I had studied these well at home—and speaking off-hand of 'my people at Finton Green,' of the fishing, and shooting, and riding, and 'our men-servants,' some of the younger ones got to look at me

with open eyes, and to think of Montague Reginald Sydney Finton (I had adopted those two names since I came, and there was nobody to contradict them), as a somebody of importance, and worth cultivating, seeing which I carefully snubbed them, even as I had been snubbed, especially 'draper' Smith, a little common fellow with round red cheeks, who lived in the town, and I was conscious took wonderful tales home, once humbly presenting me with a big bit of toffee his mother had made, 'like a cook,' as I said, and which I threw at his head, asking him if he knew who I was. I shouldn't have done this, perhaps, only I saw Wittier near, watching; but I didn't know he was going to pick up the lump and pocket it himself, telling tearful Smith it was uncommon nice, and a credit to the lady.

"So things went on for almost a year.

"After the vacation a curious and unpleasant thing happened—one which seriously affected me for long enough. I will tell you what that something was presently. How it affected me I will tell you now. One half-holiday, when we were all scattered about the grounds, Wit and Gerrard invited me to join them in the making of a big kite. It was not often nowadays that they seemed to care for my company, so I felt glad, and followed them eagerly; for 'being grand' was really very dull after all, and hard to stick to for so long.

"Away we went to a disused shed, where enough paper was piled to make fifty kites; it was a dirty, dismal sort of place, facing the end of a very long narrow green lane, where no one excepting a few village children ever came. No one but these two queer chums cared for this draughty corner of the play-ground; but there they set to work, Wit remarking, 'We thought we'd come here not to be interfered with, and

so as to get on quicker. Here, Finton, is your share of the tail, and sharp's the word, boys.' They were both uncommonly agreeable and full of fun that afternoon, and talked a lot of pleasant nonsense, at which no one could have helped laughing. Then Wittier, for a wonder, told us anecdotes about Sir Francis and Lady Rebecca Wittier, and how he was one day to sit in Parliament; and how his cousin Tomlin was married to a duke's daughter, and they had forty horses and carriages; he wasn't sure about the carriages, but he knew about the horses. Really Wit was very nice; but then Gerrard must needs bring in about *his* family, and how his father went for orders in a red dog-cart; and then he gave us the history of tea, and how, when he had done schooling, he was to be made partner, and meant to write ballads, and have them printed on the tea-papers. Then he strung together about a dozen very funny verses, at which Wit laughed aloud, and clapped, till I looked at him and then at Gerrard with a cold, wondering air, at which he stopped, and made a face over Gerrard's shoulder, which showed that he really felt with me, and both listened while I talked of *my* home and *my* friends, and what *I* intended to be. Of course I capped Wittier, for I was not held fast by facts, and who knew—in fact, who knows, even now, what may turn up?

"'Who's that? Who ever's that, Wit?' interrupted Gerrard, giving him a sudden nudge that sent my end of the string flying. 'That' was a tall woman in a long green cloak, with a great many capes flying, such as was the fashion then; a heavy figured veil hung over the front of her poke bonnet, and she held up the skirt of a black silk dress, as if to show two very sandaled feet on the green grass of the lane. She stared at us, and we returned the stare. Then she

solemnly beckoned to one of us—we couldn't tell which—to come to her.

"'It's you, Monty,' said Witty, pushing me.

"'It isn't, it's you, Gerrard; go on.'

"'No, it can't be me; it's you, Wit, I'm sure.'

"So Wit went, and the lady whispered, we couldn't tell what. Wit shook his head; more whispering; then came the flourish of a large handkerchief; the lady appeared to be weeping, or wiping her nose, and Wit to be explaining something. After which she turned slowly away, with bent head and dejected attitude.

"'Who's your afflicted friend?' inquired Gerrard.

"'What a prim dame; what did she want?' I asked.

"Wit flung himself back, laughing loud and long. 'Why, she must be out of her mind,' he said, when he could speak, 'raving, rampagious. What *do* you think she's come here for? Ha! ha! ha!—but you'll never guesswhat she asked—'if the boys are well treated here, as she has sons of her own, and would like to see them turn out like you.'

"'Twins of beauty and boys for ever!—Shakespeare,' volunteered Gerrard.

"'No; what do you say, Montague Finton?'

"'Oh, I don't know; but—but she looked like a lady.'

"'Yes, quite, didn't she—a real lady, too, she is,' he answered, eagerly, and then laughing again, so that Gerrard had to join in—though I must say I couldn't see much to laugh at—so that he could scarcely resume.

"'Well, she asked me if I could tell her of any boy here, here at Shuffleton Hall, that—that—any boy—'

"'That's lost his tongue now?' asked Gerrard. 'I could tell her of one.'

"'No, no; any boy that's found himself. She's looking for a dear sweet thing of a boy that she's lost, like a needle in a load of hay.'

"'Why, she doesn't suppose this is an asylum for lost, stolen, or stray boys, does she, old simpleton?' said Gerrard.

"'Dogs and cats either answering to the name of Timothy, Trip, or Toby,' I put in. And then we talked of other things, till Wit said suddenly—

"'I can tell you it seems a serious thing enough to the old lady; didn't you see her crying her eyes out yonder?'

"'Any way, she needn't go crying all over the lane; there's enough of us "soaring human boys." If she goes to our house she can call up ten beauties ready and willing to be tipped or "found" in anything,' said Gerrard, tying on the tail; and no more was said on the subject, which did not attract me much.

"That night I had a strange confused dream, in which the cloaked figure was for ever beckoning to me, and I for ever declining to come. The last I saw of her, she was ringing a big bell and calling out 'Lost, lost, lost!' until she made a dash to catch me, and I jumped into the river—a plunge which made me wake to the fact that the second bell was pealing loud, and a large wet sponge reposing on my face.

"After this our interest and excitement were kept at fever-point by several glimpses of that watchful female's long green cloak and mighty 'poke' hovering about the lane and peeping over the hedge. Wit saw her, and so did others, and they made fun of the sight, and severally declared that she was Mother Shipton, Wit's sweetheart, a princess in disguise, a witch, or some boy's fairy godmother. Once little

Hield actually remarked that she seemed to stare more at me than all the rest, at which there was a laugh at my expense; but luckily at that time Hield was snubbed by everybody, and afraid to dwell on an idea, besides, we were all busy over an examination, at which, by-the-by, I was unfairly passed over as usual, and so the less notice was taken of outside things.

"Some time flew by, and I for one had almost forgotten the incident, when, as I was sitting leaning against the gate, a dirty little hand touched mine, and looking up, I saw Jemmy, the greengrocer's boy, who, with a wink, handed me through a chink a paper—not a bill or a scrap, but a large squarely-folded sheet of stiff letter-paper, such as was then in use. It was decorated with a huge coronet on the red seal, and so scented that it almost took my breath away; while on it was scrawled, in an elegant female hand, all loops and scrawls, 'Master Montague Reginald Sydney Finton—private.'

"What could—what did it mean? I turned and turned it about, closely examined the paper, ink, seal, writing, then I sniffed it, held it upside down and sideways, as though it had a voice that might drop out and answer. At last I thought I might as well open it, only not there, where I was liable to be seen or interrupted. No, I retreated to the little broom cupboard, as the only safe and discreet place. There I made out these words:—

"'STRANGER AND MUCH-WRONGED YOUTH,—How shall I begin this missive? Shall I dissemble? Shall I cloke villany? Shall I assert what is not? Better perish first than say what is is not, and what is not, is. Are you, I ask, are you? But no; yes, you are. I felt it the moment my eye fell upon you. I know it from the depths of this proud, passionate, palpitating, peni——'

here I referred to the superscription—Montague Reginald Stanley. Yes, that was all right enough, so I resumed—

'"tent heart, I ask, are you really he, the wronged offspring sacrificed to a worldly kinsman's gruel'

"Gruel?—No,

'cruel thirst for revenge? And that sweet lady too. To think that I—I alone can restore; that I alone can revenge; alone can tell the where, the when, the how. Remorse has its sparrows,'

"Its sparrows—what did they mean? and here, in my anxiety to make this mysterious phrase clear, I raised myself towards the light by standing on a broom-head, the stick of which, instantly lurching forward, struck me such a blow across the nose that I had a black eye for days; but I never felt the hurt just then.

'Remorse has—

"Oh! its arrows.

'as you, sweet innocent, may some day feel; it is one of these that has reached my heart, and leads me to confess, or DIE! DIE! DIE! No matter!

"'I had been seeking you far and near, when by chance my eyes met yours in the scholastic precincts. I know of the past—its hopes, its fears, its base St. Giles, of the dreary morn in drear December, when you were flung like a puppy into the kitchen of that well-meaning and respectable lady, who little knew who it was that—but I must dissemble. Her mean neighbours and her retainers too—how they will meanly bow and crouch when they realise that——but no more. From yours, "'A MYSTERY.'

"'P.S.—If you would wish to know all, please write a line and give it to dirty Jemmie in the lane. It's no use asking him anything, because he don't know, and won't tell; but you may give him a penny in case I have not any coppers by me.'

"How well I remember this extraordinary epistle, and the effect it had upon me. I sat for I cannot tell how long, breathless, stupefied, and still, in the close stuffy cupboard, feeling and seeing nothing but that large sheet of gilt-edged

paper. Here at least could be no deceit, for nobody—not even the masters at Shuffleton—knew my story. I was no mere waif or stray or 'poor boy' to them, simply Monty Finton, and one of the low form. I certainly had kept my lips sealed, and yet there was not only a letter full of allusions to known facts, but also a strange mystery by which it seemed I was involved in some dark plot—some story of repentance and restitution, just like so many I had read of, and hitherto believed in most devoutly. Why, therefore, should I doubt its possibility in my own case, especially when I thought of that woman in green, evidently anxiously watching and seeking for something or somebody? Why should that somebody not be me? 'Would I wish to know all,' wouldn't I? 'Would I send an answer by ragged Jenny,' wouldn't I? Indeed, I had better go and write it at once, directly; but I soon found that I could not do that, for some one must have accidentally slipped the bolt and made me prisoner. For over two hours I sat fretting and fuming, and shaking and tapping, before Wit, chancing to pass, heard me, and let me out, worrying me with questions as to why I ever went in, and why my eye was swollen almost out of my head, and cheering me with the information that I would be liable to a caning and imposition for absence from class.

"At the time I felt reckless; caning or impositions were trifles now, all I thought of was getting into a quiet corner, and answering that letter, which at last, after much racking of brain, I did, on the blank page of a copy book:—

"'Please mam I Do want to know it ALL it seems something dreadful deep but please do not tell nobody but me about it because the boys are such teases and comon boys. I will give dirty Jemmy the penny will you tell him not to tell nothing he does not know to them if he does not see me i reman yours affectionaly'——

but I crossed that out, and that I might not compromise myself, merely signed a big master "M. R. S. F.," adding, as was proper, a

"'Ps.—An awnsur will oblige yours truly.'

"'Ps.—Excuse spelling my Eye is bad with a Broom Handel in it but please write i have got a nother penny for J. Its Black and blue. Write soon—M. R. S. F.'

"I fastened this epistle with several large wafers, and that evening managed to slip it into Jemmy's fingers; he soon returned with an answer, written on the same style of coronetted paper, but more to the point this time.

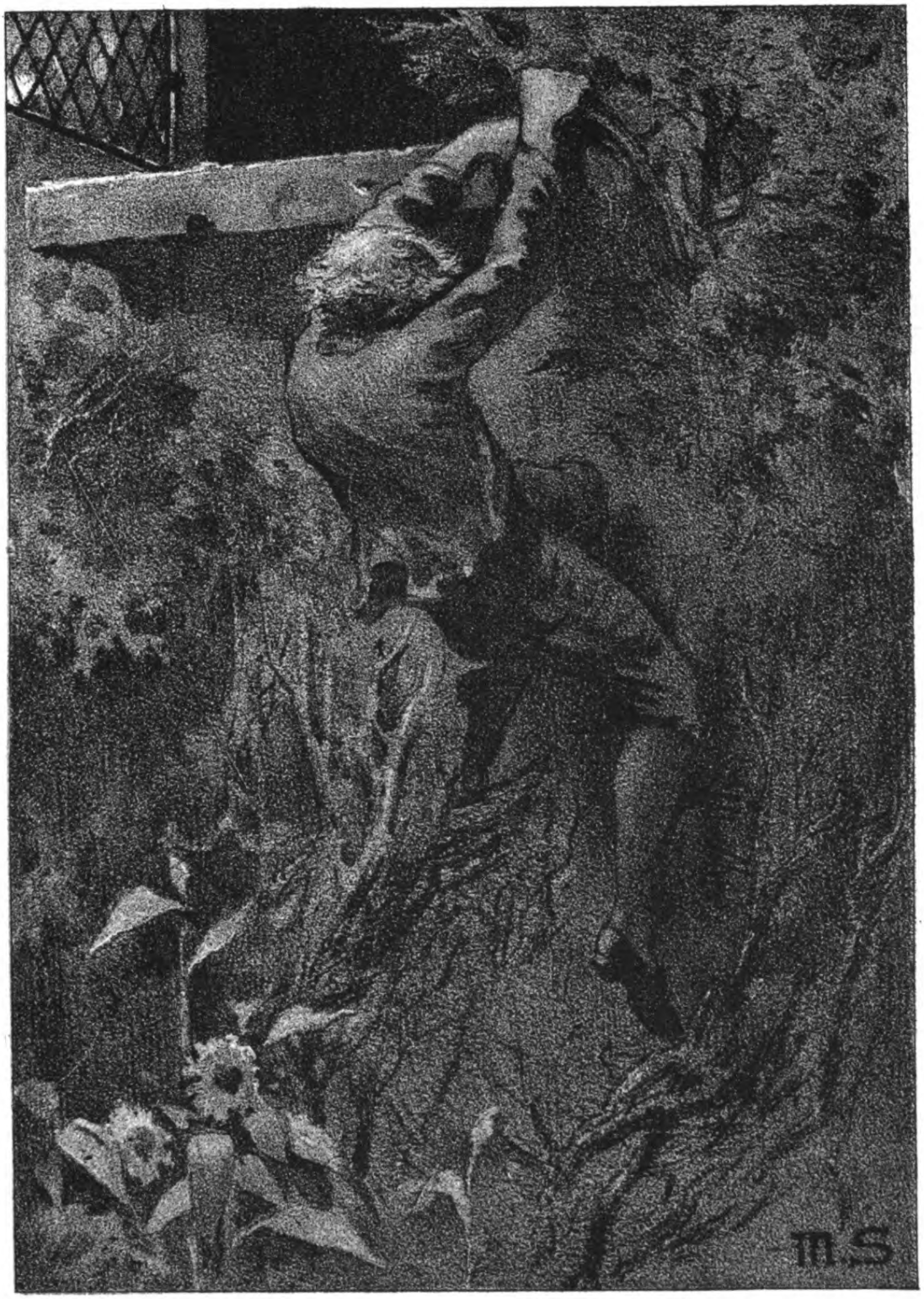
"'To-morrow night in the lane under the hollow elm, then the mystery shall be disclosed, the veil torn apart by yours—A CONSCIENCE-STRICKEN CONFIDANTE.'

"'Ps.—Ten is to be the hour, as King Charles said on the scaffold. Remember—ten! ten! ten!—or Never.'

"It was all very well saying 'ten or never,' how was I to get out in the lane at ten! ten! ten! when we were all expected to be in bed by nine? Why couldn't the woman have said 'four! four! four?' or, 'six! six! six?' It couldn't be done, it must be 'never.' I thought, and fretted, and worried over it all night, and got reprimanded for innattention next morning, when in answer to a question as to the age of Methusaleh, I answered distractedly 'ten! ten! ten!'

