

SAMUEL WARREN

TEN THOUSAND A-YEAR.
VOLUME 1

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PUBLISHERS' PREFACE

The fact that a well-printed edition of this notable story has not been in print either in England or America since its original publication in 1841 is a sufficient reason for the present edition.

It includes the valuable notes in which the author elucidated the "many legal topics contained in the work, enabling the non-professional reader to understand more easily the somewhat complex and elaborate *plot* of the story."

Of the story itself it is hardly necessary to speak. Always deservedly popular, it has been widely read for nearly fifty years in England and America, has been translated into French and German, and has only required to be presented in a pleasing form, with readable type and good paper, to insure it the circulation which it deserves.

Boston, 1889.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

The Author of this Work begs gratefully to express his conviction that no small share of any success which it may have met with, is attributable to the circumstance of its having had the advantage of an introduction to the public through the medium of *Blackwood's Magazine*—a distinguished periodical, to which he feels it an honor to have been, for a time, a contributor.

One word, only, he ventures to offer, with reference to the general character and tendency of "Ten Thousand a-Year." He has occasionally observed it spoken of as "an amusing and laughable" story; but he cannot help thinking that no one will so characterize it, who may take the trouble of reading it throughout, and be capable of comprehending its scope and object. Whatever may be its defects of execution, it has been written in a grave and earnest spirit; with no attempt whatever to render it acceptable to *mere* novel-readers; but with a steadfast view to that development and illustration, whether humorously or otherwise, of principles, of character, and of conduct, which the author had proposed to himself from the first, in the hope that he might secure the approbation of persons of sober, independent, and experienced judgment.

Literature is not the author's profession. Having been led, by special circumstances only, to commence writing this work, he found it impossible to go on, without sacrificing to it a large

portion of the time usually allotted to repose, at some little cost both of health and spirits. This was, however, indispensable, in order to prevent its interference with his professional avocations. It has been written, also, under certain other considerable disadvantages—which may account for several imperfections in it during its original appearance. The periodical interval of leisure which his profession allows him, has enabled the author, however, to give that revision to the whole, which may render it worthier of the public favor. He is greatly gratified by the reception which it has already met with, both at home and abroad; and in taking a final and a reluctant leave of the public, ventures to express a hope, that this work may prove to be an addition, however small and humble, to the stock of healthy English literature.

London, *October* 1841.

For the beautiful verses entitled "Peace," (at [page 266](#), Vol. I.) the author is indebted to a friend—(W. S.)

CHAPTER I

About ten o'clock one Sunday morning, in the month of July 18—, the dazzling sunbeams, which had for several hours irradiated a little dismal back attic in one of the closest courts adjoining Oxford Street, in London, and stimulated with their intensity the closed eyelids of a young man—one Tittlebat Titmouse—lying in bed, at length awoke him. He rubbed his eyes for some time, to relieve himself from the irritation occasioned by the sudden glare they encountered; and yawned and stretched his limbs with a heavy sense of weariness, as though his sleep had not refreshed him. He presently cast his eyes towards the heap of clothes lying huddled together on the backless chair by the bedside, where he had hastily flung them about an hour after midnight; at which time he had returned from a great draper's shop in Oxford Street, where he served as a shopman, and where he had nearly dropped asleep, after a long day's work, in the act of putting up the shutters. He could hardly keep his eyes open while he undressed, short as was the time required to do so; and on dropping exhausted into bed, there he had continued, in deep unbroken slumber, till the moment of his being presented to the reader.—He lay for several minutes, stretching, yawning, and sighing, occasionally casting an irresolute glance towards the tiny fireplace, where lay a modicum of wood and coal, with a tinder-box and a match or two placed upon the hob, so that he could

easily light his fire for the purposes of shaving, and breakfasting. He stepped at length lazily out of bed, and when he felt his feet, again yawned and stretched himself. Then he lit his fire, placed his bit of a kettle on the top of it, and returned to bed, where he lay with his eye fixed on the fire, watching the crackling blaze insinuate itself through the wood and coal. Once, however, it began to fail, so he had to get up and assist it, by blowing, and bits of paper; and it seemed in so precarious a state that he determined not again to lie down, but sit on the bedside: as he did, with his arms folded, ready to resume operations if necessary. In this posture he remained for some time, watching his little fire, and listlessly listening to the discordant jangling of innumerable church-bells, clamorously calling the citizens to their devotions. The current of thoughts passing through his mind, was something like the following:—

"Heigho!—Lud, Lud!—Dull as ditch water!—This is my only holiday, yet I don't seem to enjoy it!—for I feel knocked up with my week's work! (A yawn.) What a life mine is, to be sure! Here am I, in my eight-and-twentieth year, and for four long years have been one of the shopmen at Tag-rag & Co.'s, slaving from half-past seven o'clock in the morning till nine at night, and all for a salary of thirty-five pounds a-year, and my board! And Mr. Tag-rag—eugh! what a beast!—is always telling me how high he's raised my salary!! Thirty-five pounds a-year is all I have for lodging, and turning out like a gentleman! 'Pon my soul! it *can't* last; for sometimes I feel getting desperate—such

strange thoughts come into my mind!—Seven shillings a-week do I pay for *this* cursed hole—(he uttered these words with a bitter emphasis, accompanied by a disgustful look round the little room)—that one couldn't swing a cat in without touching the four sides!—Last winter three of our gents (*i. e.* his fellow-shopmen) came to tea with me one Sunday night; and bitter cold as it was, we four made this cussed dog-hole so hot, we were obliged to open the window!—And as for accommodation—I recollect I had to borrow two nasty chairs from the people below, who on the next Sunday borrowed my only decanter, in return, and, hang them, cracked it!—Curse me, say I, if this life is worth having! It's all the very vanity of vanities—as it's said somewhere in the Bible—and no mistake! Fag, fag, fag, all one's days, and—what for? Thirty-five pounds a-year, and '*no advance!*' (Here occurred a pause and revery, from which he was roused by the clangor of the church-bells.) Bah, bells! ring away till you're all cracked!—Now do you think *I'm* going to be mewed up in church on this the only day out of the seven I've got to sweeten myself in, and sniff fresh air? A precious joke that would be! (A yawn.) Whew!—after all, I'd almost as lieve sit here; for what's the use of my going out? Everybody I see out is happy, excepting me, and the poor chaps that are like me!—Everybody laughs when they see me, and know that I'm only a tallow-faced counter-jumper—I know that's the odious name we gents go by!—for whom it's no use to go out—for one day in seven can't give one a bloom! Oh, Lord! what's the use of being good-looking, as *some* chaps

say I am?"—Here he instinctively passed his left hand through a profusion of sandy-colored hair, and cast an eye towards the bit of fractured looking-glass which hung against the wall, and had, by faithfully representing to him a by no means ugly set of features (despite the dismal hue of his hair) whenever he chose to appeal to it, afforded him more enjoyment than any other object in the world, for years. "Ah, by Jove! many and many's the fine gal I've done my best to attract the notice of, while I was serving her in the shop—that is, when I've seen her get out of a carriage! There has been luck to many a chap like me, in the same line of speculation: look at Tom Tarnish—how did he get Miss Twang, the rich pianoforte-maker's daughter?—and *now* he's cut the shop, and lives at Hackney, like a regular gentleman! Ah! that *was* a stroke! But somehow it hasn't answered with *me* yet; the gals don't take! How I have set my eyes to be sure, and ogled them!—*All* of them don't seem to dislike the thing—and sometimes they'll smile, in a sort of way that says I'm safe—but it's been no use yet, not a bit of it!—My eyes! catch me, by the way, ever nodding again to a lady on the Sunday, that had smiled when I stared at her while serving her in the shop—after what happened to me a month or two ago in the Park! Didn't I feel like damaged goods, just then? But it's no matter, women are so different at different times!—Very likely I mismanaged the thing. By the way, what a precious puppy of a chap the fellow was that came up to her at the time she stepped out of her carriage to walk a bit! As for good looks—cut me to ribbons (another

glance at the glass) no; I a'n't afraid *there*, neither—but—heigho!—I suppose he was, as they say, born with a golden spoon in his mouth, and had never so many a thousand a-year, to make up to him for never so few brains! He was uncommon well-dressed, though, I must own. What trousers!—they stuck so natural to him, he might have been born in them. And his waistcoat, and satin stock—what an air! And yet, his figure was nothing *very* out of the way! His gloves, as white as snow; I've no doubt he wears a pair of them a-day—my stars! that's three-and-sixpence a-day; for don't I know what *they* cost?—Whew! if I had but the cash to carry on that sort of thing!—And when he'd seen her into her carriage—the horse he got on!—and what a tip-top groom—that chap's wages, I'll answer for it, were equal to my salary! (Here was another pause.) Now, just for the fun of the thing, only suppose luck was to befall *me*! Say that somebody was to leave me lots of cash—many thousands a-year, or something in that line! My stars! wouldn't I go it with the best of them! (Another long pause.) Gad, I really should hardly know how to begin to spend it!—I think, by the way, I'd buy a *title* to set off with—for what won't money buy? The thing's often done; there was a great pawn-broker in the city, the other day, made a baronet of, all for his money—and why shouldn't I?" He grew a little heated with the progress of his reflections, clasping his hands with involuntary energy, as he stretched them out to their fullest extent, to give effect to a very hearty yawn. "Lord, only think how it would sound!—

"sir tittlebat titmouse, baronet;" or, "lord titmouse!!"

"The very first place I'd go to, after I'd got my title, and was rigged out in Tight-fit's tip-top, should be—our cursed shop! to buy a dozen or two pair of white kid. Ah, ha! What a flutter there would be among the poor pale devils as were standing, just as ever, behind the counters, at Tag-rag and Co.'s when my carriage drew up, and I stepped, a tip-top swell, into the shop. Tag-rag would come and attend to me himself! No, he wouldn't—pride wouldn't let him. I don't know, though: what wouldn't he do to turn a penny, and make two and nine-pence into three and a penny? I shouldn't *quite* come Captain Stiff over him, I think, just at first; but I should treat him with a kind of an air, too, as if—hem! 'Pon my life! how delightful! (A sigh and a pause.) Yes, I should often come to the shop. Gad, it would be half the fun of my fortune! How they would envy me, to be sure! How one should enjoy it! I wouldn't think of *marrying* till—and yet I won't say either; if I got among some of them out-and-outers—those first-rate articles—that lady, for instance, the other day in the Park—I should like to see her cut me as she did, with ten thousand a-year in my pocket! Why, she'd be running after *me*!—or there's no truth in novels, which I'm sure there's often a great deal in. Oh, of course, I might marry whom I pleased! Who couldn't be got with ten thousand a-year? (Another pause.) I think I should go abroad to Russia directly; for they tell me there's a man lives there who could dye this cussed hair of mine any color I liked—and—egad! I'd come home as black as a crow,

and hold up my head as high as any of them! While I was about it, I'd have a touch at my eyebrows"—Crash here went all his castle-building, at the sound of his tea-kettle, hissing, whizzing, sputtering, in the agonies of boiling over; as if the intolerable heat of the fire had driven desperate the poor creature placed upon it, which instinctively tried thus to extinguish the cause of its anguish. Having taken it off, and placed it upon the hob, and put on the fire a tiny fragment of fresh coal, he began to make preparations for shaving, by pouring some of the hot water into an old tea-cup, which was presently to serve for the purposes of breakfast. Then he spread out a bit of crumpled whity-brown paper, in which had been folded up a couple of cigars, bought over-night for the Sunday's special enjoyment—and as to which, if he supposed they had come from any place beyond the four seas, I imagine him to have been slightly mistaken. He placed this bit of paper on the little mantel-piece; drew his solitary well-worn razor several times across the palm of his left hand; dipped his brush, worn, within half an inch, to the stump, into the hot water; presently passed it over so much of his face as he intended to shave; then rubbed on the damp surface a bit of yellow soap—and in less than five minutes Mr. Titmouse was a shaved man. But mark—don't suppose that he had performed an extensive operation. One would have thought him anxious to get rid of as much as possible of his abominable sandy-colored hair. Quite the contrary! Every hair of his spreading whiskers was sacred from the touch of steel; and a bushy crop

of hair stretched underneath his chin, coming curled out on each side of it, above his stock, like two little horns or tusks. An imperial—*i. e.* a dirt-colored tuft of hair, permitted to grow perpendicularly down the under-lip of puppies—and a pair of promising mustaches, poor Mr. Titmouse had been compelled to sacrifice some time before, to the tyrannical whimsies of his vulgar employer, Mr. Tag-rag, who imagined them not to be exactly suitable appendages for counter-jumpers. Thus will it be seen that the space shaved over on this occasion was somewhat circumscribed. This operation over, he took out of his trunk an old dirty-looking pomatum pot. A modicum of its contents, extracted on the tips of his two forefingers, he stroked carefully into his eyebrows; then spreading some on the palms of his hands, he rubbed it vigorously into his stubborn hair and whiskers for some quarter of an hour; afterwards combing and brushing his hair into half a dozen different dispositions—so fastidious in that matter was Mr. Titmouse. Then he dipped the end of a towel into a little water, and twisting it round his right forefinger, passed it gently over his face, carefully avoiding his eyebrows, and the hair at the top, sides, and bottom of his face, which he then wiped with a dry corner of the towel; and no farther did Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse think it necessary to carry his ablutions. Had he, however, been able to "see himself as others saw him," in respect of those neglected regions which lay somewhere behind and beneath his ears, he might not, possibly, have thought it superfluous to irrigate them with a little soap and water; but,

after all, he knew best; it might have given him cold: and besides, his hair was very thick and long behind, and might perhaps conceal anything that was unsightly. Then Mr. Titmouse drew from underneath the bed a bottle of "incomparable blacking," and a couple of brushes; with great labor and skill polishing his boots up to a wonderful degree of brilliancy. Having replaced his blacking implements under the bed and washed his hands, he devoted a few moments to boiling about three tea-spoonfuls of coffee, (as it was styled on the paper from which he took, and in which he had bought, it—whereas it was, in fact, *chiccorry*.) Then he drew forth from his trunk a calico shirt, with linen wristbands and collar, which had been worn only twice—*i. e.* on the preceding two Sundays—since its last washing—and put it on, taking great care not to rumple a very showy front, containing three rows of frills; in the middle one of which he stuck three "studs," connected together with two little gilt chains, looking exceedingly stylish—especially when coupled with a span-new satin stock, which he next buckled round his neck. Having put on his bright boots, (without, I am really sorry to say, any stockings,) he carefully insinuated his legs into a pair of white trousers, for the first time since their last washing; and what with his short straps and high braces, they were so tight that you would have feared their bursting if he should have sat down hastily. I am almost afraid that I shall hardly be believed; but it is a fact, that the next thing he did was to attach a pair of spurs to his boots:—but, to be sure, it was not *impossible* that he might intend

to ride during the day. Then he put on a queer kind of under-waistcoat, which in fact was only a roll-collar of rather faded pea-green silk, and designed to set off a very fine flowered damson-colored silk waistcoat; over which he drew a massive mosaic-gold chain, (to purchase which he had sold a serviceable silver watch,) which had been carefully wrapped up in cotton wool; from which soft depository, also, he drew his ring, (those must have been sharp eyes which could tell, at a distance, and in a hurry, that it was not diamond,) which he placed on the stumpy little finger of his red and thick right hand—and contemplated its sparkle with exquisite satisfaction. Having proceeded thus far with his toilet, he sat down to his breakfast, spreading upon his lap the shirt which he had taken off, to preserve his white trousers from spot or stain—his thoughts alternating between his late waking vision and his purposes for the day. He had no butter, having used the last on the preceding morning; so he was fain to put up with dry bread—and very dry and teeth-trying it was, poor fellow—but his eye lit on his ring! Having swallowed two cups of his *quasi*-coffee, (eugh! such stuff!) he resumed his toilet, by drawing out of his other trunk his blue surtout, with embossed silk buttons and velvet collar, and an outside pocket in the left breast. Having smoothed down a few creases, he put it on:—then, before his little vulgar fraction of a looking-glass, he stood twitching about the collar, and sleeves, and front, so as to make them sit well; concluding with a careful elongation of the wristbands of his shirt, so as to show their

whiteness gracefully beyond the cuff of his coat-sleeve—and he succeeded in producing a sort of white boundary line between the blue of his coat-sleeve and the red of his hand. At that useful member he could not help looking with a sigh, as he had often done before—for it was not a handsome hand. It was broad and red, and the fingers were thick and stumpy, with very coarse deep wrinkles at every joint. His nails also were flat and shapeless; and he used to be continually gnawing them till he had succeeded in getting them down to the quick—and they were a sight to set one's teeth on edge. Then he extracted from the first-mentioned trunk a white pocket handkerchief—an exemplary one, that had gone through four Sundays' show, (not *use*, be it understood,) and yet was capable of exhibition again. A pair of sky-colored kid gloves next made their appearance: which, however, showed such barefaced marks of former service as rendered indispensable a ten minutes' rubbing with bread-crumbs. His Sunday hat, carefully covered with silver-paper, was next gently removed from its well-worn box—ah, how lightly and delicately did he pass his smoothing hand round its glossy surface! Lastly, he took down a thin black cane, with a gilt head, and full brown tassel, from a peg behind the door—and his toilet was complete. Laying down his cane for a moment, he passed his hands again through his hair, arranging it so as to fall nicely on each side beneath his hat, which he then placed upon his head, with an elegant inclination towards the left side. He was really not bad-looking, in spite of his sandy-colored hair. His

forehead, to be sure, was contracted, and his eyes were of a very light color, and a trifle too protuberant; but his mouth was rather well-formed, and being seldom closed, exhibited very beautiful teeth; and his nose was of that description which generally passes for a Roman nose. His countenance wore generally a smile, and was expressive of—self-satisfaction: and surely any expression is better than none at all. As for there being the slightest trace of *intellect* in it, I should be misleading the reader if I were to say anything of the sort. In height, he was about five feet and a quarter of an inch, *in his boots*, and he was rather strongly set, with a little tendency to round shoulders:—but his limbs were pliant, and his motions nimble.

Here you have, then, Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse to the life—certainly no more than an average sample of his kind; but as he is to go through a considerable variety of situation and circumstance, I thought you would like to have him as distinctly before your mind's eye as it was in my power to present him.—Well—he put his hat on, as I have said; buttoned the lowest two buttons of his surtout, and stuck his white pocket handkerchief into the outside pocket in front, as already mentioned, anxiously disposing it so as to let a little appear above the edge of the pocket, with a sort of careful carelessness—a graceful contrast to the blue; drew on his gloves; took his cane in his hand; drained the last sad remnant of infusion of chiccory in his coffee-cup; and, the sun shining in the full splendor of a July noon, and promising a glorious day, forth sallied this poor fellow, an

Oxford Street Adonis, going forth conquering and to conquer! Petty finery without, a pinched and stinted stomach within; a case of Back *versus* Belly, (as the lawyers would have it,) the plaintiff winning in a canter! Forth sallied, I say, Mr. Titmouse, as also, doubtless, sallied forth that day some five or six thousand similar personages, down the narrow, creaking, close staircase, which he had no sooner quitted than he heard exclaimed from an opposite window, "My eyes! *a'n't* that a swell!" He felt how true the observation was, and that at that moment he was somewhat out of his element; so he hurried on, and soon reached that great broad disheartening street, apostrophized by the celebrated Opium-Eater,^[1] with bitter feeling, as—"Oxford Street!—stony-hearted stepmother! Thou that listenest to the sighs of orphans, and drinkest the tears of children!" Here, though his spirits were not just then very buoyant, our poor little dandy breathed more freely than when he was passing through the wretched crowded court (Closet Court) which he had just quitted. He passed and met hundreds who, like himself, seemed released for a precious day's interval from miserable confinement and slavery during the week; but there were not very many of them who could vie with him in elegance of appearance—and that was indeed a luxurious reflection! Who could do justice to the air with which he strutted along! He felt as happy, poor soul, in his little ostentation, as his Corinthian rival in tip-top turn-out, after twice as long, and as anxious, and fifty times as expensive, preparations for effective public display! Nay, *my*

poor swell was in some respects greatly the superior of such an one as I have alluded to. Mr. Titmouse *did*, to a great degree, bedizen his back—but at the expense of his belly; whereas, the Corinthian exquisite, too often taking advantage of station and influence, recklessly both pampers his luxurious appetite within, and decorates his person without, at the expense of innumerable heart-aching creditors. I do not mean, however, to claim any real merit for Mr. Titmouse on this score, because I am not sure how he would act if he were to become possessed of his magnificent rival's means and opportunities for the perpetration of gentlemanly frauds on a splendid scale.—But we shall perhaps see by and by.

Mr. Titmouse walked along with leisurely step; for haste and perspiration were vulgar, and he had the day before him. Observe, now, the careless glance of self-satisfaction with which he occasionally regards his bright boots, with their martial appendage, giving out a faint clinking sound as he heavily treads the broad flags; his spotless trousers, his tight surtout, and the tip of white handkerchief peeping *accidentally* out in front! A pleasant sight it was to behold him in a chance rencontre with some one genteel enough to be recognized—as he stood, resting on his left leg; his left arm stuck upon his hip; his right leg easily bent outwards; his right hand lightly holding his ebon cane, with the gilt head of which he occasionally tapped his teeth; and his eyes, half closed, scrutinizing the face and figure of each "*pretty gal*" as she passed, and to whom he had a delicious

consciousness that he appeared an object of interest! This was indeed happiness, as far as his forlorn condition could admit of his enjoying happiness.—He had no particular object in view. A tiff over-night with two of his shopmates, had broken off a party which they had agreed the Sunday preceding in forming, to go that day to Greenwich; and this trifling circumstance had a little soured his temper, depressed as had been his spirits before. He resolved, on consideration, to walk straight on, and dine somewhere a little way out of town, by way of passing the time till four o'clock, at which hour he intended to make his appearance in Hyde Park, "to see the swells and the fashions," which was his favorite Sunday occupation.

His condition was, indeed, forlorn in the extreme. To say nothing of his *prospects* in life—what was his present condition? A shopman with thirty-five pounds a-year, out of which he had to find his clothing, washing, lodging, and all other incidental expenses—the chief item of his board—such as it was—being found him by his employers! He was five weeks in arrear to his landlady—a corpulent old termagant, whom nothing could have induced him to risk offending, but his overmastering love of finery; for I grieve to say, that this deficiency had been occasioned by his purchase of the ring he then wore with so much pride! How he had contrived to pacify her—lie upon lie he must have had recourse to—I know not. He was indebted also to his poor washerwoman in five or six shillings for at least a quarter's washing; and owed five times that amount to a little old

tailor, who, with huge spectacles on his nose, turned up to him, out of a little cupboard which he occupied in Closet Court, and which Titmouse had to pass whenever he went to or from his lodgings, a lean, sallow, wrinkled face, imploring him to "settle his small account." All the cash in hand which he had to meet contingencies between that day and quarter-day, which was six weeks off, was about twenty-six shillings, of which he had taken one for the present day's expenses!

Revolving these somewhat disheartening matters in his mind, he passed easily and leisurely along the whole length of Oxford Street. No one could have judged from his dressy appearance, the constant smirk on his face, and his confident air, how very miserable that poor little dandy was; but three-fourths of his misery were really occasioned by the impossibility he felt of his ever being able to indulge in his propensities for finery and display. Nothing better had he to occupy his few thoughts. He had had only a plain mercantile education, as it is called, *i. e.* reading, writing, and arithmetic; beyond an exceedingly moderate acquaintance with these, he knew nothing whatever; not having read anything except a few inferior novels, and plays, and sporting newspapers. Deplorable, however, as were his circumstances—

"Hope springs eternal in the human breast."

