Farjeon Benjamin Leopold

Grif: A Story of Australian Life

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I.
GRIF RELATES SOME OF HIS EXPERIENCES

In one of the most thickly populated parts of Melbourne city, where poverty and vice struggle for breathing space, and where narrow lanes and filthy thoroughfares jostle each other savagely, there stood, surrounded by a hundred miserable hovels, a gloomy house, which might have been likened to a sullen tyrant, frowning down a crowd of abject, poverty-stricken slaves. From its appearance it might have been built a century ago; decay and rottenness were apparent from roof to base: but in reality it was barely a dozen years old. It had lived a wicked and depraved life, had this house, which might account for its premature decay. It looked like a hoary old sinner, and in every wrinkle of its weather-board casing was hidden a story which would make

respectability shudder. There are, in every large city, dilapidated or decayed houses of this description, which we avoid or pass by quickly, as we do drunken men in the streets.

In one of the apartments of this house, on a dismally wet night, were two inmates, crouched before a fire as miserable as the night. A deal table, whose face and legs bore the marks of much rough usage; a tin candlestick containing a middle-aged tallow candle, the yellow light from which flickered sullenly, as if it were weary of its life and wanted to be done with it; a three-legged stool; and a wretched mattress, which was hiding itself in a corner, with a kind of shamefaced consciousness that it had no business to be where it was: – comprised all the furniture of the room. The gloominess of the apartment and the meanness of the furniture were in keeping with one another, and both were in keeping with the night, which sighed and moaned and wept without; while down the rickety chimney the wind whistled as if in mockery, and the rain-drops fell upon the embers, hissing damp misery into the eyes of the two human beings who sat before the fire, bearing their burden quietly, if not patiently.

They were a strange couple. The one, a fair young girl, with a face so mild and sweet, that the beholder, looking upon it when in repose, felt gladdened by the sight. A sweet, fair young face; a face to love. A look of sadness was in her dark brown eyes, and on the fringes, which half-veiled their beauty, were traces of tears. The other, a stunted, ragged boy, with pockmarked face, with bold and brazen eyes, with a vicious smile too often

playing about his lips. His hand was supporting his cheek; hers was lying idly upon her knee. The fitful glare of the scanty fire threw light upon both: and to look upon the one, so small and white, with the blue veins so delicately traced; and upon the other, so rough and horny, with every sinew speaking of muscular strength, made one wonder by what mystery of life the two had come into companionship. Yet, strange as was the contrast, there they sat, she upon the stool, he upon the ground, as if they were accustomed to each other's society. Wrapt in her thoughts the girl sat, quiet and motionless, gazing into the fire. What shades of expression passed across her face were of a melancholy nature; the weavings of her fancy in the fitful glare brought nothing of pleasure to her mind. Not far into the past could she look, for she was barely nineteen years of age; but brief as must have been her experience of life's troubles, it was bitter enough to sadden her eyes with tears, and to cause her to quiver as if she were in pain. The boy's thoughts were not of himself; they were of her, as was proven by his peering up at her face anxiously every few moments in silence. That he met with no responsive look evidently troubled him; he threw unquiet glances at her furtively, and then he plucked her gently by the sleeve. Finding that this did not attract her attention, he shifted himself uneasily upon his seat, and in a hoarse voice, called, -

"Ally!"

"Yes," she replied vacantly, as if she were answering the voice of her fancy.

"What are you thinkin' of, Ally?"

"I am thinking of my life," she answered, dreamily and softly, without raising her eyes. "I am trying to see the end of it."

The boy's eyes followed the direction of her wistful gaze.

"Blest if I don't think she can see it in the fire!" he said, under his breath. "I can't see nothin'." And then he exclaimed aloud, "What's the use of botherin'? Thinkin' won't alter it."

"So it seems," she said, sadly; "my head aches with the whirl."

"You oughtn't to be unhappy, Ally; you're very good-looking and very young."

"Yes, I am very young," she sighed. "How old are you, Grif?"

"Blest if I know," Grif replied, with a grin. "I ain't agoin' to bother! I'm old enough, I am!"

"Do you remember your father, Grif?"

"Don't I! He was a rum 'un, he was. Usen't he to wallop us, neither!"

Lost in the recollection, Grif rubbed his back, sympathetically.

"And your mother?" asked the girl.

"Never seed her," he replied, shortly.

Thereafter they fell into silence for a while. But the boy's memory had been stirred by her questions, and he presently spoke again:

"You see, Ally, father is a ticket-of-leave man, and a orfle bad un he is! I don't know what he was sent out for, but it must have been somethin' very desperate, for I've heerd him say so.

He was worse nor me-oh, ever so much; but then, of course," he added, apologetically, as if it were to his discredit that he was not so bad as his convict parent, "he was a sight older. And as for lush-my eye! he could lush, could father! Well, when he was pretty well screwed, he used to lay into us, Dick and me, and kick us out of the house. Dick was my brother. Then Dick and me used to fight, for Dick wanted to lay into me too, and I wasn't goin' to stand that. We got precious little to eat, Dick and me; when we couldn't get nothin' to eat at home, we went out and took it. And one day I was trotted up afore the beak, for takin' a pie out of a confetchoner's. They didn't get the pie, though; I eat that. The beak he give me a week for that pie, and wasn't I precious pleased at it! It was the first time I'd ever been in quod, and I was sorry when they turned me out, for all that week I got enough to eat and drink. I arksed the cove to let me stop in another week, so that I might be reformed, as the beak sed, but he only larfed at me, and turned me out. When I got home, father he ses, 'Where have you been, Grif?' And I tells him, I've been to quod. 'What for?' he arks. 'For takin' a pie,' I ses. Blest if I didn't get the worst wallopin' I ever had! 'You've been and disgraced your family,' he sed; 'git out of my sight, you warmint; *I* was never in quod for stealin' a pie!' And with that he shied a bottle at my 'ead. I caught it, but there was nothin' in it! I was very savage for that wallopin'! 'What's disgrace to one's family,' thought I, 'when a cove want's grub?' I was awful hungry, as well as savage; so I made for the confetchoner's and took another pie.

I bolted the pie quick, for I knew they would be down on me; and I was trotted up afore the beak agin, and he give me a month. Wasn't I jolly glad! When I come out of quod, father had cut off to the gold-diggins; and as I wanted to get into quod agin, I went to the confetchoner's, and took another pie. The beak, wasn't he flabbergasted! 'What!' he ses, 'have you been and stole another pie!' and then he looks so puzzled that I couldn't help larfin'. 'What do you go and do it for?' ses he. 'Cos I'm hungry, your washup,' ses I. But the beak didn't seem to think nothin' of that; the missus of the shop, she ses, 'Pore boy!' and wanted him to let me off; but he wouldn't, and I wasn't sorry for it. I was five times in quod for takin' pies out of that confetchoner's shop. Next time I was nabbed, though. The old woman she knew I was jist come out, so she hides herself behind the door; and when I cuts in to git my pie, she comes out quick, and ketches 'old of me by the scruff. 'You little warmint,' she ses; 'you shan't wear my life out in this here way! Five times have I been before that blessed magerstrate, who ain't got no more heart than a pump! I wouldn't go,' she ses, keepin' hold of my collar, and looking me 'ard in the face-'I wouldn't go, but the ploesemen they make me. I ain't goin' agin, that I'm determined on. Here! Here's a pie for you!' and she 'olds out a big un. 'That's a rum start,' I thort, as I looked at the pie in her hand. 'It won't do, though. If I take her pie in a honest way, where's my blanket to come from?' But the old woman looked so worried, that I thort I'd make her a offer. 'If I take your pie, missus,' I ses, 'will you let me sleep under the

counter?' 'What do you mean?' she ses. Then I tells her that it's no use her givin' me a pie, for I hadn't no place to sleep in; and that she'd better let me take one while she looked another way. 'When I've eat it,' I ses, 'I'll cough, very loud, and then you turn round as if you was surprised to see me, and give me in charge of a peeler.' 'What'll be the good of that?' she arks. 'Don't you see?' I ses. 'Then I shall have the pie, and I shall get my blanket at the lock-up as well!' She wasn't a bad un, by no manner of means. 'My pore boy,' she ses, 'here's the pie, and here's a shillin'. Don't steal no more pies, or you'll break my 'art. You shall have a shillin' a week if you'll promise not to worry me, and whenever you want a pie I'll give you one if you arks for it.' Well, you see, Ally, I thort that was a fair offer, so I ses, 'Done!' and I took my pie and my shillin'. I don't worry her more than I can help," said Grif; "when I'm very hungry I go to the shop. She's a good old sort, she is; and I gets my shillin' a week reglar."

"And have you not heard of your father since he went away?" asked the girl.

"No, 'cept once I was told permiskusly that he was cut tin' some rum capers up the country. They did say he was a bush-ranging, but I ain't agoin' to bother. I was brought up very queer, I was; not like other coves. Father he never give us no eddication; perhaps he didn't have none to give. But he might have give us grub when we wanted it."

"Yours is a hard life, Grif," the girl said, pityingly.

"Yes, it is 'ard, precious 'ard, specially when a cove can't

get enough to eat. But I s'pose it's all right. What's the use of botherin'? I wonder," he continued, musingly, "where the rich coves gets all their money from? If I was a swell, and had lots of tin, I'd give a pore chap like me a bob now and then. But they're orfle stingy, Ally, is the swells; they don't give nothin' away for nothin'. When I was in quod, a preacher chap comes and preaches to me. He sets hisself down upon the bench, and reads somethin' out of a book-a Bible, you know-and after he'd preached for arf an hour, he ses, 'What do you think of that, 'nighted boy?' 'It's very good,' I ses, 'but I can't eat it.' 'Put your trust above,' he ses. 'But s'pose all the grub is down here?' ses I. 'I can't go up there and fetch it.' Then he groans, and tells me a story about a infant who was found in the bulrushes, after it had been deserted, and I ups and tells him that I've been deserted, and why don't somebody come and take *me* out of the bulrushes! Wasn't he puzzled, neither!" Grif chuckled, and then, encouraged by his companion's silence, resumed, -

"He come agin, did the preacher cove, afore I was let out, and he preaches a preach about charity. 'Don't steal no more,' he ses, 'or your sole 'll go to morchal perdition. Men is charitable and good; jist you try 'em, and give up your evil courses.' 'How can I help my evil courses?' I ses. 'I only wants my grub and a blanket, and I can't get 'em no other way.' 'You can, young sinner, you can,' he ses. 'Jist you try, and see if you can't.' He spoke so earnest-like, and the tears was a runnin' down his face so hard, that I promised him I'd try. So when I gets out of quod, I thort, I'll

see now if the preacher cove is right. I waited till I was hungry, and couldn't get nothin' to eat, without stealin' it. I could have took a trotter, for the trotter-man was a-drinkin' at a public-house bar, and his barsket was on a bench; but I wouldn't. No; I goes straight to the swell streets, and there I sees the swells a-walkin' up and down, and liftin' their 'ats, and smilin' at the gals. They was a rare nice lot of gals, and looked as if butter wouldn't melt in their mouths; but there wasn't one in all the lot as nice as you are, Ally! I didn't have courage at first to speak to the swells, but when I did, send I may live! they started back as if I was a mad dawg. 'You be awf,' they ses, 'or you'll be guv in charge.' What could a pore beggar like me do, after that? I dodged about, very sorry I didn't take the trotter, when who should I see coming along but the preacher chap. 'Here's a slant!' ses I to myself. 'He's charitable and good, he is, and 'll give me somethin' in a minute. He had a lady on his arm, and they both looked very grand. But when I went up to him he starts back too, and ses, 'Begawn, young reperrerbate!' When I heerd that, I sed, 'Charity be blowed!' and I goes and finds out the trotter-man, and takes two trotters, and no one knows nothin' about it."

Before he had finished his story, the girl's thoughts had wandered again. A heavy step in the adjoining apartment roused her.

"Who is that?"

"That's Jim Pizey's foot," replied the boy; "they're up to some deep game, they are. They was at it last night."

"Did you hear them talking about it, Grif?" she asked, earnestly.

"A good part of the time I was arf asleep, and a good part of the time I made game that I was asleep. I heerd enough to know that they're up to somethin' precious deep and dangerous. But, I say, Ally, you won't peach, will you? I should get my neck broke if they was to know that I blabbed."

"Don't fear me, Grif," said the girl; "go on."

"Jim Pizey, of course, he was at the 'ead of it, and he did pretty nearly all the talkin'. The Tenderhearted Oysterman, he put in a word sometimes, but the others only said yes and no. Jim Pizey, he ses, 'We can make all our fortunes, mates, in three months, if we're game. It'll be a jolly life, and I know every track in the country. We can "stick-up"[1] the gold escort in the Black Forest, and we don't want to do nothin' more all our lives. Forty thousand ounces of gold, mates, not a pennyweight less?' Then the Tenderhearted Oysterman ses he didn't care if there was forty million ounces, he wouldn't have nothin' to do with it, if Jim wanted to hurt the poor coves. Didn't they larf at him for sayin' that!"

"Is he a kind man, Grif?"

"The Tenderhearted Oysterman, do you mean, Ally?" asked the boy, in return.

"Yes, is he really tenderhearted?"

"He's the wickedest, cruellest, of all the lot, Ally. They call

[1] "Sticking-up" is an Australian term for burglary and highway Robbery.

him the Tenderhearted Oysterman out of fun. He's always sayin' how soft-hearted he is, but he would think as much of killin' you and me as he would of killin' a fly. After that I falls off in a doze, and presently I hears 'em talkin' agin, between-whiles, like, 'If the escort's too strong for us,' ses Jim Pizey, 'we can tackle the squatters' stations. Some of the squatters keeps heaps of money in their houses.' And then they called over the names of a lot of stations where the squatters was rich men."

"Did you hear them mention Highlay Station, Grif?" the girl asked, anxiously.

"Can't say I did, Ally."

The girl gave a sigh of relief.

"Who were there, Grif, while they were talking?"

"There was Jim Pizey, and Ned Rutt, and Black Sam, and the Tenderhearted Oysterman, and-" but here Grif stopped, suddenly.

"Who else, Grif?" laying her hand upon his arm.

"I was considering Ally," the boy replied, casting a furtive look at her white face, "if there *was* anybody else. I was 'arf asleep, you know."

The girl gazed at him with such distress depicted in her face that Grif turned his eyes from her, and looked uneasily upon the ground. For a few moments she seemed as if she feared to speak, and then she inquired in a voice of pain, -

"Was my husband there, Grif?"

Grif threw one quick, sharp glance upon her, and, as if

satisfied with what he saw, turned away again, and did not reply.

"Was my husband there, Grif," the girl repeated.

Still the boy did not reply. He appeared to be possessed with some dogged determination not to answer her question.

"Grif," the girl said, in a voice of such tender pleading that the tears came into the boy's eyes, "Grif, be my friend!"

"Your friend, Ally!" he exclaimed, in amazement, and as he spoke a thrill of exquisite pleasure quivered through him. "Me! A pore beggar like me!"

"I have no one else to depend upon-no one else to trust to-no one else to tell me what I must, yet what I dread to hear. Was my husband there, Grif?"

"Yes, he was there," the boy returned, reluctantly; "more shame for him, and you a sittin' here all by yourself. I say, Ally, why don't you cut away from him? What do you stop here for?"

"Hush! Was he speaking with them about the plots you told me of?"

"No, he was very quiet. They was a tryin' to persuade him to join 'em; but he wouldn't agree. They tried all sorts of games on him. They spoke soft, and they spoke hard. They give him lots of lush, too, and you know, Ally, he *can*-" but Grif pulled himself up short, dismayed and remorseful, for his companion had broken into a passionate fit of weeping.

"I didn't mean to do it, Ally," he said sorrowfully. "Don't take on so. I'll never say it agin. I'm a ignorant beast, that's what I am!" he exclaimed, digging his knuckles into his eyes. "I'm always a

puttin' my foot in it."

"Never mind, Grif," said the girl, sobbing. "Go on. Tell me all you heard. I *must* know. Oh, my heart! My heart!" and her tears fell thick and fast upon his hand.

He waited until she had somewhat recovered herself, and then proceeded very slowly.