"Several times during the day I caught short glimpses of that cloaked figure, popping up and down the lane like a restless spirit. Once Jakes pointed it out to Wit, and laughingly said, 'There's your old green girl again.' I never even turned my head, for fear they should suspect us. Once she held up her fingers for an instant, and I read them, 'ten! ten! ten!' there could be no deceit in her signal.

"However, that ten difficulty cleared up when I remem-



"Scrambled down the shadowy ivy like a cat."—*Page* 213.

bered that the corridor window was always left open to the very last moment for ventilation, and that Smith had once got out of it, and into trouble, with a view to plums below. If fat Smith could get out of it for plums I could surely get out of it for a clue to that great secret which had troubled me so much.

"So said, so done. The three boys in my room went to sleep that night sooner and sounder than usual, and I, as soon as they snored, slipped on my clothes again, stole to the window, squeezed through it, and scrambled down the shadowy ivy like a cat; then I bounded off, and was over the gate and into the lane before you could have counted the hour that moment striking from the gable clock.

"No deceit now, for there by the big elm loomed the tall cloaked figure. I felt startled and nervous, when I found myself standing in its long shadow, and almost shrieked aloud when she clutched my shoulder in a firm grip, whispering in a hoarse, deep voice, like the villains in Miss Georgy's recitations—

"'A bold, brave lad, 'tis well; I read it in your steady eye; I saw—I heard it in your firm, decided tread—you are prepared. Then follow, follow, follow me, and learn the deep mystery you have sought so long in vain. Come, come, we will away;' and the bony hand gripped mine and would have drawn me rapidly along the lane, but I resisted and struggled somewhat, for I was not prepared, had no thought of coming or going anywhere with her. I stammered that I must not leave the lane; that I—I only wanted to know; that I had rather not go; at which the tall woman flung me scornfully against the hedge, exclaiming bitterly, 'Know! How can you know unless you trust? Trust is ever the key to mysteries such as

these. Can words convey such knowledge to you, or relieve them? Youth, if your recreant heart fails you now, it must be that I am mistaken. You are not; you cannot be *he*—the betrayed son of the—ha! what was I about to reveal? We part for ever, and yet, "I could a tale unfold," but never now, never, never!' And then to my consternation the woman turned away with a gesture of contempt, and strode off at an indignant pace, evidently prepared to leave me alone in the still moonlight, and the company of the croaking toads. It was a case of now or never, that I felt in my excitement. I thought of nothing but stopping her, and so ran after and clutched at her capes, and begged and implored for at least some little information; indeed I would trust, if—if I only knew—if, what—please give me time to think. Where did she want to take me? Was she sure—could I be sure? 'Oh! stop, please stop, just one moment, only one.'

"But still she strode on, trying to shake me off, and uttering no response to my breathless appeals. We were both almost at the end of the lane and into the road, when, out of breath, giddy and sick with the disappointment of losing this woman who had shewn me that she knew so much, and whom I might never meet again, I determined to take her at her word and trust her after all. Why should I not trust her? It was so different to that old story of the bailiff, and no one could want to take anything a school-boy had, for a very good reason. A woman, well-dressed, anxious now to leave me; no, I would go where she liked, and do as she wished, but here I must not be left unenlightened, unanswered. Besides, I really was no coward, and did not think of personal hurt; why should I? So I gasped out humbly as I ran—

"'Oh! please ma'am, stop. I—I will go. I'll go where

you like, I—only don't go further; we might meet some one, a master, and I'll go—I'll go anywhere, ma'am.'

"She stopped short in an instant, and caught my arm eagerly and exultingly.

"'Ha! ha! 'tis well. I thought I could not have been so far wrong; you are *he*. You shall come; you will trust; but you must promise that, happen what will, you will not draw back or seek to find out ought till the hour comes. By what do you promise, youth? By what solemn vow?'

"'Ponmywordanhonner, 'strue as 'strue.' I gabbled fast.

"''Tis well, then; now let me place this silken scarf as a bandage on your eyes. The equipage awaits us near, and until you have met your noble kin and made good your claim, I may not let one of their menials meet your eye.'

"The silken scarf, which was nothing more than a large fancy silk pocket-handkerchief, smelling strongly of stale tobacco and peppermint, was in a twinkling being fastened over my face, though when I agreed I would follow I had not bargained for being blindfolded; but somehow I could not easily stop the process. Besides, I remembered in time that people were always blindfolded (in books) if they were on their way to seeing something or somebody particular; so I only asked timidly where the 'equipage' was. I liked the word much. Equipage and noble kin subdued and decided me. Without more ado I submitted; the tight bandage was secured. I was led along a few yards, and finally I was assisted into the equipage, apparently an open one, of which, truth to tell, the seats were rather hard and narrow, but which rattled away at a fine rate up the Ford Road, drawn, my companion informed me, by a spirited, cream-coloured pony of priceless value, and which she would advise me to

match at Jerusalem. But we didn't talk much. Beyond giving a few directions to the driver, the woman at my side sat silent, and I—I—my head beat; I was in such a whirl of mingled feeling that I could not have talked much. Was I at last to be recognised by my family? Was I really driving fast to the arms of a noble kinswoman? What would she say? What would she do? What would she be like? What should I say? How behave? What if she would not own me after all? Should I get expelled from school for running away thus in the dark? Would my kinswoman want to see my family sign? Would she know it again? Surely. Then I slipped my hand nervously up my sleeve to feel if it was still there, and then would have smoothed my curls. My companion instantly seized my hand, and put it down again sharply, crying in a harsher voice than I should have thought she possessed—

"'Come, youngster, none of that;' but then she added more softly, 'You see I am risking so much in restoring you to the bosom of your family, and am so determined that your appearance should be a surprise to your lady grandame (my grandmama, was it?) that I must insist upon your keeping your eyes covered. You vowed silence.'

"I said 'ponmywordanhonner,' I answered crossly, for I was getting tired of this rattling and shaking over the stones. Why, one might as well be in a common cart as in an 'equipage' drawn by spirited ponies, if this was it. At last we stopped so suddenly that I almost lurched out. Then my conductor silently assisted me down. Everything was solemnly quiet, just what one might have expected on such an occasion; and my feelings were so worked up I could have run instead of stumbling along to meet my fate, when just

as we had gone a few steps, I was awfully alarmed and startled by hearing a deafening and prolonged "hee-haw! hee-haw!" so close behind us that it might have come from our cream-coloured pony had that been possible, which, of course, it was not.'

"'Dear me! why it's the head gardener's donkey loose among the asparagus. How careless, to be sure; come on, my lad. Hurry, please, that I may send one of the domestics to secure the tiresome animal.'

"I was led upstairs, and along passages innumerable, then at last into some warm apartment, where my guide, apparently addressing a servant, said, in a commanding voice, 'Rodolpho, announce us to my lady,' and we were announced, for I was led on, soon aware of sundry exclamations in a female voice, and that the thick handkerchief was being hastily untied, much to my relief every way.

"'Your noble grandma. This, Madam, is Sir Montague Reginald Sydney Finton, come like a bird, to be introduced to his noble relatives. Trumpets sound! Relative number one.'

"A weak too-tooing, as of penny trumpets, and I was caught and held fast in the arms of—Norah! old Norah, the charwoman at Finton! Norah, whose wrinkled, good-natured, foolishly-ugly face was only too familiar to me since my earliest recollections.

"Can I—shall I attempt to describe the scene that followed? For several minutes I stood speechless, partly from astounded vexation at this most heartless and unexpected climax, partly because Norah held me pressed so closely to her starchy lilac cotton bosom that I could hardly breathe, let alone remonstrate, which at last, after struggling violently to loose myself, I did, with a shrill loud burst of indignation,

which, strangely enough, seemed to surprise her not a little—

"'A shame! An impudent joke!—a silly, foolish mistake!'

"'Shure now, it's nothing o' that same; an' no mistake at all, Patrick, me honey, for Patrick's the name the praste—an' he Father Maloon o' Spanish Point—started ye wid, for all the names they've given ye since. Now, will ye listen in patience, me darlint, an' I'll be makin' it all clare to ye. Me daughter Judy—bless her!—married poor Ter——'

"'How dare you? You miserable, dirty charwoman, how dare you talk to me—*me?*' I almost screamed; 'and you, ma'am, how dare——' Here I turned fiercely round to see James Smith, little 'draper' Smith's big tall brother, calmly shaking off a ring of skirts, the green cloak lying aheap on the top of the poke bonnet.

"'Oh, don't excite yourself; "I dare" anything, Master Montague Reginald Sydney Finton,' he answered, with a little mocking laugh; 'besides, it's all right, and for your good; you bragged so much about your relatives, and crowed so loud over little Hal because he was 'draper' Smith's son, that I thought you'd like to be introduced to this good lady. I came across her quite by chance, and from what she says. I don't think you can decline to acknowledge your long lost grandmama. Ha! ha! Tableau!'

"The old woman seized my unwilling hand, saying, in a dreadfully soft way, that irritated me more than bad language could have, 'Shure, Misther Smith, an' don't ye be hard on the poor lad of mine, if it's taken him by surprise afther all. Ye see, Miss Ballisy made much of him, an' how could he tell a faithful heart was batin' with joy at seein' it? But niver cry, darlin', I'm niver thinkin' of doin' my poor Judy's

son hurt or harm. I'm not goin' to till anybody, an' I'd niver have let out and told yer own purty self, only I heard an' were told ye were for ever cravin' after yer own kith and kin, and that's how ye went a-listenin' to the blarney of those two thaves of the world, Misther Lord St. Jails, an——'

"'Be quiet, Norah; hold your tongue. I'll tell Miss Georgy. I'll have you turned out. I'll—besides'—I broke down wildly. 'How could it be? I—I—you—why even my arm contradicts such a story. You know as well as I do that I have a mark, a family mark; look Smith, surely that means something!' and I bared my elbow exultingly.

"'Shure, then, yere right there, jewel; I niver thought of that same. They are family marks; can't I show the same?' and, horror! up went the sleeves, and there were five of them!

"Only a horrid old charwoman. And I? what was I, then? I don't know what happened till I found that Smith was bathing my face, and saying to Wittier—

"'Poor little silly chap, who'd a thought he'd have gone and taken it to heart so. Come, cheer up, young Paddy Finton. I'll drive you back, and we will promise never to let out, so long as you behave well to our Harry, and to this honest woman, who is certainly your grandmother, and our nurse's sister.'

"'An' I'll niver tell, Paddy, my own!'—oh! I almost fainted again—'an', as I said, I niver should ha' told, but I heard so much of yer a-wantin' to know yer own, flesh an' blood wouldn't hould out; and a month ago I met my own step-sister, nurse at Misther Smith's mother's here, an' we got talkin' over family matters, an' thoughtless, I let out

that poor Molly an' her husband had gone sudden dead with faver, an' out o' true love for it I had "found" their baby at Miss Ballisy's door. Bless her for the tinder heart; I knew she would take him in, an' niver ask to know much more than that he wor a helpless an' forsaken babe; not that I iver really forsook ye, child, for I've been a-watchin' yer all the way through, an' if ye had seemed contint, would niver ha' breathed a word, nor I iver will to harm ye, alanna! for I see it's kind and not kin y'ere seeking after all.'

"And so she talked and talked, and by-and-by I was taken back, miserable and dazed-like at first, in a queer little dirty donkey-cart, by Smith, who laughed, and Wit, who made all sorts of fun of all sorts of things, till he got me almost laughing; for, after all, I was a boy then, and, once the trouble over, it was not as deep as one would have thought, and all the lighter that Wit and Smith kept it quiet, though I certainly was always in a fright and afraid to mention Finton, or snub anybody, lest——"

Here "Poor Man" stopped, and looking contemptuously at his neighbour the Ploughboy, remarked—

"I feel by this common person's nudges that he considers my tale quite long enough, so I will wish you good day, Mr. Parley, only begging that if you *should* hear of a clue, you will let me know. I only want a clue. I have spent all my time, and all the money Miss Georgy left to set me up in business—*me* in business!—to find a clue; for of course, when I came to think it out later, I was not for one moment taken in with that foolish story of Norah's, though I must own to much discomfort in consequence. In fact, clues have been all the time the trouble of my life hitherto; still I seek, and when I do get the right one, I— But I see you smile; it

is indeed time I should conclude. I hope I have added to the interest of your volume; and, besides, this may lead to something, if any of your readers should meet with a——but good day, sir, again good day, I have done."

"Stop, 'Poor Man,'" I cried, eagerly; "you said something about a poem—Gerrard's, a boy—about a boy. How my youngsters would like to read it; I know they would. I have not a line of poetry put down: no one else has mentioned any. Do oblige me—us—with it, sir, if you can."

He bowed, took off his tall hat, and looked in the crown as if he thought it might be there, then frowned at his boots, then hemmed and hawed at the sky, and finally repeated the "Story of Harold":—

"'A gentle, quiet, blue-eyed lad was he,
With curling hair,
Cheeks flushing like a timid country child's,
Winsome and fair.
He was the mourning widow's only son,
Her dearest joy;
She thought on earth none other could compare
With this, her boy.

"'But as the autumn roses faded slow,
She faded too,
Leaving poor Harold, friendless and forlorn,
Her loss to rue.
He soon was sent to join a school-boy throng—
A heedless round,
All careless of his troubled aching heart,
His grief profound.

"'They mocked to see him shrink from noisy play
From rough rude jest;
They scorned that unlike other, happier boys,
He loved calm best;

That while they bounded off at "hare and hounds"
In frolic riot,
He, with a book in hand, would steal away
To dream in quiet.

"'One day, the petted wit of all the school
Gave him a name,
That greeted the poor lad where'er he went
In sort of shame;
For ill-meant words must grieve a tender mind—
Simple, yet proud,
"Faint-heart," they jeered at him in tones unkind,
Then laughed aloud.

"'How sadly, oft-remembered those glad days,
When love was there,
When smiles and tender teaching made the paths
Of learning fair;
But now! ah now, no mother's good-night kiss,
No fond caress,
No father's hand to guide him on the way—
Naught but distress.

"'His schoolmates all were older, strong and brave,
But he so weak;
They, rough youths, moorland bred, afraid of nought,
To hear them speak.
Faint-heart," oft shrank in horror from the things
That gave them joy,
Yet still with snake, or snapping cur, or rat,
They teased the boy.

"'One day, the "Wit," that I should name him such,
Cried "Harold Hield,
The master's wanting you, in that long drive,
Beyond the field;

Some books he has—brand-new ones—spick and span;
He's 'neath an oak!
So hurry." Harold, ready to believe,
Went as he spoke.

"'Loud laughed the "Wit," as rushing to his mates
With what was done,
He shouted, "Boys, come to the window! quick!
Watch 'Faint heart' run!
He thinks to get a book; he'll get a fright,
And serve him right!
Strange cows are in the field that he must cross:
Cows never toss.

"'Besides, the wall's not high, he'll race too fast
To chance a lift,
For though he is a coward, one must own,
His pace is swift;
Look out, you fellows! all get a good stand,
Hey-day for fun."
Sudden the speaker stopped, with paling face—
It *had* begun.

"'Harold, half-way across the field, had flown
And hurried,
Till doubt of trickery stayed his eager foot:
All flurried
He stopp'd to hear his distant schoolmates' laugh
Ring through the space:
Looked round, and lo! a frightful danger near
In that still place.

"'He saw an angry bull, with circling tail
And blood-shot eye,
Start in pursuit—it had but late been brought
With others nigh;

They sudden joined the chase; all this he marked:
A fearful sight,
That filled his beating heart with nameless awe
And shuddering fright.

"'The mocking laugh changed to a startled cry—
"The bulls are out!"
Bold voices faltered then, the "Wit" grew faint;
Wild rose the shout:
"Fly, Harold, fly; the meadow path! run back,
The gate, the gate!
Your only chance," he heard, and instant turned,
Ere t'was too late.