And probably, in common with most who are miserable from

straitened circumstances, he often conceived, and secretly relied upon, the possibility of some unexpected and accidental change for the better. He had heard and read of extraordinary cases of luck. Why might he not be one of the lucky? A rich girl might fall in love with him—that was, poor fellow! in his consideration, one of the least unlikely ways of luck's advent; or some one might leave him money; or he might win a prize in the lottery;—all these, and other accidental modes of getting rich, frequently occurred to the well-regulated mind of Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse; but he never once thought of one thing, viz. of determined, unwearied industry, perseverance, and integrity in the way of his business, conducing to such a result!

Is his case a solitary one?—Dear reader, *you* may be unlike poor Tittlebat Titmouse in every respect except *one*!

On he walked towards Bayswater; and finding that it was yet early, and considering that the farther he went from town the better prospect there would be of his being able, with little sacrifice of appearances, to get a dinner consistent with the means he carried about with him, viz. one shilling, he pursued his way a mile or two beyond Bayswater; and, sure enough, came at length upon a nice little public-house on the roadside, called the Square-toes Arms. Very tired, and very dusty, he first sat down in a small back room to rest himself; and took the opportunity to call for a clothes-brush and shoe-brush, to relieve his clothes and boots from the heavy dust upon them. Having thus attended to his outer man, as far as circumstances would permit, he bethought

himself of his inner man, whose cravings he presently satisfied with a pretty substantial mutton-pie and a pint of porter. This fare, together with a penny (which he felt *forced* to give) to the little girl who waited on him, cost him tenpence; and then, having somewhat refreshed himself, he began to think of returning to town. Having lit one of his two cigars, he sallied forth, puffing along with an air of quiet enjoyment. Dinner, however humble, seldom fails, especially when accompanied by a fair draught of tolerable porter, in some considerable degree to tranquillize the animal spirits; and that soothing effect began soon to be experienced by Mr. Titmouse. The sedative *cause* he erroneously considered to be the cigar he was smoking; whereas in fact the only tobacco he had imbibed was from the porter. But, however that might be, he certainly returned towards town in a calmer and more cheerful humor than that in which he had quitted it an hour or two before.

As he approached Cumberland Gate, it was about half-past five; and the Park might be said to be at its *acme* of fashion, as far as that could be indicated by a sluggish stream of carriages, three and four abreast—coroneted panels in abundance—noble and well-known equestrians of both sexes, in troops—and some hundreds of pedestrians of the same description. So continuous was the throng of carriages and horsemen, that Titmouse did not find it the easiest matter in the world to dart across to the footpath in the inner circle. That, however, he presently safely accomplished, encountering no more serious mischance than

the muttered "D—n your eyes!" of a haughty groom, between whom and his master Mr. Titmouse had presumed to intervene. What a crowd of elegant women, many of them young and beautiful, (who but such, to be sure, would have become, or been allowed to become, pedestrians in the Park?) he encountered, as he slowly sauntered on, all of them obsequiously attended by brilliant beaux! Lords and ladies were here manifestly as plentiful as plebeians in Oxford Street. What an enchanted ground!—How delicious this soft crush and flutter of aristocracy! Poor Titmouse felt at once an intense pleasure, and a withering consciousness of his utter insignificance. Many a sigh of dissatisfaction and envy escaped him; yet he stepped along with a tolerably assured air, looking everybody he met straight in the face, and occasionally twirling about his little cane with an air which seemed to say—"Whatever opinion *you* may form of me, I have a very good opinion of myself." Indeed, was he not as much a man—an Englishman—as the best of them? What was the real difference between Count Do-'em-all and Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse? Only that the Count had dark hair and whiskers, and owed more money than Mr. Titmouse's creditors could be persuaded to allow *him* to owe! Would to Heaven—thought Titmouse—that any *one* tailor would patronize *him* as half a dozen had patronized the Count! If pretty ladies of quality did not disdain a walking advertisement of a few first-rate tailors, like the Count, why should they turn up their noses at an assistant in an extensive wholesale and retail establishment in Oxford Street, conversant

with the qualities and prices of the most beautiful articles of female attire? Yet alas, they *did* so!— He sighed heavily. Leaning against the railing in a studied attitude, and eying wistfully each gay and fashionable equipage, with its often lovely, and sometimes haughty enclosure, as it rolled slowly past him, Mr. Titmouse became more and more convinced of a great practical truth, viz. that the only real distinction between mankind was that effected by money. Want of money alone had placed him in his present abject position. Abject indeed! By the great folk, who were passing him on all sides, he felt, well-dressed as he believed himself to be, that he was no more noticed than as if he had been an ant, a blue-bottle fly, or a black beetle! He looked, and sighed—sighed, and looked—looked, and sighed again, in a kind of agony of vain longing. While his only day in the week for breathing fresh air, and appearing like a gentleman in the world, was rapidly drawing to a close, and he was beginning to think of returning to the dog-hole he had crawled out of in the morning, and to the shop for the rest of the week; the great, and gay, and happy folk he was looking at, were thinking of driving home to dress for their grand dinners, and to lay out every kind of fine amusement for the ensuing week: and that, moreover, was the sort of life they led every day in the week! He heaved a profound sigh. At that moment a superb cab, with a gentleman in it dressed in great elegance, and with very keen dark eyes, and striking nose and whiskers, came up with a cab of still more exquisite structure and appointments, and at which

Titmouse gazed with unutterable feelings of envy—in which sat a young man, evidently of consequence; very handsome, with splendid mustaches; perfectly well-dressed; holding the reins and whip gracefully in hands glistening in straw-colored kid gloves—and between the two gentlemen ensued the following low-toned colloquy, which it were to be wished that every such sighing simpleton (as Titmouse must, I fear, by this time appear to the reader) could have overheard.

"Ah, Fitz!" said the former-mentioned gentleman to the latter, who suddenly reddened when he perceived who had addressed him. The manner of the speaker was execrably familiar and presumptuous—but how could the embarrassed *swell* help himself?—"When did you return to town?"

"Last night only"—

"Enjoyed yourself, I hope?"

"Pretty well—but—I—suppose you"—

"Sorry for it," interrupted the first speaker in a lower tone, perceiving the vexation of his companion; "but can't help it, you know."

"When?"

"To-morrow at nine. Monstrous sorry for it—'pon my soul, you really must look sharp, Fitz, or the thing won't go on much longer."

"Must it be, really?" inquired the other, biting his lips—at that moment kissing his hand to a very beautiful girl, who slowly passed him in a coroneted chariot—"must it really be, Joe?"

he repeated, turning towards his companion a pale and bitterly chagrined countenance.

"Poz, 'pon my life. Cage clean, however, and not very full—just at present"—

"Would not *Wednesday!*"—inquired the other, leaning forward towards the former speaker's cab, and whispering with an air of intense earnestness. "The fact is, I've engagements at C-'s on Monday and Tuesday nights with one or two country cousins, and I *may* be in a condition—eh? you understand?"

His companion shook his head distrustfully.

"Upon my word and honor as a gentleman, it's the fact!" said the other, in a low vehement tone.

"Then—say Wednesday, nine o'clock, a.m. You understand? No mistake, Fitz!" replied his companion, looking him steadily in the face as he spoke.

"None—honor!"—After a pause—"Who is it?"

His companion took a slip of paper out of his pocket, and in a whisper read from it—"Cab, harness, &c., £297, 10s."

"A villain! It's been of only three years' standing," interrupted the other, in an indignant mutter.

"Between ourselves, he *is* rather a sharp hand. Then, I'm sorry to say there's a Detainer or two I have had a hint of"—

The swell uttered an execration which I dare not convey to paper—his face distorted with an expression of mingled disgust, vexation, and hatred; and adding, "*Wednesday—nine*"—drove off, a picture of tranquil enjoyment.

I need hardly say that *he* was a fashionable young spendthrift, and the other a sheriff's officer of the first water—the genteelest *beak* that ever was known or heard of—who had been on the look-out for him several days, and with whom the happy youngster was doomed to spend some considerable time at a cheerful residence in Chancery Lane, bleeding gold at every pore the while:—his only chance of avoiding which, was, as he had truly hinted, an honorable attempt on the purses of two hospitable country cousins, in the meanwhile, at C-'s! And if he did not succeed in that enterprise, so that he *must* go to cage, he lost the only chance he had for some time of securing an exemption from such annoyance, by entering Parliament to protect the liberties of the people—an eloquent and resolute champion of freedom in trade, religion, and everything else; and an abolitionist of everything, including, especially, negro slavery and imprisonment for debt[2]—two execrable violations of the natural rights of mankind.

But I have, for several minutes, lost sight of the admiring Titmouse.

"Why," thought he, "am *I* thus spited by fortune?—The only thing she's given *me* is—nothing!—*D—n everything!*" exclaimed Mr. Titmouse aloud, at the same time starting off, to the infinite astonishment of an old peer, who had been for some minutes standing leaning against the railing, close beside him; who was master of a magnificent fortune, "with all appliances and means to boot;" with a fine grown-up family, his eldest son and heir

having just gained a Double First, and promising wonders; possessing many mansions in different parts of England; a reputation for exquisite taste and accomplishment; and being the representative of one of the oldest families in England; but who at that moment loathed everything and everybody, including himself, because the minister had the day before intimated to him that he could not give him a vacant ribbon, for which he had applied, unless he could command two more votes in the Lower House, and which at present his lordship saw no earthly means of doing. Yes, the Earl of Cheviotdale and Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse were both miserable men; both had been hardly dealt with by fortune; both were greatly to be pitied; and both quitted the Park, about the same time, with a decided misanthropic tendency.

Mr. Titmouse walked along Piccadilly with a truly chopfallen and disconsolate air. He very nearly felt dissatisfied even with his personal appearance! Dress as he would, no one seemed to care a curse for him; and, to his momentarily jaundiced eye, he seemed equipped in only second-hand and shabby finery; and then he was really such a *poor* devil!—Do not, however, let the reader suppose that this was an unusual mood with Mr. Titmouse. No such thing. Like the Irishman who "married a wife for to make him *un-aisy*;" and also not unlike the moth that *will* haunt the brightness which is her destruction; so poor Titmouse, Sunday after Sunday, dressed himself out as elaborately as he had done on the present occasion, and then always betook himself to the scene he had just again witnessed, and which had once again

excited only those feelings of envy, bitterness, and despair, which I have been describing, and which, on every such occasion, he experienced with, if possible, increased intensity.

What to do with himself till it should be time to return to his cheerless lodgings he did not exactly know; so he loitered along at a snail's pace. He stood for some time staring at the passengers, their luggage, and the coaches they were ascending and alighting from, and listening to the strange medley of coachmen's, guards', and porters' vociferations, and passengers' greetings and leave-takings—always to be observed at the White Horse Cellar. Then he passed along, till a street row, near the Haymarket, attracted his attention and interested his feelings; for it ended in a regular set-to between two watermen attached to the adjoining coach-stand. Here he conceived himself looking on with the easy air of a swell; and the ordinary penalty (paying for his footing) was attempted to be exacted from him; but he had nothing to be picked out of any of his pockets except that under his very nose, and which contained his white handkerchief! This over, he struck into Leicester Square, where, (he was in luck that night,) hurrying up to another crowd at the farther end, he found a man preaching with infinite energy. Mr. Titmouse looked on, and listened for two or three minutes with apparent interest; and then, with a countenance in which pity struggled with contempt, muttered, loud enough to be heard by all near him, "poor devil!" and walked off. He had not proceeded many steps, before it occurred to him that a friend—one Robert Huckaback, much

such another one as himself—lived in one of the narrow, dingy streets in the neighborhood. He determined to take the chances of his being at home, and if so, of spending the remainder of the evening with him. Huckaback's quarters were in the same ambitious proximity to heaven as his own; the only difference being, that they were a trifle cheaper and larger. He answered the door himself, having only the moment before returned from *his* Sunday's excursion,—*i. e.* the Jack Straw's Castle Tea-Gardens, at Highgate, where, in company with several of his friends, he had "spent a jolly afternoon." He ordered in a glass of negus from the adjoining public-house, after some discussion, which ended in an agreement that he should stand treat that night, and Titmouse on the ensuing Sunday night. As soon as the negus had arrived, accompanied by two sea-biscuits, which looked so hard and hopeless that they would have made the nerves thrill within the teeth of him that meditated attempting to masticate them, the candle was lit; Huckaback handed a cigar to his friend; and both began to puff away, and chatter pleasantly concerning the many events and scenes of the day.

"Anything stirring in to-day's 'Flash?'" inquired Titmouse, as his eye caught sight of a copy of that able and interesting Sunday newspaper, the "Sunday Flash," which Huckaback had hired for the evening from the news-shop on the ground-floor of his lodgings.

Mr. Huckaback removed his cigar from his mouth, and holding it between the first and second fingers of his right hand,

in a knowing style, with closed eyes and inflated cheeks, very slowly ejected the smoke which he had last inhaled, and rose and got the paper from the top of the drawers.

"Here's a mark of a beastly porter-pot that's been set upon it, by all that's holy! It's been at the public-house! Too bad of Mrs. Coggs to send it me up in this state!" said he, handling it as though its touch were contamination.—(He was to pay only a halfpenny for the perusal of it.) "Faugh! how it stinks!"

"What a horrid beast she must be!" exclaimed Titmouse, after, in like manner as his friend, expelling his mouthful of smoke. "But, since better can't be had, let's hear what news is in it. Demmee! it's the only paper published, in my opinion, that's worth reading!—Any fights astirring?"

"Haven't come to them yet; give a man *time*, Titty!" replied Huckaback, fixing his feet on another chair, and drawing the candle closer to the paper. "It says, by the way, that the Duke of Dunderhead is certainly making up to Mrs. Thumps, the rich cheesemonger's widow;—a precious good hit that, isn't it? You know the Duke's as poor as a rat!"

"Oh! *that's* no news. It's been in the papers for I don't know how long. Egad, 't will quite set him up—and no mistake. Seen the Duke ever?"

"Ye—es! Oh, several times!" replied Huckaback. This was a lie, and Huckaback knew that it was.

"Deuced good-looking, I suppose?"

"Why—middling; I should say middling. Know *some* that

needn't fear to compare with *him*—eh! Tit?"—and Huckaback winked archly at his friend, meaning him, however, to consider the words as applicable to the speaker.

"Ah, ha, ha!—a pretty joke! But come, that's a good chap!—You can't be reading both of those two sheets at once—give us the other sheet, and set the candle right betwixt us!—Come, fair's the word among *gents*, you know!"

Huckaback thus appealed to, did as his friend requested; and the two gentlemen read and smoked for some minutes in silence.

"Well—I shall spell over the advertisements now," said Titmouse, very emphatically; "there's a pretty lot of them—and I've read everything else—(though precious little there is, *here* besides!)—So, here goes!—One *may* hear of a prime situation, you know—and I'm quite sick of Tag-rag!"

Another interval of silence ensued. Huckaback was deep in the ghastly but instructive details of a trial for murder; and Titmouse, after having glanced listlessly over the entertaining first sheet of advertisements, was on the point of laying down his half of the paper, when he suddenly started in his chair, turned very pale, and stammered—

"Hollo!—hollo, Hucky!—Why"—

"What's the matter, Tit?—eh?" inquired Huckaback, greatly astonished.

For a moment Titmouse made no answer, but, dropping his cigar, fixed his eyes intently on the paper, which began to rustle in his trembling hands. What occasioned this outbreak, with

its subsequent agitation, was the following advertisement, which appeared in the most conspicuous part of the "Sunday Flash:"—

"Next of Kin—Important.—The next of kin, if any such there be, of Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse, formerly of Whitehaven, cordwainer, and who died somewhere about the year 1793, in London, may hear of something of the greatest possible importance to himself, or herself, or themselves, by immediately communicating with Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, Solicitors, Saffron Hill. No time is to be lost. 9th July 18—.—*The third advertisement.*"

"By George! Here *is* a go!" exclaimed Huckaback, almost as much flustered as Titmouse over whose shoulder he had hastily read the above paragraph.

"We aren't dreaming, Hucky—are we?" inquired Titmouse, faintly, his eyes still glued to the newspaper.

"No—by George! Never was either of us fellows so precious wide awake in our lives before! that I'll answer for!" Titmouse sat still, and turned paler even than before.

"Read it up, Huck!—Let's hear how it *sounds*, and then we shall believe it!" said he, handing the paper to his friend.

Huckaback read it aloud.

"It sounds like something, don't it?" inquired Titmouse, tremulously, his color a little returning.

"Uncommon!—If this isn't *something*, then there's nothing in anything any more!" replied Huckaback, solemnly, at the same time emphatically slapping the table.

"No!—'Pon my soul! but do you really think so?" said Titmouse, seeking still further confirmation than he had yet derived from his senses of sight and hearing.

"I do, by jingo!" repeated Huckaback—"What a go it is!—Well, my poor old mother used to say, 'depend on it, wonders never *will* cease;' and curse me if she ever said a truer word!"

Titmouse again read over the advertisement; and then picking up and relighting his fragment of cigar, puffed earnestly in silence for some moments.

"Such things never happens to such a poor devil of a chap as me!" exclaimed Huckaback, with a sigh.

"What *is* in the wind, I wonder?" muttered Titmouse. "Who knows—hem!—who knows?—But now, *really*"—he paused, and once more read over the pregnant paragraph.—"It can't—no, curse me, it *can't* be"—he added, looking very serious.

"What, Tit? *What* can't be?" interrupted Huckaback, eagerly.

"Why, I've been thinking—but what do *you* think, eh?—it can't *hardly* be a cursed hoax of the chaps in the premises at Tagrag's?"

"Bo!—Is there any of 'em flush enough of money to do the thing? And how should they think it would ever come to be seen by you?—Then, besides, there isn't a chap among them that could come up to the composing a piece of composition like that—no, not for all a whole year's salary—there isn't, by George! You and I couldn't do it, and, of course, *they* couldn't!"

"Ah! I don't know," said Titmouse, doubtfully. "But—honor!"

—do you really now think there's anything in it?"

"I do—I'm blowed if I don't, Tit!" was the sententious answer.

"Tol de rol, de rol, de rol, de rol—diddl'em—daddl'em—bang!" almost shouted Titmouse, jumping up, snapping his fingers, and dancing about in a wild ecstasy, which lasted for nearly a minute.

"Give me your hand, Hucky," said he presently, almost breathless. "If I *am* a made man—tol de rol, lol de rol, lol de rol, lol!—you see, Huck!—if I don't give you the handsomest breastpin you ever saw? No paste! real diamond!—Hurrah! I will, by jingo!"

Huckaback grasped and squeezed his hand. "We've always been friends, Tit—haven't we?" said he, affectionately.

"My room won't hold me to-night!" continued Titmouse; "I'm sure it won't. I feel as if I was, as you may say, swelling all over. I'll walk the streets all night: I couldn't sleep a wink for the life of me! I'll walk about till the shop opens. Oh, faugh! how nasty! Confound the shop, and Tag-rag, and everything and everybody in it! Thirty-five pounds a year? See if I won't spend as much in cigars the first month!"

"Cigars! Is that your go? Now, *I* should take lessons in boxing, to begin with. It's a deuced high thing, you may depend upon it, and you can't be fit company for swells without it, Tit! You can't, by Jove!"

"Whatever you like, whatever you like, Hucky!" cried Titmouse—adding, in a sort of ecstasy, "I'm sorry to say it, but

how *precious* lucky that my father and mother's dead, and that I'm an only child—too-ra-laddy, too-ra-laddy!" Here he took such a sudden leap, that I am sorry to say he split his trousers very awkwardly, and that sobered him for a moment, while they made arrangements for cobbling it up as well as might be, with a needle and thread which Huckaback always had by him.

"We're rather jumping in the dark a-bit, aren't we, Tit?" inquired Huckaback, while his companion was repairing the breach. "Let's look what it all means—here it is." He read it all aloud again—" *greatest possible importance!*"—what *can it mean?* Why the deuce couldn't they speak out plainly?"

"What! in a newspaper? Lord, Hucky! how many Titmouses would start up on all sides, if there isn't some already indeed! I wonder what '*greatest possible importance*' can mean, now!"

"Some one's left you an awful lot of money, of course"—

"It's too good to be true"—

"Or you may have made a *smite*; you a'n't such a bad-looking fellow, when you're dressed as you are now—you a'n't indeed, Titty!" Mr. Titmouse was quite flustered with the mere supposition, and also looked as sheepish as his features would admit of.

"E-e-e-eh, Hucky! how ve-ry silly you are!" he simpered.

"Or you may be found out heir to some great property, and all that kind of thing.—But when do you intend to go to Messrs. What's-their-name? I should say, the sooner the better. Come, you've stitched them trousers well enough, now; they'll hold you

till you get home, (you do brace up uncommon tight!) and I'd take off my straps, if I was you. Why shouldn't we go to these gents now? Ah, here they are—Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, solicitors."

"I wonder if they're great men? Did you ever hear of them before?"

"Haven't I! Their names is always in this same paper; they are every day getting people off out of all kinds of scrapes—they're the chaps *I* should nat'rally go to if I anyhow got wrong—ahem!"

"But, my dear fellow—*Saffron Hill!*—Low that—devilish low, 'pon my soul! Never was near it in my life."

"But they live there to be near the thieves. Lud, the thieves couldn't do without 'em! But what's that to you! You know 'a very dirty ugly toad has often got a jewel in his belly,' so Shakspeare or some one says. Isn't it enough for *you*, Tit, if they can make good their advertisement? Let's off, Tit—let's off, I say; for you mayn't be able to get there to-morrow—your employers!"—

"My employers! Do you think, Hucky, I'm going back to business after this?"

"Come, come, Titty—not so fast—suppose it all turns out moonshine, after all"—quoth Huckaback, seriously.

"Lord, but I *won't* suppose anything of the sort! It makes me sick to think of nothing coming of it!—Let's go off at once, and see what's to be done!"

So Huckaback put the newspaper into his pocket, blew out the candle, and the two started on their important errand. It was well

that their means had been too limited to allow of their indulging to a greater extent than a glass of port-wine negus (that was the name under which they had drunk the "*publican's port*"—*i. e.* a warm sweetened decoction of oak bark, logwood shavings, and a little brandy) between them; otherwise, excited as were the feelings of each of them by the discovery of the evening, they must in all probability have been guilty of some piece of extravagance in the streets. As it was, they talked very loudly as they went along, and in a tone of conversation pitched perhaps a little too high for their present circumstances, however in unison it might be with the expected circumstances of *one* of them.

In due time they reached the residence of which they were in search. It was a large house, greatly superior to all its dingy neighbors; and on a bright brass plate, a yard long at least, and a foot wide, stood the awe-inspiring words, "Quirk, Gammon, & Snap, Solicitors."

"Now, Tit," whispered Huckaback, after they had paused for a second or two—"now for it—pluck up a sperrit—ring!"

"I—I—'pon my life—I feel all of a sudden uncommon funky—I think that last cigar of yours wasn't"—

"Stuff, Tit—ring! ring away! Faint heart never wins!"

"Well, it *must* be done: so—here goes at any rate!" he replied; and with a short nervous jerk, he caused a startling clatter within, which was so distinctly audible without, that both of them instinctively *hemmed*, as if to drown the noise which was so much greater than they had expected. In a very few moments they heard

some one undoing the fastenings of the door, and the gentlemen looked at one another with an expression of mingled expectation and apprehension. A little old woman at length, with a candle in her hand, retaining the heavy door-chain in its fastening, peered round the edge of the door at them.