"They was a-tryin' to persuade him to join 'em. They tried all sorts of dodges, but they was all no go. The Tenderhearted Oysterman, he comes the tender touch, and ses, 'I'm a soft-hearted cove, you know, mate, and I wouldn't kill a worm, if I thort I should 'urt him; if there was any violence a-goin' to be done, I wouldn't be the chap to have a 'and in it.' 'Then why do you have anythin' to do with it?' arks your-you know who I mean, Ally? 'Because I think it'll be a jolly good spree,' ses the Oysterman, 'and because I know we can make a 'cap of shiners without nobody bein' the worse for it.' But they couldn't get him to say Yes; and at last Jim Pizey he gets up in a awful scot, and he ses, 'Look here, mate, we've been and let you in this here scheme, and we ain't a-goin' to have it blown upon. You make up your mind very soon to join us, or it will be the worse for you.'"

"And my husband-"

"I didn't hear nothin' more. I fell right off asleep, and when I woke up they was gone."

"Grif", said the girl, "he must not join in this plot. I *must* keep him from crime. He has been unfortunate-led away by bad companions."

"Yes; we're a precious bad lot, we are."

"But his heart is good, Grif," she continued.

"What does he mean by treatin' you like this, then?" interrupted Grif, indignantly. "You've got no business here, you haven't. You ought to have a 'ouse of your own, you ought."

"I can't explain; you would not understand. Enough that he is my husband; it is sufficient that my lot is linked with his, and that through poverty and disgrace I must be by his side. I can never desert him while I have life. God grant that I may save him yet!"

The boy was hushed into silence by her solemn earnestness.

"He is weak, Grif, and we are poor. It was otherwise once. Those who should assist us will not do so, unless I break the holiest tie-and so we must suffer together."

"I don't see why you should suffer," said Grif, doggedly; "you don't deserve to suffer, you don't."

"Did you ever have a friend, my poor Grif," the girl said, "whom you loved, and for whose sake you would have sacrificed even the few sweets of life you have enjoyed?"

Grif pondered, but being unable to come to any immediate conclusion upon the point, did not reply.

"It is so with me," Alice continued. "I would sacrifice everything for him and for his happiness: for I love him! Ah! how I love him! When he is away from me he loses hope for my sake, not for his own, I know. If he is weak, I must be strong. It is my duty."

She loved him. Yes. No thought that he might be unworthy of

the sacrifice she had already made for him tainted the purity of her love, or weakened her sense of duty.

"I've got a dawg, Ally," Grif said, musingly, after a pause. "He ain't much to look at, but he's very fond of me. Rough is his name. The games we have together, me and Rough! He's like a brother to me, is Rough. I often wonder what he can see in me, to be so fond of me-but then they say dawgs ain't got no sense, and that's a proof of it. But if he ain't got sense, he got somethin' as good. Pore old Rough! One day a cove was agoin' to make a rush at me-it was the Tenderhearted Oysterman (we always had a down on each other, him and me!) when Rough, he pounces in, and gives him a nip in the calf of his leg. Didn't the Oysterman squeal! He swore, that day, that he would kill the dawg; but he'd better not try! Kill Rough!" and, at the thought of it, the tears came into the boy's eyes; "and him never to rub his nose agin me any more, after all the games we've had! No, I shouldn't like to lose Rough, for he's a real friend to me, though he *is* only a dawg!"

The girl laid her hand upon Grif's head, and looked pityingly at him. As their eyes met, a tender expression stole into his face, and rested there.

"I'm very sorry for you, Ally. I wish I could do somethin' to make you happy. It doesn't much matter for a pore beggar like me. We was always a bad lot, was father, and Dick, and me. But *you!*-look here, Ally!" he exclaimed, energetically. "If ever you want me to do anythin'-never mind what it is long as I know I'm a-doin' of it for you-I'll do it, true and faithful, I will, so 'elp

me-!" Her hand upon his lips checked the oath he was about to utter. He seized the hand, and placed it over his eyes, and leant his cheek against it, as if it brought balm and comfort to him; as indeed it did. "You believe me, Ally, don't you?" he continued, eagerly. "I don't want you to say nothin' more than if ever I can do somethin' for you, you'll let me do it."

"I will, Grif, and I do believe you," she replied. "God help me, my poor boy, you are my only friend."

"That's it!" he exclaimed, triumphantly. "That's what I am, till I die!"

CHAPTER II.
HUSBAND AND WIFE

The rain pattered down, faster and faster, as the night wore on, and still the two strange companions sat, silent and undisturbed, before the fire. At intervals sounds of altercation from without were heard, and occasionally a woman's drunken shriek or a ruffian's muttered curse was borne upon the angry wind. A step upon the creaking stairs would cause the girl's face to assume an expression of watchfulness: for a moment only; the next, she would relapse into dreamy listlessness. Grif had thrown himself upon the floor at her feet. He was not asleep, but dozing; for at every movement that Alice made, he opened his eyes, and watched. The declaration of friendship he had made to her had something sacramental in it. When he said that he would be true and faithful to her, he meant it with his whole heart and soul. The better instincts of the boy had been brought into play by contact with the pure nature of a good woman. He had never met any one like Alice. The exquisite tenderness and unselfishness exhibited by her in every word and in every action, filled him with a kind of adoration, and he vowed fealty to her with the full strength of his uncultivated nature. His vow might be depended on. He was rough, and dirty, and ugly, and a thief; but he was faithful and true. Some glimpse of a better comprehension appeared to pass

into his face as he lay and watched. And so the hours lagged on until midnight, when a change took place.

A sudden change-a change that transformed the hitherto quiet house into a den of riotous vice and drunkenness. It seemed as though the house had been forced into by a band of ruffianly bacchanals. They came up the stairs, laughing, and singing, and screaming. A motley throng-about a dozen in all-but strangely contrasted in appearance. Men upon whose faces rascality had set its seal; women in whose eyes there struggled the modesty of youth with the depravity of shame. Most of the men were middle-aged; the eldest of the women could scarcely have counted twenty winters from her birth: many of them, even in their childhood, had seen but little of life's summer. With the men, moleskin trousers, pea-jackets, billycock hats, and dirty pipes, predominated. But the women were expensively dressed, as if they sought to hide their shame by a costly harmony of colours. How strange are the groupings we see, yet do not marvel at, in the kaleidoscope of life!

The company were in the adjoining apartment, and, through the chinks in the wall, Alice could see them flitting about. She had started to her feet when she heard them enter the house, and her trembling frame bespoke her agitation. All her heart was in her ears as she listened for the voice she expected yet dreaded to hear.

"Get up, Grif," she whispered, touching the gently with her foot. On the instant, he was standing, watchful by her side.

"Listen! Can you hear his voice?"

The boy listened attentively, and shook his head. At this moment, a ribald jest called forth screams of laughter, and caused Alice to cover her crimsoned face, and sink tremblingly into her seat. But after it short struggle with herself, she rose again, and listened anxiously.

"He must be there," she said, her hand twitching nervously at her dress. "Oh, what if I should not see him to-night! I should be powerless to save him. What if they have kept him away from me, fearing that I should turn him from them! Oh, Grif, Grif, what shall I do? what shall I do?"

"Hush!" Grif whispered. "You keep quiet. You pretend to be asleep, and don't let 'em 'ear you. If anybody comes in, you shut your eyes, and breathe 'ard. I'll go and see if he's there."

And he crept out of the room, closing the door softly behind him. Left alone, the girl sat down again by the fire, whispering to herself, "I must save him, I must save him;" as if the words were a charm. "Yes," she whispered, "I must save him from this disgrace, and then I will make one more appeal;" and then she started up again, and listened, and paced the room in an agony of expectation. Thus she passed the next half-hour. At the end of that time, Grif came in, almost noiselessly, and to her questioning look replied,

"He's there, all right."

"What is he doing?"

"He's a settin' in a corner, 'arf asleep, all by 'isself, and he

hasn't sed a word to no one. Where are you goin'?" he inquired quickly, as Alice walked towards the door.

"I am going in to him."

"What for?" cried Grif hoarsely, gripping her arm. "Ally, are you mad?"

"I must go and bring him away," she replied, firmly.

"Look here, Ally," said Grif, in a voice of terror; "don't you try it. Pizey's got the devil in him to-night. I know it by his eye. It's jist as cool and wicked as anythin'! When he sets his mind upon a thing he'll do it, or be cut to pieces. If you go in, you can't do nothin', and somethin' bad 'll 'appen. Pizey 'll think you know what you oughtn't to know. Don't you go!"

"But I must save him, Grif," she said, in deep distress. "I must save him, if I die!"

"Yes," Grif said in a thick undertone, and still keeping firm hold of her arm; "that's right and proper, I dersay. But s'pose you die and don't save him? They won't do nothin' to-night. You can't do no good in there, Ally. The Oysterman 'll kill you, or beat you senseless, if you go; and then what could you do? I've seen him beat a woman before to-night. They're mad about somethin' or other, the whole lot of 'em. You'll do him more good by stoppin' away."

"Of what use can my husband be to them, Grif?" she cried, yet suppressing her voice, so that those in the next room should not hear. "What plot of their hatching can he serve them in?"

"I don't know," Grif replied; "he can talk and look like a swell,

and that's what none of 'em can do. But you'll soon find out, if you keep quiet. 'Ark! they're a clearin' out the gals," and as he spoke were heard female voices and laughter, and the noise of the speakers who were trooping into the miserable night. "They won't be very long together. They won't be together at all!" he cried, as the door of the adjoining apartment opened, and heavy steps went down the stairs.

"But suppose my husband goes with them?" Alice cried, and tried to reach the door; but Grif restrained her.

"There's Jim Pizey's foot," he said, with a finger at his lips; "jist as if he was tramplin' some one down with every step. And there's Black Sam-I could tell him from a mob of people, for he walks as if he was goin' to tumble down every minute. And there's Ned Rutt-he's got the largest feet I ever sor. And there's the Tenderhearted Oysterman, he treads like a cat. I'll be even with him one day for sayin' he'd kill Rough! And there's-there's no more."

The street door was heavily slammed, and a strange stillness fell upon the house-a stillness which did not appear to belong to it, and which struck Alice with a sense of desolation, and made her shiver. A few moments afterwards Alice's husband entered the apartment. He was a handsome, indolent-looking man, with a reckless manner which did not become him. There were traces of dissipation upon his countenance, and his clothes were a singular mixture of rough coarseness and faded refinement. He did not notice Grif, who had stepped aside, but, gazing neither to the

right nor to the left, walked to the seat which Alice had occupied, and sinking into it, plunged his fingers in his hair, and gazed vacantly at the ashes in the grate. He made no sign of recognition to Alice, who went up to him, and encircled his neck with her white arms. As she leant over him, with her face bending to his, caressingly, it appeared, although he did not repulse her, as if there were within him some wish to avoid her, and not be conscious of her presence.

"Richard," she whispered.

But he doggedly turned his head from her.

"Richard," she whispered again, softly and sweetly.

"I hear you," he said, pettishly.

"Do not speak to me harshly to-night, dear," she said; "this day six months we were married."

He winced as he heard this, as if the remembrance brought with it a sense of physical pain, and said: -

"It is right that you should reproach me, yet it is bitter enough for me without that."

"I do not say it to reproach you, dear, – indeed, indeed, I do not!"

"That makes it all the more bitter. This day six months we were married, you say! Better for you, better for me, that we had never seen each other."

"Yes," the girl said, sadly; "perhaps it would have been. But there is no misery to me in the remembrance. I can still bless the day when we first met. Oh, Richard, do not give me cause

to curse it!"

"You have cause enough for that every day, every hour," he replied; "to curse the day, and to curse me. You had the promise of a happy future before you saw me, and I have blighted it. What had you done that I should force this misery upon you? What had you done that I should bring you into contact with this?" he looked loathingly upon the bare walls. "And I am even too small-hearted to render you the only reparation in my power-to die, and loose you from a tie which has embittered your existence!"

"Hush, Richard!" she said. "Hush! my dear! All may yet be well, if you have but the courage-"

"But I have not the courage," he interrupted. "I am beaten down, crushed, nerveless. I was brought up with no teaching that existence was a thing to struggle for, and I am too old or too idle to learn the lesson now. What do such men as I in the world? Why, it has been thrown in my teeth this very night that I haven't even soul enough for revenge."

"Revenge, Richard!" she cried. "Not upon-"

"No, not that," he said; "nor anything that concerns you or yours. But it has been thrown in my teeth, nevertheless. And it is true. For I am a coward and a craven, if there ever lived one. It is you who have made me feel that I am so; it is you who have shown me to myself in my true colours, and who have torn from me the mask which I-fool that I am! – had almost learnt to believe was my real self, and not a sham! Had you reproached me, had you reviled me, I might have continued to be deceived.

But as it is, I tremble before you; I tremble, when I look upon your pale face;" and turning to her suddenly, and meeting the look of patient uncomplaining love in her weary eyes, he cried, "Oh, Alice! Alice! what misery I have brought upon you!"

"Not more than I can bear, dear love," she said, "if you will be true to yourself and to me. Have patience-"

"Patience!" he exclaimed. "When I think of the past, I lash myself into a torment. Will patience feed us? Will it give us a roof or a bed? Look here!" and he turned out his pockets. "Not a shilling. Fill my pockets first. Give me the means to fight with my fellow-cormorants, and I will have patience. Till then, I must fret, and fret, and drink. Have you any brandy?"

"No," she said, with a bitter sigh.

"Perhaps it is better so," he said, slowly, for his passion had somewhat exhausted him; "for what I have to say might seem the result of courage that does not belong to me. I have refrained from drink to-night that my resolution might not be tampered with."

He paused to recover himself; Alice bending forward, with clasped hands, waited in anxious expectancy.

"Do you know how I have spent to-night and many previous nights?" he asked. "In what company, and for what purpose?"

She had been standing during all this time, and her strength was failing her. She would have fallen, had he not caught her in his arms, whence she sank upon the ground at his feet, and bowed her head in her lap.

"I have spent to-night, and many other nights," he continued, "in the company of men whose touch, not long since, I should have deemed contamination. I have spent them in the company of villains, who, for some purpose of their own, are striving to inveigle me in their plots. But they will fail. Yes, they will fail, if you will give me strength to keep my resolution. Coward I am, I know, but I am not too great a coward to say that you and I must part."

"Part!" she echoed, drearily.

"Look around," he said; "this is a nice home I have provided for you; I have surrounded you with fit associates, have I not? How nobly I have performed my part of husband! How you should bless my name, respect, and love me, for the true manliness I have displayed towards you! But by your patience and your love you have shown me the depth of my degradation."

"Not degradation, Richard, not degradation for you!"

"Yes, degradation, and for me, in its coarsest aspect. Is not this degradation?" and he pointed to Grif, who was crouching, observant, in a corner. "Come here," he said to the lad, who slouched towards him, reluctantly. "What are you?"

"What am I?" replied Grif, with a puzzled look; "I'm a pore boy-Grif."

"You're a poor boy-Grif!" the man repeated. "How do you live!"

"By eatin' and drinkin'."

"How do you get your living?"

"I makes it as I can," answered Grif, gloomily.

"And when you can't make it?"

"Why, then I takes it."

"That is, you are a thief?"

"Yes, I s'pose so."

"And a vagabond?"

"Yes, I s'pose so."

"And you have been in prison?"

"Yes, I've been in quod, I have," said Grif, feeling, for the first time in his life, slightly ashamed of the circumstance.

"And you say," Richard said, bitterly, as the boy slunk back to his corner, "that this is not degradation!"

She turned her eyes to the ground, but did not reply.

"I was once a good arithmetician," he continued. "Let us see what figures there are in the sum of our acquaintance, and what they amount to."

"Of what use is it to recall the past, Richard?"

"It may show us how to act in the future. Besides, I have a strange feeling on me to-night, having met with an adventure which I will presently relate. Listen. When I first saw you I was a careless ne'er-do-well, with no thought of the morrow. You did not know this then, but you know it now. It is the curse of my life that I was brought up with expectations. How many possibly useful, if not good, men have been wrecked on that same rock of expectations! Upon the strength of 'expectations' I was reared into an idle incapable. And this I was when you first knew me.

