Blackmore Richard Doddridge

Cradock Nowell: A Tale of the New Forest. Volume 3 of 3

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I

Upon the Christmas morning the parish flocked to church, and the church was dressed so beautifully that every one was amazed. Amy and Eoa made the wreaths, the garlands, and rosettes; there was only one cross out of the lot, a badly–bred Maltese one; and Eoa walked over the barbarous pewscreens (like the travisses in a stable), springing from one to another, with a cable of flowers and evergreens, as easily and calmly as she would come down–stairs to dinner. Of course she had never heard of that sort of thing before, but she took to it at once, as she did to anything pretty; and soon she was Amy's mistress, as indeed she must be every one's, unless she could not bear them.

The sons of the Forest looked up with amazement as they shambled in one after other, and an old woodcutter went home for his axe, lest the ivy should throttle the pillars. On the whole, the parish attributed this great outburst of foliage to the indignation of the pixies at Parson John's going to London, and staying there so long.

The prayers were read by Mr. Pell, for the rector was weary and languid; but he would not forego his pleasant words to the well–known flock that day. While the choir was making a stupendous din out of something they called an "anthem," Octave slipped off to his Rushford duty, through the chancel–door. Then, with his silken gown on – given him years ago by subscription, and far too grand for him to wear, except at Christmas and Easter – John Rosedew mounted the pulpit–stairs, and showed (as in a holy bower of good–will and of gratitude) the loving–kindness of his face and the grandeur of his forehead. As he glanced from one to the other with a general welcome, a genial interest in the welfare both of soul and body, a stir and thrill ran through the church, and many eyes were tearful. For already a rumour was abroad that "Uncle John" must leave them, that another Christmas Day would see a stranger in his pulpit.

After dwelling briefly on his favourite subject, Christian love, and showing (by quotations from the noblest of heathen philosophers) how low and false their standard was, how poor a keystone is earthly citizenship, the patriotism of a pugnacious village, or a little presumptuous Attica, to crown and bind together the great arch of humanity; after showing, too, with a depth of learning wasted on his audience, how utterly false the assertion is that the doctrines, or rather the principles, nay, the one great principle of our New Testament, had ever been anticipated on the banks of the Yellow River – eloquently he turned himself to the application of his subject.

With some unconscious yearning perhaps, or perhaps some sense of home–truth, he gazed towards the curtained pew where sat his ancient friend, brought thither (it was too evident) by tidings of his absence. As the eyes of the old men met, for the first time after long estrangement – those eyes that had met so frankly and kindly for more than fifty years, during all which time each to the other had been a "necessarius" – and as each observed how pale and grey his veteran comrade looked, neither heart was wholly free from self–reproach and sorrow.

John Rosedew's mild eyes glistened so, and his voice so shook and faltered, that all the parish noticed it, and wondered what harm it had done last week. For none of them had ever known his voice shake, except when some parishioner had done the unbecoming; and then the village mourned it, because it vexed the parson so.

The next day, as soon as Parson John had found that all parochial matters were in proper trim, and that he might leave home again without neglect of duty, what did he do but order a fly, no less than a one–horse fly, from the "Jolly Foresters;" which fly should rush to the parsonage–door, as nearly as might be, at one o'clock? Now why would not Coræbus suffice to carry the rector and valise, according to the laws of the Medes and Persians, a distance of two parasangs?

Simply because our Amy was going, and had every right to go. Beautiful Amy was going to London, great fountain–head of all visions and marvels, even from white long–clothes up to the era

of striped crinoline. And who shall object, except on the ground that Amy was too good to go?

If Amy were put down now in Hyde Park, Piccadilly, or Regent–street, at the height and cream of the season, when fop, and screw, and fogey, Frivolus and Frivola, Diana Venatrix, Copa Syrisca, Aphrodite Misthote, yea, and even some natural honest girls moderately ticketed, are doing their caravaning – if Amy were put on the pathway there, in her simple grey hat and feather, and that roundabout chenille thing which she herself had made, and which followed the lines of her figure so, fifty fellows, themselves of the most satisfactory figure (at Drummond's, or at Coutts's), fifty fellows who had slipped the hook fifty times apiece (spite of motherly bend O'Shaugnessey) must have received their stroke of grace, and hated Cradock Nowell.

Although the South–Western Railway had been open so many years, our forest–child had never been further from green leaf and yellow gorse than Winchester in the eastern hemisphere, and Salisbury in the western. And now after all to think that she was going to London, not for joy, but sorrow. Desperate coaxing it had cost; every known or new device – transparent every one of them, as the pleading eyes that urged it – every bit of cozening learned from three years old and upward, every girlish argument that never can hold water, unless it be a tear–drop; and, better than a million pleas, every soft caress and kiss, all loving, all imploring – there was not one of these but came to batter Amy's

father, or ever he surrendered. For John's ideas were very old–fashioned as to maidenly decorum, and Aunt Eudoxia's view of the matter was even more prim and grim than his. Yet (as Amy well remarked) if *she* could see no harm in it, there certainly could be none; and how could they insist so much on the *καλόν* and the *πρέπον*, as if they over–rode *τὸ δέον*!

It is likely enough that this last stroke won the palm of victory; for, though Miss Amy knew little of Greek, and her father knew a great deal, she often contrived, with true feminine skill, to take his wicket neatly, before he had found his block–hole. And then her father would smile and chuckle, and ask to have his bat again; which never was allowed him. To think that any man should be the father of such *ἐνστοχία*!

Therefore, that father was compelled to throw himself, flat as a flounder, on Eudoxia's generosity; for the leech–bottle now was dry.

"Darling Doxy, you know quite well you are such a wonderful manager; you have got a little cash somewhere?"

He put it with a twist of interrogation, a quivering lever of doubt, and yet a grand fulcrum of confidence, which were totally irresistible. No wonder his daughter could coax. Oh that I were like you, John, when I want a bit of money!

Hereupon Aunt Doxy smiled, with the perception of superior mind, and the power of causing astonishment. Never a word she said, but went to some unknown recesses in holy up–stair adyta: she fussed about with many keys, over sounding boards

and creaking ones, to signify her caution; and at last came back with a leathern bag, wash–leather tied with bobbin. Putting up her hands to keep Amy at a distance, she pursed her lips, as if to say, "Now don't be disappointed; there is really nothing in it. Nothing, at least, I mean for people of your extravagant ideas."

Then, one by one, before John's eyes, which enlarged with a geometric progression of amazement, she laid a gorgeous train of gold, as if it were but dominoes, beginning with half–sovereigns first, then breaking into the broader gauge, until there must have been twenty pounds, and John thought of all his poor people. Verily then she stopped awhile, to enhance her climax; or perhaps she hesitated, as was only natural. But now the pleasure of the thing was too much for her prudence. Looking at John and then at Amy, and wanting to look at both at once, she drew from a little niche in the bag, with a jerk (as if it were nothing) a dainty marrowfat ten–pound note of the Bank of England, with a name of substance upon the back, and an authenticity of grease grander than any water–mark. She tried very hard to make light of it, and not wave it in the air even; but the tide of her heart was too strong for her, and she turned away, and cried as hard as if she had no money.

Who may pretend to taste and tell every herb in the soup of nature? There is no sovereign moly, no paramount amellus; even basil (the herb of kings) may be lost in garlic. Blest are they who seek not ever for the forced–meat balls, but find some good in every brewis, homely, burnt, or overstrained. John

Rosedew, putting on his boots for the road to London, felt himself, at every tug, quite as rich as Megacles – that man of foremost Athenian blood, but none the more a gentleman, who walked capaciously into, and rapaciously walked out of, the gold–granaries of Crœsus. A delightful sense of having gotten great money out of Eudoxia – a triumph without historic parallel – inspired him, away with that overdone word! – aerated him with glory. Thirty pounds, and some odd shillings, wholly at John Rosedew's mercy (who never gave quarter to money, but hewed it as small as Agag when anybody asked him), – thirty pounds, with no duty upon it, no stamp of responsibility, and a peculiar and peppery piquancy in the spending of every halfpenny, to wonder what sister Doxy would think if she could only know it! He gave careful Amy the note to keep, and 15*l.* to go inside it, because he had promised to do so, for Doxy knew his nature.

In that noble fly from the "Foresters," which had only two springs broken, John and his daughter went away to catch the train at Brockenhurst. Out of the windows dangerously they pushed their beautiful heads – the beauty of youth on one side, the beauty of age on the other – although the coachman had specially warned them that neither door would fasten. But what could they do, when Aunt Doxy was there by the great rhododendron, with a kettle–holder over her mouth because it was so cold; fat Jemima too, and Jenny, and Jem Pottles leading Coræbus to shake off his dust at the shay–horse, and learn what he might come to?

Some worthy people had journeyed up from the further end of the village, to bid an eternal farewell to Amy, and to take home the washing. They knew she would never come back again; she would never be let go again; folks in London were so wicked, and parson was so innocent. Evil though the omens were, as timidly blushing she went away, tearfully leaving her father's hearth, though a daw on the left hand forbade her to go, and a wandering chough was overheard, and a croaking raven whirled away into the wilds of the woodland – for whom shall I fear, I the cannie seer, while Amy smiles dexter out of the cab, and wraps her faith around her?

Make we not half our life here, according as we receive it? Is it not as the rain that falls, softly when softly taken, as of leaves and grass and water; but rattling and flying in mud and foul splashes, when met at wrong angles repulsively?

My little daughter, if you cannot see your way in that simile – a very common–place one, – take a still more timeworn and venerable illustration. Our life is but a thread, my child, at any moment snappable, though never snapped unwisely; and true as it is that we cannot spin and shape it (as does the spider) out of our own emotions, yet we have this gift of God, that we can secrete some gold along it, some diamonds fetching the sunlight. Knowing, then, in whose Hand we are, and feeling how large that Hand is, let us know and feel therewith that He will not crush us; that He loves us to rejoice therein, and tamely to regard Him; with confidence in adoration, a smile in every bow to Him.

CHAPTER II

Polly Ducksacre was sitting in state behind the little counter, and opposite the gas–jet, upon her throne – a bushel basket set upside down on another. It was the evening of Boxing Day, and Polly was arrayed with a splendour that challenged the strictest appraisement; so gorgeous were her gilt earrings, cornelian necklace, sham cameo brooch – Cupid stealing the sword of Mars – and German–silver bracelets. The children who came in for "ha'porths of specked" forgot their errand and hopes of prigging, and, sucking their lips with wild admiration, cried "Lor now! Ain't she stunnin?" "Spexs her sweetheart in a coach and four," exclaimed one little girl of great penetration; "oh give us a ride, miss, when he comes."