"Who are you?" she exclaimed crustily.

"Is this Messrs.—What is it, Huck?—Oh! Messrs. Quirk & Co.'s?" inquired Titmouse, tapping the end of his cane against his chin, with a desperate effort to appear at his ease.

"Why, where's your eyes?" she replied angrily, "I should think you might have seen what was wrote on this here plate—it's large enough, one should have thought, to be read by them as *can* read—Is your's Newgate business? Because if—"

"We want—Give us the paper, Hucky"—he added, addressing his companion, who produced it in a moment; and Titmouse would have proceeded to possess the old lady of all his little heart, when she cut him short by saying snappishly—"They aren't none on 'em in; nor never is on Sundays—so you'll just call to-morrow if you wants 'em. What's your names?"

"Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse," answered that gentleman, with a very particular emphasis on every syllable.

"Mr. *who*?" exclaimed the old woman, opening her eyes very wide, and raising her hand to the back of her ear. Mr. Titmouse repeated his name more loudly and distinctly.

"Tippetytippety—what's that?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Titmouse, peevishly; "I said, Mr. Tit-el-

bat Tit-mouse!—will that suit you?"

"Tick-a-tick-a-tick?—Well, gracious! if ever I heard such a name. Oh!—I see!—you're making a fool of me! Get off, or I'll call a constable in!—Get along with you, you couple of jail-birds! Is this the way"—

"I tell you," interposed Mr. Huckaback, angrily, "that this gentleman's name is Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse; and you'd better take care what you're at, old woman, for we've come on business of *wital consequence!*"

"I dare say it'll keep, then, till to-morrow," tartly added the old woman.

The friends consulted for a moment, and then Titmouse asked if he might come in and write a letter to Messrs. Quirk and Co.

"No indeed!" said she; "how do I know who you are? There's a public-house close by, where you may write what you like, and bring it here, and they'll get it the first thing in the morning. So that's what you may take away with you!"—with which the complaisant old janitrix shut the door in their faces.

"Huck, 'pon my life, I am afraid there's nothing in it," said Titmouse, despondingly, to his friend—both of them remaining rooted to the spot.

"Oudacious old toad!" muttered Huckaback, very indignantly.

"Hucky—I'm *sure* there's nothing in it!" exclaimed Titmouse, after a long pause, looking earnestly at his friend, hoping to draw from him a contrary opinion.

"I—I own I don't half like the looks of it," replied Huckaback,

putting his newspaper into his pocket again; "but we'll try if we can't write a letter to sound 'em, and so far take the old creature's advice. Here's the public-house she told us of. Come, let's see what's to be done!"

Titmouse, greatly depressed, followed his friend; and they soon provided themselves with two glasses of stout, and after a little difficulty, with implements for writing. That they made good use of their time and materials, let the following epistle prove. It was their joint composition, and here is an exact copy of it:—

"*To Messrs. Quirk, Gammon and Snap.*

"Sir,

"Your Names being Put In an Advertisement in This present *Sunday Flash*, Newspaper of To Day's Date, Mr. T. T. Begs To inform Your respectable House I feel Uncommon anxious To speak with them On This *truly interesting subject*, seeing It mentions The Name Of Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse, which Two last Names Of That Deceased Person *my Own Name Is*, which can *Any Day* (As soon As Possible) call and *prove* To you, By telling you The Same, *truly*. He being Engaged in Business During the week Very close, (for The Present,) I hope that If they Have Anything particular To say To Him, they will write To me without The least Delay, and please address T. T., At Tagrag and Co.'s, No. 375, Oxford Street, Post-Paid, which will ensure Its Being duly Taken In By my Employers, and am,

"Gents,

"Your's to Command,
"Tittlebat Titmouse.

"P. S.—My Friend, which Is With me writing This, (Mr. Robert Huckaback,) can prove who I am If necessiated so to do.

"N. B.—Shall have no objections to do the Liberal Thing if anything suitable Turns Up Of It.

"T. T.

"(Sunday Evening, 9/7/18—.

"Forgot to Say, am The only Child of my Honored Parents, one of which (my Mother) Died; before I knew them In Lawful Wedloc, and Was 27 last Birth Day, Never having Seen your Advertisement Till This Night, w^h, if Necessary *can Prove*.)"

This perspicuous and truly elegant performance having been thrice subjected to the critical examination of the friends, (the paragraph concerning Huckaback having been inserted at the instance of that gentleman, who wished to be mixed up from the beginning with so promising an affair,) was then folded up, and directed to "Messrs. Quirk and Co.," a great straggling wet wafer having been first put upon it. It was safely deposited, a few minutes afterwards, with the old lady at Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap's; and then the two West-End gentlemen hastened away from that truly plebeian part of the town! Under three different gas-lights did they stop, take out the newspaper, and spell over the advertisement; by which ingenious processes

they at length succeeded in satisfying themselves that there *was* something in it—a fact of which, upon the old woman shutting the door in their faces, it may be recollected they had had grievous misgivings. They parted, however, with a considerable abatement of the excitement with which they had set out on their voyage of discovery.

Mr. Titmouse did not, on reaching his room, take off and lay aside his precious Sunday apparel with his accustomed care and deliberation. On the contrary, he peeled it off, as it were, and threw himself on the bed as quickly as possible, in order that he might calmly revolve the immense event of the day in his little mind, which it had agitated like a stone thrown into a stagnant pool by the roadside. Oh, how restless was he!—not more so could he have been had he lain between horse-hair sheets. He repeatedly got up and walked about two or three little steps, which were all that his room admitted of. At the very first peep of daylight he started out of bed, got out of his pocket the newspaper which Huckaback had lent him, strove to decipher the advertisement, and then sank into bed again—but not to sleep, till four or five o'clock; having nevertheless to rise at half-past six, to resume his detested duties at Tag-rag and Co.'s, whose shop he assisted in opening at seven o'clock, as usual. When he and his shopmates were sitting together at breakfast, he could not for the life of him help letting out a little, vaguely and mysteriously, about "something that *might* happen in the course of the day;" and thereby succeeded in satisfying his experienced

companions that he expected the visit of a policeman, for some *row* he had been concerned in over-night.—Well:—eight, nine, ten o'clock wore away heavily, and nothing transpired, alas! to vary the monotonous duties in which Mr. Titmouse was engaged; bale after bale, and package after package, he took down and put up again, at the bidding of pretty, capricious customers; silk, satin, bombazines, crapes, muslins, ribbons, gloves, he assisted in displaying, disposing of, or replacing as usual; but it was clear that his powerful understanding could no longer settle itself, as before, upon his responsible and arduous duties. Every other minute he cast a feverish furtive glance towards the door. He almost dropped, at one time, as a postman crossed from the opposite side of the street, as if to enter their shop—then passing on immediately, however, to the next door. Not a person, in short, entered the premises, whom he did not scrutinize narrowly and anxiously, but in vain. No—buying and selling was the order of the day, as usual!—Eleven o'clock struck, and he sighed. "You don't seem well," said a pretty young woman, to whom, in a somewhat absent manner, he was exhibiting and describing the qualities of some cambric. "Oh—ye—es, uncommon!" he replied; "never better, ma'am, than when so well employed!" accompanying the latter words with what he conceived to be a very arch, but which was in fact a very impudent, look at his fair customer. At that moment a voice called out to him from the farther end of the shop, near the door—"Titmouse! Wanted!"

"Coming!" he shouted, turning as white as the cambric he

held in his hands—which became suddenly cold; while his heart went thump, thump, as he hastily exclaimed to the astonished lady, "Excuse me, ma'am, if you please—Jones," addressing the shopman next him, "will you attend to this lady?" and he hastened whither he had been called, amid a prevalent grin and "hem!" from his companions on each side, as he passed along the shop, till he reached the spot where stood the stranger who had inquired for him. He was of a slight and gentlemanly figure, above the average height. His countenance was very striking: he was dressed with simplicity—somewhat carelessly perhaps; and appeared somewhere about thirty-six or thirty-seven years of age. He bowed slightly as Titmouse approached him, and an air of very serious surprise came over his expressive countenance.

"Mr. Titmouse?" he inquired blandly.

"Ye-e-s, sir, at your service," replied Titmouse, trembling involuntarily all over. The stranger again slightly inclined towards him, and—still more slightly—touched his hat; fixing on him, at the same time, an inquisitive penetrating eye, which really abashed, or rather perhaps alarmed him.

"You left—you favored us by leaving—a note at our office last night, sir, addressed to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap?" he inquired, lowering his voice to a whisper.

"Yes, sir, hoping it was no"—

"Pray, Mr. Titmouse, can we be alone for about five or ten minutes?"

"I—I—don't exactly know, *here*, sir; I'm afraid—against the

rules of the house—but I'll ask. Here *is* Mr. Tag-rag.—May I step into the cloak-room with this gentleman for a few minutes, sir?" he continued, addressing his imperious employer, who, with a pen behind his right ear, his left hand in his breeches pocket, and his right hand impatiently tweedling about his watch-seals, had followed Titmouse, on hearing him inquired for in the manner I have described, and stood at a yard or two's distance, eying the two with a truculent dissatisfied look, wondering what on earth any one *could* want with one of *his* young men.

As Mr. Tag-rag will be rather a prominent figure on my canvas, I may as well here give the reader a slight preparatory sketch of that gentleman. He was about fifty-two years old; a great tyrant in his little way; a compound of ignorance, selfishness, cant, and conceit. He knew nothing on earth except the price of his goods, and how to make the most of his business. He was of middle size, with a tendency to corpulence; and almost invariably wore a black coat and waistcoat, a white neck handkerchief very primly tied, and gray trousers. He had a dull, gray eye, with white eyelashes, and no eyebrows; a forehead which seemed ashamed of his face, it retreated so far and so abruptly back from it; his face was pretty deeply pitted with the small-pox; his nose—or rather semblance of a nose—consisted of two great nostrils looking at you—as it were, impudently—out of the middle of his face; there was a perfect level space from cheek-bone to cheek-bone; his gray whiskers, trimly and closely cut, came in points to each corner of his mouth, which was large,

shapeless, and sensual-looking. This may serve, for the present, to give you an idea of the man who had contrived to excite towards himself the hatred and contempt of everybody over whom he had any control—with whom in fact he had anything to do.

"You know quite well, sir, we never allow anything of the sort," was his short reply, in a very disagreeable tone and manner, to Titmouse's modest request.

"May I beg the favor of a few minutes' private conversation with Mr. Titmouse," said the stranger, politely, "on a matter of the last importance to him? My name, sir, is Gammon, and I am a solicitor of the firm of Quirk, Gammon, and Snap"—

"Why, sir," answered Tag-rag, somewhat cowed by the calm and gentlemanly, but at the same time decisive manner of Mr. Gammon—"it's really very inconvenient, and decidedly against the rules of the house, for any of my young men to be absent on business of their own during *my* business hours; but—I suppose—what must be must be—I'll give him ten minutes—and he'd better not stay longer," he subjoined fiercely—looking significantly first at his watch, and then at Titmouse. "It's only for the sake of my other young men, you know, sir. In a large establishment like ours, we're obliged, you know, sir," &c. &c. &c., he added, in a low cringing tone, deprecatory of the contemptuous air with which he *felt* that Mr. Gammon was regarding him.

That gentleman, with a slight bow, and a sarcastic smile,

presently quitted the shop, accompanied by Titmouse, who scarce knew whether his head or heels were uppermost.

"How far do you live from this place, Mr. Titmouse?" inquired Mr. Gammon, as soon as they had got into the street.

"Not four minutes' walk, sir; but—hem!"—he was flustered at the idea of showing so eminent a person into his wretched room—"Suppose we were to step into this tavern here, sir—I dare say they have a room at our service"—

"Pray, allow me to ask, Mr. Titmouse—have you any private papers—family writings, or things of that sort, at your rooms?"

Titmouse seemed considering.

"I—I think I have, sir," he replied—"one or two—but they're of no consequence."

"Are you a *judge* on that point, Mr. Titmouse?" inquired Mr. Gammon, with a smile; "pray let us, my dear sir, at once proceed to your rooms—time is very short and valuable. I should vastly like to look at these same insignificant papers of yours!"

In less than two minutes' further time, Mr. Gammon was sitting at Titmouse's little rickety round table, at his lodgings, with a sheet of paper before him, and a small pencil-case in his hand, asking him a number of questions concerning his birth and family connections, and taking down his answers very carefully. Mr. Titmouse was surprised at the gentleman's knowledge of the family history of the Titmouses. As for papers, &c., Mr. Titmouse succeeded in producing four or five old letters and memoranda from the bottom of his trunk, and one or two entries,

in faded ink, on the fly-leaf of a Bible of his father's, which he did not recollect having opened before for very many years, and of which said entries, till pressed on the subject by Mr. Gammon, he had been hardly aware of even the existence. With these several documents Mr. Gammon was so much struck that he proposed to take them away with him, for better and more leisurely examination, and safer custody, at their office; but Mr. Titmouse significantly hinted at his very recent acquaintance with Mr. Gammon, who, he intimated, was at liberty to come and make exact copies of them whenever he pleased, in his (Mr. Titmouse's) presence.

"Oh, certainly—yes," replied Mr. Gammon, slightly coloring at the distrust implied by this observation; "I applaud your caution, Mr. Titmouse. By all means keep these documents, and most carefully; because, (I do not say that they *are*,) but it is quite possible that they may become rather valuable—to *you*."

"Thank you, sir; and now, hoping you'll excuse the liberty," said Titmouse, with a very anxious air, "I should most uncommonly like to know what all this means—what is to turn up out of it all?"

"The law, my dear sir, is proverbially uncertain"—

"Oh, Lord! but the law can surely give one a *hint*"—

"*The law never hints*," interrupted Mr. Gammon, impressively, with a bland smile.

"Well then, how did you come, sir, to know that there ever was such a person as Mr. Gabriel Titmouse, my father? And what

can come from *him*, seeing he was only a bit of a shoemaker—unless he's *heir* to something?"

"Ah, yes—exactly; those are very interesting questions, Mr. Titmouse—very!"—

"Yes, sir; and them and many more I was going to ask long ago, but I saw you were"—

"Sir, I perceive that we have positively been absent from your place of business nearly an hour—your employers will be getting rather impatient."

"Meaning no offence, sir—bother *their* impatience! *I'm* impatient, I assure you, to know what all this means. Come, sir, 'pon my life I've told *you* everything! It isn't quite fair!"

"Why, certainly, you see, Mr. Titmouse," said Gammon, with an agreeable smile—(it was that smile of his which had been the making of Mr. Gammon)—"it is only candid in me to acknowledge that your curiosity is perfectly reasonable, and your frankness very obliging; and I see no difficulty in admitting at once, that *I have* had a—motive"—

"Yes, sir—and all that—*I* know, sir,"—hastily interrupted Titmouse, but without irritating or disturbing the placid speaker.

"And that we waited with some anxiety for the result of our advertisement."

"Ah, you can't escape from *that*, you know, sir!" interposed Titmouse, with a confident air.

"But it is a maxim with us, my dear sir, never to be premature in anything, especially when it may be—very prejudicial; you've

really no idea, my dear Mr. Titmouse, of the world of mischief that is often done by precipitancy in legal matters; and in the present stage of the business—the *present* stage, my dear sir—I really do see it necessary not to—do anything premature, and without consulting my partners."

"Lord, sir!" exclaimed Titmouse, getting more and more irritated and impatient as he reflected on the length of his absence from Tag-rag & Co.'s.

"I quite feel for your anxiety—so perfectly natural"—

"Oh, dear sir! if you'd only tell me the *least bit*"—

"If, my dear sir, I were to disclose just now the exact object we had in inserting that advertisement in the papers"—

"How did you come to know of it at all, sir? Come, there can't be any harm in *that* anyhow"—

"Not the least, my dear sir. It was in the course of business—in the course of business."

"Is it money that's been left me—or—anything of that sort?"

"It quite pains me, I assure you, Mr. Titmouse, to suppose that our having put this advertisement into the papers may have misled you, and excited false hopes—I think, by the way"—added Gammon, suddenly, as something occurred to him of their previous conversation, which he was not quite sure of—"you told me that that Bible had been given you by your father."

"Oh yes, sir! yes—no doubt of it; surely *that* can't signify, seeing he's dead, and I'm his only son?" asked Titmouse, quickly and eagerly.

"Oh, 'tis only a circumstance—a mere circumstance; but in business, you know, Mr. Titmouse, every little helps—and you really, by the way, have no recollection of your mother, Mr. Titmouse?"

"No, sir, I said so! And—meaning no offence, sir—I can't abide being put off in this kind of way,—I must own!—See what I have told you—you've told *me* nothing at all. I hope you haven't been only making me a cat's-paw of? 'Pon my soul, I *hate* being made a cat's-paw of, sir!"

"Good heavens, Mr. Titmouse! how can you imagine it? Matters in some degree connected with one or two former members of your family, are at this moment the object of some little of our anxiety"—

"Not meaning it rudely, sir—please to tell me at once, plainly, am I to be the better for anything you're now about, or was that advertisement all fudge?"

"That may or may not be, sir," answered Mr. Gammon, in the same imperturbable manner, drawing on his gloves, and rising from his chair. "In justice to yourself, and other parties concerned"—

"Oh! is anybody to *share* in it?" exclaimed Titmouse, alarmedly.

"I am sure," said Gammon, smiling, "that you will give us credit for consulting your best interests, if they should prove to be in any degree concerned in our present inquiries! We should, in that event, sincerely desire to advance them. But—it is *really*,"

looking at his watch, "upwards of an hour since we quitted your place of business—I fear I shall get into disgrace with that respectable gentleman, your employer. Will you favor us with a call at our office to-morrow night, when the business of the day is over? When do you quit at night?"

"About half-past nine o'clock, sir; but really—to-morrow night! Couldn't I come to-night, sir?"

"Not to-night, I fear, my dear sir. We have a very important engagement. Let us say to-morrow night, at a quarter past ten—shall we say that hour?" inquired Mr. Gammon, with an imperative smile.

"Well, sir, if not before—yes—I'll be with you. But I *must* say"—quoth Titmouse, with a sulky disconcerted air.

"Good-day, Mr. Titmouse," said Mr. Gammon—they were by this time in Oxford Street again.—"Good-day, my dear sir—good-day—to-morrow night, as soon after ten as possible—eh? Good-by."

This was all that Mr. Titmouse could get out of Mr. Gammon, who, hailing a coach off the stand beside them, got in, and it was soon making its way eastward. What a miserable mixture of doubts, hopes, and fears, had he left Titmouse! He felt as if he were a squeezed orange; he had told everything he knew about himself, and got nothing in return out of the smooth, imperturbable, impenetrable Mr. Gammon, but empty civilities.—"Lord, Lord!" thought Titmouse, as Mr. Gammon's coach turned the corner; "what would I give to know half about it that

that gent knows! But Mr. Tag-rag! by Jove! what *will* he say? It's struck twelve. I've been more than an hour away—and he gave me ten minutes! Sha'n't I catch it?"

And he did. Almost the very first person whom he met, on entering the shop, was his respected employer; who, plucking his watch out of his fob, and looking furiously at it, motioned the trembling Titmouse to follow him to the farther end of the long shop, where there happened to be then no customers.

"Is this your ten minutes, sir, eh?"

"I am sorry"—

"Where may you have been, sir, all this while?"

"With that gentleman, sir, and I really did not know"—

"You didn't know, sir! Who cares what you know, or don't know? *This*, at any rate, you know—that you ought to have been back fifty-five minutes ago, sir. You do, sir! Isn't your time my property, sir? Don't I pay for it, sir? An hour!—in the middle of the day! I've not had such a thing happen this five years! I'll stop it out of your salary, sir."

Titmouse did not attempt to interrupt him.

"And pray what have you been gossiping about, sir, in this disgraceful manner?"

"Something that he wanted to say to me, sir."

"You low puppy!—do you suppose I don't see your impertinence? I *insist*, sir, on knowing what all this gossiping with that fellow has been about?"

"Then you *won't* know, sir, that's flat!" replied Titmouse,

doggedly; returning to his usual station behind the counter.

"I *sha'n't*!!" exclaimed Mr. Tag-rag, almost aghast at the presumption of his inferior.

"No, sir, you *sha'n't* know a single word about it."

"Sha'n't know a single word about it! Vastly good, sir!!—Do you know whom you're talking to, sir? Do you really know in whose presence you are, sir?" inquired Mr. Tag-rag, nearly trembling with rage.

"Mr. Tag-rag, I presume, of the firm of Tag-rag and Co.," replied Titmouse, looking him full in the face.—One or two of his companions near him, almost turned pale at the audacity he was displaying.

"And who are *you*, sir, that dare to presume to bandy words with me, sir?" inquired Tag-rag, his deeply pitted face having turned quite white, and his whole body quivering with rage.

"Tittlebat Titmouse, at your service," was the answer, in a glib tone, and with a sufficiently saucy air; for Titmouse then felt that he had passed the Rubicon.

"You heard that, I hope?" inquired Tag-rag, with forced calmness, of a pale-faced young man, the nearest to him.

"Ye—es, sir," was the meekly reluctant answer.

"This day month you leave, sir!" said Mr. Tag-rag, solemnly—as if conscious that he was passing a sort of sentence of death upon the presumptuous delinquent.

"Very well, Mr. Tag-rag—anything that pleases you pleases your humble servant. I *will* go this day month, and welcome

—I've long wished—and now, p'r'aps," he added significantly—"it's rather convenient than otherwise"—

"Then you *sha'n't* leave, sir," said Tag-rag, furiously.

"But I will, sir. You've given me warning; and, if you haven't, now I give *you* warning," replied Titmouse; turning, however, very pale, and experiencing a certain sudden sinking of the heart—for this was a serious and most unlooked-for event, and for a while put out of his head all the agitating thoughts of the last few hours. Poor Titmouse had enough to bear—what with the delicate raillery and banter of his refined companions for the rest of the day, find the galling tyranny of Mr. Tag-rag, (who dogged him about all day, setting him about the most menial and troublesome offices he could, and constantly saying mortifying things to him before customers,) and the state of miserable suspense in which Mr. Gammon had thought fit to leave him; I say that surely all this was enough for him to bear without having to encounter at night, as he did, on his return to his lodgings, his blustering landlady, who vowed that if she sold him out and out she would be put off no longer—and his pertinacious and melancholy tailor, who, with sallow unshaven face, told him of five children at home, all ill of the small-pox, and his wife in an hospital—and he *implored* a payment on account. This sufferer succeeded in squeezing out of Titmouse seven shillings on account, and his landlady extorted ten; which staved off a distress—direful word!—for some week or two longer; and so they left him in the possession of eight shillings or so, to last

till next quarter-day—six weeks off! He sighed heavily, barred his door, and sat down opposite his little table, on which was nothing but a solitary thin candle, and on which his eyes rested unconsciously, till the stench of it, burning right down into the socket, roused him from his wretched revery. Then he unlocked his box, and took out his Bible and the papers which had been produced to Mr. Gammon, and gazed at them with intense but useless scrutiny. Unable to conjecture what bearing they could have upon himself or his fortunes, he hastily replaced them in his box, threw off his clothes, and flung himself on his bed, to pass a far more dismal night than he had known for years.

