

CHARLES DICKENS

PEARL-FISHING; CHOICE
STORIES FROM
DICKENS' HOUSEHOLD
WORDS; SECOND
SERIES

Чарльз Диккенс

**Pearl-Fishing; Choice Stories
from Dickens' Household
Words; Second Series**

«Public Domain»

Диккенс Ч.

Pearl-Fishing; Choice Stories from Dickens' Household Words; Second Series / Ч. Диккенс — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

I.	5
II.	11
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	25

Charles Dickens

Pearl-Fishing; Choice Stories from Dickens' Household Words; Second Series

I. The Young Advocate

ANTOINE DE CHAULIEU was the son of a poor gentleman of Normandy, with a long genealogy, a short rent-roll, and a large family. Jacques Rollet was the son of a brewer, who did not know who his grandfather was; but he had a long purse and only two children. As these youths flourished in the early days of liberty, equality, and fraternity, and were near neighbors, they naturally hated each other. Their enmity commenced at school, where the delicate and refined De Chaulieu being the only gentleman among the scholars, was the favorite of the master (who was a bit of an aristocrat in his heart) although he was about the worst dressed boy in the establishment, and never had a sou to spend; while Jacques Rollet, sturdy and rough, with smart clothes and plenty of money, got flogged six days in the week, ostensibly for being stupid and not learning his lessons – which, indeed, he did not – but, in reality, for constantly quarrelling with and insulting De Chaulieu, who had not strength to cope with him. When they left the academy, the feud continued in all its vigor, and was fostered by a thousand little circumstances arising out of the state of the times, till a separation ensued in consequence of an aunt of Antoine de Chaulieu's undertaking the expense of sending him to Paris to study the law, and of maintaining him there during the necessary period.

With the progress of events came some degree of reaction in favor of birth and nobility, and then Antoine, who had passed for the bar, began to hold up his head and endeavored to push his fortunes; but fate seemed against him. He felt certain that if he possessed any gift in the world it was that of eloquence, but he could get no cause to plead; and his aunt dying inopportunately, first his resources failed, and then his health. He had no sooner returned to his home, than, to complicate his difficulties completely, he fell in love with Mademoiselle Natalie de Bellefonds, who had just returned from Paris, where she had been completing her education. To expiate on the perfections of Mademoiselle Natalie, would be a waste of ink and paper; it is sufficient to say that she really was a very charming girl, with a fortune which, though not large, would have been a most desirable acquisition to De Chaulieu, who had nothing. Neither was the fair Natalie indisposed to listen to his addresses; but her father could not be expected to countenance the suit of a gentleman, however well-born, who had not a ten-sous piece in the world, and whose prospects were a blank.

While the ambitious and love-sick young barrister was thus pining in unwelcome obscurity, his old acquaintance, Jacques Rollet, had been acquiring an undesirable notoriety. There was nothing really bad in Jacques' disposition, but having been bred up a democrat, with a hatred of the nobility, he could not easily accommodate his rough humor to treat them with civility when it was no longer safe to insult them. The liberties he allowed himself whenever circumstances brought him into contact with the higher classes of society, had led him into many scrapes, out of which his father's money had one way or another released him; but that source of safety had now failed. Old Rollet having been too busy with the affairs of the nation to attend to his business, had died insolvent, leaving his son with nothing but his own wits to help him out of future difficulties, and it was not long before their exercise was called for. Claudine Rollet, his sister, who was a very pretty girl, had attracted the attention of Mademoiselle de Bellefonds' brother, Alphonso; and as he paid her more attention than from such a quarter was agreeable to Jacques, the young men had more than one quarrel on the subject, on which occasions they had each, characteristically, given vent to their enmity, the one in

contemptuous monosyllables, and the other in a volley of insulting words. But Claudine had another lover more nearly of her own condition of life; this was Claperon, the deputy-governor of the Rouen jail, with whom she made acquaintance during one or two compulsory visits paid by her brother to that functionary; but Claudine, who was a bit of a coquette, though she did not altogether reject his suit, gave him little encouragement, so that betwixt hopes, and fears, and doubts, and jealousies, poor Claperon led a very uneasy kind of life.

Affairs had been for some time in this position, when, one fine morning, Alphonse de Bellefonds was not to be found in his chamber when his servant went to call him; neither had his bed been slept in. He had been observed to go out rather late on the preceding evening, but whether or not he had returned, nobody could tell. He had not appeared at supper, but that was too ordinary an event to awaken suspicion; and little alarm was excited till several hours had elapsed, when inquiries were instituted and a search commenced, which terminated in the discovery of his body, a good deal mangled, lying at the bottom of a pond which had belonged to the old brewery. Before any investigations had been made, every person had jumped to the conclusion that the young man had been murdered, and that Jacques Rollet was the assassin. There was a strong presumption in favor of that opinion, which further perquisitions tended to confirm. Only the day before, Jacques had been heard to threaten M. de Bellefonds with speedy vengeance. On the fatal evening, Alphonse and Claudine had been seen together in the neighborhood of the now dismantled brewery; and as Jacques, betwixt poverty and democracy, was in bad odor with the prudent and respectable part of society, it was not easy for him to bring witnesses to character, or prove an unexceptionable alibi. As for the Bellefonds and De Chaulieus, and the aristocracy in general, they entertained no doubt of his guilt; and finally, the magistrates coming to the same opinion, Jacques Rollet was committed for trial, and as a testimony of good will Antoine de Chaulieu was selected by the injured family to conduct the prosecution.

Here, at last, was the opportunity he had sighed for! So interesting a case, too, furnishing such ample occasion for passion, pathos, indignation! And how eminently fortunate that the speech which he set himself with ardor to prepare, would be delivered in the presence of the father and brother of his mistress, and perhaps of the lady herself! The evidence against Jacques, it is true, was altogether presumptive; there was no proof whatever that he had committed the crime; and for his own part he stoutly denied it. But Antoine de Chaulieu entertained no doubt of his guilt, and his speech was certainly well calculated to carry conviction into the bosom of others. It was of the highest importance to his own reputation that he should procure a verdict, and he confidently assured the afflicted and enraged family of the victim that their vengeance should be satisfied. Under these circumstances could anything be more unwelcome than a piece of intelligence that was privately conveyed to him late on the evening before the trial was to come on, which tended strongly to exculpate the prisoner, without indicating any other person as the criminal. Here was an opportunity lost. The first step of the ladder on which he was to rise to fame, fortune, and a wife, was slipping from under his feet!

Of course, so interesting a trial was anticipated with great eagerness by the public, and the court was crowded with all the beauty and fashion of Rouen. Though Jacques Rollet persisted in asserting his innocence, founding his defence chiefly on circumstances which were strongly corroborated by the information that had reached De Chaulieu the preceding evening, – he was convicted.

In spite of the very strong doubts he privately entertained respecting the justice of the verdict, even De Chaulieu himself, in the first flush of success, amid a crowd of congratulating friends, and the approving smiles of his mistress, felt gratified and happy; his speech had, for the time being, not only convinced others, but himself; warmed with his own eloquence, he believed what he said. But when the glow was over, and he found himself alone, he did not feel so comfortable. A latent doubt of Rollet's guilt now burnt strongly in his mind, and he felt that the blood of the innocent would be on his head. It is true there was yet time to save the life of the prisoner, but to admit Jacques innocent, was to take the glory out of his own speech, and turn the sting of his argument against himself. Besides, if

he produced the witness who had secretly given him the information, he should be self-condemned, for he could not conceal that he had been aware of the circumstance before the trial.

Matters having gone so far, therefore, it was necessary that Jacques Rollet should die; so the affair took its course; and early one morning the guillotine was erected in the court-yard of the jail, three criminals ascended the scaffold, and three heads fell into the basket, which were presently afterwards, with the trunks that had been attached to them, buried in a corner of the cemetery.

Antoine de Chaulieu was now fairly started in his career, and his success was as rapid as the first step towards it had been tardy. He took a pretty apartment in the Hôtel de Marbœuf, Rue Grange-Batelière, and in a short time was looked upon as one of the most rising young advocates in Paris. His success in one line brought him success in another; he was soon a favorite in society, and an object of interest to speculating mothers; but his affections still adhered to his old love Natalie de Bellefonds, whose family now gave their assent to the match – at least, prospectively – a circumstance which furnished such an additional incentive to his exertions, that in about two years from the date of his first brilliant speech, he was in a sufficiently flourishing condition to offer the young lady a suitable home. In anticipation of the happy event, he engaged and furnished a suite of apartments in the Rue du Helder; and as it was necessary that the bride should come to Paris to provide her trousseau, it was agreed that the wedding should take place there, instead of at Bellefonds, as had been first projected; an arrangement the more desirable, that a press of business rendered M. de Chaulieu's absence from Paris inconvenient.