"'Turning, he saw that which they had not seen:
By hillock near,
A little child that played amid the green
Without a fear.
The pretty babe had scrambled through some hedge,
And laughing lay
Right in the path those trampling beasts must take
On their wild way.

"'Quick glance he cast upon the high-barred gate:
Full well he knew
That was his goal; 'twas death to hesitate!
Yet sick he grew,
For yonder babe, unconscious and serene,
With savage power
The fierce-eyed band might crush upon the moss,
Like daisy flower.

"'It coo'd and crowed in innocent delight,
A simple thing,
That wilding clover blossoms tried to pick
And aimless fling;

One instant Harold paused—but only one—
Then started
Back, with a man's resolve, the lad they dubbed
"Faint-hearted."

"'With low gasped cry, "God help us!" Harold tore
From safety's road,
And breathless, panting, caught that baby girl—
A heavy load;
Yet strength seemed lent him, for his weak arms bore,
When safety needed,
A weight they would have faltered 'neath before,
Now all unheeded.

"'Bore it as lightly as a pictured child,
Nigh to his breast
Held fast, to save it from those creatures wild;
With fierce unrest,
Close gather'd they about their leader black
As darkest night,
Whose gleaming eyes, with threatening fury shone,
And lurid light.

"'He fled, that close-clutched infant, all his thought,
Laughing in glee,
Laid its soft golden curls against his cheek;
Stern will had he!
If, by a life this child's life could be saved
He'd give his own!
Though closer still, and near, the cattle pressed,
He made no moan.

"'Afar his schoolmates watched, excited, pale;
The "Wit" loud weeping
With sad remorse; but what might tears avail
For Harold's keeping?

Tears could not stay the trampling beasts' career,
Or ope the gate,
So high for him to scale, with such a load!
Too late, too late!

" ' Up to the bars he stagger'd, panting, pale,
With labouring breath,
And wild despairing sob, for much, how much
The boy feared death.
Yet self, controlling self, he quick unclasped
Each finger round,
By one last effort raised, the baby fell
Safe to the ground.

" ' As though a spell were loos'd, strength failed him then!
He shuddering stood,
Repeating that lorn cry, " God help me now,"
In dazèd mood,
As nearer rushed the herd, each horn bent low,
In challenge glad,
It seemed, of that still form, that set young face.
" Poor lad, poor lad!"

" ' So groaned his mates, now with small heart to watch
The mischief done,
All through a careless joke, a moment's whim,
A boy's rash fun;
They saw him sink, white to the very lips,
Stricken and white,
Like storm-crushed flower, all aimless now—
A piteous sight.

" " " God help me," he had sigh'd, at that dread hour,
Stricken and still,
And He *did* help with answering unseen power,
As help He will.



BEN. GEORGE, LITH.

SAVED!

What else had turned that raging bull aside
Its victim near,
What else had stayed it in its furious pride,
Or caused it fear.

"'What else a roving whim to satisfy
With aimless trot,
Had brought huge Nero from the stables far;
Then swift as shot,
Had sent him bounding o'er the ivied wall
At Harold's side,
To plunge amid the shaggy herd and drive
Them far and wide.

"'In hasty chase that teazed, but turned them all,
And roused the lad,
Who, swift as bird on wing, sprang from the ground,
Thankful and glad.
He sprang, and safe, unhurt, though trembling yet,
Leapt o'er the gate;
Then bent to kiss the baby, weeping near,
Saved from its fate.

"'Up rose the boy with startled wondering smile
And flushing face,
To hear his name as shouted from the skies,
In that still place;
With frank applause rang out his schoolmates' tones
In loyal truth!
How altered now his bold, brave deed had won
Each conscious youth.

"'They came down trooping, still with anxious looks,
But hands held ready
To clasp his own. The "Wit," with features pale
And voice unsteady,

Cried "Harold, you're a trump—a right good fellow,
I should have smarted,
When first I called a boy worth ten of me
'Faint-hearted.'"

"'In vain would Harold bashfully have 'scaped.
With eager passion,
They cheered and shouted for the good deed done;
Then, Roman fashion,
They crowned him with a victor's wreath of oak,
That all might know
Their youngest comrade had dread danger braved
And fiercest foe.

"'"Baby" they homewards bore in noisy state
A trophy sweet,
And laid it with the tale of peril past
At mother's feet;
Few words she spoke, but broken blessings told
What woe was spared!
The schoolboys troop'd away with dimmed eyes, glad
That *one* had dared.

"'So ends my simple tale, for need I add,
How from that day
The clouds of coolness, mockery, and mistrust
Were rent away.
How each lad honouring this timid mate,
Soon started
Another name by "Wit" at once devised—
"True-hearted."'"

A little murmur of applause followed, and then Ploughboy was pushed forward, his face redder than ever, now that he had to speak out.

The Ploughboy's Story.

"Please, that's very nice, but I don't think I ha'nt got nothin' to tell." And as he spoke, Ploughboy pulled his forelock, in the shamefaced way familiar to his kind.

"Nothing to tell? Nothing to tell? Then I'm afraid I can't put you down. D'ye see, my man?"

"I don't see why you shouldn't then, as well as he—and he;" and the hero of the field tittered and blushed as well, the while he pointed in his usual shuffling fashion, first at Poor Man and then at Thief.

"Very well. That's just as I think too;" for I began to understand that I must humour and coax Ploughboy, if so be that I wished to succeed at all with the aim I had in view. "And now, in the first place, what's your name?"

"Silas Dobson, sir."

"And what may you have done, Silas? I mean, what may have happened to you, which you think worth the putting down?"

"Nothin' have happened, sir, but"—and a gleam of light spreading over his countenance, caused his mouth to widen from ear to ear—"as to t'other, why I've done my duty in 'that state of life unto which'"—

"All right, my lad; and now go on and tell us what that duty has been."

"Well, sir, Poor Man told about his being lost as a baby; it's 'minded me that if I never was lost myself, I found a baby once, and I could tell about that, sir."

"Capital! first-rate! Go on, and begin at the begin-

ning!" I cried, for surely here at least was the real key to a story, just such as I required.

"Well, sir—" and now the way in which Silas sidled about upon his awkward feet threatened a something quite as remarkable as his story promised to be. I trembled for the bridge, trembled for him and for the rest: still, it would not do to stop him, therefore I kept quiet, listening to the words which now came so fast as to be well-nigh a jumble before I could jot them down. "Well, sir, I were but a youngster when father went to live at New Broom to mind Squoire's sheep; but for all I were so young, Squoire's man put me on to help wi' the hosses, though I didn't do much, seein' I was so leetle. But I worked, sir, I yarned my own, an' I were as proud an' as happy as a king. Seemed to I that the world begun then, an' that all the flowers busted out that spring, just for I, an' for nobody else.

"I drove in an' out from the hay-field, an' when I had a minute to spare, I just set down, an' looked at all the pretty things, down low an' up above, till it seemed as though—as though swingin' on a gate were nothin' to work, an' the settin' there atween whiles like that. But do 'ee know, or can 'ee think, what were the prettiest sight there?"

"No;" and I shook my head, for how should I know, or guess, what was the most beautiful to Silas in that rural scene?

"T' Squoire's sister. She was a beauty, she was, an' she used to come out in the fields in her white gown, an' her big bonnet thing, wi' her hair all little curls round her feace, just like mother's cap border; no matter how she smoothed it, so folks said, it allays 'u'd curl up like that, an' never grow'd no longer round her feace, while the curls a-hangin' down her

back were longer nor Dobbin's tail, an' shined up in the sun, a deal yellower nor the watch she used to wear a danglin' by her side. Ah, but she were bonny! She said as she liked the hay, but I see'd her a-sighin' a bit once over a heap o' flowers, as the mowers had cut down along wi' the grass, an' she tell'd I then, as how she called the flowers 'little children,' an' that now they were withered an' dead, an' as how she were sorry. I thought 'twas all mortal queer, but then, you see, I were but a leetle 'un; still I minded it then, an' I minds it now, now when folks be all a-tryin' to forget Miss Rachel, an' all her sweet ways.

"Well, sir, I took to church mighty in them days, and a sittin' wi' t'other boys, I could look at *her* feace. I used to pick some vi'lets too, early in the mornin' afore the dew was dried up, an' I used to say as they were like her eyes, an' then I'd put 'em in her seat afore church time, an' there she'd set wi' 'em in her hand, an' smell 'em, an' smell 'em till 'twere time to go home again; but she never know'd as 'twere I as put 'em there. An' once when the vi'lets were a'most gone, I put some lilies o' the valley as I'd found in the 'ood, an' she seem'd mighty took up wi' they, an' once when she smelled 'em she looked across the church to where one set, as was sommat like he"—and Silas pointed away to where the rich man stood. "He hadn't got no dust in his hair though —Squoire dusted his over, but this man didn't—his hair were black, an' curled like a lady's right down on his coat, but I didn't like un, an' I never cared for his curls neither. He seemed to smile a bit, though, when Miss Rachel looked at un, an' then it com'd to me, leetle un though I were, as how she thought that 'twere he as brought her the flowers. Well, I were sorry but I didn't care much, for says I to myself 'It

don't matter a bit, Silas, so long as she loves 'em;' an' so I went on a-goin' to church an' a-bringin' of my flowers all summer, an' 'twere through a-goin' there that I learned to do my duty in that state of life unto which—"

"Yes, yes, we know that—we want you to tell us now what that duty was;" for I could see that my next story-teller disliked the repetition of this quotation, so much so, that I more than half feared his going away before his turn came.

"As though I weren't a-doin' of it!" And Silas opened his eyes and mouth to their very widest. "As though a-goin' to church, an' bein' happy, an' doin' all as com'd in my way, weren't a-doin' my duty! Leastways that's how Miss Rachel put it to me one day, when I were a-workin' in the field close by the house, an' if she didn't know what duty were, why then—I'll yeat my hat" (which feat seemed to me not at all unlikely.) "Well, all that summer I grow'd older, bigger, an' wiser, an' when home-harvest night com'd round, Squoire's man said as how I was to go, though I were a leetle 'un, an' then just wasn't I glad! I didn't yeat nothin' all day long, so mother she saved, as I tell'd her; but when night come, an' I'd a-put on my best things, I said as I were main hungry-like, an' that I'd yeat lots o' pies an' things, an' then father an' I went off to the big barn where the supper were to be, an' I were as glad as ever anybody, for it seem'd now as how I were a-growin' to be a man fast. The barn were just grand wi' flowers, an' the table real loaded wi' good things, for our Squoire were one o' the right sort, so father said, an' he ought to know; but somehow when I went in an' took my place by father's side, an' see that lots o' gentry were there, an' Miss Rachel a-settin' at Squoire's side wi' her bonnet off an' her hair an' feace a-shinin' more nor ever, I couldn't yeat

—I were too shylike, you see, an'—an' Miss Rachel's eyes made me seem as though I could a'most cry. They was like vi'lets still, but she just seemed to look at ev'rybody as though she couldn't see, till by-an'-by he com'd—I mean the one who went to church wi' the black, curly hair. Then she got up a little from her seat, an' looked all pink an' white, an' flutterin', till he come up an' took her hand; Squoire spoke to un too, an' then he just took his place by Miss Rachel's side, an' somehow after that she looked sweeter nor ever.

"Ah! but that were a good time. We all sung all the songs we know'd; an' the ladies an' gents sung too. Miss Rachel sung, an' so did Squoire; an' Squoire looked proud of she, an' patted her hand, which were white like a lily, an' ev'rybody else was pleased to look at 'em, 'cause, as I yeard them say, they was such a han'some couple.

"An' after there were lots o' talk a-goin' on—I mean in the days which come after that supper. Folks said as how Squoire were a-goin' to ha' a madam; an' folks said, too, as how Miss Rachel wouldn't be wi' 'un for long, for that they could see how the wind blow'd, which were nothin' out o' the way, seein' as there were a weathercock on the church tower to tell 'em. But very soon there was real news to talk about, for ev'rybody seemed set upon findin' out all they could; an' the news were, as how Miss Rachel were a-goin' to be married, an' that Squoire were set again it awful—I mind I wondered why; but I waited, an' waited, an' listened, an' by-an'-by, when Christmas com'd, I see'd for myself that the news were true. There were a grand weddin' then; an' my Miss Rachel looked a'most like a angel as she went up to the church-door, a-holdin' on to Squoire's yarm, an' I mind as I quite holded my breath to see her. She looked happy, too, an' I

were glad, for folks were a-sayin' as she were a-goin' away; an' I thought that like enough I should never see her again—an' I hav'nt. Folks said, too, as how Squoire acted han'some by her; but I on'y know as how that he were a changed man after that—little chap as I were, I missed the smile from his feace; an' then, when he spoke, his voice were cold, an' 'twere said that he missed Miss Rachel, an' that he weren't happy, which I could believe—I as missed her so much myself. You see, I loved mother, but I worshipped *she;* an' when she went away I missed her, 'cause she were so beautiful an' so good.

"Then 'twere talked o' that there were to be another weddin' somewhere; an' one day Squoire went off in the coach, an' 'twere said as he were a-goin' to it; an' by-an'-by he came back in a grand carriage, an' there were a lady wi' 'un, as folks said was the new Madam, for Squoire were married now, d'ye see, an' were a-goin' to be happy—leastways, that's what folks were a-sayin'.

"She were pretty—Madam, I mean—an', oh! she were so tiny, too, wi' black hair an' eyes, not at all like Miss Rachel, but pretty enough in her way, just as a butterfly is as pretty as a bird, though 'tain't so big, an' can't sing. But I were a-growin' all this time, an' I were got big enough to foller plough, so old Abel said (Abel were t' head carter); and I mind as I were a-ploughin' a field on the hill-side just above the house, how I watched Squoire an' his lady in the nice spring days. He were big an' strong, an' good at jumpin' fences an' ditches, an' the likes, and 'twere fun to see how she'd foller 'un, just like Jock, our dog, 'u'd foller father; an' when he jumped she'd try to do the same, if 'twasn't too much o' a good thing. I thought they were happy; and then I'd think o' Miss Rachel, an' fancy she as happy some-

wheres else; an' then I'd call to mind all she'd tell'd me about my duty an' the like; an' though but a Ploughboy, I tried wi' all my might an' main to do it.

"But the time come when Madam gi'ed over jumping, an' took to walkin' on the green by the house, wi' a wee baby in her yarms, which she'd kiss an' fondle, and talk to, wi', oh! sich shiny eyes—eyes which made me think o' Miss Rachel, though Madam's were black an' hers blue—an' somewhere I yeard somebody say that Madam worshipped that baby. But she needn't ha' done so, for before it were three months old it were took from her, an' buried out o' sight, which minded me o' Miss Rachel an' the withered flowers as she cried over. An' after that Madam never took to her jumpin' an' runnin' again—she'd just walk quiet-like on the lawn, an' in the meads, an' to my mind she grow'd littler ev'ry day; an', by-an'-by, it begun to be said about that very soon Madam 'ud be wi' her precious baby, which I took to mean that very soon she'd be laid in the churchyard alongside o' it.

"An' so the spring come round again—that were the second after the jumpin' time, an' I were pretty well a grow'd up—leastways, to my mind I were—for I were hard on sixteen. The lambs were oncommon fine an' forward that year, an' father brought 'em out o' fold early down into the meads; an' as I were fond o' lambs, an' o' shepherdin' too, for the matter o' that, I often went wi' un o' a Sunday mornin' a bit; an' it chanced one Sunday, that as we was a-drivin' the sheep down from the fold, we come upon Squoire a-loiterin' about; for he wasn't gone to church, you see, an' as seemed nat'ral, father, he asked how Madam were, as he hadn't see'd her lately.