I had an income then small, it is true, but sufficient, or if it was not, I got into debt upon the strength of my expectations, which were soon to yield to me a life's resting-place. You know what happened. One day there came a letter, and I learned that, in a commercial crash at home, my income and my expectations had gone to limbo. The news did not hurt me much, Alice, for I had determined on a scheme which, if successful, would give me wealth and worldly prosperity. It is the truth-shamed as I am to speak it-that, knowing you to be an only child and an heiress, I deliberately proposed to myself to win your affections. I said, 'This girl will be rich, and her money will compensate for what I have lost. This girl has a wealthy father, not too well educated, not too well connected, who will be proud when he finds that his daughter has married a gentleman.' In the execution of my settled purpose, I sought your society, and strove to make myself attractive to you. But your pure nature won upon me. The thought that your father was wealthy, and that you would make a good match for me, was soon lost in the love I felt for you. For I learned to love you, honestly, devotedly-nay, keep your place, and do not look at me while I speak, for I am unworthy of the love I sought and gained. Yet, you may believe me when I say, that as I learned to know you, all mercenary thoughts died utterly away. Well, Alice, I won your love, and could not bear to part from you. I had to do something to live; and so that I might be near you, I accepted the post of tutor offered me by your father. I accepted this to be near you-it was happiness enough for the

time, and I thought but little of the future. Happy, then, in the present, I had no thought of the passing time, until the day arrived when your father wished to force you into a marriage with a man, ignorant, brutal mean, and vulgar, – but rich. You came to me in your distress-Good God!" he exclaimed passionately; "shall I ever forget the night on which you came to me, and asked for help and for advice? The broad plains, bathed in silver light, stretched out for miles before us. The branches of the old gum-trees glistened with white smiles in the face of the moon-we were encompassed with a peaceful glory. You stood before me, sad and trembling, and the love that had brought sunshine to my heart rushed to my lips" – he stopped suddenly, looked round, and smiled bitterly. Then he continued-"The next day we fled, and at the first town we reached we were married. Then, and then only, you learned for the first time, that the man you had married was a beggar, and was unable to provide for his wife the common comforts of a home. We appealed to your father-you know how he met our appeals. The last time I went, at your request, to his house, he set his dogs upon me-"

"Richard! Richard!" she cried entreatingly. "Do not recall that time. Be silent for awhile, and calm yourself."

"I will go on to the end. We came to Melbourne. Brought up to no trade or profession, and naturally idle, I could get nothing to do. Some would have employed me, but they were afraid. I was not rough enough-I was too much of a gentleman. They wanted coarser material than I am composed of, and so, day by

day, I have sunk lower and lower. People begin to look on me with suspicion. I am fit for nothing in this colony. I was born a gentleman, and I live the life of a dog; and I have dragged you, who never before knew want, down with me. With no friends, no influence to back me, we might starve and rot. What wonder that I took to drink! The disgust with which I used to contemplate the victims of that vice recoils now upon myself, and I despise and abhor myself for what I am! By what fatality I brought you here, I know not. I suppose it was because we were poor, and I could not afford to buy you better lodging. Now, attend to me-but stay, that boy is listening."

"He is a friend, Richard," said Alice.

"Yes," said Grif, "I am a friend that's what I am. Never you mind me I ain't a-goin' to peach. I'd do any thin' to 'elp her, I would-sooner than 'urt her, I'd be chopped up first. You talk better than the preacher cove!"

"Very well. Now attend. These men want me to join them in their devilish plots. I will not do so, if I can help it. But if I stop here much longer, they will drive me to it. And so I must go away from you and from them. I will go to the gold diggings, and try my luck there-"

"Leaving me here?"

"Leaving you here, but not in this house. You have two or three articles of jewellery left. I will sell them-the watch I gave you will fetch ten pounds-and you will be able to live in a more respectable house than this for a few weeks until you hear from

me."

"How will you go?"

"I shall walk I cannot afford to ride. But I have not concluded yet. I have something to tell you, which may alter our plans, so far as you are concerned. I have a message for you, which I must deliver word for word."

"A message for me!"

He paced the room for a few moments in silence. Then, standing before Alice, he looked her in the face, and said: -

"I saw your father this evening."

"In town!" she exclaimed.

"In town. I do not know for what purpose he is here, nor do I care."

"Oh, Richard," cried the girl; "you did not quarrel with him?"

"No; I spoke to him respectfully. I told him you were in Melbourne, in want. I begged him to assist us. I said that I was willing to do anything-that I would take any situation, thankfully, in which I could earn bread for you. He turned away impatiently. I followed him, and continued to address him humbly, entreatingly. For your sake, Alice, I did this."

She took his hand and kissed it, and rested her cheek against it.

"Hearken to his reply," he said, disengaging his hand, and standing apart from her. "This was it. 'You married my daughter for my money. You are a worthless, idle scoundrel, and I will not help you. If you so much regret the condition to which you have brought my daughter, divorce yourself from her.'"

"No, no, Richard!"

"Those were his words. 'Divorce yourself from her, and I will take her back. When you come to me to consent to this, I will give you money. Till then, you may starve. I am a hard man, as you know, obstinate and self-willed; and rather than you should have one shilling of the money you traded for when you married my daughter, I would fling it all in the sea. Tell my daughter this. She knows me well enough to be sure I shall not alter when once I resolve.' Those were his words, word for word. That was the message he bade me give you. What is your answer?"

"What do you think it is?" she asked, sadly.

"I cannot tell," he said, doggedly, turning his face from her; "I know what mine would be."

"What would it be?"

"I should say this" (he did not look at her while he spoke) – "You, Richard Handfield, Scapegrace, Fortune-hunter, Vagabond (any of these surnames would be sufficiently truthful), came to me, a young simple girl, and played the lover to me, without the knowledge of my father, for the sake of my father's money. You knew that I, a young simple girl, bred upon the plains, and amidst rough men, would be certain to be well affected towards you-would almost be certain to fall in love with you, for the false gloss you parade to the world, and for the refinement of manner which those employed about my father's station did not possess. You played for my heart, and you won it. But you won it without the money you thought you would

have gained, for you were disappointed in your calculations. And now that I know you for what you are, and now that I have been sufficiently punished for my folly, in the misery you have brought upon me, I shall go back to the home from which I fled, and endeavour to forget the shame with which you have surrounded me."

"Do you think that this would be my answer, Richard?"

He had not once looked at her while he spoke, and now as she addressed him, with an indescribable sadness in her voice, he did not reply. For full five minutes there was silence in the room. Then the grief which filled her heart could no longer be suppressed, and short broken gasps escaped her.

"Richard!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, Alice."

"Have you not more faith in me than this? As I would die to keep you good, so I should die without your love. What matters poverty? We are not the only ones in the world whose lot is hard to bear! Be true to me, Richard, so that I may be true to myself and to you. You do not believe that this would be my answer!"

There came no word from his lips.

"When I vowed to be faithful to you, Richard, I was but a girl-indeed, I am no better now, except in experience but I vowed with my whole heart. I had no knowledge then of life's hard trials, but since I have learned them, I seem also to have learned what is my duty, and what was the meaning of the faith I pledged. I never rightly understood it till now, darling! You do not believe

that this would be my answer!"

Still he did not look at her. Although she waited in an anxious agony of expectation, he did not speak. The plain words he had chosen in which to make his confession, had brought to him, for the first time, a true sense of the unworthy part he had played.

"If in the time that has gone, my dear," she continued, "there is any circumstance, any remembrance, connected with me, that gives you pain, forget it for my sake. If you have believed that any thought that, you have done me wrong exists, or ever existed, in my mind, believe it no longer. Think of me as I am-see me as I am-your wife, who loves you now with a more perfect love than when she was a simple girl, inexperienced in the world's hard ways. Ah! see how I plead to you, and turn to me, my dear!"

She would have knelt to him, but he turned and clasped her in his arms, and pressed her pure heart to his. Her fervent love had triumphed; and as he kissed away her tears, he felt, indeed, that wifely purity is man's best shield from evil.

"You shall do what you have said, Richard; but not to-morrow. Wait but one day longer; and if I then say to you-'Go,' you shall go. I have a reason for this, but I must not tell you what it is. Do you consent?"

"Yes, love."

"Brighter days will dawn upon us. I am happier now than I have been for a long, long time! And oh, my dear! – bend your head closer, Richard-there may come a little child to need our care-"

The light had gone out and the room was in darkness. But mean and disreputable as it was, a good woman's unselfish love sanctified it and made it holy!

CHAPTER III.
GRIF LOSES A FRIEND

"It's a rum go," Grif muttered to himself, as he wiped the tears from his eyes, and groped his way down the dark stairs; "a very rum go. If I was Ally, I should do as he told her. But she don't care for herself, she don't. She's too good for him by ever so many chalks, that's what she is!"

By this time Grif had reached the staircase which led to the cellar. Crouching upon the floor, he listened with his ear to the ground.

"I can hear him," he said, in a pleasant voice, "he's a beatin' his tail upon the ground, but he won't move till I call him. I don't believe there's another dawg in Melbourne to come up to him. Jist listen to him! He's a thinkin' to himself, How much longer will he be, I wonder, afore he calls me! And he knows I'm a-talkin' of him; he knows it as well as I do myself."

He listened again, and laughed quietly.

"If I was to mention that dawg's name," Grif said in a confidential tone, as if he were addressing a companion, "he'd be here in a minute. He would! It's wonderful how he knows! I've had him since he was a pup, and afore he could open his eyes. It would be nice sleepin' down in the cellar, but we can't do it, can we, old feller? We've got somebody else to look after, haven't

we? You, and me, and him, ain't had a bit of supper, I'll bet. But we'll get somethin' to eat somehow, you see if we don't."

Here the lad whistled softly, and the next instant a singularly ugly dog was by his side, licking his face, and expressing satisfaction in a quiet but demonstrative manner.

"Ain't you jolly warm, Rough!" whispered Grif, taking the dog in his arms, and gathering warmth from it. "Good old Rough! Dear old Rough!"

The dog could only respond to its master's affection by action, but that was sufficiently expressive for Grif, who buried his face in Rough's neck, and patted its back, and showed in twenty little ways that he understood and appreciated the faithfulness of his dumb servant. After this interchange of affectionate sentiment, Grif and his dog crept out of the house. It was raining hard, but the lad took no further heed of the weather than was expressed by drooping his chin upon his breast, and putting his hands into the ragged pockets of his still more ragged trousers. Slouching along the walls as if he derived some comfort from the contact, Grif walked into a wider street of the city, and stopped at the entrance of a narrow passage, leading to a room used as a casino. The dog, which had been anxiously sniffing the gutters in quest of such stray morsels of food as had escaped the eyes and noses of other ravenous dogs, stopped also, and looked up humbly at its master.

"I'll stay here," said Grif, resting against the wall. "Milly's in there, I dare say, and she'll give me somethin' when she comes

out, if she's got it."

Understanding by its master's action that no further movement was to be made for the present, Rough sat upon its haunches in perfect contentment, and contemplated the rain-drops falling on the ground. Grif was hungry, but he had a stronger motive than that for waiting; as he had said, he had some one besides himself to provide for, and the girl he expected to see had often given him money. Strains of music floated down the passage, and the effect of the sounds, combined with his tired condition sent him into a half doze. He started now and then, as persons passed and repassed him; but presently he slid to the earth, and, throwing his arm over the dog's neck, fell into a sound sleep. He slept for nearly an hour, when a hand upon his shoulder roused him.

"What are you sleeping in the rain for?" a girl's voice asked.

"Is that you, Milly?" asked Grif, starting to his feet, and shaking himself awake. "I was waitin' for you, and I was so tired that I fell off. Rough didn't bark at you, did he, when you touched me?"

"Not he! He's too sensible," replied Milly, stooping, and caressing the dog, who licked her hand. "He knows friends from enemies. A good job if all of us did!"

There was a certain bitterness in the girl's voice which jarred upon the ear, but Grif, probably too accustomed to hear it, did not notice it. She was very handsome, fair, with regular features, white teeth, and bright eyes; but her mouth was too small, and there was a want of firmness in her lips. Take from her face a

careworn, reckless expression, which it was sorrowful to witness in a girl so young, and it would have been one which a painter would have been pleased to gaze upon.

"I have been looking for Jim," she said, "and I cannot find him."

"I sor him to-night," Grif said; "he was up at the house-him and Black Sam and Ned Rutt, and the Tenderhearted Oysterman."

"A nice gang!" observed the girl. "And Jim's the worst of the lot."

"No, he isn't," said Grif; and as he said it, Milly looked almost gratefully at him. "Rough knows who's the worst of that lot; don't you, Rough?"

The dog looked up into its master's face, as if it perfectly well understood the nature of the question.

"Is Black Sam the worst?" asked Grif.

The dog wagged its stump of a tail, but uttered no sound.

"Is Ned Rutt the worst?" asked Grif.

The dog repeated the performance.

"Is Jim Pizey the worst?" asked Grif.

Milly caught the lad's arm as he put the last question, and looked in the face of the dog as if it were a sibyl about to answer her heart's fear. But the dog wagged its tail, and was silent.

"Thank God!" Milly whispered to herself.

"Is the Tenderhearted Oysterman the worst?" asked Grif.

Whether Grif spoke that name in a different tone, or whether

some magnetic touch of hate passed from the master's heart to that of the dog, no sooner did Rough hear it, than its short yellow hair bristled up, and it gave vent to a savage growl.

A stealthy step passed at the back of them at this moment.

"For God's sake!" cried Milly, putting her hand upon Grif's mouth, and then upon the dog's.

Grif looked at her, inquiringly.

"That was the Oysterman who passed us," said Milly, with a pale face. "I hope he didn't hear you."

"I don't care if he did. It can't make any difference between us. He hates me and Rough, and Rough and me hates him; don't we?"

Rough gave a sympathetic growl.

"And so you were up at the house, eh, Grif?" said Milly, as if anxious to change the subject. "What were you doing all the night?"

"I was sittin' with-"

But ignorant as Grif was, he hesitated here. He knew full well the difference between the two women who were kind to him. He knew that one was what he would have termed "respectable," and the other belonged to society's outcasts. And he hesitated to bring the two together, even in his speech.

"You were sitting with-?" Milly said.

"No one particler," Grif wound up, shortly.

"But I should like to know, and you *must* tell me, Grif."

"Well, if I must tell you, it was with Ally I was sittin'. You

never seed her."

"No, I've never seen her," said Milly, scornfully. "I've heard of her, though. She's a lady, isn't she?"

"Yes, she is."

Milly turned away her head and was silent for a few moments; then she said,

"Yes, she's a lady, and I'm not good enough to be to about her. But she isn't prettier than me for all that; she isn't so pretty; I've been told so. She hasn't got finer eyes than me, and she hasn't got smaller hands than me;" and Milly held out hers, proudly-a beautiful little hand-"nor smaller feet, I know, though I've never seen them. And yet she's a lady!"

"Yes, she is."

"And I am not. Of course not. Well, I shall go. Good-night."

"Good-night, Milly," Grif said, in a conflict of agitation. For he knew that he had hurt Milly's feelings, and he was remorseful. He knew that he was right in saying that Alice was a lady, and in inferring that Milly was not; yet he could not have defined why he was right, and he was perplexed. Then he was hungry, and Milly had gone without giving him any money, and he knew that she was angry with him. And he was angry with himself for making her angry.

While he was enduring this conflict of miserable feeling, Milly came back to him. Grif was almost ashamed to look her in the face.

"She isn't prettier than me?" the girl said, as if she desired to

be certain upon the point.

"I didn't say she was," Grif responded, swinging one foot upon the pavement.

"And she hasn't got smaller hands than me?"

"I didn't say she had, Milly."

"Nor smaller feet?"

"Nobody said so."

"Nor brighter eyes, nor a nicer figure? And yet," Milly said, with a kind of struggle in her voice, "and yet she's a lady, and I'm not."

"Don't be angry with me, Milly," Grif pleaded, as if with him rested the responsibility of the difference between the two women.