Brides and bridegrooms in France, except of the very high classes, are not much in the habit of making those honeymoon excursions so universal in this country. A day spent in visiting Versailles, or St. Cloud, or even the public places of the city, is generally all that precedes the settling down into the habits of daily life. In the present instance St. Denis was selected, from the circumstance of Natalie having a younger sister at school there; and also because she had a particular desire to see the Abbey.

The wedding was to take place on a Thursday; and on the Wednesday evening, having spent some hours most agreeably with Natalie, Antoine de Chaulieu returned to spend his last night in his bachelor apartments. His wardrobe and other small possessions, had already been packed up and sent to his future home; and there was nothing left in his room now, but his new wedding suit, which he inspected with considerable satisfaction before he undressed and lay down to sleep. Sleep, however, was somewhat slow to visit him; and the clock had struck *one* before he closed his eyes. When he opened them again, it was broad day-light; and his first thought was, had he overslept himself? He sat up in bed to look at the clock which was exactly opposite, and as he did so, in the large mirror over the fire-place, he perceived a figure standing behind him. As the dilated eyes met his own, he saw it was the face of Jacques Rollet. Overcome with horror he sunk back on his pillow, and it was some minutes before he ventured to look again in that direction; when he did so, the figure had disappeared.

The sudden revulsion of feeling such a vision was calculated to occasion in a man elate with joy, may be conceived! For some time after the death of his former foe, he had been visited by not unfrequent twinges of conscience; but of late, borne along by success, and the hurry of Parisian life, these unpleasant remembrances had grown rarer, till at length they had faded away altogether. Nothing had been further from his thoughts than Jacques Rollet, when he closed his eyes on the preceding night, nor when he opened them to that sun which was to shine on what he expected to be the happiest day of his life! Where were the high-strung nerves now! The elastic frame! The bounding heart!

Heavily and slowly he arose from his bed, for it was time to do so; and with a trembling hand and quivering knees, he went through the processes of the toilet, gashing his cheek with the razor, and spilling the water over his well-polished boots. When he was dressed, scarcely venturing to cast a glance in the mirror as he passed it, he quitted the room and descended the stairs, taking the key of the door with him for the purpose of leaving it with the porter; the man, however, being absent, he laid it on the table in his lodge, and with a relaxed and languid step proceeded on his way to the

church, where presently arrived the fair Natalie and her friends. How difficult it was now to look happy with that pallid face and extinguished eye!

“How pale you are! Has anything happened? You are surely ill?” were the exclamations that met him on all sides. He tried to carry it off as well as he could, but felt that the movements he would have wished to appear alert were only convulsive; and that the smiles with which he attempted to relax his features, were but distorted grimaces. However, the church was not the place for further inquiries; and while Natalie gently pressed his hand in token of sympathy, they advanced to the altar, and the ceremony was performed; after which they stepped into the carriages waiting at the door, and drove to the apartments of Madame de Bellefonds, where an elegant *déjeuner* was prepared.

“What ails you, my dear husband?” inquired Natalie, as soon as they were alone.

“Nothing, love,” he replied; “nothing, I assure you, but a restless night and a little overwork, in order that I might have to-day free to enjoy my happiness!”

“Are you quite sure? Is there nothing else?”

“Nothing, indeed; and pray don't take notice of it, it only makes me worse!”

Natalie was not deceived, but she saw that what he said was true; notice made him worse; so she contented herself with observing him quietly, and saying nothing; but, as he *felt* she was observing him, she might almost better have spoken; words are often less embarrassing things than too curious eyes.

When they reached Madame de Bellefonds' he had the same sort of questioning and scrutiny to undergo, till he grew quite impatient under it, and betrayed a degree of temper altogether unusual with him. Then everybody looked astonished; some whispered their remarks, and others expressed them by their wondering eyes, till his brow knit, and his pallid cheeks became flushed with anger. Neither could he divert attention by eating; his parched mouth would not allow him to swallow anything but liquids, of which, however, he indulged in copious libations; and it was an exceeding relief to him when the carriage, which was to convey them to St. Denis, being announced, furnished an excuse for hastily leaving the table. Looking at his watch, he declared it was late; and Natalie, who saw how eager he was to be gone, threw her shawl over her shoulders, and bidding her friends *good morning*, they hurried away.

It was a fine sunny day in June; and as they drove along the crowded boulevards, and through the Porte St. Denis, the young bride and bridegroom, to avoid each others eyes, affected to be gazing out of the windows; but when they reached that part of the road where there was nothing but trees on each side, they felt it necessary to draw in their heads, and make an attempt at conversation, De Chaulieu put his arm round his wife's waist, and tried to rouse himself from his depression; but it had by this time so reacted upon her, that she could not respond to his efforts, and thus the conversation languished, till both felt glad when they reached their destination, which would, at all events, furnish them something to talk about.

Having quitted the carriage, and ordered a dinner at the Hôtel de l'Abbaye, the young couple proceeded to visit Mademoiselle Hortense de Bellefonds, who was overjoyed to see her sister and new brother-in-law, and doubly so when she found that they had obtained permission to take her out to spend the afternoon with them. As there is little to be seen at St. Denis but the Abbey, on quitting that part of it devoted to education, they proceeded to visit the church, with its various objects of interest; and as De Chaulieu's thoughts were now forced into another direction, his cheerfulness began insensibly to return. Natalie looked so beautiful, too, and the affection betwixt the two young sisters was so pleasant to behold! And they spent a couple of hours wandering about with Hortense, who was almost as well informed as the Suisse, till the brazen doors were open which admitted them to the Royal vault. Satisfied, at length, with what they had seen, they began to think of returning to the inn, the more especially as De Chaulieu, who had not eaten a morsel of food since the previous evening, owned to being hungry; so they directed their steps to the door, lingering here and there as they went, to inspect a monument or a painting, when, happening to turn his head aside to see if

his wife, who had stopt to take a last look at the tomb of King Dagobert, was following, he beheld with horror the face of Jacques Rollet appearing from behind a column! At the same instant his wife joined him, and took his arm, inquiring if he was not very much delighted with what he had seen. He attempted to say yes, but the word would not be forced out; and staggering out of the door, he alleged that a sudden faintness had overcome him.

They conducted him to the Hôtel, but Natalie now became seriously alarmed; and well she might. His complexion looked ghastly, his limbs shook, and his features bore an expression of indescribable horror and anguish. What could be the meaning of so extraordinary a change in the gay, witty, prosperous De Chaulieu, who, till that morning, seemed not to have a care in the world? For, plead illness as he might, she felt certain, from the expression of his features, that his sufferings were not of the body but of the mind; and, unable to imagine any reason for such extraordinary manifestations, of which she had never before seen a symptom, but a sudden aversion to herself, and regret for the step he had taken, her pride took the alarm, and, concealing the distress she really felt, she began to assume a haughty and reserved manner towards him, which he naturally interpreted into an evidence of anger and contempt. The dinner was placed upon the table, but De Chaulieu's appetite, of which he had lately boasted, was quite gone, nor was his wife better able to eat. The young sister alone did justice to the repast; but although the bridegroom could not eat, he could swallow champagne in such copious draughts, that ere long the terror and remorse that the apparition of Jacques Rollet had awakened in his breast were drowned in intoxication. Amazed and indignant, poor Natalie sat silently observing this elect of her heart, till overcome with disappointment and grief, she quitted the room with her sister, and retired to another apartment, where she gave free vent to her feelings in tears.