"Squoire started like a man wakin' up from a good sleep—'Madam!'—an' he looked as though 'twere a liberty in father to mention her name. 'Thank you, Dobson, she's well enough. A little knocked up wi' the winter p'raps, but so soon as the weather 's settled she'll be all right.' Then, as though a second thought had come, he asked, sharp-like, as he were a-goin' away, 'Nobody says she's ill, do they?'

"'Well, no, not exactly, sir,' an' father didn't know how he said it as I knows; for ev'rybody was a-sayin' as how Madam wasn't on'y ill, but a dyin' too.

"'Ye see, Silas,' father went on, so soon as Squoire were out o' hearin', 'I know'd no luck could come to 'em, so soon as I clapped eyes on 'em.'

"'How did ye know that, father?'—for father were main knowin', as you may guess.

"'Why, boy, just as the carriage were a drivin' down Sandy Lane to the hall, I were a goin' down to the great mead, an' they had kinder to pull up, 'cause as how I couldn't hurry the lambs along. 'Tis ill luck, boy, to come upon a flock o' sheep behind, an' good to meet 'em. I never know'd it to come different; an' that blessed baby o' theirn too, why, the first time 'twere carried out, sure enough the nuss overtook me just in the same place, when I were a takin' three fat uns off to the butcher. She didn't meet me, Silas—mark that, boy; an' where's that baby now?'

"Well, time went on, an' Madam were wuss an' wuss. Squoire tell'd ev'rybody as axed un, though, that she were well; but he didn't mean it, on'y he holded on to her an' thinkin' she'd live, just as we holds on to summer, an' won't say 'tis winter, though 'tis, not till the water's friz, an' the snow a fallin'. But 'twere summer then, an' 'cause hay-cart

were well over, an' there'd be a pretty busy time o' 't in harvest, Old Abel gi'ed I, an' one or two more o' us, a bit of a holiday. We just see'd to the hosses, an' then we went away where we was a-minded. I went up to the 'oods, for I were main fond o' flowers an' the likes, an' I wanted to feel that the world were made for I, an' nobody else, like as I did when I were a little chap. An' I thought, like a fool, that up there, wi' nobody about, it 'ud come to me—I mean, the feelin' I wanted. An' so I set down on the dry, soft moss, just where the mornin' sun a-peepin' through the trees had dried up the dew, an' I looked at the trees wi' their bright, new leaves, which hadn't got dark yet, nor dusty neither. I looked up at the sky, wi' little bits o' white a-dottin' the blue, an' then I looked down on the ground where the dew were all sparkly, an' the flowers a-risin' out o' the grass an' moss, an' the sweet dead leaves. The snake-leaves were a-wavin' like green feathers, an' the snakes, too, were a-wrigglin' in an' out, looking' as pretty as anythin'; but I couldn't think as I had, for the snakes made me mind a somethin' Miss Rachel had tell'd me, as how our hearts were our gardens of Eden, an' all our pretty thoughts the flowers an' our ugly ones the weeds, an' as how the serpent o' sin 'ud try hard to creep in. She said, too, that he did creep into all our gardens, an' that little by little he touched our flowers an' made 'em dry up, if so be as we didn't keep 'em watered wi' heavenly dew; an' that to get this dew we must pray for it, an' after prayer that we must watch an' wait, an' do our duty, believin' it 'll come.

"Well, I thought o' that, an' then I fell a-thinkin' o' Miss Rachel herself, an' I wondered if the serpent could be in her garden, an' she so fair and lovely to look at.

An' then I fell to thinkin' of that first spring, when I were so happy an' proud, an' I wished 'em back, I did—the spring, Miss Rachel, an' the happiness too. You see, work were play then, wi' settin' down atween; now work were work, wi' old Abel a grumblin', an' then 'tweren't summer always. An' though 'twere summer now, the days was often wet, which they wasn't then; an' even if the days had all been fine, winter were a-comin', an' though I were nice an' hot, I shivered as I thought o' the cold dark mornin's, an' the snow an' ice, an' all the rest o' it. Yes, the world were nice, an' the sun were hot, but—all the sunshine weren't mine, an'—I wished I were Squoire—but no—for I thought o' Miss Rachel a-goin', an' the baby, an' I thought, too, as how he walked about all day long a sayin' as Madam 'u'd live, just 'cause he wouldn't say as she'd die; and—I didn't want to be he, for all his fine house and his big fires.

"Well, I must ha' gone to sleep somehow, though I didn't mean to; but by-an'-by, I woke, an' surely that were Squoire's voice a goin' on so quarrelsome like. It must ha' woke me too, an' as the voice came from behind, an' the trees hid un from me, I made bold to listen an' hear what he said. 'Course he wasn't a talkin' to his self, an' 'twas t'other voice as were a-speakin' then. He were a man, whoever he were, an' I yeard un say—oh, what were it I yeard un say? Why, that Miss Rachel were mad an' shut up somewhere, an' that he, her husban', wanted Squoire to ha' Miss Rachel's baby, an' to give he some money as well. He said as Miss Rachel's were all gone, an' then Squoire he up an' tell'd un in a passion like as how that were what he married her for—her money, an' nothin' more; an' then t'other laughed a wicked laugh, an' said as he had, an' that he deserved more o' it,



BEN, GEORGE, LITH.

A "BABE IN THE WOOD."

seein' how much it cost un to live in style when he were a courtin'. Then Squoire got worse nor ever, an' in the middle o' it a little baby cried, an' I yeard un say as how he'd sooner see it a-dyin' than he'd take it, as t'other wanted un to; and I feel'd just then as how I couldn't stand that cryin', an' seemed, too, that if that baby were like Miss Rachel, I could just gi'e it my very life, if so be as 'twould do it any good. Well, they hollered an' bullied a bit more, an' then Squoire went away, the bushes a-crackin' as he tore along through 'em; but that baby cried an' cried, an' didn't stop, while I were a'most afraid to go an' see what I could do, 'cause o' he as said he were Miss Rachel's husban'. But when all seemed to be quiet, I made up my mind at last; for says I, 'He can't yeat thee, Silas,' an' so I went to where the cry were, an' there I found the most preciousest baby I'd ever see'd.

"She were pretty nigh wold enough to walk; and, oh! she were that little, wi' just her mother's mouth an' eyes; but her hair were black, an' all in rings and twists. She were just done cryin' when I got there, an' I think were a bit frighted to see me; but when I laughed, she laughed too, an' her eyes was like vi'lets wi' the dew on 'em, an' her little teeth like bits o' daisy leaves all in a row. I took her up, an' says I, 'My honey, Silas 'll keep thee;" but how 'twere to be done never once come into my head. She were hungry, too, an' ready an' willin' to yeat her little fistes; an', 'ceptin' for a bit o' barley cake an' a cold tater, I'd nought to gi'e her, so I took her home, an' I cuddled her to me, an' talked to her my way, till, by-an'-by, her little hand kep' agoin' up to my feace, an' a pattin' it; an', somehow, I loved her dearly by the time I got home. I tell'd mother, and she tell'd father who the baby were, an' where I'd found her;

an' they said as how we'd best keep the story to ourselves, an' as nobody had met me a-bringing her home, we'd best just say as we'd found her, lost and unowned, an' nothin' more.

"And mother didn't say Nay to our keepin' of her, though there was lots o' little mouths to feed besides; an' father but said as we'd do our best till sich times as she took her place wi' her own, which, I said, 'u'd be never; an' so my baby got a welcome, cast off though she were. An', bless you, I were proud to ha' folks a-callin' after me, an' a-askin' how my baby was, an' if so be I'd found another yet; an' wi' her to think o', an' to know that she were fonder o' I than o' all t'others put together, I come back nearer to the days I hankered after, though they never come quite, for work were work still, an' the serpent seemed to be creepin' ev'rywhere.

"An' I thought an' thought in them days o' the time when my baby's father com'd an' took up his livin' amongst us. I thought o' his grand ways, an' his fine looks, an' his good clo'es; an' I said to myself, says I, 'Silas, there's not much odds atween a rich man an' a thief,' for sure an' sartin he were that, for hadn't he stole Miss Rachel's money? Oh! I can tell 'ee there's more ways o' theivin' nor one.

"Well, we worked all harvest, like; but 'twere a-nigh over, though the hosses slep' out in the mead at night, 'cause as how they had to go through the river ev'ry day to some fields as were t'other side, an' common-sense seemed to say as they mustn't be coddled till that were over; but one evenin' when I just went round, as I often did, to see if they was all right in the mead, I found one had strayed off, an', as in duty bound, I went to seek 'un. The nights was a-growing dark then, the stars was a-shinin', an' a little moon, as had

showed herself a bit before, were a-most gone, so that 'twere darkish, though 'twern't so very late. Well, I couldn't find 'Smiler;' an' so I went on an' on, not that I cared much for the hoss—she'd come home all right; but then 'twere my duty to look for her—an' I were tired, an' the night were fine, so that seemed as though I'd sooner go on nor turn back. So at last I found myself out by Squoire's; but there were the copse atween I an' the house—the way I was—an' 'twere precious dark there; but dark as 'twere, there were sommat darker still, for a man stood in among the trees. An' while I were a-wond'rin' what his business could be, another creepéd up from somewhere in the copse, an' as I'd a-been a-keepin' to the grass at the sides o' the roads, I know'd as t'other hadn't a-yeared me, an' so now I just creepéd in a bit handier, an' for all I couldn't make out their whisperin', I know'd who one o' 'em was by his black curly hair; an' when they moved on I moved too, on'y I kep' a bit off, an' kep' free from the bushes; an' they were pretty quiet, too, I can tell 'ee, so well as I. Well, we all went on till they come to the clearin' close by the lawn, then they stood an' whispered again, an' I just yeard a sommat about a winder; an' I made sure as they mean'd that there were a light in Madam's, which there were; an' on the curtains I could see Squoire's shadder, for though he said as Madam was well, he know'd she wasn't. An' night after night he tended her till daylight come, just 'cause the servants nor nobody shouldn't know what she suffered—as though their not know-in' would make Madam better.

"But, presently, I know'd as the two that were a-whisperin' didn't mean what I thought, for when they creepéd round by the shrubs to get across the lawn, an' when I see

'em clim' the wall to get over to the back, it come upon me what they was after, an' that they was thieves out an' out. An' what could I do? What should I do? Ah! I know'd; I'd a-yeard o' folks bein' frightened wi' donkeys, an' what were I but a donkey? Leastways, I set up a he-hawin', as if for very life. Squoire yeard me, an' opened the winder to see what donkey 'twere—ha! ha! But 'twern't no laughin' matter neither, for when he see'd a sommat dark, which were I, he tried to shoot it, an' I had just time to jump away an' cry out, 'Squoire, 'tis I, Silas Dobson! an' there's thieves in the house! Thieves! thieves!' when bang went the gun, just 'cause he could'nt stop 'un.

"I see 'un go away, but not afore he'd shut the winder, not for Madam to feel the cold; an' then I heard that gun go off again, an' next I mind were o' the two thieves a-runnin' by an' knockin' I down; and then, afore I could get up, somebody else were a-kickin' at me (but on'y wi' slippers on), while lots o' folks—the servants, I reckon—were a-hollerin' behind like mad.

"'Squoire,' I said—for 'twere he were the kickin' one—'I 'aint done nothin'. I'm Silas, don't you know?' Wi' that he stopped; an' when I stood up he looks me up an' down, an' so I tells 'un all; an' then his fust words were, 'An' where be they gone now?'

"But, bless you, they was far enough off, an' so I tell'd 'un, an' then he wanted to know if I could say what the men was like; but then, how could I do that, an' the night so dark? Leastways, I didn't. An' then he kinder asked pardon for shootin' at me, but, says he—'Madam had just gone off to sleep, an' I believe I were mad wi' that donkey for wakin' her—not that you was a donkey, Silas;' an' wi'

that he shuck my hand, an' then I know'd as Squoire an' I were friends; an' when folks talked, an' said as how Squoire loved his fine things an' his silver better nor anything, an' as how 'twere lucky I'd a-saved 'em, I know'd as he loved one better still; for hadn't he stayed an' shut that winder afore he went to save t'other? However, I said nothin', an' I never tell'd anybody till now who that thief were. Night after night, though, I kep' watch, for I didn't want Miss Rachel's husban' to come to grief, wuss nor he was, an Squoire kep' watch too, as well as one or two o' his men, but nought come o' it; an' so winter begun stark an' cold, an' then I for one got tired o' watchin', an' took to settin' by the fire instead, a-nussin' little Vi'let—for no other name seemed half so nice as that for my baby.

"Well, one night I set an' played wi' her, till her little eyes fair shut up wi' sleep, an' then she just laid wi' her head on my yarm, an' her bits o' curls a-fallin' about, an' a-watchin' she I a-nigh went to sleep too, till all at once a voice sounded in my ear, as clear as a bell, 'Silas Dobson, wake up! You're wanted!'

"I rubbed my eyes, an' looked about me: father were a-noddin' t'other side o' the fireplace, an' mother were a-knittin' in front o' the fire—for all the youngsters were a-gone to bed—an' I wondered, lookin' fust one way an' then t'other, who could ha' called me. Why, nobody, sure—I were but a-dreamin', an' so I shut my eyes again, but no sooner had I done so when the voice comes a second time—'Silas Dobson, you're wanted!' An' then, quick as thought, I seemed to know what the voice were—it were Miss Rachel a-callin', an'—ploughboys ain't no stupider nor other folk, when they takes to thinkin' a bit—an' it seemed to I, as though she

must be dead, an' as how her spirit were a-watchin' over *him*, an' now she wanted I to do a sommat, I hardly know'd what. I thought o' t'other time, though, an' o' Squoire's house, an' so sayin' never a word, but just a-puttin' Vi'let into mother's yarms, I went away. I wasn't long in getting to Squoire's, but all were quiet, an' still; no stars, no moon, no nothin', but cold, an' quiet, an' damp. I was just a thinkin' as I were a fool to ha' come, when, lookin' away from Madam's winder, where the lights show'd, my eye went down to one o' the downstairs winders, an' just then I see'd a bit o' light through one o' the cracks. It were well know'd that Squoire an' his went to bed early, on account o' Madam, an', besides that, what wi' my comin', and waitin', and all, it were hard upon twelve o'clock then. An' while I looked, all of a twink the shutter were turned back, an' the winder throw'd open, as though to make the flames burn all the quicker, for the room inside were all of a blaze, an' there at t'other end stood *my thief*, though how he'd got in is a puzzle to ev'rybody till this day. I were frighted! I forgot ev'rythin' for a minute, but quick an' sharp the cry come—'Silas Dobson, you're wanted!' Yet when I took to 'he-hawin',' as I did once before, Squoire didn't come to the winder, an' then I rushed athert the lawn a-cryin' 'Fire! Fire!' wi' all my might. I went in through that winder somehow, an' got across the room to the hall; t'other tried to stop me, but 'twere all as though one were a-holdin' 'un back, and the last I see o' un were, when all black an' scorched, he stood for a minute outside, wi' a wicked grin on his feace, as he turned to look back on what he'd done. Then he were lost in the dark, an' I a cryin' 'Fire!' still, as loud as I could, was a tryin' to find my way up-stairs so as to wake up the

folks, who was like, as I could see, to be burned in their beds.

"I did wake 'em too, an' they all come rushin' down, Squoire first, but how we put that fire out wi'out its spreadin' is more nor any o' us know, an' the loss wasn't much after all, so Squoire said, an' he thanked I, an', says he, 'Silas, I won't forget.'