That little girl was right, to a limited extent. Polly did expect her sweetheart; not in a coach and four, however, but in a smallish tax–cart, chestnut–coloured, picked out with white; on the panel whereof was painted, as the Act directs, "Robert Clinkers, Junior, Coal–merchant, Hammersmith." Mr. Clinkers, whose first visit had been paid simply from pity for Cradock, and to acquit himself of all complicity in Hearty Wibraham's swindle, had called again to make kind inquiries, after finding how ill the poor fellow was, and that his landlady sold coals. Nor was it long before he ventured to propose an arrangement, mutually beneficial, under which the Ducksacre firm should

receive their supply from him. Two or three councils were held, but the ladies were obliged to surrender at last, because he was so complimentary, and had such nice white teeth, and spoke in such a feeling manner of his dear departed angel. On the other hand, their old wharfinger would come blustering about his sacks, loud enough to make the potatoes jump, and he kept such impudent men, and bit his nails without any manners, and called them both "Mrs. Acreducks."

During this Clinkerian diplomacy, Polly showed such shrewdness, and such a nice foot and ancle, and had such a manner of rolling her eyes – blacker and brighter than best Wallsend – that the coals of love were laid, the match struck, the fire kindled, and drawing well up the hearth–place, before Robert Clinkers knew what he was at. And now he came every evening, bringing two sacks of coal with him, and sat on a bag of Barcelonas, and cracked, and gazed at Polly.

"Miss Ducksacre, you should sell lemonade,'" he had said only Saturday last, which was Christmas Eve, "it is such a genteel drink, you know, when a chap is consumed with internal fires, as the great poet says – him as wrote the operas, or the copperas, bless me, I never know which it is; likely you can tell, miss?"

"Lor, Mr. Clinkers, why, the proper name is hopperas; we shows the boards, and we gets a ticket, when nobody else won't go."

"Oh now! Do you, though? Ah, I was there, afore ever I knew what life was. A tricksome thing is life, Miss Polly, especially

for a 'andsome female, and no young fellow to be trusted with it. Valuable cargo on green wood. Sure to come to shipwreck."

"Lor, Mr. Clinkers, you don't mean *me*! I am sure I am not at all handsome."

"Then there isn't one in London, miss. Coals is coals, and fire is fire – oh, I should like some lemonade, with a drop of rum in it. Would you join me in it now, if I just pop round the corner? It would make you feel so nice now."

"Do I ever feel anything else but nice?" Oh, Polly, what a *leading* question!

"I wishes it was in my province now, with the deepest respect, to try!" Here Polly flashed away, though nobody was pursuing her, got behind some Penzance broccoli, and seized a half–pottle to defend herself. Mr. Clinkers, knowing what he was about, appealed to a bunch of mistletoe, under which, in distracting distraction, the young lady had taken refuge.

"Now nobody else in all this London," said the coal–merchant to the berries, "in all this mighty Baal, as the poet beautifully expresses it, especially if a young man, not over five–and–thirty, not so very bad–looking but experienced in life, and with great veneration for females, and a business, you may say, of three hundred a year clear of income–tax and increasing yearly, and a contract with the company, without no encumbrances, would ever go to think of letting that beautiful young lady enjoy the sweets of retirement in that most initing position, without plucking some of the pearls off, and no harm done or taken. And

nothing at all pervents me, no consideration of the brockolo – could pay for it to–morrow morning – but my deepest respects, not having my best togs on, through a cruel haxident. Please pigs they'll come home to–morrow morning, and I'll do it on Monday, and lock up yard at four o'clock, if tailor has made a job of it. Look nice indeed, and feel nice? I should like to know how she could help it!"

This explains why, when the wheels at the door proved to be not of the sprightly tax–cart, but a lumbering cab, Polly was disappointed. Neither was her displeasure removed when she saw a very pretty girl get out, and glide into the shop, with the loveliest damask spreading over the softest and clearest cheeks. Though Polly had made up her mind about Cradock as now a bad speculation, it was not likely that she should love yet any one who meant to have him.

Amy shrunk back as her nice clean skirt swept the grimy threshold. She was not by any means fidgety, but had a nervous dislike of dirt, as most upright natures have. Then she felt ashamed of herself, and coloured yet more deeply to think that a place good enough for Cradock should seem too sordid for her, indeed! And then her tears glanced in the gas–light, that Cradock should ever have come to this, and partly, no doubt, for her sake, though she never could tell how.

The little shop was afforested with Christmas–trees of all sorts and of every pattern, as large as ever could be squeezed, with a knuckle of root to keep them steady, into pots No. 32. The

costermongers repudiate larger pots, because they take too much room on a truck, and involve the necessity of hiring a boy to push.

Aucuba, Irish yew, Portugal laurel, arbor vitæ, and bay–tree, but most of all – and for the purpose by far the most convenient, because of the hat–peg order – the stiff, self–confident, argumentative spruce. All these, when they have done their spiriting, and yielded long–remembered fun, will be fondly tended by gentle–hearted girls on some suburban balcony; they will be watered enough to kill lignum vitæ; patent compost will be bought at about the price of sugar; learned consultations will be held between Sylvia and Lucilla; and then, as the leaves grow daily more yellow, and papa is so provoking that he will only shake his head (too sagaciously to commit himself), an earnest appeal will be addressed to some of the gardening papers. Or perhaps the tree will be planted, with no little ceremony, in the centre of some grass–plot nearly as large as a counterpane; while the elder members of the family, though bland enough to drink its health, regard the measure as very unwise, because the house will be darkened so in a few short years.

Meanwhile the editor's reply arrives – "Possibly Sylvia's tree has no roots." He is laughed to scorn for his ignorance, until little Charley falls to work with his Ramsgate spade unbidden. *Factura nepotibus umbram!* It has been chopped all round the bole with a hatchet, and is as likely to grow as a lucifer–match.

Through that Christmas Tabraca John Rosedew led his daughter, begging her at every step to be careful of the trees,

whose claims upon her attention she postponed to those of her frock.

"Lor bless me, sir, is that you now, and your good lady along of you! How glad I am, to be sure!"

"Miss Ducksacre, this is my daughter, Miss Amy Rosedew, of whom you have heard me speak;" here John executed a flourish of great complacency with his hat; "my only child, but as good to me as any dozen could be. Will you allow her to stop here a minute, while I go up–stairs?"

Amy was trembling now, more and more every moment, and John would not ask how Cradock was, for fear of frightening his daughter.

"To be sure she can stay here," said Polly, not over graciously; for if Mr. Clinkers should come in the while, it might alter his ideal.

"Ah, so very sad; so very sad, miss, ain't it now?"

"Yes," said Amy, having no desire to pursue the subject with Polly. But Polly's tongue could no more keep still than a frond of maiden–hair fern in the draught of a river archway.

"Ah, so very sad! To think of him go, quite young as he is, to one of them moonstruck smilems, where they makes rope–mats and tiger rugs! As 'andsome a young man, miss, as ever I see off a hengine; and of course he must be such, being as he is your brother."

Before poor Amy could answer, Mrs. Ducksacre came to fetch her, and frowned very hard at Polly, who began to look out of

the window. In spite of all her faith and hope, the child could scarcely get up the stairs, till her father came to meet her.

"There is no one with him now, dear; Mrs. Jupp is in the sitting–room, so very kindly lent us by the good landlady. Only two more pairs of stairs, and there our Cradock lies, not a bit worse than he was; if anything, a little better; and his faithful little Wena with him: she won't leave him, night or day, dear. Give me your hand, Amy. Why, I declare, it is rather dark, when you get too far from the windows! Madam, come in with us."

But Eliza Ducksacre, though little versed in mintage, and taking pig–rings for halfpence, knew when her presence had better be absence, as well as a sleeping partner does at the association's bankruptcy. So, after showing them up to the door, she slipped away into the side–cupboard which Mr. Rosedew had called a "sitting–room."

Then John took Amy's bonnet off (after ruining the strings), and stroked her pretty hair down, and took her young cheeks in his hands, and begged her not to tremble so, because she would quite upset him. Only she might cry a little, if she thought it would do her good. But when she put her hand up, and gave a dry sob only, the father led her very tenderly into the little chamber.

It was a wretched little room, like a casual pauper's home, when he gets one, only much lower and smaller. Amy took all of it in at a glance, for in matters of that sort a woman's perception is, when compared to a man's, as forked lightning compared to a blunt dessert fork.

She even knew why the bed was awry; which her father could sooner have written ten scolia than discover. The bed was placed so because poor Cradock, jumping up all of a sudden in an early stage of illness, and before his head grew soft, had knocked a great piece of plaster away from the projecting hip–beam.

Now Craddy was looking away from them, sitting up in the sack–cloth bed, and trying with the sage gravity of fixed hallucination to read some lines which his fancy had written on the glazed dirt that served for a window. That window perhaps pronounced itself more by candlelight than by daylight, and the landlord had forbidden any attempt at cleaning it, because he knew that the frame would drop out. Two candles, the residue of two pounds which Mr. Rosedew had paid for, only helped to interpret the squalid room more forcibly.

While Amy stood there, shocked and frightened, and her father was thinking what to say, the poor sick fellow turned towards them, and his eyes met hers. She saw that the tint of her lover's eyes was gone from a beautiful deep grey to the tone of a withered oak–leaf, the pupils forthstanding haggardly, the whites dull and chased with blood veins, the sockets marked with a cloudy blue, and channeled with storms of sorrow; the countenance full of long suffering – gaunt, and wan, and weary.

Amy could not weep, but gazed, never thinking anything, with all the love and pity, devotion and faith eternal, which are sure to shine in a woman's eyes when trouble strikes its light there. How different from the shy maid's glance which, only a month or two

ago, would have met his youthful overtures! And how infinitely grander! Something of the good All–Father's power and mercy in it.

She kept her eyes upon him. She had no power to move them. And they changed exactly as his did. The pale glance wandering into her gaze, with an appealing submissive motion, eager to settle somewhere, but too faint to ask for sympathy, began to feel its way and fasten, began to quiver with vibrant light and sense of resting somewhere, began to quicken, flush, and deepen – from what fountain God only knows – then to waver and suffuse (in feeble consciousness of grief), retire and return again, fluttering to some remembered home, as a bird in the dark comes to his nest; then to thrill, and beam, and sparkle with the light, the life, the love.

So with a weak but joyful cry, like a shipwrecked man at his hearth again, he stretched out both his wasted arms, and Amy was there without knowing it. She laid his white cheek on her shoulder, and let her hair flow over it; she held him up with her own pure breast, till his worn heart beat on her warm one. Then she sobbed, and laughed, and sobbed, and called him her world, and heart, and heaven, and kissed his nestling forehead, and looked, and asked, oh, where the love was. All she begged for was one word, just one little word, if you please, to know who was to come to comfort him. Oh, he must know her – of course he must – wouldn't she know him, that was all, though she hadn't a breath of life left? His own, his faith, his truth, his love – his

own – let him say who, and she never would cry again. Only say it once, his own —

"Amy!"