After passing a couple of hours in confidences and lamentations, they recollected that the hours of liberty granted, as an especial favor, to Mademoiselle Hortense, had expired; but ashamed to exhibit her husband in his present condition to the eyes of strangers, Natalie prepared to re-conduct her to the *Maison Royale* herself. Looking into the dining-room as they passed, they saw De Chaulieu lying on a sofa fast asleep, in which state he continued when his wife returned. At length, however, the driver of their carriage begged to know if Monsieur and Madame were ready to return to Paris, and it became necessary to arouse him. The transitory effects of the champagne had now subsided; but when De Chaulieu recollected what had happened, nothing could exceed his shame and mortification. So engrossing indeed were these sensations that they quite overpowered his previous one, and, in his present vexation, he, for the moment, forgot his fears. He knelt at his wife's feet, begged her pardon a thousand times, swore that he adored her, and declared that the illness and the effect of the wine had been purely the consequences of fasting and over-work. It was not the easiest thing in the world to re-assure a woman whose pride, affection, and taste, had been so severely wounded; but Natalie tried to believe, or to appear to do so, and a sort of reconciliation ensued, not quite sincere on the part of the wife, and very humbling on the part of the husband. Under these circumstances it was impossible that he should recover his spirits or facility of manner; his gaiety was forced, his tenderness constrained; his heart was heavy within him; and ever and anon the source whence all this disappointment and woe had sprung would recur to his perplexed and tortured mind.

Thus mutually pained and distrustful, they returned to Paris, which they reached about nine o'clock. In spite of her depression, Natalie, who had not seen her new apartments, felt some curiosity about them, whilst De Chaulieu anticipated a triumph in exhibiting the elegant home he had prepared for her. With some alacrity, therefore, they stepped out of the carriage, the gates of the Hôtel were thrown open, the *concierge* rang the bell which announced to the servants that their master and mistress had arrived, and whilst these domestics appeared above, holding lights over the balustrades, Natalie, followed by her husband, ascended the stairs. But when they reached the landing-place of the first flight, they saw the figure of a man standing in a corner as if to make way for them; the flash from above fell upon his face, and again Antoine de Chaulieu recognized the features of Jacques Rollet!

From the circumstance of his wife's preceding him, the figure was not observed by De Chaulieu till he was lifting his foot to place it on the top stair: the sudden shock caused him to miss the step, and, without uttering a sound, he fell back, and never stopped till he reached the stones at the bottom. The screams of Natalie brought the concierge from below and the maids from above, and an attempt was made to raise the unfortunate man from the ground; but with cries of anguish he besought them to desist.

"Let me," he said, "die here! What a fearful vengeance is thine! Oh, Natalie, Natalie!" he exclaimed to his wife, who was kneeling beside him, "to win fame, and fortune, and yourself, I committed a dreadful crime! With lying words I argued away the life of a fellow-creature, whom, whilst I uttered them, I half believed to be innocent; and now, when I have attained all I desired, and reached the summit of my hopes, the Almighty has sent him back upon the earth to blast me with the sight. Three times this day – three times this day! Again! again!" – and as he spoke, his wild and dilated eyes fixed themselves on one of the individuals that surrounded him.

"He is delirious," said they.

"No," said the stranger! "What he says is true enough, – at least in part;" and bending over the expiring man, he added, "May Heaven forgive you, Antoine de Chaulieu! I was not executed; one who well knew my innocence saved my life. I may name him, for he is beyond the reach of the law now, – it was Claperon, the jailor, who loved Claudine, and had himself killed Alphonse de Bellefonds from jealousy. An unfortunate wretch had been several years in the jail for a murder committed during the frenzy of a fit of insanity. Long confinement had reduced him to idiocy. To save my life Claperon substituted the senseless being for me, on the scaffold, and he was executed in my stead. He has quitted the country, and I have been a vagabond on the face of the earth ever since that time. At length I obtained, through the assistance of my sister, the situation of concierge in the Hôtel Marbœuf, in the Rue Grange-Batelière. I entered on my new place yesterday evening, and was desired to awaken the gentleman on the third floor at seven o'clock. When I entered the room to do so, you were asleep, but before I had time to speak you awoke, and I recognized your features in the glass. Knowing that I could not vindicate my innocence if you chose to seize me, I fled, and seeing an omnibus starting for St. Denis, I got on it with a vague idea of getting on to Calais, and crossing the Channel to England. But having only a franc or two in my pocket, or indeed in the world, I did not know how to procure the means of going forward; and whilst I was lounging about the place, forming first one plan and then another, I saw you in the church, and concluding you were in pursuit of me, I thought the best way of eluding your vigilance was to make my way back to Paris as fast as I could; so I set off instantly, and walked all the way; but having no money to pay my night's lodging, I came here to borrow a couple of livres of my sister Claudine, who lives in the fifth story."

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed the dying man; "that sin is off my soul! Natalie, dear wife, farewell! Forgive! forgive all!"

These were the last words he uttered; the priest, who had been summoned in haste, held up the cross before his failing sight; a few strong convulsions shook the poor bruised and mangled frame; and then all was still.

And thus ended the Young Advocate's Wedding Day.

II. The Last of a Long Line

SIR ROGER ROCKVILLE of Rockville was the last of a very long line. It extended from the Norman Conquest to the present century. His first known ancestor came over with William, and must have been a man of some mark, either of bone and sinew, or of brain, for he obtained what the Americans would call a prime location. As his name does not occur in the Roll of Battle Abbey, he was, of course, not of a very high Norman extraction; but he had done enough, it seems, in the way of knocking down Saxons, to place himself on a considerable eminence in this kingdom. The centre of his domains was conspicuous far over the country, through a high range of rock overhanging one of the sweetest rivers in England. On one hand lay a vast tract of rich marsh land, capable, as society advanced, of being converted into meadows; and on the other, as extensive moorlands, finely undulating, and abounding with woods and deer.

Here the original Sir Roger built his castle on the summit of the range of rock, with huts for his followers; and became known directly all over the country of Sir Roger de Rockville, or Sir Roger of the hamlet on the Rock. Sir Roger, no doubt, was a mighty hunter before the lord of the feudal district: it is certain that his descendants were. For generations they led a jolly life at Rockville, and were always ready to exchange the excitement of the chase for a bit of the civil war. Without that the country would have grown dull, and ale and venison lost their flavor. There was no gay London in those days, and a good brisk skirmish with their neighbors in helm and hauberk was the way of spending their season. It was their parliamentary debate, and was necessary to stir their blood. Protection and Free Trade were as much the great topics of interest as they are now, only they did not trouble themselves so much about Corn-bills. Their bills were of good steel, and their protective measures were arrows a cloth-yard long. Protection meant a good suit of mail; and a castle with its duly prescribed moats, bastions, portcullises, and donjon keep. Free Trade was a lively inroad into the neighboring baron's lands, and the importation thence of goodly herds and flocks. Foreign cattle for home consumption was as *striking an article* in their markets as in ours, only the blows were expended on one another's heads, instead of the heads of foreign bullocks – that is, bullocks from over the Welch or Scotch Marches, as from beyond the next brook.

Thus lived the Rockvilles for ages. In all the iron combats of those iron times they took care to have their quota. Whether it was Stephen against Matilda, or Richard against his father, or John against the barons; whether it were York or Lancaster, or Tudor or Stuart. The Rockvilles were to be found in the *mêlée*, and winning power and lands. So long as it required only stalwart frames and stout blows, no family cut a more conspicuous figure. The Rockvilles were at Bosworth Field. The Rockvilles fought in Ireland under Elizabeth. The Rockvilles were staunch defenders of the cause in the war of Charles I. with his Parliament. The Rockvilles even fought for James II. at the Boyne, when three-fourths of the most loyal of the English nobility and gentry had deserted him in disgust and indignation. But from that hour they had been less conspicuous.

The opposition to the successful party, that of William of Orange, of course brought them into disgrace; and though they were never molested on that account, they retired to their estate, and found it convenient to be as unobtrusive as possible. Thenceforward you heard no more of the Rockvilles in the national annals. They became only of consequence in their own district. They acted as magistrates. They served as high sheriffs. They were a substantial county family, and nothing more. Education and civilization advanced; a wider and very different field of action and ambition opened upon the aristocracy of England. Our fleets and armies abroad, our legislature at home, law and the church, presented brilliant paths to the ambition of those thirsting for distinction, and the good things that follow it. But somehow the Rockvilles did not expand with this expansion. So long as

it required only a figure of six feet high, broad shoulders, and a strong arm, they were a great and conspicuous race. But when the head became the member most in request, they ceased to go ahead. Younger sons, it is true, served in army and in navy, and filled the family pulpit, but they produced no generals, no admirals, no arch-bishops. The Rockvilles of Rockville were very conservative, very exclusive, and very stereotype. Other families grew poor, and enriched themselves again by marrying plebeian heiresses. New families grew up out of plebeian blood into greatness, and intermingled the vigor of their fresh earth with the attenuated aristocratic soil. Men of family became great lawyers, great statesmen, great prelates, and even great poets and philosophers. The Rockvilles remained high, proud, bigoted, and *borné*.