"Well, but the loss were more nor ever any o' us counted for: Madam, she yeard the uproar, an' the fright, an' the fear o' bein' burned must ha' overcome her, for when one o' the 'ooman folks went to her by Squoire's orders, she were in a dead faint, an' kep' on like it, on an' off for days, and then—word were carried about that Madam were dead, an' then I know'd that that were the greatest loss Squoire could ha' had. 'Twere sad to think o' Madam gone, but then, what were she any more nor the rest on us? An' what were Squoire's loss any more nor ours, s'posen' my mother had been took? I asked myself this when I were by myself, an' I answered the question pretty well, but all the time my heart yeached for Squoire, an' I wished I'd been able to keep it all from comin' as it had.

"So we dragged through the winter, but it were awful slow, for there were no very hard weather, an' old Abel would go to market, which wasn't fair, 'cause other winters when the weather were bad he'd used to send I an' another; now 'cause the roads were good, an' 'twern't cold, he must needs go his-self. But when spring come round, an' the days got brighter and longer, ev'rybody seemed to forget how dull they had been, for even Squoire holded up his head an' begun to look about un, an' twere then I found out as he hadn't forgot. 'Twere when flowers were a-blowin'—leastways, the primroses

were a-lookin' like pale ghosts upon the banks in the dusk o' even, an' the vi'lets was a-scentin' the very air itself—that he come to our house where I was a-playin' wi' my livin' Vi'let—for though she was tired an' sleepy too, she didn't want to go in no more nor I. Well, Squoire com'd, an' says he, 'Silas, we've had no more thieves,' an' says I, 'No, Squoire, an' I hopes as we never shan't.'

"'No—but, Silas'—hesitatin' like—'I never could understan' why you was so good like as to watch an' all that, for it couldn't ha' been by acciden' as you sav'd us them twice.' (Ah! but Squoire sighed as he spoke, for I hadn't saved 'em all.) An' I couldn't explain, leastways I wouldn't, on'y when he asked if he could do aught to pleasure or reward me in return, I feel'd all of a shiver all over, for there were one thing—a thing as 'u'd rob me o' my very heart's core.

"Little Vi'let's hands was a-holdin' of mine, an' they was warm, but not so warm as my love; her little eyes was a-shinin' sweet an' true up into my feace, but they couldn't see o' the pain a-goin' on wi'in me; but Squoire were a-waitin', an' so I spoke somehow or other.

"'Squoire,' says I,'you've maybe yeard as how I found a baby last summer, an' a more lovin'er little thing you'd never see;' an' I took Vi'let up into my yarms, so as for un to ha'e a good look at her. 'Squoire,' an' I spoke out stronger for Vi'let's sake, 'she's a lady born; won't 'ee take her an' bring her up, as—well, as her own mother u'd like her to be brought up?'

"'Twere out at last, an' I just waited to hear what he'd say. It seem'd a long time, but 'twere on'y a few minutes really, then he said, an' his voice were hard an' proud—'No; why should I take her, I'd like to know? An' as for you,

Silas Dobson, why, you're a great silly a-botherin' yourself wi' other folks' youngsters—a bit o' a lad like you, too.'

"'I couldn't let a baby die for want,' I said.

"'I could. But, Silas, isn't there sommat I can do for yourself? I owe you a debt, boy, an' I'll pay it too, if—you'll let me.'

"'No; there's nought else,' I said; 'an then Squoire went away, an' I were left wi' my little Vi'let all alone. I were glad to ha' her, an' yet she ought to be a lady, an' I know'd it too.

"An' so time went on, an' five years passed, then I were a man o' twenty-one, an' Vi'let a sweet little maid a-goin' for nine. I'd done my best to teach her some manners, sich as yeatin' wi' her mouth shut, an' smilin' when she spoke, which last was'nt hard, seein' as she smiled all day long, while as to her voice, which I tell'd her ought to be gentle an' soft, why 'twere just sweeter nor the song o' any bird, sweeter nor even Miss Rachel's were afore her.

"Yes, I were twenty-one, but old Abe still kep' his place an' I mine, on'y as was reasonable, I had man's pay, an'—'tisn't a lie to say it—done most o' the work as well. An' so it come about that I were sent wi' a sack o' barley to a 'public,' a goodish bit from home, an' rare an' tired Dobbin were when we got there. But we'd rested like, an' were just a-comin' off again, when lan'lord he said as how he had a man mortal bad wi' fever up in his loft, where he kep' a few odd things, an' that the man kep' on a-ravin' about our Squoire, an' Miss Rachel, an' sommat as were on his mind, an' he said, 'Would I go an' see un, an' hear what he said, an' then mayhap I could tell Squoire, if 'twere aught that he would like to know.'

"Well, you see, 'tweren't much in my way to go a visitin' of the sick; but I went, an' mortal bad the poor feller were. 'Pears like, he'd been a travellin' to get furder, but couldn't; an' lan'lord, seein' as he were ill, didn't like to take un into the house, an' 'twere best as 'twas, seein' as 'twere fever he had, though it grieved I sore to see un a layin' there like a dog, an' he Miss Rachel's husban'. All his curls had been cut off, an' oh! he were dreadful altered—all save his eyes, which were wild an' glittery as ever, though he didn't know me one bit. He raved o' Squoire though, an' o' the baby. He said, too, as how Miss Rachel were dead, an' as how he'd promised to get Squoire to take her child and bring her up a lady, an' that he'd had no peace since he lost the little cre'tur', an' 'peared like that the promise he'd made to the dyin' 'ooman stood afore 'un now. He said as 'twere all a lie about her bein' mad, on'y that he thought Squoire 'd be more like to gi'e un money to help to pay for her bein' took care o', if he said that, an' that he feel'd sure he wouldn't gi'e un nothing if he know'd that she were dead.

"So then I up an' asked un what made her die, for I couldn't fancy her a dyin', wi' the light all gone from her blessed eyes—seemed as though, too, there must ha' been sommat to take the light first, an' that then death had follered after.

"'What made her die, d'ye ask?' an' he raised hisself up on one yarm to glare at me. 'Why, man, she were just silly enough to pine away, 'cause she found out as I lived by my wits. She called me "a thief," "a highwayman;" but I swear that if I were that, I were forced to it by one as ought to ha' know'd better. I were a gentleman born as much as Squoire, an' so well born as Madam—ha! ha! Madam! Why, she

were my sister, my own mother's child. Ye see as how my father died, an' left ev'rythin' to my mother for me; but she—she married again, an' the new husban' turned me goin' so soon as I were got big enough to be in the way. He said as I was a bad un, but I was as good as he, which isn't a-sayin' of much; but when after a bit I yeard as Squoire Tiffy were after Bell (my sister), I said as I'd be even wi' un, for I'd go in an' win his sister at all risks, and so I did. But I'd changed my name, d'ye see, an' so Squoire never know'd nothin', nor Madam neither; but the child—Rachel's child—be like Madam, on'y she've got Rachel's eyes—Rachel's eyes'—an' then he broke off wand'rin' like; but I got to know, through his wild ravin's, that in his way he'd been kind to Miss Rachel, 'cause as he hisself said, he couldn't be no other, an' she so sweet and good. But I could fancy she a-breakin' her heart at havin' to live on what he got by his wild, wicked ways; for it seemed that her money didn't last very long.

"It made me shivery to stand an' listen to all he said o' the folks he'd left in the starin' moonlight or in the black dark, never a-knowin' whether he'd killed 'em or no, an' I could fancy my Miss Rachel a livin' on what he carried her home, with his hands all stained, maybe, wi' what were the life o' his fellow men. Now what he hankered for most were his little baby—for to his mind she were a baby still. But 'twern't so much for the love he had for it, as to keep his promise to the dead. He'd on'y half kep' it afore, d'ye see; for he'd a-tried to make Squoire believe a lie—a-tried, too, to make un ashamed for his sister's folly, for he were one who bein' treated bitter hisself, wanted to treat ev'rybody else bitter too. An' besides that, he wanted for

his baby to come in for Madam's share o' what ought to ha' been his, and—I don't say as I so much blamed un for that.

"I tried to make un understan' as the child were safe, an' as how I'd do my best wi' the Squoire; for as you know, I'd got a hold on he a *leetle*, though I didn't believe I could do much wi' un.

"'Twere a sort o' a dreary way back, though, after I left un, for I begun to think, wi' all the dreary shadders about me, what if Squoire should gi'e in to the words o' a dyin' man? What if he should take my little Vi'let, an' bring her up for his own? But I needn't ha' feared, for when I went up that same night an' told un all, he just laughed, an' called me a simpleton for my pains; for, says he, 'Madam's brother went abroad, while as for this scamp, s'posin' even if he were the same man come back, why, there'd be no believin' a word he said. The child may not even be Miss Rachel's at all, but one he stole; an' if she were, why, then she's his child too—the child of a highwayman, an' as sich I'll never own her—*never!*'

"I was glad-like at the time, but when I yeard o' his (Vi'let's father) bein' dead, I kinder wished that Squoire had been different; but I see'd that Sunday after Sunday at church he'd set and look over into the free seats where I were, wi' Vi'let close by my side, an' then I wondered what his thoughts was, for the child were just Madam all over, 'cept her eyes—yes, I could see it more and more, knowin' what I know'd. The eyes was Miss Rachel's though, an' I wished—oh! I wished—that she'd ha' been more like her mother; but there, 'twere best as 'twas after all.

"An' so I kep' her—I, a ploughboy, an' she a lady, wi'

dainty ways o' her own, as had never been teached her, an' I loved her just as I loved her sweet mother in heaven, wi' a love just like we love a Sunday, an' just like we love all good things—the sun, an' the flowers, an' the bright blue sky—there, I can't tell any better how I loved her nor that.

"An' so things went on for three years more, but there was times when I fancied Squoire took a bit kind to my little maid, for sometimes when he met her he'd gi'e her a shillin', another time a half-a-crown, and so on, but whatever 'twere, she'd gi'e it to I, an' then mother an' I bought her somethin' ladified for her to wear, so that, bless her! she were al'ays as pretty as a queen in our eyes. Well, 'twere a hard winter as com'd then, bitter hard, still 'we had a plenty,' as little Vi'let 'u'd say, when I vexed a bit over her, as ought to ha' been in warm rooms, an' a-clothed in scarlet, as the Book says; not that I wanted her gone, an' not that I, or any o' us, grudged her a bit an' a sup, on'y you see the cold seem'd a bit too much for her, an' instead o' makin' her hungry as it did we, it took all her appetite away, so that she couldn't be warm, couldn't abide the weather scarce. But the light an' the mist were still in her pretty eyes, an' that done me good, for I said, says I, 'Silas, while the light's in they, she'll weather through.' But one day, when she were wuss nor usual, mother she made her stop in bed, an' t'wards night says she, 'Silas, I must go for the doctor, for the child's right down bad;' an' says I, 'Mother, you be right, she is—an', please God, we'll pay doctor honest, if so be as he'll save her.'

"An' the doctor come at once, for ev'rybody know'd Vi'let, an' had a kind thought for her, doctor wi' the rest. But he looked grave like when he see her, an' he said as how 'twere low fever she'd got, brought on through want—'I

mean'—for he see'd as how I was a-goin' to break out—'want o' what you hadn't in your power to gi'e, want o' what 'u'd a-bear'd her up through this severe cold; you gi'ed her the best you had, an' you could do no more.'

"Still he said as how he'd bring her round again, if he could, an' that very night, when I went for the medicine, he gi'ed me a basket wi' a few things as he said mother 'u'd find useful; but she didn't just then, for Vi'let were too bad to do more nor drink an' stare about, an' she didn't know any o' us one from the t'other. Mother set up wi' her, an' I were there pretty often to see if the light were still in her eyes; but mornin' come at last, an' I were forced to go, though you may guess 'twere wi' a heavy heart I went away. An' at night she were no better—rather wuss if anythin'—an' now there were no lack o' good things in the house, for Squoire had sent all sorts—wine, an' broth, an' meat—but Squoire couldn't gi'e us what we wanted, which were nothin' more nor less than sommat to make our darlin' better.

"Mother an' I both set up that night, an' I half made up my mind, too, to stay at home next day, to see the last o' her; but toward mornin' she dropped into a doze, an' mother she said as how she were better, an' so I went off, for seemed that if I didn't, 'twere all the same as gi'en up hope, an' I couldn't do that yet. I mind as that mornin' were dark as night, but I could see the snow all about, for 't had snowed at times for three or four days, an' now the snow were friz, so that the roads wasn't so bad, seein' that the snow had come steady like, an' there'd been no wind. But that mornin', as I stood a minute at the door afore startin', I found a bit o' sharpish breeze ablowin', an' a bit o' sleet, or small snow, a drivin' in the air. But that were nought, an'

so I went on, an' when I'd see'd to the hosses I com'd back to breakfast, an' after that I got ready to go a journey, to get some fire-'ood for Squoire, for his own stock were a-well-nigh out, an' he'd a-bought some, at a place a mattern o' ten miles off, which must be brought home. An' so I set out quite early like, but 'twere slow travellin' over the snow, an' slower still when I got a little bit off, for the wind got rougher, an' the snow were thick, an' small, an' blindin'. I kep' to the road, though, an, I hoped the storm 'u'd soon be over, for, as I said, it couldn't keep on like that; an' so little by little I reached my journey's end. They let me ha' a little o' what I come for, but not much; for the man said I'd never get home wi' a load. He wanted me to stop there, an' not ventur' off again, but I thought o' Vi'let, an' there in the village the storm didn't seem so bad, an' I hoped 'twere better. But goin' back the wind were feacin' us, an' Dobbin' an' I were pretty much put about to get on at all. The snow fell faster nor ever, it were right down blindin', an' it took our breath, while in places the snow was that there drifted that I were forced to help Dobbin through. But I kep' a-sayin' as ev'ry step was a little nigher home, but them steps was that slow that I could see night a-comin' afore we was more nor half-way. But the common outside our village were the wust, an' I tried to hurry Dobbin, so as to have a glimmer o' light when we got there; but he were gone past hurryin', an' there were no shelter on the road, an' so the dark come on entirely, an' wi' the snow and wind like that, 'twere hard work even to breathe.

"How we got on to the common, flogs I to say—somehow Dobbin an' I did get there, though 'twere on'y by fancy at fust I know'd I were there. Presently, too, the wind which

had been in our feaces all the way, seemed blowin' sideways, an' then in our backs; an' then, by-an'-by, I know'd we was lost, an' Dobbin know'd it, too, for he stood stock still all at once, an' wouldn't move a step further. I forgot to say as I'd left the waggon behind some time afore, for Dobbin he couldn't get' un along. Well, we'd been a-wand'rin' some time on the common afore we know'd as we weren't gettin' further on. I tried, too, to guide myself by the wind, but 'twern't no manner o' use. I know'd we kep' a-wand'rin' round an' round, though how to help it I couldn't tell. An' at fust, when Dobbin gi'ed out, I thought I'd just stay wi' 'un, an' try to keep myself warm by holdin' on to un'; but just as I were a-gettin' colder nor ever, an' a sort o' numby feelin' were a-creepin' over me, so that I were a-most a-taking Dobbin for my little Vi'let, an' myself for Miss Rachel, a voice I know'd well come to me—'Silas Dobson, you're wanted!' An' as I listened, I were Silas Dobson again in a minute, an' I feel'd like a-wantin' to save dear life; feel'd that I must leave Dobbin too, for that my life were o' more use nor his any day. Still 'twere like leavin' a friend to leave Dobbin; but I patted 'un an' kissed un' for the last time—poor cre'tur', he were a-quite done up, or he'd ha' come wi' me then; but there! I left 'un, an' went on, for I know'd that on'y wi' moving could I keep life in me. An', oh! I did hope that somehow or nother I should find my way across that common to one or t'other o' the cottages on the t'other side. Still, I were a-nigh beat, an' I know'd that hadn't it ha' been for that voice I should never ha' moved again; an' now, though I tried to keep straight on, I couldn't ha' done so, 'cause the wind kept comin' all ways, an' at last I were dead beat once more. But 'twere hard to gi'e up,

an' so I kep' movin' slow like, on'y stoppin' once an' again to hold my sides an' get breath till I seemed strong enough to move on once more. I were a-goin' on a bit better for a minute or so, when all at once I kicked at sommat as wasn't snow, an' stoopin' down, I caught hold o' a man—a man as wasn't dead, for he moved a bit then, an' kinder groaned.