"Yes, your Amy, Amy, Amy. Say it again, oh! say it again, my poor everlasting love!"

Suddenly the barriers of his frozen grief were loosened. With a feeble arm staying on her, although it could not cling to her, he burst into a flood of tears, from the fountain of great waters whose source and home is God.

Then John, who had stood at the door all the time, with his white head bowed on his coat–sleeve, came forward and took a hand of each, knelt by the bed, and gave thanks. They wanted not to talk of it, nor any doctor to tell them. Because they had an angel's voice, that God would be gracious to them.

"Darlings, didn't I tell you," said Amy, looking up at them, with her rich curls tear–bespangled, like a young grape–leaf in the vinery; "don't you know that I was sure our Father would never forsake us; and that even a simple thing like me might fetch back my own blessing? Oh, you never would have loved me so; only God knew it was good for us."

While she spoke, Cradock looked at her with a faint far–off intelligence, not entering into her arguments. He only cared to hear her voice; to see her every now and then; and touch her to make sure of it; then to dream that it was an angel; then to wake and be very glad that it was not, but was Amy.

CHAPTER III

Slowly from that night, but surely, Cradock's mind began to return, like a child to its mother, who is stretching forth her arms to it; timid at first and wondering, and apt for a long time to reel and stagger at very slight shocks or vibrations. Then as the water comes over the ice in a gradual gentle thaw, beginning to gleam at the margin first, where the reeds are and the willow–trees, then gliding slowly and brightly on, following every skate–mark or line where a rope or stick has been, till it flows into a limpid sheet; so crystal reason dawned and wavered, felt its way and went on again, tracing many a childish channel, many a dormant memory, across that dull lethargic mind, until the bright surface was restored, and the lead line of judgment could penetrate.

Mr. Rosedew quartered himself and his Amy at the Portland Hotel hard by, and reckless of all expense moved Cradock into Mrs. Ducksacre's very best room. He would have done this long ago, only the doctor would not allow it. Then Amy, who did not like London at all, because there were so few trees in it, hired some of the Christmas–grove from the fair greengrocers, and decked out the little sitting–room, so that Cradock had sweet visions of the Queen's bower mead. As for herself, she would stay in the shop, perhaps half an hour together, and rejoice in the ways of the children. All her pocket–money went into the till as if you had taken a shovel to it. Barcelonas, Brazils, and cob–

nuts she was giving all day to the "warmints;" and golden oranges rolled before her as from Atalanta's footstep.

It is a most wonderful fact, and far beyond my philosophy, that instead of losing her roses in London, as a country girl ought to have done, Amy bloomed with more Jacqueminot upon very bright occasions – more Louise Odier constantly, with Goubalt in the dimples, then toning off at any new fright to Malmaison, or Devoniensis – more of these roses now carmined or mantled in the delicate turn of her cheeks than ever had nestled and played there in the free air of the Forest. Good Aunt Doxy was quite amazed on the Saturday afternoon, when meeting her brother and niece at the station – for it made no difference in the outlay, and the drive would do her good – she found, not a pale and withered child, worn out with London racket, and freckled with dust and smokespots, but the loveliest Amy she had ever yet seen – which was something indeed to say, – with a brilliance of bloom which the good aunt at once proceeded to test with her handkerchief.

But before the young lady left town – to wit, on the Friday evening – she had a little talk with Rachel Jupp, or rather with strapping Issachar, which nearly concerns our story.

"Oh, Miss Amy," said Rachel that morning – "Miss Amy" sounded more natural somehow than "Miss Rosedew" did – "so you're going away, miss, after all, and never see my Looey; and a pretty child she is, and a good one, and a quiet one, and father never lift hand to her now; and the poor young gentleman saved

her life, and he like her so much, and she like him."

"I will come and see her this evening, as you have so kindly asked me. That is, with my papa's leave, and if you don't mind coming for me to the inn at six o'clock. I am afraid of walking by myself after dark in London. My papa has found some books at the bookstalls, and he is so delighted with them he never wants me after dinner."

"Dear Miss Amy, would you mind, then – would you mind taking a drop of tea with us?"

"To be sure I will. I mean, if it is quite convenient, and if you can be spared here, and if – oh nothing else, Mrs. Jupp, only I shall be most happy." She was going to say, "and if you won't make any great preparations," but she knew how sensitive poor people are at restraints upon hospitality.

So grand preparations were made; and grander still they would have been, and more formal and uncomfortable, if Amy had finished her sentence. Rachel at once rushed off to her lord, whose barge–shaped frame was moored alongside of his wharf, dreaming as stolidly as none except a bargee can dream. He immediately shelled out seven and sixpence from the cuddy of his inexpressibles, and left his wife to her own devices, except in the matter of tea itself. The tea he was resolved to fetch from a little shop in the barge–walk, where, as Mother Hamp declared, who kept the tobacco–shop by the gate, they sold tea as strong as brandy.

"If you please to excuse our Zakey, miss, taking no more tea,"

said Mrs. Jupp, after Issachar had laboured very hard at it, the host being bound, in his opinion, to feast even as the guest did; "because he belong to the antiteatotallers, as takes nothing no stronger than gin, miss."

"Darrn't take more nor one noggin of tay, miss," cried Mr. Jupp, touching his short front curl with a hand scrubbed in quick–lime and copperas; "likes it, but it don't like me, miss. Makes me feel quite intemperant like, – so narvous, and queer, and staggery. Looey, dear, dad's mild mixture, for to speak the young lady's health in. Leastways, by your lave, miss."

Dad's mild mixture soon made its appearance in a battered half–gallon can, and Mr. Jupp was amazed and grieved that none but himself would quaff any. The strongest and headiest stuff it was, which even the publicans of London, alchymists of villainy, can quassify, and cocculise, and nux–vomicise up to proof. Then, the wrath of hunger and thirst being mollified, Issachar begged leave to smoke, if altogether agreeable, and it would all go up the chimney; which, however, it refrained from doing.

Now, while he is smoking, I may admit that the contents of Mr. Jupp's census–paper (if, indeed, he ever made legal entries, after punching the collector's head) have not been transcribed to the satisfaction of the Registrar–General or Home–Office, or whoever or whatever he or it is, who or which insists upon knowing nine times as much about us as we know about ourselves. Mr. Jupp was a bargee of Catholic views; "it warn't no odds to he" whether he worked upon wharf or water, sea or

river or canal, at coal, or hay, or lime, breeze, or hop–poles, or anything else. Now and then he went down to Gravesend, or up the river to Kingston or Staines; but his more legitimate area was navigable by three canals, where a chap might find time to eat his dinner, and give his wife and nag their'n. Issachar's love of nature always culminated at one o'clock; and then how he loved to halt his team under a row of alders, and see the painted meadows gay, and have grub and pipe accordin'. His three canals, affording these choice delights unequally, were the Surrey, the Regent's, and the Basingstoke.

That last was, indeed, to his rural mind, the nearest approach to Paradise; but as there is in all things a system of weights and measures, Mr. Jupp got better wages upon the other two, and so could not very often afford to indulge his love of the beautiful. Hence he kept his household gods within reach of the yellow Tibers, and took them only once a year for a treat upon the Anio. Then would Rachel Jupp and Looey spend a summer month afloat, enjoying the rural glimpses and the sliding quietude of inland navigation, and keeping the pot a–boiling in the state–cabin of the *Enterprise* or the *Industrious Maiden*.

Now Amy having formed Loo's acquaintance, and said what was right and pretty in gratitude for their entertainment and faithful kindness to Cradock, was just about to leave them, when Issachar Jupp delivered this speech, very slowly, as a man who has got to the marrow and pope's–eye of his pipe: —

"Now 'scuse me for axing of you, miss, and if any ways wrong

in so doing, be onscrupulous for to say so, and no harm done or taken. But I has my raisons for axing, from things as I've a 'ear'd him say, and oncommon good raisons too. If you please, what be the arkerate name and dwellin'–place of the young gent as saved our Loo? Mr. Clinkers couldn't find out, miss, though he knowed as it warn't 'Charles Newman.'"

"Don't you know his story, then?" asked Amy, in some astonishment. "I thought you knew all about it, and were so kind to him partly through that, though you were kind enough not to talk to me about it."

"We guesses a piece here and there, miss, since he talk so wild in his illness. And that's what made me be axing of you; for I knowed one name right well as he out with once or twice; not at all a common name nother. But we knows for sartin no more nor this, that he be an onlucky young gent, and the best as ever come into these parts."

"There can be no harm in my telling you, such faithful friends as you are. And the sad tale is known to every one, far and wide, in our part of Hampshire."

"Hampshire, ah!" said Mr. Jupp, with a very mysterious look; "we knowed Mr. Rosedew come from Hampshire, and that set us the more a–thinkin' of it. Loo, child, run for dad's bacco–box, as were left to Mother Richardson's, and if it ain't there, try at Blinkin' Davy's, and if he ain't got it, try Mother Hamp."

The child, sadly disappointed, for her eyes were large with hopes of a secret about her "dear gentleman," as she called

Cradock, departed upon her long errand. Then Amy told, as briefly as possible, all she knew of the great mishap, and the misery which followed it. From time to time her soft voice shook, and her tears would not be disciplined; while Rachel Jupp's strayed anyhow. But Issachar listened dryly and sternly, with one great brown hand on his forehead. Not once did he interrupt the young lady, by gesture, look, or question. But when she had finished, he said very quietly,

"One name, miss, as have summat to do with it, I've not 'ear'd you sinnify; and it were the sound o' that very name as fust raised my coorosity. 'Scuse me, miss, but I wouldn't ax, only for good raison."

"I hardly know what right I have to mention any other names," replied Amy, blushing and hesitating, for she did not wish to speak of Pearl Garnet; "there is only one other name connected at all with the matter, and that one of no importance."

"Ah," returned Jupp, with a glance as intense as a cat's through a dairy keyhole, "maybe the tow–rope ain't nothin' to do with the goin' of the barge, miss. That name didn't happen permiskious now to be the name of Garnet, ma'am?"

"Yes, indeed it did. But how could you know that, Mr. Jupp?"

"Pearl Garnet were the name I 'ear'd on, and that ain't a very common name, leastways to my experience. Now, could it 'ave 'appened by a haxident that her good father's name were Bull Garnet?"

Amy drew back, for Mr. Jupp, in his triumph and excitement,

had laid down his pipe, and was stretching out his unpeeled crate of a hand, as if to take her by the shoulder, and shake the whole truth out of her. It was his fashion with Rachel, and he quite forgot the difference. Mrs. Jupp cried, "Zakey, Zakey!" in a tone of strong remonstrance. But he was not abashed very seriously.