He ran the gantlet at Messrs. Tag-rag and Co.'s all Tuesday as he had done on the day preceding. One should have supposed that when his companions beheld him persecuted by their common tyrant, whom they all equally hated, they would have made common cause with their suffering companion, or at all events given no countenance to his persecution; yet it was far otherwise. Without stopping to analyze the feeling which produced it, (and which the moderately reflective reader may easily analyze for himself if so disposed,) I am grieved to have to say, that when all the young men saw that Tag-rag would be gratified by their *cutting* poor Titmouse, who, with all his little vanities, fooleries, and even selfishness, had never personally offended or injured any of them—they did cut him; and, when Tag-rag observed it, his miserable mind was unspeakably gratified with what they had done: and he spoke to all of them with unusual blandness; to the

sinner, Titmouse, with augmented bitterness and sternness.

CHAPTER II

A few minutes after ten o'clock that night, a gentle ringing at the bell of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap's office, announced the arrival of poor Titmouse. The door was quickly opened by a very fashionably dressed clerk, who seemed in the act of quitting for the night.

"Ah—Mr. Titmouse, I presume?" he inquired, with a kind of deference in his manner to which Titmouse had never been accustomed.

"The same, sir—Tittlebat Titmouse."

"Oh! allow me, sir, to show you in to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap; I know they're expecting to see you. It's not often they're here so late! Walk in, sir"—With this he led the way to an inner room, and opening a green-baize door in the farther side of it, announced and showed in Mr. Titmouse, and left him—sufficiently flustered. Three gentlemen were sitting at a large table, on which he saw, by the strong but circumscribed light of two shaded candlesticks, were lying a great number of papers and parchments. The three gentlemen rose when he entered, Mr. Quirk and Mr. Snap involuntarily starting on first catching sight of the figure of Titmouse: Mr. Gammon came and shook hands with him.

"Mr. Titmouse," said he, with a very polite air, "let me introduce you to Mr. Quirk"—(This was the senior partner, a

short, stout elderly gentleman, dressed in black, with a shining bald crown fringed with white hair, and sharp black eyes, and who looked very earnestly, nay, with even a kind of dismay, at him)—"and Mr. Snap"—(This was the junior partner, having recently been promoted to be such after ten years' service in the office, as managing clerk: he was about thirty, particularly well dressed, slight, active, and with a face like a terrier—*so* hard, sharp, and wiry!) Of Mr. Gammon himself, I have already given the reader a slight notion. He appeared altogether a different style of person from both his partners. He was of most gentlemanly person and bearing—and at once acute, cautious, and insinuating—with a certain something about the eye, which had from the first made Titmouse feel uneasy on looking at him.

"A seat, sir," said Mr. Quirk, rising, and placing a chair for him, on which he sat down, they resuming theirs.

"You are punctual, Mr. Titmouse!" exclaimed Mr. Gammon, kindly; "more so than, I fear, you were yesterday, after our long interview, eh? Pray what did that worthy person, Mr. Rag-bag—or whatever his name is—say on your return?"

"Say, gents?"—(he tried to clear his throat, for he spoke somewhat more thickly, and his heart beat more perceptibly than usual)—"Meaning no offence—I'm ruined by it, and no mistake."

"Ruined! I'm sorry to hear it," interposed Mr. Gammon, with a concerned air.

"I am, indeed, sir. Such a towering rage as he has been in

ever since; and he's given me warning to go on the 10th of next month." He thought he observed a faint smile flit over the faces of all three. "He has, indeed!"

"Dear me, Mr. Titmouse!—Did he allege any reason for dismissing you?" keenly inquired Mr. Quirk.

"Yes, sir"—

"What might it have been?"

"Stopping out longer than I was allowed, and refusing to tell him what this gentleman and I had been talking about."

"Don't think that'll do; sure it won't!" briskly exclaimed Mr. Snap; "no just cause of dismissal that," and he jumped up, whisked down a book from the shelves behind him, and eagerly turned over the leaves.

"Never mind that now, Mr. Snap," said Mr. Quirk, rather petulantly; "surely we have other matters to talk about to-night!"

"Asking pardon, sir, but I think it *does* matter to me, sir," interposed Titmouse; "for on the 10th of next month I'm a beggar—being next door to it *now*."

"Not quite, we trust," said Mr. Gammon, with a benignant smile.

"But Mr. Tag-rag said he'd make me as good as one."

"That's evidence to show malice," again eagerly interjected Mr. Snap, who was a second time tartly rebuffed by Mr. Quirk; even Mr. Gammon turning towards him with a surprised—"Really, Mr. Snap!"

"So Mr. Tag-rag said he'd make you a beggar?" inquired Mr.

Quirk.

"He vowed he would, sir!—He did, as true as the gospel, sir!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Quirk and Mr. Gammon—but such a laugh!—not careless or hearty, but subdued, and with a dash of deference in it. "Well—it perhaps *may* not signify much, by that time;" said Mr. Quirk, and laughed again, followed by the soft laugh of Mr. Gammon, and a kind of sharp quick sound, like a bark, from Mr. Snap.

"But, gents, you'll excuse me if I say I think it *does* signify to *me*, and a'n't any laughing matter, by any means!" quoth Titmouse, earnestly, and coloring with anger. "Without being rude, I'd rather come to business, if there's any to be done, without so much laughing at one."

"Laughing at you! my dear sir,—no, no!" exclaimed all three in a breath—"laughing *with* you," said Mr. Quirk!—"By the time you mention, you may perhaps be able to laugh at Mr. Rag-bag, and everybody else, for"—

[—"No use mincing matters?" he whispered, in a low tone, to Mr. Gammon, who nodded, but in apparently very reluctant acquiescence, and fixed his eyes earnestly on Titmouse.]

"I really think we are warranted, sir, in preparing you to expect by that time—that is, you will understand, sir, if our efforts are successful in your behalf, and if you yield yourself implicitly in all things to our guidance—that is *absolutely essential*—a prospect—we say at present, you will observe, *only* a prospect—of a surprising and splendid change in your circumstances!"

Titmouse began to tremble violently, his heart beat rapidly, and his hands were bedewed with a cold moisture.

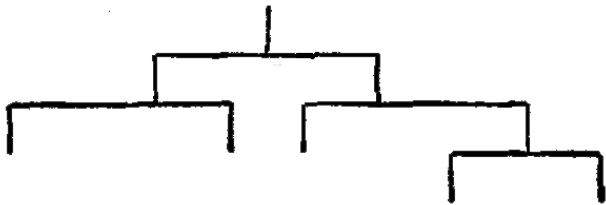
"I hear, gents," said he, thickly; and he also heard a faint ringing in his ears.

"It's not impossible, sir, in plain English," continued Mr. Quirk, himself growing a little excited with the important communication which trembled on the tip of his tongue, "that you may at no distant time (if you really turn out to be the person we are in search of) be put into possession of an estate of somewhere about Ten Thousand a-year"—

The words seemed to have struck Titmouse blind—as he saw nothing for some moments; then everything appeared to be swimming around him, and he felt a sort of faintness or sickness stealing over him. They had hardly been prepared for their communication's affecting their little visitor so powerfully. Mr. Snap hastened out, and in again, with a glass of water; and the earnest attentions of the three soon restored Mr. Titmouse to his senses. It was a good while, however, before he could appreciate the little conversation which they now and then addressed to him, or estimate the full importance of the astounding intelligence which Mr. Quirk had just communicated, "Beg pardon—but may I make free to ask for a little brandy and cold water, gents? I feel all over in a kind of tremble," said he, some little time afterwards.

"Yes—by all means, Mr. Titmouse," replied Mr. Quirk—"Mr. Snap, will you be kind enough to order Betty to bring

in a glass of cold brandy and water from the Jolly Thieves, next door?"—Snap shot out, gave the order, and returned in a trice. The old woman in a few minutes' time followed, with a large tumbler of dark brandy and water, quite hot, for which Mr. Gammon apologized, but Mr. Titmouse said he preferred it so—and soon addressed himself to the inspiriting mixture. It quickly manifested its influence, reassuring him wonderfully. As he sat sipping it, Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap being engaged in an earnest conversation, of which he could not comprehend a word, he had leisure to look about him, and observed that there was lying before them a large sheet of paper, at which they all of them often and earnestly looked, filled with marks, so—



with writing at the ends of each of them, and round and square figures. When he saw them all bending over and scrutinizing this mysterious object, it puzzled him (and many a better head than his has a pedigree puzzled before) sorely, and he began to suspect it was a sort of conjuring paper!—

"I hope, gents, that paper's all right—eh?" said he, supported

by the brandy, which he had nearly finished. They turned towards him with a smile of momentary surprise, and then—

"We hope so—a vast deal depends on it," said Mr. Quirk, looking over his glasses at Titmouse. Now what *he* had hinted at, as far as he could venture to do so, was a thought that glanced across his as yet unsettled brain, that there might have been invoked more than *mere earthly assistance*; but he prudently pressed the matter no farther—that was all Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap's look-out; *he* had been no party to anything of the sort, nor would he knowingly. He also observed the same sheets of paper written all over, which Mr. Gammon had filled up at his (Titmouse's) room, the night before; and several new, and old-looking, papers and parchments. Sometimes they addressed questions to him, but found it somewhat difficult to keep his attention up to anything that was said to him for the wild visions which were chasing one another through his heated brain; the passage of which said visions was not a little accelerated by the large tumbler of brandy and water which he had just taken.

"Then, in point of fact," said Mr. Quirk, as Messrs. Gammon and Snap simultaneously sat down, after having been for some time standing poring over the paper before Mr. Quirk. "This Tittlebat Titmouse's title must have accrued in 18—. That's the point—eh, Gammon?"

"Precisely so," said Mr. Gammon, calmly.

"To be sure," confidently added Snap; who having devoted himself exclusively all his life to the sharpest practice of the

criminal law, knew about as much of real property law as a snipe—but it would not have done to appear ignorant, or taking no part in the matter, in the presence of the heir-at-law, and the future great client of the House.

"Well, Mr. Titmouse," at length said Mr. Quirk, with a sort of grunt, laying aside his glasses—"if *you* turn out to be the Titmouse we have been speaking of, you are likely, through our immense exertions, to become one of the luckiest men that ever lived! We may be mistaken, but it appears to us that we shall by and by be able to put you into possession of a very fine estate in Yorkshire, worth some £10,000 or £12,000 a-year at the least!"

"You—don't—say—so!" exclaimed Titmouse, elevating his hands and opening his eyes with amazement—"Oh, gents, I do believe we're all dreaming! Is it all true, indeed?"

"It is, Mr. Titmouse—and we are very proud and happy indeed to be the honored instruments of establishing your rights, my dear sir," said Mr. Gammon, in a most impressive manner.

"Then all the money that's been spent this ten or twelve years has been *my* money, has it?"

"*If* we are right, it is undoubtedly as you say," answered Mr. Quirk, giving a quick apprehensive glance at Mr. Gammon.

"Then there'll be a jolly reckoning for some one, shortly—eh? My stars!"

"My dear Mr. Titmouse," said Mr. Gammon, gravely, "you have no more than a just regard for your own interests. There *will* be a reckoning, and a very terrible one ere long, for somebody—

but we've a vast deal to go through, and a vast deal of money to be spent, before we come to discuss *that* matter! Only let us have the unspeakable happiness of seeing you once fairly in possession of your estates, and our office shall know no rest till you have got all you may be entitled to—even to the uttermost farthing!"

"Oh, never fear our letting them rest!" said Mr. Quirk, judiciously accommodating himself to the taste and apprehension of his excited auditor—"Those that must give up the goose, must give up the giblets also—ha, ha, ha!" Messrs. Gammon and Snap echoed the laugh, duly tickled with the joke of the head of the firm.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Titmouse, immensely excited by the conjoint influence of the brandy, and the news of the night; "capital! capital! hurrah! Such goings on there will be! You're all of the right sort, gents, I see! 'Pon my life, law for ever! There's *nothing* like it! Let's all shake hands, gents! Come, if you please, all together! all friends to-night!" And the little fellow grasped each of the three readily-proffered right hands of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, with an energy that was likely to make all the high contracting parties to that quadruple alliance, remember its ratification.

"And is it all a *ready-money* affair, gents?—or *rent*, and all *that* kind of thing?" he inquired, after many eloquent expressions of delight.

"Why, almost entirely the latter," answered Mr. Quirk, "except the accumulations."

"Then, 'pon my soul—I'm a great landlord, am I?"

"Indeed, my dear Mr. Titmouse, you are—(that is, unless we have made a blunder such as—I will say—our house is not *often* in the habit of making)—and have two very fine houses, one in town and the other in the country."

"Capital! delightful! I'll live in both of them—we'll have *such* goings on!—And is it *quite* up to the mark of £10,000 a-year?"

"We really entertain no doubt at present that it is"—

"And such as that I can spend all of it, every year?"

"Certainly—no doubt of it—not the least. The rents are paid with most exemplary punctuality—at least," added Mr. Gammon, with a captivating, an irresistible smile, and taking him affectionately by the hand—"at least they *will* be, as soon as we have them fairly in *our* management."

"Oh, *you're* to get it all in for me, are you?" he inquired briskly. The three partners bowed, with the most deprecatingly-disinterested air in the world; intimating that, for *his* sake, they were ready to take upon themselves even *that* troublesome responsibility.

"Capital! couldn't be better! couldn't be better! Ah, ha, ha—you've caught the goose, and must bring me its eggs. Ah, ha, ha! a touch in *your* line, old gent!" said he, slapping Mr. Quirk's knee.

"Ha, ha, ha! excellent! ah, ha, ha!" laughed the three partners at the wit of their new client. Mr. Titmouse joined them, and snapped his fingers in the air. Then he added suddenly—

"Lord—by the way—I've just thought of Tag-rag and Company's—I seem as if I hadn't seen or heard of those gents for Lord knows how long! Only fancy old Tag-rag making me a beggar on the 10th of next month—ha, ha, ha!—I sha'n't see *that* infernal hole any more, anyhow!"

["There!" whispered Mr. Gammon, suddenly and apprehensively, in the ear of Mr. Quirk, "you hear that? A little wretch! We have been perfectly insane in going so far already with him! Is not this what I predicted?"—"I don't care," said Mr. Quirk, stubbornly. "Who first found it out, Mr. Gammon? and who's to be at the expense and responsibility? Pshaw! I know what I'm about—I'll make him knuckle down—never fear me! Caleb Quirk a'n't a man to be trifled with!"]

"*That*," continued Titmouse, snapping his fingers with an air of defiance—"for Mr. Tag-rag! *That* for Mother Squallop—Ah, ha, gents! It won't do to go back to that—eugh!—eh? will it?—you know what I mean! Fancy Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse—or Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse, *Esquire*—standing behind"—

The partners looked rather blank at this unexpected sally.

"We would venture to suggest, Mr. Titmouse," said Mr. Gammon, seriously, "the *absolute necessity* there is for everything on your part, and our parts, to go on as quietly as before, for a little time to come: to be safe and successful, my dear sir, we must be very—very *secret*."

"Oh, I see, gents! I see; mum—mum's the word, for the present! But, I *must* say, if there is any one whom I want to hear

of it, sooner than another, it's"—

"Rag-bag and Co., I suppose! ha, ha, ha!" interrupted Mr. Gammon, his partners echoing his gentle laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha! Cuss the cats—that's it—ha, ha, ha!" echoed Mr. Titmouse; who, getting up out of his chair, could not resist capering to and fro, sticking his hands on his hips, in something of the attitude of a hornpipe dancer, whistling and humming by turns, and indulging in various other wild antics.

"And now, gents—excuse me, but, to do a bit of business—when am I to *begin* scattering the shiners, eh?" he inquired, interrupting a low-toned, but somewhat vehement conversation, between the two senior partners; while Snap sat silently eyeing him like a terrier a rat coming within his reach!

"Oh, of course, sir!" replied Mr. Gammon, rather coldly, "very—considerable—delay is unavoidable. All we have done, as yet, is to discover that, as far as we are advised, and can judge, you will turn out to be the right owner; but—as we've already intimated—very extensive and expensive operations must be immediately commenced, before you can be put into possession. There are some who won't be persuaded to *part* with £10,000 a-year, Mr. Titmouse, for the mere asking!" added Mr. Gammon, with an anxious and bitter smile.

"The devil there are! *Who* are they that want to keep me any longer out of what's my own?—what's justly mine? Eh? I want to know! Haven't they kept me out long enough?—hang 'em! Put 'em in prison directly—don't spare 'em—the villains!"

"They'll probably, ere long, find their way in that direction—for how," replied Mr. Quirk, "he's ever to make up, poor devil, the mesne profits"—

"*Mean profits?*—is that all you call them, gents? 'Pon my life, it's rogue's money—villain's profits! So don't spare him—don't spare him!—he's robbed the fatherless, which I am, and an orphan. Keep me out of what's mine, indeed! Curse me if he shall, though!"

"My dear Mr. Titmouse," said Gammon, very gravely, "we are getting on too fast—dreadfully too fast. It will never do, matters of such immense importance as these cannot be hurried on, or talked of, in this way"—

"I like that, sir!—I do, by Jove!"—exclaimed Titmouse, scornfully.

"You will really, if you go on in this wild way, Mr. Titmouse, make us regret the trouble we have taken in the affair, and especially the promptness with which we have communicated to you the extent of your *possible* good fortune."

"Beg pardon, I'm sure, gents, but mean no offence: am monstrous obliged to you for what you've done for me—but, by Jove, it's taken me rather a-back, I own, to hear that I'm to be kept so long out of it all! Why can't you offer him, whoever he is that has my property, a slapping sum to go out at once? Gents, I'll own to you I'm most uncommon low—never so low in my life—devilish low! Done up, and yet it seems a'n't to get what's justly mine! What am I to do in the meanwhile? Consider *that*, gents!"

"You are rather excited just now, Mr. Titmouse," said Mr. Quirk, seriously; "suppose we now break up, and resume our conversation to-morrow, when we are all in better and calmer trim?"

"No, sir, thanking you all the same; but I think we'd better go on with it now," replied Titmouse, impetuously. "Do you think I can stoop to go back to that nasty, beastly shop, and stand behind that odious counter?—I'd almost as lieve go to the gallows!"

"Our *decided* opinion, Mr. Titmouse," said Mr. Quirk, emphatically—his other partners getting graver and graver in their looks—"that is, if our opinion is worth offering"—

"That, by Jove! remains to be seen," said Titmouse, with a pettish shake of the head.

"Well, such as it is, we offer it you; and it is, that for many reasons you must continue, for a little while longer, in your present situation"—

"What! own Tag-rag for my master—and I worth £10,000 a-year?" interrupted Titmouse, furiously.

"My dear sir, you've not *got* it yet," said Mr. Quirk, with a very bitter smile.

"Do you think you'd have told me what you have, if you weren't sure that I *should*, though? No, no! you've gone too far, by Jove!—but I shall burst, I shall! Me to go on as before!—they use me worse and worse every day. Gents, you'll excuse me—I hope you will; but business is business, gents—it is; and if you won't do mine, I must look out for them that will—'pon my soul,

I must, and"—If Mr. Titmouse could have seen, or having seen, appreciated, the looks which the three partners interchanged, on hearing this absurd, ungrateful, and insolent speech of his—the expression that flitted across their shrewd faces; that was, of intense contempt for him, hardly overmastered and concealed by a vivid perception of their own interest, which was, of course, to *manage*, to soothe, to conciliate him!

How the reptile propensities of his mean nature had thriven beneath the sudden sunshine of unexpected prosperity!—See already his selfishness, truculence, rapacity, in full play!

"So, gents," said he, after a long and keen expostulation with them on the same subject, "I'm really to go to-morrow morning to Tag-rag and Co.'s, and go on with the cursed life I led there to-day, all as if nothing had happened—ha, ha, ha!—I do so like that!"

"In your present humor, Mr. Titmouse, it would be in vain to discuss the matter," said Mr. Quirk, sternly. "Again I tell you that the course we have recommended is, in our opinion, the proper one; excuse me if I add, that you are entirely in our hands—and if I ask you—what *can* you do but adopt our advice?"

"Why, hang me if I won't employ somebody else—that's flat! S' elp me, Heaven, I will! So, good-night, gents; you'll find that Tittlebat Titmouse isn't to be trifled with!" So saying, Mr. Titmouse clapped his hat on his head, bounced out of the room, and, no attempt being made to stop him, he was in the street in a twinkling.

Mr. Gammon gazed at Mr. Quirk with a look, the significance of which the astounded old gentleman thoroughly understood—'twas compounded of triumph, reproach, and apprehension.

"Did you ever see such a little beast!" exclaimed Mr. Quirk, with an air of disgust, turning to Mr. Snap.

"Beggar on horseback!" exclaimed Snap, with a bitter sneer.

"It won't do, however," said Mr. Quirk, with a most chagrined and apprehensive air, "for him to go at large in his present frame of mind—he may ruin the thing altogether"—

"As good as £500 a-year out of the way of the office," quoth Snap.

"It cannot be helped *now*," said Mr. Gammon, with a sigh of vexation, turning to Mr. Quirk, and seizing his hat—"he must be managed—so I'll go after him instantly, and bring him back at all hazards; and we must really try and do something for him in the meanwhile, to keep him quiet till the thing's brought a little into train." So out went after Titmouse, Mr. Gammon, from whose lips dropped persuasion sweeter than honey;[3] and I should not be surprised if he were to succeed in bringing back that little stubborn piece of conceited stupidity.

As soon as Mr. Titmouse heard the street door shut after him with a kind of *bang*, he snapped his fingers once or twice, by way of letting off a little of the inflammable air that was in him, and muttered, "Pretty chaps those, upon my soul!" said he, disdainfully. "I'll expose them all! I'll apply to the lord-mayor—they're a pack of swindlers, they are! This is the way they

treat *me*, who've got a title to £10,000 a-year! To be sure"—He stood still for a moment—and another moment—and another—and then dismay came quickly over him; for the thought suddenly occurred to his partially obfuscated intellect—what *hold* had he got on Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap?—what *could* he do?—or rather, what had he done?

Ah—the golden vision of the last few hours was fading away momentarily, like a dream! Each second of his deep and rapid reflection, rendered more impetuous his desire and determination to return and make his peace with Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap. By submission for the present, he could get the whip-hand of them hereafter! He was in the act of turning round towards the office, when Mr. Gammon gently laid his hand upon the shoulder of his repentant client.

"Mr. Titmouse! my dear sir," said Mr. Gammon, softly, "what is the matter with you? How could we so misunderstand each other?"

Titmouse's small cunning was on the *qui vive*, and he saw and followed up his advantage. "I am going," said he, in a resolute tone, "to speak to some one else in the morning."

"Ah, to be sure!" replied Mr. Gammon, with a smile of utter unconcern—"I supposed as much—'tis a matter which of course, however, signifies nothing to any one—but yourself. You will take any steps, my dear sir, that occur to you, and act as you may be advised!"

"Monstrous kind of you, 'pon my life! to come and give

me such good advice!" exclaimed Titmouse, with a sneer—but consciously baffled.

"Oh, don't mention it!" said Gammon, coolly; "I came out of pure good-nature, to assure you that our office, notwithstanding what has passed, entertains not the slightest personal ill feeling towards you, in thus throwing off our hands a fearfully expensive, and most harassing enterprise—which we have feared from the first had been too rashly undertaken"—

"Hem!" exclaimed Titmouse, involuntarily, once or twice.

"So good-night, Mr. Titmouse—good-night! God bless you! and think hereafter of all this as a mere idle dream—as far as *we* are concerned!" Mr. Gammon, in the act of returning to the door, extended his hand to Mr. Titmouse, whom he instantly perceived to be melting rapidly.