"'Who be 'ee?' I hollered, for the wind were like that that I could scarcely year my own voice. 'Wake up, an' I'll help 'ee!' I said—I, who were in want o' help myself. An' seemed as though as what t'other voice were to I, so were my voice to he, for he shook hisself an' spoke my name; an' then I know'd as 'twere Squoire. 'Squoire! Squoire!' I said, 'get up!' An' then, for all bein' so weak, I rubbed 'un, an' then helped 'un to stand; an' it seemed to gi'e me strength, too, to feel that—that I shouldn't ha' to die alone. Not that I talked o' dyin'. No, I said, 'Please God, Squoire, we'll get on now, we two together;' an' though he hung heavy on me at fust, we struggled on, an' atween whiles I learned that Squoire, havin' gone round to ask for Vi'let, had found the storm stronger nor he thought; an' knowin' as father, an' Tom, an' Jerry was a-busy wi' providing for the sheep, he just thought as he'd come an' meet me, thinkin' I'd have a sharpish pull to get along, an' never a-dreamin' how bad 'twere really out in the open. An' when he found out how 'twere, he tried to keep on for my sake; but the dark, an' the drifts, an' the wind, were too much for 'un, strong though he were, an' so he sunk down just as I found 'un, for nobody but they as were beat by that storm can really say what 'twere. But we was no nigher bein' saved than we was afore—leastways, it seemed so. I kep' on a-sayin' as, 'Please God, we'd be all right;' but

though God seemed near to us, He seemed far away too, an' 'twere dreadful to feel strength a-goin', an' to feel the numbness a-creepin' on, an' the wind a-cuttin', an' the storm a-stoppin' our breath; an' to feel, too, that ev'ry minute there was a bit less of hope left to us to hold on to. But hope did come, an' help too; an' where should 'ee think it come from?

"I were just a-thinkin' as we two couldn't drag about no longer, when there seemed a bit o' a twinklin' light away off; Squoire see it, an' so did I, an' as we made way to it, it com'd our way too. 'Tweren't long afore we met it nother, an' then you might just a-knocked I down wi' a straw, for if it weren't little 'Vi'let,' a-dressed up as though she were well, and a-bringin' a lantern in her hand to guide the way! 'Vi'let' I said, an' I took her, while Squoire took the lantern, an' then she just nestled close, an' says she 'Silas, I tried to find ye, an' now I'm glad I have.' An' wi' she in my yarms I seemed to grow strong, an' the light put life into Squoire, but Vi'let, she just said 'Silas, I must come an' show ye the way. Mother, she cried about ye, an' I cried too, an' then I just went to sleep, an' somebody said I were to come an' lead ye, an' Silas; I *must* do it. I had to come.'

"An' so she did, an' I wondered more an' more—wondered what it all meant—wondered how she got away wi'out mother a-knowin'. But there, it seemed as we was saved! Not that I didn't feel frightened for Vi'let—I minded how when I took her up, her feace were like a hot coal when it titched mine, while her hair an' clo'es like ours was a-covered wi' snow; her little hand, too, which were in mine, were hot even now wi' the fever, an' I said to myself that now my darlin' 'u'd die for my sake, an' that I'd



"If it weren't llttle Vi'let . . . . a-bringin' a lantern in her hand."
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a-deal rather ha' been left, for she were a-guidin' us as though she were a angel, though how she come to us, or how she feaced the storm now, no mortal tongue can tell; but, Squoire Parley, I can tell 'ee, that when ye've been feace to feace wi' death, an' sich a death, ye hardly knows what ye do think about gi'en' up your life for another. I did'nt, an' Squoire Tiffy didn't nother, though when we got to our house he stayed till mornin' to see how the child were, and he seemed ev'ry bit so bad as I did, for fear she'd die. An' then we learned that, seein' Vi'let better and asleep, mother'd gone to get somebody to see for I, as I hadn't come, an' father an' the boys couldn't leave the sheep; you see she never thought o' anythin' happenin' while she were away, but when she com'd back Vi'let were gone, an' the big lantern too, as she'd lit, thinkin' it 'u'd help whoever come off to seek me. Nobody ventured out though, nobody but Vi'let, an' she, strong in a strength not her own, saved us! Little Vi'let, who seemed like a angel from heaven to Squoire an' I!

"In the mornin' he went home, but he come back again pretty soon, an' he an' I had no rest all day till night com'd, an' then—thank God, Vi'let were better! God, who sent her to us took care o' her, it seemed, for the cold didn't strike the fever in; an' seems I see Squoire now, when a-goin' down on his knees, he kissed her pretty lips, an' says he to I afterwards, 'Silas, you must gi'e her to me; she's Miss Rachel an' Madam together—I'd say it to nobody but you, Silas; but you an' I be brothers now in the sight o' heaven, no matter what men may say o' us; an', Silas, you shall be a gentleman too, if you like, for I'll make you one.'

"But I said, 'No, Squoire, 'tis no good to try to make I that, but make Vi'let a lady, an' I'll be content.' An' Squoire

owned I were right, for what I were then I be now, an' 'I do my duty in that state—'"

"Yes, yes; but go on, my good fellow."

"There beant no more to go on wi', on'y when I see'd Vi'let a-ridin' in her carriage, an' when she smiled an' stopped to gi'e me her little hand, I thought o' Squoire's words about bein' brothers, an' then I said, 'Silas, thou bee'st a rich man so well as he.' An' when I thought o' Miss Rachel's husban' an' what he were, an' when I thought o' what he said as Madam's father done, then I said, 'Silas, a rogue's a rogue all the world over, an' there's many a one as don't—

"Ahem," I coughed, warningly; "thank you very much, Ploughboy, but what about your neighbour?—time is passing you know."

"Now, Mr. Thief! Now, now, now! Silas, give him a nudge, will you? Thief!" I called, as cheerily as I could; for, truth to tell, I rather shrank from chronicling such events as were likely to be recorded by the rough and rugged-looking figure I had so inadvertently conjured up.

The Thief's Story.

"What is it, eh? Oh, hi, ha! Yes, it's my turn, is it?" he yawned heavily, rousing himself from a nap in which he had apparently lost himself during the latter part of Ploughboy's story—indeed, except a little passing interest in Poor Man's incident concerning Lord St. Giles, Thief had been rather bored by the whole proceedings, and when not asleep or bobbing in and out of the rails in a noiseless but most distracting way, was fidgetting with his lantern, or clicking his weapons, or pulling up his boots, or pulling down his hat, or practising heavy frowns at nobody in particular. Alto-

gether the fellow was most objectionable, and felt it, and knew it, and exulted in the fact that I and every one else there wished him gone; but nobody's wishes affected him in the least—rather the other way, indeed.

"It certainly is your turn—that is, if you have anything you particularly care to tell. Do not exert yourself if you would rather not. I am nearly at the end of ink and paper, and can excuse you to my young people"—who care little to hear "Thief," I could have added; but remembering that he could not help that, I merely said—"being the last on the list."

"If I have anything to tell!" he answered, rousing himself suddenly, "If I have anything to tell! Why, man alive! I could tell as much as would fill all the foolscap you've ever spoiled. I don't think much of all the softy stories these mates of mine have been taking up time with. Why I could tell such as would make your pretty-faced reading-school boys and girls turn white, and wriggle and twist with fright. I could make 'em afraid of their shadders in sunshine, and their beds at night; I could——"

"Oh, stop, stop! None of that sort of thing, if you please. We do not want to wriggle and twist, or be horrified by waving 'shadders.' We shall be quite content with something far less exciting, such as our friends here have kindly told—some adventure suitable to be heard by all, especially our youngest wonder-loving boys. You look most in their line, I fancy, and have no doubt a perfect budget."

"*Do* I look like a party likely to tell bits of baby stories? Do I look like Tailor Snip, or like our Simple Simon here?"—and he glowered at the Ploughboy so fiercely that the young fellow turned pale through all his freckles,

and almost swallowed a straw as he hastily drew back a step or two. "Do I, I say? 'cause if I do, I didn't know it before, nor no one else noticed it;" and his gleaming, steely blue eyes shone bright, and his bearded, black chin shook aggressively in the many folds of his cloak.

Dear me! I very much wished he would go away quietly and keep his stories to himself; and yet I had called "Thief," just such a "thief" too, and must put up with, or rather put down, whatever he might choose to tell. Could I have patience to do it? I faltered, and he knew it, and chuckled, and clashed his many pistols and poniards, and pulled the black crape lower, and laughed a hoarse ha, ha! when he saw that in desperation I was preparing to rise and fly. "Thief!" now I had him, was too much for me.

"It's no use, mister, off this bridge you cannot go," he cried. "I don't budge till I'm put down with the rest; but after all you needn't be a-looking and a-feeling it like that," he added, with a sudden change in his gruff voice. "I'm not really half as bad as I look, I ain't. It's this fine show-dress does it. Why P. P.," he whispered encouragingly, with a knowing wink, "*you* ought to know that a real, live, every-day thief is one thing, and a boy's Robber-thief is another, and both quite different—t'other from which. As you meant a boy's thief, it's as one I've come, and as such mean to tell 'em a bit of my story—just a morsel that will please 'em, I fancy. Call it 'How I became the Leader of a Band,' eh, sir, will that do? Sounds well;" and suddenly dropping his easier manner, he dragged up the folds of his heavy cloak, and in a deep, bass voice, and with many a frown and wave of the hand, as though reciting, began :—"Hearers All :—I was born of very respectable, poor, but dishonest

parents, in a darksome dank hut, in a densely wooded forest. My earliest recollections are of blows, and of a wrinkled beldame of the gipsy band—a Bohemian, that sounds better—who nursed my innocent youth, and made clothes pegs. There I grew up to boyhood in calm sweet solitude; there the voices of nature appealed to my sensitive self in many ways; for the wind blew, howling through the chinks and rifts and broken branches of our hut, as in a howling wilderness the owls howled their loudest howl."

"Owls don't howl, they hoot, mister," put in Ploughboy, authoritatively; but Thief turned upon him so threateningly that Silas this time swallowed the straw he was nibbling, and stood staring in silent amaze, and discomfort and choke.

"My owls howled, I tell you, and did not hoot 'mister.' I ought to know best, and I say my owls howled howls, and my winds blew blowy every night all the year round, so there. Well, I grew and I grew, and soon was handsome and skilful, as became a swart child of the forest; while yet an infant baby I could trap hares and rabbits by the dozen. At six I could aim straight at the heart of the smallest squirrel on the highest tree-top; at seven shoot the flying fox on the wing; at——"

"I don't believe that, never a bit—seven, bosh!" cried the Tinker, giving his tin can an impatient shake.

"If this is to go on, I shan't," said Thief, sulkily, but in very matter-of-fact tones, as he turned to me.

"Sh-sh-sh!" I cried. "Remember all, it is the 'Boys' Thief' talking, and as such, nothing that he says is to be questioned by anybody, for nothing is too surprising or unlikely to be believed in."

"You're right there, Mr. Parley, sir; you know

youngsters, you do. Why, they wouldn't thank me to come here a every-day sneaking, pickpocketing sort of chap, with a helmetted policeman a watching round the corner, not they; but I'll go on, as you're so pressing;" and again changing to the attitude and the deep voice, he continued: "One aim, one idea, one thought, had taken possession of me in all the happy days of my boyhood; at home being cuffed, or eating my porridge, abroad ranging the forest free, my longing was to be one of a Band, a free and merry Band—that was the life for me.'

"I tried that once, was triangle for three months, and got kicked——" put in number two of the company.

"S-sh! really Tailor, sh-sh! this wont do. Mister Parley knows I didn't mean ne'er a band of fiddling, triangles, and noise, but a band of bold, brave robbers, real independent outcasts of society, venturesome, smart footpads, Bandleitys (I think he meant banditti), whatever it might be, that dressed in this fine style, and lived in caves, helped themselves to anybody's anything, and altogether did as they liked. I had heard about them from my old beldame nurse, who had known a lot of such people, and loved to talk over the embers about her uncle Dick Turpin, and her cousin Maid Marian, and her brother Spring-heeled Jack, and Robin Hood and his father, Friar Tuck, and Jack Sheppard. And a lot of such-like she did really know, and hearing of them made me worse; so that I went wandering in and out, and up and down the forest glades looking for Bands, but I never found one, not in our part leastways, and got quite thin and unhappy, because I was afraid I should have to give up my noble aspirations after Bands, and take to charcoal-burning and wood-cutting, which was the only other thing to be done,

meant hard work, and was common, as 'Poor Man' would say. One memorable day, grown quite desperate, I left my native cot at daybreak, with a small blue bundle on the end of my stick, a strong heart, and determined to venture all on a desperate cast. I crossed a mountain's brow, and wandered over hills and dale, and on, and on, and on, until I left all signs of habitation far, far behind, and plunged into a wilderness of tangled trees and tall grasses. Above me screamed the tawny eagle, as it devoured the cruel kite. About me hid fierce forest creatures, lurking to kill their more defenceless friends. Prickly cactus, laden with scarlet bloom, and the humble blackberry and sloe, lined the wayside, while soft green moss carpetted the road, and trickling waterfalls cooled the soft breezes of the summer air; for in this fair land all was and ever is bright and beautiful, and slow music is heard continual."

"Whatever land did'ee call that, maty?" inquired Sailor, with interest. "I don't believe I ever cast anchor there."

"Maybe not, Jack, you of the foaming waves; but it is the same land where I, 'Boys' Robber-thief,' am to be found —was, at least, at that time of which I speak. Well, on this particular day, and in this particular spot, I presently heard what I took for a piping bullfinch or a nightingale, but which turned out to be the melodious melody of a maiden, mounting the mountain's brow—leastways, I mean reposing on a bed of roses and lilies, and a bathing one of her sweet feet in a big pinkie shell, which she had found conveniently filled with dew, while she twanged softly on a big guitar thing hanging by a blue ribbon round her alabaster neck, all smothered by hyacinthine tresses of flowing auburn. Stealing carefully

along in the shadows, I distinguished a tender melancholy over her fair, wan features, and heard the words of her song, which have haunted me in many an idle hour, through many a dreamless night—

"'I, the stern pirate's bride
Shall be to-morrow-row-ow.
Alas! my heart must break,
Heavy with sorrow-row-ow-o.
Oh that some youth would come!
Bear me across the sea-ea-e,
Safe to his palace home,
Where I could wed with he, he, he.'"

So sang Thief, turning up his eyes with the most affected air, at which every one present laughed aloud. He only coolly remarked—"Ah! yes; that's 'cause you're not my boys now. They don't laugh at nothing of the sort, I can tell you—songs and sentiment, that's what they love, any amount. But to return to my narrative. My heart beat so fast, that reeling back I dropped my stick and homely bundle, clapped my hand to my heart, and with a choking gasp fell head-over-ears in love with this fair apparition. Ah! how changed all the world was now. All the birds in all the trees looked down kindly like; they felt for me, but I do not know if I should have had courage to declare my passion yet, had not a sweet little jackdaw hopped out of a ripe raspberry bush, and, standing right in my path, closing one bright eye and holding up one friendly claw, said, with the ghost of a caw, as plainly as jackdaws can speak, '*'Erputofftilltomorrowwhatyoucando*——' Surely after that I need not hesitate. It was beyond all dispute ordained, for even voiceless things had a voice in it. The finger of fate in the feathers of a daw: she should—the maid, not the daw—

she must be mine—my bride, my adored one! For the moment I forgot the high purpose of my life. A Band! what was a Band then, to—to—whatever her sweet, though as yet unkenned, name might be? With stealthy steps I strode softly, so as not to alarm the fair creature, who by this time was shaking off the dewdrops, and encasing her ivory, lovely foot in a slipper, to which that of Cinderella was a boat—a steamer—a regular canoe, I can assure you.