"Why should I be angry with you?" asked Milly, her voice hardening. "It's not your fault. I often wonder if it is mine! It's hard to tell; isn't it?"

Grif, not understanding the drift of the question, could not conscientiously answer; yet, feeling himself called upon to express some opinion, he nodded his head acquiescently.

"Never mind," said Milly; "it will be all the same in a hundred years! Have you had anything to eat to-night, Grif?"

Grif felt even more remorseful, for, after what had passed, Milly's question, kindly put, was like a dagger's thrust to him.

"Well, here's a shilling for you-it's the only one I've got, and you're welcome to it. Perhaps the lady would give you her last shilling! Any lady would, of course-that's the way of ladies! Why

don't you take the shilling?"

"I don't want it," said Grif, gently, turning aside.

Milly placed her hand on the boy's head, and turned his face to hers. She could see the tears struggling to his eyes.

"Don't be a stupid boy," Milly said; "I have only been joking with you. I don't mean half I said; I never do. Though she's a lady, and I'm not, I'd do as much for you as she would, if I was able." And, forcing the shilling into his hand, the girl walked quickly away.

Grif looked after her until she was out of sight, and shaking his head, as if he had a problem in it which he could not solve, made straight for a coffee-stall where pies were sold, and invested his shilling. Carrying his investment carefully in his cap, which he closed like a bag, so that the rain should not get to the pies, Grif, with Rough at his heels, dived into the poorer part of the city, and threaded his way among a very labyrinth of deformed streets. The rain poured steadily down upon him, and soaked him through and through, but his utter disregard of the discomfort of the situation showed how thoroughly he was used to it. Grif was wending his way to bed; and lest any misconception should arise upon this point, it may be as well to mention at once that the bed was a barrel, which lay in the rear of a shabby house. Not long since the barrel had been tenanted by a dog, whose master had lived in the shabby house. But, happily, master and dog had shifted quarters, and the barrel becoming tenantless, Grif took possession without inquiring for the landlord. Whereby

he clearly laid himself open to an action for ejectment. And Grif was not the only tenant, for when he arrived at his sleeping-place, he stooped, and putting his head into the barrel, withdrew it again, and said, "Yes; there he is!" the utterance of which common-place remark appeared to afford him much satisfaction. Grif's action had disturbed the occupant of the barrel, who had evidently been sleeping, and he presently appeared, rubbing his eyes.

Such a strange little tenant! Such a white-faced, thin-faced, haggard-faced, little tenant! Such a large-eyed, wistful-eyed, little tenant! In truth, a small boy, a very baby-boy, who might have been an infant, or who might have been an old man whom hunger had pinched, whom misery had shaken hands and been most familiar with. He gazed at Grif with his large eyes and smiled sleepily, and then catching sight of Grif's cap with the pies in it, rubbed his little hands gladly, and was wide-awake in an instant.

"You haven't had nothin' to eat to-night, I'll bet," said Grif.

The little fellow's lips formed themselves into a half-whispered No.

Grif insinuated his body into the barrel, and stretched himself full length by the side of the baby-boy. Then he slightly raised himself, and, resting his chin upon his hand, took a pie from his cap, and gave it to his companion. The boy seized it eagerly, and bit into it, without uttering a word.

"You haven't got me to thank for it, Little Peter," Grif said.

"It's Milly you have got to thank. Say, thank you, Milly."

"Thank you, Milly," said Little Peter obediently, devouring his pie.

There was another pie in the cap, but hungry as Grif was he did not touch it. He looked at Little Peter, munching, and then at his dog, who had crept to the mouth of the barrel, and who was eyeing the pie wistfully. Had the dog known that its master was hungry, it would not have looked at the pie as if it wanted it.

"*You've* had precious little to eat to-night, too," said Grif to Rough, who wagged its tail as its master spoke. "We'll have it between us." And he broke the pie in two pieces.

He was about to give one piece of it to Rough, when he heard a cat-like step within a few yards of him. "Who's there?" he cried, creeping partly out of the barrel. No answer came, but the dog gave a savage growl, and darted forwards. Grif listened, but heard nothing but a faint laugh.

"I know that laugh, that's the Tenderhearted Oysterman's laugh. What can he want here? Rough! Rough!" The dog came back at the call, with a piece of meat in its mouth, which it was swallowing ravenously. "Well, if this isn't a puzzler, I don't know what is," observed Grif. "Where did you got that from? You're in luck's way to-night, you are, Rough. All the better for Little Peter! Here, Little Peter, here's some more pie for you."

Little Peter took the dog's share of the pie without compunction, and expeditiously disposed of it. He then stretched himself on his face, and was soon fast asleep again. Grif, having

eaten his half of the pie, coiled himself up, and prepared for sleep. No fear of rheumatism assailed him; it was no new thing for him to sleep in wet clothes. He was thankful enough for the shelter, poor as it was, and did not repine because he did not have a more comfortable bed. He was very tired, but the remembrance of the events of the day kept him dozing for a little while. Alice, and her husband, and Milly, presented themselves to his imagination in all sorts of confused ways. The story he had heard Alice's husband tell of how their marriage came about was also strong upon him, and he saw Alice and Richard standing in the soft moonlight on her father's station. "I wonder what sort of a cove her father is!" Grif thought, as he lay between sleeping and waking. "He must be a nice 'ard-'earted bloke, he must? I wish I was her father; I'd soon make her all right!" Then he heard Milly say, "She hasn't got smaller hands than me!" and Milly's hands and Alice's hands laid themselves before him, and he was looking to see which were the smaller. Gradually, however, these fancies became indistinct, and sleep fell upon him; but only to deepen them, to render them more powerful. They were no longer fancies, they were realities. He was crouching in a corner of the room, while Richard was speaking to Alice; he was groping down the stairs, and calling for Rough, and fondling him; he was standing at the entrance of the narrow passage, waiting for Milly, and he was sleeping, with his arm embracing his dog; he was talking to Milly, and asking Rough who was the worst of all Jim Pizey's lot? he was listening to the Tenderhearted Oysterman's

retreating footsteps; and he was standing at the pie-stall, spending Milly's last shilling. But here a new feature introduced itself into the running commentary of his dreams. He fancied that, after he and Little Peter had eaten the pies, the Tenderhearted Oysterman came suddenly behind Rough, and, seizing the dog by the throat, thrust it into a small box, the lid of which he clapped down and fastened; that then the Oysterman forced the box into the barrel, and so fixed it upon Grif s chest that the lad could not move; and that, although he heard the dog moan and scratch, he could not release it. The weight upon Grif's chest grew heavier and heavier; it was forcing the breath out of his body. In his sleep he gasped, and fought release himself. And after a violent struggle, he awoke.

There *was* something lying upon his chest. It was Rough, who had crawled into the barrel, and was licking its master's face. It had been whining, but directly it felt Grif's hand, it grew quiet. The rain was falling heavily, and the drops were forcing themselves through the roof of the barrel. Grif shifted the dog gently on one side.

"There's 'ardly room enough for two, let alone three of us," Grif muttered. "Little Peter, are you awake?" The soft breathing of Peter was the only reply. "You've no right to come shovin' yourself in," continued Grif, addressing the dog, who gave utterance to a pleading moan; "but I ain't goin' to turn you out. What a night it is! And how wet the barrel is! It would be much nicer if it was dry. It's almost as bad as a gutter?" Here

came a long-drawn sigh from Rough, and then a piteous moan, as if the dog were in pain. "Be quiet Rough! What's the use of botherin' about the rain!" exclaimed the boy. "There'll be a flood in Melbourne, if this goes on!" And drawing his limbs closer together, Grif disposed himself for sleep. He was almost on the boundary of the land of dreams, when a yelp of agony from Rough aroused him again, and caused him to start and knock his head against the roof of the barrel. "Blest if I don't think somethin's the matter with the dawg!" he exclaimed. "What are you yelpin' for, Rough?" The dog uttered another sharp cry of agony, and trembled, and stretched its limbs in convulsion. Thoroughly alarmed, Grif corkscrewed his way out of the barrel as quietly as he could for fear of waking little Peter, and called for Rough to follow him. Rough strove to obey its master's voice even in the midst of its pain, but it had not strength.

"Rough! Rough!" cried Grif, drawing the dog out of the barrel. "What's the matter, Rough? Are you hurt?" He felt all over its body, but could discover nothing to account for Rough's distress. He took his faithful servant in his arms, and looked at it by the dim light of the weeping stars. Rough opened its eyes and looked gratefully at Grif, who pressed the dog to his breast, and strove to control the violent shuddering of its limbs; but its agony was too powerful. It rolled out of Grif's arms on to the ground, where it lay motionless.

Cold and wet and shivering as he was, a deeper chill struck upon Grif's heart as he gazed at the quiet form at his feet. He

called the dog by name, but it did not respond; he walked away a few steps and whistled, but it did not follow; he came back, and stooping, patted it upon its head, but it did not move; he whispered to it, "Rough! poor old Rough! dear old Rough! speak to me, Rough!" but the dog uttered no sound. Then Grif sitting down, took Rough in his arms, and began to cry. Quietly and softly at first.

"What did Ally arks me to-night?" he half thought and half spoke between his sobs. "Did I ever have a friend that I would sacrifice myself for? Yes! I would for Rough! There wasn't another dawg in Melbourne to come up to him! And now he's gone, and I ain't got no friend left but Ally." And he laid his face upon the dog's wet coat, and rained warm tears upon it.

"After all the games we've had together!" he continued. "After the times he's stood up for me! He'll never stand up for me agin-never agin!"

He knew that the dog was dead, and his anguish at the loss of his dumb, faithful friend was very keen. Had it been human, he could not have felt a deeper affliction.

"Everybody liked Rough! And he never had a growl for no one who spoke kind to him. Everybody liked him-everybody except the Tenderhearted Oysterman. The Tenderhearted Oysterman!" he cried, jumping to his feet as if an inspiration had fallen upon him. "Why, it was him as swore he would murder Rough! It was him as passed to-night when I was goin' to give Rough the pie! It was him as give Rough the piece of meat! The piece of meat!

It was pizened! He swore he'd kill him, and he's done it! That's what I heerd him laughin' at."

Grif wiped the tears from his eyes with the cuff of his ragged jacket, and clenched his teeth.

"He's pizened Rough, has he?" he muttered, gloomily; and raising his hand to the dark sky, he said, "If ever I can be even with him for killin' my dawg, I will, so 'elp me-"

This time there was no one by to check the oath, and he uttered it savagely and emphatically. Then he put his head in the barrel, and shook Little Peter awake.

"Peter," he said, "Rough's dead. Ain't you sorry?"

"Yes," said Little Peter, without any show of feeling.

"He's been pizened. The Tenderhearted Oysterman's pizened him. Say Damn him!"

"Damn him!" Little Peter said, readily.

"I'm going to bury him," said Grif. "Git up and come along with me."

Very obediently, but very sleepily, Little Peter came out of bed. Grif looked about him, picked up a piece of rusty iron, and taking Rough in his arms, walked away, and Little Peter, rubbing his eyes, trudged sometimes behind and sometimes at Grif's side. Now and then the little fellow placed his hand half carelessly and half caressingly upon Rough's head, and now and then Grif stopped and kissed his dead servant. In this way, slouching through the miserable streets, the rain pouring heavily down, the funeral procession reached a large burial-ground. The

gates were closed, but they got in over a low wall at the back. Everything about him was very solemn, very mournful, and very dreary. The night was so dark that they could scarcely see, and they stumbled over many a little mound of earth as they crept along.

"This'll do," said Grif, stopping at a spot where a tangle of grass leaves were soiling their crowns in the muddy earth.

With the piece of iron he soon scraped a hole large enough for the body. Some notion that he was performing a sacred duty which demanded sacred observances was upon him.

"Take off your cap," he said to Little Peter.

Little Peter pulled off his cap; Grif did so likewise; and the rain pattered down upon their bare heads. They stood so for a little while in silence.

"Ashes to ashes!" Grif said, placing the body in the hole, and piling the earth over it. He had followed many funerals to the churchyard, and had heard the ministers speak those words.

"Good-bye, Rough!" murmured Grif, with a sob of grief. "Dear old Rough! Poor old Rough!"

And then the two outcasts crept back again, through the dreary streets, to their bed in the barrel.

CHAPTER IV.
THE CONJUGAL NUTTALLS

The March of Progress is sounding loudly in the ears of the people who throng the streets of Melbourne. It is not a lazy hum, a droning whisper, with an invitation to sleep in its every note; there is something martial in its tones, something that tells you to look alive and move along, if you do not wish to be pushed into a corner and lost sight of. It may be that the March of Progress is set to quicker time in the busy thoroughfares of Melbourne than in those of the cities of the older world. It makes itself more strongly felt; it asserts itself more independently; it sets the blood in more rapid circulation. It carries us along with it, past noble-looking stores filled with the triumphs of the workshops of the world which emigrants call Old; past great hotels whence men issue in the noonday light, wiping their months unblushingly, and through the swinging doors of which you catch glimpses of excited men, eating, drinking, talking, gesticulating, as rapidly and fiercely as if they thirsted to trip up the heels of Time, and take him prisoner by the forelock; past fine houses and squalid houses; through quarters where wealth smiles and poverty groans; to the very verge of the growing city, from which line the houses dot the landscape pleasantly, and do not crowd it uncomfortably-from which line are seen fair plains and fields,

and shadows of primeval forests in the clouds. And here, the air which had been swelling louder and louder, until it grew into a clanging sound that banished all sense of rest, grows fainter and sweeter; here in the suburbs, as you walk in them by the side of the whispering river, over whose bosom the weeping willow hangs, the March of Progress subsides into a hymn, which travels on through the landscape to the primeval forests, and softly sings, that soon-where now grim members of the eucalypti rear their lofty heads; where now a blight is heavy on the bush, which before the burning sun had waged fierce war with it and sucked the juices from the earth, was bright and beautiful with tree and flower-the golden corn shall wave, and gladden the face of nature with rippling smiles.

The March of Progress sounds but faintly before a prettily-built weatherboard cottage in the suburbs, where dwell the family of the Nuttalls. It is a pleasant cottage, and so Mr. Nicholas Nuttall seems to think as he looks round the parlour with a smile, and then looks down again, and reads, for at least the sixth time, a letter which is lying open on the table.

"And Matthew is alive," he said, speaking to the letter as if it were sentient; "alive and prosperous! To think that it should be thirty years since I saw him; that I should come out here, scarcely hoping to find him alive, and that, after being here only a month, I should hear of him in such a wonderful manner. So amazingly rich, too! Upon my word," he continued, apostrophising a figure of Time, which, with a very long beard and a very long scythe,

looked down upon him from the family mantel-shelf; "upon my word, old daddy, you're a wonder. You are," he continued, shaking his head at the figure; "there's no getting over *you!* You grow us up, you mow us down; you turn our hair black, you turn it white; you make us strong, you make us feeble; and we laugh at you and wheeze at you, until the day comes when we can laugh and wheeze no more. Dear! dear! dear! What a handsome fellow he was to be sure! I wonder if he is much altered. I wonder if he ever thinks of old times. I shall know him again, for certain, directly I clap eyes on him. He must have got grey by this time, though. Dear! dear! dear!"

And Mr. Nicholas Nuttall fell to musing over thirty years ago, fishing up from that deep well a hundred trifles which brought pleasant ripples to his face. They had been buried so long that it might have been excused them had they been rusted, but they were not so. They came up quite bright at his bidding, and smiled in his face. They twinkled in his eyes, those memories, and made him young again. In the glowing wood fire rose up the pictures of his past life; the intervening years melted away, and he saw once more his boyhood's home, and the friends and associates whom he loved. As at the touch of a magician's hand, the tide of youth came back, and brought with it tender episodes of his happy boyhood; he looked again upon faces, young as when he knew them, as if youth were eternal, and time had no power to wrinkle; eyes gazed into his lovingly, as of yore; and days passed before him containing such tender remembrances that his

heart throbbed with pleasure at the very thought of them. He and his brother were walking hand-in-hand through a leafy forest; they came upon two girls (who were afterwards drowned but he did not think of that!) whom they greeted with hand-clasps, and then the four wandered on. He remembered nothing more of that woodland walk; but the tender pressure of the girl's hand lingered upon his even after so many years, and made the day into a sweet and loving remembrance. And thus he mused and mused, and all his young life passed before him, phantasmagorically. The flowers in the garden of youth were blooming once again in the life of Mr. Nicholas Nuttall.