"It couldn't be now, could it, miss; it worn't in any way possible that Pearl Garnet's father was ever known by the name of Bull Garnet?"

"But indeed that is his name, Mr. Jupp. Why should you be so incredulous?"

"Oncredulous it be, miss; oncredulous, as I be a sinner. Rachey, who'd ha' thought it? How things does come about, to be sure! Now please to tell me, miss – very careful, and not passin' lightly of anything; never you mind how small it seem – every word you knows about Pearl Garnet and that there – job there; and all you knows on her father too."

"You must prove to me first, Mr. Jupp, that I have any right to do so."

Issachar now was strongly excited, a condition most unusual with him, except when his wife rebelled, and that she had, years ago, ceased to do. He put his long black face, which was working so that the high cheek–bones almost shut the little eyes, quite close to Amy's little white ear, and whispered,

"If ye dunna tell me, ye'll cry for it arl the life long, ye'll never right the innocent, and ye'll let the guilty ride over ye. I canna tell no more just now, but every word is gospel. I be no liar, miss,

though I be rough enough, God knows. Supposes He made me so."

Then Amy, trembling at his words, and thinking that she had hurt his feelings, put her soft little hand, for amends, into Zakey's great black piece of hold, which looked like the bilge of a barge; and he wondered what to do with it, such a sort of chap as he was. He had never heard of kissing a hand, and even if he had it would scarcely be a timely offering, for he was having a chaw to compose himself – yet he knew that he ought not, in good manners, to let go her hand in a hurry; so what did he do but slip off a ring (one of those so–called galvanic rings, in which sailors and bargemen have wonderful faith as an antidote to rheumatics, tick dolorous, and the Caroline Morgan), and this ring he passed down two of her fingers, for all females do love trinkets so. Amy kept it carefully, and will put it on her chatelaine, if ever she institutes one.

Then, being convinced by his words and manner, she told him everything she knew about the Garnet family – their behaviour in and after the great misfortune; the strange seclusion of Pearl, and Mr. Garnet's illness. And then she recurred to some vague rumours which had preceded their settlement in the New Forest. To all this Issachar listened, without a word or a nod, but with his narrow forehead radiant with concentration, his lips screwed up in a serrate ring, after the manner of a medlar, and a series of winks so intensely sage that his barge might have turned a corner with a team of eight blind horses, and no nod wanted for one of

them.

"Ain't there no more nor that, miss?" he asked, with some disappointment, when the little tale was ended; "can't you racollack no more?"

"No, indeed I cannot. And if you had not some important object, I should be quite ashamed of telling you so much gossip. If I may ask you a question now, what more did you expect me to tell you?"

"That they had know'd, miss, as Bull Garnet were Sir Cradock Nowell's brother."

"Mr. Garnet Sir Cradock's brother! You must be mistaken, Mr. Jupp. My father has known Sir Cradock Nowell ever since he was ten years old; and he could not have failed to know it, if it had been so."

"Most like he do know it, miss. But dunna you tell him now, nor any other charp. It be true as gospel for all that, though."

"Then Robert and Pearl are Cradock's first cousins, and Mr. Garnet is his uncle!"

"Not ezackly as you counts things," answered the bargeman, looking at the fire; "but in the way as we does."

Amy felt that she must ask no more, at least upon that subject; and that she was not likely to speak of it even to her father.

"Let him go, miss," continued Issachar, referring now to Cradock; "let him go for a long sea–vohoyage, same as doctor horders un. He be better out of the way for a spell or two. The Basingstoke ain't fur enoo, whur I meant to 'ave took him. 'A

mun be quite out o' the kintry till this job be over like. And niver a word as to what I thinks to coom anigh his ear, miss, if so be you vallies his raison."

"But you forget, Mr. Jupp, that you have not told me, as yet, at all what it is you do think. You said some things which frightened me, and you told me one which astonished me. Beyond that I know nothing."

"And better so, my dear young leddy, a vast deal better so. Only you have the very best hopes, and keep your spirits roaring. Zakey Jupp never take a thing in hand but what he go well through with it. Ask Rachey about that. Now this were a casooal haxident, mind you, only a casooal haxident – "

"Of course we all know that, Mr. Jupp. No one would dare to think anything else."

"Yes, yes; all right, miss. And we'll find out who did the casooal haxident – that's all, miss, that's all. Only you hold your tongue."

She was obliged to be content with this, and on the whole it greatly encouraged her. Then she returned to the Portland Hotel under convoy of all the Jupp family, and Issachar got into two or three rows by hustling every one out of her way. Although poor Amy was frightened at this, no doubt it increased her faith in him through some feminine process of dialectics unknown to the author of the Organon.

Though Amy could not bear to keep anything secret from her father, having given her word she of course observed it, and

John was greatly surprised at the spirits in which his daughter took leave of Cradock. But there were many points in Amy's character, as has been observed before, which her father never understood; and he concluded that this was a specimen of them, and was delighted to see her so cheerful.

Now, being returned to Nowelhurst, he held counsel with sister Eudoxia, who thoroughly deserved to have a vote after contributing so to the revenue. And the result of their Lateran – for they both were bricks – council was as follows: That John was bound, howsoever much it went against his proud stomach after his previous treatment, to make one last appeal from the father according to the spirit to the father according to the flesh, in favour of the unlucky son who was now condemned to exile, so as at least to send him away in a manner suitable to his birth. That, if this appeal were rejected, and the appellant treated unpleasantly – which was almost sure to follow – he could not, consistently with his honour and his clerical dignity, hold any longer the benefices (paltry as they were), the gifts of a giver now proved unkind. That thereupon Mr. Rosedew should first provide for Cradock's voyage so far as his humble means and small influence permitted; and after that should settle at Oxford, where he might get parochial duty, and where his old tutorial fame and repute (now growing European from a life of learning) would earn him plenty of pupils —

"And a professorship at least!" Miss Eudoxia broke in; for, much as she nagged at her brother, she was proud as could be

of his knowledge.

"Marry, ay, and a bishopric," John answered, smiling pleasantly; "you have often menaced me, Doxy dear, with Jemima's apron."

So, on a bright day in January, John Rosedew said to Jem Pottles, "Saddle me the horse, James." And they saddled him the "horse" – not so called by his master through any false aggrandisement (such as maketh us talk of "the servants," when we have only got a maid–of–all–work), but because the parson, in pure faith, regarded him as a horse of full equine stature and super–equine powers.

After tightening up the girths, then – for that noble cob, at the saddling period, blew himself out with a large sense of humour (unappreciated by the biped who bestraddled him unwarily), an abdominal sense of humour which, as one touch of nature makes the whole world kin, induced the pigskin to circulate after the manner of a brass dog's collar – tush, I mean a dog's brass collar – in order to learn what the joke was down in those festive regions; therefore, having buckled him up six inches, till the witty nag creaked like a tight–laced maid, away rode the parson towards the Hall. Much liefer would he have walked by the well–known and pleasant footpath, but he felt himself bound, as one may say, to go in real style, sir.

The more he reflected upon the nature of his errand, the fainter grew his hopes of success; he even feared that his ancient friendship would not procure him a hearing, so absorbed were all

the echoes of memory in the pique of parental jealousy, and the cajoleries of a woman. And the consequences of failure – how bitter they must be to him and his little household! Moreover, he dearly loved his two little quiet parishes; and, though he reaped more tithe from them in kindness than in kind or by commutation, to his contented mind they were far sweeter than the incumbency of Libya–cum–Gades, and both Pœni for his beadles.

He thought of Amy with a bitter pang, and of his sister with heaviness, as he laid his hand – for he never used whip – on the fat flank of the pony to urge him almost to a good round trot, that suspense might sooner be done with. And when the Hall was at last before him, he rode up, not to the little postern hard by the housekeeper's snuggery (which had seemed of old to be made for him), but to the grand front entrance, where the orange–trees in tubs were, and the myrtles, and the pilasters.

Most of the trees had been removed, with the aid of little go–carts, before the frosts began; but they impressed John Rosedew none the less, so far as his placid and simple mind was open to small impressions.

Dismounting from Coræbus, whose rusty snaffle and mildewed reins would have been a disgrace to any horse, as Amy said every day, he rang the main entrance bell, and wondered whether they would let him in.

That journey had cost him a very severe battle, to bear himself humbly before the wrong, and to do it in the cause of the injured.

In the true and noble sense of pride, there could not be a prouder man than the gentle parson. But he ruled that noble human pride with its grander element, left in it by the Son of God, His incarnation's legacy, the pride which never apes, but is itself humility.

At last the door was opened, not by the spruce young footman (who used to look so much at Amy, and speer about as to her expectations, because she was only a parson's daughter), but by that ancient and most respectable Job Hogstaff, patriarch of butlers. Dull and dim as his eyes were growing, Job, who now spent most of his time in looking for those who never came, had made out Mr. Rosedew's approach, by virtue of the pony's most unmistakable shamble. Therefore he pulled down his best coat from a jug–crook, twitched his white hair to due stiffness, pushed the ostiary footman back with a scorn which rankled for many a day under a zebra waistcoat, and hobbled off at his utmost pace to admit the visitor now so strange, though once it was strange without him.

Mr. Rosedew walked in very slowly and stiffly, then turned aside to a tufted mat, and began to wipe his shoes in the most elaborate manner, though there was not a particle of dirt upon them. Old Job's eyes blinked vaguely at him: he felt there was something wrong in that.

"Don't ye do that, sir, now; for God's sake don't do that. I can't abear it; and that's the truth."

Full well the old man remembered how different, in the happy

days, had been John Rosedew's entrance; and now every scrub on the mat was a rub on his shaky hard–worn heart.

Mr. Rosedew looked mildly surprised, for his apprehension (as we know) was swifter on paper than pavement. But he held forth his firm strong hand, and the old man bowed tearfully over it.

"Any news of our boy, sir? Any news of my boy as was?"

"Yes, Job; very bad news. He has been terribly ill in London, and nobody there to care for him."

"Then I'll throw up my situation, sir. Many's the time I have threatened them, but didn't like to be too hard like. And pretty goings on there'd be, without old Job in the pantry. But I bain't bound to stand everything for the saving of them as goes on so. And that Hismallitish woman, as find fault with my buckles, and nice things she herself wear – I'd a given notice a week next Monday, but that I likes Miss Oa so, and feel myself bound, as you may say, to see out this Sir Cradock; folk would say I were shabby to leave him now he be gettin' elderly. Man and boy for sixty year, and began no more than boot–cleaning; man and boy for sixty–three year, come next Lammas–tide. I should like it upon my tombstone, sir, with what God pleases added, if I not make too bold, and you the master of the churchyard, if so be you should live long enough, when my turn come, God willing."

"It will not be in my power, Job. But if ever it is, you may trust me."

"And I wants that in I was tellin' my niece about, 'Put Thy

hand in the hollow of my thigh.' Holy Bible, you know, sir, and none can't object to that."