"As she arose, tossing back the trailing auburn tresses which curled about her like a bright vermilion—I mean veil—I felt no time was to be lost, and advancing gracefully fell on one knee, dashed my plumed cap to the earth, and exclaimed in low tones of the deepest emotion, 'Fairest of beings! I love but thee! Adored one, wilt thou be mine?'

"You should have heard the slow music then, but louder beat our young hearts—mine with tenderness, hers with bashful, maidenly, shy confusion. She drew back with a little scream, and waving me back with lily-white hands—about the wrists glimmered many rows of priceless pearls—she cried in haughty tones of proud disdain—

"'Wherefore this intrusion, stranger youth? Away, caitiff, I am not unprotected—or stay—yes I am—say who art thou? Ha! silent; then I am betrayed. Say, must I quit this spot?' and then she turned as though to fly; but the ribbon of the guitar became entangled in her scarf, and she would—she must—have fallen low, had I not bravely sprung to the rescue, and borne her fainting form to the fountain's brim, where soon she recovered enough to thank me for my ready service, and presently to look up and ask me, blushing, my name and address. 'What was my father? who was my mother? had I a sister? had I a brother? had I

a nearer one? had I a dearer one?—a dearer one?' she repeated, as she sighed deeply; then once more said she must indeed depart, or she would be bringing peril and danger on my innocent head. 'Fly, fly from the presence of the hapless Angela, or death will be your doom,' she cried wildly, as I once more sank on one knee. 'Fly!—you do not know—'tis true! 'tis true! 'tis true! 'tis pity! but 'tis true! I am betrothed!' and then she burst once more into that pitiful song, accompanying herself on the ready guitar—

"'I the stern pirate's bride
Shall be to-morrow-row, ow, o!
Alas! my heart must break,
Heavy with sorrow-row, ow, o.'

"It would be impossible to describe the wildness with which she uttered these pathetic words; but I softly took the guitar from her frenzied grasp, and sweetly sang the remainder of the verse thus"—and Thief struck an attitude, and thrumming on an imaginary instrument, sang rather nasally—

"'Here is the wished-for youth,
Ready for land or sea-ea-ea-ea,
Off to his palace home,
Where we will wedded be, wedded be, be, be.'

"No more words were needed. From that moment our hearts were one; we were betrothed; we sat down side by side and looked into each other's eyes, and sighed. I pressed her hands and called her 'Angelina;' she owned me as her Edwin of Edwins, which wasn't my name exactly, but no matter. Angelina wasn't hers—Mary Ann was; but it did just as well, and sounded better. And so, gentlemen, I won my Angela—'my beautiful, my bride,' for 'love rules the court, the camp, the grove,' &c. &c., as Shakspeare has it."

"Well, of all the absurd love scenes I never heard the like," sneered Poor Man. "It reminds me of Shuffleton Schoolhouse and of Gerrard, and books, and stages."

"Aye! and a the-a-tre I went to once in a town," said Ploughboy, who had lately become so much impressed that he had picked quite a hole in his comforter.

"But what about the Band?" I asked, thinking Thief was wandering off too far.

"All right, Mr. Parley, sir, we're a coming to that fast; for you see just as I was imploring the lovely lady to tell me she loved me and to recite the story of her life, and then threatening to jump into the fountain if she gave even another thought to the pirate gentleman, whose life I intended to put an end to if ever he crossed my path—which didn't seem very likely, pirates not usually living in forests—a crashing and a crushing came through the gravel walk. 'Black Ralpho it is, it is! Protect me, Edwin,' cried my fair companion, flinging her white arms about me, and holding me so fast that I could not stir, which of course helped me to protect her, in a quiet sort of way.

"You seem to think *my* appearance somewhat peculiar, but I should like you to have seen him, the ruffian Ralpho, his eyes, and his cloak, and his felt hat, and his beltful of weapons, and the way he clenched his doeskin gauntlets, and stamped when he saw us there, and if only you had heard the deep voice in which he cried, 'Ho! Angela, what means this? Hath forgotten that to-morrow thou art mine; away to thy bower, minion. As to this pale caitiff—unhand her, sir, I say, or——' and he drew a ready-cocked pistol and aimed it at my head so suddenly that of course I unhanded her, and pretty quickly too, seeing which he gave a loud,

insulting laugh, and slipping the pistol back again, bade me depart for a craven youngling. 'Ha, ha! the maid was not for thee.' But Angelina, taking it for granted that once parted, circumstances over which we had no control—to-morrow's wedding perhaps—might interfere with our again meeting, blankly refused to stir; then, concluding from my heroic attitude that I was about to hurl defiance at the foe—hers, mine, our foe—she rushed between us and cried, weeping, 'Edwin, spare him, oh spare him!' which I did, entirely for her sake. 'Ralpho, dark being, I renounce thee for ever; dost hear? for ever.' But then, as he hid his face in one doe-skinned hand, she caught the other—her woman's heart relented—and impulsively holding it, the hand I mean, to her purple velvet boddice, she cried in choking accents, 'Yet why, why should we be foes, Ralpho, because I tell thee my heart is another's, this, my noble preserver's? My heart it is this other's, and it never can be thine. I see thou relenting; be gentle as thou art strong, take him to thy heart, Ralpho, smile on us, we love thee; let me be thy sweet sister, let him be thy sweet brother. Come Edwin, come, on thy knees;' and she dragged me down to her side, and implored him to bless our union, and to make our home his home, or his ours, I forget which, and we hugged his top boots, and each other, and his top boots again. I even thought of inviting him to drop in at the wedding, though mind I would not have done this only to please Angy; besides he looked so much the bigger and stronger of the two, it would be as well to be neighbourly. If I had been the biggest and strongest, well, matters might have been more pleasant, and have turned out differently; so far, it was that sweet, rash Angela's doings. Left to myself I would

have defied him to mortal combat; but my triumph was to come, though I little recked of that as yet—indeed I soon recked of nothing, for I suddenly found both the boot and the beauty slipping from my grasp. I must have tripped somehow, and fallen on my manly forehead and into insensibility.

"When I looked up again, I was alone, all alone, stretched among the docks and stinging nettles, with no one to love me—the crushed guitar, which seemed to have gone through a severe course of kicking, was near my back, and overhead the larks were singing wildly, nay shrieking, as though abusing the absent Ralpho; even the woodland sparrow pressed near, whispering pleasantly, 'Cheer up, cheer up!' and seemed to think sitting there a joke. I didn't feel it one, any way, at first; some dim notion had I that as I fell Black Ralpho had caught up the shrieking young lady under his arm, and had marched off whistling with her through the woodland range. However, it was no use my hurrying to follow blindly, I knew not how or where; but I would nurse a deep and dark revenge. She should yet be mine, my Angelina, ever dear; but now I must dissemble, be very calm and cool. I rose, resolved and calm, calm, but not cool, far from it, and went my way many weary hours, and yet I wandered on, and on, musing deep thoughts, and wishing for a sight of that cottage light in the distance which is always expected to turn up in a dense forest; but no light appeared. I grew faint with hunger, even though of adventure and blackberries and cold water I had had my fill. So exhausted did I grow at last, that I sank on the earth, and wept bitterly over my lost love; not lost surely, for how could I bear to have my young affections thus trifled

with, not to mention my poor face, all scarred with cruel thorns and nettle stings? How could I, with fortune so low, afford the quantity of goose grease it would require to—but hold, what was this?—a mystery, here at my feet; for, carelessly shuffling them in the earth, I became aware of a huge and rusty iron ring, fixed in a square of solid stone; some crafty hiding place no doubt, some entrance to somewhere. I sat and stared transfixed; I looked all round for a key to this strange revealing; none, none, none, only the tender watchful 'Cheer up, cheer up!' of sleepy sparrows. What could, what should I do? and echo answered——"

"Why, man, give the ring a good pull up—I should," shouted Tinker, impatiently.

"You would, no doubt, you're so clever; but folks of my kind ain't in such a hurry to 'pull up' and put an end to mysteries, or where would the wonderful thrilling stories and the fancies be. However, after due hesitation and preparation, I did possess my hand of the ring. I did pull up; I did raise the stone; I did disclose a steep flight of stairs, which ended apparently in utter darkness. I was young and brave and impulsive in those days; so after looking long and carefully at the steps cut in the living rock, and at this cleverly-contrived slab, hidden there from the eye of man, I was about to close the hole up again, and resume my weary way, when, as I peered for the last time in the depths, I became aware of something shining like a star at arm's length from me. I reached, I clasped, I brought to light a brand new coin of the realm, a florin. Fortune smiled on me at last; for where one new florin was, others must be. My courage rose at a bound; Angelina, nettles, hunger, all trifles were forgotten. I could not, would not, leave such a well of possible wealth

unransacked. I would descend, let the peril be what it might. A mine of florins was worth the venture of a life—ha, ha! I would descend at once, even though the shades of even were falling fast, and luckily I remembered that I happened to have a whole new rushlight and a box of 'warranted to ignite only' somewhere about me; for at that time I was not got up in this sort of array, of course, but in a light blue cloth frock, fastened with a belt—Mr. Parley will remember colouring the style of thing.

"With something cold beating a loud pit-a-pat within my manly and impulsive bosom, I descended those mysterious stairs—down, and down, and down—hearing only the glide of the subtle adder and the whisper of the passing bat."

"Adders and batses wouldn't be found down no stone stepses," here interpolated Ploughboy; but Thief took no notice.

"Down and down, till suddenly I found myself in a long stone gallery, and at the end of that long stone gallery I saw an intensely bright red light, and heard a hum and noise as of many voices; and creeping quietly and holding my breath, I presently found myself, with my eye at a chink, the astonished spectator of what my heart felt at once was the home of a Band—a Robber Band, of the kind I had so longed for.

"A large stone-vaulted chamber, with flaring torches stuck here and there, piles of valuable plate, gold, gems, purses, rich garments, glasses, goblets full of precious wines, a mighty hearth, before which turned spits, heavy with wild-fowl and venison, it must be—it was; but to make surety more sure, the 'Band' itself was singing a new and original song, which I noted down at the time, and which you may like to

hear. Excuse my having a cold, and I'll favour you with it now:—

"'A dark night and a ready hand,
A dirk and a pistol too,
Hark! honest men, and understand
What robbers bold can do.
When we have heard the when and where
You townsfolk will go by,
Here's over twenty of us come
In ambush safe to lie.

Chorus—"'Hear how we mock, Tim, Bob, and Ben,
Their knapsacks all awry;
Yes, that's the way with highwaymen,
When you go marching by.

"'Loud cries Black Ralpho, stout and bold,
In crape and cloak is he,
'Though citizens their pelf would hold,
We'll set the good gold free!
We'll pass it swift from hand to hand,
Gold was not made to stay,
Then spend each doit, as free men should,
And get more on the way;
For when we ask it, gun in hand,
Who'll dare to say us nay?'

"Now gentlemen—

"'Hear how we mock Tim, Bob, and Ben,
Their knapsacks all awry;
Yes, that's the way with highwaymen,
When you go marching by.'

It was strange to hear the cheery, yet muffled sound of that chorus dying away again into Thief's own voice. By this time he appeared in full swing.

"Of course my heart beat high with delighted hope and surprise. I had indeed fallen in with the Band at the moment I least expected to do so, and one conducting itself

in the free and independent manner one might expect when in the privacy of its own deep domains. Little recked they that a stranger's eye and hand was nigh, and perhaps it was as well for the eyes and ears that so it was, especially when at the close of the chorus they took to drinking with spirit. For then there arose a great tumult and noise—one gentleman of the Band playfully snatched a gold watch from another gentleman of ditto, who retaliated by knocking him down with a big leaden dish, belabouring him with a heavy ladle, and then sitting on him. Another man, seeing his difficulty, fired a pistol at gentleman No. 2's legs, and the whole was complicated by a youth, evidently a cook, flinging a pailful of scalding cabbage water over the party—to cool its feelings doubtless.

"'Silence all!' rose a cry, when the noise was at its worst, and altogether overpowering.

"In the midst of this hubbub, I was startled to see a form I knew, to hear a voice I had heard, and to discover the portly and powerful Black Ralpho himself, advancing from a recess, and producing silence and order as he came by simply waving, as though it had been a marshal's baton, a huge red-hot poker which he evidently kept handy for this particular purpose.

"'Silence all,' he thundered, as he mounted on a high tub; "now explain, Blue Donald Dhu, what's all this about?"

"'He's trying to rob me of every bawbee I have,' cried Donald Dhu, seemingly a Highlander of the Highlanders.

"'Ye ain't got ne'er a bawbee; ye know ye ain't, Scotchy.'

"'Hould your fash, ye're only an English cuddy;' and Donald flew at his leader's throat.

"'Friends, robbers, country——' roared the captain;

but here somebody tipped up his tub, and in he went, to reappear smothered with flour from head to foot; then out he bounded, and began hitting right and left with his hot wand of office, before which every one retreated, helter-skelter at first, but presently each man seemed to remember his own dignity, and fighting began. Fists were flying, so were roast fowls, in every direction, followed by the legs of the furniture, and the leaden platters, and the ill words. Confusion was at its fearful utmost, the noise and fighting something dreadful; altogether the band generally was in a very loose unbuckled state, in the fitful light of the flaming torches they looked more like demons than men spending a pleasant evening; but use is everything, and no one seemed to mind. How long this scene might have lasted, who can tell? for when at its wildest, maddest height, it stopped as suddenly as it had commenced, in fact much more so: for in an instant the combatants fell back in two lines, staring blankly at each other, then at their captain, who lay staring at nothing at all, transfixed through the heart by a long and shining rapier, which held him writhing to the stony earth. Black Ralpho was no more; I was avenged! The band was captainless.

"It is at such moments that great minds find, or rather make, their chance of rising from poverty to fortune, from lowliness to leadership; so it was that a magnificent idea flashed upon me, even before I removed my eye from the keyhole, or the great cry of astonishment and horror had time to rise to its full height. With one bound I was in the midst of that crowd of astounded men, had possessed myself of that long rapier, and bestriding the fallen body of the blood-stained corpse, I tossed back my raven locks, exclaiming, in loud, commanding accents, 'Sirs, Ralpho was a deep, dark

traitor, a detective, a pirate; I, I will be your leader!' See Lord Mayor Walworth, Richard II., English History, vol. xiii.

"How can I describe the singular scene that followed? Some cheered loudly, awed and surprised at so much bold resolution they were at once captivated and ready to follow my banner, but others fell on me and jeered, and would have slain me to death as I stood. Well was it that I understood fence and foil at that decisive thrilling moment. With six flourishes of that long and shining weapon, which had so lately done me such good service, I laid six of my assailants low, but as the others hesitated to cross the fearful space, I lowered my point, and made a little neat speech, praising their bravery, promising to lead them only on expeditions where ancient madams and lazy citizens should disburse their gold, and to do all the hard and difficult work myself—in fact, saying whatever they liked to ensure present peace and command. All were tired and hungry. Ralpho was dead, they knew they could not agree to elect or obey any one among themselves; so, in short, the climax of it was that ere midnight had sounded from the tower, a truce was agreed upon. We shook hands all round, the place was tidied somewhat by a score of handy youths I had not hitherto perceived, the roast fowls that had lately been used as ready missiles were laid upon plates, the board was piled till it groaned with good things, Black Ralpho and his six stark comrades tipped out of a handy side-window into the raving torrent below, and then we sat down to spend a jovial evening and laugh ha, ha! while quaffing flagons full of nut-brown ale, sack, and canary—all drinks of the period. Every one talked and boasted, so did I; in fact we got on so well together, that

ere midnight I was loudly hailed leader and captain of as bold and dauntless a Band as heart could wish for, singing joyously as we clanked our steel—

"'A dark night and a ready hand,
A dirk and a pistol too,
Hark! honest men, and understand
What robbers bold can do.'