The Rockvilles married Rockvilles, or their first cousins, the Craigvilles, simply to prevent property going out of the family. They kept the property together. They did not lose an acre, and they were a fine, tall, solemn race – and nothing more. What ailed them?

If you saw Sir Roger Rockville, – for there was an eternal Sir Roger – filling his office of high sheriff, – he had a very fine carriage, and a very fine retinue in the most approved and splendid of antique costumes; – if you saw him sitting on the bench at quarter sessions, he was a tall, stately, and solemn man. If you saw Lady Rockville shopping, in her handsome carriage, with very handsomely attired servants; saw her at the county ball, or on the race-stand, she was a tall, aristocratic, and stately lady. That was in the last generation – the present could boast of no Lady Rockville.

Great outward respect was shown to the Rockvilles on account of the length of their descent, and the breadth of their acres. They were always, when any stranger asked about them, declared, with a serious and important air, to be a very ancient, honorable, and substantial family. “Oh! a great family are the Rockvilles, a very great family.”

But if you came to close quarters with the members of this great and highly distinguished family, you soon found yourself fundamentally astonished; you had a sensation come over you, as if you were trying, like Moses, to draw water from a rock without his delegated power. There was a goodly outside of things before you, but nothing came of it. You talked, hoping to get talking in return, but you got little more than “noes” and “yeses,” and “oh! indeeds!” and “reallys,” and sometimes not even that, but a certain look of aristocratic dignity or dignification, that was meant to serve for all answers. There was a sort of resting on aristocratic oars or “sculls,” that were not to be too vulgarly handled. There was a feeling impressed on you, that eight hundred years of descent and ten thousand a-year in landed income did not trouble themselves with the trifling things that gave distinction to lesser people – such as literature, fine arts, politics, and general knowledge. These were very well for those who had nothing else to pride themselves on, but for the Rockvilles – oh! certainly they were by no means requisite.

In fact, you found yourself, with a little variation, in the predicament of Cowper’s people,

– who spent their lives
In dropping buckets into empty wells,
And *growing tired* of drawing nothing up.

Who hasn’t often come across these “dry wells” of society; solemn gulfs out of which you can pump nothing up? You know them; they are at your elbow every day in large and brilliant companies, and defy the best sucking bucket ever invented to extract anything from them. But the Rockvilles were each and all of this adust description. It was a family feature, and they seemed, if either, rather proud of it. They must be so; for proud they were, amazing proud; and they had nothing besides to be proud of, except their acres, and their ancestors.

But the fact was, they could not help it. It was become organic. They had acted the justice of peace, maintained the constitution against upstarts and manufacturers, signed warrants, supported the church and the house of correction, committed poachers, and then rested on the dignity of their

ancestors for so many generations, that their skulls, brains, constitutions, and nervous systems, were all so completely moulded into that shape and baked into that mould, that a Rockville would be a Rockville to the end of time, if God and Nature would have allowed it. But such things wear out. The American Indians and the Australian nations wear out; they are not progressive, and as Nature abhors a vacuum, she does not forget the vacuum wherever it may be, whether in a hot desert, or in a cold and stately Rockville; – a very ancient, honorable, and substantial family, that lies fallow till the thinking faculty literally dies out.

For several generations there had been symptoms of decay about the Rockville family. Not in its property, that was as large as ever; not in their personal stature and physical aspect. The Rockvilles continued, as they always had been, a tall and not bad-looking family. But they grew gradually less prolific. For a hundred and fifty years past there had seldom been more than two, or at most three, children. There had generally been an heir to the estate, and another to the family pulpit, and sometimes a daughter married to some neighboring squire. But Sir Roger's father had been an only child, and Sir Roger himself was an only child. The danger of extinction to the family, apparent as it was, had never induced Sir Roger to marry. At the time that we are turning our attention upon him, he had reached the mature age of sixty. Nobody believed that Sir Roger now would marry; he was the last, and likely to be, of his line.

It is worth while here to take a glance at Sir Roger and his estate. They bore a strange contrast. The one bore all the signs of progress, the other of a stereotyped feudality. The estate which in the days of the first Sir Roger de Rockville had been half morass and half wilderness, was now cultivated to the pitch of British agricultural science. The marshlands beyond the river were one splendid expanse of richest meadows, yielding a rental of four solid pounds per acre. Over hill and dale on this side for miles, where formerly ran wild deer, and grew wild woodlands or furze-bushes, now lay excellent farms and hamlets, and along the ridge of the ancient cliffs rose the most magnificent woods. Woods, too, clothed the steep-hill sides, and swept down to the noble river, their very boughs hanging far out over its clear and rapid waters. In the midst of these fine woods stood Rockville Hall, the family seat of the Rockvilles. It reared its old brick walls above the towering mass of elms, and travellers at a distance recognized it for what it was, the mansion of an ancient and wealthy family.

The progress of England in arts, science, commerce, and manufacture, had carried Sir Roger's estate along with it. It was full of active and moneyed farmers, and flourished under modern influences. How lucky it would have been for the Rockville family had it done the same.

But amid this estate there was Sir Roger solitary, and the last of the line. He had grown well enough – there was nothing stunted about him, so far as you could see on the surface. In stature, he exceeded six feet. His colossal elms could not boast of a properer relative growth. He was as large a landlord, and as tall a justice of the peace, as you could desire; but, unfortunately, he was, after all, only the shell of a man. Like many of his veteran elms, there was a very fine stem, only it was hollow. There was a man, just with the rather awkward deficiency of a soul.

And it were no difficult task to explain, either, how this had come about. The Rockvilles saw plainly enough the necessity of manuring their lands, but they scorned the very idea of manuring their family. What! that most ancient, honorable, and substantial family, suffer any of the common earth of humanity to gather about its roots! The Rockvilles were so careful of their good blood, that they never allied it to any but blood as pure and inane as their own. Their elms flourished in the rotten earth of plebeian accumulations, and their acres produced large crops of corn from the sewage of towns and fat sinks, but the Rockvilles themselves took especial care that no vulgar vigor from the rich heap of ordinary human nature should infuse a new force of intellect into their race. The Rockvilles needed nothing; they had all that an ancient, honorable, and substantial family could need. The Rockvilles had no need to study at school – why should they? They did not want to get on. The Rockvilles did not aspire to distinction for talent in the world – why should they? They had a large estate. So the Rockville soul, unused from generation to generation, grew —

Fine by degrees and *spiritually* less,

till it tapered off into nothing.

Look at the last of a long line in the midst of his fine estate. Tall he was, with a stoop in his shoulders, and a bowing of his head on one side, as if he had been accustomed to stand under the low boughs of his woods, and peer after intruders. And that was precisely the fact. His features were thin and sharp; his nose prominent and keen in its character; his eyes small, black, and peering like a mole's, or a hungry swine's. Sir Roger was still oracular on the bench, after consulting his clerk, a good lawyer, – and looked up to by the neighboring squires in election matters, for he was an unswerving tory. You never heard of a rational thing that he had said in the whole course of his life; but that mattered little, he was a gentleman of solemn aspect, of stately gait, and of a very ancient family.

With ten thousand a-year, and his rental rising, he was still, however, a man of overwhelming cares. What mattered a fine estate if all the world was against him? And Sir Roger firmly believed that he stood in that predicament. He had grown up to regard the world as full of little besides upstarts, radicals, manufacturers, and poachers. All were banded, in his belief, against the landed interest. It demanded all the energy of his very small faculties to defend himself and the world against them.

Unfortunately for his peace, a large manufacturing town had sprung up within a couple of miles of him. He could see its red-brick walls, and its red-tiled roofs, and its tall smoke-vomiting chimneys, growing and extending over the slopes beyond the river. It was to him the most irritating sight in the world; for what were all those swarming weavers and spinners but arrant radicals, upstarts, sworn foes of the ancient institutions and the landed interests of England? Sir Roger had passed through many a desperate conflict with them for the return of members to parliament. They brought forward men that were utter wormwood to all his feelings, and they paid no more respect to him and his friends on such occasions than they did to the meanest creature living. Reverence for ancient blood did not exist in that plebeian and rapidly multiplying tribe. There were master manufacturers there actually that looked and talked as big as himself, and *entre nous*, a vast deal more cleverly. The people talked of rights and franchises, and freedom of speech and of conscience, in a way that was really frightful. Then they were given most inveterately to running out in whole and everlasting crowds on Sundays and holidays into the fields and woods; and as there was no part of the neighborhood half so pleasant as the groves and river banks of Rockville, they came swarming up there in crowds that were enough to drive any man of acres frantic.