"Come, Job, my good friend, you must not talk so sepulchrally. Leave His own good time to God."

"To be sure, sir; I bain't in no hurry yet. I've a sight of things to see to, and my master must go first, he be so very particular. I'll live to see the young master yet, as my duty is for to do. *He* 'ont carry on with a Hismallitish woman; *he* 'ont say, 'What, Hogstaff, are your wits gone wool–gatherin'?' and his own wits all the time, sir, fleeced, fleeced, fleeced – "

Here John Rosedew cut short the contrast between the present and the future master (which would soon have assumed a golden tinge as of the Fourth Eclogue), for the parson was too much a gentleman to foster millennial views at the expense of the head of the household.

"Job, take my card to your master; and tell him, with my compliments, that I wish to see him alone, if he will so far oblige me. By–the–by, I ought to have written first, to request an interview; but it never occurred to me."

He could scarcely help sighing as he thought of formality re–established on the ruins of familiarity.

"He'll be in the little coved room, no doubt, long o' that Hismallitish woman. But step in here a moment, sir."

Instead of passing the doorway, which the butler had thrown open for him, Mr. Rosedew stood scrupulously on the mat, as if it marked his territory, until the old man came back and showed

him into the black oak parlour.

The little coved room was calmly and sweetly equal to the emergency. The moment Job's heels were out of sight, Mrs. Corklemore, who had been indulging in a nice little chat with Sir Cradock, "when she ought to have been at work all the while, plain–sewing for her little household, for who was to keep the wolf from the door, if she shrank from a woman's mission – though irksome to her, she must confess, for it did hurt her poor fingers so" – here she held up a dish–cloth rather rougher than a coal–sack, which she had stolen cleverly from her host's own lower regions, and did not know from a glass–cloth; but it suited her because it was brown, and set off her lily hands so; – "oh, Uncle Cradock, in all this there is something sweetly sacred, because it speaks of *home*!" She was darning it all the while with white silk, and took good care to push it away when any servant came in. It had lasted her now for a week, and had earned her a hundred guineas, having made the most profound impression upon its legitimate owner. She would earn another hundred before the week was out by knitting a pair of rough worsted socks for her little Flore, "though it made her heart bleed to think how that poor child hated the feel of them."

Now she rose in haste from her chair, and pushed the fortunate dish–cloth, with a very expressive air, into her pretty work–basket, and drew the strings loudly over it.

"What are you going for, Georgie? You need not leave the room, I am sure."

"Yes, uncle dear, I must. You are so clear and so honest, I know; and most likely I take it from you. But I could not have anything to do with any secret dealings, uncle, even though you wished it, which I am sure you never could. I never could keep a secret, uncle, because I am so shallow. Whenever secrecy is requested, I feel as if there was something dishonest, either done or contemplated. Very foolish of me, I know, but my nature is so childishly open. And of course Mr. Rosedew has a perfect right, and is indeed very wise, to conceal his scheme with respect to his daughter."

"Georgie, stay in this room, if you please; he is not coming here."

"But that poor simple Amy will, if he has brought her with him. Well, I will stay here and lecture her, uncle, about her behaviour to you."

After all this the old man set forth, in some little irritation, to receive his once–loved friend. He entered the black oak parlour in a cold and stately manner, and bowed without a word to John, who had crossed the room to meet him. The parson held out his hand, as a lover and preacher of peace should do; but the offer, ay, and the honour too, not being at all appreciated, he withdrew it with a crimson blush all over his bright clear cheeks, as deep as his daughter's would have been.

Then Sir Cradock Nowell, trying to seem quite calm and collected, addressed his visitor thus:

"Sir, I am indebted to you for the honour of this visit. I

apologize for receiving you in a room without a fire. Pray take a chair. I have no doubt that your intentions are kind towards me."

"I thank you," replied the parson, speaking much faster than usual, and with the frill of his shirt–front rising; "I thank you, Sir Cradock Nowell; but I will not sit down in the house of a gentleman who declines to take my hand. I am here much against my own wishes, and only because I supposed that it was my duty to come. I am here on behalf of your son, a noble but most unfortunate youth, and now in great trouble of mind."

If he had only said "in great bodily danger," it might have made a difference.

"Your interest in him is very kind; and I trust that he will be grateful, which he never was to me. He has left his home in defiance of me. I can do nothing for him until he comes back, and is penitent. But surely the question concerns me rather than you, Mr. Rosedew."

"I am sorry to find," answered John, quite calmly, "that you think me guilty of impertinent meddling. But even that I would bear, as becomes my age and my profession," – here he gave Sir Cradock a glance, which was thoroughly understood, because they had been at school together, – "and more than that I would do, Cradock Nowell, for a man I have loved like you, sir."

That "sir" came out very oddly. John poked it in, as a retractation for having called him "Cradock Nowell," and as a salve to his own self–respect, lest he should have been too appealing. And to follow up this view of the subject, he made a

bow such as no man makes to one from whom he begs anything. But Sir Cradock Nowell lost altogether the excellence of the bow. The parson had put up his knee in a way which took the old man back to Sherborne. His mind was there playing cob–nut as fifty years since, with John Rosedew. Once more he saw the ruddy, and then pugnacious, John bringing his calf up, and priming his knee, for the cob–nut to lie upon it. This he always used to do, and not care a flip for the whack upon it, instead of using his blue cloth cap, as all the rest of the boys did; because his father and mother were poor, and could only afford him one cap in a year.

And so the grand bow was wasted, as most formalities are: but if John had only known when to stop, it might have been all right after all, in spite of Georgie Corklemore. But urged by the last infirmity (except gout) of noble minds, our parsons never do know the proper time to stop. Excellent men, and admirable, they make us shrink from eternity, by proving themselves the type of it. Mr. Rosedew spoke well and eloquently, as he was sure to do; but it would have been better for his cause if he had simply described the son's distress, and left the rest to the father's heart. At one time, indeed, poor old Sir Cradock, who was obstinate and misguided, rather than cold and unloving, began to relent, and a fatherly yearning fluttered in his grey–lashed eyes.

But at this critical moment, three little kicks at the door were heard, and the handle rattled briskly; then a shrill little voice came through the keyhole:

"Oh pease let Fore tum in. Pease do, pease do, pease do. Me

‘ost me ummy top. Oh you naughty bad door!”

Then another kick was administered by small but passionate toe–toes. Of course your mother did not send you, innocent bright–haired popples, and with a lie so pat and glib in that pouting pearl–set mouth. Foolish mother, if she did, though it seal Attalic bargain!

Sir Cradock went to the door, and gently ordered the child away. But the interruption had been enough —*ibi omnis effusus labor*. When he returned and faced John Rosedew the manner of his visage was altered. The child had reminded him of her mother, and that graceful, gushing, loving nature, which tried so hard not to doubt the minister. So he did what a man in the wrong generally does instinctively; he swept back the tide of war into his adversary’s country.

“You take a very strong interest, sir, in one whose nearest relations have been compelled to abandon him.”

“I thought that your greatest grievance with him was that he had abandoned you.”

“Excuse me; I cannot split hairs. All I mean is that something has come to my knowledge – not through the proper channel, not from those who ought to have told me – something which makes your advocacy seem a little less disinterested than I might have supposed it to be.”

“Have the kindness to tell me what it is.”

“Oh, perhaps a mere nothing. But it seems a significant rumour.”

"What rumour, if you please?"

"That my – that Cradock Nowell is attached to your daughter, who behaved so ill to me. Of course, it is not true?"

"Perfectly true, every word of it." And John Rosedew looked at Sir Cradock Nowell as proudly as ever a father looked. Amy, in his opinion, was peeress for any mortal. And perhaps he was not presumptuous.

"Ah!" was the only reply he received: an "ah" drawn out into half an ell.

"Why, I would have told you long ago, the moment that I knew it, but for your great trouble, and your bitterness towards him. You have often wished that a son of yours should marry my daughter Amy. Surely you will not blame him for desiring to do as you wished?"

"No, because he is young and foolish; but I may blame you for encouraging it, now that he is the only one."

"Do you dare to think that I am in any way influenced by interested motives?"

"I dare to think what I please. No bullying here, John, if you please. We all know how combative you are. And, now you have forced me to it, I will tell you what will be the conviction, ay, and the expression of every one in this county, except those who are afraid of you. 'Mr. Rosedew has entrapped the future Sir Cradock Nowell, hushed up the crime, and made all snug for his daughter at Nowelhurst Hall.'"

Sir Cradock did not mean half his words, any more than the

rest of us do, when hurt; and he was bitterly sorry for them the moment they were uttered. They put an impassable barrier between him and John Rosedew, between him and his own conscience, for many a day and night to come.

Have you ever seen a pure good man, a man of large intellect and heart, a lover of truth and justice more than of himself, confront, without warning, some black charge, some despicable calumny, in a word (for I love strong English, and nothing else will tell it), some damned lie? If not, I hope you never may, for it makes a man's heart burn so.

John Rosedew was not of the violent order. Indeed, as his sister Eudoxia said, and to her own great comfort knew, his cistern of wrathfulness was so small, and the supply–pipe so unready – as must be where the lower passions filter through the intellect – that most people thought it impossible "to put the parson out." And very few of those who knew him could have borne to make the trial.

Even now, hurt as he was to the very depth of his heart, he was indignant more than angry.

"It would have been more manly of you, Sir Cradock Nowell, to have said this very mean thing yourself, than to have put it into the mouths of others. I grieve for you, and for myself, that so mean a man was ever my friend. Perhaps you have still some relics of gentlemanly feeling which will lead you to perform a host's duty towards his visitor. Have the kindness to order my horse."

Then John Rosedew, so punctilious, so polite to the poorest cottager, turned his broad back upon the baronet, and as he slowly walked to the door, these words came over his shoulder: —

"To–day you will receive my resignation of your two benefices. If I live a few years more, I will repay you all they have brought me above a curate's stipend. My daughter is no fortune–hunter. She never shall see your son again, unless he renounce you and yours for ever, or you come and implore us humbly as now you have spoken arrogantly, contemptibly, and meanly."

Then, fearing lest he had been too grand about a little matter – not his daughter's marriage, but the aspersion upon himself – he closed the door very carefully, so as not to make any noise, and walked away towards his home, forgetting Coræbus utterly. And, before his fine solid face began to recover its healthy and bashful pink, he was visited by sore misgivings as to his own behaviour; to wit, what claim had any man, however elate with the pride of right and the scorn of wrong, to talk about any fellow–man becoming humble to him? Nevertheless, he could not manage to retract the wrong expression in his letter of resignation; not from any false pride – oh no! – but for fear of being misunderstood. But that very night he craved pardon of Him before whom alone we need humbly bow; who alone can grant us anything.