"Why, sir," quoth Titmouse, with a mixture of embarrassment and alarm, "if I thought you all meant the correct thing—hem! I say, the *correct* thing by me—I shouldn't so much mind a little disappointment for the time; but you must own, Mr. Gammon, it is very hard being kept out of one's own so long—honor, now! isn't it?"

"True, very true, Mr. Titmouse. Very hard it is, indeed, to bear, and we all felt deeply for you, and would have set everything in train"—

"*Would have!* oh my stars!"—

"Yes, my dear Mr. Titmouse, we *would* have done it, and believed we could have brought you through every difficulty

—over every obstacle, prodigious though they are, and almost innumerable."

"Why—you—don't—hardly—quite—mean to say you've given it all up?—What, already! 'Pon my life! Oh Lord!" exclaimed Titmouse, in evident trepidation.

Mr. Gammon had triumphed over Mr. Titmouse! whom, nothing loath, he brought back, in two minutes' time, into the room which Titmouse had just before so insolently quitted. Mr. Quirk and Mr. Snap had now *their* parts to perform in the little scene which they had determined on enacting. They were in the act of locking up desks and drawers, evidently on the move, and received Mr. Titmouse with an air of cold surprise.

"Mr. Titmouse again!" exclaimed Mr. Quirk, taking his gloves out of his hat. "Back again!—This, sir, is quite an unexpected honor!"

"Leave anything behind?" inquired Mr. Snap, affecting to look about him—"don't *see* anything"—

"Oh no, sir! No, sir!" exclaimed Titmouse, with eager anxiety. "This gent, Mr. Gammon, and I, have made it all up, gents! I'm not angry any more—not the least, 'pon my soul I'm not—and quite forgive you—and no mistake!"

"*Angry!—Forgive!!* Mr. Titmouse!" echoed Mr. Quirk, with an air sternly ironical. "We are under great obligations to you for your forbearance!"

"Oh, come, gents!" said Titmouse, more and more disturbed, "I *was* too warm, I dare say, and—and—I ask your pardon, all

of you, gents! I won't say another word if you'll but buckle to business again—quite exactly in your own way—because you see"—

"It's growing *very* late," said Mr. Quirk, coldly, and looking at his watch; "however, after what you have said, probably at some future time, when we've *leisure* to look into the thing"—

Poor Titmouse was near dropping on his knees, in mingled agony and fright.

"May I be allowed to say," interposed the bland voice of Mr. Gammon, anxiously addressing himself to Mr. Quirk, "that Mr. Titmouse a few minutes ago assured me, outside there, that if you, as the head of the firm, could only be persuaded to permit our house to take up his case again"—

"I did—I did indeed, gents! so help me—!" interrupted Mr. Titmouse, eagerly backing with an oath the ready lie of Mr. Gammon.

Mr. Quirk, with a stern countenance, drew his hand across his chin musingly, and stood silently for a few moments, apparently irresolute.

"Well," said he at length, but very coldly, "since that is so, probably we may be induced to resume our heavy labors in your behalf; and if you will favor us with a call to-morrow night, at the same hour, we may have, by that time, made up our minds as to the course we shall think fit to adopt."

"Lord, sir, I'll be here as the clock strikes, and as meek as a mouse; and pray, have it all your own way for the future, gents—"

do!"—cried Titmouse, clasping his hands together on his breast.

"Good-night, sir—good-night!" exclaimed the partners, stiffly—motioning him towards the door.

"Good-night, gents!" said Titmouse, bowing very low, and feeling himself at the same time being—bowed *out*! As he passed out of the room, he cast a lingering look at their three frigid faces, as if they were angels sternly shutting him out from Paradise. What misery was his, as he walked slowly homeward, with much the same feelings (now that the fumes of the brandy had somewhat evaporated, and the reaction of excitement was coming on, aggravated by a recollection of the desperate check he had received) as those of a sick and troubled man, who, suddenly roused out of a delicious dream, drops into wretched reality, as it were out of a fairyland, which, with all its dear innumerable delights, is melting overhead into thin air—disappearing, *forever*!

Closet Court had never looked so odious to him as it did on his return from this memorable interview. Dreadfully distressed and harassed, he flung himself on his bed for a moment, directly he had shut his door, intending presently to rise and undress; but Sleep, having got him prostrate, secured her victory. She waved her black wand over him, and—he awoke not completely till about eight o'clock in the morning. A second long-drawn sigh was preparing to follow its predecessor, when he heard the clock strike eight, and sprang off the bed in a fright; for he ought to have been at the shop an hour before. Dashing a little water into

his face, and scarce staying to wipe it off, he ran down-stairs, through the court, and along the street, never stopping till he had found his way into—almost the very arms of the dreaded Mr. Tag-rag; who, rarely making his appearance till about half-past nine, had, as the deuce would have it, happened to come down an hour and a half earlier than usual on that particular morning, the only one out of several hundreds on which Titmouse had been more than ten minutes beyond his time.

"Yours ve-ry respectfully, Mr. Titmouse—Thomas Tag-rag!" exclaimed that personage, with mock solemnity, bowing formally to his astounded and breathless shopman.

"I—I—beg your pardon, sir; but I wasn't very well, and overslept myself," stammered Titmouse.

"Ne-ver mind, Mr. Titmouse! ne-ver mind!—it don't much signify, as it happens," interrupted Mr. Tag-rag, bitterly; "you've just got an hour and a half to take this piece of silk, with my compliments, to Messrs. Shuttle and Weaver, in Dirt Street, Spitalfields, and ask them if they aren't ashamed to send it to a West-end house like mine; and bring back a better piece instead of it! D' ye *hear*, sir?"

"Yes, sir—but—am I to go before my breakfast, sir?"

"Did I say a word about breakfast, sir? You heard my orders, sir; you can attend to them or not, Mr. Titmouse, as you please!"

Off trotted Titmouse *instanter*, without his breakfast; and so Tag-rag gained one object he had had in view. Titmouse found this rather trying: a four-mile walk before him, with

no inconsiderable load under his arm; having, moreover, had nothing to eat since the preceding evening, when he had partaken of a delicate repast of thick slices of bread, smeared slightly over with somewhat high-flavored salt butter, and moistened with a most astringent decoction of *quasi* tea-leaves sweetened with brown sugar, and discolored with sky-blue milk. He had not even a farthing about him wherewith to buy a penny roll! As he went disconsolately along, so many doubts and fears buzzed impetuously about him, that they completely darkened his little soul, and bewildered his petty understanding. *Ten Thousand a-Year!*—it could never be meant for the like of *him!* He soon worked himself into a conviction that the whole thing was infinitely too good to be true; the affair was desperate; it had been all moonshine; for some cunning purpose or another, Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, had been—ah, here he was within a few yards of their residence, the scene of last night's tragic transactions! As he passed Saffron Hill, he paused, looked up towards the blessed abode,

"Where centred all his hopes and fears,"—

uttered a profound sigh, and passed slowly on towards Smithfield. The words "*Quirk, Gammon, and Snap,*" seemed to be written over every shop-window which he passed—their images filled his mind's eye. What could they be at? They had been all very polite and friendly at first—and of their own

seeking: but he had affronted them. How coldly and proudly they had parted with him over-night, although they had professed themselves reconciled to him! It was evident that they would stand no nonsense—they were great lawyers; so he must (if they really would allow him to see them again) eat humble pie cheerfully till he had got all that they had to give him. How he dreaded the coming night! Perhaps they intended civilly to tell him that, since seeing him, they would have nothing more to do with him; they would get the estate for themselves, or some one else who would be more manageable! They had taken care to tell him nothing at all about the nature of his pretensions to this grand fortune. Oh, how crafty they were—they had it all their own way!—But what, after all, had he really done? The estates were his, if they were really in earnest—his and no one's else; and why should he be kept out of them at their will and pleasure? Suppose he were to say he would give them all he was entitled to for £20,000 down, in cash? Oh no; on second thoughts, that would be only two years' income! But on the other hand—he dared hardly even propose it to his thoughts—still, suppose it *should* really all turn out true! Goodness gracious!—that day two months he might be riding about in his carriage in the Parks, and poor devils looking on at *him*, as he now looked on all those who now rode there. There he would be, holding up his head with the best of them, instead of slaving as he was that moment, carrying about that cursed bundle—ough! how he shrunk with disgust as he changed its position, to relieve his aching right arm! Why was his mouth to

be stopped—why might he not tell his shopmates? What would he not give for the luxury of telling it to the odious Tag-rag? If he *were* to do so, Mr. Tag-rag, he was sure, would ask him to dinner the very next Sunday, at his country house at Clapham!—Ah, ha!—Thoughts such as these so occupied his mind, that he did not for a long while observe that he was walking at a rapid rate towards the Mile-end road, having left Whitechapel church nearly half a mile behind him! The possible master of £10,000 a-year was nearly dropping with fatigue, and sudden apprehension of the storm he should have to encounter when he first saw Mr. Tag-rag after so unduly prolonged an absence on his errand. He was detained for a cruel length of time at Messrs. Shuttle and Weaver's; who, not having the exact kind of silk required by their imperious customer at that moment on their premises, had some difficulty in obtaining it, after having sent for it to one or two neighboring manufactories; by which means it came to pass that it was two o'clock before Titmouse, completely exhausted, had returned to Tag-rag and Company's. The gentlemen of the shop had finished their dinners.

"Go up-stairs and get your dinner, sir!" exclaimed Tag-rag, sternly, after having received Messrs. Shuttle and Weaver's obsequious message of apologies and hopes.

Titmouse having laid down his heavy bundle on the counter, went up-stairs hungry enough, and found himself the sole occupant of the long close-smelling room in which his companions had been recently dining. His dinner was presently

brought to him by a slatternly slipshod servant-girl. It was in an uncovered basin, which appeared to contain nothing but the leavings of his companions—a savory intermixture of cold potatoes, broken meat, (chiefly bits of fat and gristle,) a little hot water having been thrown over it to make it appear warm and fresh—(faugh!) His plate (with a small pinch of salt upon it) had not been cleaned after its recent use, but evidently only hastily smeared over with a greasy towel, as also seemed his knife and fork, which, in their disgusting state, he was fain to put up with—the table-cloth on which he might have wiped them, having been removed. A hunch of bread that seemed to have been tossing about in the pan for days, and half a pint of turbid table-beer, completed the fare set before him; opposite which he sat for some minutes, too much occupied with his reflections to commence his repast. He was in the act of scooping out of the basin some of its inviting contents, when—"Titmouse!" exclaimed the voice of one of his shopmates, peering in at him through the half-opened door, "Mr. Tag-rag wants you! He says you've had plenty of time to finish your dinner!"

"Oh, tell him, then, I'm only just beginning my dinner—eugh! such as it is," replied Titmouse, sulkily.

In a few minutes' time Mr. Tag-rag himself entered the room, stuttering with fury—"How much longer, sir, may it be your pleasure to spend over your dinner, eh?"

"Not another moment, sir," answered Titmouse, looking with unaffected loathing and disgust at the savory victuals before him;

"if you'll only allow me a few minutes to go home and buy a penny roll instead of all this"—

"Ve—ry good, sir! Ve—ry parti—cu—larly good, Mr. Titmouse," replied Tag-rag, with ill-subdued rage; "anything else that I can make a *leetle* memorandum of—against the day of—your leaving us?"

This hint of twofold terror, *i. e.* of withholding on the ground of misconduct the wretched balance of salary which might be then due to him, and of also giving him a damning character—dispelled the small remains of Titmouse's appetite, and he rose to return to the shop, involuntarily clutching his fist as he brushed close past the tyrant Tag-rag on the stairs, whom he would have been delighted to pitch down head-foremost. If he *had* done so, none of his fellow-slaves below, in spite of their present sycophancy towards Tag-rag, would have shown any particular alacrity in picking up their common oppressor. Poor Tittlebat resumed his old situation behind the counter; but how different his present, from his former air and manner! With his pen occasionally peeping pertly out of his bushy hair over his right ear, and his yard-measure in his hand, no one, till the previous Monday morning, had been more cheerful, smirking, and nimble than Tittlebat Titmouse: alas, how chopfallen now! None of his companions could make him out, or guess what was in the wind; so they very justly concluded that he had been doing something dreadfully disgraceful, the extent of which was known to Tag-rag and himself alone. Their jeers and banter were giving place to

cold distrustful looks, which were far more trying to bear. How he longed to be able to burst upon their astounded minds with the pent-up intelligence that was silently racking and splitting his little bosom! But if he did—the terrible firm of Quirk, Gammon, and Snap—Oh! the very thought of them glued his lips together. There was *one*, however, of whom he might surely make a confidant—the excellent Huckaback, with whom he had had no opportunity of communicating since Sunday night. That gentleman was as close a prisoner at the establishment of Diaper and Sarsenet, in Tottenham-court Road, as Titmouse at Messrs. Tag-rag's, of which said establishment he was, by the way, quite as great an ornament as Titmouse of Messrs. Tag-rag's. They were of about the same height, and equals in vulgar puppyism of manners, dress, and appearance; but Titmouse was certainly the better-looking. With equal conceit apparent in their faces, that of Huckaback, square, flat, and sallow, had an expression of ineffable impudence, made a lady shudder, and a gentleman feel a tingling sensation in his right toe. About his small black eyes there was a glimmer of low cunning;—but he is not of sufficient importance to be painted any further. When Titmouse left the shop that night, a little after nine, he hurried to his lodgings, to make himself as imposing in his appearance before Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, as his time and means would admit of. Behold, on a table lay a letter from Huckaback. It was written in a flourishing mercantile hand; and here is a *verbatim* copy of it:

"Dear Tit,

"Hope you are well, which is what I can only middling say in respect of me. Such a row with my governors as I have had to-day! I thought that as I had been in the House near upon Eighteen Months at £25 per annum, I might nat'rally ask for £30 a-year (which is what my Predecessor had) when, would you believe it, Mr. Sharpeye (who is going to be taken in as a Partner,) to whom I named the thing, ris up in rage against me, and I were had up into the counting-house, where both the governors was, and they gave it me in such a way that you never saw nor heard of; but it wasn't all on their own side, as you know me too well to think of. You would have thought I had been a-going to rob the house. They said I was most oudacious, and all that, and ungrateful, and what would I have next? Mr. Diaper said times was come to such a pitch!! since when he was first in the business, for salaries, says he, is ris to double, and not half the work done that was, and no gratitude—(cursed old curmudgeon!) He said if I left them just now, I might whistle for a character, except one that I should not like; but if he don't mind I'll give him a touch of law about that—which brings me to what happened to-day with *our* lawyers, Titty, the people at Saffron Hill, whom I thought I would call in on to-day, being near the neighborhood with some light goods, to see how affairs was getting on, and stir them up a bit"—

This almost took Titmouse's breath away—

—"feeling most *interested* on your account, as you know, dear Tit, I do. I said I wanted to speak to one of the

gentlemen on business of wital importance; whereat I was quickly shown into a room where two gents was sitting. Having put down my parcel for a minute on the table, I said I was a very partic'lar friend of yours, and had called in to see how things went on about the advertisement; whereat you never saw in your life how struck they looked, and stared at one another in speechless silence, till they said to me, what concerned me about the business? or something of that nature, but in such a way that *ris* a *rage* in me directly, all for your sake, (for I did not like the looks of things;) and says I, I said, we would let them know we were not to be *gammoned*; whereat up rose the youngest of the two, and ringing the bell, he says to a tight-laced young gentleman with a pen behind his ear, 'Show this fellow to the door,' which I was at once; but, in doing so, let out a little of my mind to them. They're no better than they should be, you see if they are; but when we touch the property, we'll show them who is their masters, which consoles me. Good-by, keep your sperrits up, and I will call and tell you more about it on Sunday. So farewell (I write this at Mr. Sharpeye's desk, who is coming down from dinner directly, the beast!)
—Your true friend,
"R. Huckaback.

"P. S.—Met a young Jew last night with a lot of prime cigars, and (knowing he *must* have stole them—betwixt you, and I, and the Post—they looked so good at the price,) I bought one shilling's worth for me, and two shillings' worth for you, your salary being higher, and to say nothing of your

chances."

All that part of the foregoing letter which related to its gifted writer's interview with Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, Titmouse read in a kind of spasm—he could not draw a breath, and felt a choking sensation coming over him. After a while, "I may spare myself," thought he, "the trouble of rigging out—Huckaback has done my business for me with Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap!—Mine will only be a walk in vain!" And this cursed call of Huckaback's, too, to have happened after what had occurred last night between Titmouse and them!! and so urgently as he had been enjoined to keep the matter to himself! Of course, Huckaback would seem to have been sent by him; seeing he appeared to have assumed the hectoring tone which Titmouse had tried so vainly over-night, and now so bitterly repented of; and he had no doubt grossly insulted the arbiters of Titmouse's destiny, (for he knew Huckaback's impudence)—he had even said that he (Titmouse) would not be gammoned by them! But time was pressing—the experiment must be made; and with a beating heart he scrambled into a change of clothes—bottling up his wrath against the unconscious Huckaback till he should see that worthy. In a miserable state of mind he set off soon after for Saffron Hill at a quick pace, which soon became a trot, and often sharpened into a downright run. He saw, heard, and thought of nothing, as he hurried along Oxford Street and Holborn, but Quirk, Gammon, Snap, and Huckaback, and the reception which the last-mentioned gentleman might have

secured for him—if, indeed, he was to be received at all. The magical words, *Ten Thousand a-year*, had not disappeared from the field of his troubled vision; but how faintly and dimly they shone!—like the Pleiades coldly glistening through intervening mists far off—oh! at what a stupendous, immeasurable, and hopeless distance! Imagine those stars gazed at by the anguished and despairing eyes of the bereaved lover, madly believing one of them to contain her who has just departed from his arms, and from this world, and you may form a notion of the agonizing feelings—the absorbed contemplation of one dear, dazzling, but distant object, experienced on this occasion by Mr. Titmouse. No, no; I don't mean seriously to pretend that so grand a thought as this *could* be entertained by his little optics intellectual; you might as well suppose the tiny eye of a black beetle to be scanning the vague, fanciful, and mysterious figure and proportions of Orion, or a kangaroo to be perusing and pondering over the immortal *Principia*. I repeat, that I have no desire of the sort, and am determined not again foolishly to attempt fine writing, which I now perceive to be entirely out of my line. In language more befitting me and my subject, I may be allowed to say that there is no getting the contents of a quart into a pint pot; that Titmouse's mind was a half-pint—and it was brim-full. All the while that I have been going on thus, however, Titmouse was hurrying down Holborn at a rattling rate. When at length he had reached Saffron Hill, he was in a bath of perspiration. His face was quite red; he breathed hard; his heart beat violently; he had

got a stitch in his side; and he could not get his gloves on his hot and swollen hands. He stood for a moment with his hat off, wiping his reeking forehead, and endeavoring to recover himself a little, before entering the dreaded presence to which he had been hastening. He even fancied for a moment that his eyes gave out sparks of light. While thus pausing, St. Andrew's Church struck ten, half electrifying Titmouse, who bolted up Saffron Hill, and was soon standing opposite the door. How the sight of it smote him, as it reminded him of the way in which, on the preceding night, he had bounced out of it! But that could not now be helped; so *ring* went the bell; as softly, however, as he could; for he recollected that it was a very loud bell, and he did not wish to offend. He stood for some time, and nobody answered. He waited for nearly two minutes, and trembled, assailed by a thousand vague fears. He might not, however, have rung loudly enough—so—again, a little louder, did he venture to ring. Again he waited. There seemed something threatening in the great brass plate on the door, out of which "Quirk, Gammon, and Snap" appeared to look at him ominously. While he thought of it, by the way, there was something very serious and stern in all their faces—he wondered that he had not noticed it before. What a drunken beast he had been to go on in their presence as he had! thought he; then Huckaback's image flitted across his disturbed fancy. "Ah!" thought he, "that's the thing!—that's it, depend upon it: this door will never be opened to *me* again—he's done for me!" He breathed faster, clinched his fist, and involuntarily raised it

in a menacing way, when he heard himself addressed—"Oh! dear me, sir, I *hope* I haven't kept you waiting," said the old woman whom he had before seen, fumbling in her pocket for the door-key. She had been evidently out shopping, having a plate in her left hand, over which her apron was partially thrown. "Hope you've not been ringing long, sir!"

"Oh dear! no ma'am," replied Titmouse, with anxious civility, and a truly miserable smile—"Afraid I may have kept *them* waiting," he added, almost dreading to hear the answer.

"Oh no, sir, not at all—they've all been gone since a little after nine; but there's a letter I was to give you!" She opened the door; Titmouse nearly dropping with fright. "I'll get it for you, sir—let me see, where did I put it?—Oh, in the clerk's room, I think." Titmouse followed her in. "Dear me—where can it be?" she continued, peering about, and then snuffing the long wick of the candle, which she had left burning for the last quarter of an hour, during her absence. "I *hope* none of the clerks has put it away in mistake! Well, it isn't *here*, anyhow."

"Perhaps, ma'am, it's in their *own* room," suggested Titmouse, in a faint tone.

"Oh, p'r'aps it is!" she replied. "We'll go and see"—and she led the way, followed closely by Titmouse, who caught his breath spasmodically as he passed the green-baize door. Yes, there was the room—the scene of last night was transacted there, and came crowding over his recollection—there was the green-shaded candlestick—the table covered with papers—an arm-

chair near it, in which, probably, Mr. Quirk had been sitting only an hour before to write the letter they were now in quest of, and which might be to forbid him their presence forever! How dreary and deserted the room looked, thought he as he peered about it in search of the dreaded letter!

"Oh, here it is!—well, I never!—who could have put it here, now? I'm sure I didn't. Let me see—it was, no doubt"—said the old woman, holding the letter in one hand and putting the other to her head.

"Never mind, ma'am," said Titmouse, stretching his hand towards her—"now we've got it, it don't much signify." She gave it to him. "Seem *particularly* anxious for me to get it—did they, ma'am?" he inquired, with a strong effort to appear unconcerned—the dreaded letter quite quivering, the while, in his fingers.

"No, sir—Mr. Quirk only said I was to give it you when you called. B'lieve they sent it to you, but the clerk said he couldn't find your place out; by the way, (excuse me, sir,) but yours *is* a funny name! How I heard 'em laughing at it, to be sure! What makes people give such queer names? Would you like to read it here, sir?—you're welcome."

"No, thank you, ma'am—it's of not the *least* consequence," he replied, with a desperate air; and tossing it with attempted carelessness into his hat, which he put on his head, he very civilly wished her good-night, and departed—very nearly inclined to sickness, or faintness, or something of the sort, which the fresh air might perhaps dispel. He quickly espied a lamp at a corner,

which promised to afford him an uninterrupted opportunity of inspecting his letter. He took it out of his hat. It was addressed—simply, "Mr. Titmouse, *Cocking Court*, Oxford Street," (which accounted, perhaps, for the clerk's having been unable to find it;) and having been opened with trembling eagerness, thus it read:—

"Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, present their compliments to Mr. Titmouse, and are anxious to save him the trouble of his intended visit this evening.

"They exceedingly regret that obstacles (which it is to be hoped, however, may not prove *ultimately* insurmountable) exist in the way of their prosecuting their intended inquiries on behalf of Mr. Titmouse.

"Since their last night's interview with him, circumstances, which they could not have foreseen, and over which they have no control, have occurred, which render it unnecessary for Mr. T. to give himself any more anxiety in the affair—at least, not until he shall have heard from Messrs. Q. G. and S.