Unluckily, there were roads all about Rockville; foot roads, and high roads, and bridle roads. There was a road up the river side, all the way to Rockville woods, and when it reached them, it divided like a fork, and one prong or footpath led straight up a magnificent grove of a mile long, ending close to the hall; and another ran all along the river side, under the hills and branches of the wood.

Oh, delicious were these woods! In the river there were islands, which were covered in summer with the greenest grass, and the freshest of willows, and the clear waters rushed around them in the most inviting manner imaginable. And there were numbers of people extremely ready to accept this delectable invitation of these waters. There they came in fine weather, and as these islands were only separated from the main-land by a little and very shallow stream, it was delightful for lovers to get across – with laughter, and treading on stepping stones, and slipping off the stepping-stones up to the ankles into the cool brook, and pretty screams, and fresh laughter, and then landing on those sunny, and to them really enchanted, islands. And then came fishermen, solitary fishermen, and fishermen in rows; fishermen lying in the flowery grass, with fragrant meadow-sweet and honey-breathing clover all about their ears; and fishermen standing in file, as if they were determined to clear all the river of fish in one day. And there were other lovers, and troops of loiterers, and shouting roysterers, going along under the boughs of the wood, and following the turns of that most companionable of rivers. And there were boats going up and down; boats full of young people, all holiday finery and mirth, and

boats with duck-hunters and other, to Sir Roger, detestable marauders, with guns and dogs, and great bottles of beer. In the fine grove, on summer days, there might be found hundreds of people. There were pic-nic parties, fathers and mothers with whole families of children, and a grand promenade of the delighted artisans and their wives or sweethearts.

In the times prior to the sudden growth of the neighboring town, Great Stockington, and to the simultaneous development of the love-of-nature principle in the Stockingtonians, nothing had been thought of all these roads. The roads were well enough till they led to these inroads. Then Sir Roger aroused himself. This must be changed. The roads must be stopped. Nothing was easier to his fancy. His fellow-justices, Sir Benjamin Bullockshed and Squire Sheepshank, had asked his aid to stop the like nuisances, and it had been done at once. So Sir Roger put up notices all about, that the roads were to be stopped by an Order of Session, and these notices were signed, as required by law, by their worships of Bullockshed and Sheepshank. But Sir Roger soon found that it was one thing to stop a road leading from One-man-Town to Lonely Lodge, and another to attempt to stop those from Great Stockington to Rockville.

On the very first Sunday after the exhibition of those notice-boards, there was a ferment in the grove of Rockville, as if all the bees in the county were swarming there, with all the wasps and Hornets to boot. Great crowds were collected before each of these obnoxious placards, and the amount of curses vomited forth against them was really shocking for any day, but more especially for a Sunday. Presently there was a rush at them; they were torn down, and simultaneously pitched into the river. There were great crowds swarming all about Rockville all that day, and with looks so defiant that Sir Roger more than once contemplated sending off for the Yeoman Cavalry to defend his house, which he seriously thought in danger.

But so far from being intimidated from proceeding, this demonstration only made Sir Roger the more determined. To have so desperate and irreverent a population coming about his house and woods, now presented itself in a much more formidable aspect than ever. So, next day, not only were the placards once more hoisted, but rewards offered for the discovery of the offenders, attended with all the maledictions of the insulted majesty of the law. No notice was taken of this, but the whole of Great Stockington was in a buzz and an agitation. There were posters plastered all over the walls of the town, four times as large as Sir Roger's notices, in this style: —

“Englishmen! your dearest rights are menaced! The Woods of Rockville, your ancient, rightful, and enchanting resorts, are to be closed to you. Stockingtonians! the eyes of the world are upon you. ‘Awake! arise! or be forever fallen!’ England expects every man to do his duty! And your duty is to resist and defy the grasping soil-lords, to seize on your ancient Patrimony!”

“Patrimony! Ancient and rightful resort of Rockville!” Sir Roger was astounded at the audacity of this upstart, plebeian race. “What! they actually claimed Rockville, the heritage of a hundred successive Rockvilles, as their own. Sir Roger determined to carry it to the Sessions; and at the Sessions was a magnificent muster of all his friends. There was Sir Roger himself in the chair; and on either hand, a prodigious row of county squirearchy. There was Sir Benjamin Bullockshed, and Sir Thomas Tenterhook, and all the squires, — Sheepshank, Ramsbottom, Turnbull, Otterbrook, and Swagsides. The Clerk of the Session read the notice for the closing of all the footpaths through the woods of Rockville, and declared that this notice had been duly, and for the required period publicly posted. The Stockingtonians protested by their able lawyer Daredeville, against any order for the closing of these ancient woods — the inestimable property of the public.

“Property of the public!” exclaimed Sir Roger. “Property of the public!” echoed the multitudinous voices of indignant Bullocksheds, Tenterhooks, and Ramsbottoms. “Why, Sir, do you dispute the right of Sir Roger Rockville to his own estate?”

“By no means;” replied the undaunted Daredeville; “the estate of Rockville is unquestionably the property of the honorable baronet, Sir Roger Rockville; but the roads through it are the as unquestionable property of the public.”

The whole bench looked at itself; that is, at each other, in wrathful astonishment. The swelling in the diaphragms of the squires Otterbrook, Turnbull, and Swagsides, and all the rest of the worshipful row, was too big to admit of utterance. Only Sir Roger himself burst forth with an abrupt – “Impudent fellows! But I’ll see them – first!”

“Grant the order!” said Sir Benjamin Bullockshed; and the whole bench nodded assent. The able lawyer Daredeville retired with a pleasant smile. He saw an agreeable prospect of plenty of grist to his mill. Sir Roger was rich, and so was Great Stockington. He rubbed his hands, not in the least like a man defeated, and thought to himself, “Let them go at it – all right.”

The next day the placards on the Rockville estate were changed for others bearing “Stopped by Order of Sessions!” and alongside of them were huge carefully painted boards, denouncing on all trespassers prosecutions according to law. The same evening came a prodigious invasion of Stockingtonians – tore all the boards and placards down, and carried them on their shoulders to Great Stockington, singing as they went, “See, the Conquering Heroes come!” They set them up in the centre of the Stockington market-place, and burnt them, along with an effigy of Sir Roger Rockville.

That was grist at once to the mill of the able lawyer Daredeville. He looked on, and rubbed his hands. Warrants were speedily issued by the Baronets of Bullockshed and Tenterhook, for the apprehension of the individuals who had been seen carrying off the notice-boards, for larceny, and against a number of others for trespass. There was plenty of work for Daredeville and his brethren of the robe; but it all ended, after the flying about of sundry mandamuses and assize trials, in Sir Roger finding that though Rockville was his, the roads through it were the public’s.

As Sir Roger drove homeward from the assize, which finally settled the question of these footpaths, he heard the bells in all the steeples of Great Stockington burst forth with a grand peal of triumph. He closed fast the windows of his fine old carriage, and sunk into a corner; but he could not drown the intolerable sound. “But,” said he, “I’ll stop their pic-nic-ing. I’ll stop their fishing. I’ll have hold of them for trespassing and poaching!” There was war henceforth between Rockville and Great Stockington.

On the very next Sunday there came literally thousands of the jubilant Stockingtonians to Rockville. They had brought baskets, and were for dining, and drinking success to all footpaths. But in the great grove there were keepers, and watchers, who warned them to keep the path, that narrow well-worn line up the middle of the grove. “What! were they not to sit on the grass?” – “No!” – “What! were they not to pic-nic?” – “No! not there!”

The Stockingtonians felt a sudden damp on their spirits. But the river bank! The cry was. “To the river bank! There they *would* pic-nic.” The crowd rushed away down the wood, but on the river bank they found a whole regiment of watchers, who pointed again to the narrow line of footpath, and told them not to trespass beyond it. But the islands! they went over to the islands. But there too were Sir Roger’s forces, who warned them back! There was no road there – all found there would be trespassers, and be duly punished.