CHAPTER IV

What is lovelier, just when Autumn throws her lace around us, and begs us not to begin to think of any spiteful winter, because she has not yet unfolded half the wealth of her bosom, and will not look over her shoulder – when we take that rich one gaily for her gifts of beauty; what among her clustered hair, freshened with the hoar–frost in imitation of the Spring (all fashions do recur so), tell us what can be more pretty, pearly, light, and elegant, more memoried of maidenhood, than a jolly spider's web?

See how the diamonds quiver and sparkle in the September morning; what jeweller could have set them so? All of graduated light and metrical proportion, every third pre–eminent, strung on soft aerial tension, as of woven hoar–frost, and every carrying thread encrusted with the breath of fairies, then crossed and latticed at just angles, with narrowing interstices, to a radiated octagon – the more we look, the more we wonder at the perfect tracery. Then, if we gently breathe upon it, or a leaf of the bramble shivers, how from the open centre a whiff of waving motion flows down every vibrant radius, every weft accepts the waft slowly and lulling vibration, every stay–rope jerks and quivers, and all the fleeting subtilty expands, contracts, and undulates.

Yet if an elegant spider glide out, exquisite, many–dappled, pellucid like a Scotch pebble or a calceolaria, with a dozen

dimples upon his back, and eight fierce eyes all up for business, the moment he slips from the blackberry–leaf all sense of beauty is lost to the gazer, because he thinks of rapacity.

And so, I fear, John Rosedew's hat described in the air a flourish of more courtesy than cordiality, when he saw Mrs. Corklemore gliding forth from the bend of the road in front of him. Although she had left the house after him, by the help of a short cut through the gardens, where the rector would no longer take the liberty of trespassing, she contrived to meet him as if herself returning from the village.

"Oh, Mr. Rosedew, I am so glad to see you," cried Georgie, as he tried to escape with his bow: "what a fortunate accident!"

"Indeed!" said John, not meaning to be rude, but unwittingly suggesting a modified view of the bliss.

"Ah, I am so sorry; but you are prejudiced against me, I fear, because my simple convictions incline me to the Low Church view."

That hit was a very clever one. No other bolt she could have shot would have brought the parson to bay so, upon his homeward road, with the important news he bore.

"I assure you, Mrs. Corklemore, I beg to assure you most distinctly, that you are quite wrong in thinking that. Most truly I hope that I have allowed no prejudice, upon such grounds, to dwell for a moment with me."

"Then you are not a ritualist? And you think, so far as I understand you, that the Low Church people are quite as good

as the High Church?"

"I hope they are as good; still I doubt their being as right. But charity is greater even than faith and hope. And, for the sake of charity, I would wash all rubrics white. If the living are rebuked for lagging to bury their dead, how shall they be praised for battling over the Burial Service?"

Mrs. Corklemore, quick as she was, did not understand the allusion. Mr. Rosedew referred to a paltry dissension over a corpse in Oxfordshire, which had created strong disgust, far and near, among believers; while infidels gloried in it. It cannot be too soon forgotten and forgiven.

"Oh, Mr. Rosedew, I am so glad that your sentiments are so liberal. I had always feared that liberal sentiments proceeded from, or at least were associated with, weak faith."

"I hope not, madam. The most liberal One I have ever read of was God as well as man. But I cannot speak of such matters casually, as I would talk of the weather. If your mind is uneasy, and I can in any way help you, it is my duty to do so."

"Oh, thank you. No; I don't think I could do that. We are such Protestants at Coo Nest. Forgive me, I see I have hurt you."

"You misunderstand me purposely," said John Rosedew, with that crack of perception which comes (like a chapped lip) suddenly to folks who are too charitable, "or else you take a strangely intensified view of the simplest matters. All I intended was – "

"Oh yes, oh yes, I am always misunderstanding everybody. I

am so dreadfully stupid and simple. But you *will* relieve my mind, Mr. Rosedew?"

Here Georgie held out the most beautiful hand that ever darned a dish–cloth, so white, and warm, and dainty, from her glove and pink muff–lining. Mr. Rosedew, of course, was compelled to take it, and she left it a long time with him.

"To be sure I will, if it is in my power, and you will only tell me how."

"It is simply this," she answered, meekly, dropping her eyes, and sighing; "I do so long to do good works, and never can tell how to set about it. Unhappily, I am brought so much more into contact with the worldly–minded, than with those who would improve me, and I feel the lack of something, something sadly deficient in my spiritual state. Could you assign me a district anywhere? I am sadly ignorant, but I might do some little ministering, feeling as I do for every one. If it were only ten cottages, with an interesting sheep–stealer! Oh, that would be so charming. Can I have a sheep–stealer?"

"I fear I cannot accommodate you" – the parson was smiling in spite of himself, she looked so beautifully earnest; "we have no felons here, and scarcely even a hen–stealer. Though I must not take any credit for that. Every house in the village is Sir Cradock Nowell's, and Mr. Garnet is not long in ousting the evil–doers."

"Oh, Sir Cradock; poor Sir Cradock!" Here she came to the real object of her expedition. "Oh, Mr. Rosedew, tell me kindly, as a Christian minister; I am in so difficult a position, – have you

noticed in poor Sir Cradock anything strange of late, anything odd and lamentable?"

Mr. Rosedew hated to be called a "minister," – the Dissenters love the word so, and even the great John had his weaknesses.

"I trust I should tell you the truth, Mrs. Corklemore, whether invoked as a minister, or asked simply as a man."

"No doubt you would – of course you would. I am always making such mistakes. I am so unused to clever people. But do tell me, in any capacity which may suit you best" – it was foolish of her not to forego that little repartee – "whether you have observed of late anything odd and deplorable, anything we who love him so – " Here she hesitated, and wiped her eyes.

"Though Sir Cradock Nowell," replied Mr. Rosedew, slowly, and buttoning up his coat at the risk of spoiling his cock's–comb frill, "is no longer my dearest friend, as he was for nearly fifty years, it does not become me to speak about him confidentially and disparagingly to a lady whom I have not had the honour of seeing more than four times, including therein the celebration of Divine service, at which a district–visitor should attend with *some* regularity, if only for the sake of example. Mrs. Corklemore, I have the honour of wishing you good morning."

Although the parson had neither desire nor power to pierce the lady's schemes, he felt, by that peculiar instinct which truly honest men have (though they do not always use it), that the lady was dishonest, and dishonestly seeking something. Else had he never uttered a speech so unlike his usual courtesy. As for

poor simple Georgie, she was rolled over too completely to do anything but gasp. Then she went to the gorse to recover herself; and presently she laughed, not spitefully, but with real amusement at her own discomfiture.

Being quite a young woman still, and therefore not *spe longa*, and feeling a want of sympathy in waiting for dead men's shoes, Mrs. Corklemore, who had some genius – if creative power prove it; if *gignere*, not *gigni*, be taken as the test, though perhaps it requires both of them, – that sweet mother of a sweeter child (if so much of the saccharine be admitted by Chancellors of the Exchequer, themselves men of more alcohol), what did she do but devise a scheme to wear the shoes, *ipso vivo*, and put the old gentleman into the slippers.

How very desirable it was that Nowelhurst Hall, and those vast estates, should be in the possession of some one who knew how to enjoy them, and make a proper use of them! Poor Sir Cradock never could do so; it was painfully evident that he never more could discharge his duties to society, that he was listless, passive, somnolent, – somnambulant perhaps she ought to say, a man walking in a dream. She had heard of cases, – more than that, she had actually known them, – sad cases in which that pressure on the brain, which so frequently accompanies the slow reaction from sudden and terrible trials, had crushed the reason altogether, especially after a "certain age." What a pity! And it might be twenty years yet before it pleased God to remove him. He had a tough and wiry look about him. In common kindness

and humanity, something surely ought to be done to relieve him, to make him happier.

Nothing rough, of course; nothing harsh or coercive. No personal restraint whatever, for the poor old dear was not dangerous; only to make him what she believed was called a "Committee in Chancery" – there she was wrong, for the guardian is the Committee – and then Mr. Corklemore, of course, and Mr. Kettledrum would act for him. At least she should think so, unless there was some obnoxious trustee, under his marriage–settlement. That settlement must be got at; so much depended upon it. Probably young Cradock would succeed thereunder to all the settled estate upon his father's death. If so, there was nothing for it, except to make him incapable, by convicting him of felony. Poor fellow! She had no wish to hang him. She would not have done it for the world; and she had heard he was so good–looking. But there was no fear of his being hanged, like the son of a tradesman or peasant.

Well, when he was transported for life, with every facility for repentance, who would be the next to come bothering? Why, that odious Eoa. As for her, she would hang her to–morrow, if she could only get the chance. Though she believed it would never hurt her; for the child could stand upon nothing. Impudent wretch! Only yesterday she had frightened Georgie out of her life again. And there was no possibility of obtaining a proper influence over her. There was hardly any crime which that girl would hesitate at, when excited. What a lamentable state of

morality! She might be made to choke Amy Rosedew, her rival in Bob's affection. But no, that would never do. Too much crime in one family. How would society look upon them? And it would make the house unpleasant to live in. There was a simpler way of quenching Eoa – deny at once her legitimacy. The chances were ten to one against her having been born in wedlock – such a loose, wild man as her father was. And even if she had been, why, the chances were ten to one against her being able to prove it. Whereas it would be very easy to get a few Hindoos, or Coolies, or whatever they were, to state their opinion about her mother.

Well, supposing all this nicely managed, what next? Why, let poor Sir Cradock live out his time, as he would be in her hands entirely, and would grow more and more incapable; and when it pleased God to release him, why then, "thou and Ziba divide the land," and for the sake of her dear little Flore, she would take good care that the Kettledrums did not get too much.

This programme was a far bolder one than that with which Mrs. Corklemore had first arrived at the Hall. But she was getting on so well, that of course her views and desires expanded. All she meant at first was to gain influence over her host, and irrevocably estrange him from his surviving son, by delicate insinuations upon the subject of fratricide; at the same time to make Eoa do something beyond forgiveness, and then to confide the reward of virtue to obituary gratitude.

Could anything be more innocent, perhaps we should say more laudable? What man of us has not the privilege of knowing

a dozen Christian mothers, who would do things of nobler enterprise for the sake of their little darlings?

But now, upon the broader gauge which the lady had selected, there were two things to be done, ere ever the train got to the switches. One was, to scatter right and left, behind and before, and up and down, wonder, hesitancy, expectation, interrogation, commiseration, and every other sort of whisper, confidential, suggestive, cumulative, as to poor Sir Cradock's condition. The other thing was to find out the effect in the main of his marriage–settlement. And this was by far the more difficult.