"If anything of importance *should* hereafter transpire, it is not improbable that Mr. T. may hear from them.

"They were favored, this afternoon, with a visit from Mr. T.'s friend—a Mr. Hucklebottom."

"Saffron Hill, Wednesday Evening, 12th July 18—."

When poor Titmouse had finished reading over this vague, frigid, and disheartening note a second time, a convulsive sob or two pierced his bosom, indicative of its being indeed swollen with sorrow; and at length, overcome by his feelings, he cried

bitterly—not checked even by the occasional exclamations of one or two passers-by. He could not at all control himself. He felt as if he could have almost relieved himself, by banging his head against the wall! A tumultuous feeling of mingled grief and despair prevented his thoughts, for a long while, from settling on any one idea or object. At length, when the violence of the storm had somewhat abated, on concluding a third perusal of the death-warrant to all his hopes, which he held in his hand, his eye lit upon the strange word which was intended to designate his friend Huckaback; and it instantly changed both the kind of his feelings, and the current in which they had been rushing. Grief became rage; and the stream foamed in quite a new direction—namely, towards Huckaback. That accursed fellow he considered to be the sole cause of the direful disaster which had befallen him. He utterly lost sight of one circumstance, which one might have imagined likely to have occurred to his thoughts at such a time—viz. his own offensive and insolent behavior over-night to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap. Yet so it was:—yes, upon the devoted (but unconscious) head of Huckaback, was the lightning rage of Tittlebat Titmouse doomed to descend. The fire that was thus quickly kindled within, soon dried up the source of his tears. He crammed the letter into his pocket, and started off at once in the direction of Leicester Square, breathing rage at every step—*viresque acquirens eundo*. His hands kept convulsively clinching together as he pelted along. Hotter and hotter became his rage as he neared the

residence of Huckaback. When he had reached it, he sprang up-stairs; knocked at his *quondam* friend's door; and on the instant of its being—doubtless somewhat surprisedly—opened by Huckaback, who was undressing, Titmouse sprang towards him, let fly a goodly number of violent blows upon his face and breast—and down fell Huckaback upon the bed behind him, insensible, and bleeding profusely from his nose.

"There! there!"—gasped Titmouse, breathless and exhausted, discharging a volley of oaths and opprobrious epithets at the victim of his fury. "Do it again! You will, won't you? *You'll* go—and meddle again in other people's—you—cu-cu-cursed officious"—but his rage was spent—the paroxysm was over; the silent and bleeding figure of Huckaback was before his eyes; and he gazed at him, terror-stricken. What had he done! He sank down on the bed beside Huckaback—then started up, wringing his hands, and staring at him in an ecstasy of remorse and fright. It was rather singular that the noise of such an assault should have roused no one to inquire into it; but so it was. Frightened almost out of his bewildered senses, he closed and bolted the door; and addressed himself, as well as he was able, to the recovering of Huckaback. After propping him up, and splashing cold water into his face, Titmouse at length discovered symptoms of restoration to consciousness, which he anxiously endeavored to accelerate, by putting to the lips of the slowly-reviving victim of his violence some cold water, in a tea-cup. He swallowed a little; and soon afterwards, opening his eyes, stared on Titmouse with a dull eye

and bewildered air.

"What's been the matter?" at length he faintly inquired.

"Oh, Hucky! so glad to hear you speak again. It's I—I—Titty! I did it! Strike me, Hucky, as soon as you're well enough! Do—kick me—anything you choose! I won't hinder you!" cried Titmouse, sinking on his knees, and clasping his hands together, as he perceived Huckaback rapidly reviving.

"Why, what *is* the matter?" repeated that gentleman, with a wondering air, raising his hand to his nose, from which the blood was still trickling. The fact is, that he had lost his senses, probably from the suddenness, rather than the violence of the injuries which he had received.

"I did it all—yes, I did!" continued Titmouse, gazing on him with a look of agony and remorse.

"Why, I can't be awake—I can't!" said Huckaback, rubbing his eyes, and then staring at his wet and blood-stained shirt-front and hands.

"Oh yes, you are—you are!" groaned Titmouse; "and I'm going *mad* as fast as I can! Do what you like to me! Kick me if you please! Call in a constable! Send me to jail! Say I came to rob you—anything—blow me if I care what becomes of me!"

"Why, what *does* all this jabber mean, Titmouse?" inquired Huckaback, sternly, and apparently meditating reprisals.

"Oh, yes, I see! Now you *are* going to give it me! but I won't stir. So hit away, Hucky."

"Why—are you mad?" inquired Huckaback, grasping him by

the collar rather roughly.

"Yes, quite! Mad!—ruined!—gone to the devil all at once!"

"And what if you are? What did it matter to *me*? What brought you here?" continued Huckaback, in a tone of increasing vehemence. "What have I done to offend you? How *dare* you come *here*? And at this time of night, too? Eh?"

"What, indeed! Oh lud, oh lud, oh lud! Kick me, I say—strike me! You'll do me good, and bring me to my senses. *Me* to do all this to you! And we've been such precious good friends always. I'm a brute, Hucky—I've been mad, stark mad, Hucky—and that's all I can say!"

Huckaback stared at him more and more; and began at length to suspect how matters stood—namely, that the Sunday's incident had turned Titmouse's head—he having also, no doubt, heard some desperate bad news during the day, smashing all his hopes. A mixture of emotions kept Huckaback silent. Astonishment—apprehension—doubt—pride—pique—resentment. He had been *struck*—his blood had been drawn—by the man there before him on his knees, formerly his friend; now, he supposed, a madman.

"Why, curse me, Titmouse, if I can make up my mind what to do to you!" he exclaimed, "I—I suppose you are going mad, or gone mad, and I must forgive you. But get away with you—out with you, or—or—I'll call in"—

"Forgive me—forgive me, dear Hucky! Don't send me away—I shall go and drown myself if you do."

"What the d—I do I care if you do? You'd much better have gone and done it before you came here. Nay, be off and do it *now*, instead of blubbering here in this way."

"Go on! go on!—it's doing me good—the worse the better!" sobbed Titmouse.

"Come, come," said Huckaback, roughly, "none of this noise here. I'm tired of it!"

"But, pray, don't send me away from you. I shall go straight to the devil if you do! I've no friend but you, Hucky. Yet I've been such a villain to you!—But it quite put the devil into me, when all of a sudden I found it was *you*."

"Me!—Why, what *are* you after?" interrupted Huckaback, with an air of angry wonder.

"Oh dear, dear!" groaned Titmouse; "if I've been a brute to you, which is quite true, *you've* been the *ruin* of me, clean! I'm clean done for, Huck. Cleaned out! You've done my business for me; knocked it all on the head!—I sha'n't never hear any more of it—they've said as much in their letter—they say you called to-day"—

Huckaback now began to have a glimmering notion of his having been, in some considerable degree, connected with the mischief of the day—an unconscious agent in it. He audibly drew in his breath, as it were, as he more and more distinctly recollected his visit to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap; and adverted more particularly to his *threats*, uttered, too, in Titmouse's name, and as if by his authority. Whew! here was a

kettle of fish.

Now, strange and unaccountable as, at first thought, it may appear, the very circumstance which one should have thought calculated to assuage his resentment against Titmouse—namely, that he had really *injured* Titmouse most seriously, (if not indeed irreparably,) and so *provoked* the drubbing which had just been administered to him—had quite the contrary effect. Paradoxical as it may seem, matter of clear mitigation was at once converted into matter of aggravation. Were the feelings which Huckaback then experienced, akin to that which often produces hatred of a person whom one has injured? May it be thus accounted for? That there is a secret satisfaction in the mere consciousness of being a sufferer—a martyr—and that, too, in the presence of a person whom one perceives to be aware that he has wantonly injured one; that one's bruised spirit is soothed by the sight of his remorse—by the consciousness that he is punishing himself infinitely more severely than *we* could punish him; and of the claim one has obtained to the *sympathy* of everybody who sees, or may hear of one's sufferings, (that rich and grateful balm to injured feeling.) But when, as in the case of Huckaback, feelings of this description (in a coarse and small way, to be sure, according to his kind) were suddenly encountered by a consciousness of his having *deserved* his sufferings; when the martyr felt himself quickly sinking into the culprit and offender; when, I say, Huckaback felt an involuntary consciousness that the gross indignities which Titmouse had just inflicted on him, had

been justified by the provocation—nay, had been far less than his mischievous and impudent interference had deserved;—and when feelings of this sort, moreover, were sharpened by a certain tingling sense of physical pain from the blows which he had received—the result was, that the sleeping lion of Huckaback's courage was very nearly awakening.

"*I've half a mind, Titmouse*"—said Huckaback, knitting his brows, fixing his eyes, and appearing inclined to raise his arm. There was an ominous pause for a moment or two, during which Titmouse's feelings also underwent a slight alteration. His allusion to Huckaback's ruinous insult to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, unconsciously converted his remorse into rage, which it rather, perhaps, resuscitated. Titmouse rose from his knees. "Ah!" said he, in quite an altered tone, "you *may* look fierce! you may!—you'd better strike me, Huckaback—do! Finish the mischief you've begun this day! Hit away—you're quite safe"—and he secretly prepared himself for the mischief which—did not come. "You *have* ruined me! you have, Huckaback!" he continued with increasing vehemence; "and I shall be cutting my throat—nay," striking his fist on the table, "I will!"

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Huckaback, apprehensively. "No, Titmouse, don't—don't think of it; it will all come right yet, depend on't; you see if it don't!"

"Oh, no, it's all done for—it's all up with me!"

"But *what's* been done?—let us hear," said Huckaback, as

he passed a wet towel to and fro over his ensanguined features. It was by this time clear that the storm which had for some time given out only a few faint fitful flashes or flickerings in the distance, had passed away. Titmouse, with many grievous sighs, took out the letter which had produced the paroxysms I have been describing, and read it aloud. "And only see how they've spelled your name, Huckaback—look!" he added, handing his friend the letter.

"How *partic'lar* vulgar!" exclaimed Huckaback, with a contemptuous air, which, overspreading his features, half-closed as was his left eye, and swollen as were his cheek and nose, would have made him a queer object to one who had leisure to observe such matters. "And so *this* is all they say of *me*," he continued. "How do you come to know that I've been doing you mischief? All I did was just to look in, as respectful as possible, to ask how you was, and they very civilly told me you was very well, and we parted"—

"Nay, now, that's a lie, Huckaback, and you know it!" interrupted Titmouse.

"It's true, so help me—!" vehemently asseverated Huckaback.

"Why, perhaps you'll deny that you wrote and told me all you said," interrupted Titmouse, indignantly, feeling in his pocket for Huckaback's letter, which that worthy had at the moment quite forgotten having sent, and on being reminded of it, he certainly seemed rather nonplussed. "Oh—ay, if you mean *that*—hem!"—he stammered.

"Come, you *know* you're a liar, Huck—but it's no good now: liar or no liar, it's all over."

"The pot and kettle, anyhow, Tit, as far as that goes—hem!—but let's spell over this letter; we haven't studied it yet; I'm a hand, rather, at getting at what's said in a letter!—Come"—and they drew their chairs together, Huckaback reading over the letter slowly, alone; Titmouse's eyes travelling incessantly from his friend's countenance to the letter, and so back again, to gather what might be the effect of its perusal.

"There's a glimpse of daylight yet, Titty!" said Huckaback, as he concluded reading it.

"No! But is there really? Do tell me, Hucky"—

"Why, first and foremost, how uncommon polite they are, (except that they haven't manners enough to spell my name right)"—

"Really—and so they are!" exclaimed Titmouse, rather elatedly.

"And then, you see, there's another thing—if they'd meant to give the thing the go-by altogether, what could have been easier than to say so?—but they haven't said anything of the sort, so they don't *mean* to give it all up!"

"Lord, Huck! what would I give for such a head as yours! What you say is quite true," said Titmouse, still more cheerfully.

"To be sure, they do say there's an *obstacle*—an obstacle, you see—nay, it's obstacles, which is several, and that"—Titmouse's face fell.

"But they say again, that it's—it's—curse their big words—they say it's—to be got over in time."

"Well—that's something, isn't it?"

"To be sure it is; and a'n't anything better than nothing? But then, again, here's a stone in the other pocket—they say there's a *circumstance!*—don't you hate circumstances, Titty?—I do."

"So do I!—What does it mean? I've often heard—isn't it a *thing?* And that may be—anything."

"Oh, there's a great dif—hem! And they go on to say it's happened since you was there"—

"Curse me, then, if that don't mean *you*, Huckaback!" interrupted Titmouse, with returning anger.

"No, that can't be it; they said they'd no control over the circumstance;—now they *had* over me; for they ordered me to the door, and I went; a'n't that so, Titty?—Lord, how my eye *does* smart, to be sure!"

"And don't I smart all over, inside and out, if it comes to that?" inquired Titmouse, dolefully.

"There's nothing particular in the rest of the letter—only uncommon civil, and saying if anything turns up you shall hear."

"*I* could make that out myself—so there's nothing in that"—said Titmouse, quickly.

"Well—if it *is* all over—what a pity! Such things as we could have done, Titty, if we'd got the thing—eh?"

Titmouse groaned at this glimpse of the heaven he seemed shut out of forever.

"Can't you find anything—nothing at all comfortable-like, in the letter?" he inquired with a deep sigh.

Huckaback again took up the letter and spelled it over.

"Well," said he, striving to give himself an appearance of thinking, "there's something in it that, after all, I don't seem quite to get to the bottom of—they've seemingly taken a deal of pains with it!"

[And undoubtedly it *was* a document which had been pretty well considered by its framers before being sent out; though, probably, they had hardly anticipated its being so soon afterwards subjected to the scrutiny of such acute intellects as were now engaged upon it.]

"And then, again, you know they're lawyers; and do *they* ever write anything that hasn't got more in it than anybody can find out? These gents that wrote this, they're a trick too keen for the thieves even—and how can *we*—hem!—but I wonder if that fat, old, bald-headed gent, with sharp eyes, was Mr. Quirk"—

"To be sure it was," interrupted Titmouse, with a half shudder.

"Was it? Well, then, I'd advise Old Nick to look sharp before he tackles that old gent, that's all!"

"Give me Mr. Gammon for my money," said Titmouse, sighing, "such an *uncommon* gentlemanlike gent—he's quite taken to me"—

"Ah, that, I suppose, was him with the black velvet waistcoat, and pretty white hands! But *he* can look stern, too, Tit! You should have seen him ring, when—hem!—But what was I saying

about the letter? Don't you see they say they'll be sure to write if anything turns up?"

"So they do, to be sure! Well—I'd forgot that!" interrupted Titmouse, brightening up.

"Then, isn't there their advertisement in the *Flash*? They hadn't their eye on anything when they put it there, I dare say!—They can't get out of *that*, anyhow!"

"I begin to feel all of a sweat, Hucky; I'm sure there's something in the wind yet!" said Titmouse, drawing nearer still to his comforter. "And more than that—would they have said half they did to me last night"—

"Eh! hollo, by the way! I've not heard of what went on last night! So you went to 'em? Well—tell us all that happened—and nothing but the truth, be *sure* you don't; come, Titty!" said Huckaback, snuffing the candle, and then turning eagerly to his companion.

"Well—they'd such a number of queer-looking papers before them, some with old German-text writing, and others with zigzag marks—and they were so uncommon polite—they all three got up as I went in, and made me bows, one after the other, and said, 'Yours most obediently, Mr. Titmouse,' and a great many more such things."

"Well—and then?"

"Why, Hucky, so help me—! and 'pon my soul, that old gent, Mr. Quirk, told me"—Titmouse's voice trembled at the recollection—"he says, 'Sir, you're the real owner of Ten

Thousand a-year, and no mistake!"

"Lawks!" ejaculated Huckaback, opening wider and wider his eyes and ears as his friend went on.

"And a title—a *lord*, or something of that sort—and you've a great many country seats; and there's been £10,000 a-year saving up for you ever since you was born—and heaps of interest besides!—'pon my soul he did!"

"Lord, Tit! you take my breath away," gasped Huckaback, his eyes fixed intently on his friend's face.

"Yes; and they said I might marry the most beautifulest woman that ever my eyes saw, for the asking."

"You'll forget poor Bob Huckaback, Tit!" murmured his friend, despondingly.

"Not I, Huckaback—if I get my rights, and you know how to behave yourself!"

"Have you been to Tag-rag's to-day, after hearing all this?"

[The thermometer seemed to have been here plunged out of hot water into cold—Titmouse was down at zero in a trice.]

"Oh!—that's it! 'Tis all gone again! What a fool I am! We've clean forgot this cursed letter—and that leads me to the end of what took place last night. That cursed shop was what we split on!"

"Split on *the shop*! eh? What's the meaning of that?" inquired Huckaback, with eager anxiety.

"Why, that's the thing," continued Titmouse, in a faltering tone, and with a depressed look—"That was what I wanted to

know myself; for they said I'd better go back!! So I said, 'Gents,' said I, 'I'll be— if I'll go back to the shop any more;' and I snapped my fingers at them—so! (for you know what a chap I am when my blood's up.) And they all turned gashly pale—they did, upon my life—you never saw anything like it! And one of them said then, in a humble way, 'Wouldn't I please to go back to the shop, just for a day or two, till things is got to rights a bit.' 'Not a day nor a minute!' says I, in an immense rage. 'We think you'd better, really,' said they. 'Then,' says I, 'if that's your plan, curse me if I won't cut with you all, and I'll employ some one else!' and— would you believe me?—out I went, bang! into the street!!"

"You *did*, Tit!!" echoed Huckaback, aghast.

"They shouldn't have given me so much brandy and water as they did; I didn't well know what I was about, what with the news and the spirits!"

"And you went into the street?" inquired Huckaback, with a kind of horror.

"I did, by Jove, Hucky!"

"They'd given you the sperrits to see what kind of chap you'd be if you got the property—only to try you, depend on it!"

"Lord! I—I dare say they did!" exclaimed Titmouse, elevating his head with sudden amazement, totally forgetting that same brandy and water he had asked for—"and me never to think of it at the time."

"Now are you quite sure you wasn't in a *dream* last night, all the while?"

"Oh, dear, I wish I had been—I do, indeed, Hucky!"

"Well—you went into the street—what then?" inquired Huckaback, with a sigh of exhausted attention.

"Why, when I'd got there, I could have bitten my tongue off, as one may suppose; but, just as I was a-turning to go in again, who should come up to me but Mr. Gammon, saying, he humbly hoped there was no offence."

"Oh, glorious! So it was all set right again, then—eh?"

"Why—I—I can't quite exactly say that much, either—but—when I went back, (being obligated by Mr. Gammon being so pressing,) the other two was sitting as pale as death; and though Mr. Gammon and me went on our knees to the old gent, it wasn't any use for a long time; and all that he could be got to say was, that perhaps I might look in again to-night—(but they first made me swear a solemn oath on the Bible never to tell any one anything about the fortune)—and then—you went, Huckaback, and you did the business; they of course concluding I'd sent you!"

"Oh, bother! that can't be. Don't you see how civilly they speak of me in their letter? They're afraid of me, you may depend on it. By the way, Tit, how much did you promise to come down, if you got the thing?"

"*Come down!*—I—really—by Jove, I didn't think of such a thing! No—I'm sure I didn't"—answered Titmouse, as if new light had burst in upon him.

"Why, Tit, I never see'd such a goose! That's it, depend upon it—it's the whole thing! That's what they're driving at, in the

note!—Why, Tit, where *was* your wits? D' ye think such gents as them—great lawyers, too—will work for nothing?—You must write at once and tell them you will come down handsome—say a couple of hundreds, besides expenses—Gad! 'twill set you on your pins again, Titty!—Rot me! now I think of it, if I didn't dream last night that you was a Member of Parliament or something of that sort."

"A member of Parliament! And so I shall, if all this turns up well—I shall be *that* at least!" replied Titmouse, exultingly.

"You see if my dream don't come true! You see, Titty, I'm *always* a-thinking of you, day and night. Never was two fellows that was such close friends as we was from the very beginning of knowing each other!"

[They had been acquainted with each other about half a year.]

"Hucky, what a cruel scamp I was to behave to you in the way I did—curse me, if I couldn't cry to see your eye bunged up in that way!"

"Pho! dear Titty, I knew you loved me all the while"—whined Huckaback, "and meant no harm; you wasn't yourself when you did it—and besides, I deserved ten times more! If you had killed me I should have liked you as much as ever!"

"Give us your hand, Hucky! Let's forgive one another!" cried Titmouse, excitedly; and their hands were quickly locked together.

"If we don't mismanage the thing, we shall be all right yet, Titty; but you won't do anything without speaking to *me* first—

will you, Titty?"

"The thoughts of it all going right again is enough to set me wild, Hucky—But what shall we do to set the thing going again?"

"*Quarter past one!*" quivered the voice of the paralytic watchman beneath, startling the friends out of their exciting colloquy; his warning being at the same time silently seconded by the long-wicked candle, burning within half an inch of its socket. They hastily agreed that Titmouse should immediately write to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, a proper [*i. e.* a most abject] letter, solemnly pledging himself to obey their injunctions in everything for the future, and offering them a handsome reward for their exertions, if successful.

"Well—good-night, Huck! good-night," said Titmouse, rising. "I'm not the least sleepy—I sha'n't sleep a wink all night long! I shall sit up to write my letter—you haven't got a sheet of paper here, by the way?—I've used all mine." [That was, he had, some months before, bought a sheet to write a letter, and had so used it.]

Huckaback produced a sheet, somewhat crumpled, from a drawer. "I'd give a hundred if I had them!" said he; "I sha'n't care a straw for the hiding I've got to-night—though I'm a *leetle* sore after it, too—and what the deuce am I to say to-morrow to Messrs. Diaper"—

"Oh, you can't hardly be at a loss for a lie that'll suit *them*, surely!—So good-night, Hucky—good-night!"

Huckaback wrung his friend's hand, and was in a moment or

two alone. "Haven't my fingers been itching all the while to be at the fellow!" exclaimed he, as he shut the door. "But, somehow, I've got too soft a sperrit, and can't bear to hurt any one;—and then—if the chap gets his £10,000 a-year—why—hem! Titty a'n't such a bad fellow, in the main, after all."

If Titmouse had been many degrees higher in the grade of society, *he would still have met with his Huckaback*;—a trifle more polished, perhaps, but hardly more quicksighted or effective than, in his way, had been the vulgar being he had just quitted.

Titmouse hastened homeward. How it was he knew not; but the feelings of elation with which he had quitted Huckaback did not last long; they rapidly sank, in the cold night-air, lower and lower, the farther he got from Leicester Square. He tried to recollect *what it was* that had made him take so very different a view of his affairs from that with which he had entered Huckaback's room. He had still a vague impression that they were not desperate; that Huckaback had told him so, *and somehow proved it*; but how he now knew not—he could not recollect. As Huckaback had gone on from time to time, Titmouse's little mind seemed to himself to comprehend and appreciate what was being said, and to gather encouragement from it; but *now*—consume it!—he stopped—rubbed his forehead—what the deuce was it? By the time that he had reached his own door, he felt in as deplorable and despairing a humor as ever. He sat down to write his letter at once; but, after

many vain efforts to express his meaning—his feelings being not in the least degree relieved by the many oaths he uttered—he at length furiously dashed his pen, point-wise, upon the table, and thereby destroyed the only implement of the sort which he possessed. Then he tore, rather than pulled off, his clothes; blew out his candle with a furious *puff*; and threw himself on his bed—but in so doing banged the back of his head against the back of the bed—and which of the two suffered more, for some time after, probably Mr. Titmouse was best able to tell.