"And now, Mr. Parley, as I see you're at the last page, I'll be the first to wish you a very good day; besides, a lot of youngsters have been a calling us—don't you hear the burr that is going on? listen!" and he held up a warning finger. "Hark! 'Tinker, Tailor——'"

"But what about that young woman? Didn't 'e marry her after all? Measter, here, I call that right mean, I does;" remarked Ploughboy, in a disappointed voice.

"Hey, what is it?" he asked, turning sharply. "What do you want to know? Did I marry the lady, Ploughboy; let me see, did I? Yes, of course I did; went to chapel instead of my rival next morning, and was wedded to very slow music indeed, and to the repeated 'Cheer-up, cheer-up!' of those same friendly sparrows who had followed my fortunes since the previous day; and that reminds me, sirs, of a most unexpected and somewhat startling incident, with which I must conclude, being bound, as a proper story-teller, to end with a startling incident, which is more than any one of you has done, but is what the boys expect and look out for.

"So far, all you people must allow that I have only related very simple and ordinary facts. Now for my incident, which is a real startler, I promise you." And Thief's eye brightened as he saw us look up with renewed interest.

"It happened after our wedding, which took place in a mountain chapel which we accidentally discovered in a flowery nook, near which we also met a priest, the reverend hermit Roberto, in a burnt-sienna cloth gown and sandals. He was engaged culling watercresses when we so conveniently crossed his path, but at once understood our errand, and led the way, followed by my Band and myself, supporting the lovely bride, simply arrayed in a costume of white satin and black lace, without which she never travelled. As for orange blossoms, we found them in every cleft of the rock; and to slow music she became mine: she the daughter of a bold baron, and I the nursling of the forest, the child of fortune, the leader of a Band—ha! ha!—the successor of Black Ralpho, now lying cold and still in the depths of the ravine, where my bold hand, assisted by several others, had helped to lay him low.

"With thoughts like this no wonder I exulted as we descended the steps that led to my underground domain, and proudly bade my Angelina welcome. Loud rose the acclamations of my hardy followers, and all was joy as we took our places at the loaded board, on which stood smoking all the delicacies of the season, including an immense wedding-cake. Aye, Mr. Parley you may put that down, for all these gentlemen's grins. I'm Boys' Thief, as you have several times mentioned, and when I say wedding-cake I mean it, and what would boys care for a wedding without cake? Why should'nt I be believed if I add crackers and chocolate? And why shouldn't I be believed if I add that just as that cake was being handed round, a peculiar tramp, tramp was suddenly heard, and to our great surprise the doors were flung back, and in marched—who do you think?

"The police, I should say," put in Tinker.

"Beadle," hazarded Ploughboy.

"Nothing of the kind, Mr. Clever; nothing of the kind. *Police, beadle*, indeed! If you had said myrmidons of the law, now, you wouldn't have spoiled my incident," he added, darting an angry glance at the first speaker. "No, sir, it was not the police, or the myrmidons either, for the matter of that. It was Ralpho, Black Ralpho, lately so stern and terrible, now subdued by my eagle eye, and the waters of the torrent in which he had lain to cool so long, and which it appeared was possessed of magic healing power; so that not only Ralpho, but his six tall followers, were all restored and strong as ever, for their wounds had healed and their cloaks had dried, and, fortunately, they were feeling so fresh and hungry that they wished for nothing better than peace and a fair share of the good things before them. Finding them thus peaceably inclined, I held out the right hand of fellowship, and, on due acceptance and submission, received them once more as true members of my Band, Black Ralpho being sworn-in as first lieutenant; and so passed the evening merrily and cheerily to the tune of—

"'A dark night and a ready hand,
A dirk, and a pistol too.
Hark! honest men, and understand
What robbers bold can do.'

"But, I say, wouldn't you like any more of my experiences, Mr. Parley," asked Thief, as I blotted the last sheet of my paper and began collecting my writing materials, which lay scattered about.

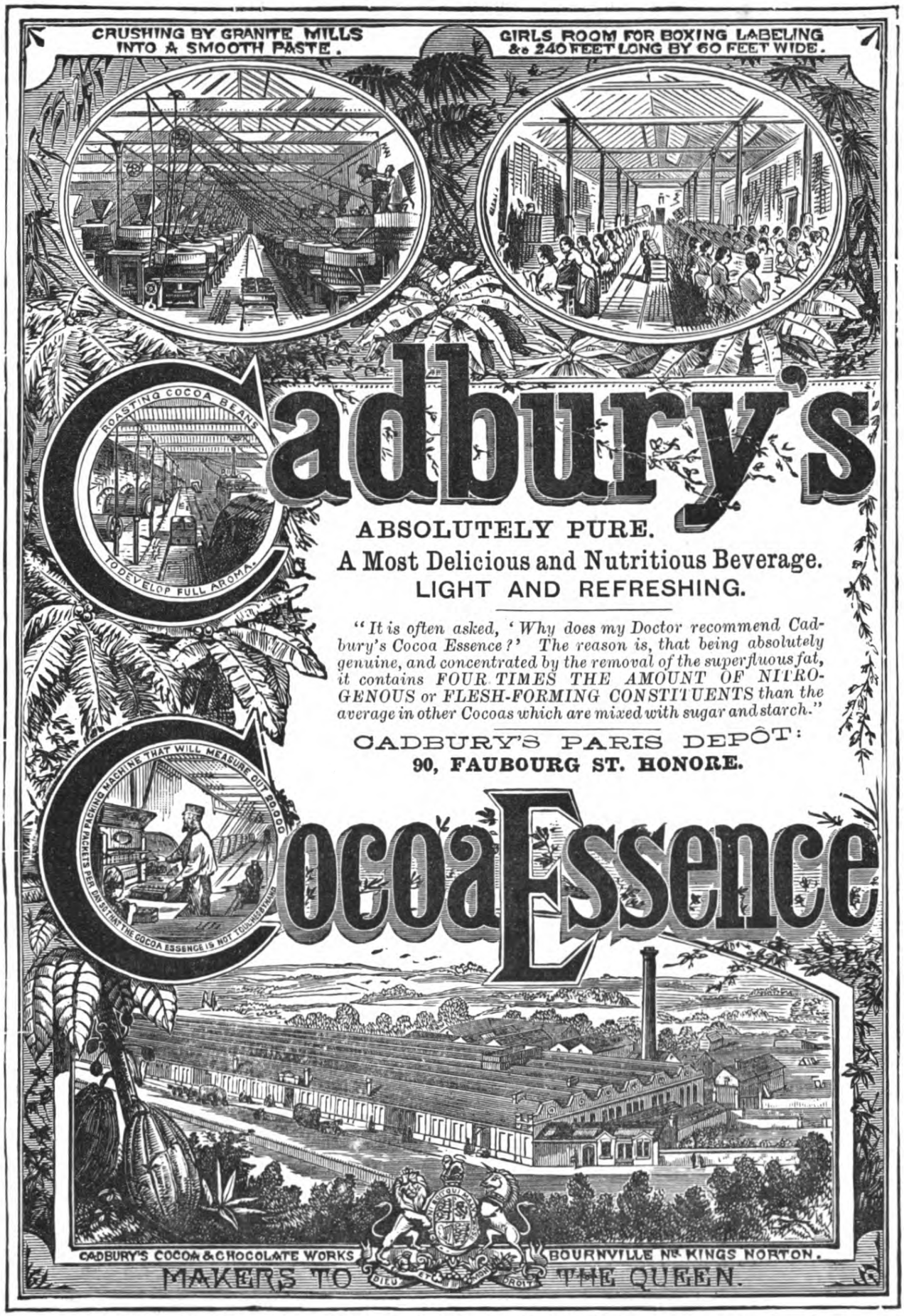
"Well, thank you, no. I think we have enough to give variety to our pages, besides I must get back to Nowhere

Hall, or they will think me lost. Thank you, one and all, very much. I need not detain you any longer; but hark! what is that?" And I quite started, as louder grew the distant "buzz, buzz," and a whole dash, as it were, of impatient children's voices swept by like an angry summer breeze. I bent my head to listen better, and plainly made out the call, as it swept over the hills. Need I say it was for Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor, Rich Man, Poor Man, Ploughboy, Thief? As the call resounded over and over again, it was followed by a strangely weird phenomenon; for, one by one, the members of that chatty party vanished, no doubt in answer to their invisible summoners, and when my eyes returned to the bridge it was to see it once more lonely and deserted. Now there was no bar to my passage, no sound to distract my attention, nothing but the lingering splish splash of the waters, as they dashed over the moss-grown timbers. I rubbed my eyes, and pinched my arms, and tried to think the whole thing was a dream, but yet here was a goodly bundle of closely-written papers. Here was all the material collected for our Annual. I could not account for it clearly; I cannot account for it even now. If any of you dear young people can aid me to understand it better, please send word to

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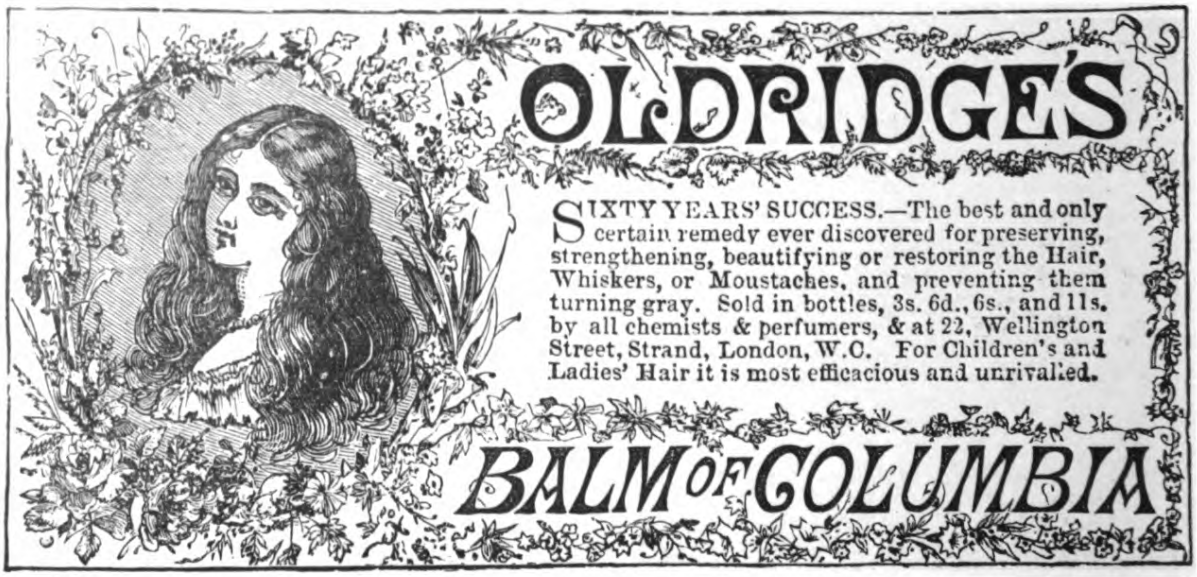
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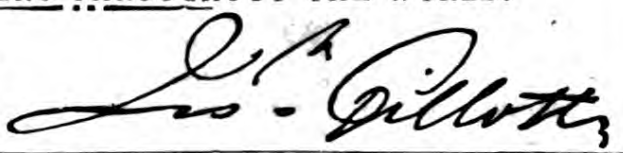
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What every Travelling Trunk and Household in the World ought to contain,

A BOTTLE OF

ENO'S FRUIT SALT.

Without such a simple Precaution the JEOPARDY of LIFE is immensely increased.



As a natural product of nature, use **ENO'S FRUIT SALT,** prepared from Sound Ripe Fruit. You cannot overstate its great value in keeping the **Blood Pure.** As a means of keeping the system clear, and thus taking away the groundwork of Malarious Diseases, **Blood Poisons,** and all Liver Complaints, or as a **Health-giving, Refreshing, Cooling,** and **Invigorating Summer Beverage,** or as a Gentle Laxative and Tonic in the various forms of Indigestion.

IMPORTANT TO PARENTS.—Should a parent have nothing to bestow on a child but a narrow education, still he will bless you if you form his body to health, and strength, and activity, whether he earns his simple meal by labour at the plough, anvil, or axe. On the contrary, if you NEGLECT his health and strength, and leave him a debilitated wretch, he would curse you, though a millionaire. **ENO'S FRUIT SALT** is an INDISPENSABLE REQUISITE in the PRESERVATION of CHILDREN'S HEALTH.

HOW TO AVOID THE INJURIOUS EFFECTS OF STIMULANTS.—The present system of living—partaking of too rich foods, as pastry, saccharine and fatty substances, alcoholic drinks, and an insufficient amount of exercise—frequently deranges the liver. I would advise all bilious people, unless they are careful to keep the liver acting freely, to exercise great care in the use of alcoholic drinks; avoid sugar, and always dilute largely with water. Experience shows that porter, mild ales, port wine, dark sherries, sweet champagne, liqueurs, and brandies, are all very apt to disagree; while light white wines, gin, or old whiskey largely diluted with seltzer water, will be found the least objectionable. **ENO'S FRUIT SALT** is peculiarly adapted for any constitutional weakness of the liver; it possesses the power of reparation when digestion has been disturbed or lost, and places the invalid on the right track to health. A world of woe is avoided by those who keep and use **ENO'S FRUIT SALT;** therefore no family should ever be without it.

A SONG OF GRATITUDE.

(By an F.S.A. of Eighty Years of Age.)

These words a wise Physician said:
"Stomach's a master all should dread."
Oppose his laws—for Death prepare!
Obey them—Health will triumph there!
With grateful thanks I hail thy name,
ENO! and strive to give thee fame.
Your SALT-OF-FRUIT can bring me ease.
And give me comfort when I please;
By true aperient, strong or mild,
To calm a man or soothe a child;
Aid Nature, without force or strain;
Strengthen heart, liver, lung, and brain;
Make the pulse neither fast nor slow,
The blood heat not too high nor low.
So bringing health at little cost,
Restoring what neglect had lost!
To **ENO'S SALT** I owe a debt,
The grateful mind may not forget:
With rhyme that debt, in part, I pay,
Experience teaching what to say.

ENO'S FRUIT SALT.—"After suffering for nearly two and a half years from severe headache and disordered stomach, and after trying almost everything and spending much money without finding any benefit, I was recommended by a friend to try **ENO'S FRUIT SALT,** and before I had finished one bottle I found it doing me a great deal of good, and now I am restored to my usual health; and others I know that have tried it have not enjoyed such good health for years.—Yours truly, ROBERT HUMPHREYS Post Office, Barrasford.'

IMPORTANT TO TRAVELLERS.—"Clifton Down Hotel, near Bristol, Gloucestershire, Feb. 10, 1881.—Sir, having travelled a great deal in my life, and having suffered a great deal from poisoned blood and want of appetite, I was induced by a friend to use your world-famed **FRUIT SALT.** I was immediately relieved, and am once more hale and hearty. I shall never be without a bottle again on my travels. I am too pleased to repay you in some way for your wonderful invention by giving you full use of my testimony to the above.—Sir, I am yours, gratefully, Dr. J. HANSON, M.A." To J. C. Eno, Esq."

Directions in Sixteen Languages, HOW to PREVENT DISEASE.

CAUTION.—*Legal rights are protected in every civilised country. Examine each bottle, and see the Capsule is marked "ENO'S FRUIT SALT." Without it you have been imposed upon by worthless imitations.*

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