Already Mrs. Corklemore had done a little business, without leaving a tongue–print behind her, in the distributory process; and if Mr. Rosedew could just have been brought, after that rude dismissal, to say that he had indeed observed sad eccentricity, growing strangeness, on the part of his ancient friend, why then he would be committed to a line of most telling evidence, and the parish half bound to approval.

But John's high sense of honour, and low dislike of Georgie, had saved him from the neat, and neatly–baited, trap.

That morning Mr. Rosedew's path was beset with beauty, though his daughter failed to meet him; inasmuch as she very naturally awaited him on the parish road. When he had left the chase, and was fetching a compass by the river, along a quiet footway, elbowed like an old oak–branch, overlapped with scraggy hawthorns, paved on either side with good intention of primroses, there, just in a nested bend where the bank overhangs

the stream, and you would like to lie flat and flip in a trout fly about the end of April, over the water came lightly bounding, and on a mossy bank alighted, young Eoa Nowell.

"To and fro, that's the way I go; don't you see, Uncle John, I must; only the water is so narrow. It scarcely keeps me in practice."

"Then your standard, my dear, must be very high. I should have thought twice about that jump, in my very best days!"

"*You* indeed!" said Eoa, with the most complacent contempt; eyeing the parson's thick–set figure and anterior development.

"Nevertheless," replied John, with a laugh, "it is but seven and forty years since I won first prize at Sherborne, both for the long leap and the high leap; and proud enough I was, Eoa, of sixteen feet four inches. But I should have had no chance, that's certain, if you had entered for the stakes."

"But how could I be there, Uncle John, don't you see, thirty years before I was born?"

"My dear, I am quite prepared to admit the validity of your excuse. Tyrio cothurno! child, what have you got on?"

"Oh, I found them in an old cupboard, with tops, and whips, and whistles; and I made Mother Biddy take them in at the ancle, because I do hate needles so. And I wear them, not on account of the dirt, but because people in this country are so nasty and particular; and now they can't say a word against me. That's one comfort, at any rate."

She wore a smart pair of poor Clayton's vamplets, and a dark

morning–frock drawn tightly in, with a little of the skirt tucked up, and a black felt hat with an ostrich feather, and her masses of hair rolled closely. As the bright colour shone in her cheeks, and the heartlight outsparkled the sun in her eyes, John Rosedew thought that he had never seen such a wildly beautiful, and yet perfectly innocent, creature.

"Well, I don't know," he answered, very gravely, "about your gaiters proving a Palladium against calumny. But one thing is certain, Eoa, your face will, to all who look at you. But why don't you ride, my dear child, if you must have such rapid exercise?"

"Because they won't let me get up the proper way on a horse. Me to sit cramped up between two horns, as if a horse was a cow! Me, who can stand on the back of a horse going at full gallop! But it doesn't matter now much. Nobody seems to like me for it."

She spoke in so wistful and sad a tone, and cast down her eyes so bashfully, that the old man, who loved her heartily, longed to know what the matter was.

"Nobody likes you, Eoa! Why, everybody likes you. You are stealing everybody's heart. My Amy would be quite jealous, only she likes you so much herself."

"I am sure, I have more cause to be jealous of her. Some people like me, I know, very much; but not the people I want to do it."

"Oh, then you don't want us to do it. What harm have we done, Eoa?"

"You don't understand me at all, Uncle John. And perhaps you

don't want to do it. And yet I did think that you ought to know, as the clergyman of the parish. But I never seem to have right ideas of anything in this country!"

"Tell me, my dear," said Mr. Rosedew, taking her hand, and speaking softly, for he saw two great tears stealing out from the dark shadow of her lashes, and rolling down the cheeks that had been so bright but a minute ago; "tell me, as if you were my own daughter, what vexes your pure heart so. Very likely I can help you, and I will promise to tell no one."

"Oh no, Uncle John, you never can help me. Nobody in the world can help me. But do you think that you ought to know?"

"That depends upon the subject, my dear. Not if it is a family–secret, or otherwise out of my province. But if it is anything with which I have to deal, or which I understand – "

"Oh yes, oh yes! Because you manage, you manage all – all the banns of matrimony."

This last word was whispered with such a sob of despairing tantalization, that John, although he was very sorry, could scarcely keep from laughing.

"You need not laugh, Uncle John. You wouldn't if you were in my place, or could at all understand the facts of it. And as for its being a family–secret, ever so many people know it, and I don't care two pice who knows it now."

"Then let me know it, my child. Perhaps an old man can advise you."

The child of the East looked up at him, with a mist of

softness moving through the brilliance of her eyes, and spake these unromantic words: —

"It is that I do like Bob so; and he doesn't care one bit for me."

She looked at the parson, as much as to say, "What do you think of that, now? I am not at all ashamed of it." And then she stooped for a primrose bud, and put it into his button–hole, and then she burst out crying.

"Upon my word," said John, "upon my word, this is too bad of you, Eoa."

"Oh yes, I know all that; and I say it to myself ever so many times. But it seems to make no difference. You can't understand, of course, Uncle John, any more than you could jump the river. But I do assure you that sometimes it makes me feel quite desperate. And yet all the time I know how excessively foolish I am. And then I try to argue, but it seems to hurt me here. And then I try not to think of it, but it will come back again, and I am even glad to have it. And then I begin to pity myself, and to be angry with every one else; and after that I get better and whistle a tune, and go jumping. Only I take care not to see him."

"There you are quite right, my dear: and I would strongly recommend you not to see him for a month."

"As if that could make any difference! And he would go and have somebody else. And then I should kill them both."

"Well done, Oriental! Now, will you be guided by me, my dear? I have seen a great deal of the world."

"Yes, no doubt you have, Uncle John. And you are welcome

to say just what you like; only don't advise me what I don't like; but tell the truth exactly."

"Then what I say is this, Eoa: keep away from him altogether – don't allow him to see you, even when he wishes it, for a month at least. Hold yourself far above him. He will begin to think of you more and more. Why, you are ten times too good for him. There is not a man in England who might not be proud of you, Eoa, when you have learned a little dignity."

Somehow or other none of the Rosedews appreciated the Garnets.

"Yes, I dare say; but don't you see, I don't want him to be proud of me. I only want him to like me. And I do hate being dignified."

"If you want him to like you, do just what I have advised."

"So I will, Uncle John. Kiss me now, to make it up. Oh, you are such a dear! – don't you think a week would do, now?"

CHAPTER V

At high noon of a bright cold day in the early part of March, a labourer who had been "frithing," that is to say, cutting underwood in one of the forest copses, came out into the green track, which could scarce be called a "lane," to eat his well–earned dinner.

As it happened to be a Monday, the poor man had a better dinner than he would see or smell again until the following Sunday. For there, as throughout rural England, a working man, receiving his wages on the Saturday evening, lives upon a sliding scale throughout the dreary week. He has his bit of hot on Sunday, smacking his lips at every morsel; and who shall scold him for staying at home to see it duly boiled, and feeling his heart move with the steaming and savoury pot–lid more kindly than with the dry parson?

And he wants his old woman 'long of him; he see her so little all the week, and she be always best–tempered on Sundays. Let the young uns go to school to get larning – though he don't much see the use of it, and his father lived happy without it – 'bating that matter, which is beyond him, let them go, and then hear parson, and bring home the news to the old folk. Only let 'em come home good time for dinner, or they had best look out. "Now, Molly, lift the pot–lid again. Oh, it do smell so good! Got ever another onion?"

Having held high feast on Sunday, and thanked the Lord, without knowing it (by inhaling happiness, and being good to the children – our Lord's especial favourites), off he sets on the Monday morning, to earn another eighteenpence – twopence apiece for the young uns. And he means to be jolly that day, for he has got his pinch of tobacco and two lucifers in his waistcoat pocket, and in his frail a most glorious dinner hanging from a hedge–stake.

All the dogs he meets jump up on his back; but he really cannot encourage them, with his own dog so fond of bones, and having the first right to them. Of course, his own dog is not far behind; for it is a law of nature, admitting no exception, that the poorer a man is, the more certain he is to have a dog, and the more certain that dog is to admire him.

Pretermitting the dog, important as he is, let us ask of the master's dinner. He has a great hunk of cold bacon, from the cabbage–soup of yesterday, with three short bones to keep it together, and a cross junk from the clod of beef (out of the same great pot) which he will put up a tree for Tuesday; because, if it had been left at home, mother couldn't keep it from the children; who do scarce a stroke of work yet, and only get strong victuals to console them for school upon Sundays. Then upon Wednesday our noble peasant of this merry England will have come down to the scraping of bones; on Thursday he may get bread and dripping from some rich man's house; on Friday and Saturday nothing but bread, unless there be cold potatoes. And he will not

have fed in this fat rich manner unless he be a good workman, a hater of public–houses, and his wife a tidy body.

Now this labourer who came out of the copse, with a fine appetite for his Monday's dinner (for he had not been "spreeing" on Sunday), was no other than Jem – not Jem Pottles, of course, but the Jem who fell from the oak–branch, and must have been killed or terribly hurt but for Cradock Nowell's quickness. Everybody called him "Jem," except those who called him "father;" and his patronymic, not being important, may as well continue latent. Now why could not Jem enjoy his dinner more thoroughly in the copse itself, where the witheys were gloved with silver and gold, and the primroses and the violets bloomed, and the first of the wood–anemones began to star the dead ash–leaves? In the first place, because in the timber–track happen he might see somebody just to give "good day" to; the chances were against it in such a lonesome place, still it might so happen; and a man who has been six hours at work in the deep recesses of a wood, with only birds and rabbits moving, is liable to a gregarious weakness, especially at feeding–time. Furthermore, this particular copse had earned a very bad name. It was said to be the harbourage of a white and lonesome ghost, a ghost with no consideration for embodied feelings, but apt to walk in the afternoon, in the glimpses of wooded sunshine. Therefore Jem was very uneasy at having to work alone there, and very angry with his mate for having that day abandoned him. And but that his dread of Mr. Garnet was more than supernatural, he would

have wiped his billhook then and there, and gone all the way to the public–house to fetch back that mate for company.

Pondering thus, he followed the green track as far as the corner of the coppice hedge, and then he sat down on a mossy log, and began to chew more pleasantly. He had washed his hands at a little spring, and gathered a bit of watercress, and fixed his square of cold bacon cleverly into a mighty hunk of brown bread, like a whetstone in its socket; and truly it would have whetted any plain man's appetite to see the way he sliced it, and the intense appreciation.

With his mighty clasp–knife (straight, not curved like a gardener's) he cut little streaky slips along, and laid each on a good thickness of crust, and patted it like a piece of butter, then fondly looked at it for a moment, then popped it in, with the resolution that the next should be a still better one, supposing such excellence possible. And all the while he rolled his tongue so, and smacked his lips so fervently, that you saw the man knew what he was about, dealt kindly with his hunger, and felt a good dinner – when he got it.