The Stockingtonians discovered that their triumph was not quite so complete as they had flattered themselves. The footpaths were theirs, but that was all. Their ancient license was at an end. If they came there, there was no more fishing; if they came in crowds, there was no more pic-nic-ing; if they walked through the woods in numbers, they must keep to Indian file, or they were summoned before the county magistrates for trespass, and were soundly fined; and not even the able Daredeville would undertake to defend them.

The Stockingtonians were chop-fallen, but they were angry and dogged; and they thronged up to the village and the front of the hall. They filled the little inn in the hamlet – they went by scores, and roving all over the churchyard, read epitaphs

That teach the rustic moralists to die,

but don't teach them to give up their old indulgences very good-humoredly. They went and sat in rows on the old churchyard wall, opposite to the very windows of the irate Sir Roger. They felt themselves beaten, and Sir Roger felt himself beaten. True, he could coerce them to the keeping of the footpaths – but, then, they had the footpaths! True, thought the Stockingtonians, we have the footpaths, but then the pic-nic-ing, and the fishing, and the islands! The Stockingtonians were full of sullen wrath, and Sir Roger was – oh, most expressive old Saxon phrase – HAIRSORE! Yes, he was one universal wound of vexation and jealousy of his rights. Every hair in his body was like a pin sticking into him. Come within a dozen yards of him; nay, at the most, blow on him, and he was excruciated – you rubbed his sensitive hairs at a furlong's distance.

The next Sunday the people found the churchyard locked up, except during service, when beadles walked there, and desired them not to loiter and disturb the congregation, closing the gates, and showing them out like a flock of sheep the moment the service was over. This was fuel to the already boiling blood of Stockington. The week following, what was their astonishment to find the much frequented inn gone! it was actually gone! not a trace of it; but the spot where it had stood for ages, turfed, planted with young spruce trees, and fenced off with post and rail! The exasperated people now launched forth an immensity of fulminations against the churl Sir Roger, and a certain number of them resolved to come and seat themselves in the street of the hamlet and there dine; but a terrific thunderstorm, which seemed in league with Sir Roger, soon routed them, drenched them through, and on attempting to seek shelter in the cottages, the poor people said they were very sorry, but it was as much as their holdings were worth, and they dare not admit them.

Sir Roger had triumphed! It was all over with the old delightful days at Rockville. There was an end of pic-nic-ing, of fishing, and of roving in the islands. One sturdy disciple of Izaak Walton, indeed, dared to fling a line from the banks of Rockville grove, but Sir Roger came upon him and endeavored to seize him. The man coolly walked into the middle of the river, and, without a word, continued his fishing.

“Get out there!” exclaimed Sir Roger, “that is still on my property.” The man walked through the river to the other bank, where he knew that the land was rented by a farmer. “Give over,” shouted Sir Roger, “I tell you the water is mine.”

“Then,” said the fellow, “bottle it up, and be hanged to you! Don't you see it is running away to Stockington?”

There was bad blood between Rockville and Stockington forever. Stockington was incensed, and Sir Roger was hairsore.

A new nuisance sprung up. The people of Stockington looked on the cottagers of Rockville as sunk in deepest darkness under such a man as Sir Roger and his cousin the vicar. They could not pic-nic, but they thought they could hold a camp-meeting; they could not fish for roach, but they thought they might for souls. Accordingly there assembled crowds of Stockingtonians on the green of Rockville, with a chair and a table, and a preacher with his head bound in a red handkerchief; and soon there was a sound of hymns, and a zealous call to come out of the darkness of the spiritual Babylon. But this was more than Sir Roger could bear; he rushed forth with all his servants, keepers, and cottagers, overthrew the table, and routing the assembly, chased them to the boundary of his estate.

The discomfited Stockingtonians now fulminated awful judgments on the unhappy Sir Roger, as a persecutor and a malignant. They dared not enter again on his parish, but they came to the very verge of it, and held weekly meetings on the highway, in which they sang and declaimed as loudly as possible, that the winds might bear their voices to Sir Roger's ears.

To such a position was now reduced the last of the long line of Rockville. The spirit of a policeman had taken possession of him. He had keepers and watchers out on all sides, but that did not satisfy him. He was perpetually haunted with the idea that poachers were after his game, that trespassers were in his woods. His whole life was now spent in stealing to and fro in his fields and plantations, and prowling along his river side. He lurked under hedges, and watched for long hours

under the forest trees. If any one had a curiosity to see Sir Roger, they had only to enter his fields by the wood side, and wander a few yards from the path, and he was almost sure to spring out over the hedge, and in angry tones demand their name and address. The descendant of the chivalrous and steel-clad De Rockvilles was sunk into a restless spy on his own ample property. There was but one idea in his mind – encroachment. It was destitute of all other furniture but the musty technicalities of warrants and commitments. There was a stealthy and skulking manner in everything that he did. He went to church on Sundays, but it was no longer by the grand iron gate opposite to his house, that stood generally with a large spider's web woven over the lock, and several others in different corners of the fine iron tracery, bearing evidence of the long period since it had been opened. How different to the time when the Sir Roger and Lady of Rockville had had these gates thrown wide on a Sunday morning, and, with all their train of household servants at their back, with true antique dignity, marched with much proud humility into the house of God. Now, Sir Roger – the solitary, suspicious, undignified Sir Roger, the keeper and policeman of his own property – stole in at a little side gate from his paddock, and back the same way, wondering all the time whether there was not somebody in his pheasant preserves, or Sunday trespassers in his grove.

If you entered his house, it gave you as cheerless a feeling as its owner. There was the conservatory, so splendid with rich plants and flowers in his mother's time – now a dusty receptacle of hampers, broken hand-glasses, and garden tools. These tools could never be used, for the gardens were grown wild. Tall grass grew in the walks, and the huge unpruned shrubs disputed the passage with you. In the wood above the gardens, reached by several flights of fine, but now moss-grown, steps, there stood a pavilion, once clearly very beautiful. It was now damp and ruinous – its walls covered with greenness and crawling insects. It was a great lurking-place of Sir Roger when on the watch for poachers.

The line of the Rockvilles was evidently running fast out. It had reached the extremity of imbecility and contempt – it must soon reach its close.

Sir Roger used to make his regular annual visit to town; but of late, when there, he had wandered restlessly about the streets, peeping into the shop-windows; and if it rained, standing under entries for hours together, till it was gone over. The habit of lurking and peering about, was upon him; and his feet bore him instinctively into those narrow and crowded alleys where swarm the poachers of the city – the trespassers and anglers in the game preserves and streams of humanity. He had lost all pleasures in his club; the most exciting themes of political life retained no piquancy for him. His old friends ceased to find any pleasure in him. He was become the driest of all dry wells. Poachers, and anglers, and Methodists, haunted the wretched purlieus of his fast fading-out mind, and he resolved to go to town no more. His whole nature was centred in his woods. He was forever on the watch; and when at Rockville again, if he heard a door clap when in bed, he thought it a gun in his woods, and started up, and was out with his keepers.

Of what value was that magnificent estate to him? – those superb woods; those finely-hanging cliffs; that clear and *riant* river coming travelling on, and taking a noble sweep below his windows, – that glorious expanse of neat verdant meadows stretching almost to Stockington, and enlivened by numerous herds of the most beautiful cattle – those old farms and shady lanes overhung with hazel and wild rose; the glittering brook, and the songs of woodland birds – what were they to that worn-out old man, that victim of the delusive doctrine of blood, of the man-trap of an hereditary name?

There the poet could come, and feel the presence of divinity in that noble scene, and hear sublime whispers in the trees, and create new heavens and earths from the glorious chaos of nature around him, and in one short hour live an empyrean of celestial life and love. There could come the very humblest children of the plebeian town, and feel a throb of exquisite delight pervade their bosoms at the sight of the very flowers on the sod, and see heaven in the infinite blue above them. And poor Sir Roger, the holder, but not the possessor of all, walked only in a region of sterility, with no sublimer ideas than poachers and trespassers – no more rational enjoyment than the brute

indulgence of hunting like a ferret, and seizing his fellow-men like a bull-dog. He was a specimen of human nature degenerated, retrograded from the divine to the bestial, through the long-operating influences of false notions and institutions, continued beyond their time. He had only the soul of a keeper. Had he been only a keeper, he had been a much happier man.