Hath, then—oh, Titmouse! fated to undergo much!—the blind jade Fortune, in her mad vagaries—she, the goddess whom thou hast so long foolishly worshipped—at length cast her sportful eye upon thee, and singled thee out to become the envy of millions of admiring fools, by reason of the pranks she will presently make thee exhibit for her amusement? If this be indeed, as at present it promises, her intent, she truly, to me calmly watching her movements, appears resolved first to wreak her spite upon thee to the uttermost, and make thee pass through intense sufferings! Oh me! Oh me! Alas!

CHAPTER III

The means by which Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, became possessed of the important information which had put them into motion, as we have seen, to find out by advertisement one yet unknown to them, it will not be necessary for some time to explain. Theirs was a keen house, truly, and dealing principally in the criminal line of business; and they would not, one may be sure, have lightly committed themselves to their present extent, namely, in inserting such an advertisement in the newspapers, and, above all, going so far in their disclosures to Titmouse. Their prudence in the latter step, however, was very questionable to themselves even; and they immediately afterwards deplored together the precipitation with which Mr. Quirk had communicated to Titmouse the nature and extent of his possible good fortune. It was Mr. Quirk's own doing, however, and done after as much expostulation as the cautious Gammon could venture to use. I say they had not *lightly* taken up the affair; they had not "acted unadvisedly." They were fortified, first, by the opinion of Mr. Mortmain, an able and experienced conveyancer, who thus wound up an abstrusely learned opinion on the voluminous "case" which had been submitted to him:—

"...Under all these circumstances, and assuming as above, I am decidedly of opinion that the title to the estates in question is at this moment not in their present

possessor, (who represents the younger branch of the Dreddlington family,) but in the descendants of Stephen Dreddlington, through the female line; which brings us to Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse. This person, however, seems not to have been at all aware of the existence of his rights, or he could hardly have been concerned in the pecuniary arrangements mentioned at fol. 33 of the case. Probably something may be heard of his heir by making careful inquiry in the neighborhood where he was last heard of, and issuing advertisements for his heir-at-law; care, of course, being taken not to be so specific in the terms of such advertisements as to attract the notice of A. B., (the party now in possession.) If such person should, by the means above suggested, be discovered, I advise proceedings to be commenced forthwith, under the advice of some gentleman of experience at the common-law bar.

"Mouldy Mortmain.

"Lincoln's Inn, January 19, 18—."

This was sufficiently gratifying to the "house;" but, to make assurance doubly sure, before embarking in so harassing and expensive an enterprise—one which lay a good deal, too, without the sphere of their practice, which as already mentioned, was chiefly in criminal law—the same *case* (without Mr. Mortmain's opinion) was laid before a young conveyancer, who, having much less business than Mr. Mortmain, would, it was thought, "look into the case fully," though receiving only one-third of the fee which had been paid to Mr. Mortmain. And Mr. Fussy

Frankpledge—that was his name—*did* "look into the case fully;" and in doing so, turned over two-thirds of his little library;—and also gleaned—by note and verbally—the opinions upon the subject of some half-dozen of his "learned friends;" to say nothing of the magnificent air with which he indoctrinated his eager and confiding pupils upon the subject. At length his imp of a clerk bore the precious result of his master's labors to Saffron Hill, in the shape of an "opinion," three times as long as, and indescribably more difficult to understand than, the opinion of Mr. Mortmain; and which if it demonstrated anything beyond the prodigious *cram* which had been undergone by its writer for the purpose of producing it, demonstrated this—namely, that neither the party indicated by Mr. Mortmain, nor the one then actually in possession, had any more right to the estate than the aforesaid Mr. Frankpledge; but that the happy individual so entitled was some third person. Messrs. Quirk and Gammon, a good deal flustered hereat, hummed and hawed on perusing these contradictory opinions of counsel learned in the law; and the usual and proper result followed—*i. e.* a "consultation," which was to solder up all the differences between Mr. Mortmain and Mr. Frankpledge, or, at all events, strike out some light which might guide their clients on their adventurous way.

Now, Mr. Mortmain had been Mr. Quirk's conveyancer (whenever such a functionary's services had been required) for about twenty years; and Quirk was ready to suffer death in defence of any opinion of Mr. Mortmain. Mr. Gammon

swore by Frankpledge, who had been at school with him, and was a "rising man." Mortmain belonged to the old school—Frankpledge steered by the new lights. The former could point to some forty cases in the Law Reports, which had been ruled in conformity with his previously given opinion, and some twenty which had been overruled thereby; the latter gentleman, although he had been only five years in practice, had written an *opinion* which had led to a suit—which had ended in a difference of opinion between the Court of King's Bench and the Common Pleas; the credit of having done which was, however, some time afterward, a little bit tarnished by the decision of a Court of Error, without hearing the other side, *against* the opinion of Mr. Frankpledge. But—

Mr. Frankpledge quoted *so* many cases, and went to the bottom of everything, and gave so much for his money—and was *so* civil!—

Well, the consultation came off, at length, at Mr. Mortmain's chambers, at eight o'clock in the evening. A few minutes before that hour, Messrs. Quirk and Gammon were to be seen in the clerk's room, in civil conversation with that prim functionary, who explained to them that *he* did all Mr. Mortmain's drafting—pupils were *so* idle; that Mr. Mortmain did not score out much of what he (the aforesaid clerk) had drawn; that he noted up Mr. Mortmain's new cases for him in the reports, Mr. M. having so little time; and that the other day the Vice-Chancellor called on Mr. Mortmain—with several other matters of that

sort, calculated to enhance the importance of Mr. Mortmain; who, as the clerk was asking Mr. Gammon, in a good-natured way, how long Mr. Frankpledge had been in practice, and where his chambers were—made his appearance, with a cheerful look and a bustling gait, having just walked down from his house in Queen's Square, with a comfortable bottle of old port on board. Shortly afterwards Mr. Frankpledge arrived, followed by his little clerk, bending beneath two bags of books, (unconscious bearer of as much law as had well-nigh split thousands of learned heads, and broken tens of thousands of hearts, in the making of, being destined to have a similar but far greater effect in the applying of,) and the consultation began.

As Frankpledge entered, he could not help casting a sheep's eye towards a table that glistened with *such* an array of "papers," (a tasteful arrangement of Mr. Mortmain's clerk before every consultation;) and down sat the two conveyancers and the two attorneys. I devoutly wish I had time to describe the scene at length; but greater events are pressing upon me. The two conveyancers fenced with one another for some time very guardedly and good-humoredly: pleasant was it to observe the conscious condescension of Mortmain, the anxious energy and volubility of Frankpledge. When Mr. Mortmain said anything that seemed weighty or pointed, Quirk looked with an elated air, a quick triumphant glance, at Gammon; who, in his turn, whenever Mr. Frankpledge quoted an "old case" from Bendloe, Godbolt, or the Year Books, (which, having always piqued

himself on his almost exclusive acquaintance with the modern cases, he made a point of doing,) gazed at Quirk with a smile of placid superiority. Mr. Frankpledge talked almost the whole time; Mr. Mortmain, immovable in the view of the case which he had taken in his "opinion," listened with an attentive, good-natured air, ruminating pleasantly the while upon the quality of the port he had been drinking, (the first of the bin which he had tasted,) and upon the decision which the Chancellor might come to on a case brought into court on his advice, and which had been argued that afternoon. At last Frankpledge unwittingly fell foul of a favorite crotchet of Mortmain's—and at it they went, hammer and tongs, for nearly twenty minutes, (it had nothing whatever to do with the case they were consulting upon.) In the end, Mortmain of course adhered to his points, and Frankpledge intrenched himself in his books; each slightly yielded to the views of the other on immaterial points, (or what would have appeared the use of the consultation?) but did that which both had resolved upon doing from the first, *i. e.* sticking to his original opinion. Both had talked an amazing deal of deep law, which had at least one effect, *viz.* it fairly drowned both Quirk and Gammon, who, as they went home, with not (it must be owned) the clearest perceptions in the world of what had been going on, (though, before going to the consultation, each had really known something about the case,) stood each stoutly by his conveyancer's opinion, each protesting that he had never been once misled—Quirk by Mortmain, or Gammon by Frankpledge

—and each resolved to give *his* man more of the conveyancing business of the house than he had before. I grieve to add, that they parted that night with a trifle less of cordiality than had been their wont. In the morning, however, this little irritation had passed away; and they agreed, before giving up the case, to take the final opinion of Mr. Tresayle—the great Mr. Tresayle. He was, indeed, a wonderful conveyancer—a perfect miracle of real-property law-learning. He had had such an enormous practice for forty-five years, that for the last ten he had never put his nose out of chambers for pure want of time, and at last of inclination; and had been so conversant with Norman French and law Latin, in the old English letter, that he had almost entirely forgotten how to write the modern English character. His opinions made their appearance in three different kinds of handwriting. First, one that none but he and his old clerk could make out; secondly, one that none but he himself could read; and thirdly, one that neither he, nor his clerk, nor any one on earth, could decipher. The use of any one of these styles depended on—the difficulty of the case to be answered. If it were an easy one, the answer was very judiciously put into No. I.; if rather difficult, it, of course, went into No. II.; and if exceedingly difficult, (and also important,) it was very properly thrown into No. III.; being a question that really ought not to have been asked, and did not deserve an answer. The fruit within these uncouth shells, however, was precious. Mr. Tresayle's law was supreme over everybody's else. It was currently reported that Lord Eldon even (who was himself

slightly acquainted with such subjects) reverently deferred to the authority of Mr. Tresayle; and would lie winking and knitting his shaggy eyebrows half the night, if he thought that Mr. Tresayle's opinion on a case, and his own, differed. This was the great authority to whom, as in the last resort, Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap resolved to appeal. To his chambers they, within a day or two after their consultation at Mr. Mortmain's, despatched their case, (making no mention of the opinion which had been previously taken,) with a highly respectable fee, and a special compliment to his clerk, hoping to hear from that awful quarter within a month—which was the earliest average period within which Mr. Tresayle's opinions found their way to his patient but anxious clients. It came at length, with a note from Mr. Prim, his clerk, intimating that they would find him, *i. e.* the aforesaid Mr. Prim, at his chambers the next morning, prepared to explain the opinion to them; having just had it read over to him by Mr. Tresayle, for it proved to be in No. II. The opinion occupied about two pages; and the handwriting bore a strong resemblance to Chinese or Arabic, with a quaint intermixture of the uncial Greek character—it was impossible to contemplate it without a certain feeling of awe! In vain did old Quirk squint at it, from all corners, for nearly a couple of hours, (having first called in the assistance of a friend of his, an old attorney of upwards of fifty years' standing;) nay—even Mr. Gammon, foiled at length, could not for the life of him refrain from a soft curse or two. Neither of them could make anything of it—(as for Snap, they never showed

it to him; it was not within his province—*i. e.* the Insolvent Debtors' Court, the Old Bailey, the Clerkenwell Sessions, the Police Offices, the inferior business of the Common Law Courts, and the worrying of the clerks of the office—a department in which he was perfection itself.)

To their great delight, Mr. Tresayle took Mr. Mortmain's view of the case. Nothing could be more terse, perspicuous, and conclusive than the great man's opinion. Mr. Quirk was in raptures, and that very day sent to procure an engraving of Mr. Tresayle, which had lately come out, for which he paid 5s., and ordered it to be framed and hung up in his own room, where already grinned a quaint resemblance, in black profile, of Mr. Mortmain, cheek by jowl with that of a notorious traitor who had been hanged in spite of Mr. Quirk's best exertions. In special good-humor, he assured Mr. Gammon, (who was plainly somewhat crestfallen about Mr. Frankpledge,) that everybody must have a beginning; that even he himself (Mr. Quirk) had been once only a beginner.

Once fairly on the scent, Messrs. Quirk and Gammon soon began, secretly but energetically, to push their inquiries in all directions. They discovered that Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse, having spent the chief portion of his blissful days as a cobbler at Whitehaven, had died in London, somewhere about the year 1793. At this point they stood for a long while, in spite of two advertisements, to which they had been driven with the greatest reluctance, for fear of attracting the attention of

those most interested in thwarting their efforts. Even that part of the affair had been managed somewhat skilfully. It was a stroke of Mr. Gammon's to advertise not for "Heir-at-Law," but "*Next of Kin*," as the reader has seen. The former might have challenged the notice of unfriendly curiosity, which the latter was hardly calculated to attract. At length—at the "third time of asking"—up turned Tittlebat Titmouse, in the way which we have seen. His relationship with Mr. Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse was indisputable; in fact, he was (to adopt his own words) that "deceased person's" son and heir-at-law.

The reader may guess the chagrin and disgust of Mr. Gammon at the appearance, manners, and character of the person whom he fully believed, on first seeing him at Messrs. Tag-rag's, to be the rightful owner of the fine estates held by one who, as against Mr. Titmouse, had no more real title to them than had Mr. Tag-rag; and for whom their house was to undertake the very grave risk and expense of instituting such proceedings as would be requisite to place Mr. Titmouse in the position which they believed him entitled to occupy—having to encounter a hot and desperate opposition at every point, from those who had nine-tenths of the law—to wit, *possession*—on their side, on which they stood as upon a rock; and with immense means for carrying on the war defensive. That Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap did not contemplate undertaking all this, without having calculated upon its proving well worthy their while, was only reasonable. They were going voluntarily to

become the means of conferring immense benefits upon one who was a total stranger to them—who had not a penny to spend upon the prosecution of his own rights. Setting aside certain difficulties which collected themselves into two awkward words, Maintenance and Champerty, and stared them in the face—whenever they contemplated any obvious method of securing the just reward of their enterprise and toils—setting aside all this, I say, it might turn out, only after a ruinous expenditure had been incurred, that the high authorities which had sanctioned their proceedings in point of law, had expressed their favorable opinions on a state of facts, which, however satisfactorily they looked on paper, could not be substantiated, if keenly sifted, and determinedly resisted. All this, too—all their time, labor, and money, to go for nothing—on behalf of a vulgar, selfish, ignorant, presumptuous, ungrateful puppy, like Titmouse!—Well indeed, therefore, might Mr. Gammon, as we have seen he did, give himself and partners a forty-eight hours' interval, between his interview with Titmouse and formal introduction of him to the firm, in which to consider their position and mode of procedure. The taste of his quality which that first interview afforded them all—so far surpassing all that the bitter description of him given to them by Mr. Gammon had prepared them for—filled the partners with inexpressible disgust, and would have induced them to throw up the whole affair—so getting rid both of it, and of him, together. But then, on the other hand, there were certain very great advantages, both of a professional and

even directly pecuniary kind, which it would have been madness indeed for any office lightly to throw away. It was really, after all, an unequal struggle between feeling and interest. If they should succeed in unseating the present wrongful possessor of a very splendid property, and putting in his place the rightful owner, by means alone of their own professional ability, perseverance, and heavy pecuniary outlay, (a fearful consideration, truly, but Mr. Quirk had scraped together some thirty thousand pounds!) what recompense could be too great for such resplendent services? To say nothing of the *éclat* which it would gain for their office, in the profession and in the world at large, and the substantial and permanent advantages to the firm, if, as they ought to be, they were intrusted with the general management of the property by the new and inexperienced and confiding owner—ay, but there was the rub! What a disheartening and disgusting specimen of such new owner had disclosed itself to their anxiously expecting but soon recoiling eyes—always, however, making due allowances for one or two cheering indications, on Mr. Titmouse's part, of a certain rapacious and litigious humor, which might hereafter right pleasantly and profitably occupy their energies! Their professional position, and their interests had long made them sharp observers; but when did ever before low and disgusting qualities force themselves into revolting prominence, as those of Mr. Titmouse had done, in the very moment of an expected display of the better feelings of human nature—such as enthusiastic gratitude? They had, in their

time, had to deal with some pleasant specimens of humanity, to be sure; but when with any more odious and impracticable than Tittlebat Titmouse threatened to prove himself? What hold could they get upon such a character as his? Beneath all his coarseness and weakness, there was a glimmer of low cunning which might suffice to keep their superior and practised astuteness at its full stretch. These were difficulties, cheerless enough in the contemplation, truly; but, nevertheless, the partners could not bear the idea of escaping from them by throwing up the affair altogether. Then came the question—How were they to manage Mr. Titmouse?—how acquire an early and firm hold of him, so as to convert him into a *capital client*? His fears and his interests were obviously the engines with which their experienced hands were to work; and several long and most anxious consultations had Messrs. Quirk and Gammon had on this important matter. The first great question with them was—To what extent, and when, they should acquaint him with the nature of his expectations.

Gammon was for keeping him comparatively in the dark, till success was within reach: during that interval, (which might be a long one,) by alternately stimulating his hopes and fears; by habituating him to an entire dependence on them; by persuading him of the prodigious extent of their exertions and sacrifices on his behalf—they *might* do something; mould him into a shape fit for their purposes, and persuade him that his affairs must needs go to ruin but in their hands. Something like this was the

scheme of the cautious, acute, and placid Gammon. Mr. Quirk, however, (with whom, as will be hereafter shown, had originated the whole discovery,) thought thus:—tell the fellow at once the whole extent of what we can do for him, viz. turn a half-starving linen-draper's shopman into the owner of £10,000 a-year, and of a great store of ready money. This will, in a manner, stun him into submission, and make him at once and for all what we want him to be. He will immediately fall prostrate with reverent gratitude—looking at us, moreover, as three gods, who, at our will, can shut him out of heaven. "*That's* the way to bring down your bird," said Mr. Quirk; and Mr. Quirk had been forty years in practice—had made the business what it was—still held half of it in his own hands, (two-thirds of the remaining half being Gammon's, and the residue Snap's;) and Gammon, moreover, had a very distinct perception that the funds for carrying on the war would come out of the tolerably well-stored pockets of the august head of the firm. So, after a long discussion, he openly yielded his opinion to that of Mr. Quirk—cherishing, however, a very warm respect for it in his own bosom. As for Snap, that distinguished member of the firm was very little consulted in the matter; which had not yet been brought to that stage where his powerful energies could come into play. He had of course, however, heard a good deal of what was going on; and knew that ere long there would be the copying out and serving of the Lord knows how many copies of declarations in ejectment, motions against the casual ejector, and so forth—so far at least as he was "up to" all those quaint and

anomalous proceedings. It had, therefore, been at length agreed that the communication to Titmouse, on his first interview, of the full extent of his splendid expectations, should depend upon the discretion of Mr. Quirk. The reader has seen the unexpected turn which matters took upon that important occasion; and if it proved Quirk's policy to be somewhat inferior in point of discretion and long-sightedness to that of Gammon, still it must be owned that the latter had cause to admire the rapid generalship with which Mr. Quirk had obviated the consequences of his false move—not ill seconded by Snap. What could have been more judicious than his reception of Titmouse, on the occasion of his being led in again by the subtle Gammon?

The next and greatest matter was, how to obtain any hold upon such a person as Titmouse had shown himself, so as to secure to themselves, in the event of success, the remuneration to which they considered themselves entitled. Was it so perfectly clear that, if he felt disposed to resist it, they could compel him to pay the mere amount of their bill of costs?

Suppose he should turn round upon them, and have their Bill taxed—Mr. Quirk grunted with fright at the bare thought. Then there was a slapping *quiddam honorarium* extra—undoubtedly for *that* they must, they feared, trust to the honor and gratitude of Mr. Titmouse; and a pretty taste of the quality of that animal they had already experienced! Such a disposition as *his*, to have to rely upon for the prompt settlement of a bill of thousands of pounds of costs! and, besides that, to have it to look to for the

payment of at least some five or perhaps ten thousand pounds *douceur*—nay, and this was not all. Mr. Quirk had, as well as Mr. Gammon, cast many an anxious eye on the following passages from *Blackstone's Commentaries*:—

"Maintenance is an officious intermeddling in a suit that no way belongs to one, by 'maintaining' or assisting either party with money, or otherwise, to prosecute or defend it.... It is an offence against public justice, as it keeps alive strife and contention, and perverts the remedial process of the law into an engine of oppression.... The punishment by common law is fine and imprisonment, and by statute 32 Hen. VIII. c. 9, a forfeiture of £10!

"Champerty—(*campi partitio*)—is a species of Maintenance, and punished in the same manner; being a bargain with a plaintiff or defendant '*campum partiri*,' to divide the land, or other matter sued for, between them, if they prevail at law; whereupon the champertor is to carry on the suit at his own expense.... These pests of civil society, that are perpetually endeavoring to disturb the repose of their neighbors, and officiously interfering in other men's quarrels, even at the hazard of their own fortunes, were severely animadverted on by the Roman law; and they were punished by the forfeiture of a third part of their goods, and perpetual infamy."^[4]

These were pleasant passages surely!—

Many were the conversations and consultations which the partners had had with Messrs. Mortmain and Frankpledge

respectively, upon the interesting question, whether there were any mode of at once securing themselves against the ingratitude of Titmouse, and protecting themselves against the penalties of the law. It made old Mr. Quirk's bald head, even, flush all over whenever he thought of their bill being taxed, or contemplated himself the inmate of a prison, (above all, at his advanced time of life,) with mournful leisure to meditate upon the misdeeds that had sent him thither, to which profitable exercise the legislature would have specially stimulated him by a certain *fine* above mentioned. As for Gammon, he knew there *must* be a way of doing the thing somehow or another; for his friend Frankpledge felt infinitely less difficulty in the way than Mortmain, whom he considered a timid and old-fashioned practitioner. The courts, said Mr. Frankpledge, were now setting their faces strongly against the doctrine of Maintenance, as being founded on a bygone state of things: *cessante ratione cessat et ipsa lex*, was his favorite maxim. There was no wrong without a remedy, he said; and was there not a *wrong* in the case of a poor man wrongfully deprived of his own? And how could this be *remedied*, if the old law of Maintenance stood like a bugbear in the way of humane and spirited practitioners? Was no one to be at liberty to take up the cause of the oppressed, encouraged by the prospect of an ample recompense? It might be said, perhaps—let the claimant sue *in formâ pauperis*: but then he must swear that he is not worth five pounds; and a man may not be able to take that oath, and yet be unequal to the commencement of a suit requiring

the outlay of thousands. Moreover, a pretty prospect it was for such a suitor, (*in formâ pauperis,*) if he should happen to be nonsuited—to be "put to his election, whether to be whipped or pay the costs." [5] Thus reasoned within himself that astute person, Mr. Frankpledge; and at length satisfied himself that he had framed an instrument which would "meet the case"—that "would hold water." To the best of my recollection, it was a bond, conditioned to pay the sum of ten thousand pounds to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, within two months of Titmouse's being put into possession of the rents and profits of the estate in question. The *condition* of that bond was, as its framer believed, drawn in a masterly manner; and his draft was lying before Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, on the Wednesday morning, (*i. e.* the day after Titmouse's interview with them,) and had succeeded at length in exciting the approbation of Mr. Quirk himself; when—whew!—down came a note from Mr. Frankpledge, to the effect that, "since preparing the draft bond," he had "had reason *slightly to modify* his original opinion," owing to his "having lit upon a late case," in which an instrument precisely similar to the one which he had prepared for his admiring clients, had been held "totally ineffectual and void both at law and in equity." I say, Mr. Frankpledge's note was to that effect; for so ingeniously had he framed it—so effectually concealed his retreat beneath a little cloud of contradictory authorities, like as the ink-fish, they say, eludeth its pursuers—that his clients cursed the law, not their draftsman; and,

moreover, by prudently withholding the *name* of the "late case," he, at all events for a while, had prevented their observing that it was *senior* to some eight or ten cases which (indefatigable man!) he had culled for them out of the legal garden, and arrayed on the back of his draft. Slightly disconcerted were Messrs. Quirk and Gammon, it may be believed, at this new view of the "result of the authorities." "Mortmain is always right!" said Quirk, looking hard at Gammon; who observed simply that one day Frankpledge would be as old as Mortmain then was—by which time (thought he) I also know where—please God—*you* will be, my old friend, if there's any truth in the Scriptures! In this pleasant frame of mind were the partners, when the impudent apparition of Huckaback presented itself, in the manner which has been described. Huckaback's commentary upon the disgusting text of Titmouse over-night, (as a lawyer would say, in analogy to a well-known term, "Coke upon Littleton,") produced an effect upon their minds which may be easily imagined. It was while their minds were under these two soothing influences, *i. e.* of the insolence of Huckaback and the vacillation of Frankpledge, that Mr. Gammon had penned the note to Titmouse, (surely, under the circumstances, one of extraordinary temper and forbearance,) which had occasioned him the agonies I have been attempting faintly to describe;—and that Quirk, summoning Snap into the room, had requested him to give orders for denial to Titmouse if he should again make his appearance at the office; which injunction Snap forthwith

delivered in the clerk's room, in a tone and manner that were a very model of the *imperative mood*.