But his reverie was soon disturbed. For the partner of his bosom, Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall, suddenly bouncing into the room, and seating herself, demonstratively, in her own particular arm-chair, on the other side of the fire, puffed away his dreams in a trice.

Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall was a small woman. Mr. Nicholas Nuttall was a large man. Mrs. Nichols Nuttall, divested of her crinolines and flounces and other feminine vanities, in which she indulged inordinately, was a very baby by the side of her spouse. In fact, the contrast, to an impartial observer, would have been ridiculous. Her condition, when feathered, was that of an extremely ruffled hen, strutting about in offended majesty, in defiance of the whole poultry race. Unfeather her, and figuratively speaking, Mr. Nicholas Nuttall could have put Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall into his pocket-like a doll.

Yet if there ever was a man hopelessly under petticoat government; if ever there was a man completely and entirely subjugated; if ever there was a man prone and vanquished beneath woman's merciless thumb; that man was the husband of Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall. It is a singular fact, but one which may be easily ascertained by any individual who takes an interest in studying the physiology of marriage life, that when a very small man espouses a very large woman, he is, by tacit consent, the king of the castle: it is an important, unexpressed portion of the marriage obligation; and that, when a very small woman espouses a very large man, she rules him with a rod of iron, tames him, subjugates him, so to speak, until at length he can scarcely call his soul his own.

This was the case with the conjugality of the Nuttalls, as was proven by the demeanour of the male portion of the bond. For no sooner had the feminine half (*plus*) seated herself opposite the masculine half (*minus*) than the face of Mr. Nicholas Nuttall assumed an expression of the most complete and perfect submission.

Mrs. Nuttall was not an agreeable-looking woman. As a girl she might have been pretty: but twenty-five years of nagging and scolding and complaining had given her a vinegarish expression. Her eyes had contracted, as if they had a habit of looking inward for consolation; her lips were thin, and her nose was sharp. This last feature would not have been an ugly one if it had not been so bony; but constant nagging had worn all the flesh away, and

brought into conspicuous notice a knob in the centre of the arc, for it was a Roman. If such women only knew what a splendid interest amiability returned, how eager they would be to invest in it!

Mrs. Nuttall sat in her chair and glared at her husband. Mr. Nuttall sat in his chair and looked meekly at his wife. He knew what was coming-the manner, not the matter. He knew that something had annoyed the wife of his bosom, and that she presented herself before him only for the purpose of distressing him with reproaches. He waited patiently.

"Mr. Nuttall," presently said Mrs. Nuttall, "why don't you speak? Why do you sit glaring at me, as if I were a sphinx?"

To throw the *onus* of the interview upon Mr. Nuttall was manifestly unfair, and the thought may have kept him silent; or, perhaps, he had nothing to say.

"This place will be the death of me, I'm certain," Mrs. Nuttall remarked with an air of resignation.

Nicholas shrugged his shoulders with an almost imperceptible motion-shrugged them, as it were, beneath his shirt and coat, and in such a manner that no movement was imparted to those garments. Ever since they had been married, something or other was always going to be the death of Mrs. Nuttall; about six times a day, on an average, since the honeymoon, Mr. Nuttall had heard her utter the complaint, accompanied by an expression of regret that she had ever married. That regret she expressed upon the present occasion, and Mr. Nuttall received it with equanimity.

The first time he heard it, it was a shock to him; but since then he had become resigned. So he merely put in an expostulatory "My dear" – being perfectly well aware that he would not be allowed to get any further.

"Don't my-dear me," interrupted Mrs. Nuttall, as he expected; he would have been puzzled what to say if she had not taken up the cue. "I'm tired of your my-dearing and my-loving. You ought never to have married, Nicholas. You don't know how to appreciate a proper and affectionate wife. Or if you were bent upon marrying-and bent you must have been, for you would not take No, for answer-you ought to have married Mary Plummer. I wish you had *her* for a wife! Then you would appreciate me better."

No wonder, that at so thoroughly illogical and bigamy-suggesting an aspiration, Mr. Nuttall looked puzzled. But Mrs. Nuttall paid no attention to his look, and proceeded, -

"I went to school with her, and I ought to know how she would turn out. The way she brings up her family is disgraceful; the girls are as untidy as can be. You should see the bed-rooms in the middle of the day! And yet her husband indulges her in everything. He is something like a husband should be. He didn't drag his wife away from her home, after she had slaved for him all her life, and bring her out to a place where everything is topsy-turvy, and ten times the price that it is anywhere else, and where people who are not fit for domestics are put over your heads. He didn't do that! Not he! He knows his duty as a husband and a

father of a family better."

Mr. Nuttall sighed.

"The sufferings I endured on board that dreadful ship," continued Mrs. Nuttall, "ought to have melted a heart of stone. What with walking with one leg longer than the other for three months, I'm sure I shall never be able to walk straight again. I often wondered, when I woke up in a fright in the middle of the night, and found myself standing on my head in that horrible bunk, what I had done to meet with such treatment from you. From the moment you broached the subject of our coming to the colonies, my peace of mind was gone. The instant I stepped on board that dreadful ship, which you basely told me was a clipper, and into that black hole of a hen-coop, which you falsely described as a lovely saloon, I felt that I was an innocent convict, about to be torn from my native country. The entire voyage was nothing but a series of insults; the officers paid more attention to my own daughter than they did to me; and the sailors, when they were pulling the ropes-what good they did by it I never could find out! – used to sing a low song with a chorus about Maria, knowing that to be my name, simply for the purpose of wounding my feelings. And when I told you to interfere, you refused, and said it was only a coincidence! That is the kind of consideration I get from you."

Mr. Nuttall sighed again.

"There's Jane," observed Mrs. Nuttall, approaching one of her grievances; "the best servant I ever had. At home she was quite

satisfied with ten pounds a year; and now, after our paying her passage out, she says she can't stop unless her wages are raised to thirty pounds. Thir-ty pounds," said Mrs. Nuttall, elongating the numeral. "And at home she was contented with twelve. Do you know how you are to meet these frightful expenses? I'm sure *I* don't. But mind, Nicholas, if we come to ruin, don't blame me for it. I told you all along what would be the result of your dragging us to the colonies. I pray that I may be mistaken; but I have never been mistaken yet, and you know it;" and Mrs. Nuttall spread out her skirts (she was always spreading out her skirts, as if she could not make enough of herself) complacently.

Still Mr. Nuttall made no remark, and sat as quiet as a mouse, gazing humbly upon the household prophet.

"Thirty pounds a year for a servant-of-all-work!" continued the lady. "Preposterous! The best thing we can do, if that's the way they're paid, is all of us to go out as servants-of-all-work, and lay by a provision for Marian."

A vision of himself, in feminine attire, floor-scrubbing on his knees, flitted across the disturbed mind of Mr. Nuttall.

"She must have the money, I suppose. I know who has put her up to it; it is either the baker's or the butcher's man. The two noodles are hankering after her, and she encourages them. I saw the pair of them at the back-gate last night, and she was flirting with them nicely. You must give information to the police, Nicholas, and have them locked up."

"Looked up!" exclaimed Mr. Nuttall.

"Certainly. Do you think the police would allow such goings on at home?"

"Perhaps not, my dear," said Mr. Nuttall, with a sly smile; "the police at home, I believe, are said to hold almost a monopoly in servant-girls."

"I don't understand your coarse allusions, Mr. Nuttall," said Mrs. Nuttall, loftily. "What I say is, you must give information to the police, and have these goings-on stopped."

"It is perfectly impossible, Maria. Do be reasonable!"

"Sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Nuttall, glaring at her husband.

"What I meant to say, Maria," said Mr. Nuttall, clearing his throat, as if something had gone down the wrong way, "is, that I don't believe it is a criminal offence for a servant-girl to talk to a baker, or even a butcher, over a gate; and I doubt if giving information to the police would lead to any satisfactory result."

"It will be a very satisfactory result-won't it? – if Jane runs away and gets married. Servant-girls don't think of that sort of thing at home. I shall be in a nice situation. It would be like losing my right hand. I tell you what this country is, Mr. Nuttall-it's demoralizing, that's what it is." And Mrs. Nuttall wept, through sheer vexation.

All this was sufficiently distressing to Mr. Nuttall, but he did not exhibit any outward show of annoyance. Time was when Mrs. Nuttall's tears impressed him with the conviction that he was a man of hard feeling, but he had got over that. And so Mrs. Nuttall wept, and Mr. Nuttall only experienced a feeling of weariness;

but he brightened up as his eyes rested upon the letter which had occasioned him so much pleasure, and he said-

"Oh, Maria, I have an invitation for you. At short notice, too. For this evening. From Mr. and Mrs. Blemish. Great people, you know, Maria."

Mrs. Nuttall instantly became attentive.

"And whom do you think we shall meet? When I tell you, you will be as surprised as I was when I read it."

"Whom, Nicholas?" asked Mrs. Nuttall, impatiently. "Do *not* keep me in suspense."

"My brother Matthew!"

"Alive!" exclaimed Mrs. Nuttall.

"Of course. You would not wish to meet him in any other condition, would you?"

"That you should make such a remark," observed Mrs. Nuttall, "of a brother whom we all thought dead, is, to say the least of it, heartless, Nicholas. Of course, if the Blemishes are, as you say, great people, and he visits them, it is a comfort, as showing that his position is not a bad one. But, if we are to go, can you tell me what to wear? I don't know, in this outlandish colony, whether we are expected to dress ourselves like Christians or aboriginals."

"The last would certainly be inexpensive, but it would scarcely be decent, Maria," remarked Mr. Nuttall, slily.

"That may be very witty, Mr. Nuttall," responded his lady, loftily; "but it is hardly an observation a man should make to his own wife. Though for what you care about your wife's feelings I

would not give that," and she snapped her fingers, disdainfully.

From long and sad experience, Mr. Nicholas Nuttall had learned the wisdom of saying as little as possible when his wife was in her present humour. Indeed, he would sometimes lose all consciousness of what was passing, or would find himself regarding it as an unquiet dream from which he would presently awake. But Mrs. Nuttall was always equal to the occasion; and now, as she observed him about to relapse into a dreamy state of inattention, she cried, sharply-

"Nicholas!"

"Yes, my dear," he responded, with a jump, as if half-a-dozen needles had been smartly thrust into a tender part.

"What am I to wear this evening?"

"Your usual good taste, Maria," he commenced-

"Oh, bother my good taste!" she interrupted. "You know that we are to meet your brother to-night, and I am only anxious to do you credit. Not that I shan't be a perfect fright, for I haven't a dress fit to put on my back. If I wasn't such a good contriver, we should look more like paupers than respectable people. My black silk has been turned three times already; and my pearl grey-you ought to know what a state that is in, for you spilt the port wine over it yourself. Is your brother very rich, Nicholas?"

"They say so, Maria; he owns cattle stations, and thousands of sheep and cattle. He is a squatter, you know."

"A what?" she screamed.

"A squatter."

"What a dreadful thing!" she exclaimed. "What a shocking calamity! Is he always squatting, Nicholas?"

"My dear;" said Nicholas, amazed.

"Not that it matters much," she continued, not heeding him; "he may squat as long as he likes, if he has plenty of money, and assists you as a brother should. Thank heaven! none of my relations ever squatted. Has he been squatting long, Nicholas?"

"For ever so many years," he replied.

"What a disagreeable position! Why, his legs must be quite round. You ought to thank your stars that you have a wife who doesn't squat-"

But observing a furtive smile play about her husband's lips, she rose majestically, and said,

"I shall not waste my conversation upon you any longer. I suppose the cab will be here at half-past nine o'clock; everybody else, of course, will go in their own carriages." (Here she took out her watch, and consulted it.) "Bless my soul! it is nearly seven o'clock now. I have barely three hours to dress."

And she whisked out of the room, leaving Mr. Nuttall, nothing loth, to resume his musings.

CHAPTER V.
THE MORAL MERCHANT ENTERTAINS HIS FRIENDS AT DINNER

On the same evening, and at about the same hour, of the occurrence of the foregoing matrimonial dialogue, Mr. Zachariah Blemish entertained his friends at dinner. Mr. Zachariah Blemish was a merchant and a philanthropist; he was also a gentleman of an imposing mien, and of a portly appearance. Some of his detractors (and what man lives who has them not?) said that the manly bosom which throbbed to the beats of his patriotic heart was filled with as earthly desires as other earthly flesh. If this assertion, which was generally made spitefully and vindictively, was the worst that could be said against him, Zachariah Blemish could look the world in the face without blushing. True or untrue, he did look, unmoved, in the world's face, and if either felt abashed in the presence of the other, it was the world, and not Blemish. There was a self-assertion in his manner when he appeared in public, which, if it could have been set down in so many words, would have thus expressed itself: – "Here am I, sent among you for your good; make much of me. You are frail, I am strong; you are mean,

I am noble. But do not be abashed. Do not be afraid of your own unworthiness. I do not wish to hold myself above you. I will eat with you, and talk with you, and sleep with you, as if I were one of yourselves. It is not my fault that I am superior to you. Perhaps, if you look up to me, you may one day reach my level. It would be much to accomplish, but you have my best wishes. I am here to do you good, and I hope I may." As he walked along the streets, people fell aside and made way for him, deferentially. They looked after him, and pointed him out to strangers as the great Mr. Blemish; and it was told of one family that, when the children were put to bed at night, they were taught to say, "God bless papa and mamma, and Good Mr. Blemish." His snowy shirt-front, viewed from a distance, was a sight to look upon, and, upon a nearer acquaintance, dazzled one with its pure whiteness. At church he was the most devout of men, and the congregation wondered how so much greatness and so much meekness could be found in the breast of any one human being. There was not a crease in his face; it was fat, and smooth, and ruddy; it looked like the blessed face of a large cherubim; and it said as plainly as face could say, "Here dwell content, and peace, and prosperity, and benevolence." He was Chairman of the United Band of Temperance Aboriginals; President of the Moral Boot-blacking Boys' Reformatory; Perpetual Grand Master of the Society for the Total Suppression of Vice; the highest dignitary in the Association of Universal Philanthropists; and a leading member of the Fellowship of Murray Cods. He

subscribed to all the charities; with a condescending humility he allowed his name to appear regularly upon all committees for religious and benevolent purposes, and would himself go round with lists to collect subscriptions. In this direction his power was enormous. Such a thing as a refusal was not thought of. People wrote their names upon his list, in the firm belief that twenty shillings invested in benevolence with Zachariah Blemish returned a much larger rate of interest than if invested with any other collector. Once, and once only, was he known to be unsuccessful. He asked a mechanic for a subscription to the funds of the United Band of Temperance Aboriginals, and the man refused him, in somewhat rough terms, saying that the United Band of Temperance Aboriginals was a Band of Humbugs. Blemish gazed mildly at the man, and turned away without a word. The following day he displayed an anonymous letter, in which the writer, signing himself "Repentant," enclosed one pound three shillings and sixpence as the contribution of a working man (being his last week's savings) towards the funds of the United Band of Temperance Aboriginals, and a fervent wish was expressed in the letter that the Band would meet with the success it deserved. There was no doubt that it was the mechanic who sent it, and that it was the magnetic goodness of the Moral Merchant that had softened his heart. At the next meeting of the United Band of Temperance Aboriginals (which was attended by a greasy Australian native clothed in a dirty blanket, and smelling strongly of rum) a resolution was passed,

authorizing the purchase of a gilt frame for the mechanic's letter, to perpetuate the goodness of Blemish, and the moral power of his eye.