His time was at hand. The severity which he had long dealt out towards all sorts of offenders made him the object of the deepest vengeance. In a lonely hollow of his woods, watching at midnight with two of his men, there came a sturdy knot of poachers. An affray ensued. The men perceived that their old enemy, Sir Roger, was there; and the blow of a hedge-stake stretched him on the earth. His keepers fled – and thus ignominiously terminated the long line of the Rockvilles. Sir Roger was the last of his line, but not of his class. There is a feudal art of sinking, which requires no study; and the Rockvilles are but one family among thousands who have perished in its practice.

In Great Stockington there lived a race of paupers. From the year of the 42d of Elizabeth, or 1601, down to the present generation, this race maintained an uninterrupted descent. They were a steady and unbroken line of paupers, as the parish books testify. From generation to generation their demands on the parish funds stand recorded. There were no *lacunæ* in their career; there never failed an heir to these families; fed on the bread of idleness and legal provision, these people nourished, increased, and multiplied. Sometimes compelled to work for the weekly dole which they received, they never acquired a taste for labor, or lost the taste for the bread for which they did not labor. These paupers regarded this maintenance by no means as a disgrace. They claimed it as a right, – as their patrimony. They contended that one-third of the property of the Church had been given by benevolent individuals for the support of the poor, and that what the Reformation wrongfully deprived them of, the great enactment of Elizabeth rightfully – and only rightfully – restored.

Those who imagine that all paupers merely claimed parish relief because the law ordained it, commit a great error. There were numbers who were hereditary paupers, and that on a tradition carefully handed down, that they were only manfully claiming their own. They traced their claims from the most ancient feudal times, when the lord was as much bound to maintain his villein in gross, as the villein was to work for the lord. These paupers were, in fact, or claimed to be, the original *adscripti glebæ*, and to have as much a claim to parish support as the landed proprietor had to his land. For this reason, in the old Catholic times, after they had escaped from villenage by running away and remaining absent from their hundred for a year and a day, dwelling for that period in a walled town, these people were among the most diligent attendants at the Abbey doors, and when the Abbeys were dissolved, were, no doubt, among the most daring of these thieves, vagabonds, and sturdy rogues, who, after the Robin Hood fashion, beset the highways and solitary farms of England, and claimed their black mail in a very unceremonious style. It was out of this class that Henry VIII. hanged his seventy-two thousand during his reign, and, as it is said, without appearing materially to diminish their number.

That they continued to “increase, multiply, and replenish the earth,” overflowing all bounds, overpowering by mere populousness all the severe laws against them of whipping, burning in the hand, in the forehead or the breast, and hanging, and filling the whole country with alarm, is evident by the very act itself of Elizabeth.

Among these hereditary paupers who, as we have said, were found in Stockington, there was a family of the name of Deg. This family had never failed to demand and enjoy what it held to be its share of its ancient inheritance. It appeared from the parish records, that they had practised in different periods the crafts of shoe-making, tailoring, and chimney-sweeping; but since the invention of the stocking frame, they had, one and all of them, followed the profession of stocking-weavers, or as they were there called, stockingers. This was a trade which required no extreme exertion of the physical or intellectual powers. To sit in a frame, and throw the arms to and fro, was a thing that might either be carried to a degree of extreme diligence, or be let down into a mere apology for idleness. An “idle stockinger” was there no very uncommon phrase, and the Degs were always classed under that

head. Nothing could be more admirably adapted than this trade for building a plan of parish relief upon. The Degs did not pretend to be absolutely without work, or the parish authorities would soon have set them to some real labor, – a thing that they particularly recoiled from, having a very old adage in the family, that “hard work was enough to kill a man.” The Degs were seldom, therefore, out of work, but they did not get enough to meet and tie. They had but little work if times were bad, and if they were good, they had large families and sickly wives or children. Be times what they would, therefore, the Degs were due and successful attendants at the parish pay-table. Nay, so much was this a matter of course, that they came at length not even to trouble themselves to receive their pay, but sent their young children for it; and it was duly paid. Did any parish officer, indeed, turn restive, and decline to pay a Deg, he soon found himself summoned before a magistrate, and such pleas of sickness, want of work, and poor earnings brought up, that he most likely got a sharp rebuke from the benevolent but uninquiring magistrate, and acquired a character for hard-heartedness that stuck to him.

So parish overseers learned to let the Degs alone; and their children regularly brought up to receive the parish money for their parents, were impatient as they grew up to receive it for themselves. Marriages in the Deg family were consequently very early, and there were plenty of instances of married Degs claiming parish relief under the age of twenty, on the plea of being the parent of two children. One such precocious individual being asked by a rather verdant officer why he had married before he was able to maintain a family, replied, in much astonishment, that he had married in order to maintain himself by parish assistance. That he never had been able to maintain himself by his labor, nor ever expected to do it; his only hope, therefore, lay in marrying and becoming the father of two children, to which patriarchal rank he had now attained, and demanded his “pay.”

Thus had lived and flourished the Degs on their ancient patrimony, the parish, for upwards of two hundred years. Nay, we have no doubt whatever that, if it could have been traced, they had enjoyed an ancestry of paupers as long as the pedigree of Sir Roger Rockville himself. In the days of the most perfect villenage, they had, doubtless, eaten the bread of idleness, and claimed it as a right. They were numerous, improvident, ragged in dress, and fond of an ale-house and of gossip. Like the blood of Sir Roger, their blood had become peculiar through a long persistence of the same circumstances. It was become pure pauper blood. The Degs married, if not entirely among Degs, yet among the same class. None but a pauper would dream of marrying a Deg. The Degs, therefore, were in constitution, in mind, in habit, and in inclination, paupers. But a pure and unmixed class of this kind does not die out like an aristocratic stereotype. It increases and multiplies. The lower the grade, the more prolific, as is sometimes seen on a large and even national scale. The Degs threatened, therefore, to become a most formidable clan in the lower purlieu of Stockington, but luckily there is so much virtue even in evils, that one, not rarely cures another. War, the great evil, cleared the town of Degs.

Fond of idleness, of indulgence, of money easily got, and as easily spent, the Degs were rapidly drained off by recruiting parties during the last war. The young men enlisted, and were marched away; the young women married soldiers that were quartered in the town from time to time, and marched away with them. There were, eventually, none of the once numerous Degs left except a few old people, whom death was sure to draft off at no distant period with his regiment of the line which has no end. Parish overseers, magistrates, and master manufacturers, felicitated themselves at this unhopd-for deliverance from the ancient family of the Degs.

But one cold, clear winter evening, the east wind piping its sharp sibilant ditty in the bare-shorn hedges, and poking his sharp fingers into the sides of well broad-clothed men by way of passing jest, Mr. Spires, a great manufacturer of Stockington, driving in his gig some seven miles from the town, passed a poor woman with a stout child on her back. The large ruddy-looking man in the prime of life, and in the great-coat and thick-worsted gloves of a wealthy traveller, cast a glance at the wretched creature trudging heavily on, expecting a pitiful appeal to his sensibilities, and thinking it a bore to have to pull off a glove and dive into his pocket for a copper; but to his surprise there was

no demand, only a low curtsey, and the glimpse of a face of singular honesty of expression, and of excessive weariness.

Spires was a man of warm feelings; he looked earnestly at the woman, and thought he had never seen such a picture of fatigue in his life. He pulled up and said,

“You seem very tired, my good woman.”

“Awfully tired, sir.”

“And are you going far to-night?”

“To Great Stockington, sir, if God give me strength.”

“To Stockington!” exclaimed Mr. Spires. “Why you seem ready to drop. You’ll never reach it. You’d better stop at the next village.”

“Ay, sir, it’s easy stopping for those that have money.”

“And you’ve none, eh?”

“As God lives, sir, I’ve a sixpence, and that’s all.”

Mr. Spires put his hand in his pocket, and held out to her the next instant half-a-crown.

“There stop, poor thing – make yourself comfortable – it’s quite out of the question to reach Stockington. But stay – are your friends living in Stockington – what are you?”

“A poor soldier’s widow, sir. And may God Almighty bless you!” said the poor woman, taking the money, the tears standing in her large brown eyes as she curtsied very low.

“A soldier’s widow,” said Mr. Spires. She had touched the softest place in the manufacturer’s heart, for he was a very loyal man, and vehement champion of his country’s honor in the war. “So young,” said he, “how did you lose your husband?”

“He fell, sir,” said the poor woman; but she could get no further; she suddenly caught up the corner of her gray cloak, covered her face with it, and burst into an excess of grief.