A day or two afterwards, Mr. Quirk, (who was a man that stuck like a limpet to a rock to any point which occurred to him,) in poring over that page in the fourth volume of *Blackstone's Commentaries*, where were to be found the passages which have been already quoted, (and which both Quirk and Gammon had long had off by heart,) as he sat one day at dinner, at home, whither he had taken the volume in question, fancied he had at last hit upon a notable crotchet, which, the more he thought of, the more he was struck with; determining to pay a visit in the morning to Mr. Mortmain. The spark of light that had twinkled till it kindled in the tinder of his mind, was struck by his hard head out of the following sentence of the text in question:—

"A man *may*, however, maintain the suit of his near kinsman, servant, or poor neighbor, out of *charity and compassion*, with impunity; *otherwise*, the punishment is," &c. &c.[6]

Now, it seemed to Mr. Quirk, that the words which I have placed in italics and small capitals, met the case of poor Tittlebat Titmouse exactly. He stuck to that view of the case, till he *almost* began to think that he really had a kind of a sort of a charity and compassion for poor Tittlebat—kept out of his rights—tyrannized over by a vulgar draper in Oxford Street—where, too, no doubt, he was half starved.—"It's a great blessing that one's got the means—and the inclination, to serve one's poor

neighbors"—thought Quirk, as he swallowed glass after glass of the *wine that maketh glad the heart of man*—and also *softens* it;—for the more he drank, the more and more pitiful became his mood—the more sensitive was he to compassionate suggestions; and by the time that he had finished the decanter, he was all but in tears! These virtuous feelings brought their own reward, too—for, from time to time, they conjured up, as it were, the faint rainbow image of a bond conditioned for the payment of Ten Thousand Pounds!

To change the metaphor a little—by the time that old Quirk had reached his office in the morning, the heated iron had cooled. If his heart *had* retained any of the maudlin softness of the preceding evening, the following pathetic letter from Titmouse might have made a very deep impression upon it, and fixed him, in the benevolent and disinterested mind of the old lawyer, as indeed his "poor neighbor." The following is an exact copy of that lucid and eloquent composition. It had been written by Mr. Titmouse, all out of his own head; and with his own hand had he left it at the office, at a late hour on the preceding evening.

"*To Messrs. Querck, Gamon, and Snape.*

"Gents,

"Y^r Esteem'd Favor lies now before Me, which *must Say* have Given me Much Concern, seeing I Thought it was All Made up betwixt us That was of Such an *Unpleasant Nature* on Tuesday night (ultimo) w^h I most humbly Own (and Acknowledge) was all alone and *intirely* of My Own

Fault, and Not in the Least Your's which behaved to me, Must say, In the most Respectful and superior manner that was possible to think Of, for I truly Say I never was In the Company of Such Imminent and Superior Gents before In my Life w^h will take my Oath sincerely Of, Gents. Please to consider the Brandy (w^h do think was *Uncommon Stiff*) such a flustrum As I was In before, to, w^h was Evident to All of Us there then Assemblid and very natral like to be the Case Seeing I have nevir known what Peas of Mind was since I behaved in Such a *Oudacious* way w^h truly was the case I can't Deny to Such Gents as Yourselfs that were doing me such Good Fortune And Kindness to me as it would Be a Dreadful *sin and shame* (such as Trust I can never be Guilty of) to be (w^h am not) and never Can Be insensible Of, Gents do Consider all this Favorably because of my humble Amends w^h I here Make with the greatest Trouble in my Mind that I have Had Ever Since, it was all of the Sperrits I Tooke w^h made me Go On at such a Rate w^h was always (beg to Assure y^r most resp^e house) the Case Since my birth when I took Sperrits never so little Since I had the Meazles when I was 3 Years Old as I Well Recollect and hope it will be Born in Mind what is Often Said, and I'm Sure I've read it Somewhere Else that People that Is Drunk Always speaks the *Direct Contrarywise* of their True and Real Thoughts. (w^h am Certain never was any Thing Truer in my case) so as I get the Money or What not, do whatever you Like w^h are quite welcome to Do if you please, and No

questions Asked, don't Mind saying by The Way It shall Be
As Good as £200 note in The way of your resp^e House if I
Get the Estate of w^h am much in Want of. Mr. Gamon (w^h
is the most Upright gent that ever I came across in All my
Life) will tell you that I Was Quite Cut up when he came
After me in that kind Way and told him Then how I loved y^r
Respect^e House and would do all In My power to Serve You,
which see if I Don't, I was in Such a rage with that Fellow
(He's only in a *Situation* in Tottenham C^t Road) Huckaback
which is his true name it was an *oudacious* thing, and have
given him such a Precious Good hiding last Night as you
never saw when on his Bendid Knees He asked the pardon
of your Respectable House, say^g nothing of Me w^h w^d not
allow because I said I would Not Forgive Him because he
had not injured me: But you, w^h I wonder at his *Impudence*
in Calling on Professional Gents like you, if I get the Estate
shall never cease to Think well of you and mean While how
full of Trouble I am *Often Thinking Of Death* which is the
End of Every Thing And then in that Case who will the
Property Go to Seeing I Leave never a Brother or Sister
Behind me. And Therefore Them That w^d Get it I Feel Sure
of w^d Not do So well by you (if You will Only believe Me)
So Gents. This is All at present That I will Make so Bold
to trouble you With About my Unhappy Affairs Only to
say That am *used* most Intolerably Bad now In The Shop
quite Tyranicall And Mr. Tag-Rag as Set Them All Against
Me and I shall Never Get Another Situatⁿ for want of a

Char^f which he will give me say^g noth^g at Present of the
Sort of Victules w^h give me Now to Eat Since Monday last,
For Which am Sure the Devil must have Come In to That
Gentleman (Mr. Tag-rag, he was only himself in a Situation
in Holborn once, gett^g the Business by marry^g the widow w^h
wonder At for he is nothing Particular to Look At.) I am y^{rs}

Humbly to Command Till Death (always Humbly
Begging pardon for the bad Conduct w^h was guilty of when
In Liquor Especially On an Empty Stomach, Having Taken
Nothing all that Day excepting what I could not Eat,)

"Your's most Resp^y

"Tittlebat Titmouse.

"P. S. Will Bring That young Man with Tears In his Eyes
to Beg y^f pardon Over again If You Like w^h will Solemnly
Swear if Required That he did It all of His *own* Head And
that Have given It him For it in the Way That is Written
Above And humbly Trust You Will make Me So happy
Once more by writing To Me (if it is only a Line) To say
You Have Thought No more of it T. T. No. 9 Closet C^t.
Oxford Street. 14/7/18—"

This exquisitely-skilful epistle might indeed have brought
tears into Mr. Quirk's eyes, if he had been *used* to the melting
mood, which he was not; having never been seen actually to shed
a tear but once—when five-sixths of his little bill of costs (£196,
15s. 4d.) were taxed off in an auction on a Bill of Exchange for
£13.[7] As it was, he tweedled the letter about in his hands for

about five minutes, in a musing mood, and then stepped with it into Mr. Gammon's room. That gentleman took the letter with an air of curiosity, and read it over; at every sentence (if indeed a sentence there was in it) bursting into soft laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he laughed on concluding it—"a comical gentleman, Mr. Titmouse, upon my honor!"

"Funny— isn't it rather?" interposed Mr. Quirk, standing with his hands fumbling about in his breeches pockets.

"What a crawling despicable little rascal!—ha, ha, ha!"

"Why—I don't quite say that, either," said Quirk, doubtingly—"I—don't exactly look at it in *that* light!"

"My dear sir!" exclaimed Gammon, leaning back in his chair, and laughing rather heartily, (at least for him.)

"You can't leave off that laugh of yours," said Quirk, a little tartly; "but I must say I don't see anything in the letter to laugh at so particularly. It is written in a most respectful manner, and shows a proper feeling towards the House!"

"Ay! see how he speaks of *me*!" interrupted Gammon, with such a smile!—

"And doesn't he speak so of me? and all of us?"

"He'll let the house tread on him till he can tread on the house, I dare say."

"But you must own, Mr. Gammon, it shows we've licked him into shape a bit—eh?"

"Oh, it's a little vile creeping reptile now, and so it will be to the end of the chapter—of our proceedings; and when we've

done everything—really, Mr. Quirk! if one *were* apt to lose one's temper, it would be to see such a *thing* as that put into possession of such a fortune."

"That may be, Mr. Gammon; but I really—hem!—trust—I've—a higher feeling!—To right—the injured"—He could get no farther.

"Hem!" exclaimed Gammon.

The partners smiled at one another. A touch, or an attempted touch at *disinterestedness!*—and at Quirk's time of life!

"But he's now in a humor for *training*, at all events—*isn't he?*" exclaimed Quirk—"we've something now to go to work upon—gradually."

"Isn't that a leaf out of my book, Mr. Quirk?—*isn't that exactly what?*"—

"Well, well—what does it signify?" interrupted Quirk, rather petulantly—"I've got a crotchet that'll do for us, yet, about the matter of law, and make all right and tight—so I'm going to Mortmain."

"I've got a little idea of my own of that sort, Mr. Quirk," said Gammon—"I've got an extract from Co-Litt—. I can't imagine how either of them could have missed it; and, as Frankpledge dines with me to-day, we shall talk it all over. But, by the way, Mr. Quirk, I should say, with all deference, that we'll take no more notice of this fellow till we've got some screw tight enough"—

"Why—all that may be very well; but you see, Gammon, the

fellow seems the real heir, after all—and if *he* don't get it, *no one can*; and if *he* don't—we don't! eh?"

"There's a very great deal of force in that observation, Mr. Quirk—it gives one another view of the subject!"—said Gammon, emphatically:—and, tolerably well pleased with one another, they parted. If Quirk might be compared to an old file, Gammon was the *oil!*—so they got on, in the main, very well together. It hardly signifies what was the result of their interviews with their two conveyancers. The two partners met the next morning on ordinary business; and as each made no allusions whatever to the "crotchet" of the day before, it may be safely inferred that each had been satisfied by his conveyancer of having found out a mare's nest.

"I think, by the way," said Mr. Gammon to Mr. Quirk, before they parted on the previous evening, "it may be as well, all things considered, to acknowledge the receipt of the fellow's note—eh?—*Can't* do any harm, you know, and civility costs nothing—hem!"

"The very thing I was thinking of," replied Quirk, as he always did, on hearing any suggestion from Mr. Gammon. So by that night's post was despatched (post-paid) the following note to Mr. Titmouse:—

"Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap have the pleasure of acknowledging the receipt of Mr. Titmouse's polite letter of last night's date; and earnestly beg that he will not distress himself about the little incident that occurred at their office

on Tuesday night, and which they assure him they have quite forgotten. They made all allowances, however their feelings suffered at the time. They beg Mr. T. will give them credit for not losing sight of his interests, to the best of their ability; obstructed as they are, however, by numerous serious difficulties. If they should be hereafter overcome, he may rest assured of their promptly communicating with him; and till then they trust Mr. T. will not inconvenience himself by calling on, or writing to them.

Saffron Hill, 15th July 18—.

"P. S.—Messrs. Q. G. and S. regret to hear that any unpleasantness has arisen (Gammon could hardly write for laughing) between Mr. Titmouse and his friend Mr. Hicklebag, who, they assure him, manifested a very warm interest in behalf of Mr. T., and conducted himself with the greatest propriety on the occasion of his calling upon Messrs. Q. G. and S. They happened at that moment to be engaged in matters of the highest importance; which will, they trust, explain any appearance of abruptness they might have exhibited towards that gentleman. Perhaps Mr. Titmouse will be so obliging as to intimate as much to Mr. Hickerbag."

There was an obvious reason for this polite allusion to Huckaback. Gammon thought it very possible that that gentleman might be in Mr. Titmouse's confidence, and exercise a powerful influence over him hereafter; and that influence Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap might find it well worth their while to secure beforehand.

The moment that Titmouse, with breathless haste, had read over this mollifying document, which being directed to his lodgings correctly, he obtained as soon as he had got home, after quitting Mr. Tag-rag, about ten o'clock, he hastened to his friend Huckaback. That gentleman (who seemed now virtually recognized by Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap as Titmouse's confidant) shook his head ominously, exclaiming—"Blarny, blarny!" and a bitter sneer settled on his disagreeable features, till he had read down to the postscript; the perusal of which effected a sudden change in his feelings. He declared, with a great oath, that Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap were "perfect gentlemen," and would "do the right thing after all—Titmouse might depend upon it;" an assurance which greatly cheered Titmouse, to whose keen discernment it never once occurred to refer Huckaback's altered tone to the right cause, viz. the lubricating quality of the postscript; and since Titmouse did not allude to it, no more did Mr. Huckaback, although his own double misnomer stuck not a little in his throat. So effectual, indeed, had been that most skilful postscript upon the party at whom it had been aimed, that he exerted himself unceasingly to revive Titmouse's confidence in Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap; and so far succeeded, that Titmouse returned to his lodgings at a late hour, a somewhat happier, if not a *wiser* man than he had left them. By the time, however, that he had got into bed, having once more spelled over the note in question, he felt as despondent as ever, and thought that Huckaback had not known

what he had been talking about. He also adverted to an *apparently* careless allusion by Huckaback to the injuries which had been inflicted upon him by Titmouse on the Wednesday night: and which, by the way, Huckaback determined it should be no fault of his if Titmouse easily forgot! He hardly knew why—but he disliked this particularly.—Whom had he, however, in the world, but Huckaback? In company with him alone, Titmouse felt that his pent-up feelings could discharge themselves. Huckaback had certainly a wonderful knack of keeping up Titmouse's spirits, whatever cause he fancied he might really have for depression. In short, he longed for the Sunday morning, ushering in a day of rest and sympathy. Titmouse would indeed then have to look back upon an agitating and miserable week, what with the dismal upsetting of his hopes in the manner I have described, and the tyrannical treatment which he had experienced at Tag-rag and Co.'s. His tormentor there, however, began at length, in some degree, to relax his *active* exertions against Titmouse, simply because of the exertion requisite for keeping them up. He attributed the pallid cheek and depressed manner of Titmouse entirely to the discipline which had been inflicted upon him at the shop; and was gratified at perceiving that all his other young men seemed, especially in his presence, to have imbibed his hatred of Titmouse. What produced in Tag-rag this hatred of Titmouse? Simply what had taken place on the Monday. Mr. Tag-rag's dignity and power had been doggedly set at nought by one of his shopmen, who had since refused to make the least submission,

or offer any kind of apology. Such conduct struck at the root of subordination in his great establishment. Again, there is perhaps nothing in the world so calculated to enrage a petty and vulgar mind to the highest pitch of malignity, as the cool persevering defiance of an inferior, whom it strives to *despise*, while it is only *hating*, feeling at the same time such to be the case. Tag-rag now and then, when he looked towards Titmouse, as he stood behind the counter, felt as though he could have killed the little ape. Titmouse attempted once or twice, during the week, to obtain a situation elsewhere, but in vain. He could expect no character from Tag-rag; and when the 10th of August should have arrived, what was to become of him? These were the kind of thoughts often passing through his mind during the Sunday, which he and Huckaback spent together in unceasing conversation on the one absorbing event of the last week. Titmouse, poor little puppy, had dressed himself with just as much care as usual; but as he was giving the finishing touches at his toilet, pumping up grievous sighs every half minute, the sum of his reflections might be stated in the miserable significance of a quaint saying of Poor Richard's—"How hard is it to make an empty sack stand upright!"

Although the sun shone as vividly and beautifully as on the preceding Sunday, to Titmouse's saddened eye there seemed a sort of gloom everywhere. Up and down the Park he and Huckaback walked, towards the close of the afternoon; but Titmouse had not so elastic a strut as before. He felt empty and sinking. Everybody seemed to know what a sad pretender he

was: and the friends quitted the magic circle much earlier than had been usual with Titmouse. What with the fatigue of a long day's saunter, the vexation of having had but a hasty, inferior, and unrefreshing meal, which did not deserve the name of dinner, and their unpleasant thoughts, both seemed depressed as they walked along the streets. At length they arrived at the open doors of a gloomy-looking building, into which two or three sad and prim-looking people were entering. After walking a few paces past the door—"Do you know, Huck," said Titmouse, stopping, "I've often thought that—that—there's something in *Religion*."

"To be sure there is, for those that like it—who doubts it? It's all very well in its place, no doubt," replied Huckaback, with much surprise, which increased, as he felt himself being slowly swayed round towards the building in question. "But what of that?"

"Oh, nothing; but—hem! hem!" replied Titmouse, sinking his voice to a whisper—"a touch of—religion—eh?—would not be so much amiss, just now! I feel—uncommon inclined that way, somehow, 'pon my soul!"

"Religion's all very well, Titty, dear!—for them that has much to be thankful for; but devil take me! what have either you or me to be"—

"But, Huck—how do you know but we might *get* something to be thankful for, by praying?—I've often heard of great things in that line—but—*do* come in with me, Huck!"

Huckaback stood for a moment irresolute, twirling about his

cane, and looking rather distastefully towards the dingy building. "It won't answer," said he, faintly. Titmouse drew him nearer; but he suddenly started back.—"No! oh, 'tis only a meeting-house, Tit! Curse Dissenters, how I hate 'em! Isn't your precious governor one in that line? Give *me* a regular-like, respectable church, with a proper steeple, and parson, and prayers, and an organ, and all that!"

Titmouse secretly acknowledged the force of these observations; and the intelligent and piously disposed couple, with perhaps a just, but certainly a somewhat sudden regard for orthodoxy, were not long before they had found their way into a church where evening service was being performed. They ascended the gallery stair; and seeing no reason to be ashamed of being at church, down they both went, with loud clattering steps and a bold air, into the very central seat (which happened to be vacant) in the front of the gallery. Titmouse paid a most exemplary attention to what was going on, kneeling, sitting, and standing with exact propriety, in the proper places; joining audibly in the responses, and keeping his eyes pretty steadily on the prayer-book, which he found lying there. He even rebuked Huckaback for whispering (during one of the most solemn parts of the service) that "there was an uncommon pretty gal in the next pew!"—He thought that the clergyman was a remarkable fine preacher, and said some things that he *must* have meant for him, Titmouse, in particular!

"Curse me, Hucky!" said he, heatedly, as soon as they had

quitted the church, and were fairly in the street—"Curse me if —if—ever I felt so comfortable-like in my mind before, as I do now—see if I don't go again next Sunday!"

"Lord, Tit, you don't *really* mean—eh?—it's deuced dull work!"

"Hang me if I don't, though! and if anything should come of it —if I *do* but get the estate—(I wonder, now, where *Mr. Gammon* goes to church. I should like to know!—I'd go there regularly)—But if I *do* get the thing—you see if I don't"—

"Ah, I don't know; it's not much use praying for money, Tit; I've tried it myself, once or twice, but it didn't answer!"

"I'll take my oath you was staring at the gals all the while, Hucky!"

"Ah, Titty!" exclaimed Huckaback, and winked his eye, and put the tip of his forefinger to the tip of his nose, and laughed.

Titmouse continued in what he doubtless imagined to be a devout frame of mind, for several minutes after quitting the church. But close by the aforesaid church, the devil had a thriving little establishment, in the shape of a cigar-shop; in which a showily-dressed young Jewess sat behind the counter, right underneath a glaring gas-light—with a narrow stripe of greasy black velvet across her forehead, and long ringlets resting on her shoulders—bandying slang with two or three other such creatures as Titmouse and Huckaback. Our friends entered and purchased a cigar a-piece, which they lit on the spot; and after each of them had exchanged an impudent wink with the Jewess,

out they went, puffing away—all the remains of their piety! When they had come to the end of their cigars they parted, each speeding homeward. Titmouse, on reaching his lodgings, sank into profound depression. He felt an awful conviction that his visit to the cigar-shop had entirely spoiled the effect of his previous attendance at the church; and that, if so disposed, (and it served him right,) he might now sit and whistle for his ten thousand a-year. Thoughts such as these drove him nearly distracted. If, indeed, he had foreseen having to go through such another week as the one just over, I think it not impossible that before the arrival of the ensuing Sunday, he might have afforded a little employment to that ancient and gloomy functionary, a coroner, and his jury. At that time, however, inquests of this sort were matter-of-fact and melancholy affairs enough; which I doubt not would have been rather a *dissuasive* from suicide, in the estimation of one who might be supposed ambitious of the *éclat* of a modern inquest; where, indeed, such strange antics are played by certain new performers as would suffice to revive the corpse, (if it were a corpse that had ever had a spark of sense or spirit in it,) and make it kick the coroner out of the room.[8] But to one of so high an ambition as Tittlebat Titmouse, how delightful would it not have been, to anticipate becoming (what had been quite impracticable during life) the object of public attention after his death—by means of a flaming dissertation by the coroner on his own zeal and spirit—the nature and extent of his rights, powers, and duties;—when high doctors are brow-

beaten, the laws set at defiance, and public decency plucked by the beard, and the torn and bleeding hearts of surviving relatives still further agonized by an exposure, all quivering under the recent stroke, to the gaping vulgar! Indeed, I sometimes think that the object of certain coroners, now-a-days, is twofold; first, public—to disgust people with suicide, by showing what horrid proceedings will take place over their carcasses; and secondly, private—to get the means of studying anatomy by *post mortems*, which the said coroner never could procure in his own practice; which enables us to account for some things one has lately seen, viz. that if a man come to his death by means of a wagon crushing his legs, the coroner institutes an exact examination of the structure of the *lungs* and *heart*. I take it to be getting now into a rule—the propriety whereof, some people think, cannot be doubted—namely, that bodies ought now to be opened only to prove that they ought not to have been opened; an inquest must be held, in order to demonstrate that it need not have been held, except that certain fees thereby find their way into the pocket of the aforesaid coroner, which would otherwise not have done so. In short, such a coroner as I have in my eye may be compared to a great ape squatting on a corpse, furiously chattering and spitting at all around it; and I am glad that it hath at last had wit enough first to *shut the door* before proceeding to its horrid tricks.

Touching, by the way, the *moral* of suicide, it is a way which some have of *cutting*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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