On the present evening he was seated at the head of his table, round which were ranged some dozen guests of undoubted respectability. He was supported on his right by a member of the Upper House of Parliament; he was supported on his left by a member of the Lower House of ditto. One of the leading members of the Government was talking oracularly to one of the leading merchants of the city. One of the leading lawyers was laying down the law to one of the leading physicians. And only three chairs off was Mr. David Dibbs, eating his dinner like a common mortal. Like a common mortal? Like the commonest of common mortals! He might have been a bricklayer for any difference observable between them. For he gobbled his food did Mr. David Dibbs, and he slobbered his soup did Mr. David Dibbs, and his chops were greasy, and his hands were not nice-looking, and, altogether, he did not present an agreeable appearance. But was he not the possessor of half-a-dozen cattle and sheep-stations, each with scores of miles of water frontage, and was not his income thirty thousand pounds a year? Oh, golden calf! nestle in my bosom, and throw your glittering veil over my ignorance, and meanness, and stupidity give me thirty thousand pounds a year, that people may fall down and worship me!

The other guests were not a whit less respectable. Each

of them, in his own particular person, represented wealth or position. Could it for a single moment be imagined that the guests of Mr. Zachariah Blemish were selected for the purpose of throwing a halo of respectability round the person of their host, and that they were one and all administering to and serving his interest? If so, the guests were unconscious of it; but it might not have been less a fact that he made them all return, in one shape or another, good interest for the hospitality he so freely lavished upon them. This evening he was giving a dinner party to his male friends; and later in the night Mrs. Zachariah Blemish would receive *her* guests and entertain them.

The gentlemen are over their wine, and are conversing freely. Politics, scandal, the state of the colony, and many other subjects, are discussed with animation. Just now, politics is the theme. The member of the Lower House and the member of the Upper House are the principal speakers here. But, occasionally, others say a word or two, which utterings are regarded by the two members as unwarrantable interruptions. The member of the Government says very little on politics, and generally maintains a cautious reticence.

"I should like to have been in the House last night," said one of the conversational interlopers; "that was a smart thing Ritchie said."

"What was it?" asked another.

"Speaking of Beazley, who is awfully rich you know, and an incorrigible miser, he said, 'He congratulated himself upon not

belonging to a party which had, for its principal supporter, a man whose office was his church, whose desk was his pulpit, whose ledger was his Bible, and whose money was his god.'"

"Very clever, but very savage," remarked one of the guests. "I do not believe in such unbridled licence of debate."

"I met Beazley the other day, and he complained that the times were dreadfully dull. He did not know what things were coming to. He had seventy thousand pounds lying idle, he said, and he could not get more than five per cent. for it. He shook his head and said, 'The golden days of the colony are gone!'"

"And so they are," said the member of the Lower House, whose proclivities were republican, "and they will not return until we have Separation and Confederation. That's what we want to set us going-separation from the home country, and a confederation of the South Sea colonies. We don't want our most important matters settled for us in the red-tape office over the water. We don't want our Governors appointed for us; we want to select them ourselves from the men who have grown up with us, and whose careers render them worthy and prove them fit for the distinction. If we were in any serious trouble we should have to extricate ourselves as best we could, and if we *did* have help from the home country, shouldn't we have to pay the piper? That's the point-shouldn't we have to pay the piper?"

"Nay, nay," expostulated Mr. Zachariah Blemish. "Consider for a moment, I beg-we are all loyal subjects, I hope-"

"I maintain," said the member of the Lower House, excited

by his theme, "that, notwithstanding our loyalty to the reigning Sovereign, the day must come when we shall not be dependent upon the caprices of a colonial office fourteen thousand miles distant, which very often does not understand the nature of the difficulty it has to legislate upon. I maintain that the day must come-"

"Gentlemen," called Mr. Zachariah Blemish, horrified at the utterance of such sentiments over his dinner table, "gentlemen, I give you The Queen! God bless her!"

"The Queen! God bless her!" responded all the guests, rising to their feet, and drinking the toast enthusiastically. And then the conversation took another turn. Presently, all ears were turned to the leading physician, who was relating a circumstance to the leading lawyer.

"It is a curious story," he said. "The man I speak of was always reported to be very wealthy. No one knows more of his early career than that, when the gold-diggings were first discovered, he was a Cheap-Jack, as they call them, trading at all the new gold-fields. He bought tents, picks, shovels, tubs, anything, from the diggers, who were madly running from one place to another. He bought them for a song, for the diggers could not carry those things about with them, and they were glad to get rid of them at any price. When he sold them he made enormous profits, and by these means he was supposed to have amassed a great fortune. Then he speculated largely in sheep and cattle, and grew to be looked upon as a sort of banker. Many men deposited their

savings with him, and, as he did not pay any interest for the money, and traded with it, there is no doubt as to the profitable nature of his operations. The great peculiarity about him was that his face from beneath his eyes, was completely hidden in bushy, brown, curly hair, He had been heard to say that he had never shaved. Well, one night, at past eleven o'clock, he knocked up a storekeeper at the diggings, and bought a razor and strop, a pair of scissors, a pair of moleskin trousers, a pair of watertight boots, and a blue serge shirt. In the course of conversation with the storekeeper, and while he was selecting the articles, he said that they were for a man whom he had engaged as a shepherd, and who was to start at daybreak the following morning. That was the last indisputable occurrence that was known in connection with him; the next day he disappeared and was not heard of again. For a day or two, no notice was taken of his absence; but, after that, depositors and others grew uneasy, and rumour invented a hundred different stories about him. A detective who knew him intimately, said that he was standing at the pit entrance of the Theatre Royal in Bourke Street, when a man passed in, the glitter of whose eyes attracted the detective's attention strangely. He could not recall the man's face, which was clean shaven, and he thought no more about it at the time. The missing man was traced to Melbourne, but no further. Some three or four weeks after his disappearance, the body of a drowned person was found in a river in New South Wales, and, from certain marks about it, it was supposed to be that of our missing friend. The inquest

was adjourned, to allow time for the production of evidence from Victoria, and twelve medical men, all of whom knew the missing party were subpoenaed for the purpose of identifying him, or otherwise. The body was much decomposed, but some of the witnesses said that they would know if it was the missing man by the peculiar shape of one of his toes. The singularity of the affair lies in this. Six of the witnesses swore that it was the missing man, and six of them swore that it was not. Both sides were very positive. Some months after the inquest, a story was current that he had been seen at Texas, which story was shortly afterwards followed up by another, that he was shot in a tavern in South America. Then came other reports that he was living in great magnificence in all sorts of out-of-the-way places. But whether he is alive or not, no one in the colony knows, and to this day the mystery is not cleared up, and probably never will be."

"And the depositors' money?" asked the lawyer.

"Was never heard of. Vanished. If he was drowned, he did not like to part with it, and he took it into the other world with him."

Everybody at the table was much interested in the story, and commented upon it; after which there was a lull in the conversation.

"I have a great surprise in store for you to-night," said Mr. Blemish; addressing a gentleman of about sixty years of age, whose face was covered with iron-grey whiskers, beard, and moustache.

From some unexplained cause, the gentleman addressed

looked suddenly and excitedly into the face of his host, and exclaimed, in a quick, nervous voice-

"A surprise!"

"Yes, and I hope a pleasant one."

"What surprise?" he asked, in the same agitated manner.

"Nay." returned Mr. Blemish, gently, "it will not be a surprise if I tell you beforehand."

The flush that had risen to that portion of the gentleman's face which the iron-grey whiskers, beard, and moustache allowed to be seen, slowly died away, and was replaced by a whitish-grey tint, which almost made him look like the ghost of an antique warrior. He debated within himself for a few moments, and then, taking out his pocket-book, wrote upon a leaf, "I shall take it as a particular favour if you will let me know what is the surprise you have in store for me; I have urgent reasons for asking;" and passed it, folded, to his host. Mr. Blemish read it, smiled, and wrote beneath, in reply, "Do you remember your brother?" and repassed the paper to his guest.

"Brother!" exclaimed that gentleman, in a voice betokening that, although he was considerably astonished, he was also considerably relieved.

"Yes," said Mr. Blemish, "your brother Nicholas."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Matthew Nuttall; and the rest of the guests stared hard at him. Excepting Mr. David Dibbs, who was not disposed to be diverted from the serious occupation of eating and drinking. For Mr. David Dibbs lived to eat; he did

not eat to live.

It *is* a shock to a man to be wrenched, without forewarning, from the groove in which his life has been gliding for twenty years. For fully that time Mr. Matthew Nuttall, engrossed in his own pursuits and his own cares, had never once thought of his brother; and now, at the very mention of his name, memories, long buried and forgotten, floated upon his mind like the sudden rising of a ghostly tide.

"Have you seen him?" he asked.

"No," said Mr. Zachariah Blemish, "I learned by accident that he has but lately arrived in the colony. Singularly enough, he had a letter of introduction to me from some of my people at home, and Mrs. Blemish, out of respect to you, invited him this evening to meet you."

"Mrs. Blemish is always kind. I shall be very glad to see Nicholas," said Mr. Matthew Nuttall, slowly and thoughtfully; and then the conversation became more general.

"Sheep are rising in the market, are they not, Mr. Dibbs?" asked the member of the Upper House.

"It's time they was," replied the great squatter, his mouth full of pine-apple.

"The people are complaining loudly of the price of beef," observed the democratic member of the Lower House.

"They're always a-growlin'," said Mr. David Dibbs, who, having swallowed his pine-apple, was enabled to speak with greater clearness. "They don't know what they want, don't the

people. Beef ought to be double the price. My motto all'as has been, 'Live and let live.' They lay the blame on us squatters, but it's the butchers as sticks it on."

"It lies between the two of you, I suppose. Did you read in the papers that Mr. Froth said at the Eastern Market last night that the squatters were the ruin of the country?" asked the member of the Lower House, who, in virtue of his position, did all he could to make himself disagreeable.

"Mr. Froth wants his head punched," said Mr. Dibbs, elegantly, "and I wouldn't mind a-doin' of it for him. Why doesn't he stick to his business? He's a ignorant, lazy-a-a-" Here Mr. Dibbs wanted a word, and could not get it.

"Demagogue," suggested one of the guests.

"That's it. He's a ignorant, lazy demagogue, and is always trying to stir up the mob."

"The fact of it is, sir," said the member of the Upper House, seizing the opportunity to give a blow to democracy, "the people, as you call them, are a discontented set. Manhood suffrage has done it all. No man ought to have a vote who has not a property qualification."

"Quite right, sir," said Mr. Dibbs. "A glass of wine?"

"With pleasure. For, sir, what is the result?" (This oracularly, as if he were addressing the House.) "These men, sir, who have no property, but have a vote, exercise a pressure upon property detrimental to the interests of gentlemen who have property. What has property to do with them, or what have they to do with

property? When they have property, let them speak; until then, let them be silent, and not interfere with what does not concern them."

"Them's my sentiments," nodded Mr. Dibbs, approvingly, helping himself to more wine and pine-apple.

"To what, sir, is this state of things to be attributed?" continued the orator. "The answer is plain. It is to be attributed to the unfortunate state of independence in which the working-man finds himself in these colonies. The working-classes all over the world, sir, are democratic, often dangerously democratic. But in such a country as England they are kept in their proper position by a sense of dependence. They cannot afford to quarrel with their bread-and-butter there. But, sir, when the working-man lands upon these shores, this spirit of dependence vanishes. Speaking vulgarly, sir, he says within himself, 'Jack's as good as his master;' and acting up to the spirit of that old adage (the author of it sir, ought to have been put into the pillory) – acting, I say again, sir, up to the spirit of that adage, he aims a blow at the interests of all of us who have property in the colony. He does not pay property the respect: to which it is entitled. He becomes democratic to a dangerous degree, and has no regard for conservative interests. This must be put a stop to, sir. It is incumbent upon us, who are loyal subjects, to put a stop to it-as loyal subjects, I say, sir, for we all know what is the meaning of democracy. It behoves all of us who have settled interests in the colony to look sharply about us. We must, if necessary, band

together for the protection of our own interests; and, above all, sir, we must stick to the Constitution."

"Quite right again, sir," assented Mr. Dibbs, whose only idea of the Constitution was thirty thousand pounds a year for himself.

All the guests, with the exception of the member of the Lower House, agreed to the proposition that they must stick to the Constitution. The way that poor word was tossed about, and flung across the table and back again, was deplorable. It was settled that the Constitution was in danger, and, at all hazards, must be protected. No one could define precisely the nature of the danger. It appeared, as far as could be gathered, to resolve itself into this-that times were very dull, and that, therefore, the Constitution was imperilled. They all, with one exception, appeared to think that something was very wrong somewhere, and that the country was in a most distressing condition. Mr. Zachariah Blemish was the only person at the table who ventured to remark that "We are young, gentlemen, we are young, and have plenty of time before us for improvement. In all new colonies evils are sure to creep in. We have a fine estate in our hands, gentlemen; one of the finest estates in the world; and all it wants is proper management. Certainly the state of commercial morality is very bad-"

Ah, here was a theme! Commercial morality! The guests grew eloquent upon it. The member of the Upper House said it was deplorable; the member of the Lower House said it was

disgraceful; the leading physician said it was frightful; the leading lawyer said it was unparalleled; Mr. Dibbs said it was beastly; and they raised their hands and their eyes, and shook their heads as much as to say, "Is it not dreadful that we, who are immaculate, who are undefiled, should live in the midst of such a state of things, without being able to remedy the evil?" But the most impressive of all was Mr. Zachariah Blemish; and, as a merchant of the highest standing, his words were listened to with deep attention.

Commercial morality (he said) was at its lowest ebb. The spirit of over-speculation among traders was something frightful to contemplate, and disastrous results were sure to follow. Indeed, indications of the approaching crisis were already observable in the records of the Insolvency Court. It was all occasioned by the easiness with which men got credit-men who commenced with nothing, who had nothing, with the exception of self-assurance, and who speculated recklessly, with the knowledge that when the crash came-and come it must, sooner or later, with such-like speculators-their creditors would only be too glad to take five shillings in the pound; would feel delighted at seven shillings and sixpence; would congratulate themselves at ten shillings; and then, after giving a full release, would actually do business again, upon terms, with the very man who had robbed them. Where was honesty? Where was morality? What would become of vested interests if that sort of thing were to continue? Steps must be taken-it behoved all of them to take steps. A check must be put to

the spirit of reckless speculation, and he himself had some idea of initiating a movement in furtherance of the desired result. All that was required was that merchants should be true to themselves and to their own interests, and the country would soon recover from its present depressed condition.

And after the utterance of these platitudes, Mr. Zachariah Blemish stuck his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, and looked round upon his guests, who, one and all, bowed down to the spirit of honour and integrity shining in the face of their merchant host!

CHAPTER VI.
FATHER AND DAUGHTER

The house of Mr. Zachariah Blemish looked out upon the sea. It was a magnificent mansion, worthy of the greatness of its inmate, and was the resort of the most fashionable, as well as the most influential, residents of Melbourne and its charming suburbs. It had a balcony round three of its sides-a broad, spacious balcony, on which the guests could promenade, and talk politics, or love, or philosophy, as suited them. It was grand, on a quiet night, to sit thereon, and watch the moon rising from the sea; it was grand to watch the sea itself, cradled in the arms of night, while myriad cloud-shadows floated on its breast, and flashed into lines of snow-fringed light with the rising and the falling of the waves.

Lights were gleaming in the windows and round the balcony, and the house was pleasant with the buzz of conversation, and soft laughter, and sweet music. The party seemed altogether a very delightful one; for a smile was on every lip, and distilled honey dropped from every tongue, while the presiding genius of the establishment was benign and affable, and moved among his guests like Jove dispensing agreeability.

The brothers Nuttall had met in the ball-room. The only words they exchanged were "Matthew!" "Nicholas!" and then, after a

long pressure of the hand, they adjourned to the balcony, where their conversation would be more private than in the house.

They felt somewhat awkward; the days they had passed together might have belonged to another life, so long gone by did that time seem. The bridge between their boyhood and their old age had crumbled down, and the fragments had been almost quite washed by the stream of Time. Still, some memory of the old affection was stirred into life by the meeting, and they both felt softened and saddened as their hands lay in each other's clasp.

They paced the balcony in silence at first. Then the elder, Matthew, asked some stray questions as to the old places he used to frequent, and smiled and pondered wonderingly as he heard of the changes that had taken place.

"And the yew, where the parrot used to swing, gone!" he said. "And the wood where we went nutting?"