The manufacturer felt as if he had hit the woman a blow by his careless question; he sat watching her for a moment in silence, and then said, “Come, get into the gig, my poor woman; come, I must see you to Stockington.”

The poor woman dried her tears, and heavily climbed into the gig, expressing her gratitude in a very touching and modest manner. Spires buttoned the apron over her, and taking a look at the child, said in a cheerful tone to comfort her, “Bless me, but that is a fine thumping fellow, though. I don’t wonder you are tired, carrying such a load.”

The poor woman pressed the stout child, apparently two years old, to her breast, as if she felt it a great blessing and no load: the gig drove rapidly on.

Presently Mr. Spires resumed his conversation.

“So you are from Stockington?”

“No, sir; my husband was.”

“So: what was his name?”

“John Deg, sir.”

“Deg?” said Mr. Spires. “Deg, did you say?”

“Yes, sir.”

The manufacturer seemed to hitch himself off towards his own side of the gig, gave another look at her, and was silent. The poor woman was somewhat astonished at his look and movement, and was silent too.

After awhile Mr. Spires said again, “And do you hope to find friends in Stockington? Had you none where you came from?”

“None, sir, none in the world!” said the poor woman, and again her feelings seemed too strong for her. At length she added, “I was in service, sir, at Poole, in Dorsetshire, when I married; my mother only was living, and while I was away with my husband, she died. When – when the news came from abroad – that – when I was a widow, sir, I went back to my native place, and the parish officers said I must go to my husband’s parish, lest I and my child should become troublesome.”

“You asked relief of them?”

“Never; oh, God knows, never! My family have never asked a penny of a parish. They would die first, and so would I, sir; but they said I might do it, and I had better go to my husband’s parish at once – and they offered me money to go.”

“And you took it, of course?”

“No, sir; I had a little money, which I had earned by washing and laundering, and I sold most of my things, as I could not carry them, and came off. I felt hurt, sir; my heart rose against the treatment of the parish, and I thought I should be better among my husband’s friends – and my child would, if anything happened to me; I had no friends of my own.”

Mr. Spires looked at the woman in silence. “Did your husband tell you anything of his friends? What sort of a man was he?”

“Oh, he was a gay young fellow, rather, sir; but not bad to me. He always said his friends were well off in Stockington.”

“He did!” said the manufacturer, with a great stare, and as if bolting the words from his heart in a large gust of wonder.

The poor woman again looked at him with a strange look. The manufacturer whistled to himself, and giving his horse a smart cut with the whip, drove on faster than ever. The night was fast settling down; it was numbing cold; a gray fog rose from the river as they thundered over the old bridge; and tall engine chimneys, and black smoky houses loomed through the dusk before them. They were at Stockington.

As they slackened their pace up a hill at the entrance of the town, Mr. Spires again opened his mouth.

“I should be sorry to hurt your feelings, Mrs. Deg,” he said, “but I have my fears that you are coming to this place with false expectations. I fear your husband did not give you the truest possible account of his family here.”

“Oh, Sir! What – what is it?” exclaimed the poor woman; “in God’s name, tell me!”

“Why, nothing more than this,” said the manufacturer, “that there are very few of the Degs left here. They are old, and on the parish, and can do nothing for you.”

The poor woman gave a deep sigh, and was silent.

“But don’t be cast down,” said Mr. Spires. He would not tell her what a pauper family it really was, for he saw that she was a very feeling woman, and he thought she would learn that soon enough. He felt that her husband had from vanity given her a false account of his connections; and he was really sorry for her.

“Don’t be cast down,” he went on, “you can wash and iron, you say; you are young and strong; those are your friends. Depend on them, and they’ll be better friends to you than any other.”

The poor woman was silent, leaning her head down on her slumbering child, and crying to herself; and thus they drove on, through many long and narrow streets, with gas flaring from the shops, but with few people in the streets, and these hurrying shivering along the pavement, so intense was the cold. Anon they stopped at a large pair of gates; the manufacturer rung a bell, which he could reach from his gig, and the gates presently were flung open, and they drove into a spacious yard, with a large handsome house, having a bright lamp burning before it, on one side of the yard, and tall warehouses on the other.

“Show this poor woman and her child to Mrs. Craddock’s, James,” said Mr. Spires, “and tell Mrs. Craddock to make them very comfortable; and if you will come to my warehouse to-morrow,” added he, addressing the poor woman, “perhaps I can be of some use to you.”

The poor woman poured out her heartfelt thanks, and following the old man servant, soon disappeared, hobbling over the pebbly pavement with her living load, stiffened almost to stone by her fatigue and her cold ride.

We must not pursue too minutely our narrative. Mrs. Deg was engaged to do the washing and getting up of Mr. Spire's linen, and the manner in which she executed her task insured her recommendations to all their friends. Mrs. Deg was at once in full employ. She occupied a neat house in a yard near the meadows below the town, and in those meadows she might be seen spreading out her clothes to whiten on the grass, attended by her stout little boy. In the same yard lived a shoemaker, who had two or three children of about the same age as Mrs. Deg's child. The children, as time went on, became play-fellows. Little Simon might be said to have the free run of the shoemaker's house, and he was the more attracted thither by the shoemaker's birds, and by his flute, on which he often played after his work was done.

Mrs. Deg took a great friendship for this shoemaker; and he and his wife, a quiet, kind-hearted woman, were almost all the acquaintances that she cultivated. She had found out her husband's parents, but they were not of a description that at all pleased her. They were old and infirm, but they were of the true pauper breed, a sort of person, whom Mrs. Deg had been taught to avoid and to despise. They looked on her as a sort of second parish, and insisted that she should come and live with them, and help to maintain them out of her earnings. But Mrs. Deg would rather her little boy had died than have been familiarized with the spirit and habits of those old people. Despise them she struggled hard not to do, and she agreed to allow them sufficient to maintain them on condition that they desisted from any further application to the parish. It would be a long and disgusting story to recount all the troubles, annoyance, and querulous complaints, and even bitter accusations that she received from these connections, whom she could never satisfy; but she considered it one of her crosses in her life, and patiently bore it, seeing that they suffered no real want, so long as they lived, which was for years; but she would never allow her little Simon to be with them alone.

The shoemaker neighbor was a stout protection to her against the greedy demands of these old people, and of others of the old Degrés, and also against another class of inconvenient visitors, namely, suitors, who saw in Mrs. Deg a neat and comely young woman with a flourishing business, and a neat and soon well-furnished house, a very desirable acquisition. But Mrs. Deg had resolved never again to marry, but to live for her boy, and she kept her resolve in firmness and gentleness.

The shoemaker often took walks in the extensive town meadows to gather groundsell and plantain for his canaries and gorse-linnets, and little Simon Deg delighted to accompany him with his own children. There William Watson, the shoemaker, used to point out to the children the beauty of the flowers, the insects, and other objects of nature; and while he sate on a stile and read in a little old book of poetry, as he often used to do, the children sate on the summer grass, and enjoyed themselves in a variety of plays.

The effect of these walks, and the shoemaker's conversation on little Simon Deg was such as never wore out of him through his whole life, and soon led him to astonish the shoemaker by his extraordinary conduct. He manifested the utmost uneasiness at their treading on the flowers in the grass; he would burst with tears if they persisted in it; and when asked why, he said they were so beautiful, and that they must enjoy the sunshine, and be very unhappy to die. The shoemaker was amazed, but indulged the lad's fancy. One day he thought to give him a great treat, and when they were out in the meadows, he drew from under his coat, a bow and arrow, and shot the arrow high up in the air. He expected to see him in an ecstasy of delight; his own children clapped their hands in transport, but Simon stood silent, and as if awestruck. "Shall I send up another?" asked the shoemaker.

"No, no," exclaimed the child, imploringly. "You say God lives up there, and he mayn't like it."

The shoemaker laughed, but presently he said, as if to himself, "There is too much imagination there. There will be a poet, if we don't take care."

The shoemaker offered to teach Simon to read, and to solidify his mind, as he termed it, by arithmetic, and then to teach him to work at his trade. His mother was very glad; and thought shoemaking would be a good trade for the boy; and that with Mr. Watson she should have him always near her. He was growing now a great lad, and was especially strong, and of a frank and daring habit.

He was especially indignant at any act of oppression of the weak by the strong, and not seldom got into trouble by his championship of the injured in such cases amongst the boys of the neighborhood.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.