"There, Scratch," he cried to his dog, after giving him many a taste, off and on, as in fairness should be mentioned; "hie in, and seek it there, lad."

With that he tossed well in over the hedge – for he was proud of his dog's abilities – the main bone of the three (summum bonum from a canine point of view; and, after all, perhaps they are right), and the flat bone fell, it may be a rod or so, inside the

fence of the coppice. Scratch went through the hedge in no time, having watched the course of the bone in air (as a cricketer does of the ball, or an astronomer of a comet) with his sweet little tail on the quiver. But Scratch, in the coppice, was all abroad, although he had measured the distance; and the reason was very simple – the bone was high up in the fork of a bush, and there it would stay till the wind blew. Now this apotheosis of the bone to the terrier was not proven; his views were low and practical; and he rushed (as all we earth–men do) to a lowering conclusion. The bone must have sunk into ĕra's bosom, being very sharp at one end, and heavy at the other. The only plan was to scratch for it, within a limited area; and why was he called "Scratch," but for scarifying genius?

Therefore that dog set to work, in a manner highly praiseworthy (save, indeed, upon a flowerbed). First he wrought well with his fore–feet, using them at a trot only, until he had scooped out a little hole, about the size of a rat's nest. This he did in several places, and with sound assurance, but a purely illusory bonus. Presently he began in earnest, as if he had smelled a rat; he put out his tongue and pricked his ears, and worked away at full gallop, all four feet at once, in a fashion known only to terriers. Jem came through the hedge to see what it was, for the little dog gave short barks now and then, as if he were in a rabbit–hole, with the coney round the corner.

"Mun there, mun, lad; show whutt thee carnst do, boy."

Thus encouraged, Scratch went on, emulative of self–burial,

throwing the soft earth high in the air, and making a sort of laughing noise in the rapture of his glory.

After a while he sniffed hard in the hole, and then rested, and then again at it. The master also was beginning to share the little dog's excitement, for he had never seen Scratch dig so hard before, and his mind was wavering betwixt the hope of a pot of money, and the fear of finding the skeleton belonging to the ghost.

Scratch worked for at least a quarter of an hour, and then ran to the ditch and lapped a little, and came back to work again, while Jem stood by at a prudent distance, and puffed his pipe commensurately, and wished he had somebody with him. Presently he saw something shining in the peaty and sandy trough, about two feet from the surface, something at which Scratch tried his teeth, but found the subject ungenial. So Jem ran up, making sure this time that it was the pot of money. Alas, it was nothing of the sort, nothing at all worth digging for. Jem was so bitterly disappointed that he laid hold of Scratch, and cuffed him well, and the little dog went away and howled, and looked at his bleeding claws, and stood penitent, with his tail down.

Nevertheless, the thing dug up had cost some money in its time, for gunmakers know the way to charge, if never another soul does. It was a pair of gun–barrels, without any stock, or lock, or ramrod, heavily battered and marked with fire, as if an attempt had been made to burn the entire implement, and then, the wood being consumed, the iron parts had been kicked

asunder, and the hot barrels fiercely trampled on. Now Jem knew nothing whatever of guns, except that they were apt to go off, whether loaded or unloaded; so after much ponderous thinking and fearing —*fiat experimentum in corpore vili*– he summoned poor Scratch, and coaxed him, and said, "Hie, boy, vetch thic thur thin'!"

When he found that the little dog took the barrels in his mouth without being hurt by them, and then dragged them along the ground, inasmuch as he could not carry them, Jem plucked up courage and laid them by, to take them home that evening.

After his bit of supper that night, Jem and his wife held counsel, the result of which was that he took his prize down to Roger Sweetland's shop, at the lower end of the village. There he found the blacksmith and one apprentice working overtime, repairing a harrow, which must be ready for Farmer Blackers next morning. The worthy Vulcan received Jem kindly, for his wife was Jem's wife's second cousin; and then he blew up a sharp yellow fire, and examined the barrels attentively.

"Niver zeed no goon the likes o' thissom, though a 'ave 'eered say as they makes 'em now to shut out o' t'other end, man. Whai, her han't gat niver na brichin'! A must shut the man as shuts wi' her."

"What wull e' gie vor un, Roger? Her bain't na gude to ussen."

"Gie thee a zhillin', lad, mare nor her be worth, on'y to bate up vor harse–shoon."

After vainly attempting to get eightee–pence, Jem was fain to

accept the shilling; and this piece of beautiful workmanship, and admirable "Damascus twist," was set in the corner behind the door, to be forged into shoes for a cart–horse. So, as Sophocles well observes, all things come round with the rolling years: the best gun–barrels used to be made of the stub–nails and the horse–shoes (though the thing was a superstition); now good horse–shoes shall be made out of the best gun–barrels.

But, in despite of this law of nature, those gun–barrels never were made into horse–shoes at all, and for this simple reason: – Rufus Hutton came over from Nowelhurst to have his Polly shodden; meanwhile he would walk up to the Hall, and see how his child Eoa was. It is a most worshipful providence, and as clever as the works of a watch, that all the people who have been far abroad, whether in hot or cold climates (I mean, of course, respectively, and not that a Melville Bay harpooner would fluke in with a Ceylon rifleman), somehow or other, when they come home, groove into, and dovetail with, one another; and not only feel a *pudor* not to contradict a brother alien, but feel bound by a *sacramentum* to back up the lies of each other. To this rule of course there are some exceptions (explosive accidents in the *Times*, for instance), but almost every one will admit that it is a rule; just as it is not to tell out of school.

As regards Rufus and Eoa, this association was limited (as all of them are now–a–days, except in their powers of swindling), strictly limited to a keen and spicily patriarchal turn. Eoa, somehow or other, with that wonderful feminine instinct (which

is far in advance of the canine, but not a whit less jealous) felt that Rue Hutton had admired her, though he was old enough to be her grandfather in those precocious climates. And though she would not have had him, if he had come out of Golconda mine, one stalactite of diamonds, she really never could see that Rosa had any business with him. Therefore, on no account would she go to Geopharmacy Lodge, and she regarded the baby, impending there, as an outrage and an upstart.

Dr. Hutton knew more about shoeing a horse than any of the country blacksmiths; and as Polly, in common with many fast trotters, had a trick of throwing her hind–feet inwards, and "cutting" (as it is termed in the art), she liked to have her hind–shoes turned up, and her hoofs rasped in a peculiar manner, which Sweetland alone could execute to her perfect satisfaction.

"Ha, Roger, what have you got here?" said Rufus, having returned from the Hall, and inspected Polly's new shoes, which she was very proud to show him.

"Naethin' at all, yer honour, but a bit o' a old anshent goon, as happed to coom in last avening."

"Ancient gun, man! Why, it is a new breech–loader, only terribly knocked about. I found it all out in London. But there are none in this part of the country. How on earth did you come by it? And what made you spoil it, you stupid, in your forge–fire?"

"Her han't a bin in my varge–vire. If her had, her'd nivir a coom out alaive. Her hath bin in a wood vire by the look o' the smo–uk."

Then Roger Sweetland told Rufus Hutton, as briefly as it is possible for any New Forest man to tell anything, all he knew about it; to which the inquisitive doctor listened with the keenest interest.

"And what will you take for it, Sweetland? Of course it is utterly ruined; but I might stick it up in my rubbish–hole."

"I'll tak whutt I gie vor 'un; no mare, nor no less. Though be warth a dale mare by the looks ov 'un."

"And what did you give for it – twopence?"

"As good a croon–pace as wor iver cooined. Putt un barck in carner, if a bain't worth thart."

Dr. Hutton was glad to get it for that, but the blacksmith looked rather blue when he saw him, carefully wielding it, turn his mare's head towards the copse where poor Jem was at work. For to lose the doctor's custom would make his lie at four shillings premium an uncommonly bad investment, and Jem was almost sure to "let out" how much he had got for the gun–barrels.

After hearing all that Jem had to say, and seeing the entire process of discovery put dramatically, and himself searching the spot most carefully without any further result, and (which was the main point of all, at least in Jem's opinion) presenting the woodman with half–a–crown, and bidding him hold his tongue, Rufus Hutton went home, and very sagely preferred Harpocrates to Hymen.

The which resolution was most ungrateful, for Hymen had lately presented him with a perfect little Cupid, according to the

very best judges, including the nurse and the mother, and the fuss that was made at the Lodge about it (for to us men a baby is neuter, a heterogeneous vocable, unluckily indeclinable); really the way everybody went on, and worst of all Rufus Hutton, was enough to make a sane bachelor bless the memory of Herod. However, of that no more at present. Some one was quite awake to all the ridiculous parts of it, and perfectly ready to turn it all to profitable account, as an admirable reviewer treats the feeble birth of a novel.

Mrs. Corklemore's sympathetic powers were never displayed more brilliantly, or to better effect; and before very long she had added one, and that the primal, step to the ascending scale of the amiable monarch. For she could manage baby, and baby could manage Rosa, and Rosa could manage Rufus. Only Rufus was not king of the world, except in his own opinion.

As soon as Dr. Hutton could get away, he took the barrels to his own little room, and examined them very carefully. Scarred as they were, and battered, and discoloured by the fire, there could be no question as to their having formed part of a patent breech–loading gun; even the hinge and the bolt still remained, though the wooden continuation of the stock was, of course, consumed; moreover, there was no loop for ramrod, nor screw–thread to take the breeching. Then Rufus went to a little cupboard, and took out a very small bottle of a strong and rodent acid, and with a feather slightly touched the battered, and crusted, and rusty "bridge," in the place where a gunmaker puts his name,

and for the most part engraves it wretchedly. In breech–loading guns, the bridge itself is only retained from the force of habit, and our conservatism of folly; for as the breech–end is so much thicker than the muzzle–end of the barrel, and the interior a perfect cylinder, the line of sight (if meddled with) should be raised instead of being depressed at the muzzle–end, to give us a perfect parallel. Of course we know that shot falls in its flight, and there is no pure point–blank; but surely the allowance for, and correction of, these defeasances, according to distance, &c., should be left to the marksman's eye and practice, not slurred by a crossing of planes at one particular distance.

Leaving that to wiser heads, which already are correcting it (by omitting the bridge entirely), let us see what Dr. Hutton did. As the acid began to work, it was very beautiful to watch the clouding and the clearing over the noble but fiercely–abused metal. There is no time now to describe it – for which readers will be thankful – enough that the result revealed the maker's name and address, "L – , C – r–street," and the number of the gun. Dr. Hutton by this time had made the acquaintance of that eminent gunmaker, who, after improving greatly upon a French design, had introduced into this country a rapid and striking improvement; an implement of slaughter as far in advance of the muzzle–loader as a lucifer–match is of flint and tinder. And Rufus, although with a set design to work out his suspicions, would have found it a very much slower work, but for a bit of accident.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.