"Almost a city, Mat. A tree here and there, that's all. I was thinking only to-night of that wood, and of one happy day we spent there-you know with whom?"

"I know-I know. Good God! I have not thought of it or them for twenty years. And now they come to me again. Do they live?"

"Drowned!"

"Poor girls! There, Nick, let us talk of something else. It is no wonder things have changed. We have changed more than they."

"Yes, we are old men now," responded his brother. "This is a strange meeting, Mat, and in a new world, too."

"What did you come out to the colonies for?" asked the elder

brother.

"For the same reason, I suppose, that thousands of other people come out-to better myself. I don't know that I had any particular other reason, and I don't know that I exactly knew how I was going to better myself. But I thought it would come right somehow.

"Then there were the goldfields, eh, Nicholas?"

"Yes; then there were the goldfields. They did excite me certainly. I heard of people picking up nuggets-of course you laugh-and I thought it possible that such a thing might happen. I know now how foolish even the stray thought of such a thing was for me, an old man. But still the gold seemed to say to me, Come, and I came."

"You are not rich?"

"No," was the reply.

"Any fixed plans of what you are going to do?"

"No-a dozen things have occurred to me, but, to tell you the truth, I am puzzled. Everything here appears to be so-so go-ahead," he said, after hesitating for a term, "that I am bewildered somewhat. Then, there is Mrs. Nuttall!"

"Mrs. Nuttall!"

"Yes," replied Nicholas, smiling; "my wife. I will introduce you presently. She will be agreeably surprised at your appearance," and he chuckled to himself as he thought of his wife's notions of squatting. "Then there is the girl-"

"What girl?"

"My daughter."

"Daughter!" cried Matthew, almost convulsively. But he controlled himself the moment after, and said, "A spasm, Nicholas, nothing more. What is her age?"

"Sixteen," said Nicholas. "She is here to-night. I am very proud of her, and hope you will like her."

"Marian! That was our mother's name."

Then there was silence, and, as they stood on the balcony looking out upon the ocean, the snow-fringed waves might have been bringing back to them the time that seemed to belong to another life.

"Stay here a moment, Mat," said Nicholas; "I will bring Marian to you."

And going into the house, he returned with a beautiful girl, whose face was rosy with youth and health, and whose eyes beamed with pleasure. Her graceful person and her soft white dress made her a pretty figure in the scene.

"Marian, my dear, your uncle."

He turned and took her hand, and made a movement as if about to kiss her. But he restrained himself with a sudden impulse.

"This is her first ball, Mat," said Nicholas, with an affectionate look at his daughter. "Are you enjoying yourself?"

"Oh, so much, papa!"

As she spoke, her uncle dropped her hand, and faced the sea. She was moving away towards her partner, who was waiting for

her, when her uncle wheeled round, and said, as if the words were forced out of him-

"Kiss me, child."

She raised her face to his, and he bent down and kissed her, then pushed her lightly towards her partner.

"She is a dear good girl, Mat," said Nicholas; "and the greatest blessing I have; that is," he added, not at all enthusiastically, "next to Mrs. Nuttall, of course. By the bye, Mat-how careless of me, to be sure, perhaps you have a family of your own. Are *you* married?"

"Nicholas," said his brother, not answering the question, "do you remember my character as a boy?"

"Quite well, Mat. Eager, pushing, brave, and determined."

"Very determined, Nicholas."

"Very determined. I often wish I had your determination of character. Old Mr. Gray, our schoolmaster-you remember him, Mat? – used to say your determination was so determined, that it was nothing less than obstinacy. I heard him say of you one day, 'When Mat Nuttall makes up his mind to do a thing, he'll do it, whether it be good or bad, and whatever may be the result.' He said it was not a good trait-but he was mistaken, Mat. There is nothing so manly as determination of character. I wish I possessed it."

"Don't wish it, Nicholas. It often proves a curse."

"It has not proved so to you, Mat, for it has brought you riches and prosperity."

"I am rich and prosperous, as the world goes; but let that pass. Whether it be good or bad, I am not a whit less determined now than I was when a boy. I cannot help it. It is my nature. Old Mr. Gray was right. I am not to be turned from a determined purpose, whether I think I am right or wrong. Now, I have made up my mind to do what is in my power, so far as prudence goes, to advance your fortunes. But when I say to you, you must not do such and such a thing, I expect you not to do it. You are attending to me?"

"Yes."

"I am glad to have seen you-I am glad to have seen your-your Marian. But there is one subject which must never be mentioned between us, and that is the question of my family. Say that I have none. Tell Mrs. Nuttall this, and spare me any questions from her. Tell her and your" – (and here the same indecision expressed itself when he spoke of his brother's daughter) – "your Marian, that I am wifeless and childless. I must not be questioned upon the point. I have made up my mind not to be. I will not allow it to be referred to, or hinted at."

He spoke with distinctness, and yet with a strange hurriedness, as if he wished to be done quickly with the subject.

"You see those two figures yonder," he said, pointing to where the shadows of two persons could be seen upon the seashore.

"Yes, Mat, I can see them, although my eyes are not so good as they were."

"Suppose those two should walk out upon the sea, and sink,

and sink, and be lost to the world-you can suppose it?"

"I can suppose it, Mat," said his brother, wonderingly.

"Suppose they are walking out upon the sea, and that they are taking this subject with them, and that it sinks with them, and is heard no more. See" (and he waved his hand as the two figures disappeared), "they are gone, and the subject is gone, and they are lost to us for ever. And there is an end to them and to it. You understand me, Nicholas?"

"I understand you, Mat."

"Very well. We will go in now, and you shall introduce me to your wife."

Meanwhile, the two persons, whose shadows the brothers had noticed, were pacing the shore. The tide was running out, and each receding wave rippled in sympathy with the soft touches of melody which floated from the brilliantly-lighted mansion. The music brought no pleasure to the couple walking slowly upon the sands; they were too much engrossed in their melancholy condition. The boy had been crying at some tale he had told, and the girl's voice expressed much sympathy as she said-

"So poor Rough is dead!"

"Yes, he's dead," replied the boy. "I shall never see him agin. I hate the sight of dawgs now. I was very fond of 'em before. But didn't you say you wanted me to do somethin', Ally?"

"Wait a minute, Grif; I will tell you presently." Alice appeared to be struggling with some powerful agitation which threatened to master her, for she stopped, and placed her hand to her heart,

as if to check its beatings. "You see that house," she then said.

"Yes," Grif said; "I peeped in there a little while ago. They're very jolly, all of 'em, Ally. There's lots of swells with their white chokers, and lots of gals lookin' very sweet and nice."

"They are happier than we are, Grif."

"I should think they was-they'd be precious fools if they wasn't! I got a squint at the kitchen-there's ducks, and geese, and turkeys, and jellies painted all sorts of colours, and sugar cakes-such a spread! I wish we had some of it here. They ought to be happy with such lots to eat. I tell you what, Ally; if I thought I was agoin' to be hung, I wouldn't mind it a bit if they'd put me down in that there kitchen jist as it is now, for about three hours. I'd like to have Little Peter with me, though-wouldn't we go it!" Grif's eyes glistened at the bare anticipation.

"I want you to take a letter for me to that house. You don't mind?"

"Not a bit of it. I'll jist do anythin' as you tells me, Ally."

"You can't read."

"I can spell large letters on the walls. I never bothered about nothin' else."

"Pay attention to what I say, and do exactly as I tell you," said Alice, placing her hand on the boy's shoulder. Grif' s face assumed an expression of close attention. Alice took a letter from her pocket, and continued, "Go to the house, and ask if the gentleman to whom this letter is addressed is within. If they say he is, tell them that the letter is to be given to him at once-it is

very important. Do not drop it, Grif, or lose it. It contains my hope, my happiness, perhaps my life. Be sure you give it to some one who will promise to deliver it without delay."

She spoke in short broken gasps, and stayed her speech to recover her breath.

"Don't cry, Ally," said Grif; "am I to arks to see the gentleman?"

"No. You can give the letter to any of the servants; then go away and keep out of sight. If you see a gentleman speaking with me, do not disturb us, but when he is gone, and I am alone, come to me, and we will go home."

Her voice was very desolate as she spoke the last word. Grif gave a nod of comprehension, and walked to the house, while the girl strained her eyes thitherward in eager watchfulness. The night was changing now; a low wail of wind came across the sea, striking a colder chill of desolation to her heart. She shivered, and wrapped her shawl more closely about her. But for this movement she might have been an image of Sadness, so drear and lonely did she appear as she stood upon the glistening sands.

Grif mused as he walked along; Alice's words had deeply impressed him. He weighed the letter in his hand, and thought, "It contains her happiness, perhaps her life; then the cove who gets it has got somethin' to do with Ally. I wonder who he is: I'll have a good look at him; I'll know him agin, *I* bet, after I've seen him once." Thus soliloquising, he reached the house, and, standing in the shade, watched the people flitting about. They were all

so beautifully dressed that he felt ashamed of his rags; it was clearly, to his mind, an act of presumption to speak to such well-dressed people. With an instinctive exercise of good judgment, he resolved to ask one of the maids to deliver the letter. A man-servant might hustle him away; a girl would be more susceptible to pity. So, plucking up courage, he walked boldly to the back-door, and, seeing a girl with a pretty face, with a tray of custards in her hand, he approached her.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed the girl, almost dropping the tray, as ragged Grif emerged from the shade into the light. "What do you want? Go away; I mustn't give you any."

Grif eyed the custards hungrily and longingly. Then he wrenched his attention from the tempting glasses, and said, falsely, "I don't want nothin', miss; only if you'll please to tell me if the gentleman's name writ on this letter is in this house."

The girl looked at it, and said he was, she thought.

"Will you please give him the letter? It's very partic'ler, it is."

The girl took the letter, and said she would deliver it. Grif ducked his head, and turned slowly away. But he cast a wistful glance over his shoulder at the food for which he was longing. The kind-hearted maid saw hunger in his face, and, catching up a half-devoured fowl, ran after him. She looked round hurriedly, to see that she was not observed, and saying, "Here, dirty boy!" thrust the food into his eager hands, and ran back to the house as fast as her legs would carry her. Grif, walking carefully in the shade, commenced at a wing; he was dreadfully hungry, but in

the midst of his enjoyment he stopped, and thought of Rough, and wished the dog was there to eat the bones. The tears ran down the boy's face as he thought, and he strolled on, munching and crying. When he got to the front of the house, he saw the servant girl delivering the letter. The gentleman went in the light to read it, and Grif had an opportunity of seeing his face. "I shall know *you* agin," Grif thought. "You ain't much to look at, *you* ain't. He's goin' to Ally, and I'm not to bother 'em. All right; I'll watch for all that."

During the whole of this time Alice had not stirred. She stood where Grif had left her-her eyes turned towards the house. So fixed and rapt was her attention that her very breathing could scarcely be heard. As the form of the man came nearer and nearer to her, she shrank, and then stretched forth her arms, as if in supplication; but her feet seemed rooted to the spot. He came close to her, and said in a hard, stern voice-

"Is it you who wish to speak with me?"

"Father!" she cried.

"Alice!"

The sadden surprise robbed his voice of its sternness. He recoiled a step from her as she addressed him, and his face grew pale; but if the next moment the moon had shone upon it, no trace of emotion would have been there observable.

"So!" he said, coldly. "A trick! Another lesson you did not learn in my house."

She looked down and twisted her fingers nervously, but did

not reply.

"Why did you address a note to me in a strange hand?"

"I thought you would not have come if you recognised my writing," she answered, sadly.

"What do you out at this time of night, and alone?"

"I am not alone, father," she said, glancing to where Grif was crouching.

"What! Is your husband here?" he exclaimed with suppressed passion, following her look.

"No, sir; it is but a poor lad. I was afraid to come out by myself."

"And your husband?"

"He does not know, sir, that I have come. If he had-"

"He would have kept you away; it would have been wise in him."

"Father, have you no pity?"

"What do you want of me?"

"Help and forgiveness."

"I will give you both. You can come to my home, and I will receive you as my daughter."

"And Richard-my husband-"

"I will have nought to do with him. I give you once again your choice. You are my daughter, or his wife. You cannot and shall not be both. As this is the first, so it shall be the last time I will see you upon the subject. You shall juggle me no more with false writing. The day you ran away from your home, from me who

was hoarding and saving for you, I resolved to shut you from my heart as long as you were tied to that scheming scapegrace. You know how constant I can be when I resolve."

"Alas! I know."

"So I have resolved on this, and no power on earth can change me. Richard Handfield came to my house a guest, and he played the knave. He stopped in my house a servant, and he played the cheat. He took my money, he ate my bread, he displayed his fine gentleman's airs and accomplishments at my expense. And all this time he was stealing you from me, and laughing in his sleeve at the trick he was playing the wealthy squatter. He robbed me of the one object of my life. What! shall a father toil and scheme for a lifetime, and set his heart upon a thing, and be foiled in a day by a supercilious cheat! What does a child owe a father? Obedience. You owed me that-but a small return for all I had lavished upon you, but a small return for the fortune I was amassing for you. Did I ask you for anything else? What was this for a father to ask a daughter, that she should play the traitress to him?"

"Father, have pity!"

"You have thwarted the scheme of my life. But what was my strongest wish when it clashed with your girlish fancy? Listen. Do you know what I have suffered in this colony? I have suffered privation, hunger, misery, raging thirst, over and over again. I have walked, with blistered feet, hundreds and hundreds of miles; I have laboured with my axe till I was faint with fatigue; I have hidden from Blacks in fear of my life; I have been left for dead

upon the burning plains; I have been lost in the bush until my whole being was one great despair! Was this a pleasant life to lead, and did I deserve no recompense? Was life so sweet to me, with those burdens, that I should enjoy it in the then present? I had a child-a daughter. But for her I might have grown into a wild man of the bush, and growled at the world and at humanity. I had provocation enough, for I was poor. Men who knew me when I first came to the colony, and when I had money, knew me not when I lost it. I lost my wife, too; and I had but my daughter and my poverty left. Then, when men turned their backs to me, and I felt the bitterness of it-(I know now that they were right; poverty should be shunned) – I bent all my mind and soul to the one desire-to make money. A slice of good fortune fell to my share. I resolved to grow rich, and to make my daughter rich. I toiled, I slaved, I schemed for her. I had an object, and life was less bitter than before. I said, My daughter shall be the envy of those who knew me when I was poor; she shall marry riches, and grow into fashion and into power from the force of her father's and her husband's money. She shall be called the rich squatter's daughter, and her children shall be educated to rule the State. I knew well then, and know well now, the power of gold; it could do all this for me, and more. There is no aristocracy in this colony but the aristocracy of wealth; money is the god all worship here! It ennobles the mean, it dignifies the vulgar. It is all powerful. See what it does for me. What fascinations, what graces, what virtues, do I possess, that people should cringe to me and adulate

me? And as they idolize me, a man of money, for my wealth, so I idolize my wealth for what it brings me."

As he spoke from the vile selfishness of his heart, did the wailing wind, sighing mournfully around him, suggest to his mind no more precious thing in the world than gold? Did the pale stars and the restless waves teach no lesson that such an egotist might learn, and be the better for the learning? Did they tell no story from which he might have learned a noble creed, had he but listened to their teaching? No! he felt not their influence. He lived only in himself. What was Nature to him? She gave him nothing that he should be grateful for; what he received, all others received. And so he beheld the swelling waves, and heard the wailing wind, and looked up to the glimmering stars with indifference. What was the glory of the heavens to him or to his life? A handful of gold and a sightful of stars! Was not the gold which bought him human worship, more precious to him than all?

"Oh, father!" murmured Alice: "money is not everything."

"Money is everything," he replied; "everything to me. Can you undo, with a word, the study of my life? It was but little I asked in return for the future I was working out for you. The man I selected for you had wealth, position. Even if you had failed (as you *have* failed, but in a different manner) in the duty you owed to me, I could not have forced the man upon you; even although you knew it was the only reward I coveted for my life's labour, and refused at the last moment to give it to me,

you might still have been the daughter of my heart, as you are of my blood. But to fly from me to *him*-a penniless adventurer, a shallow, brainless coxcomb!" The thought seemed to cool his passion, and exclaiming, "Why do I waste my time here?" he made a movement towards the house.

"Stop, for pity's sake," Alice cried, stretching forth her arms; "stop and hear me."

"Speak on," he said, between his clenched teeth. There was no hope in his voice; it was hard and bitter.

"I came to-night, sir," Alice said, humbly bowing her head, and forcing back her tears, "to appeal to you for the last time. You may send me away, unhappy and broken-hearted-indeed, I am that already-but oh, sir! reflect before you do so, and let your better feelings guide you. Ah, sir! are all your thoughts about yourself and your money, and have you no thought of me? I do not know a parent's feelings, but soon" – and here her voice faltered-"soon I may become a mother-forgive me, sir, these tears-I try to conquer them, but they are too strong for me." She paused a few moments, and then continued: "What sympathy, sir, could you expect me, a simple girl, to have with your aspirations? I knew them not, and if you had confided them to me, I should not have understood them-"

"Have you come to tutor me, girl?" he asked, coldly.

"No, sir. If my distress and my misery have no weight with you, what can my poor words do? My husband-forgive me-I must speak of him."

"Go on."

"My husband, to whose fate and lot I am linked for ever-for ever," she repeated firmly, "is willing to work for me, is contented to keep me, poor and friendless as I am. But he needs help. Give it him; give it me, and I will trouble you no more. I will be content, so that you assist us to live."

"Your husband is a man; he can work like other men. Let him do so. He shall not live upon my bounty. No man need starve in this land of plenty. Let him work, if he be not too proud."

"He is not too proud, sir. He has tried to get work, but failed. Help him in his endeavor-you can do so. You have power, influence. And think, sir, that even if I would, I cannot undo the past."

"Would you, if you could?"

"For pity's sake, sir, do not ask me."

"Would you, if you could?" he repeated, relentlessly.

"Then, sir, as you insist," she returned, "I reply, as is my duty, No. He is my husband, and my future life is linked with his."

"Have you done?"

"I have but little more to say, sir. I feel from your voice that there is scant hope for me! But oh, sir, before you turn from me, think of what my future may be if you remain inexorable. You, who have undergone privations in your early life, know what a stern master is necessity. As yet, my husband is saved from crime-"

"Is this your last argument?" he interrupted. "It has no weight

with me. You cannot more disgrace me than you have already done. Here let this end. I *am* inexorable."

His voice, stern and unforgiving, carried conviction with it.

"Heaven help me!" she exclaimed sadly. "Then we must trust to chance." And she turned from him, weeping.

There was a pause, and then he said, "I will not leave you entirely unsatisfied. It is money, I suppose, you want. Here are fifty pounds. It is the last you will ever receive from me while he and you are together. Good night."

She raised her arms imploringly, but he was making towards the house. He saw not the entreating action, nor did he hear the low wailing sobs which broke from her as he walked away. A sad contrast was her drooping figure upon the lonely sands to the glad life that moved in the merchant's house! A sad accompaniment were her sobs to the strains of music and the sounds of light laughter with which they mingled! The guests within were joyous, while she, who should have been his one joy, stood desolate on the shore. But despite her misery there was hope deep within her heart-hope of a happy future yet with the man with whose lot hers was linked. Her father had cast her off; but love remained-love strong and abiding. How great the contrast! A good woman's love and a hard man's greed of gold!

CHAPTER VII.
GRIF PROMISES TO BE HONEST

Hunger has many phases; but in every phase except its physical one it is comparative. Thus, a person may be eagerly desirous, hungry, for something which his neighbour has, but which his neighbour, possessing, does not value and thinks of no regard. What is wanted is a moral, equable dispensation; yet if by any possibility such could be arranged, false weights would be sure to be introduced, and things would be unequal as before. And so the world goes on hungering, and one hungry class groans for that with which the belly of another hungry class is filled. Every step in the ladder of life is thronged with climbers ready to reach the next, and although some be twenty rounds above others, they are as restlessly unhappy in their high position, and as restlessly desirous of getting a foot higher, as those who are so far beneath them. It is the way of the world. The heaven is always above us, and we climb, and climb, and climb, and never reach our hopes.

And yet some of our desires are very small. Ambition is various; large-souled aspirations and the meanest of cravings come within its scope. Casually, we admire the aspirations of a noble mind which looks above and beyond the grovelling littleness of humanity, and strives to reach a goal where dwell the nobler virtues, studded with the jewels of their worth

and goodness. Casually, we pass by, as scarcely worthy of contempt, certainly not worthy of notice, the paltry desires for common things which fill some creatures' souls. Nevertheless, the aspiration which stretches itself towards the nobler virtues may be no finer than the paltry desire which pines for common things. 'Tis ten to one that the latter is more human; and what is human must be good, notwithstanding what some preachers say about the corruption of flesh, and the vanity of desire.

Ask Grif. How paltry, how mean is his ambition! Ask him, in such language as he can understand, what it is he most desires, what it is he most craves for? He will answer, in his own way, Sufficient of the commonest food to eat in the day, and a shelter and blanket to cover him in the night. Is it his fault that he strives no higher? His hungry body cries out to him, and he responds to its prompting. He does not openly rebel against his fate. He knows that *it is*, and, without any concerted action of the mind to assist him to that conclusion, he feels that he cannot alter it. He does not repine; he only wonders sometimes that things are so. Of course, when he is hungry he suffers; that he cannot help. But he suffers in silence, and thereby shows that he has within him the qualities that would make a hero. But still the fact remains that he aspires no higher; still the fact remains that he is dead to the conscious exercise of the nobler virtues. Spread them before him, if such were possible, and he would not even wonder. But his eyes would light up, and all his intellectual forces would be gratified, at the sight of a bone with a little meat upon it. Such

is Grif, a human waif living in the midst of a grand and mighty civilisation.

Is it possible that this same civilisation, of which we comfortable ones prate and vaunt, depraves as well as ennobles? The thought is pertinent to the subject. For here is Grif (unquestionably depraved and debased in the eyes of that civilisation which does nothing for him, which absolutely turns its back upon him), a piece of raw material out of which much good might be wrought, suffering much unmerited suffering, and surrounded by an atmosphere of actively-conscious vice. The law looks unkindly upon him; policemen push him aside as if he were an interloper in the world; and well-dressed people shrink from contact with him as he slouches by. Civilisation presses upon him unkindly. He does not deserve it. There is a better nature within him than he is called upon to exercise in his intercourse with his enemy, the world. The chord of that better nature has been touched by Alice, so kindly, so commiseratingly, that every nerve in his frame quivers with a passionate longing to serve her. He can reckon on the fingers of one hand the objects for which he has any human affection. Alice he loves far beyond the others, for he feels that she is different to them. He has seen that she is unselfish and self-sacrificing; and he knows (though he could not express it in so many words) that she is good from principle, and that she is pure because it is her nature to be pure. He has heard her renounce ease and comfort, and choose poverty and suffering, so that she might play the good angel to the man whom she loves.

And at the goodness of that renunciation, at the holiness of it, Grif fell down and worshipped her with all his soul. Then there was Milly: his love for her had no adoration in it, but was born of pity, tenderness, and gratitude. He would do much to serve Milly, for she had been very kind to him. Then came Little Peter. Grif loved that other little waif because he was so helpless, and because it was so sweet to have some one to cherish and take care of. His love for Little Peter had in it something of the love of a mother. He asked for no reward in the shape of gratitude. It was sufficient for him that Peter was dependent upon him-was his to protect. It is truly more blessed to give than to receive!

Counting, then, upon one hand the objects of his love, Grif could mention Alice, Milly, and Little Peter, and still leave a finger unprovided for. A short time since-only two days ago-the dog Rough would have closed the list; but Rough was dead, and the finger might be regarded as widowed. Yes, Rough was dead. Grif's faithful follower, his dumb companion, his honest servant, was gone-poisoned, murdered, meanly killed! Tears, born of rage and desolation, came into Grif's eyes as he thought of the death and the manner of it. But the murderer! Revengeful justice found strong expression when Grif swore and swore again that he would be even with the villain who had murdered his dog.

It was the second night after the burial, and Grif and Little Peter were sitting upon the ground near the grave. Grif was mourning for his lost friend; if Rough had been his brother he could not have mourned with more genuine grief. The night was

chilly, and the wind whistled sharply about the rags in which the boys were clothed. But they were too much engrossed in special cares and griefs to pay more attention to the remorseless wind than was expressed by a cold shiver now and then, and an involuntary huddling together of their limbs. "I wouldn't care if Rough was alive," mused Grif. "If he'd only come when I whistle!" And the next moment he absolutely whistled the old familiar call, and looked down, almost expecting to feel Rough's cold nose rubbing against his hand. Disappointed in this, he looked to Little Peter for sympathy.

He got none. Little Peter's nature was not sympathetic, and Grif obtained no response from Little Peter's eyes or tongue as he placed his hand against the lad's cheek. How thin and pale was that poor little face of poor Little Peter's! What weariness of the trouble of living was expressed in the attitude of his body and in every line of his features! As he sat, drooping, trembling, hollow-cheeked, wistful-eyed, he looked like a shrunken old child-man with every drop of healthful life-blood squeezed clean out of him.

Gazing at the drooping figure, Grif forgot his own grief, and saying "Poor Little Peter!" in a tone of much pity, drew closer to the lad, and sat motionless for many minutes. Then he rose.

"Come along, Peter," he said, "it's time we was off."

But Little Peter did not move.

"Asleep, Peter?" asked Grif.

A slight quivering of Little Peter's body was the only reply.

"Wake up, Peter!" persisted Grif, shaking him gently by the shoulder.

Still Little Peter made no response, but sat quiet, with head drooping to his knees.

Grif knelt quickly upon the ground, and raised Peter's head. The large eyes opened slowly and gazed vacantly at Grif, and a strong trembling took possession of Peter. His limbs relaxed, and he would have fallen upon his face to the earth had not Grif caught him in his arms. Where he lay, trembling and shivering.

"He's took ill!" cried Grif, with a sudden apprehension. "They won't take him in at the horspital! What shall I do?"

Grif, aware of the necessity of immediate action, lifted Little Peter upon his shoulder. As he did so, and as Little Peter's head sank forward upon Grif s breast, a small stone heart, hanging from a piece of common string, fell from the little fellow's neck. Grif caught it in his hand and held it. Ever since he had known Peter this little stone heart had been round the boy's neck. He would have lost it long ago, had it been of any value; but its worthlessness was its security. So with the stone heart in his hand and Peter upon his shoulder, Grif walked slowly back to the city. Now and then a wayfarer stopped and looked after ragged Grif and his ragged burden. But Grif walked steadily on, taking no notice of curiosity mongers. Once he was stopped by a policeman, who questioned him.

"He's my brother," said Grif, telling the lie without the smallest compunction, "and he's took ill. I'm carryin' of him

home."

Carrying of him home! The words caused Grif to reflect and ask himself where he *should* carry Little Peter. The barrel? Clearly, that was not a fit place for the sick lad. He knew what he would do. He would take Peter to Milly's house. Grif's instincts were nearly always right.

Soon he was in the city, and choosing the quietest streets, he made his way to the quarter where Milly lived. There was a light in her room. He walked slowly up the stairs, and knocked at the door. No answer came. He knocked again, and listened. A sound of soft singing reached his ears, and opening the door, he entered the room and stood still.

Milly was at the further end of the room, kneeling by the side of a bed on which lay a baby asleep. Her hands were clasped, and she was smiling, and singing softly to herself, and looking at the face of her baby, the while she gently swayed her body to and fro. He stood wondering. "I never knowed she had a baby," he muttered inly, under his breath.

Love and devotion were expressed in every curve of the girl's body. The outline of her face, her hair hanging loosely down, the graceful undulations of her figure, were beautiful to look at. She was singing some simple words which might have been sung to her when she was a sinless child, and the good influence of sweet remembrance was upon her, and robed her with tenderness.

"Milly!" whispered Grif.

She turned quickly at the sound, and seeing Grif, cautioned

him by signs not to make a noise; and then, after placing her cheek caressingly against her baby's, came towards him.

"What do you want, Grif?" she asked. "Who have you got there?"

"It's Little Peter," said Grif, placing the boy on the ground; "he's took ill, and I don't know what to do."

Milly raised Peter's head to her lap, and bent over him.

"Poor Little Peter!" she said. "How white he is, and how thin! Perhaps he's hungry."

"No," said Grif. "I know what's the matter with him. He caught cold t'other night, when I took him with me to bury my dawg. It was rainin' hard, and we both got soppin' wet. It didn't matter for me, but he was always a pore little chap. I ought to have knowed better."

"To bury your dog!" repeated Milly. "Why, I saw him with you the night before last."

"Yes, Milly, that was when you gave me that shillin'. Rough was all right then. But he was pizened that night."

"Poisoned!"

"Yes," very mournfully.

"Who poisoned him?"

"The Tenderhearted Oysterman."

"The mean hound!"

"He heerd me say somethin' agin him when I was speakin' to you, Milly, so he took it out of me by pizenin' the dawg. But I'll be even with him!"

By this time Milly had undressed Little Peter, and placed him in the bed by the side of her baby.

"There!" she said. "He'll be all right to-morrow. I'll make him some gruel presently. He's got a bad cold, and wants keeping warm."

"You're a good sort, Milly," said Grif, gratefully. "I'd have carried him to the horspital, but I didn't think they'd take him in."

"No; they wouldn't take him there without a ticket, and where could you have got *that* from?"

"Blest if I know!" exclaimed Grif. "Nobody would give *me* a ticket, I shouldn't think!" This remark was made by Grif in a tone sufficiently indicative of his sense of his abasement.

"But I say, Milly," he continued, "I didn't know you had a baby. May I look at him?"

"It's a little girl," said Milly, smiling, leading Grif towards the bed, and turning down the coverlid so that he might get a peep of baby's face. "Isn't she a beauty?"

Grif bent over the bed, and timidly put his hand upon baby's. The little creature involuntarily grasped one of Grit's dirty fingers in her dimpled fist, and held it fast.

"It's like a bit of wax," said Grif, contemplating with much admiration the difference between baby's pretty hand and his own coarse fingers. "Will she always be as nice, Milly?"

"You were like that once, Grif," Milly remarked.

"Was I, though?" he replied, reflectively; "I shouldn't have thought it. How did I come like this I wonder?"

Here the baby opened her eyes-which had a very wide-awake look in them, as if she had been shamming sleep-and stared at Grif, seriously, as at some object really worth studying. To divert her attention from a study so unworthy, Grif smiled at the baby, who, thus encouraged, reflected back his smile with interest, and crowed into the bargain. Whereat Milly caught her in her arms, and pressing her to her breast, covered her face with kisses.

"How old is she, Milly?" asked Grif, regarding this proceeding with honest pleasure.

"Ten weeks the day after to-morrow," replied Milly, who, as is usual with young mothers, reckoned forward. "And now, Grif, if you will hold her, I will make some gruel for Little Peter. Be careful. No; you mustn't take her like that! Sit down, and I will put her in your lap."

So Grif squatted upon the ground, and Milly placed the child in his lap. He experienced a strange feeling of pleasure at his novel position. It was a new revelation to him, this child of Milly's. Milly herself was so different. He had never seen her in so good a light as now. Hitherto he had in his thoughts drawn a wide line between her and Alice; a gulf that seemed impassable had divided them. Now the gulf was bridged with human love and human tenderness. Alice was all good; but was Milly all bad?

He looked at her as she was making the gruel. Tender thoughts beautify; a mother's love refines. She was kneeling before the fire, pausing in her occupation now and then to bestow a smile upon her child. Once she rested her face in baby's neck,

caressingly. Her hair hung upon Grif's hand, and he touched it and marvelled at the contrast between Milly of yesterday and Milly of to-day. Then he fell to wondering more about Milly than he had ever wondered before. Had she a father, like Alice, who was unkind to her? What was it that she saw in Jim Pizey that made her cling to him? Why was it that everything seemed to be wrong with those persons whom he loved? Rough had been poisoned, Little Peter was ill, Milly was attached to a bad man, and Alice-well, it was a puzzle, the whole of it! While he thus thought, Milly had been giving Little Peter the gruel.

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